

Warwickshire

Vision

Spring 2022



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Acknowledgements

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Welcome Keith

It can be a strange course of events that bring you to a specific place in life. This is definitely the case for me and my recent appointment as Chief Executive Officer. I spent my teenage years supporting my father as he came to terms with sight loss but it was from a conversation talking about the impact of my own sight loss diagnosis nearly 40 years later that put me on course to this role.

Why strange? I had just left a successful 20-year management career with Coventry Council and was in unfamiliar surroundings with a new team, ironically in an office which overlooks 14 Market Place, the new head office. I was talking with a new colleague about how a sight loss diagnosis had inspired me to look for volunteering opportunities in a conversation which was overheard by someone who I didn't know. She casually asked if I was aware of a local charity supporting people experiencing and living with sight loss called Warwickshire Vision Support. I hadn't but in that moment the course of my life was changed. I was signed up as a trustee in just a few weeks and then as a qualified accountant, was pleased to offer my support as Treasurer just a few months later.

That was a nearly four years ago in

which time my understanding and passion for the work of the charity has grown significantly. It was a desire to do more than I could achieve as a trustee in the little spare time I had that compelled me to apply for the Chief Executive role when Nik Demetriades announced he was leaving shortly before Christmas.

I started as Chief Executive at the beginning of April and was thrilled to be able to attend a meeting of the building focus group on my very first day. The focus group made up of service users, volunteers, staff and trustees, created a list of ideas for how the space at 14 Market Place should be used, ideas which will inform design proposals by a local architect.

The development and use of 14 Market Place will be the start of a new and very significant chapter for Warwickshire Vision Support. As I look back from the office in Market Place to where this journey began, I will be forever grateful for the chance conversation that has brought me to this place and the start of a new and exciting chapter in my own life.



Keith Eales

News Round Up

Walking in Warwickshire

We'd like to remind our readers that everybody is welcome to come and join us in our fun and social walking groups that take place across Warwick, Leamington and now after linking with Walking for Health, we also offer a walk based in Kenilworth.

We typically walk for up to an hour and then relax and sit as a group and enjoy a nice cup of tea or coffee.

We're accepting people of all abilities, it doesn't matter if you want to speed walk your way through or just join us for a leisurely stroll.

If you're living in or around the Warwick, Kenilworth or Leamington area, and enjoy being outside and meeting new people, then come and join us!

On the 1st, 3rd (and potentially 5th) Tuesday of each month we meet



A WVS walking group laughing together



A picture of some members at our Warwick walking group

outside St Nicholas Park in Warwick at 10:30am near the café.

On the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month, we meet at Jephson Gardens in Leamington at 10:30am, outside the Aviary Café.

The Kenilworth group takes place every Friday at 12.30pm at Abbey Medical Centre, 42 Station Road, Kenilworth.

The walk is 30 – 45 minutes and finishes at The Kenilworth Centre, Abbey End Car park where they serve light refreshments and there is opportunity for a chat and to make new friends.

Come and join the fun! Email us at enquiries@warwickshire.vision to let us know you're coming!

Vision Support Centres and Clubs - Full Timetable

Listed below are the timetables for our weekly and monthly Vision Support Centres and our social clubs.

Please drop in and visit one of our Vision Support Centres on one of the following days for face-to-face advice and information, equipment demonstrations, service requests and IT training – we'd be delighted for you to join us.

Whilst every care has been taken to ensure our centres and clubs are COVID safe, please note that your attendance will be at your own risk. You may be asked to register and have your temperature taken on arrival, and we ask that you please wear a mask until seated by our team.

Please note: All of our centres and clubs will follow this timetable indefinitely, excluding for any bank holidays.

Weekly Centres

Area	Location	Date	Time
Leamington	Chandos Court, Chandos Street, CV32 4YU	Every Monday	9:30 - 11:30am
Nuneaton	Newtown Community Centre, Newtown Road, CV11 4HG	Every Thursday	9:30 - 11:30am
Rugby	Rugby Baptist Church, Regent Place, CV21 2PJ	Every Wednesday	9:30 - 11:30am
Stratford-Upon-Avon	Stratford Samaritans Community Hub - Tyler House, Tyler Street, CV37 6TY	Every Tuesday	9:30 - 11:30am

Monthly Centres

Area	Location	Date	Time
Alcester	Malt Mill Lane Community Centre, Malt Mill Lane, B49 5QR	Every 3 rd Tuesday of the Month	1:30 - 3:30pm
Atherstone	St Mary's Church Hall, The Market Place, Sheepy Road, CV9 1EX	Every 3 rd Friday of the Month	9:30 - 11:30am
Bedworth	Bedworth Ex-Servicemans Social Club, Rye Piece Ringway, CV12 8JH.	Every 1 st Friday of the Month	9:30 - 11:30am
Coleshill	Coleshill Community Centre, Temple Way, B46 1HH	Every 2 nd Thursday of the Month	2:30 - 4:30pm
Kenilworth	Kenilworth Senior Citizens Club, Abbey End, CV8 1QJ	Every 2 nd Friday of the Month	9:30 - 11:30am
Shipston-on-Stour	Stour Court, Old Road, CV36, 4HE	Every 4 th Tuesday of the Month	2:30 - 4:30pm
Southam	Graham Adams Centre, St James Road, CV47 0LY	Every 1 st Tuesday of the Month	2:00 - 4:00pm

Clubs

If you're feeling social, we also offer an extensive network of Clubs and Groups for people living with sight loss in Warwickshire.

Transport to and from the club is provided at a subsidised rate. If you would like to join one of our clubs, please call us on 01926 411331.

