



The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind
Providing information, support and services
to visually impaired people

Summer 2010
Issue 126

Sight News



**(3rd from the right, Grant Shapps MP, Welwyn Hatfield,
visits Woodside on Friday 9th October 2009)**

Please support The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind

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

Hello again everyone

Lots has been happening at The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind and I am sure you have all heard about the changes the new Government are proposing which will impact on everyone.

We are near to celebrating our first year at The Woodside Centre and we have really started to settle in. During National Eye Health Week and Carers Week from the 14th to 18th June we had two really successful open mornings at the centre where local people came to see all the amazing services on offer here. The Deputy Mayor for Welwyn and Hatfield, Carl Storer, attended one day and found the wide range of information and services offered really helpful.

I attended the latest UK Vision Conference on 15th June 2010, when the Rt Hon David Blunkett MP gave a key address to launch the 'You and Your Vision' charter. The charter

outlines, in clear and jargon-free terms, what people should expect on their eye care journey, reinforcing the drive for seamless health and social care services. Essentially, it places the individual at the heart of the process and I am sure you all will have heard about the plans to 'revamp' the National Health Service and that the main aim is to put the person at the heart of their treatment. I am sure there will be huge challenges and I will keep you all up to date with developments in Hertfordshire.

Finally, I have been working with one of our volunteers, Iain Lamb, to carry out some research to gather evidence about the eye health care needs of the residents of Hertfordshire. It has produced some real hard facts that we can use to help plan and develop the work of The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind for the future to make sure we are delivering high quality services to the people who need them in a timely and professional way. We are also looking at whether The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind should start working more on prevention.

I am sure some of you know that 50% of blindness is preventable in the UK if there is early intervention. So should we be changing some of the services we offer? I would like to hear your thoughts and comments. If you would like to get involved in developing The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind's services we have set up a Service Committee that is looking at our current services and making recommendations for the future. You can find out more by writing to me

Maria Surgenor
The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind
The Woodside Centre
The Commons
Welwyn Garden City AL7 4SE
or email office@hertsblind.com

I hope you have enjoyed the sunshine.

Maria

Focus on Fundraising by John Hood Funding Manager

Grant News

We were successful in gaining some funding for the Home-visiting service from the Garfield Weston Foundation, who kindly granted us £5,000. We are grateful to the Foundation for their support.

Donations

The Society have continued to receive support from many sources and these have included £500 from the St. Albans & Mid Herts Caledonian Society, £150 from the New Testament Church of God in Hitchin, £350 from the Miss MAM Hart Will Trust and £2,000 from the Childwick Trust. We have also received a number of donations from friends and family in memory of people who have sadly passed away. As ever, we are very grateful for all donations, large or small.

Quick reminder!

Don't forget to nominate The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind for the Waitrose "Community Matters" donation scheme whereby every branch donates money to local good causes. Just to recap, the Waitrose store needs to receive a "Community Matters" nomination form which can be picked up in store. Each month three good causes are chosen to have a box for collecting customers' tokens displayed in the store.

I am aware that another local charity has benefitted twice from this scheme in the past few months so let's make sure that The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind gets part of the action! Please try to help if you, or someone you know, goes shopping at a Waitrose store, or may simply be passing one. It is very straightforward to pick up and complete a "Community Matters" form and any donations received really can help to make a difference to The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind.

Sight-Line Update by George Hatchman Office Co-ordinator

I'm sure that most, if not all of you, are aware of our Sight-Line service, but just in case you are not, here's a reminder of what it's all about.

The Sight-Line is a help/advice line for blind and partially sighted people, their families and/or carers, as well as health and other professional staff. It can give information about equipment and The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind's services as well as signpost callers to other sources of information and help. The Sight-Line operates from 10.00am to 1.00pm Monday to Thursday and the number is 01707 324680 .

Previously Sight-Line was manned mainly by staff, with occasional support from Volunteers. However, since moving to The Woodside Centre we have had a dedicated band of Volunteers who have manned the line for us on each of the days.

