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of Warwickshire Vision Support

This publication is also available in digital audio,
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Rosemary Went, Editor



Rosalie Visick, Co-editor

Editorial

Changing weather patterns brought very early spring flowers and variable weather conditions. It wasn't a cold winter, but rather wet. In March Warwickshire experienced it's heaviest rainfall for 100 years. At present it seems as if winter is over, with the days getting longer.

People are living longer and that is when medical conditions can develop. However, many are enjoying a longer retirement from work with time to do what they want, but not everyone.

Queen Elizabeth II was born on 21st April 1926 - the first child of the Duke and Duchess of York (not in direct line of accession to the throne). In June there will be official celebrations for Her Majesty's 90th birthday, and we send her our congratulations and best wishes.

Shakespeare is probably one of Warwickshire's most famous

residents. It is 400 years since his death and we give details of his plays that are being performed with audio description, making them accessible to visually impaired people. While you may not know the name Cervantes, you may know the name Don Quixote, the character he created - who will be portrayed on the stage in Stratford this season. It is also Cervantes 400th anniversary.

Volunteers are the life-blood that in the past has enabled and continues to enable our Association to provide the range of charitable services that it does. Volunteers perform a wide range of tasks, giving generously of their time. Volunteering and some of our Volunteers are featured in this magazine; new Volunteers are always welcome - please phone the office.

We look forward to receiving your contributions to the Summer edition of Warwickshire Vision. The articles are needed by mid May.

News from Warwickshire Vision Support

Rebecca Hunt



A new year and a new challenge! I am the new Technology Officer for Warwickshire Vision Support and took up my post in January 2016. Prior to joining WVS I worked for nearly ten years with a small IT charity in Solihull. I organised and ran a variety of projects including IT@home – for those unable to attend classes, silver surfer classes and Do IT For Job Seekers, to name but a few. Supporting people at Warwickshire Vision Support will, I am sure, present me with opportunities and challenges to help people through the use of IT to maintain independence, develop new skills and perhaps new hobbies. I have

had the pleasure of meeting a few members of Warwickshire Vision Support at the Vision Support Centres and look forward to meeting many more in the coming months.

At home I am married to David, whose favourite saying is 'I'd be on parole by now'. We have three children; Ben who is 23 and Megan and Harriette who are 21. We also provide board and lodgings to Tag, a 7 year old English springer spaniel, who is as mad as a box of frogs. We have recently moved into a new home which we call 'DIY City' and this currently takes up most of our spare time. Gardening and baking are two of my favourite pastimes, although more practice of the former and less tasting of the latter is required.

Vicky Lewis

Hello my name is Vicky, I'm 26 and I'm the new rehab assistant.

Well, where should I start with telling you all about me?

I have lived in Leamington most of my life. I was originally from Birmingham but moved here with my family at a very young age. I went to the local secondary school and sixth form where I left with 12 GCSE's, an A level in Art and Health and Social Care and an AS level in Psychology and Business Studies. I have also completed an NVQ in Health and Social Care and numerous modules



through the Open University on counselling.

After leaving school I worked in a range of jobs, including retail at Boots and a Shrinkage Analyst and Personal Assistant at National Grid. However in the last 6 years I have had a massive career change and worked within the Health and Social Care sector. I worked with children, mental health and acquired brain injury. I have been able to meet and help an array of people. This is what I'm most looking forward to being a rehab assistant, being able to meet different people and hopefully help them to live independent lives. I'm also looking forward to learning lots of new things about this specific area.

I am a keen sports person; I have taken part in various sports over the years including football, tennis, gymnastics, kick boxing, athletics and

netball. However for the last 7 years I have been a dedicated rugby player for the local ladies team. I enjoy the physicality, team spirit and a cheeky beer or two after the match. Recently my goal was to challenge myself to complete a mud/obstacle run. So far I have done two; this year I will be attempting to complete the 10 mile British Military Legion run. Wish me luck!

As you can probably tell by now I am a very outdoorsy person. I have a little dog called Olly, he's a Yorkshire terrier and is absolutely crackers. He definitely has the big dog in little body syndrome. We like going on long walks whatever the weather, even though he's not a massive fan of getting wet, I think it's because he knows it's going to result in a bath afterwards.

Family is very important to me - and no wonder, with how many there are of us - I'm one of 10!!! Six sisters, three brothers plus three nieces, three nephews, one godson and a partridge in a pear tree!! Yes, Christmas is a nightmare. Trying to juggle my weekends to fit everyone in is impossible; I definitely need to work on a rotational basis.

