

Warwickshire Vision

Summer 2021



Featuring an exclusive
interview with stand-up
comedian Chris
McCausland

Photo by Steve Ullathorne

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Acknowledgements

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Our New CEO

Like many people in the country, I found myself with time to reflect on life during the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Hidden somewhere amongst the tumultuous events of 2020 were, I thought, some valuable life lessons for me to learn.

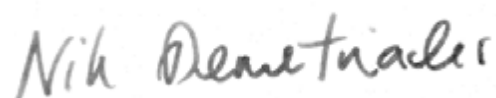
The first of those lessons was that myself and my partner needed to relocate to Bedfordshire from West Sussex so that we could be closer to our grown-up daughters, for all of our family's health and wellbeing.

The second lesson was also about family and the realisation that now I'd moved, I wanted to stay within the 'sight loss sector family' that I have been privileged enough to work in, most recently as CEO at 4Sight Vision Support in West Sussex where I have had 6 very happy years. Before that in my career, I spent 11 years as co-founder and CEO of Enable Me, a disability awareness charity.

Which is why I'm so excited to have been offered the opportunity to become a part of the WVS family by taking up the CEO role that Phil has so ably filled in recent years. And on that point – 'Thank You' Phil for your warm welcome and your time and help with my handover; I wish you all the very best in your new career.

In the meantime and until we meet, I would just like to say that it will be my absolute pleasure and honour to become part of the WVS family in September and that I'm very much looking forward to working with you all on the next exciting phase of growth and development for WVS, as it seeks to develop every aspect of its mission to improve the lives of blind and partially sighted people in Warwickshire.

With best wishes,



Nik Demetriades



Thank You

After nine years with Warwickshire Vision Support, and the last three as Chief Executive, I have decided that it is time for me to leave for new horizons and fresh challenges. I believe that we have achieved a great deal during the last few years and that the charity is now better positioned for the future.

During the last year, we have managed the challenges of the pandemic, developed and delivered new services, agreed a new strategy and are investing in a new property that will improve our profile and provide better access to our services.

I am proud to have been a part of these developments but now believe that it is time for someone else to take up the mantle of leadership.

The pandemic has brought things into perspective for many of us. For

me, it has helped me to prioritise what I want to do with my life. I will be joining Daventry & District Citizen's Advice Bureau as Chief Officer.

I would like to thank everyone who has made my time with WVS such an enjoyable experience.

- Phil Arkell



Good Luck Louise!

We would also like to wish former Senior Vision Support Officer and Fundraising Officer, Louise Jelley, the best of luck as she departs from her post at Warwickshire Vision Support.

Louise will be rejoining but in a more part-time role, working less hours so she can spend more time pursuing her true passion, writing. Already, the proud author of a novel that was released at the end of last year, perhaps Louise's name will start filling up our bookshelves sometime in the near future!



Welcome to the Team

It is a season of change at Warwickshire Vision Support. As we say farewell to some old and familiar faces, we welcome in the new. In addition to our new CEO, we also welcome eight friendly faces to our team of staff.

With Warwickshire Vision Support rapidly growing both internally and externally, it felt only necessary that we recruit a new wave of talented

individuals to our team to help accommodate our growth.

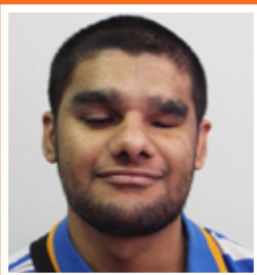
The following is a short introduction to each one of our new team members, although we're sure you will get to know each team member a bit more personally as time goes on.



Deb Kerrison

Admin & Finance Manager

Deb currently resides in Gaydon, has extensive experience of working in Charity Management and is a keen gardener and lacemaker.



Shaf Patel

Vision Support Officer

Shaf is a Vision Support Officer with the charity and is passionate about empowering those living with sight loss to live more full and independent lives.



Lauren Hall

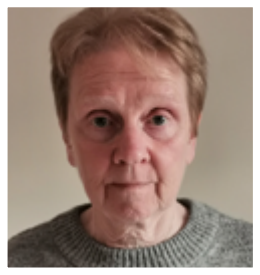
Volunteer Coordinator

Lauren recently relocated from the Southeast, where she co-managed a team of 250 volunteers in Guildford. She has an MA in Arts and Project Management and enjoys nature and watercolouring.



Sue Medcalf **Admin Officer**

Sue lives locally in Warwick with her partner Greg. She likes spending time gardening, reading and crafting and enjoys learning about local history.



Jackie Goodyear **Vision Support Officer**

Currently living in Priors Marston, Jackie has a BSc in Occupational Therapy and absolutely loves new recipes and old photos.



