

Welcome to our Autumn edition of “In Touch”. We have never been quite so ready to embrace “sweater weather” after the long hot summer!



Our big news is that our longest serving member of staff – Anne Morris – has decided it is time to retire. Anne first volunteered for us back in 2002 and has been a paid member of staff since 2004. From 2009, she has been leading the ten pin bowling sessions and has successfully claimed many trophies. She has mentored, encouraged, advised and befriended hundreds of local blind and partially sighted people over the years and we know she will be missed by many. The photo left shows Anne wearing a “Retired” crown and sash

sat in front of a Victoria Sponge cake with a “Happy Retirement” topper.

However, we are pleased to say that Anne will still be volunteering for us and after a well-deserved holiday, she has promised not to be a stranger at our Centre. Anne is very proud to be associated with our charity and is particularly pleased that we now work with children and young people. She tells us that there was no real support for her or her family as an adult starting her working life and that the young Anne would have very much benefitted from chatting to others in a similar situation to her own. In this issue we focus on the support we can offer to children, young people and their parents to ensure that they are not alone in their sight loss journey – all part of Anne’s legacy!

Team Talk

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

Thanks to the air conditioning unit in our Centre, we were able to get through the hottest summer on record. The weather didn't stop you all visiting us for advice and guidance, we are pleased to say. With over 450 appointments/telephone calls/drop ins and home visits over the last few months, the Centre team has been as busy as ever.

Staff have also been experimenting with the layout of our Centre. Thank you to everyone who has visited us over the summer and for putting up with these changes. Our aim is to create a balance between enabling staff to have a quiet area to carry out their work and for people dropping in to us to have the best experience. We are excited for you all to share our new space with us once the refurbishment is finished.

Our drop-in days for suppliers have proved very popular. We held one with Professional Vision in April, Optelec in July and there is one planned for October with Synaptic. A separate flyer with all the details for this latest one is included in this newsletter. We strongly advise you to call and book a place if you are interested in trying their equipment first hand.

Georgie is as busy as ever, organising activities for local blind and partially sighted people of all ages. Her coffee mornings and Fun Fridays remain popular, as do the two talking book clubs and her monthly choir.

The children still love meeting up at Kids Kingdom for soft play. Their next activity will be a small bowling tournament at CJs in Hockley. Meanwhile our working age group meet regularly for pizza night, with a few ad hoc activities planned for the Autumn. And remember, we are open every morning for our drop-in sessions between 10:30am and 12:30pm for tea and chat.

We are sorry to say that Dean will be leaving us for pastures new in September. Dean has been on quite a journey with us, from first meeting us as a client, to volunteering and then becoming a staff member. Over the years we have seen Dean grow in confidence. Many of you will know him from his regular wellbeing calls or from the energy saving advice he has given.



Dean's lived experience of sight loss has proved invaluable in making the people he supports feel understood. In fact, we received this lovely feedback from one of his regular calls: "My sight loss journey has been a challenge, but the ongoing, consistent support I have been getting from Dean is a massive part of where I have got to now. Dean has helped me so much that I am so much more confident now. Thank you to all the staff at Southend in Sight, with special thanks to Dean". We wish Dean (pictured left) all the success in his future career and we are pleased to say he will continue to volunteer for us. There seems to be a bit of a theme here!

Ten pin bowling has around 20 regulars attending weekly, with ages ranging from 22 to 80 plus! This popular activity has halted for the summer holidays but will resume again in September. The bowlers have still managed to meet up during the break – a picnic in Southchurch Park, fish and chips and a pier walk.

Southend Hospital Eye Clinic continues to be extremely busy, with plenty of referrals to our ECLO, Tracey. There is a long waiting list for Low Vision appointments, but our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer has a cancellation/priority list for urgent cases. If there is a last minute cancellation, she will contact patients to avoid an appointment going to waste.

A reminder about contacting Southend Hospital - all calls go through a central call centre where they are logged. There is a long wait to speak to someone, but you are advised to hang on the line until you get through. The number for Southend Hospital is: **0300 443 0105**.

For all advice, support and details about our activities for local blind and partially sighted people, please contact our office on **01702 34 21 31**.

Pottery For Children

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

We held our first pottery session for children during the school holidays, run by experienced art teacher Judy Goring. Eight visually impaired children attended with their parents and carers, using clay to craft pieces to take home and paint.

Judy taught the children techniques to roll out the clay and how to score and scratch, as well as using water to ensure the clay doesn't dry out. They started with simple handprints, then moved on to monsters with teeth, tongues and googly eyes – the uglier the better! The children progressed to making a trinket pot and finished with free play, where they moulded animals, flowers and imaginative creatures. As the clay needed time to dry out, each child was given their own paint set and brushes to complete their works of art at home.