When I'm not walking the dog, spending time with family or friends or even playing rugby I like to dabble in some arts and crafts. I love creating something new, whether it's a named photo frame, a drawing or even card making. I like to learn new skills and

my latest one is knitting. I find it so therapeutic; I know what you're thinking - a knitting rugby player, who'd have thought it.

I look forward to meeting you all over the next couple of months.

Staff Departures

Imke Carruthers, who left in December 2016, had been a temporary Assistant Community Worker. Imke has now started her final placement to be a Rehabilitation Worker under Birmingham City University. We hope that her experiences with us will have been of benefit and we wish her well.

Melanie Pritchard left the position of Interactive Technology Officer at the end of November 2015. Melanie was responsible for establishing this service for Warwickshire Vision Support and we wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

Fundraising Update

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who made a donation in response to our regular giving campaign.

You will recall that the Board of Trustees suspended the Subscribing Membership fee last year in recognition that many of our service users are struggling financially during these times of economic uncertainty. It was our goal to generate the same level of income from voluntary donations as we received from the

subscribing membership fee. I am pleased to tell you that we succeeded and raised almost £6,000.

Given this success, we plan to repeat the exercise again later in the year. In this way, we hope to ensure that those people willing and able to make a donation can do so whilst those who have limited resources can continue to receive services without having to make a payment.

I would also like to acknowledge some grants that we have received in the last few months:

- The Trusthouse Charitable Foundation donated £6,500 in support of the Nuneaton Vision Support Centre
- Leamington and Warwick Soroptimists donated £2,761 from their annual Swimathon
- The Eveson Charitable Trust donated £3,000 in support of our Vision Support Centre in Coventry
- We were extremely fortunate to receive support from five Councillors in South Warwickshire who have supported our clubs in Southam, Shipston, Stratford, Henley and Alcester with the County Councillors Grant Fund
- We have also received £3,730 from Stratford District Council in support of the Stratford Digital Inclusion Programme to help us to reach more people with IT training in the more remote parts of South Warwickshire.

Membership of Warwickshire Vision Support

Do you receive services from Warwickshire Vision Support? There is a wide range of services provided. Have you been to one of our Vision Support Centres or do you attend one of our Clubs? Perhaps you enjoy receiving a Reader/Visitor in your home? Do you enjoy reading this magazine? All these are services provided by Warwickshire Vision Support with no direct charge made to the recipient.

Do you contribute as a Voting Member who is entitled to vote on issues concerning the management and conduct of Warwickshire Vision Support? The only financial obligation of Voting Members is £1, **if** the Association becomes financially unviable - less than the price of a cup of coffee. (The Association has already been in existence for over 100 years.)

All VIPs, visually impaired people, in Warwickshire are eligible to receive the services and support of Warwickshire Vision Support. These are Ordinary Members who have no voting rights.

In addition, there are Life Members who have been given voting membership as an honour.

To become a Voting Member, if you aren't one already, please contact the office for an application form.

A Board of Directors/Trustees governs Warwickshire Vision Support. Would you, or someone you know, like to become a Director/Trustee? If so, please ask Barbara Main at our office about the application procedure.



Calling all VIPs

(Visually Impaired People/Persons)

Have you ever played bowls? Would you like to start again? If you have never bowled would you like to try your hand at it now? You might surprise yourself how you take to it.

Do you want exercise, companionship, someone to chat to? If so, why not join the WVS Bowls Club. It meets every Friday at the Avon Valley Indoor Bowls Club at Gaydon from 10 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. Come along and try it out for a friendly atmosphere, exercise, chat, coffee/tea and biscuits. Bowls are available. Volunteer drivers provide transport from Warwick and Leamington Spa to and from the venue. Come and join us!

For more information telephone Sue at Warwickshire Vision Support on **01926 411331** or email: **enquiries@warwickshire.vision**

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Advocacy

At the Consultations held last summer one of the issues raised was pavement obstructions. And that was the topic discussed by members of our Nuneaton Advocacy group and the Manager with Warwickshire County Council.

The Council was very receptive to the points made about cluttered streets. In particular a street in Atherstone was cited. Later in the week of that meeting it was seen that the number of A-boards in that street was considerably reduced.

Steve Plumpton, a blind Trustee/ Director, was invited to speak on local radio about this subject. It is hoped that further meetings with WCC will

be held, and a street charter is due to be drawn up.

At present there are Advocacy Groups based at the Vision Support Centres in Nuneaton, Stratford-upon-Avon and Rugby and it is planned to establish one at each of our Centres.