Helen Jones **Vision Support Officer**

Helen currently resides in Warwick, has a degree in Business Management and hobbies include running and golf.



Rebecca Bourton **Senior Vision Support Officer**

Rebecca lives in Southam where she enjoys volunteering with Southam and District Lions and watching her youngest daughter play football.



Claire Weaver **Fundraising Officer**

Claire lives in Birmingham and has 10 years+ experience in charity fundraising. Her hobbies include reading, singing and musical theatre.

Back in Business!

By Sam Davis

When lockdown was first imposed at the end of March last year, nobody was quite prepared for just how long normality would be put on hold.

It goes without saying, that the safety and wellbeing of the people we support is our utmost priority. However, that did not make closing our vision support centres any easier, especially when so many people are reliant on getting regular support.

Like many other charities and organisations, to ensure that we were still in reach for the people we support, we turned our services to the virtual world. Creating an online Vision Support Centre group that took place over web-conferencing calls, remote IT support and a Telephone Befriending Service so people who felt lonely or isolated were still able to connect with others over lockdown.

Still being able to connect with the people who needed it whilst in lockdown was a fantastic achievement, but it was clear that while a useful alternative, it didn't quite match the level of support and familiarity that our face-to-face vision support centres can offer.

That is why we are delighted to announce that due to the latest Government guidelines, our Vision Support Centres will finally be



re-opening to the public and will be running alongside our virtual services.

The re-opening will be a gradual process as there are a number of concerns regarding the projected increase in infection rates as restrictions are eased. We will be monitoring the situation over the coming weeks before making a decision about resuming all services fully, but ultimately, we are ecstatic to see what looks to be the light at the end of the tunnel, as we finally look to resume our support centres.

Please be aware that with restrictions and guidelines continually changing, there is a high possibility that the timings, scheduling and rules around our Vision Support Centres will change, please visit our website, www.warwickshire.vision or call us on 01926 411331 for the latest information on your local support centre.

Support Centre Schedule

While our services have not fully resumed yet, here is the schedule for our Vision Support Centres. You will be contacted personally when your

local centre is available to attend. **Please ensure that you check our website, www.warwickshire.vision or call us on 01926 411331 for the latest information.**

Area	Location	Date	Time
Alcester	TBC	Every 3rd Tuesday of the Month	TBC
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	TBC	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, Kenilworth, CV8 1QJ	Every 2 nd Friday of the Month	9:30 - 11:30am
Leamington	Leamington Spa Baptist Church, Chandos Street, CV32 4RN	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
Shipston-on- Stour	TBC	Every 4th Tuesday of the Month	TBC
Southam	TBC	Every 2 nd Tuesday of the Month	2:30 - 4:30pm
Stratford- Upon-Avon	Stratford Samaritans Community Hub - Tyler House, Tyler Street, CV37 6TY	Every Tuesday	9:30 - 11:30am

WVS Finds a New Home

By Sam Davis

After 12 steady years of bustling away inside our hidden little head office at Charles Court, Warwick, we are excited to announce that we are getting ready to move to a much larger, new home, situated in Warwick's vibrant town centre.

We are looking for a change of premises that will make it a lot easier for people to access our offices and services. Ideally located nearby to Warwick's market square, the new building should make it a lot easier for people who are using public transport as there are many public transport links across the county to Warwick's town centre.

We will also be ensuring that our new headquarters boasts a lot more space than its predecessor. The plan is to effectively utilise this space in such a way that it makes planned future sessions much easier to attend and will provide ample space for various activities and events to take place.

Reflecting on the move to a new building, Warwickshire Vision Support Chair, Liz Thiebe, writes: "As Warwickshire Vision Support continues to grow across all areas, we are delighted to have the opportunity to move to a much larger and more central location that will bring us much closer to the



people we support. We have a lot of exciting plans for the future, and our new headquarters is just one step of many in achieving our goal of providing the best possible service and support to the people who need it".

We just need to wait for the purchase to be finalised before we can officially announce to you the location of Warwickshire Vision Support's new home, so keep a look out on our website and social media in the coming weeks!

As we wait for the new headquarters to open, please note that our offices at Charles Court are now closed. However our team will carry on working from home and our services will continue as usual.

You can contact us by calling 01926 411331 or by emailing enquiries@warwickshire.vision.

A Bright Future Ahead

Our goal has always been to provide a seamless, holistic service to people living with sight loss from the point of diagnosis, through visual impairment rehabilitation to long term social support.

Thanks to a substantial legacy gift, this year, we launched a strategy refresh. This game-changing sum of approximately £2 million means that for the first time in many years, we have the resources to invest in our services.