Area	Time	Date
Atherstone	10:30am – 1:30pm	Every other Wednesday
Kenilworth	2pm – 4pm	Every Tuesday
Leamington Spa	2pm – 4pm	1 st and 3 rd Wednesday of the month
Rugby Hamilton House	11am – 1pm	2 nd and last Fridays of the month
Rugby Hillmorton	7.30pm – 10pm	3 rd Monday of the month
Rugby (VIP)	2pm – 4pm	2 nd Wednesday of the month
Southam	2pm – 4pm	2 nd Wednesday of the month
Stratford	2pm – 4pm	Every other Thursday

Vision Support Centres

- Upcoming Agendas

Our Vision Support Centres were established to meet your need for local access to equipment and information in your community.

Tea, coffee and biscuits are served and a donation towards the centre operating costs is requested.

Each Vision Support Centre provides the following:

- Advice & Information.
- A chance to view and try equipment for daily living including specialist equipment for the home.
- Regular Magnifier Sessions to help you identify the most appropriate magnifier for your condition.
- Requests for our services for Warwickshire residents and advice about what services are available for

Coventry residents.

- Regular presentations of services in your area as well as exhibitions of new products for visually impaired people.
- IT Training (appointment required)

In addition, we also have regularly updated agendas for our weekly Vision Support Centres to help provide you with useful information.

Listed below is the most recent agenda covering the topics for our sessions in June and July.

The weekly Vision Support Centres agenda is regularly updated, be sure to check our website for the latest copy at: www.warwickshire.vision/how-we-can-help/vision-support-centres/physical-support-centres/

Nuneaton

Open every Thursday from 9:30-11:30am

Vision Support Centre Agenda	Date
Closed (Bank Holiday)	2 nd June
Warwickshire Library Services Session	9 th June
Humanware Assistive Technology Session	16 th June
Social Session	23 rd June
Demonstration of Equipment	30 th June
Optelec - Low Vision Solutions Session	7 th July
U3A Ukulele Group	14 th July
Demonstration of Equipment	21 st July
Coventry Diabetes UK Group	28 th July

Stratford-upon-Avon

Open every Tuesday from 9:30-11:30am

Vision Support Centre Agenda	Date
Warwickshire Library Services Session	7 th June
Humanware Assistive Technology Session	14 th June
Activity Session	21 st June
Demonstration of Equipment	28 th June
Coventry Diabetes UK Group	5 th July
Optelec - Low Vision Solutions Session	12 th July
Carers Trust Session	19 th July
Demonstration of Equipment	26 th July

Royal Leamington Spa

Open every Monday from 9:30-11:30am

Vision Support Centre Agenda	Date
Social Session	6 th June
Warwickshire Library Services Session	13 th June
Humanware Assistive Technology Session	20 th June
Demonstration of Equipment	27 th June
Coventry Diabetes UK Group	4 th July
Demonstration of Equipment	11 th July
Carers Trust Session	18 th July
Optelec- Low Vision Solutions Session	25 th July

Rugby

Open every Wednesday from 9:30-11:30am

Vision Support Centre Agenda	Date
Queen's Platinum Jubilee Party	1 st June
Warwickshire Library Services Session	8 th June
Humanware Assistive Technology Session	15 th June
Social Session	22 nd June
Demonstration of Equipment	29 th June
Activity Session	6 th July
Coventry Diabetes UK Group	13 th July
Demonstration of Equipment	20 th July

5 Million Steps for WVS

To help raise money for Warwickshire Vision Support's services, WVS trustee Martyn Parker has set himself an enduring challenge of walking a total of 5 million steps in 2022.

Martyn who is visually impaired, will have to walk an impressive average of 13,698 steps every single day without fail to complete his goal.

Martyn has been involved with Warwickshire Vision Support for over 30 years and would like your support to help him raise money.

In Martyn's own words, he wrote "There are around 30,000 people in Warwickshire who experience sight loss and Warwickshire Vision Support is the local Charity who provide support and rehab services for the County. Like many local charities, WVS relies heavily on its volunteers and fundraising to carry out the work that they do.

I have been involved with WVS for over 30 years, and they have helped and supported me as a visually impaired person. WVS have a 111 year history of supporting people in Warwickshire with sight loss.

I am currently a Trustee of the Charity and wanted to do a fundraiser to help support the work that they do. I have always enjoyed walking and a walking challenge seems the logical



A photograph of Martyn smiling at the camera

thing to do.

For my own fitness reasons, I have done 1 million steps challenges in the last two autumns. I decided that 5 million in a year would be a challenge, but one I think I will manage."

If you would like to help support Martyn in his 5 million step challenge, please visit:
<https://localgiving.org/fundraising/Martyn-5Million-Step>

Features Eyes Right

by Vicky Sartain

Sight loss is easier to bear if you are mentally and physically prepared. In his new book, Simon Mahoney guides readers through the steps to regaining confidence, dignity and independence following the dreaded diagnosis

For those familiar with the emotions of receiving bad news about their deteriorating vision, the weeks, months or years leading to total loss of sight can be overwhelming to say the least. Simon Mahoney's new book, *Winging it Blind*, serves as a survival guide for navigating through this difficult period, arming yourself with the tools and wisdom to prepare for a different kind of life.

Glaucoma is in my family, and from my late 30s I was semi prepared for it – it happened gradually over about four years, starting in 2013. When I retired from my job in social work, the plan was to move to Derbyshire to focus on working as a freelance artist, painting local scenery. But my vision deteriorated soon after arriving when I noticed some issues while I was driving. I saw the optician and after that I hung my car keys up and sold the car. Funnily enough, I didn't mind that too much because the bus service here is quite good and



A photograph of Simon Mahoney holding one of his books

I always have the most incredible conversations with fellow passengers. I find it gives me a sense of independence, as when you're blind there's a tendency to end up doing things that are heavily supervised, and it's just so nice to get out and do my own thing. I'm completely blind but for me it's actually quite tolerable. I have visual memories of everything that happens to me which I don't fully understand.