This has proved very successful in that it has allowed our Outreach Staff to concentrate on being out in the community rather than spending a few hours of their time each week in the office on Sight-Line. On most days the Outreach Staff are available to the Sight-Line Volunteers via their mobile phones and e-mail to receive messages and offer their advice and guidance if it's needed. I would like to thank Debs Gibson, Peter Jenkins, Lorna Whitaker and Terry Knight for their support in covering this important function.

We would like to extend the service to Fridays at some point in the future and also extend the hours into the afternoon period if there is a demand.

For Sale

Aladdin AL5A CCTV

This is a few years old and therefore has a large monitor and is quite heavy. If you are interested and require more information, please call Rod Higham on 01707 875940

Clubs by Christine Wheeler Clubs Co-ordinator

The local clubs for visually impaired people in Hertfordshire are well worth a visit. They are run by dedicated, friendly leaders and helpers. I know that transport can be an issue but to visit a club for a cup of tea and a chat can be very beneficial and you can always pick up some very useful information.

I visited the Frank Letts club in Royston for the first time and especially enjoyed the lovely location on Royston Heath. A big thank you to the hospitality of all the clubs I have visited recently including Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City, St Albans, Christchurch Hatfield, Yvonne Savage Letchworth and the Hertford Macular Club. I have produced posters for some of the clubs that are looking for new members which should help increase numbers.

I am in the process of looking at establishing a new club and if you know anyone who would want to help start a club please let me know.

I would also appreciate any relevant information that may be helpful to my initial research. Personally, I must tell you about the new member of our family; my daughter now has an ex-racehorse that needed a home, so we are busy looking after "Roo".

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 any information about the Clubs then please email me the details to 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.

Hertfordshire Action on Disability is stocking a new weight bearing white walking stick (not for guiding) for about £10. The stick is all white, including the handle which is a 'T' shape rather than the more normal 'crook' shape.

For further information please ring
01707 384260

An Update from Central and East Herts Patch, by Sue Lewis Outreach Support Worker

Dear All

Firstly I do hope everybody has been enjoying our wonderful weather which is lovely after a summer that was a bit of a dud last year.

Next I would like to welcome Vicky Palumbo and Vanessa Macdonald to The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind team as the new Outreach Support Workers for the Central and South East areas of the county respectively.

As I am becoming long in the tooth I shall be retiring at the end of August and following in the footsteps of Hercule Poirot I will be tending my roses, (heaven help them).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank one and all for your support over the ten years I have been with the Society.

There have been lots of changes in these years and some have been for the better such as the treatment for “wet Macular Degeneration” with injections and many of the new technological aids such as the video magnifiers and computer systems which are wonderful inventions.

However, for me it has always been the personal contact with local people that has made the job so enjoyable. The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind will continue to serve the local community and I hope it will thrive in this difficult economic climate. My colleagues will soon fill in any little gaps I leave behind so if there are any VIPs who need help and support please don't hesitate to give the Sight-Line a call.

Once again, thank you.

Best wishes, Sue

News from the North by Lindsey Wheeler Outreach Support Worker

Hello everyone, greetings from the North!

Thank you everyone who ventured out into the wilds of the Ware countryside for the volunteer garden party (for North and Central Herts.). We hope you enjoyed yourselves. For those of you who didn't make it, the sun shone gloriously, Victoria's garden was stunning. Those running the plant stall were very busy and the cakes were the best yet (the coffee sponge was voted the favourite by George). The party was our way of saying thank you to all the volunteers who so gladly give their time for home visiting, helping in the eye clinics and at sight information points and in the office. They are a wonderful group of people.

Our next celebration and thank you to the volunteers will be at Christmas, so if anyone has an inspired idea for a venue please let me know!

For those of you struggling with magnification if you have not already attended a Low Vision Clinic at hospital let me tell you what is provided. You will be seen by an Optometrist who is a trained optician but also a specialist in low vision. They will carry out various eye tests and then assess which magnifiers are most suitable for you. These magnifiers are on loan free of charge. The Optometrist will also advise on lighting.