If you have any issues of concern which you would like to bring to our attention, why not pop in to your local Vision Support Centre when a member our team, will be happy to take details or alternatively email either Steve at steve.plumpton@uwclub.net or John at john.davis@warwickshire.vision or write to John.

Health and Wellbeing

What is Dry Eye?

Dry eye usually affects both eyes and the symptoms are

- dry and itchy eyes
- a constant feeling that there is something in your eye
- overwatering - when your eye is making tears all the time
- your vision is slightly blurry, usually only for short periods of time.

The eye has three layers of tears that keep it moist and comfortable and take nutrients to your cornea. Every time you blink, these layers of tears are spread across the front of the eye.

Dry eye is the term for a number of things that can go wrong with the tears on the front of your eye.

The tear film contains an oily layer and if there is a problem with this layer the eye becomes irritated every time you blink, which then makes it water.

Dry eye can be caused by

- getting older, particularly in women, whose hormone balance changes, causing dryness
- wearing contact lenses
- arthritis
- infections in your eyelash roots

- drugs taken for other problems that may cause tears to dry up

Dry eye can be exacerbated: perhaps in the spring if you are prone to hay fever or if you read for a long time without a break. Using eye drops before watching the television may pre-empt dryness.

Dry eye can be managed by using eye drops or a new treatment that can be sprayed directly onto your eyelids.

If you think you have dry eye - speak to your optometrist. When they test your eyes they can examine your tear film using a microscope.

To find out more about dry eye log on to dryeyezone.com

Eye Care – from a Patient's Perspective Sheila Venville, Warwick

I called at my group medical practice, unwilling to hang on the telephone line until the receptionist had dealt with the morning queue. I idly considered the junior doctors and their plans for strike action. I also thought about recent news on the radio which reported on the use of antibiotics - too many were doled out and this was considered partly the fault of the doctors and partly the demands of the patients.

I had visited my local opticians when my glaucoma-affected eye seemed to be losing vision again. The optician had diagnosed blepharitis,

an infection hard to get rid of, with the appropriate eye ointment costing £13 per tube. I might need to use this for several months, I was told. I declined the purchase and said I would speak to my general practitioner.

So here I was. The receptionist said, 'The doctor can see you now'. I couldn't believe my luck. I entered his room to be greeted with a cheery smile as the doctor fetched up my records on his computer. I told him of the diagnosis, but couldn't recall the name of the apparently persistent infection of the eyelid. He took one quick look and named the condition and I confirmed that blepharitis was what the optician had said. Within minutes, I was leaving the surgery with a prescription for antibiotics - eye drops for 5 days - and three pages printed off the internet.

The three pages I summarised as the use of baby shampoo. The instructions said use baby shampoo on the end of a cotton wool bud and apply daily to the eyelids to keep the blepharitis at bay. Personally, I simply wash my entire face including eyelids with a spot of the shampoo rubbed into my hand to form a lather. It works beautifully. The infection has not returned after several months.

I was duly impressed with both my medical practice centre and the doctor, new to me. He had done exactly what I considered the best thing for both of us!

Bionic Eye Implant

An electronic chip implanted behind the eye of a woman with Retinitis Pigmentosa has restored some of her sight. Rhian Lewis was diagnosed with RP at the age of five. The cells in her retina were gradually destroyed, so she lost the sight in one eye and, by the age of 49, had only minimal sight in the other one.

The chip had already been used in Germany, but Rhian Lewis was the first person in the UK to receive such an advanced electronic eye. It uses a light-sensitive chip inserted behind her damaged retina to communicate directly with her optic nerve. This is possible as the optic nerve, which carries light signals to the brain remained intact.

A computer is placed under the skin behind the ear, powered by a magnetic coil. The light sensitive chip, which is 3mm x 3mm is inserted at the back of the eye to replace the damaged retina. The operation took about 10 hours, as the chip must be positioned accurately. However, it has only 1,600 pixels, so the resolution it gives is far lower than that provided by a healthy eye.

The implant captures light and stimulates the nerve cells and sends signals via the optic nerve to the brain. The computer helps to interpret the signals.

As soon as the device was switched on Rhian could see flashing in her

eye. The parts of her brain that had been dormant for years had to learn to interpret what she was seeing, but 6 months later she was able to make out objects more clearly.

Genetic Blindness Research

Genetic Engineers are closer to a cure for inherited blindness. At Columbia University in New York they have used high precision genetic engineering to correct the complicated tangle of mutated DNA that causes the most widespread condition - Retinitis Pigmentosa. RP is believed to affect about 20,000 people in the UK.