With this investment, we have been able to:

- Welcome new members of staff to support our services
- Relocate to a larger and more accessible premises
- Upgrade the level of training and support for our volunteers
- Enhance our existing services to reflect the feedback given

from the people we support, including new services such as our telephone befriending service and walking group

- Plans to increase the IT provision at the existing and new support centres
- Increase the number of Vision Support Centres over the county and offer a greater variety of activities and services
- Expand our eye clinic advice desks meaning more regular support is delivered at local hospitals

These are just a few of the many exciting things that we have been able to achieve so far. The future looks bright for WVS, be on the lookout for more big changes to come as we continually strive to improve our services in our mission to provide the best possible support.

Charity Governance Awards



We are proud to announce that after being shortlisted at the UK-wide Charity Governance Awards 2021 for the Board Equity, Diversity and Inclusion award, we were able to take home the silver as runners up. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion are things we strive for at WVS, it was great to be recognised for our work to push for these across all areas of our organisation.

Volunteer Awards

As you may be aware, the first week of June was celebrated as National Volunteers Week. Across the nation, charities celebrate the work that all volunteers do and the amazing contribution that they make to improving the lives of others.

For the past two years, Warwickshire Vision Support has given out a small number of Volunteer Excellence Awards and this year was no exception. We have over 250 volunteers, and every single one is so worthy in so many ways. It was really hard to decide who should benefit this year.

Our five winners have all done an amazing job, not only in the past twelve months, but in the many years before. Our services would not be possible without them supporting our social clubs, home visitors and telephone befriending service. Combined, they have contributed over 80 years of service to Warwickshire Vision Support.



Our winners of the 2021 Volunteer Excellence Awards are: Sheila Richards, Elaine Ball, Shirley Pilkington, Ruth Dutton & Ruth Beesley!

Thank you for all of your hard work and service to Warwickshire Vision Support, we look forward to presenting the awards in person at the Queens Award Event in September.

In Memory

In memory of Prof. Zbigniew Pelczynski OBE. Zbigniew was a friend of WVS and will be sadly missed by his friends and family. Zbig lived a very interesting life, from being a POW in World War 2, to setting up charities and even tutoring politics to future President Bill Clinton. You can learn more about his life in his biography: Zbigniew Pelczynski - A Life Remembered by David McAvoy.



Warwick Walking Group

Getting to go outside and meet people is something of a blessing after all of this time in lockdown.

We're taking full advantage of being able to meet in groups (and of the nice weather!) and have created a new walking group made specifically for people living with sight loss.

Taking place every Tuesday morning at St Nicholas' Park, Warwick, we meet in a group and venture across the park. We usually walk for up to an hour and will then sit as a group and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee.

If you're living in or around the Warwick area and enjoy being outside and meeting new people, come and join us! We're accepting people of all abilities, it doesn't matter if you want to speedwalk your way through or just join us for a leisurely stroll!



While this is only taking place in Warwick currently, we hope to create more walking groups across different areas within the county, should enough people be interested.

If you are interested in joining us, please email Rebecca at rebecca.bourton@warwickshire.vision with the subject "Walking Group" or call 01926 411331



Features

Laughs After Lockdown

by Vicky Sartain

Blind comedian Chris McCausland is a familiar figure on the comedy circuit, both stage and screen. Here, he tells WVS about his accidental path to fame.

As a child did you ever dream of stardom and have things worked out as you imagined, or better?

No, never. I have been a massive comedy fan since about the age of 13, but I never had the slightest desire to be on stage myself. I have zero background in drama or performance beyond school nativity plays, and if anything, I was only really ever going to be a computer programmer. The idea to try my hand at comedy came from nowhere. It was a ridiculous idea and was only ever meant to be a one-off thing to say that I had tried it, and here we are now 18 years later and it's the only string I have to my bow these days.

How much preparation goes into your stand-up routine?

My first gig was absolutely terrifying – in fact, you probably could have pushed me over with a single finger. Back then I remember spending weeks working on five minutes of stand-up and committing it all to memory, but these days I have



Photo by Steve Ullathorne

different methods for writing material. These range from simply going on stage and trying stuff out straight from my head, and then building on those ideas organically on stage, to actually sitting down with an idea in my head and trying to flesh it out on paper. If I have quite a big piece of material to try out for the first time, what I will often do is just select a couple of bits from it that can stand alone, and then just try those out to see if there are any laughs. If they get a laugh then I will add more and more to it at each next gig. There's nothing worse than

getting stuck into a five-minute new idea and realising that it's just not funny, but that you're kind of stuck in it until the end. It's much better to build a piece up over time – better for me and definitely better for the audiences who have to sit through it.