This is a list of equipment to help with low vision

- Illuminated stand magnifiers
- Pocket magnifiers
- Telescopes (pocket size) for distance viewing
- Clamps to hold magnifiers
- Glass rulers or dome magnifiers
- Clip on magnification for glasses
- Craft magnifiers
- Magnifiers for wearing around the neck
- Wrap-around sunglasses

To be referred to the clinic which is held on Thursday mornings, ask your Ophthalmologist or your GP to refer you.

Sight Village London

This is the big event of the year for visually impaired people. This year more than 20 exhibitors from around the world will take over Kensington Town Hall again and thousands of VIPs from around the country will visit. The dates are 2nd and 3rd November and it is free. To find out more visit www.qac.ac.uk/sightvillage or for general enquiries phone 0121 428 5050 (main switchboard)

Emotional Support Counselling Service by Pat Senior Counsellor

It is really good to feel the summer and to feel the warmth from the sun on your skin. A real 'feel good factor'.

You may be aware that The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind is piloting an Emotional Support/Counselling service for clients that have been recently diagnosed with an eye condition and may wish to talk, confidentially, to a counsellor.

Referrals can be through professionals, such as Consultants, Optometrists, The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind Outreach Workers, Sensory Services or from individuals. The service offers 6-8 weeks counselling sessions. These are free and can be either at the client's home or here at Woodside in a dedicated quiet room. After the sessions have concluded on-going telephone support is offered.

Should the client wish they can be referred for further sessions to a counsellor at Hertfordshire Action on Disability; a small fee needs to be negotiated with them.

The pilot covers three hospital areas, Hemel Hempstead, Welwyn Garden City and Stevenage. Although the pilot is still in its infancy the response seems to be encouraging. A diagnosis of sight loss can take a big toll on the emotions, quite apart from the practical problems people face. Anger, grief, anxiety, isolation and a profound sense of lost identity and independence are some of the feelings that can overwhelm people following a diagnosis of sight loss.

No one who is diagnosed should make the Sight Loss Journey alone. The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind recognises the need for support when trying to cope with the traumatic news of sight loss.

A Farewell Message from Cherrell Christie Work Experience Student

Hi All

For those of you that I have not had the pleasure to meet, I am a third year social work student who has undertaken a 100 day placement at The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind since November 2009. I have enjoyed every minute of my time although it has been a journey with many twists and turns. It has been very exciting and challenging. I left The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind on 30th June. As my role was a placement post it unfortunately had to come to an end.

It seems that my time as a student is over and I am now to enter the scary world of work but as 'one chapter ends a new one opens'. This outlook is keeping me positive; leaving has made me tearful at times as I will miss so many of the people I have met and worked with but I can't work for free all of my life! 😊

I would just like to take this opportunity to thank you all for allowing me to work alongside you. It has been my pleasure to offer you advice and support. I hope that they have been effective and helped you to make informed choices about the services you wish to receive. My experience and knowledge have developed greatly whilst on placement at The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind. The time I have spent in post has been extremely valuable to my learning. I feel that I have embraced my placement and I have grown and developed into an individual who now has a good knowledge of this area of work.

I now feel confident when asked questions or am put into new situations that I am able to give a relevant and thorough response. This I will carry with me into my future career.

The experience in the placement has been a learning curve which I fully appreciated and I am pleased that I have been given the opportunity to expand my knowledge and professional skills.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind team as they have been so supportive and have really helped me to maximise my potential. A big thank you to Maria Surgenor and Sue Lewis who have supervised me during my placement; they have been very patient and helpful. I wish everyone all the best for the future and I will keep in touch.

All the best, Cherrell

**“Getting On” by
Linda Coleman
Volunteer**

I work at the Wolsey Hall Sight Information Point with George and occasionally we are asked questions about things other than the items on show. This can be about returning to work or going to college. As this is not what I have been trained to do I thought I should start asking questions myself to find out where to start and who to contact.