The scientists take a small patch of the patient's skin cells; these are then 'reprogrammed' into stem cells by adding genes using a messenger molecule called RNA. The mutated gene is then cut out using a new 'scissor' tool and replaced with a healthy copy.

The next step, which has not yet been tested on humans, is to open the patient's eye and transplant the GM stem cells into the retina, to replace the faulty tissue.

Clinical trials for other inherited eye conditions are to be started next year.



Eat More Leafy Vegetables

Over the last 30 years researchers at Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston studied the diets of 100,000 middle-aged people. They found that a greater intake of dietary nitrate and green leafy vegetables was associated with a 20-30 per cent lower risk of glaucoma and up to 50 per cent with central vision loss.

Chronic open-angle glaucoma affects up to two in every 100 people over 40 years old and around five in every 100 people over 80 years old.

Glaucoma occurs when there is a blockage in the eye that prevents fluid from draining away and causes increased pressure.

The study discovered that people who ate at least 240mg of nitrate, which is found in vegetables such as spinach, were 30 per cent less likely to develop glaucoma. It is thought that leafy vegetables improve the blood circulation to the optic nerve.

Around 500,000 people in Britain suffer from glaucoma.

Volunteers and Volunteering

Kenilworth Reader Service for the Blind

Fred Reid

Kenilworth Reader Service for the Blind will have a new chairperson this year. Brian Cackett stands down after 18 years. It seems a good moment to take stock of a unique service for people with serious sight loss.

It all began in 1972, when I answered my door bell to an unknown caller.

'I'm Ted Herbert', he said, 'may I talk to you for a bit?'

He explained that he was Manager of the Career Service for Coventry. He was trying to help an unemployed youth, whose chances of getting employment would be improved if he could get some voluntary work. Could I use him as a reader?

It was a shrewd idea, typical of Ted. I was blind. I had been working as a lecturer in History at Warwick University since 1966. My wife, Etta, a physiotherapist in the NHS, was also blind. What was more likely than that I would need people to read to me?

What Ted didn't know was that I already had a team of readers and couldn't find time for even one more. Those were the days before print scanners and talking computers and there was no other way to study a subject like history, for which there were very few braille and audio books.

As we chatted over the teacups, I began to think laterally. Why should it only be blind people in certain jobs

who could have readers? There must be many who wanted help to read their favourite newspaper, recipe or knitting pattern - to say nothing of their daily post (people still got letters in those days). I had lived as a student and lecturer in several parts of the UK. Nowhere had I found an established reader service that I could just plug in to. Every time I moved I had to begin again, slowly recruiting my own private army of helpers. Wouldn't it be wonderful if everywhere had a reader service ready to meet the needs?

Ted warmed to the idea and we began to think what a reader service should look like. His first thought was that we would attach one reader to one 'client'. I persuaded him that this was a bad idea. What if that reader suddenly dropped out? What if reader and client didn't get on? Was it a good thing for one helper to know so much about the private affairs of a blind person?

Together we gradually modelled our idea of a reader service. There would be a pool of volunteers and a list of clients who asked for their support. Each client would request the service needed – a weekly session of 1 or 2 hours' duration. Every month an 'organiser' would draw up a rota of reading appointments, allocating a different reader to each client from week to week. If a reader had to cancel the appointment, another would be sent to fill the

gap. Clients would be able to cancel appointments by giving reasonable notice. Our overarching aim was a flexible service in which no one would feel over committed. And that is how 'KRS' still works today. About a dozen blind and visually impaired people are serviced by a rota of about twenty-five volunteers.

What does KRS mean to people who rely on it? We can gauge this from the kind of support delivered, the kind of people supported and the remarkable ways the service has touched their lives. Volunteers support clients, not only by reading anything from tinned food labels to Christmas cards, but also with a friendly chat to isolated people. In fact there is no limit. Brian Cackett, who is an engineering genius, has at times repaired my exercise bike and my wife's vacuum cleaner.

Over the years KRS has delivered crucial support to blind and visually impaired people in employment and education. I couldn't have done my job without volunteers who read my teaching resources. Students have been helped to take degrees at Warwick and Coventry Universities.

There are several remarkable life stories, but I have space to mention only Elisabeth Standen. Resident in Leamington, Elisabeth was a Rubella baby, born hard of hearing with partial sight and locomotor disabilities. She was then blinded by an accident in her teens. By her 20's

she was written off as unemployable and ineducable.