When I was younger, I spent several years in the military as a Royal Marine Officer. It gave me that little bit of

steel to help me overcome obstacles. I'm a member of Blind Veterans UK now, which is quite a robust society, and very supportive. After my time in the military, I got a degree in Business Studies, and went on to become a social worker for 30 years where I got another degree in Psychology. I followed that up with a Masters in Social Work, which may seem a strange career change, but to me it seemed that social workers were fighting a war on the home front, because people on the bottom rung of society would be desperate without the little that we could provide. It was just fighting a different war to prevent disorder and anarchy, which is why I find the cutbacks in public services such as social work, so foolish.

I've written two other books dealing with sight loss and bereavement ('A descent into darkness') and cookery ('First catch your rabbit'). Winging it Blind is my third, and draws together issues touched on in the first two. It focuses on the key things that someone can expect to face when first diagnosed with progressive sight loss. There are five levels covered that address putting sight loss into perspective, including overcoming fear of the unknown through seeking knowledge of your condition and how to manage it; preparing for a lack of support and understanding the importance of registering yourself as blind and how to do it;

and laws about managing your work situation.

It also covers stress, adaptation, knowing how to ask for and refuse help, managing sight loss, the importance of self-presentation, and other basic tools like communication skills. Further on, topics look at establishing yourself and developing your skills, such as navigation. It addresses accepting your condition and building relationships with others, and considerations for family and friends who are also trying to come to terms with what you're going through. It also deals with sight loss within society – where I've vented a little about my abhorrence of the word 'community', which I feel encourages stereotyping which has no relevance to individuals!

My studies and work history have helped me personally get through difficult times. I knew from theory that my emotions were going to be all over the place. Sight loss is a bereavement but I was prepared for the emotional rollercoaster and change. The first thing I did was set up some rules of engagement that dealt with the immediate issues I'd need to face and positive action, such as learning something new every day; learning to adapt; not getting upset by people's well-meaning comments; and keeping things in their place. I determined fairly early on what I was going to do.

One of my last jobs as a sighted person was running a large day centre for people with disabilities. We encouraged those who could read and write to express what they felt about their life, and that proved to be very powerful in therapeutic terms. I thought if it worked for them, it should work for me, so when I sat down to write it enabled me to engage with the process and empowered me at the same time.

I was determined from the outset that I was not going to give up through fear of the unknown. A pivotal moment was a fantastic flight

over the Peak District to Ladybower Reservoir in a Tiger Moth, arranged by my late wife. Having taken the controls of the plane with no vision whatsoever, I thought afterwards – there's nothing I can't do. It was a huge confidence boost as I realised I could hack whatever came.

Winging it Blind is now the focus of a project by Anglian Ruskin University into vision loss research. One aspect of it is to find out how the book helps people entering the world of sight loss. I just hope that all three of my books help people find the solutions they need when they need them.



Winging it Blind by Simon Mahoney is available now on Amazon, priced £12.99.

ISBN: 1916446361.

For more information, please visit www.wingingitblind.com

The World of SocialEye

If you're the type of person that loves to socialise, and wants to connect with other visually impaired people across the UK and the rest of the globe, consider joining The World of Socialeye.

The World of Socialeye is an online community of people living with sight loss who connect with each other regularly over platforms such as Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and their official website. These communities are separated into different groups so people can be part of the conversations and activities that appeal to them.

The World of Socialeye originally started in January 2018 by David, who is also visually impaired and works as a baker at Morrisons when he's not managing Socialeye. David's philosophy was all about connecting people with sight loss together that might be feeling isolated and share experiences, common interests and just have a bit of fun!

Originally starting as just a small group on the messaging platform WhatsApp, The World of Social Eye quickly grew in size and is now also available on Youtube, Instagram, Twitter, Discord and their website. The World of Socialeye isn't just online either; before the pandemic



started, a few members actually met up together in London and went to see Mamma Mia at the West End as a group outing. There are several different niche communities you can join, each with their own quizzes, games and activities. Some of the groups include:

- An entertainment group (discussing films, audiobooks, music, tv, jokes)
- A ladies group
- A cooking and recipes group
- A sports group (with competitions)
- A group for VI parents
- A group discussing new technology
- Fur Buddies (A group for VI dog owners)
- A choir group (in which people send in their singing which is compiled together to make a song)
- A quizzes and games group

To join the fun, visit:

Instagram: @theworldofsocialeye

Facebook: @theworldofsocialeye

YouTube: @theworldofsocialeye

Website: www.theworldofsocialeye.co.uk

Blind Voters Count!

On the 150th anniversary of the introduction of our right to vote in secret, many blind and partially sighted still have to share their vote with someone they don't know.

As you may already be aware, there is currently a new piece of legislation going through parliament right now called 'The Elections Bill'.

The Elections Bill focuses on a number of subjects, which the government describes as "A Bill to make provision about the administration and conduct of elections, including provision designed to strengthen the integrity of the electoral process; about overseas electors; about voting and candidacy rights of EU citizens; about the designation of a strategy and policy statement for the Electoral Commission; about the membership of the Speaker's Committee; about the Electoral Commission's functions in relation to criminal proceedings; about financial information to be provided by a political party on applying for registration; for preventing a person being registered as a political party and being a recognised non-party campaigner at the same time; about regulation of expenditure for political purposes; about disqualification of offenders for holding elective offices; about information to be included in

electronic campaigning material; and for connected purposes."

However, if this bill were to go through, it could take away the guarantee of a vote "without any assistance" for voters with sight loss.

Taking away this guarantee will only put voting independently and in secret further out of reach for the 350,000 blind and partially sighted people across the UK.

A survey conducted by The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) in May 2021 found that 4 in 5 blind people felt they were unable to vote independently and in secret.