The first person I spoke to was the disability officer at the Job Centre who was really quite helpful. He said that if you are on incapacity benefit you need to see your doctor to be signed off as ready for work first. Then you can make an appointment with a disability officer at your local office who will assess your needs and, if necessary, will help you to get some training.

He also said there is some help to get people into employment such as help to get you to the place of work as well as some practical help while you are there which all sounds good.

I then went to Hertford Regional College to ask about computing for blind people and was told that they do not have a class for blind people but they are taught in main-stream College. However, if you do want computing you will need to learn the software enabling packages first, which are JAWS or Zoom text. I was assured that whatever a visually impaired person wanted to learn they would be welcome at the College.

The person to speak to is Christine Giddings who is head of the support team at

Hertford Regional College
phone number is
01992 411400

Also there is a book written by Action for Blind People entitled “Getting On” which is used by the disability officer at Waltham Cross Job Centre. This is free and can be ordered from the Royal National Institute for the Blind. The book covers things like employment and training, equipment, money, housing and lots more.

Feedback on National Eye Health Week and Carers Week by Bernie Prizeman

Well everyone, I am surprised to be writing this article but I have not yet quite settled down into my new role as housewife extraordinaire, I think Tim, my husband, keeps asking Maria to find wee jobs for me to do to keep me away from the kitchen – can't think why!

To celebrate National Eye Health Week and Carers Week (14th – 18th June) we invited the all the visually impaired people in the Welwyn Garden City area, their carers and other local community groups to two special open days. We arranged for suppliers of equipment to come in and showcase the wide range of technology that is now on the market to ease everyday living. We organised this event together with Hertfordshire Action on Disability and the Hertfordshire Hearing Advisory Service and we invited other support services like the Money Advice Unit, Library Service, Children's Schools and Families Specialist Advisory Teachers, Talking Newspapers and

Wireless for the Blind so visitors were able to find out what support is available locally, no matter what their needs.

Over the two days about 78 people visited us including Police staff, Adult Care Service staff, Optometrists and others involved in the provision of services. It was clear everyone found this event very useful. Many people did not realise what support services were available in the local area.

It really is worthwhile visiting our Resource Centre in Welwyn Garden City so, if you haven't been over to visit yet, give us a call and we can arrange this for you.

Have a great summer.

The Action for Blind People
Bus will be in the county in
November:

9th November Stevenage
10th November Bishops
Stortford
11th November Tring

West Herts Area Update by Dawn Bunting Outreach Support Worker

Hello everyone

I wanted to start by saying a big thank you to all The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind staff and volunteers for making me so welcome and for all the advice, help and, most of all, the support you have all given me in my new post. I have been here 5 months now and I really enjoy my work.

I am also the newly appointed "Centre Manager " at the Social Centre for the Blind in Hemel Hempstead, having spent time over at the Centre I have become aware that we are not using it to its full potential. I intend to introduce several new clubs and classes and I would particularly like to hear your thoughts and ideas.

Please call with any suggestions on 07825 330648, or email me at dawn.bunting@hertsblind.com.

The Sight Information Point has changed. It is now at the Stanborough Centre Garston, North Watford. It's a really nice

Centre with lots of free parking. Please come along for any advice on sight loss worries. Once again thank you for all your support.

David Heath, a case study, by Terry Knight

David Heath takes a positive attitude about his lack of sight but he is the first to admit that "it's awful being blind".

"I give the impression I'm all right but inside I'm churning. However, there are no such words as 'I can't'. I do all my own shopping and cooking, I do not want to be a vegetable".

David, who was born in Battersea, now lives in Stevenage. He suffers from *Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP). He did not realise he had a sight impairment at first but after working in engineering and surface grinding and later for Tesco and Toys R Us, he went to his doctor's surgery and an optician's practice. He undertook a visual field test, was diagnosed and subsequently registered as severely sight impaired in 2002.