Yet she longed to live a normal life and Ted Herbert championed her cause. With the support of KRS he arranged for her to take A-levels at Coventry's Hereward College for People with Disabilities. From there, still with KRS support, she went to Warwick University and took a Philosophy degree. After that there was no stopping her. Legal qualifications followed and she was employed for the rest of her working life as an advisor on disability rights to several local authorities. 'My highest ambition', she once said, 'is to pay income tax.'

Some people say there is no need for reader services today. Scanners and talking computers give people with sight loss access to all the information they need. Well no, not exactly. Not everyone can access computers. Even those who can, may still benefit from the support of a reader who rapidly sorts through mail, identifies household goods, spots stains on the posh dress she wants to wear to her best friend's wedding, and so on. There is really no limit to the ways in which KRS volunteers make the lives of its clients easier.

At its Annual General Meeting on 27th February, KRS warmly thanked Brian Cackett and welcomed John Harris as its new Chairperson. Next year, another pillar of the service,

Yvonne Rich, will retire after more than a decade as Rota Organiser. Change is in the air and John is attracting new blood to the management committee. Some of our readers have given over 20 years' service and there is always demand for new recruits. The needs continue. The service goes on.

A Life in Volunteering

John Harris

Kenilworth Reader Service

When I first met Brian Cackett, it was when he came with Yvonne Rich to 'interview' me to see if I was a suitable candidate for reading with Kenilworth Readers Service. His gentle manner and encouragement, with other pointers given at the time, were enough to convince me that this was and is a worthwhile part of Warwickshire Vision Support (formerly WAB)

Little did I know that Brian, with his wife Ann, had been a part of the Service for over 30 years, and now over 40 years. It has meant responding to the needs of clients, which can be as varied as the people visited. For one it means dealing with finances, even to the point of sending off money; for another it means reading the instructions on an appliance bought so that it can be used effectively; amazingly enough when you consider our title it can actually mean reading a book, although we will always remember one client who, after a few minutes



dozed off so that you were reading to yourself and not to the person the book was meant for! Most of all, it means a person to talk to, a visit from someone from 'outside', someone who becomes a friend.

Brian and Ann have been ideal Readers. What is more, they have been actively involved in all of this for all of this time and one can only admire their faithfulness to the visually impaired people of the town and the insistence that the work continues, so much so that when it was necessary to appoint a Chairman, Brian was able to volunteer for that role. Perhaps he did not know how long he would be doing the job, but do it he did, and how well!

Brian is a quiet and unassuming man, but he has carried out the role of Chairman with great energy and meticulous efficiency. Helped by a good working committee, where Yvonne has made sure the rota has worked - and when I started she actually organised it (Brian has been the link between the Service and WVS). At his retirement speech he made reference to how much WVS had helped and how the Service could not have run without it. Apart from the obvious tasks of ensuring we were checked (CRB now DBS) and insured, they have been Brian's port of call for all sorts of advice and they are thanked.

Then Brian has been absolutely super-efficient in his keeping of

records. Just before the A.G.M. I went to see him about some minutes he wanted to pass on and there he was, with lists of Readers and Clients that he wanted to make, to ensure they are not forgotten, although naturally he admitted he had difficulty in remembering some of them himself. All of these were about to be put into archives instead of being shredded or hoarded, either option equally useless.

Then there have been the meetings to chair, meetings to go to on behalf of the Service, the funeral to attend to represent the Service and so on and so on. In all of this, Ann was an active player as well as a support. And we do well to remember this is all in the work of a Volunteer. We salute their sheer industry and the spirit in which it has been carried out.

And has it been effective, all of this self-giving over the years? One likes to think of those clients who saw no one else all week and looked forward to the weekly visit, but there have to be special cases. Fred Reid himself testifies to the Readers Service 'reading his teaching resources' so that he could help students take degrees at Warwick and Coventry Universities. Many of us remember reading for the late Roger Duclos-Williams in the Politics Department at Warwick University, all recorded for future use and then there is the story of Elizabeth Standen whose

remarkable story is told by Fred in his article on the story of the Service.

Let the Readers and clients have the last word about Brian and Ann – those who knew them best:

'Dear Brian and Ann, thank you both for your deep commitment to KRS and the quiet rigour with which you ensured that the Service provided an important support for many visually impaired people over many years.'

'Thank you Brian for your leadership over so many years and your devoted service to all aspects of KRS.'

'Thank you Brian for your calm efficiency running KRS for so many years and thank you both for all the extra kindnesses you did for us.'