Georgie Haynes, Community Engagement Officer said: "Judy has experience working with visually impaired children and made the session really engaging for them. You could tell the children loved the feel of the clay". The photo left shows some of the children sat around a table engrossed in their pottery making.

Danielle, parent to Jake said: "We have never made pottery before and this session was

really good fun. We always look forward to Southend in Sight's activities for children".

App-date

Interview with volunteers Liam and Qandagha.

We spoke with two of our younger volunteers to find out what technology and Apps they use to help them navigate everyday life.

Transport.

They both like “Google Maps” for getting them where they need to be when travelling. This App offers live readings and even gives you platform numbers for trains and buses.

They gave mixed feedback for Passenger Assistance at railway stations (you can call **0800 022 3720** to book or download the App for this), as it can be difficult meeting up with your guide.

Using your phone.

They both take photos and enlarge the text to read. They also use the “double tap to Zoom” option on their i-phone. This needs to be activated in settings first, but once done, is easy to use. There is also a dedicated magnifier app available on the i-phone.

OOOrion.

OOOrion is an alternative to Seeing AI. You can use this App when out and about to help you “Find an item” by typing or saying aloud what you are looking for. Other options include “Search for text” or “Nearby Objects” for a real-time description of your surroundings and/or objects.

Meta Glasses.

Neither use Meta Glasses at present but can appreciate how useful they could be to someone with a visual impairment. They both think the technology for this type of equipment will improve in the future.

If you would like further information on tech and downloading Apps, please call our office on **01702 34 21 31** to book an appointment with one of our IT volunteers.

Back To School

With extracts from the RNIB website.

With “back to school” looming, we thought it would be helpful to touch on what support to expect from a school if your child has a vision impairment. Vision impairment (VI) is a low incidence disability, so a school may not have previously had a blind or partially sighted child in their setting. Only two in every 1000 (0.2%) of children and young people up to the age of 25 in the UK have a vision impairment.

You should already be in contact with your local council service for children: In Southend, the visual impairment outreach service: **01702 212310**. In Essex, specialist teachers of VI: **0333 037 5547**.

Any child or young person with a recognised visual condition may need to receive SEN (Special Educational Needs) support or have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. The level and structure of support provided will be developed following an assessment of the child's needs.

Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP).

The local authority will usually make an EHC plan if they decide that all the special help a child needs cannot be provided from within the school's resources, or through SEN Support. This Plan will describe all of a child's special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and the support, interventions or adaptations the child should receive in order to access their education and achieve defined outcomes. These resources could include money, staff time and special equipment.

Whether a child has an EHCP or not, careful planning between the QTVI (Qualified Teacher of Children with Vision Impairment), Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), subject teachers and learning support needs to be put in place. Class work (and homework) may need to be prepared in advance to ensure it is presented to a child in the correct format.

Practical lessons such as science and PE may need to be discussed with the QTVI to ensure any issues relating to a child's vision difficulties are considered and that they can participate fully and move around the school and playground safely. A Habilitation Officer/Mobility Officer may be required to teach the child how best to manage in a new environment.

If necessary/appropriate they will teach cane use and/or routes to and from school.

Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Schools may develop an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) for a visually impaired child. This is separate to an EHCP.

An IEP should include how a child can access material from the board and that worksheets and textbooks are in the correct size/font/colour, or if needed, in braille or electronic format. Any required specialist equipment and the necessary training for the child should also be covered.

Support staff time should be planned as well as what teaching strategies are most effective for a child. Considerations of how the child can be taught to work as independently as possible – ‘learning to access’ as well as ensuring they have ‘access to learning’.

Broader inclusion into the school and support strategies for social inclusion, independence or playtime activities should be considered too.

The annual review.

The annual review process for any child with an Education, Health and Care Plan is set out by legislation and local authority policies. The QTVI can support with this through submitting a report or attending. The needs of the child will be reviewed, including any changes to their vision.

There are a number of resources available to help parents navigate the school support system.

The government are undertaking a SEND review and the **RNIB** has some great resources on their website. You can call their helpline for further information: **0303 123 9999**.

The **IPSEA** website is a well-respected resource covering SEND law.

Guide Dogs has details about the eyecare support pathway and what to expect regarding statutory services after a diagnosis for your child.

Thomas Pocklington Trust has a whole section on their website dedicated to education support through primary school, secondary and beyond.

You can also call our office for advice and information on **01702 34 21 31**.

Cheesecake Anyone?

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

At one of our recent cake club drop-in sessions, we were visited by Jeff Burgess from Luv-Leigh Cheesecakes. He brought in a few of his “best sellers” for us to try. Jeff was given “12 out of 10” by his taste testers for his vanilla, salted caramel and lemon cheesecakes!



