



# The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind

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

Spring 2011  
Issue 128

## Sight News



**Alan Nevill (HSB Volunteer) and Michelle Nash (HSB Volunteer) with her guide dog, Radley, outside Specsavers in the Pavilions Shopping Centre, Waltham Cross**

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

Hello again to you all!

As I explained in Sight News before Christmas there has been a lot happening and we have now been told how the comprehensive Spending Review and Voluntary Sector Review will impact on HSB funding currently received and I am sure you will be aware of the challenges that we all face as a result.

I am sad to report that the Deaf Blind service that HSB has delivered for many years will end on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. We have worked closely with the County Council to make sure appropriate support and services continue to be offered to the Deaf Blind Service users who have been receiving this service and referring to the Sensory Services Team where necessary.

All other HSB services will continue to be supported and I would like to thank all of the staff and volunteers for their hard work, dedication and commitment making sure we can evidence the need for these services and by working together we aim to

enhance and develop these services further.

I am also delighted to tell you that we have four new Trustees, Richard Hill, Richard Seaman, Edwin Godfrey and Ron Pickford. The recruitment of new Trustees has been a high priority in the last year, looking at strengthening and developing a committed Board of Trustees who can work together to set the mission, aims and values of the Charity.

There are some key changes happening around eye health services and I am working closely with NHS Hertfordshire and the County Council to develop eye health services in Hertfordshire. This includes working with other key partners such as Guide Dogs, Action for Blind People, RNIB and SENSE as well as suppliers of the aids and equipment people with a visual impairment often find vital and enable them to retain their independence.

HSB will be holding a multi agency event in June to raise the awareness of sight loss in Hertfordshire. This will form part of National Eye Health Week and Carers Week and we will be working with key partners to make sure this event has a wide range of information available and access to other service providers.

If you would like to find out more about any of the services HSB can offer or you would like to make suggestions about HSB services please contact the office on 01707 324680. This is a 24 hour answerphone number, if you leave your name and contact number a member of staff will call you back as soon as possible.

I would like to thank all of our subscribers and sponsors of the newsletter for their continued support to help contribute towards the production and circulation of our regular Sight News newsletter. Without the generous support from our readers and suppliers we would not be able to

produce and circulate such a wide range of information to as many people with sight loss as possible.

HSB would like to thank our subscribers for their continuing support; with the additional support via sponsorship and advertising we are able to maximise the circulation and important information we can share with our readers.

I look forward to keeping you up to date and I hope you enjoy the 128<sup>th</sup> issue of Sight News.

*Maria*

## Merlin LCD

The **Merlin LCD** has helped thousands of people with macular degeneration and low vision regain the ability to view photos, crosswords, puzzles, newspapers, magazines, confidential documents and food packaging.

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

We have been fortunate to receive some good donations over the last few months; firstly from the Sawbridgeworth Rotary Club who donated £900 from their carol service on Christmas Eve. We have received £250 from the New Testament Church of God in Hitchin and £100 from the Widford Handbell Ringers, despite not being able to do their normal fundraising event owing to the bad weather before Christmas. Our staff member Vanessa Macdonald, together with volunteers, raised over £120 through a collection at the Waltham Cross Pavilions Shopping Centre.

Our thanks to those mentioned and to all of you who have sent us much needed donations over the recent past.

I am pleased to report that we have also received £380 from Waitrose in Welwyn Garden City from our participation in their “Community Matters” scheme in November. Some further good news is that we have also been nominated to take part as one of the three good causes at the Hitchin Waitrose in April. So if you are anywhere near that store

in April (or you know someone who is) then do pop in and put a token in the HSB collecting box!

Just to recap, for a good cause to take part 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. You can help us by nominating HSB at your nearest Waitrose store!

John

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

I have worked for the Hertfordshire Society for the Blind for a year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Maria, our CEO, and all staff members for their support throughout this time. It has been a privilege to work with HSB clients.

I would also like to say thank you for the wonderful training I have been given and also for the depth of enlightenment and awareness of sight loss I have gained during this time.

Pat

**Office / Resource Centre  
Update by George Hatchman  
Office Co-ordinator**

Most of you will be aware of our eight Sight Information Points (SIPs) sited around the County on a monthly basis which provide information and demonstrate aids and equipment to help maintain independence for the visually impaired.

