

# SightNews

Newsletter 122

Spring 2009

Sightnews is the newsletter of the Hertfordshire Society for the Blind

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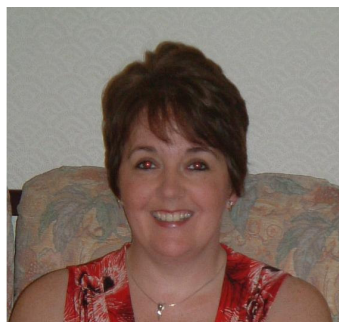
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## CEO's Patch



Hello again everyone and welcome to our Spring Newsletter. I hope you all had a good Christmas and New Year.

It's with a heavy heart I have to tell you that the start to 2009 has been a very challenging time. I am sure you are all aware of the current 'credit crunch' that is affecting the whole of the country and this is also having an impact on the Society. Since taking up this new role there have been real challenges facing us all, and this has resulted in us having to make some really difficult decisions and changes.

As a result we have had to restructure the Society and this has resulted in having to make some staff redundant. John Hood, who has worked for the Society for over four years will be leaving us at the end of March, his hard work and dedication will be sadly missed. Lis Barratt, who has worked for the Society for over ten years will also be leaving the Society at the end of March, again her hard work and dedication will be greatly missed. Claire MacKenzie, who has only been working for the Society since October 2008, will be leaving the Society at the end of February 2009. Although she has only been here a short time, her hard work and passion to make a difference will be a great loss to the Society. Christine Wheeler, who has only been with the Society since September 2008, will be leaving the Society at the end of March 2009. Christine has offered support and advice to the 25 independent blind clubs in the county. Unfortunately, as there was no other funding available to support this post we have had to say a sad goodbye. Lindsey Wheeler, Sue Lewis, George Hatchman and Bernie Prizeman will be remaining with the Society and working with me to develop the services and support that HSB offers in the county.

The restructure of the Society is being done to give the staff a smaller local area to cover, so hopefully this will help them to find out more about what is happening in their area, as well as providing more timely responses to the support they can offer.

Lindsey will be covering the North of the county; this will include the Hitchin, Stevenage and Royston Sight Information Points, the Lister hospital eye clinics and low vision clinics, as well as providing support to the volunteers.

Sue will be covering the East and Centre of the county; this will include St Albans, Cheshunt and Hertford Sight Information Points, the QEII eye clinics and low vision clinics, as well as providing support to the volunteers.

Bernie will be covering the West of the county; this will include Hemel and Watford Sight Information Points, as well as the Hemel low vision clinic, and will provide support to the volunteers.

George is taking on a more office based role. However, he will continue to provide support for the team at Sight Information Points when he can.

This restructure will be a real challenge to the team as it will change the way the Society has worked in the past, but hopefully it will enable the staff to deliver a more localised service.

I have continued to work really hard to secure funding to help the Society to be able to deliver support and services to blind and visually impaired people, their families and carers in Hertfordshire. I have been able to secure additional funding from the County Council and a new contract from the Primary Care Trust that will help us to continue to deliver the valuable support that the small team of staff, and large team of volunteers is able to offer. There will need to be some changes to the services that we have offered in the past, but by working much closer with Adult Care Services, the Primary Care Trust and other voluntary organisations we aim to be able to deliver a quality service.

One thing we are having to look at is this newsletter. We currently produce 3200 in large print, 980 in audio cassette format, 34 via email and 30 in Braille. There is a significant cost to the Society to provide this newsletter and I have had to look at how we can secure money to be able to support this very valuable service. As a result I have had to introduce a charge of £5 per person per year for three newsletters.

I understand that the credit crunch is affecting us all. However, if I cannot secure the funding, we may have to look at stopping the newsletter and I am sure that this will be greatly missed by you all. Inserted in this newsletter is a reply slip to be returned to HSB with a cheque for £5 if you wish to continue to receive future issues of the newsletter. I hope you feel able to support the Society in this way as we have not been in the situation before where we have had to ask for financial support to help us to deliver support and services.

