



# The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind

“Supporting and empowering people with a visual impairment in Hertfordshire.”

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Winter 2010/2011  
Issue 127

# Sight News



The Dragon Apprentices from St Columba's College, St Albans with Maria Surgenor (HSB), Vicky Palumbo (HSB) and Jacqui Crane (Deloitte LLP)

**Please support The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind**

**News from our  
Chief Executive Officer  
Maria Surgenor**

Hello again everyone

A lot has been happening at HSB and I am sure you have all heard about the changes the Government are making which will impact on everyone. The Comprehensive Spending Review announced on 20th October 2010 set out the Government's plans for public spending over the next four years.

As a direct result, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) is carrying out a Review of Spending. HSB receives funding from HCC to contribute towards the Home Visiting Service, Equipment and Information Service and Deaf Blind Service.

HCC have held Stakeholder Consultation events and all voluntary organisations have had formal written notice of possible changes or withdrawal of the funding they receive. HSB have been working closely with Adult Care Services (ACS) as they carry out a full review of Sensory Services and we have had several meetings to discuss possible changes which may result in better services while making cost savings to HCC and HSB.

It is still unclear at the moment exactly how these challenges may impact on HSB and the services we currently offer. However, what is very clear is that there will be more demand on our services, more people in need of help, support and advice and fewer resources to be able to meet these needs. I am currently evaluating all of HSB services again to see where savings can be made to ensure that priority is given to front line services and we maximise every pound we receive!

Alongside all of this the Government has set out its Big Society agenda that seeks to shift power from politicians to people. Inevitably this has huge implications for the services which we deliver and the way in which we work with the statutory and voluntary sector. Even after all this doom and gloom I am really excited about the future. We are all aware there will be challenges, but by working together, sharing ideas and real partnership working, I am sure we will be able to pull together to make things happen. There is no doubt 2011 will be a challenging year, however, with the hard work and dedication of a committed team of staff and volunteers I am sure HSB will ride out the storm!

Please get in touch if you would like to find out more about the progress being made as a result of these challenging times.

From April 2011 the rules for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will change making it possible for some visually impaired people to qualify for the higher rate of the mobility component. The Department of Work and Pensions will be phoning people who are in receipt of DLA because their primary disability is loss of vision. Callers will be asked questions to clarify their eligibility for the higher rate of the mobility element. If they are likely to be eligible they will be sent a form and covering explanation in large print. I will keep you up to date with any further information we have about these changes.

From all at HSB I would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and Best Wishes for 2011.

*Maria*

### **The Abbey Theatre, St Albans**

The Abbey Theatre plans to start putting on 'audio-described' performances next year. It stages seven plays in the main auditorium every year, each running for eight or nine days, and one performance in each run will be audio-described. A hearing loop and headset for the hard of hearing is currently provided. One performance in every run is dedicated for a local charity. The theatre would like to extend this practice to help the partially sighted to enjoy the productions.

Audio description is a verbal commentary that tells visually impaired theatre-goers what is happening during the parts of the performance where there is no dialogue (eg during fight scenes). The description does not interfere with the performance but fills in the gaps, describing facial expressions, costume, scenery and action sequences so anyone with a sight problem can follow the plot fully and independently.

The theatre would like to know whether these performances will be of interest to partially sighted or blind people. Please contact The Abbey Theatre on 01727 857861 or

E-mail:

[boxoffice@abbeytheatre.org.uk](mailto:boxoffice@abbeytheatre.org.uk)

**Focus on Fundraising**  
**by John Hood**  
**Funding Manager**

No doubt you are aware from coverage in the newspapers and on TV of the pressures there will be on public spending for the foreseeable future. This will have an effect on charities such as HSB so we must work hard to ensure that we safeguard our services for the future.

Our supporters can help us through these difficult times in many ways. Firstly through donations (have you tried our 'on-line' donation service through the website? Or you can donate 'on-line' if you use the CAF Bank). Cheque or cash donations can also be made direct to the office. Other ways to help are by running small fundraising events such as coffee mornings or plant stalls or getting sponsored for, say, losing weight or giving up smoking or even for planning that "once in a lifetime" adventure.

A massive help to HSB is if supporters can think about leaving us a legacy in their will – this really does help.