This article is to remind everyone about our Resource Centre here at the Woodside Centre in Welwyn Garden City. It is ideal for those of you who may live in or around the Welwyn Garden City area or in areas of the County where transport links to us may be better than trying to attend a SIP within your local area.

At the Resource Centre we have the aids and equipment demonstrated at the SIPs, but also has items such as CCTVs, Document Readers, Daisy Players etc.

For those of you who are not aware we are based near to the QE11 Hospital. Unfortunately the bus stop for the QE11 is about a mile from the Woodside Centre. However, the following buses all run to and from Welwyn Garden City Bus and Railway Stations

and stop at the QE11, 300, 301, 366, 603,724 and 725.

We have dedicated days when the Resource Centre is open, normally Tuesdays and Thursdays of each week.

We have a member of staff at the Centre on those days from 10.00am to 3.00pm. Either Vanessa Macdonald, Bernie Prizeman or Lindsey Wheeler will be available to help you.

It is important you call our Sightline number to make an appointment a few days before you would like to attend. This ensures you have an appointment time and that our member of staff can give you one to one attention. The Sight-Line number is 01707 324680 Monday to Thursday between 10.00am and 1.00pm

You may also wish to be aware that Herts Action on Disability (HAD) and Herts Hearing Advisory Service (HHAS) are in the same premises. You do not require an appointment to visit HAD. However you must have an appointment to visit HHAS (01707 324582).

Have a great spring and early summer

George

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

Hello everyone. I'm glad to see spring is finally on its way; I cannot wait for all the lovely flowers to pop up.

Just a reminder! The Hemel Social Centre for the Blind has two new clubs. The Drop-in Cafe started on the 25<sup>th</sup> February and we had 6 people visit. Tea and coffee is served between 11.00am and 1.00pm and the Cafe will be open on the 2nd and 4th Friday of every month. You don't need to book, just come along for a chat and bring your friends.

Our Talking Book Club also started in February. It runs from 11.00am to 1.00pm on the last Friday of every month. At our first meeting we chatted about what we liked to read and how many books we could read each week/month just to get an idea. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed it and was really positive about the Club. We have all taken a book home (even me) and we will meet next month and give our opinion/review of our book - as we have all taken a different book this should be very interesting. I hope to see you there.

Once again the Hemel Social Centre is your facility, if you have any thoughts or ideas for clubs or groups that you would like to attend (volunteers always welcome), I would really love to hear them.

I'm always in need of volunteers so if you have friends or family who have a little time to spare please tell them about us - an hour a week could change someone's life.

Dawn

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### **New Club in Hitchin**

A new club for visually impaired people is starting in Hitchin for anyone from Hitchin and the surrounding area. It will be a WEEKLY club and will be run at The New Testament Church of God which is at the junction of Hampden Road and Willian Road SG4 OLB. Do come along to the first meeting, the lovely ladies of TNTCG are open to your ideas of what you would like to happen at the Club. The first meeting is on Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> March at 11:00am. Volunteers who'd like to help at this new venture would be very welcome too.

For more information telephone Lindsey on 07825 0059521.

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

As news from the North is very adequately being included elsewhere in this newsletter, i.e. the start of a new club in Hitchin and the big event at Chells Resource Centre on 19<sup>th</sup> April (please see the Optelec flyer enclosed). Let me take this opportunity to tell you about a relatively new Talking Book Service.

“Listening Books” is an audio-book library service like Calibre or the RNIB and is available to anyone who struggles with reading due to illness, disability or a learning disability such as dyslexia. By joining you can access 1000s of books from £20 a year available on CD, MP3 or internet streaming and downloads – downloads are free.

To become a member telephone  
0207 407 9417

Email: [info@listening-books.org.uk](mailto:info@listening-books.org.uk) or join online via:  
[www.listening-books.org.uk](http://www.listening-books.org.uk)

Happy listening!

Lindsey

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

Hello everyone

I have been very busy recently at the Woodside Centre. As well as my usual visits to the QE11 on a Thursday morning I have been attending various training courses which I hope will provide me with more knowledge and a better understanding of how I can help my clients. I was also interviewed for St Albans Talking Newspaper; some of you may have heard me if you subscribe to the service.