Another challenge the Society faces is that the lease at Leahoe House has expired. Trying to find alternative, appropriate accommodation has been a challenge. However, I am pleased to be able to tell you that we are hoping to be moving to the Woodside Centre in Welwyn Garden City in the next few months. Sensory Services are due to move to Apsley, so when they have moved out we are moving in to some of their office space. This looks like a really good move for the Society as it will mean we are able to work closely with other voluntary organisations like the Herts. Hearing Advisory Service and Herts. Action on Disability.

All this feels a bit doom and gloomish. However, I am sure that this will help us to secure the future of the Society. There are lots of really exciting opportunities that we are looking at for the future and I look forward to keeping you all up to date with what is happening.

Finally I want to say a massive thank you to the staff and volunteers, who continue to work really hard to be able to deliver these services and planning ways to move forward together in 2009.

Bye for now  
Maria

## **RECYCLE**

When you have finished with this newsletter why not recycle it by putting it in a local community venue where others can find out more about the Society?

## **Staff Update**

### **Bernie**

Happy New Year to you all. As you can see from the CEO's Patch, there has been a great deal happening here in the last few months.

In the new scheme of things, I will be providing support at the Hemel Sight information Point on the 2nd and 4th Monday every month and the Watford Sight Information Point on the 3rd Monday every month.

I will also be providing support at the eye clinics and low vision clinics at the hospitals and working closely with the volunteers who provide really valuable support to patients and the hospital staff.

Finally, I am taking over from Claire the home visiting and volunteer support in the West of the county. Claire has worked really hard to get me up to date with all the information I need and I look forward to speaking to you all soon.

Advance notification: There will be a library event at Borehamwood in May. Please watch out for the yellow flyer I will send out nearer the date.

If you want to find out more information then you can ring me on 07825 330648 or email me [bernie.prizeman@hertsblind.com](mailto:bernie.prizeman@hertsblind.com) or you can ring the Sight Line, leave a message and I can call you back.

Bye for now, Bernie

## Sue

Hello to you all. Hope you all had a good Christmas and Happy New Year. There are lots of changes taking place here and I will not go over it all again, but it looks like a really busy time ahead.

As part of the new restructure I will be working in the East and Centre of the county. This will mean a large area of the county to cover! As part of my role I will be covering the Sight Information Point at St Albans. This was held at the Jubilee Centre but is now moving to St Albans library, and will be held on the 3rd Wednesday every month. I look forward to seeing you there. I will also be working closely with George to take over the Sight Information Point in Cheshunt on the 4th Tuesday every month and Hertford on the 4th Wednesday. Like Bernie, I will be providing volunteer support for all volunteers in the East and Centre of the county and making sure there is information and advice available at the QEII eye clinic and low vision clinics

You can contact me on 07825 330649

Email

[sue.lewis@hertsblind.com](mailto:sue.lewis@hertsblind.com)

Or you can ring the office and leave a message and I can call you back.

I am also looking at developing support at the local clubs in the East and Centre of the county, working closely with MD groups and other blind clubs so if you have time to spare to help out, or would like to find out more about any clubs in your area, please get in contact.

Finally I am working with Lindsey supporting volunteers to deliver information sessions through the Expert Patient Programme. We have had some funding from the PCT to pilot a course. This will be for people who have been newly diagnosed with Macular Disease, initially, but looking at other long term health conditions in the future. If you are interested in finding out more about this course ring me or Lindsey for more details.

Hope to see you soon

Sue

## Lindsey

Hello from me too! What a busy start to the year. Things are moving very quickly and changes have been made to staffing and who is doing what and in what area. I hope that this information will help you understand the changes that have been made, and given you contact information of someone to speak to if you have any concerns.