I have written before to say that Waitrose run a scheme whereby every branch donates money each month to three local good causes.

A charity we are closely associated with has gained over £750 this year because supporters have entered nomination forms at their local store. We could do the same at HSB but we cannot benefit from this scheme without your help! It is very easy to pick up and complete a "Community Matters" form so please try to help if you, or someone you know, goes shopping at a Waitrose store, or may simply be passing one.

John Hood

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**Sight-Line Update by**  
**George Hatchman**  
**Office Co-ordinator**

With Christmas on the horizon I would like to make you aware of the HSB's service closures over the holiday period.

**Sight-Line (01707 324680)**

This Help and Advice line will close at 1.00pm on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2010 and re-open at 10.00am on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2011.

If you need to leave a message, please give your name, telephone number and a brief message and we will get back to you as soon as possible on our return.

## **Sight Information Points (SIPs)**

SIPs will run as usual during the month of December with the exception of:

Ware Road SIP (Hertford) on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2010.

Cheshunt SIP on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2010.

Both venues are on local Council premises and will be closed over the Christmas period.

Hemel Hempstead SIP on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2010 is cancelled as the date is designated as a Public Holiday.

## **Home Visiting**

The Volunteers who carry out our Home Visiting Service will inform their regular clients of their availability over the Christmas period. Many of them may be with family or have other arrangements over the period. Their availability will be determined by their own commitments.

On behalf of the Office Volunteers and myself I would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and the Best of Luck for 2011.

George Hatchman

## **Emotional Support Counselling Service by Pat Senior Counsellor**

The festive season is nearly with us. Christmas is traditionally a time for family and friends to get together and it is also a time to think about supporting others who may not have the luxury of family or close friendships.

The Pilot Emotional Support/Counselling Service is available to support you when you have been diagnosed with an eye condition that causes you concern. You do not have to face this emotional journey on your own. Sometimes, it is much easier to talk to someone who is not a family member or friend.

If you feel that this service could be helpful to you, or you can identify a friend or relative, please call me on 01462 816575.

We can talk through the situation together and arrange a meeting at your home at your convenience. If we agree that emotional support could be beneficial to you, then I will arrange to see you for 6-8 weeks. These sessions are free.

With best wishes for a very Happy Christmas.

Pat

**News from the North**  
**by Lindsey Wheeler**  
**Outreach Support Worker**

Greetings everyone! It has been a very busy few months as always and now we are all planning for Christmas and the New Year.

The new Macular Disease Society Support Group in Letchworth is going well and I am pleased to announce they are up to 16 attendees. I am due to visit on the 8th December to show equipment and do a short talk. For information on this group please ring Tom McNulty on 01264321963.

The Action for Blind People Bus came to Stevenage on 9<sup>th</sup> November in the centre of town on a freezing and wet and windy day but the hardy folk of Stevenage still turned out in force making it a very rewarding event.

Please do not forget the regular Sight Information Points in your area – Stevenage on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month, Letchworth on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday and Royston Library on the 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday. For more information ring me on 07825 005951 or 01707 324680 to leave a message and I will ring back.

I always like to mention something you may not have heard about! Did you know – Keisha of Action for Blind has launched a new website to give visually impaired ladies fashion and makeup advice. There is a section on what styles and colours are currently fashionable, a “Face to Face” section on tips for applying makeup and if you look under “Topics” how to apply nail varnish without smudging, a good tip for sighted people too. There is also a blog where you can ask questions or share advice.

[www.styleable.co.uk](http://www.styleable.co.uk)

Bye for now, Lindsey

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**News from Central Herts**  
**by Vicky Palumbo**  
**Outreach Support Worker**

Hello everyone! Having been in post for the past few months I'm glad to say that I'm starting to find my feet now. I'm very pleased to say that I'm gradually working my way through my client and volunteer matching and for those of you still waiting matching I would like to apologise and let you know that I hope to be speaking with you soon.

I've recently given a presentation to a local church organisation that recruits volunteers.

This was a fantastic opportunity for us to let people know about our services because despite the fact that we have been around for 95 years, there are still many people who still don't know of our existence.