I am due to attend the Dragons Apprentice Finale on the 16<sup>th</sup> March where we find out how our students did with their business ideas and see how much money they managed to raise on behalf of our charity. This is very exciting for us, fingers crossed that they did well.

In April I will be taking over the St Albans Sight Information Point, from Dawn, (every 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday 10.30-12.30) at St Albans library. Please come along to have a chat about any of your sight problems; I would love to meet up with you.

Take care, Vicky  
Office 01707 880544  
Mobile 07825 330649

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

I thought you might be interested in **Papworth Trust Home Solutions (PTHS)**, particularly as they are based in East Herts. PTHS provide practical housing advice and support for anyone who is disabled, has a learning difficulty, and is elderly or on a low income.

You can get expert assistance at their offices in Corby, Bishops Stortford, Harlow, Southend and Waltham Forest.

Their range of services span:

- advice on adaptation or re-location options
- advice on specialist equipment
- clarification of housing issues
- project tendering and management on client's behalf
- Core Home Improvement Agency services within East Herts and Harlow assisting with provision of Disabled Facilities Grants, Decent Home Grants and Local Authority Loans
- dispersed alarm scheme
- funding options
- handyperson service
- security service
- hospital prevention and release service
- gardening scheme.

PTHS work with home owners and with people who are in rented accommodation.

Typically, PTHS is most suited to people with disabled children, disabled adults wanting to live on their own, people who have acquired a disability, older people and people needing adaptations after leaving hospital.

Best wishes to you all

Vanessa

07825 992950 or 01707 324680

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**VocalEyes** is a nationwide audio description charity, providing access to the arts for blind and partially sighted people. Pauline one of our volunteers reports on the VocalEyes CD:

“I found the VocalEyes CD extremely well presented and clearly spoken. It named all the London and local theatres that use the VocalEyes service. I have no major criticism but perhaps an example of what a blind person would hear (say in the theatre) would have been good – that would be helpful to those who have never experienced it”.

For more information visit their website [www.vocaleyeyes.co.uk](http://www.vocaleyeyes.co.uk)

## **Club News and Goodbye by Christine Wheeler Clubs Co-ordinator**

This is my last update as Clubs Co-ordinator. I am sad to be leaving HSB but I need to help with the accounts in my husband's business. I have enjoyed my time at HSB working with great staff and volunteers. A special "thank you" to the club leaders, volunteers and members for welcoming me when I have visited your club.

Please support your local clubs and contact Sight-Line for details of your nearest one. Many people look forward to attending their club meetings. They enjoy a chat and a sociable time with friends and new members. Useful and new information is available at clubs and people share experiences and talk to each other and even solve problems together over a cup of tea or coffee.

So visit your local club. I'm sure you will thoroughly enjoy it.

Christine

## **Herts on Sight**

This new website may be of interest to your club members. It was established by Robert Coleman.

Herts on Sight provides links and helpful advice for those suffering with a visual impairment and living in or around Hertfordshire. This could include joining a walking group, travelling around the countryside by bus or train or simply just going shopping. All of these have one thing in common and that is that people with visual impairment have the opportunity get out of their house, mix with other people and make new friends.

Equally, if not more important, is the fact that with the help of Access to Work and the Disability Living Allowance people with visual impairment can continue to work. For those who have not been in work for some time there are a number of associations that can help them.

To visit Herts on Sight please go to their website:

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

## **The NHS belongs to us all. Let's use it correctly!**

Did you know that wasted medicines cost NHS Hertfordshire £7 million each year? This means that about one in every 20 medicines prescribed is unused and that this is money that could be spent on 1400 hip operations, 980 heart by-pass operations or 210 community nurses.

Heather Gray, Head of Pharmacy and Medicines Management at NHS Hertfordshire said, "When it comes to medicines there are lots of ways that people can help the NHS make best use of its resources. These include checking what medicines you still have at home every time you re-order your repeat medicines, only ordering the medicines you need, and letting your GP or pharmacist know if you've stopped taking any of your medicines. Remember, you should always take the full course of medicines, even if you start to feel better; if you don't then this might mean that you delay your recovery and have to take another full course of medication.

"Don't forget that your community pharmacist is your local medicines expert so talk to them about getting the best out of your medication".