To try and protect the voting right of blind and partially sighted voters across the UK, the RNIB have drafted a proposed amendment to the bill and are campaigning to have it debated and voted on in the House of Lords. They are in contact with leading accessibility advocates in the House of Lords to gather support in the House, and will be seeking to build media and public awareness of the threat to an independent and secret vote for blind and partially sighted people.

To sign this petition, please visit: <https://e-activist.com/page/98590/petition/1> or call RNIB's help line on 0303 123 9999 for assistance.

Rising Star: Georgie Morell

Visually impaired comedian, writer and an award-nominated actor Georgie Morell talks with WVS about life as a rising visually impaired comedian and actress, and on her recent appearance on BBC Casualty and what that means for VI representation.

You perform regularly through both acting and stand up, what was it that first sparked your interest in both of these?

For acting, I wasn't good at anything else. It's the classic story of being a child that's a bit precocious, tries out for a school play gets it, then you get the bug - it's absolutely addictive!

I carried on through secondary school, went to university, then to drama school. Then after drama school, when I didn't immediately become a star I felt a bit depressed and I had always loved stand up, and secretly always harboured being one but never thought I could be because there are so few female comics let alone any that I saw myself in. However, I had so little money and prospects, I just thought sod it, what have I got to lose? So I wrote my first solo show and just put myself out there and thankfully it paid off and I'm slowly building something. And I started writing around the same time and I really enjoyed that and still do!



Georgie Morell

By writing, is that more stand-up material, or are you writing for something else?

Both! I wrote 3 Edinburgh shows and I do my own material writing, but one of my shows has been optioned as a pilot for TV which we're trying to sell to the world. I also write a number of articles and I'm also working on a film at the moment. A company called Silver Salt Films have been really good to me and have taken me under their wing so I'm developing a film with them and the BFI (British Film Institute) so we'll see what happens there. I'm also working on a couple of other ideas too for comedy which I'm really enjoying!

In terms of your comedy routines, how much preparation do you put into them before you feel like it's ready to go out into the world?

Not long! You know in yourself if something has a chance of being funny or if it has legs. So I tend to get on it pretty quickly. I'm in London so there's loads of new material nights, I actually co-run one of these with a friend. I've noticed that as you get older, you do start to care less and less what people think so you take the chance with it. But after a while you sort of know if it's going to work or not, you just know in yourself

In terms of comedy, is there anybody out there right now who inspires you?

Sadly a few of them have passed away but one of my heroes has always been Joan Rivers (rest her soul). To be honest I like a lot of different comedians for different reasons, I like a lot of the US female comedians like Nikki Glaser Ms. Pat, Michelle Wolf. There's something about American comics that make them a lot more daring than we are. They dance around with some fun ideas, push the boundaries and develop the art form, they don't pander, change or sell out and I really admire that.

Did you ever imagine as a child that you would be on stage and appearing on TV? Is this something you always saw yourself doing?

To be honest, I know it's very arrogant but I thought I'd be world famous by now! I was a very confident child and I didn't think it would go on the path it has. I didn't think that my visual impairment would play such a strong role which is a bit naïve of me to have thought that when I was younger, but I was young, therefore naïve. You only see the narratives that are presented to you and there wasn't one like mine. So I am surprised to have got work and to be getting work based on what I was thought was something I had to be ashamed of when I was younger. Thankfully that has changed dramatically in recent years. It's something to be proud of – it's unique! And that's exactly what art needs, originality.

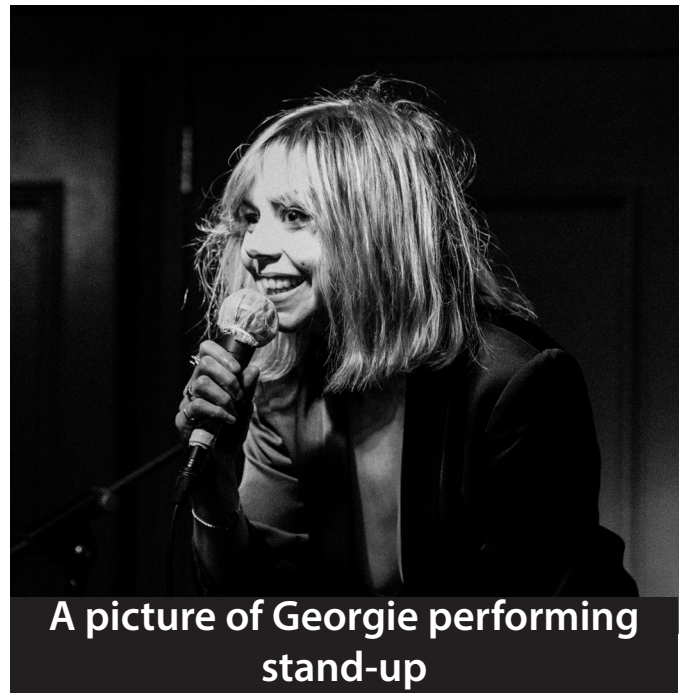
You recently guest starred in an episode of Casualty, how was the whole experience?

It's crazy how fast TV moves, I had only ever really done theatre or live comedy beforehand and in live shows it can be a bit "lovey dovey" – you can talk about it with your fellow actors afterwards, but in TV, it's like "Cool. Done. On to the next". It's a bit brutal but I quite like that fast pace and I just loved the atmosphere. It was a real buzz and I now feel confident to walk onto another set and know what I'm doing and what's going to happen and that's half the battle for actors, to be able to walk in with confidence.

Your character in Casualty was visually impaired, how important is that representation to you?