St. Albans CVS have been offering the chance to be part of a local fundraising project called Dragons Apprentice. 'A' Level students at various secondary schools are participating. We had to write a supporting letter for us to be selected as the chosen charity and I wrote a poem to support our applications. Luckily we were one of the selected few to be chosen. The project is currently running as we speak and we have a team of young men hosting a raffle with the chance to win various prizes in order to raise money for our charity. If you have any questions about this or are interested in purchasing raffle tickets, let me know.

Take care and Merry Christmas

Vicky

Office 01707 880544

Mobile 07825 330649

## Vicky's Poem

An elderly lady, sat very alone  
Nobody visits and nobody phones  
Besotted with her husband, they  
were a right pair  
Now, sadly he's passed on and  
she's left sat in despair  
To make matters worse, her eye  
condition has declined  
Almost unable to see now, why  
has life been so unkind?  
The television, the newspaper or  
a simple trip up to the shop  
Paying bills, checking dates on  
food, it's now all come to a stop.  
Herts Society for the Blind phone  
and ask if they can pop by  
Stay for a chat and see for what  
help they can apply  
A magnifier, new lighting and a  
regular volunteer  
A weekly visit to provide support,  
friendship and cheer  
This lady is no longer sat all on  
her own  
She is more organised, joined  
clubs and her confidence has  
grown  
This Charity supports those for  
when their eyes have let them  
down  
To end isolation, provide advice  
and to lift their frown  
Please choose our charity as we  
really do love what we do  
And the help we provide, may one  
day be for you.

**News from West Herts  
by Dawn Bunting  
Outreach Support Worker**

Hello all! I have been really busy over the last few months.

Since being based regularly at our Social Centre in Hemel I have been asking many of you what you would like to use the facilities for in the future and how we can work together.

So I think the real question is how can we work together to plan and develop the Centre in the future?

Many people explain to me their partners don't always understand the how their sight loss may impact on performing everyday tasks and activities.

We are planning to run a course for families and carers which will give them an insight and understanding how best to support your needs. We will be inviting along other organisations to give information about benefits, their caring role and assistance that could be offered by Sensory Services. If you would like more information or to book a place please contact me on 01442 258550 (sessions start the end of January 2011).

**Additional new activities are**

**Talking Book Club** starting in February and on the last Friday of every month.

**Drop in Café** starting in February. This is not an organised club, just an opportunity for people to meet informally on the second and fourth Friday of every month

For more information about these new activities, or if you have any ideas please give me a call on 01442 258550 24 hour answer phone or my mobile 07825 330648.

Merry Christmas, Dawn

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**Are you a keen golfer?**

The English Blind Golf Association are currently looking to recruit new members who are totally blind and would wish to either take up playing golf (beginners most welcome) or who have experience in playing golf. This would involve playing competitions against fellow blind golfers throughout the UK. Even if you have never played why not give it a try?

This is a very sociable association with competitions from March to September. For further information contact Billy McAllister on 07876 564657, [mcallister2612@gmail.com](mailto:mcallister2612@gmail.com)

**Club News**  
**by Christine Wheeler**  
**Clubs Co-ordinator**

What is a club?

Why not go along and investigate? I recommend it. Clubs are really special places and members enjoy them. The volunteers that run them are really helpful.

Many people tell me just how much they look forward to attending their club meeting. They enjoy a chat and a sociable time with friends and new members. Clubs can have a variety of interesting talks, visits by musicians and singers and even a challenging quiz. Some clubs organise day trips out and even holidays. Useful and new information is available at clubs and members share experiences and talk to each other and even solve problems together over a cup of tea or coffee. Some clubs even provide a meal for a small cost. Visit Barnet Blind and Partially Sighted Bowls Club for those who want to try a sport. So make your New Year's resolution to visit your local club. I'm sure you will thoroughly enjoy it.

We are always looking for items to include in the newsletter so if you have held a special club event or want to let others know of any special information about the clubs then please email me the details on [christine.wheeler@hertsblind.com](mailto:christine.wheeler@hertsblind.com) or phone me (01438 717898 or 07825 543888) and I will try to include it in the next newsletter. If I can be of help in any way at the clubs please contact me.

I would like to wish a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year to all club leaders, members and helpers.