As Maria explained, I will be covering the North of the county, so taking over from George running the Sight Information Points in Royston 1st Wednesday every month, Hitchin the 2nd Wednesday and Stevenage the 3rd Tuesday. I will continue to provide the support at the Lister Hospital eye clinics and low vision clinics and, finally, also providing volunteer support for all volunteers in the north of the county. As Sue explained we are also looking at developing the local clubs in the area, so if you have time to share or want to find out more about what clubs in your area offer, let me know. You can get in touch with me on 07825 005951 or email [lindsey.wheeler@hertsblind.com](mailto:lindsey.wheeler@hertsblind.com) Or ring the office and I can call you back.

Best Wishes, Lindsey

## George

Again I would like to thank you all for the support, help and kindness you have shown me. This year is going to be a very challenging year as lots of difficulties face the Society.

Changing roles as part of the restructure is a challenge to us all. I will continue to provide support to the whole team, even though the new role is more office based. Handing over the Sight Information points to Lindsey and Sue will take time and I am sure that anyone who comes to the events will still see me there for a while yet.

As I said the new role will be more office based, so if you ring in to the office you will probably speak to me. However the intention is that I will pass your details on to the relevant Outreach Support Worker in your area, who will then give you appropriate support, advice and information as they will be based in your local area.

You can contact me on 01992 588145 in the office, email [george.hatchman@hertsblind.com](mailto:george.hatchman@hertsblind.com) or on my mobile 07825 441741

Best Wishes, George

## **Claire**

Hello everyone. Even though I have been with the Society for a short time, the support and kindness that I have been shown makes it very difficult to say goodbye. My intention is to stay around as a volunteer, helping out with events and opportunities when I can. I have handed over lots of information to Bernie and I will continue to offer her support in the West of the county when needed. I hope to be able to continue to support the Society in a variety of ways so, you never know, you may still see me around.

Take care, Claire

## **Lis**

Although the changes taking place within the Society at the moment are extremely radical, from my position of 10 years sojourn with the Society, they are the latest in a long line of changes. When I joined the Society I walked to work each morning as we were then based in the Trinity Centre in Ware with Steve Howells as Chief Officer and Linda McLachlan as his Assistant. My title was that of Secretary and there were 6 other members of

staff making a total of 9. Over the years the number of staff has fluctuated with the varied fortunes of the Society, increasing and decreasing according to circumstances. Over the years the title of my job has varied considerably, finally settling on Office Administrator to cover the varied tasks I have had to perform. When the latest tranche of changes were proposed I decided that I would leave it to the youngsters!

My time with the Society has been extremely enjoyable even when it was at its most exhausting. I feel I have made many friends amongst staff, clients and the volunteers and I will certainly miss you all. Although I officially finish on Easter weekend, by taking holiday owing to me, my last day will be the 31<sup>st</sup> of March. I intend to take the whole of April as holiday – what bliss – but following that I will no doubt be ready and willing to make myself available to the Society as a volunteer. There seems to be something about HSB that prevails on ex-staff to provide their services free following their retirement so, like the others, you won't get rid of me that easily! Every good wish for the future.  
Lis

## Club Corner

### Christine

It is really sad that I have to leave. Providing support to the clubs has been a challenge at times, as they all operate differently, but one thing I really appreciated was the welcoming atmosphere, care and support that is offered by volunteers at these clubs.

A number of the smaller clubs are also facing difficulties as HSB has done. There are lots of funding challenges faced by smaller clubs and groups, however, there is support available from local CVS and volunteer bureaux that may be able to help. Also HSB staff will continue to provide support, help and advice when possible.

The clubs are looking for new members and volunteers to help out so if you or someone you know has some time to offer, then contact the office and we can give you the contact information of a local club in your area.

Bye for now and thank you for all your support. I will be helping out on a volunteer basis so you don't get rid of me that easily.

Christine

## Focus on Fundraising

It is really sad that I too am leaving. However, in the current climate it is very difficult to carry on when income is so difficult to secure. As Maria has said, the difficulties faced by the Society has had a real impact on us all, although there are strong plans in place to develop the Society.