It's important because we don't have enough disabled people or disabled actors on screen and that's just a given fact. 20% of the population is disabled and only 1-point-something percent is represented on TV, industry, film and stage. We're in this period where we haven't really displayed disabled stories either, let alone having disabled characters in things. So we need to start filling that gap. We need to start sharing the lived experiences of disabled people through interesting story telling. So that one day we can have disabled characters who aren't defined by their disability because people are not. For example, if you asked any of my friends how to describe me, my disability wouldn't even be in the top 10 things that they would say. We need to get to that, but we still have to fill in the gap. But we still need to help audiences along a bit, we can't expect them to know what it's like to live with a disability or the intricacies and frustrations of it. And even the positives - because I live a great life in so many ways. Nobody is immune to disability, so having somebody like my character Julia in Casualty on mainstream TV is brilliant, however we have to keep this up so we can get to the end goal.

When you go up on stage, do you need any assistance at all?



For when I do stand up and it's a venue that I don't know, I email the venue beforehand and ask if they can show me how to get off and on stage. Obviously it's always a bit nerve-wracking before going on stage and what I don't want is to not be able to find the steps but so far everyone's been really helpful. It hasn't happened yet but if somebody ever makes a fuss about it, I will make sure I will make their life hell! It's a simple request really. But if I'm doing theatre, I will just usually talk to the stage managers and so far everyone's been really helpful and understanding.

In your day-to-day life, do you use any assistive technology?

I have an Alexa and I like using her both for music and as a timer in the kitchen. To be honest I'm not great with technology, I have everything slightly bigger on my phone and I

use a Mac Computer which is great because it allows me to zoom in on everything. I use a digital clock that has big numbers on it next to my bed and if I'm travelling I always check my journey on my computer or phone before I go so I don't have to keep stopping to check where I'm going.

In your comedy, you talk about your visual impairment, did you find it easy to open up about that or is that something that came to you later?

It was an idea that came to me and a friend sort of planted that seed, and it wasn't easy initially. When I wrote my first show I had to go back to things that I'd rather just forget and also, audiences are better now, but they can get weirded out about disability. You have to do a bit of hand-holding with them and that got on my nerves! Especially as there aren't many conversations happening around disabilities, there are around other minorities but disability can seem a bit too scary to people, there's a bit of a stigma.

Do you think that discussing these topics through comedy can influence social perception and the overall narrative of the public and how people with disabilities are viewed within society?

Totally! And I hope it really does because if you're giving people a chance to laugh and you're taking ownership of that, then there's really

no better way to do it. What we need now is more disabled comics to be put to the forefront so they can start filtering through. There's a lot of positive movements at the moment, there's people like me, Lee Ridley, Rosie Jones and a couple of others who I'm lucky to know who are getting there and chipping away at it. It's a bit of a shame though because we're all ready to go but we're still waiting for others to catch up a little bit.

What advice could you give to our readers who might be looking to get into comedy or acting but doesn't know where to start?

Get in touch with somebody like me or anybody you admire in the industry and just say "will you go for a coffee with me" or at least "would you mind responding to an email with some questions?" and just pick their brains. You can get from them all the answers and assurances you need as to whether you want to do it or not because it's not an easy job, and it's not as rewarding as you might think. But I think there is a responsibility for people to pass on the information to you because life is already too hard, we should all be sharing the wealth.

You can catch Georgie's episode of Casualty (Season 36 Episode 20) on BBC iPlayer, and for more information on Georgie visit georgiemorrell.co.uk/

Blind Parents UK



They say that being a parent is one of the most challenging jobs in the world, and as we know, being blind or visually impaired comes with its own set of unique challenges too.

Put together, the world of blind parenting is a unique journey and can really be particularly overwhelming, especially to those who do not have the proper support or network in place to help them deal with their special circumstances.

While Warwickshire Vision Support will always do their best to help give people the support they need, there are also other charities that specialise in exactly this situation.

Blind Parents UK are a charity that deal with everything you would need to know for blind parenting, helping first time parents-to-be, all the way through to great grandparents.

Blind Parents UK offer a lively community that sees a constant flow of questions, information and stories from their fellow members. Their services are completely free and are offered by their own dedicated team of volunteers, all of whom have a visual impairment themselves!

Blind Parents UK never turn down enquiries from family members, friends and professionals and will

help in whatever way they can. Whether you just have the occasional question that needs answering or if you need everything they can give you, they are there to help. They also offer a fantastic peer-support model as they believe the best people to help are those who have been through similar situations.

In addition, they can help with:

- Access to qualified sling consultants, breastfeeding supporters and technology specialists.
- Closed and safe Facebook and WhatsApp group chats
- One-to-one technical support sessions.
- Help with locating and choosing suitable equipment and other resources, (for example the loan of a carrier, accessible books, etc)
- Support to find out what's available in your local area.
- Information on local and national services, including direct payments, Homestart, etc.
- Find-A-Parent: be linked up with someone nearby whether for chats or meet-ups.

For more information, visit:

Website: www.blindparents.uk

Email: info@blindparents.uk

Telephone: 01905 886252

Vision Support Centre Poems

Recently at our Nuneaton Vision Support Centre, as part of a bit of fun, we conducted a poetry writing session with our service users.

Written below are two lovely poems written by two of our Nuneaton Vision Support Centre attendees that they wrote about their guide dogs.



Lily's story

*I am a special dog that's what I am told.
My mummy told me I'll be a guide dog, if I'm bold.*

*With my guide dog instructor I learn so fast,
new commands and lessons are plentiful,
I soon begin to know the job is truly beautiful.*

*I work my little paws off with hope and joy
and with so much delight I gain my qualification,
my guide dog instructor seeks to find my new mummy.*

Suddenly I find myself in a new location!