Christine

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**The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind Mission Statement**

The HSB Board has agreed an interim statement that will be used on information details, reports, funding applications etc. and will satisfy our requirements for Pqasso. The wording shown below was agreed. Please note that this is not an 'official' Mission Statement, but can be referred to as our mission goal, aim etc. The interim statement reads as follows:

**“Supporting and empowering people with a visual impairment in Hertfordshire.”**

**South East Herts Area Update  
by Vanessa Macdonald  
Outreach Support Worker**

Dear All

Over the past few months I have been out and about in my area and spoken to many of you. Back in the sunny days of September I attended the Celebrating our Community event at Cedars Park, Cheshunt. This was a free festival celebrating the diverse communities who live and work within the Borough of Broxbourne. I met up with the general public who were interested in our services plus representatives of many organisations that were helpful in signposting me in various directions. I was very grateful for the support of my volunteers, Rochelle, Gemma and Peter. Thank you.

You might have caught a glimpse of myself, Alan and Michelle featured in the Cheshunt and Waltham Mercury on 28<sup>th</sup> October. On three occasions we have set up a stand to promote Herts Society for the Blind at the Pavilions Shopping Centre, Waltham Cross, outside Spec Savers. We'll be there again on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, so please say 'Hello' if you are passing.

On 10<sup>th</sup> November I worked with Monika on the Action for Blind People Bus in Bishops Stortford. Between us we saw 47 people who were keen to find out more about the latest technology and gadgets to improve daily life for blind and partially sighted people. We were able to demonstrate equipment and products and to offer free and impartial advice on sight loss. Hopefully the Bus will return next year.

Just to confirm, I will not be holding any Sight Information Points during December but I'll be back in January on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> at Wolsey Hall and Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> at Ware Road Day Centre.

Merry Christmas and a healthy and Happy New Year.

Vanessa x

**Do you fancy a holiday?**

Dacorum Talking Newspapers are planning a holiday. It has been suggested for 2011 to arrange a stay at The Russell Hotel in Bognor Regis from Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> to Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> August. The Russell is designed for people with sight impairment and guide dogs are welcome.

To know if this is a viable proposition please contact Audrey on 01442 217918.

## **When Vanessa met Pat Parker ...**

I had the opportunity to visit Pat Parker in November when I helped her order some items that she wanted to buy from the RNIB catalogue. While I was there Pat told me about the pioneering surgery she was due to undergo. I asked Pat if I could share this with you, so here goes ...

Pat, who is 64 years old, explained:

“As a young child I remember wearing very small glasses because I was short sighted and had an astigmatism. I did drive for several years but in about 2003 I realised that my eyesight was getting foggy. I went to a hospital and it was found that I had cataracts in both eyes. However I was not happy with this hospital so I asked for a referral to Addenbrookes, Cambridge where they have a very good cataract The clinic. They said they could certainly operate on my cataracts and over a period of time I had them removed. This meant that the fog went away but I was still suffering from the Macular Degeneration which hits the back of the eye and the little capillaries (blood vessels) running through it. Sometimes it is caused by high blood pressure; I had the bath water too hot, my blood pressure went up and an haemorrhage resulted in my right eye.

I read an article in the Daily Mail about a surgeon who was pioneering an operation to help people with MD. Brendon Moriarty is based at Altrincham in Cheshire but he operates in Macclesfield. I thought the least I could do was go and have a consultation. Mr Moriarty said he could do the operation. A figure of £5,500 was mentioned but as I would have better eye sight I didn't mind. He put in a lens like a prism so that the instead of the light going directly from the front of the eye to the back it is bent round a corner so that light rays hit an area that is not damaged. I later returned to Macclesfield and had an operation on my left by a similar method. The surgery is very intricate because the surgeon has to cut the eye, put a lens in and make sure it is fitted correctly”.

Pat has had the surgery and she hopes that the lens will clear the mistyness that she has. She is in recovery now and I hope to catch up with her in the New Year. I will let you know how she is progressing.

Pat was very appreciative of my help in recommending aids and equipment found in specialist catalogues.

Vanessa Macdonald  
07825 992950 or 01707 324680

## **Social Networking on HSB's Facebook and/or Twitter**

For all Tweeters and Facebook fans out there I'd like to bring to your attention that we now have our own HSB pages.