I would like to thank you all for your support that you have offered over the four years that I have been with the Society, especially with fund raising activities. The Supermarket Collections that we have held in the last few months have been a real indication of the financial issues everyone is facing, being down 50% on previous collections. But never the less, we have been out there raising the profile of the Society. However, as a result, we have had to cancel events we had planned in the next few months as there is a cost implication to holding these 'tin shakes' and we are looking at finding volunteers to help so we can still continue to fund raise in this way in the future, if you know anyone, or are able to help yourself, then ring the office and we can plan future events.

Thank you again for all your support. John

## Products & Suppliers

### Enhanced Vision Europe

Enhanced Vision is dedicated to creating innovative products that enable people with low vision, including Macular Degeneration and Glaucoma, to fully participate in life

Our products are sold through partners and our own dedicated team of sales consultants throughout Europe and the United States.

For further information visit [www.enhancedvision.co.uk](http://www.enhancedvision.co.uk) or contact us on 0115 9442317. or email:

[salesuk@enhancedvision.com](mailto:salesuk@enhancedvision.com)

### Professional Vision Services

PVS is a local company and we have a full range of products, including handheld portable CCTVs. Autofocus and Flat Screen CCTVs and Computer Solutions. We offer a personal, professional service in your own home and we are a full member of BHTA. For a free, no obligation demonstration phone 01462-420751 Fax: 01462-420185: email: [sales@professional-vision-services.co.uk](mailto:sales@professional-vision-services.co.uk) or our website: [www.professional-vision-services.co.uk](http://www.professional-vision-services.co.uk)

## Shop Window

Due to the plans to move, the Society has aids and equipment that need good homes. There will be a sale of equipment arranged before the move so when this is agreed a letter will be coming out to let you all know about when and where it will be held.

Also the CCTV rental scheme that has been operating for a long time has had to be stopped. There was a great deal of time spent taking out the CCTV's and collecting them and unfortunately there is no longer the time or staff to be able to continue this. The Society has offered people who had one at home the chance to be able to keep it for a small donation and this has proved to be really beneficial. In the future the Society will not be able to sell equipment on behalf of clients and their families, but you will still be able to advertise sales in the newsletter with direct contact details.

### For Sale

Video Spec colour combi-double camera. Excellent condition. Cost £400 new. £60 o.n.o. Contact Steve Lestrangle on 01923-721424

## **Audio Version of a local history book.**

An audio version of 'Historic Buildings of Stevenage' is now available, Published by the Stevenage Society for Local History it is available on CD, although a cassette version can be made available. The book is written to a high standard and the audio version is free of charge

If you would like a copy of this excellent book, please contact Colin Killick on 01438 358679 or email him on [colin-killick@12freeukisp.co.uk](mailto:colin-killick@12freeukisp.co.uk)

## **Braille Chess Association**

You don't need to read Braille to join the BCA

For just £7 per year the BCA supports and encourages blind and partially sighted chess players from expert to beginner. For VIPs under 25 free membership and a free braille chess set will be provided.

For full information contact: Stan Lovell, 28 Gosforth Avenue, Redcar TS10 3LL  
Tel: 01642-775668 or email [stan.lovell@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:stan.lovell@tiscali.co.uk)

## **Soccer Sight**

Soccer Sight is an initiative from the RNIB, which has been designed to work with football clubs to improve access for blind and partially sighted people. Watford Football Club launched a new commentary service in October 2008 for blind and partially sighted people. They are providing advice and training and specialist commentary equipment and a pool of volunteer commentators, to enable blind and partially sighted people to have a great match day experience at Watford Football Club. The project which is supported by the HBOS Foundation, V and the Football Foundation, was launched at Watford FC on 25 October 2008, the new equipment provided by the project allows blind and partially sighted fans to sit anywhere within the stadium to receive the commentary.