A staggering £3 million of the local NHS budget is spent on providing medicines such as paracetamol, hay fever remedies and indigestion tablets on prescription. This is money that we can't spend on more complex medicines or treatment. You can pick up these items on the High Street for less than £1, with painkillers available for as little as 16p. Why not add them to your weekly shop? This way you'll be prepared for life's little emergencies and you'll be helping the NHS to use its resources wisely.

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### **Three good homes wanted! HSB would welcome a donation!**

HSB has 3 similar scanners, complete with user guides available to the first three applicants offering a donation. Buyer to collect.

Please phone 01707 324680 and make us an offer.

## Vision UK 2011

Vision UK 2011 is the only conference that offers the opportunity to engage with the whole of the eye health and sight loss sector.

The high profile event boasts distinguished speakers such as BBC political correspondent Gary O'Donoghue and Department of Health's David Behan.

The day will focus on the changing external environment, discussing the 'Big Society,' commissioning changes and the recent advances in technology. It will address the potential risks we need to manage and the opportunities we need to grasp as a sector. In addition, it will incorporate the Techshare Mobile event and feature technological innovation as a key element of the day.

Delegates will have the chance to share and learn from examples of good practice and innovation as well as debate the wider social and economic issues around sight services.

The annual Vision conference is taking place during National Eye Health Week, 13<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> June, and is expected to attract around 450 delegates.

## Changes to Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

Following calls to Sight-Line regarding the changes to DLA, George contacted Action for Blind People Welfare Support Service.

In his discussion it became evident that the new rules are even more complex than before, especially for people over 65 who may currently be in receipt of DLA.

HSB advises clients to contact the Action for Blind People Welfare Support Service directly. This ensures that you are receiving accurate advice from people who have been trained to deal with the queries. Action for Blind People Welfare Support Service will also be able to answer any consequential questions you may have about your own particular case. By contacting them directly you will cut down the time involved in completing your query.

For further help or support with DLA please call your local team on 01603 455767 or visit [www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk](http://www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk)

## **Social Networking Online**

by Alexander Wheen

With isolation being one of, if not the biggest challenge for those of us with a visual impairment, social networking is something of extreme importance. There are many social networking sites and services but in this article I want to briefly discuss two of my favourites for social interfacing for those with a visual impairment. These are Skype and Facebook.

### **Skype**

The potential for its use in connecting not just blind and partially sighted people in the U.K, but all over the world, is a very exciting prospect.

For those unaware of Skype, it's rather like having a telephone on your computer. You can call people all over the world whenever you want for free. With just a microphone and speakers it allows you to chat to anyone who is also online and not only this it allows you to see who else is online and available to chat.

For more info about SKYPE go to [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)

## **Facebook**

Facebook is something I imagine most people will have already heard about. A misconception with Facebook is the idea that because an individual is unable to see the photographs, then Facebook would be a waste of time for someone with a visual impairment. Not true whatsoever!

Facebook has many features for those with a visual impairment. It has an instant messenger service allowing people to chat with their friends online via a text box. It allows people to keep up to date with events and announcements being made by groups and charities etc. Admittedly it is mainly aimed at the younger generation but that said it is still definitely the most popular social networking tool.

### **Census help can be obtained from**

On line: [www.census.gov.uk](http://www.census.gov.uk)

Braille and large print:

[www.census.gov.uk/2011accessibility](http://www.census.gov.uk/2011accessibility)

Telephone helpline on:

0300 0201 101, charged at local rate

Text Relay (for people with hearing problems: 18001 0300 0201 160

## **Follow these tips to avoid getting tricked out of your money.**

### **Be sceptical**

Beware of extravagant promises. Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Don't be afraid to bin it, delete it or hang up.

### **Take your time**

Scammers don't like to give you time to think. They will try to pressure you into making a decision by telling you that if you don't act now you'll miss out. Resist any pressure to make a decision right away. Consider asking a friend or family member for advice or even an accountant or solicitor if big sums of money are involved.

### **Know with whom you're dealing**

Be suspicious if you're contacted out of the blue by someone you don't know. This is often a clear warning sign that it's a scam. And don't be fooled by official looking websites and marketing materials. Scammers are very good at making their scams look authentic.

## **Protect your financial information**

Never give your bank account details and passwords to someone you don't know. Trustworthy firms will never ask for this information.