*With love in my heart I soon get stuck into my new role
and we have many adventures as we go round many a hole*

*One of my favourite routes, of course, is seeing my friends at Warwickshire vision.
They talk and chatter, eat lovely biscuits, but I'm on a mission.*

*Under the table I play a few games with my friends Kayleigh and Milly.
As I lap up my water I certainly hope no one will shout, 'Oh Lily!'*

*I know my job is very responsible so, I hope you can see my sentiment,
because I love my job as a guide dog and hope I'm a long way from my retirement.*

By Wendy Pope

My Thursday Mornings

My dog Milly

In harness, she's not silly

She reads my mind

That's what I find.

On the buses we will go

Come the rain, the sun or snow

When people shout, 'Oh what a beauty'

My black lab, she stays on duty.

The love and respect we have I cannot explain

But upon my face it must be plain

While out in public she will rest her head on my arm

To comfort me, no-one will do me harm.

It's a Thursday morning treat, she has to see fellow guide dogs Kayleigh and Lily

They are besties for my Milly

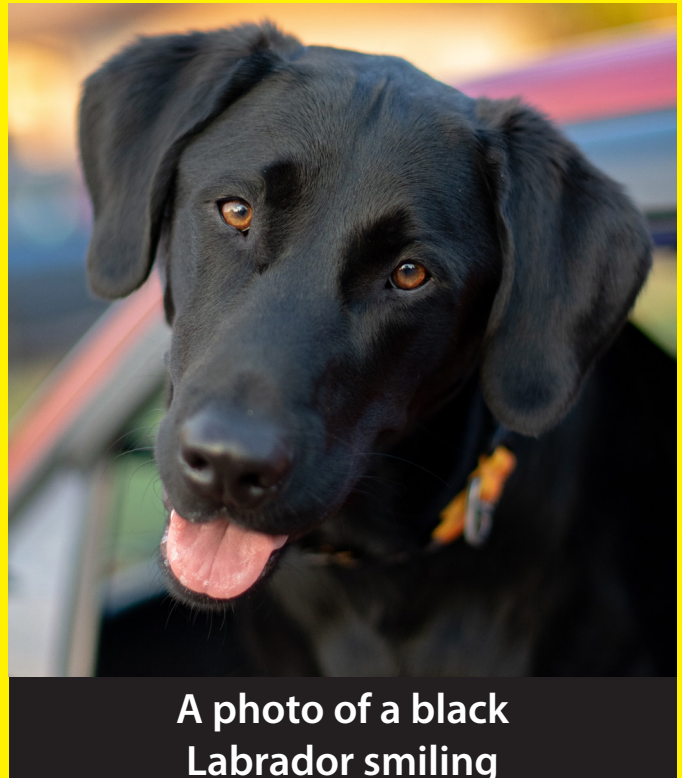
She sees me back safely to my front room

Then, out of the harness she will zoom!

A forever home with me she'll have.

Simply because I will hate

To lose my soulmate.



**A photo of a black
Labrador smiling**

By Wendy Clarke

Advice & Guidance

Successes Despite COVID

by Del Hobden

In March 2020 when the country closed its doors with the start of the pandemic, WVS Support Centres, Clubs and Home Visiting Services were suspended. As a result, WVS staff and volunteers felt very concerned for the welfare of our clients.

Within a week, staff, along with a large number of dedicated volunteers, began telephoning clients to check they had the support they needed. Almost 50% of the 3,000 clients said they had a good support from family and friends, but a large number without this support were worried for how they would cope in the coming weeks or months. These clients not only included the adults we support, but also visually impaired children, and their families.

WVS staff spent many hours, over several months problem solving the continued issues clients faced. We were even called upon to perform face to face welfare checks on clients who were unusually not contactable, and on several occasions had to call on the emergency services. Staff also linked service users with WVS volunteers, staff, and local support groups to ensure their needs were met, whether that be food supplies, medication, or other practical needs.

The welfare phone calls not only flagged up the need for practical help, but also for emotional support. This is when Warwickshire Vision Support Telephone Befriending Service began. This service was invaluable during the pandemic and continues to be a very important service today. It has not only helped combat loneliness but also highlighted further needs, which generated referrals to WVS rehabilitation services.

Although the rehabilitation service was initially restricted to telephone advice only, this was vital for practical support. The rehabilitation team were finally able to resume home visits in June 2020 (despite being weighed down by PPE). This was a great relief to many clients who were struggling at home with their sight loss.

Throughout the pandemic Warwick and Stratford Hospitals continued to refer the patients with most need to WVS. In August 2021, WVS Eye Clinic Liaison Officer service began regularly attending eye clinics at Warwick and Stratford Hospitals and Nuneaton Macular Clinic. Staff and patients have welcomed this service, which provides a streamline process to all Warwickshire Vision Support services.

Surviving the Squeeze

With everybody's bills going up, a lot of UK households are feeling the squeeze, while this can be worrying, know that there is support available.

Here are some of the things that could help you out that you might be eligible for. Read below and make sure that you're claiming them where possible.

Winter Fuel Payments

While the deadline for the winter fuel payments for this year has passed, it is important you make sure you're prepared for next winter if you are eligible as you could receive between £100 and £300.

To be eligible you must have been born on or before 26 September 1955. You will not need to claim if you either already get the State Pension, or receive another social security benefit (not Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Child Benefit or Universal Credit) as they will be paid in automatically.

For information on how to claim, please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment/how-to-claim>

Leisure and Travel Concessions

Railcards

The Disabled Person's Railcard gives at least one third off the price of



A picture of coins falling from a jar

certain rail tickets for the cardholder, and an accompanying adult where applicable, in England, Wales and Scotland.

Even if you do not have the Disabled Person's Railcard, you can get discounted rail travel of 34 per cent or 50 per cent on certain tickets, or free travel for a companion when you travel on your season ticket. To qualify you must be travelling with another person and have a document confirming your registration both when you buy and when travelling on your ticket.

Call 0845 605 0525 or visit <https://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk/> for more information.