We appreciate that there are not as many clubs and activities for people with visual impairments in Hertfordshire as we'd like. We are hoping to start the ball rolling with getting as many of you signed up onto these sites as possible with the intention of you being able to form friendships and potentially organise your own group activities.

We will also use these sites to announce our news and list future events.

On Twitter, please search for [http://twitter.com/Herts\\_Blind](http://twitter.com/Herts_Blind)

On Facebook, please search for Hertfordshire Society For The Blind.

Brand new CICERO TEXT  
READER Version 2, plus  
manual

Any interesting offers, please  
phone 01438 817253 and speak  
to Lis or Billy McAllister

## **Hertfordshire Library Service - Your chance to have your say on the proposals for the future.**

Hertfordshire County Council is running a seven-week consultation until 11 December 2010. Details of the proposals are available at libraries and mobile library services in the county. Comments can be recorded on line at or by completing a comment card available at all libraries. Feedback from the public consultation will be presented to Cabinet on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2011 when a final decision on the proposals will be taken.

### **What are the proposals?**

Some reduction in services will be inevitable and it is proposed that:

- library opening hours should be reduced by approximately 30%
- the mobile library service should be reconfigured to focus on rural areas and vulnerable users.
- a review of management and support costs

Leader of the council, Robert Gordon, says "We recognise how important it is for all residents to have convenient access to a library.

"We want to avoid closures but the financial realities have forced us to consider significant reductions in opening hours instead. We plan to stagger opening hours so that, even when your most local library is closed, another relatively local one will be open. We will also continue Saturday and Sunday opening where these are popular."

For more information contact  
Glenda Wood  
Head of Libraries, Culture &  
Learning

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### **Please support your Talking Newspaper**

Every week, in Hertfordshire Talking Newspapers record and distribute audio recordings to blind, partially sighted and physically disabled listeners. This service is free of charge. The post office delivers the tapes and do not charge the charity or the recipients for postage. In the Hertford area new listeners can obtain a free cassette tape player. The tape player can be delivered to people's homes and they will be shown how to use them. If they break down, they can be replaced.

The audio transcript contains local news, which enables our listeners

to keep in touch with what is going on in their area. The majority of listeners are senior citizens, but there are some younger ones.

A committee member of Hertford and District Talking Newspaper carried a telephone poll last year to a wide selection of recipients, to see what they would prefer to hear about on the recordings and, more importantly, what they didn't want to hear. As a large proportion of listeners are women, unsurprisingly, sport was one of the things they didn't really want!

On the whole, editors are allowed to make the decision as to what they use as time is limited so it is not always possible to get everything on the recordings in the time available.

If you would like further information regarding Talking Newspapers in Hertfordshire please contact  
HSB Sight-Line on 01707 324680.

## **Take Care when microwaving water!**

A 26-year-old man decided to have a cup of coffee. He took a cup of water and put it in the microwave to heat it up (something that he had done numerous times before). He set the timer (for how long is unknown) to bring the water to a boil. When the timer shut the oven off, he removed the cup from the oven. As he looked into the cup, he noticed that the water was not boiling, but suddenly it 'blew up' into his face. The cup remained intact until he threw it out of his hand but all the water had flown out into his face due to the build-up of energy. His whole face was blistered and he had 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree burns. He also may have lost part of the sight in his left eye. While at the hospital the doctor attending him stated that this is a fairly common occurrence and water (on its own) should never be heated in a microwave oven. If water is heated in this manner something should be placed in the cup to diffuse the energy such as a wooden stir stick, tea bag, etc. but nothing metal.

### General Electric's Response

Thanks for contacting us, I will be happy to assist you. The e-mail that you received is correct.

Microwaved water and other liquids do not always bubble when they reach boiling point. They can actually get superheated and not bubble at all. The superheated liquid will bubble up out of the cup when it is moved or when something like a spoon or tea bag is put into it.

To prevent this from happening and causing injury, do not heat any liquid for more than two minutes per cup. After heating, let the cup stand in the microwave for thirty seconds before moving it or adding anything into it.

### **For Sale**

A used Portset Document reader. The price brand new is £1,499. It is around 3-4 years old but has only had occasional use. It comes in its original box complete with instructions. Any reasonable offer would be acceptable. Please call me on 01707 697158 or 07785 700273 to discuss a possible price.

Regards, Tony.