### **Cut junk mail and calls**

Mailings: Reduce the number of unsolicited letters you get by registering for free with the Mailing Preference Service at [www.mpsonline.org.uk](http://www.mpsonline.org.uk) or by phoning **0845 703 4599**.

Telephone calls: Reduce your number of unsolicited phone calls by registering your phone number for free with Telephone Preference Service at [www.tpsonline.gov.uk](http://www.tpsonline.gov.uk) or by phoning **0845 070 0707**.

### **Report suspected scams**

If you suspect a scam, report it online at [www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/scams](http://www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/scams) It'll provide vital information to the Office of Fair Trading and local authority trading standards services.

### **Ask for help**

If you think you've been caught by a scam don't let embarrassment or fear stop you asking for help. Millions of people are taken in every year. Call Consumer Direct for advice on **08454 04 05 06**.

## Thanks go to Paul Harding from Mir Shafi

I spoke to Sue Lewis regarding Paul Harding, a volunteer helper for HSB. I would like to send the following article for publication in your newsletter.

“Paul was an exceptionally dedicated volunteer helper. He helped me over a period of three years and looked after me very well.

“I am so grateful to him; he brought sunshine to my life. There is just one complaint; he was never late and never accepted gratuity. He helped me collect my work station and assemble it... a handyman as well as computer expert. He helped me to print personalised calendars etc. I am proud of him and wish him good luck as he moves away from St Albans to the south country and I cannot now get in touch with him.

“I hope he will appreciate my comments.” Mir

### For Sale

Clearview Spectrum magnifier by Tieman (Optelec).  
£500 ono - please make an offer.  
North London / Herts border.

Call Chris for details  
07747 600 711.

## Carers Week in 2011 will be all about The True Face of Carers.

How hard is life as a carer or how easy? How much help do carers actually receive from statutory agencies and government, local and national? Or should that be how little?

How do carers think society sees them? What is the reality of caring in the UK in 2011?

What are the biggest surprises that you and I encounter when we become carers? What can really make a difference to carers' lives? Is it money or something else?

Is caring a perpetual struggle with no thanks and no recognition? Or a richly-rewarding experience that brings out the best in the human spirit?

All this and more will be revealed during 13<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> June 2011. Carers will be centrestage during the biggest awareness week in the UK. We will reveal the truth and sweep away the myths.

Best wishes.

Paul Matz  
Carers Week Manager

## **The new name for Adult Care Services (ACS) is now Health and Community Services (HCS)**

The County Council is restructuring to streamline management and ACS has been renamed to reflect changing priorities and forthcoming responsibilities for public health and community wellbeing, helping people to keep fit and well.

The change will not affect the way people get adult social services or contact us.

The phone number remains 0300 123 4042. HCS web-pages can be found at [www.hertsdirect.org/hcs](http://www.hertsdirect.org/hcs).

Online information, leaflets, factsheets, forms and signage will be updated when they are due for renewal. No additional costs will be incurred because of the change.

Customer Services and Libraries, Culture and Learning are also part of Health and Community Services. Again, the services and contact details remain unchanged.

## **In Memorium, John Blundell**

Bridget Matthews, the Secretary of The Frank Letts Blind Fellowship of Royston reported

“I have to inform you of the sad death of John Blundell, our Chairman and Treasurer. He will be very much missed by us all as he was one of the founder members of the Fellowship.

We have elected Celia Walpole, as Chairman and George Oakman as Treasurer”.

Bridget is happy to receive correspondence:

Bridget Matthews  
8 Earls Hill Gardens  
Royston SG8 9DA.

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**Please support HSB and Sight News with any of your articles or suggestions that you would like to see included:**

The Hertfordshire Society for the Blind (RCN: 1047148)  
The Woodside Centre  
The Commons  
Welwyn Garden City AL7 4SE  
Sight-Line 01707 324680  
[office@hertsblind.com](mailto:office@hertsblind.com)



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If you'd like to know more about BWBF or how to have one of our sets on free loan, please contact us on 01622 754757, visit our WEB site at [www.blind.org.uk](http://www.blind.org.uk) or talk to the Hertfordshire Society for the Blind. Alternatively fill in the form below and send it to us at the freepost address shown.

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