Jeff had a particular reason for visiting us. Back in 2019, we supported him through volunteering at our charity shop and advice on work. Having lived with Type 1 diabetes since he was 10, Jeff has scarring that affects his eyesight and he is registered severely sight impaired. Following a transplant of his pancreas a few years ago, Jeff no longer has diabetes and is even able to eat his own cheesecakes. He is pictured left, ready to serve his Sicilian lemon flavour.

Jeff has always been interested in food and was known as “Jeff the Chef” when he was younger. It was during Covid that Jeff started making his cheesecakes as a hobby, and in 2022, he decided to take the plunge and set up his business. He has turned his garage into a kitchen and regularly sells out of cheesecakes at local farmers markets. He supplies weddings, local shops and tearooms but his dream is to open a shop on Leigh Broadway. We are sure his hard work will pay off and he will achieve his ambition.

Jeff, supported by his wife Claire, really embodies the “can-do” attitude that we love. As he says, he has learned to adapt how he cooks using talking scales and coloured boards. We can also vouch for the cheesecakes – they are absolutely delicious – light, fluffy and full of flavour. If you would like to order individual or large cheesecakes, you can visit Jeff’s website:

www.luv-leighcheesecakes.co.uk or call him on 07836 431609.

You won’t be disappointed!

MP Visit

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

During the summer, we were joined by local MP for Southend East and Rochford, Bayo Alaba, at one of our Friday drop-in sessions.

Bayo met with staff and volunteers to find out about the services Southend in Sight offers to local blind and partially sighted people. He then chatted to a few of our regulars over a cup of tea about the challenges they face day to day living with sight loss.

We discussed the sort of barriers that visually impaired people encounter out and about, such as uneven pavements, pavement parking and furniture as well as overhanging shrubbery. They also talked about the long wait for local statutory services. We emphasised how important our charity is in bridging that gap not only for practical advice and guidance, but also for emotional support.



CEO Lucy Martin said: “We were very pleased to meet with Bayo and to fly the flag for local blind and partially sighted people. It is important to make the people who shape the future of our country aware of the difficulties you might face accessing local services if you are visually impaired.

The support we offer here at Southend in Sight gives people the confidence to live well with sight loss”.

The photo above shows left to right: Chayse, Ricky, Jan K, MP Bayo Alaba, Jan P, Maggie and CEO Lucy Martin.

Bowling Delight

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

As reported in our summer issue, some of our visually impaired bowlers, who meet every week at CJs in Hockley, entered the British Blind Sport Trios competition. This is the first time that three teams competed and all three qualified for the finals in Sheffield this year.

The Southend VIPers (Ray, Russell, Gary and Clare) finished third, the Kinch Pins (Anne, Keith and Linda) came fifth, while Norf and South (Liam and Nicky – playing as a satellite team with two players from “Up North”) placed sixth.

Everyone who took part should be very proud of their achievements – we knew they could do it! Even Christopher the Guide Dog joined in, with his own Southend VIPers blue bandana.



Anne Morris, the bowling activity lead said: “It’s amazing that three teams from the top 16 in the country are from Southend and we all finished in the top half. I’m so proud of our results. Everyone bowled their best in unfamiliar surroundings and made Southend proud”.

The photo above shows left to right: Ray, Russell (with Christopher), Liam, Nicky, Gary, Keith and Linda. Crouching down in front are Anne and Clare.

For more information on visually impaired bowling, please call our office on: **01702 34 21 31.**

Charity Update

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

Jerry Davenport.

We are sad to announce the passing of one of our long-standing trustees, Jerry Davenport. Jerry has been a part of our charity for over 15 years, bringing his expertise as a former solicitor to the Board, as well as his charm and sunny outlook on life.



Jerry was a regular volunteer at our charity shop, a golfer, a Rotarian as well as a Mason at the Rochford Kindred Daylight Lodge.

He used these connections to help support our work and raise funds for equipment for local blind and partially sighted people.

The photo left shows Jerry (centre) in his Rochford Rotary tie, with volunteer Gary (left) and Sight Loss Manager Coralie (right) sat at a computer. We will miss you, Jerry.

117 Hamlet Court Road.

We are pleased to say that we have now sold the building at 117 Hamlet Court Road. The new owners are currently busy refurbishing the old property and installing new flats upstairs. We will be renting our charity shop to enable us to carry on raising funds for our charity. Our thanks to our volunteers and customers for supporting us throughout these changes.

AGM.

Southend in Sight's Annual General Meeting (AGM) will take place on **Wednesday 28 October** from **2:45pm** at SAVS, 29 Alexandra Street, Southend. Please call our office on **01702 34 21 31** to book your place, as seats are limited.

Southend in Sight – your local sight loss charity.

Registered Charity Number: 1069765

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Our Charity values:

- Excellence
- Community
- Empowerment
- Support
- Integrity

Your vision is our vision