You've won several awards. Has life in the spotlight hugely changed your confidence?

Yes, being on stage has certainly built my confidence in so many ways, but the flip side of that I suppose is that it also makes you a lot more critical of yourself. Yes it's lovely having the moments of glory in the spotlight, but you also make all of your mistakes in front of audiences. In fact, everything you do is put out there for consumption and critique, and in this digital age, lots of what you do ends up having a permanent presence. I can often beat myself up for quite some time if I feel I have put something out there that isn't good enough, or if I have underperformed.

Would you describe yourself as an extrovert or introvert?

I'm a little bit of both. I've always been very outwardly social and talkative, but I'm also quite private. I hate social media for example and can't stand having to put personal things up there about life and family, but I'm also a big gob.

Is it easy to pick up on the mood of the audience and get a difficult crowd on side?

I'd much rather have a difficult audience than a difficult individual. Difficult individuals can often derail a gig or ruin momentum and it is all too easy for the gig to then become a battle between you on stage and one or two idiots in the room who everybody hates. If the energy in the room as a whole is lively then that's alright in my book as I'm pretty good at matching them and keeping them in line. I'd much rather have a room of drunk people and stag parties than a well-behaved room with just two people who won't shut up.

How do you think attitudes or perceptions have changed on the comedy circuit since you first started out?

I've been doing stand-up now for 18 years, and to be honest I have found gig promoters to be extremely supportive and accommodating from day one – be it on the open mic circuit or the professional circuit. I think that they are happy if you do a good job for them and the evening is a success. I'd say that it is more the audiences that can have preconceptions about disabled performers, and my approach, especially early on in my career, was to talk about my disability only minimally and to try to make the audiences forget that I was blind.

How much assistance do you need when doing stand-up comedy?

Obviously I am working in different places all the time, and often rushing between shows if I have multiple gigs on the same night. I really don't want to be a logistical problem for gig promoters, so I have somebody that I pay to get me around the place, whether that be in the car or running through the streets of London. At the gig, I need showing up to the microphone and back again once I've finished. Yes I need assistance, but I bring my own. You can see me being shown up on to the stage on my Live at the Apollo appearance which is on YouTube – somebody shows me up to the front and then helps me off again at the end, but whilst I'm up there I'm fine on my own.

Who do you admire in comedy?

I've always been a big Eddie Izzard fan, and I think I really did take the lead from him in a way when I started doing stand-up. Eddie is gender fluid and would walk on stage wearing all kinds of flamboyant feminine outfits, and then just barely mention it.

Her [Eddie recently adopted the pronouns 'she and 'her'] comedy was just funny stand-up, and where an audience could have been forgiven for assuming that her comedy would mainly be about being a transvestite, she kept it to a minimum, and kept it interesting and left people wanting to know more. I have also tried to

have this approach with regards to my disability. I think that most people would expect the blind comedian to mainly just do blind jokes, but I have kept it to a minimum and hopefully left people wanting to know more. After all, there's more going on in your head than just being blind.

What's the best piece of advice a fellow comedian has given you?

A lovely comedian called Martin Beaumont told me once to smarten myself up and smile more on stage! I worked with Martin quite a bit many years ago, and especially in my twenties, I was a bit of a scruff and I think also tried to be a bit moody on stage. I took his advice and he was right of course!

Is there any game-changing technology for sight loss/impairment that has helped you?

I did make the move over to Apple Mac back in about 2009 and find the whole Apple environment so much more enjoyable to work in compared to Windows. I love just being able to use technology out of the box rather than having to separately have specialist accessibility software to procure and maintain.

I have a number of Bose Bluetooth speakers which talk out loud and tell you the percentage of battery remaining and what devices they are connected to, which is great for a mainstream product range.

I am a big music fan and have an extensive vinyl collection and use the RNIB Penfriend for labelling my vinyl albums. I think for a relatively cheap piece of equipment it's a nifty little gizmo.

How have you got through lockdown?

Lockdown was just a series of moments of motivation and enthusiasm, followed by brick walls. I was lucky to have had a lot of TV work over the period but I long for the days of being able to film and perform in front of full rooms again. My tour show, 'Speaky Blinder', was written and ready to go before the first lockdown, but I now just need to get my match fitness up again, and that can only be done on stage really.

Can you describe your 2022 tour in three words?

Probably rescheduled, rescheduled, rescheduled. But I know that's not what you want. How about personal, interesting, hilarious!

Chris on tour in 2022

Chris will be taking his rescheduled stand-up show 'Speaky Blinder' on tour from 1 April 2022, with 38 dates booked across the UK so far.