Cinema Tickets

Although you may not be able to get a discount for your own ticket to the cinema, you may be able to get a free

ticket for anyone accompanying you if you sign up for a Cinema Exhibitor's Association (CEA) card.

To apply for the card, you will need to prove that you receive a qualifying benefit (such as Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment or Attendance Allowance) or that you are registered as blind ("severely sight impaired").

For more information on how to apply and which cinemas take part in the scheme, visit the CEA card website, call 01244 526 016 or email info@ceacard.co.uk.

Additionally, you can discover cinemas near you playing films with audio descriptions, visit: <https://accessiblescreeningsuk.co.uk/>

Free loan of audio equipment

Whether you are registered as either severely sight impaired or partially sighted, you can take free loans of audio equipment from the British Wireless for the Blind.

The charity produce and loan out specially adapted radios, digital radios, internet audio radios, alarm clocks and tape and CD players which are available to borrow for extend periods of time to those who need it. British Wirelss for the Blind are also a means-tested service with equipment available for purchase.

For more information, visit: blind.org.uk/

TV Licences

If you are registered as blind or severely sight impaired, then you are entitled to a "blind concession TV Licence" which gives you 50% off the cost of your TV Licence. Unfortunately you are not entitled to this if you are registered as partially sighted.

The blind concession TV Licence covers anyone who lives with you, provided that the licence is in your name. If your licence is in someone else's name then you can change this and then claim the reduction.

For more information, visit: www.tvlicensing.co.uk/cs/pay-for-your-tv-licence/blind/index.app

Benefits and Tax Allowances

You may be eligible for tax benefits, such as the Blind Person's Allowance. If you are severely sight impaired, the Blind Person's Allowance is an extra amount of tax-free allowance. This means you can earn more before you start paying Income Tax.

You may also be able to claim a VAT exemption on adapted equipment such as white canes, whistling cups and more.

For more information on the type of benefits and tax allowances you can apply for, visit the RNIB site at: www.rnib.org.uk/services-we-offer-advice-and-support-services/tax-advice-service

Focus on Health

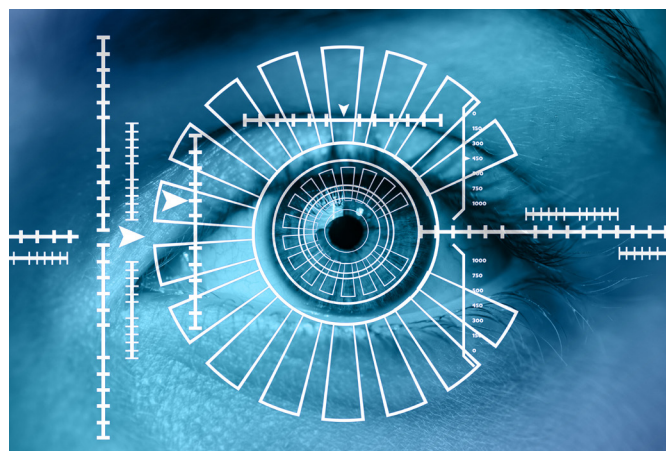
Using AI to detect dry AMD

At the tail end of last year, researchers at Moorfield eye hospital created a brand new piece of technology using artificial intelligence that can detect geographic atrophy and dry age-related macular degeneration just using common eye scans.

What is particularly impressive about this scientific breakthrough, is that not only will this allow for faster and easier diagnoses, but this new technological breakthrough will supposedly help researchers develop new and successful treatments for the condition.

In current conditions, to successfully diagnose dry age-related macular degeneration, experts examine their patients manually using a variety of tests which can sometimes be inaccurate and are often time-consuming. In fact, when clinicians examine patient's test results to determine the nature of the condition, it can take up to one hour per eye scan and of course has the potential for human error.

Fortunately however, using what is known as optical coherence tomography (OCT) scans, the researchers have managed to create



A graphic of an eye being digitally scanned

an algorithm that is able to recognise the early signs of AMD, it's precise location and even monitor the dry AMD's progression automatically.

The algorithm was tested against a set of scans from patients at Moorfields Eye Hospital which was able to outperform the predictions made by specialist clinicians, all in a fraction of a second.

The leader of the research team, Dr Konstantinos Balaskas, who also developed an algorithm to help with the wet version of this condition, hopes the algorithm will be hugely beneficial to clinicians providing care for patients with dry AMD. He stated "We hope it is a major step towards an effective treatment pathway for geographic atrophy, which affects millions of people worldwide and often leads to debilitating sight loss."

IT Bits & Bytes

by Ruth Okey

Talking Identification:

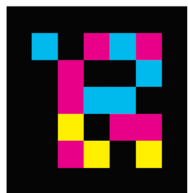
There are many apps for smart phones that can assist you in your home and the world around you to identify objects, read text etc. Here are a few to play with and they are all free.

NaviLens



This app brings you information about the item which has a NaviLens tag attached to it.

This might be travel information at a bus stop; ingredients and cooking information on a packet of food or exhibit information in a museum.



The NaviLens tag is a grid of coloured squares which can be read by the app at a distance and angle. Within the

app you can request your own set of tags which you can print and stick to items in your home and record associated information within the app.

Currently NaviLens tags are used widely in Spain and the New York Metro but are being adopted in many cities around the world.

After a trial Kelloggs are going to incorporate NaviLens codes on all cereal products across Europe in

2022. RNIB are also using them on their staff ID badges and at their office in London. Trials at Heathrow airport were postponed due to the pandemic.

Lookout by Google



This is an Android only app and can be used to identify objects and read text on items around

you. It can be used to read text in front of the camera in a live mode or in document mode it helps you line up the page before a picture is taken and the text is available to be read by Androids TalkBack or Select to Speak accessibility features.

Seeing AI



This is an Apple only app which can be used to read text in a live mode ie any text in front of the camera is read aloud.