For further information contact:  
Sue Neale 01792 366756

Also Watford FC are carrying out a trial run of putting the WFC match day programme on CD, if you are interested contact Leigh at Watford Disabled Supporters Association 01923 248006

## Moorfields Eye Hospital

The Governor of Moorfields Eye Hospital in London writes that there has been a revolution in eye care. Not since 1950 when cataract operations routinely began has there been such treatment to combat blindness, especially blindness in old age with Macular Degeneration—the biggest cause of blindness in this country. Wet AMD is caused by blood vessels leaking at the back of the eye. These can be zapped with lasers but unfortunately the laser causes scarring. The macular acts like a lens in a camera. It is made of thin tissue like material and becomes worn with age. The good news is there are new Macugen, Lucentis and Avustin injections to repair the macular.

If you have symptoms like seeing wavy lines, go to your doctor promptly and get a referral to an ophthalmic specialist. These injections can improve sight as well as save it and are available on the NHS. It is hoped that treatment for dry MD will soon be available. Gene therapy is also replacing faulty hereditary genes which cause blindness. Losing one's sight is a fear held by most adults. As the population ages it is more common. Clinicians and researchers are working all out to turn hope into reality.

[www.moorfields.nhs.uk](http://www.moorfields.nhs.uk)

## RNIB

Thursday 6 March 2009 will be World Glaucoma Day. The RNIB and the recently formed Glaucoma Alliance, are working together to raise awareness of Glaucoma, what it does to sight and how it may affect you.

RNIB would like to hear from you if you have glaucoma. They are looking for people to feature as case studies to help others understand more about the condition. Contact them at [campaign@rnib.org.uk](mailto:campaign@rnib.org.uk) to find out more.

One of RNIB's priority campaigns is to ensure better employment opportunities for blind and partially sighted people. They are campaigning for increased supported employment opportunities, better measures to improve job retention and new ways of getting people with sight problems into jobs. HSB intends to work closely with RNIB in the future to help campaign to highlight the issues visually impaired people of working age have.

The RNIB continue to campaign concerning the Disability Living Allowance. As a result HSB has written to all MP's in the county with the following request:

## Disability Living Allowance

I am writing to you again regarding the much-needed change to the rules governing eligibility for Disability Living Allowance (DLA). I need your help. The campaign to allow people with severe sight loss to claim the higher rate mobility component of DLA has reached a new phase with an opportunity for you to vote on the issue.

Specifically, MPs across the House are tabling an amendment to the Welfare Reform Bill which, if successful, will enable people with severe sight loss to claim the higher rate mobility component of DLA.

I understand RNIB has been working closely with DWP Ministers and Officials on this issue and a workable and affordable plan has been agreed. The eligible group has been tightly defined (people with no useful sight for orientation purposes; i.e. "the severely blind") and the cost capped at £45m a year. Everything is in place, all that is needed is the political will to make the change.

I have written to you before asking you to support me. I have explained the immense difference that this would make to the quality of life of people with severe sight loss.

The increase of £29 per week from £17.75 to £46.75 would enable blind people to do many fundamental things on their own that they are currently unable to, like getting to Doctors' or Hospital appointments, attending training courses and interviews, shopping independently, meeting friends, and being a member of groups or joining in local activities.

I cannot tell you how much I would appreciate your support for the amendment. As you know, after 2 years of campaigning, this is the first chance that you will have to vote on this issue, to demonstrate your support for constituents with severe sight loss. I sincerely hope that you will. Please can you keep me updated?

Also a new Early Day Motion on DLA, EDM 340, has been tabled, please will you add your signature?

Maria Moore

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We have already had a reasonably good response from MPs so we can but hope that something will be done as soon as possible.

Name

Address

I wish to subscribe to Hertfordshire Society for the Blind Newsletter and enclose a cheque for £5 to cover three issues per year

I wish to receive the newsletter in:

Large Print

Braille

Audio Cassette

Email

I do not wish to subscribe to Hertfordshire Society for the Blind Newsletter , please remove my information from the database

Please return to  
Hertfordshire Society for the Blind  
Leahoe House  
County Hall  
Pegs Lane  
Hertford  
SG13 8DZ

Also if you have not returned the Client Feedback Questionnaire sent to you last November, could you please return it, with this reply slip, in the envelope that was provided with the questionnaire. Many thanks for your help.