For tour tickets and information please go to:

<http://chrismccausland.com/tour/>

Passenger Assistance

By Paul Bowler

With the country slowly emerging from COVID restrictions and people allowed to travel more freely again, you might be thinking about visiting friends and relatives for that all-important reunion, or even taking a well-needed holiday. You may even be thinking of making the journey by train.

If you're a visually impaired rail user, one of the services that can be a huge help is the passenger assistance scheme. This is a service provided by all of the UK's rail operators, and



means that if you require help with your journey because of health reasons or disability, you can arrange for assistance from the railway staff. They will then look after you from the time you arrive at the departure station until you leave at your destination. They'll also help you change trains if your journey requires you to do that.

I first became aware of the service about eight years ago, and thanks to my step mum. I have a brother who lives in London, and up until that point, if I wanted to visit him I would either travel by train with someone else, or wait for a lift, and this meant I was limited as to when I could see him.

Having read about passenger assistance on the internet, my step mum offered to help me try it out. We agreed that she would take the same train as me, but be in the background so she could keep an eye on proceedings, and be on hand to help out if there was a problem.

So, a couple of weeks before Christmas I rang Virgin Trains to make a booking. I spoke to a friendly Scottish lady who took a few details, then arranged the assistance for my journey.

We travelled from Marston Green in Birmingham to London Euston on a Friday afternoon. A man from the ticket office at Marston Green guided me on to the train and found

me a seat, then I was met by another member of staff once we reached Euston and escorted to a taxi.

After that journey, a whole new world was opened up for me, one I'd not previously felt was possible for me to explore. Suddenly I could travel by myself, and visit friends and family who live far away without needing someone to drive me there. I now use the train regularly to go to London, and have even been able to take the occasional holiday. Shortly before the pandemic I discovered passenger assistance is also available on the London Underground, something that's now given me a quicker route to my brother's house.

With the onset of Covid we've all done much less travelling over the past year or so, and fewer trains were operating during the worst of the crisis, but it has still been possible to book assistance. I managed to get to London a couple of times when the restrictions were not so heavy, and using the railways during the pandemic was a slightly different experience. Masks had to be worn by everyone, and the staff used disposable sleeves while providing sighted guide. It was also noticeably quieter with fewer passengers, even in London.

I think passenger assistance is a great service, and it's one that's helped me a lot. It works very well for me 99.9% of the time, but human error means

now and again things can go awry. One memorable occasion when this happened occurred a couple of years ago, while I was travelling back to Birmingham from London Euston. I was put on a train that wouldn't be stopping in Birmingham, but didn't realise this until we were on the move and the guard announced the next stop as Stoke-on-Trent.

When she came to check the tickets I explained to her what had happened. "No problem," she said. "We'll get you off at Stoke and make sure you get a train back to Birmingham." We reached Stoke about an hour later, and I had a longer than planned journey that day. I wasn't charged anything extra either because what had happened wasn't my fault, so it all ended well. I imagine there were one or two red faces at Euston though.



Booking and Using Passenger Assistance

- Every train company has a designated number for booking passenger assistance, but you don't need to ring them separately if your journey is with more than one operator. Each company can arrange assistance for an entire journey.
- You need to book in advance. Generally they advise giving at least 24 hours' notice before you want to travel.
- Once your journey is arranged you receive an email detailing the schedule. This information is also sent to the various railway stations you will use during the journey.
- When you are at the departure station you make yourself known to a member of staff. At smaller stations this would be by going to the ticket office, while some larger stations have a designated team for passenger assistance.
- As mentioned above the service is also available on the London Underground, but without the need to book in advance. You can just turn up and someone will help. London Overground also offers a turn-up-and-go service.
- Railway staff are trained to provide sighted guide, and do it very well.

Radio 4 In Touch

by David Pool



The In Touch program has become familiar to many in both the sighted and visually impaired over many years, something which surprised me when I started looking into its history and what it has meant to people.

Described on Wikipedia as “A program on Radio 4 airing news, views and information for people who are blind or partially sighted”, it has held a 20-minute slot on Radio 4 on a Tuesday evening at 8.40pm since 2011.

First launched in 1961 on the Home Service by the presenter David Scot-Blackhall, himself partially sighted and something of a pioneer, he also launched the still active Milton Mountaineers, a social outdoor activity group for the vision impaired.

The current main presenter Peter White took over in 1974, a broadcasting journalist who has worked in newspapers, TV and radio.

Amongst the interesting facts about Peter White apart from his

involvement with Comic Relief in 2002, he was given the Viv Bradford Rose Bowl Award by Warwickshire Association for the Blind.

Whilst I can't personally claim to have followed In Touch for decades, only finding it whilst looking for Podcasts to subscribe to on my then new streaming device, I am glad I did and still value finding it.