In document mode it can also guide you through locating the page below the camera before a picture is taken and the text converted to speech.

If you want help installing apps or using your smart device why not contact us and request an IT appointment at one of the weekly support centres. 01926 411 331

Volunteering Focus

Volunteering Opportunities

by Lauren Hall



Lauren Hall

We currently have lots of volunteer opportunities, particularly to support our social clubs and home visiting service.

Social Club Leaders / Treasurers

Locations for Leaders: Southam, Nuneaton, Leamington, and Kenilworth

Locations for Treasurers: Leamington, Kenilworth and Coleshill

Description

- Organising events, activities, outings, and refreshments.
- Receiving members and making them welcome.
- Coordinating transport to, and from, the venue as necessary.
- Club Leader will oversee the operations of the club as a whole.
- Treasurer will keep accounts of income and expenditure.

Social Club Drivers

Locations for Drivers: Rugby, Southam, Nuneaton, Leamington, Stratford, and Kenilworth

Description

- Providing transport to, and from, the venue for our members.

- Escorting members from the vehicle into the venue.

Vision Support Centre Helpers

Location: Rugby

Description

- Preparing the venue and offering refreshments.
- Receiving visitors and making them welcome.
- Offering advice and support to visitors as necessary.
- Demonstrating equipment and explaining about local services.

Home Visitors

Location: across Warwickshire

Description

- Reading letters and help organise bills etc.
- Organise use-by dates on food in the fridge.
- Help arrange food cupboards to make it easy to identify products.
- To provide social support to reduce loneliness and isolation.

Admin Volunteer

Location: flexible – at our Warwick office or remote

Description

- To support the Volunteer Coordinator with the induction of new volunteers.

- Helping to process application forms and references for new volunteers.
- Assisting with administrating DBS checks for new and existing volunteers.

These roles are open to anyone, whether you are a current volunteer who has some additional time to offer us. For more information, please contact Lauren Hall, on 01926 411331 or email lauren.hall@warwickshire.vision.

Fundraising Update

Ways You Can Support WVS

by Claire Weaver

As a small and local charity, we are always grateful for any donations and we are constantly on the lookout for further assistance from the general public and from local communities to help us with our mission of giving the best possible support to blind and partially sighted people living in Warwickshire.

Raising money doesn't have to come straight from your own pocket - in fact, there are many fun ways in which you can help raise money for WVS without going too far out of your way. Here are some examples:

Sponsored Runs

If you are a runner, perhaps you could take part in a run and raise sponsorship for us? Some local and upcoming runs scheduled to take place are:

- Shakespeare ½ & Full marathon – 24th April 2022
- Great Birmingham Run (½ marathon) – 1st May 2022



A group of people taking part in an organised race

- Leamington Spa ½ marathon – 3rd July 2022
- Stratford Big 10k – 4th September 2022

Event Hosting

If running isn't your thing, perhaps you could host your own event – maybe you could organise a Coffee Morning or a quiz night. Any event you do arrange, will receive full support from the Fundraising Officer.

Tin Collections

If you've got some time to spare, would you be able to place a collecting tin in your local area?

Local Businesses

Are you involved with or do you maybe know a local business that may be willing to help support us?

A lot of organisations have what is known as a 'Charity of the Year', if you know a company that is looking for a charity to support then please point them in the direction of our Fundraising Officer, Claire Weaver, who can help.

Community Groups and Societies

Are you involved with a community group or society? Maybe a Rotary, Lions, Masons, Golf Club or anything similar - perhaps one of these might consider supporting Warwickshire Vision Support.



A picture of the Lions Group logo

Contact Claire Weaver at claire.weaver@warwickshire.vision or call 01926 411331 if you can help with fundraising for WVS

Roy and Debbie's Skydive

On the 6th March, Roy and his daughter Debbie undertook the challenge of a lifetime as they jumped out of a moving plane in aid of their chosen sight loss charities.

Roy, who is 88 years young, committed to do the skydive to raise funds for Warwickshire Vision Support. He was registered blind several years ago and has since regularly attended our Nuneaton Vision Support Centre.

He has made some great friends and WVS' resources and advice has been invaluable in supporting him

and his family with adjusting to his visual impairment. Roy even mentioned that attending the support centre is the highlight of his week!

Roy finally faced his challenge and undertook his exciting Skydive on Sunday 6th March. Roy and his daughter, Debbie, jumped at Sibson Airfield, Peterborough. Roy was raising money for WVS and his daughter raised money for Guide Dogs.

Although they were hoping for a sunny day it was extremely cold

on the ground, but that nothing compared to the -22C that would hit them as they left the plane at approximately 12,000 feet!

Roy's daughter Debbie even said it was snowing as she 'left' the plane. The descent took approximately 5 minutes; but they were both in extremely capable hands which put everybody at ease!

Roy was with the owner of the centre, Mike, who had over 40 years experiencing of jumping; Debbie was with Jay, a soldier who was in the Para's, has done 7 tours and completed over 1500 jumps (400 last year). Considering how windy the weather was they all has really smooth landings.



Roy and Debbie before their skydive



Roy at a Vision Support Centre

So far, Roy raised an incredible £744 – which is an amazing amount, with more sponsorship expected. We are so grateful and the money means we can continue to provide our vital services / support to the blind and visually impaired community within Warwickshire.

If you would like to donate to Roy's fundraiser for Warwickshire Vision Support. Please visit:
<https://localgiving.org/fundraising/royanddebbieskydive/>

Supporting people living
with sight loss since 1911



Warwickshire Vision is available
free to people living with sight loss
in Warwickshire. This publication is
available in digital, print and audio
formats.

For more information, please contact:

Warwickshire Vision Support

 01926 411331

E-mail: enquiries@warwickshire.vision

Website: www.warwickshire.vision



@warksvissupport