David moved to Stevenage with his family and it was while living in a flat that he decided he would like a guide dog. He considered it would not be practical in his accommodation so he moved to his present home. He had a guide dog for two years but due to the animosity generated by members of the public he was forced to give it up and now relies on a long cane to get about outside.

Although he is no longer in paid employment he keeps busy doing voluntary work. He operates the Sight-Line in Chells for The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind, teaches **JAWS to visually impaired people at his home, in their home or over the telephone. He also serves on a social club and gardening club committees and is always willing to give useful advice to blind people.

***Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP)** is a group of genetic eye conditions that can lead to incurable blindness. In the progression of symptoms for RP, night blindness generally precedes tunnel vision by years or even decades. Many people with RP do not become legally blind until their 40s or 50s and retain some sight all their lives. Others go completely blind from RP, in some cases as early as childhood. Progression of RP is different in each case.

****JAWS** is a powerful software program designed to work with a speech synthesizer to improve the productivity level of visually impaired employees, students and the casual user. By streamlining keyboard functions, automating commands, and eliminating repetition, JAWS allows the operator to learn faster and easier than ever before. JAWS is based upon a whole new approach to talking computers - that of designing software with the priorities of the blind user in mind. Yet, the sighted trainer or supervisor has not been forgotten, since JAWS offers both audible and visual flexibility.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) Regulations

Changes to Disability Living Allowance will allow people with severe visual impairment to claim the higher rate mobility component from April 2011.

On 29th June the Government laid the Regulations (covering the eligibility criteria) before parliament. The Regulations will lay before Parliament for 40 days after which they will come into force.

After this Department of Work and Pensions will then continue the implementation of the changes as per the criteria laid out in the Regulations.

Eligibility Criteria

- No perception of light
- Perception of light only
- Perception of hand movement
- A visual acuity of 3/60 with a total or extensive loss of field.

What Will Happen Next – How Do I Claim the Benefit?

Visually impaired people already in receipt of the lower rate mobility component of DLA need do nothing now. The Department is not starting work on looking at claims for a number of months. The Pensions, Disability and Carers Service will be contacting current claimants from around November onwards to talk to them about whether or not they will be eligible. Further information about this will follow in due course.

The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind will keep people updated as more information becomes available. The DWP will be publicising more information to claimants in the coming months.

Free one day IT Training Course – Is anyone interested?

We have the opportunity to run a one day IT training course here at Woodside, plus one in Hemel. If you are keen to learn more about computers please phone 01707 324680 and leave your name and telephone number and we will get back to you with further information.

An Observation by Gill Richardson

I was asked to attend a focus group in Letchworth by George to point out the problems with the new layout of the streets in Letchworth town centre. This was brought to my notice by a complaint made by Lily (surname forgotten) with regard to the lack of tactile paving. After a walk around the town centre, where we were joined by several other visually impaired people, to identify the problem areas, a core group adjourned to Letchworth Heritage Foundation's offices to put our grievances to a representative from the design group. In the meeting were representatives from: Royal National Institute for the Blind, Guide Dogs, Letchworth Heritage Foundation, The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind (myself) and Lily.

Subjects under discussion were:-

- Tactile paving, no colour definition between the tactile paving and the surrounding pavement and none at all at the junction of Leys Avenue and Eastcheap.

- Kerbing, no colour distinction between kerbstones and guttering on the side of the road, three different heights of kerbstones in a line.
- Shiny surfaces on cycle stands, waste bin tops, soak-aways for water features, the glare factor was noted by everyone as it was a very bright day.
- The designs of the circular seating areas although very pleasing to look at stick out at ground level so could be hazardous, these along with other pavement furniture is something that will be looked at.

It was brought up that someone from North Herts District Council had invited representation from all disabled groups to send in comments about the original plans before they were approved. They also invited some disabled residents and one totally blind person to walk around the town centre to give their opinions.

Note: Hopefully further information will follow in the next issue of Sight News.