Maybe not every issue interests me, however it is always informative and the articles are current and up to date. Particularly interesting now are articles covering testing and vaccinations for COVID and the on and off drama about the decisions made by London Transport whether they will, or will not, allow their staff to guide visually impaired travellers on the underground system, by the way it's “off” again.

There are lighter articles too, useful and interesting to both the visually impaired and those who support them, family, friends as well as professionals can benefit from the broad coverage of items.

Such things as “the modern visually impaired person”, and how technology helps them independently deal with life in the increasingly fast-moving world with higher and further education, cooking, travel, shopping, being

social, and so much more. Daunting for some of us but proof we could all do these things if we took our courage in our hands. However, if you are like me, from time to time the quiet life is so much less complicated!

What the program continues to do is inspire and inform, as technology and recognition that those with a visual impairment can compete and be successful on a level playing field.

In Touch continues to be broadcast on Radio 4 on a Tuesday evening, it is accessible on so many devices

from radio to the internet, phones, tablets and smart speakers. And also as a podcast, as I access it along with previous issues via the internet.

The question I hear you ask, well is it worth a listen? What we really should ask, is In Touch still relevant today?

Without doubt yes, it is relevant, after six decades of broadcasting the program still informs the listener and is a good reference point and I feel better informed and encouraged and able to cope with this increasingly fast-moving world. Happy listening.

Embroidered Baby Scans

Nathan Edge, an ex-player for England's blind football team and also an expecting father, was left stunned after being gifted a tactile stitched picture of his baby son's 12-week scan.

His friend, Deb Fisher, who made it for him, said that she had come up with the idea so Nathan was able to "feel his baby's face and features"

Nathan described the gift as "one of the best gifts" he had ever received. "It never came to mind that this could be available to me" he added.

The two of them are now looking at setting up a non-profit organisation with a network of embroidery

volunteers to help other blind parents with similar embroidered baby scans.

If you are (or know) a visually impaired expecting parent, this might just be the perfect gift. If you can't wait for Nathan and Deb's new organisation to emerge, there are plenty of embroiders across Warwickshire that can be found on Google that may be able to do this.



NFBUK

by Sam Davis

The National Federation of the Blind of the UK, better known as NFBUK, is a registered charity and national membership organisation for blind and partially sighted people.

Founded by blind and partially sighted people in 1947, NFBUK describes itself as an independent, non-political, self-help campaigning group whose mission aim is to improve the overall welfare and quality of daily life for blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted people and for them to be treated equally and receive the same dignity and respect as other members of society.

They achieve this by running campaigns that assist in ensuring that people are able to move safely around local areas, take part in education and training, get a job, have a social life – ultimately, do exactly what the average UK citizen expects to do.

The NFBUK do their campaigning through working with various charities and organisations, and also with local and national government departments and committees who are able to make decisions that affect blind and partially sighted people. NFBUK keep them updated about the current issues that blind and partially sighted people are facing, and work with them to find solutions.



Some of the more recent suggestions NFBUK are campaigning for include:

- The call for a national rehabilitation framework inscribed into UK law as a human right, to guarantee free vision rehabilitation to everyone wherever they live in the United Kingdom.
- Changes to be implemented to the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) to ensure they blind and visually impaired students have access to the standardised resources they require to participate in and complete higher education, without incurring costs related to their disability themselves.
- Changes to ensure that blind, partially sighted and deaf-blind people receive welfare benefits to cover the extra costs that their disability incurs.

NFBUK has a local Coventry and Warwickshire branch (and also a postal branch for those who aren't able travel) where members meet on the third Monday of every month. If you are interested in learning more about the NFBUK or even becoming a member, simply visit: www.nfbuk.org

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Focus on Health

Mucormycosis and Eye Health

by Sam Davis

While we can rejoice that vaccines are being issued across the country, it is still important to remain vigilant while this pandemic continues for the safety of both yourself and others as new and diverse strains of Coronavirus continue to flourish in various parts of the world.

It is not just the virus itself that requires caution. Over in India, there has been a dramatic rise in cases of current and recovering COVID-19 patients developing Mucormycosis.

Mucormycosis is a rare but dangerous fungal infection that can have devastating effects on eye health. The fungal infection is caused by mould commonly found in soils and decaying vegetables which can easily affect an immunocompromised person. This infection, sometimes known as 'Black Fungus' is very aggressive and can affect the eyes, lungs, mouth, nose and in some cases, even the brain.

It is believed that the new COVID strain known as "Delta" or B.1.617.2, causes immense damage on the pancreas, rapidly increasing blood glucose levels and triggering sudden onset diabetes. This is what allows the deadly fungus to thrive.



Mucormycosis is a very serious infection, holding a high mortality rate of 50%. Due to the areas of which Mucormycosis affects, there have been reports from India of patients losing their vision and, in some cases, having to have their eyes surgically removed in order to save their life. It has been suggested that the high case load in India is linked to a large population of the people having uncontrolled or undiagnosed diabetes.

David Denning, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Manchester and the chief executive of the Global Action Fund for Fungal Infections says that while it is "unlikely" that the UK will be as badly affected by this infection, patients with poorly controlled diabetes may still be at risk.

We ask that you continue to be cautious, especially those who are diabetic.

Advice and Guidance Spotlight on Rehabilitation

by Jane Thorn

The Rehabilitation Team decided to start "Spotlight on Rehabilitation" during the lockdown at the beginning of 2021, as a way to introduce newly registered VIPs to WVS services.

Spotlight is run over 3 consecutive afternoons, each lasting one hour, via group telephone conference hosted by the Rehabilitation Team. We give a brief overview of the charity and the services available, but focusing on rehabilitation.

Spotlight covers the registration process, eye conditions, reading, lighting, colour and contrast advice. We talk about magnifiers and other equipment that has proved most useful with our VIPs such as bumpons, liquid level indicators, Penfriends, writing frames and so much more.

Along with our VIPs, carers and family members are welcome to join us, as is anyone who feels they would benefit from these sessions in order to support their loved ones. There are opportunities to ask questions, but most feel that it is enough to just listen.

We have now resumed home visits but are continuing with Spotlight sessions as they proved so popular. Rehabilitation visits are limited due to the restrictions around PPE and the reduction of permissible visits per day. Spotlight allows us to reach more people in a safe and interactive way and gives glimpses into how others manage their vision loss. The feedback from the first two sessions was extremely positive...

"I would have liked the calls to be longer, I was really enjoying the sessions...The team was very good, came across as very refreshing." - BJ

"All really useful and helpful information" - MB

"... found the overview of WVS interesting..." - JR



Grant Successes!

by Kate Perkins

This year has been a difficult year for a number of charities having reduced fundraising income therefore I am even more grateful to those that have helped us this year in providing support.

When I approached Rugby Lions Club for John Young, a gentleman in Rugby who had just moved into the area from Birmingham in order to be cared for by his brother, they very quickly offered their support.

Mr Young has a number of health conditions as well as being sight impaired, his brother also suffers with a lung condition and they desperately needed a facility to dry their washing on a daily basis as having it hanging on airers was not conducive to their health. The Lions were able to assist by providing a



brand-new tumble dryer which was delivered and installed from a local electrical store within a week of our grant application.

Mr Young has told me what a difference this has already made to their lives and is extremely grateful for the support Rugby Lions have provided in this instance.

All grant applications referrals must be submitted to me via our rehabilitation team.

Get Your Voice Heard

Do you enjoy writing? Do you have something you want to say? A topic you want to bring to everyone's attention?

Accepting people of all ages and abilities, we're looking for enthusiastic writers to join our Warwickshire Vision magazine editing team to help us with creating content that matters to you.

If you're interested please contact 01926 411331 or email Sam Davis at sam.davis@warwickshire.vision

IT bits & bytes

by Ruth Okey

Voice Guidance Sky Q



Voice Guidance is now available on a Sky Q box connected to the internet. It

provides spoken navigation of Sky Q menus, rails, grids, the TV Guide and the Mini TV Guide, Show pages, Voice search and On Screen Messages. To activate this feature use your Sky Q voice remote and say "Switch on voice guidance" or switch it on via the accessibility menu.

Apple AirTag



Launched in April 2021, these discs are about the size of a £2 coin and can be attached to items

you wish to find using the Find My app on your Apple IOS 14.5 iPhone/iPad. For close items, you can play a sound on the built in speaker and just follow it to locate the object with the tag. Precision finding on iPhones (11 and 12) can give directions to the tagged item. For items further afield use the lost mode for it to be found using the wider network of Apple devices. Once the AirTag is configured Siri can be asked to

find my keys or find my handbag. Only you can see where your AirTag is and relay data is anonymous and encrypted. Batteries are not re-chargeable but can be replaced. As there are no clips etc on the AirTag a key fob accessory may be required to attach it to keys. Cost £29 each.

Sullivan+



This is a free Android only app that is similar to the Apple Seeing AI app that is used by many visually

impaired people. It can do text recognition, face recognition, image description and more. In document mode, you hold your device above a document keep moving the device up until the app sees the document edges using the camera. Once the document is detected select the capture button or volume button to take a picture and the text will be recognised, converted to speech and read to you.

Reminder: If you need support, you can book an appointment with our IT Service on 01926 411331. Or visit www.warwickshire.vision for more IT information.

Useful Phone Apps for VIPs (That You Might Not Know!)

by Sam Davis

Soundscape



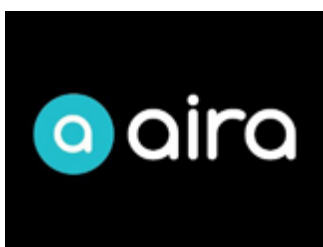
Microsoft Soundscape is an app that will place audio cues and labels in 3D space such that they sound like they are coming

from the direction of the points of interest, parks, roads and other features in your surroundings.

Users can switch between using Soundscape in the real world, or the virtual world, to help you build a picture of a place effortlessly with Street Preview.

Designed so you can use it in conjunction with other apps such as podcasts, audio books, you can place audio beacons on points of interest that you will hear it as you move around and the "My Location" feature describes your current location and the direction you are facing.

Aira

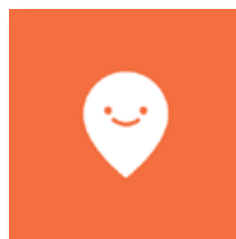


Very similar to the free App "Be My Eyes", Aira is a paid-for service that connects blind and low-

vision people to highly trained,

remotely-located agents through the smartphone app.

Unlike 'Be My Eyes', which connects users to random volunteers, Aira connects users to highly-trained professionals who are contactable 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They connect to your camera and can assist you with any type of task, even including tasks such as purchasing and organising a holiday. Be aware however, that the Aira service is quite costly, be sure to find a plan that works for you.



Moovit

Moovit is a journey planner app that helps users get from point A to point B in the

easiest and most efficient way. The app provides live public transport information, so users can keep informed and plan their trips with confidence. What makes this app particularly useful for VIPs is Moovit's "Live Directions" feature, which gives the user gets step-by-step GPS-style audio guidance for their journey and even sends alerts when their bus or train is arriving or "Get Off Alerts" to get ready before they've reached their destination stop.

Volunteer Focus

Volunteer Week

by Lauren Hall

The 37th annual Volunteer Week ran from 1st – 7th June and celebrated volunteering across the UK. For us at WVS, it was an opportunity to recognise the contribution that our volunteers have made over the past year to support service users in their local communities and to say a huge thank you to every volunteer.

The previous Spring 2021 issue gave an insight into how volunteers have gone the extra mile since the beginning of the pandemic, having continued to support their local service users through our telephone befriending service. 124 volunteers currently support our befriending service, providing over 300 service users with essential company and conversation.

From everyone at WVS, we would like to say a huge thank you to our volunteers. We couldn't provide the integrated service which makes such a huge difference to people

living with sight loss without the dedication of our volunteer team.

In addition to recognition, Volunteer Week at WVS is also about recruitment. We are looking for more enthusiastic volunteers in preparation for returning to face-to-face services. We currently have the following roles available across a range of locations:

Support Centre Volunteer – across all locations

Club Leader – Leamington & Southam

Club Helper – Nuneaton & Stratford

Home Visitor Coordinator – Stratford & Alcester

Home Visitor Volunteer – across all locations

To find out more, please contact Volunteer Coordinator, Lauren Hall, at lauren.hall@warwickshire.vision or on 01926 411331.

Queens Award Presentation Event



We are delighted to announce that after originally being postponed due to COVID restrictions, we now have a new date set for our presentation of our Queens Award for Voluntary Service. WVS volunteers have been invited to join us on Wednesday 15th September at the Warwick Boat Club for our presentation of the award from the Lord Lieutenant.

Amelia's Half Marathon

We would like to give a big thank you to Amelia Hobden, who took part in the Leamington half-marathon on the 11th of July to help raise money for Warwickshire Vision Support raising an amazing £450.

Amelia writes "During the first COVID-19 lockdown I volunteered for Warwickshire vision support helping to deliver food parcels and food shops to vulnerable people, who are blind or visually impaired in the community. Whilst involved with Warwickshire Vision Support I could see the valuable work they provide locally, which has inspired me to want to raise money to help them continue their vital work."



Louise's 110 Mile Challenge

As part of our 110th birthday celebrations that took place over the month of June, our former Senior Vision Support Officer, Louise Jelley, pledged to run 110 miles throughout the month to help raise money for our Telephone Befriending Service - our service which connects volunteers to those who are feeling an overwhelming sense of loneliness or isolation.

After what was surely a gruelling month, Louise successfully completed her challenge and raised an incredible total of £531.



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For more information, please contact:

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