Why not go for a Walk?

Walking is usually one of the easiest forms of exercise, and is enjoyed by many people as a pleasurable leisure activity. Walking is, literally, one step of a baby's progress towards independence.

However, for some people there are barriers. Confidence may have been lost for a variety of reasons. For VIPs going to unfamiliar places can be a challenge. Routes to regular venues can be taught so that they become routine.

When confidence has been lost, how can it be regained?

A Volunteer could come to your home to act as your sighted guide, so you could go to a prearranged

venue or activity. This would enable you to build the skills and confidence to live a more active lifestyle as an integrated member of your local community.

Is there a place or event you would like to go to as a one-off, but feel unable to go alone?

A Volunteer could guide you to that place or event. (But you would need to bear the cost for both of you for any transport.)

How does this work?

Warwickshire Vision Support can provide this service, with the support of its trained Volunteers.

My Guide is designed to help you to get out of your home and to participate more fully in your local community.

Don't forget - we all need some form of exercise to stay healthy. Barriers are obstacles to be overcome.

If you would like to use the My Guide service contact Warwickshire Vision Support on **01926 411331** or email **enquiries@warwickshire.vision**

I am a Volunteer for Warwickshire Vision Support

I have been involved with Warwickshire Vision Support for some time and was conscious that when I was in physical contact with VIP's, the guiding skills I had been taught some years earlier were a little rusty. This coincided with the Association looking for Volunteers to

be trained for the My Guide scheme. So I signed up for a training day.

This scheme is run in partnership with Guide Dogs, and their staff provided my training.

For one of the exercises all the members of the group put blindfolds on and were asked to place themselves in a line with the tallest person at one end and the shortest at the other.

In the afternoon we all went for a walk. We were put in pairs with one person wearing a blindfold and the other acting as Guide. First the Guide held their arm across their body parallel to the ground and stood by the side of the unsighted person. They could then hold that arm or link arms as a solid connection between the two, through which movement could be felt. Then the journey began.

The first challenge was to safely leave the room, through a door that had a strong 'closer'. We went up and down kerbs and steps and crossed roads. Both partners learnt from that experience, among other things of the trust that has to exist between the two. Then we changed roles.

It was a full day.

At the end of that training day I was given a Certificate stating that I had passed the course. So now, not only have my guiding skills been updated, but I have a piece of paper to prove it.

My first client

Sue at Warwickshire Vision Support contacted me to ask if the home of a potential client was at an acceptable distance from me and whether the preferred appointment time was also convenient. Both were acceptable.

I was provided with details of the lady. These included her date of birth (I am a retiree, but in years could be her daughter). I was also told what sight she had, potential health problems and her emergency contact details. This was in addition to her address and phone number. Volunteers and Clients are matched carefully, taking into account their stated preferences.

We met, and agreed to go ahead with our walking appointments, and I gave her my phone number.

I have enjoyed the experience so far and hope our walks will help her regain her confidence.

I find volunteering for this service a rewarding experience and hope my client feels it is useful to her. Have I made a new friend?

Administration Volunteer

Val Mitchell

Have you ever wondered about the information that you receive from Warwickshire Vision Support each month, and the journey it takes to reach you?

I am a Volunteer and would like to enlighten you as to my role.

Firstly, I have to stamp both front and back of every envelope. The stamp for the back gives the name and address of WVS. This is so that if the recipient has moved and not notified the office, it can be returned there. The front the envelope is stamped 'ARTICLES FOR THE BLIND'. This allows documents in large print to be sent through the post at no charge, and is a concession by Royal Mail.

Secondly, I stick the name and address label on the front of the envelope. The envelope is now ready for the contents to be folded neatly, inserted and sealed.

All the sealed envelopes are placed in mail sacks (not too many in each sack, as it has to be carried by one person). Then, when all the envelopes have been filled, the sacks are ready to go to the sorting office for distribution to you.

Working in Warwickshire Vision Support's office gives me something to get up for, to start the day. Volunteering makes me feel I've done some good.

Editor

Before the labels are stuck on the envelopes they have to be printed. Barbara Main, Admin Officer, uses computer technology to print just the addresses that are in the area of a specific Vision Support Centre.

We are always looking for Volunteers to support us in all aspects of our work - if you are interested please call **01926 411331**.

Leisure

Carry on Reading

Christine Ramble, Warwick

Losing your sight doesn't mean you have to lose out on the pleasure of 'a good read'! If you haven't learnt Braille and even large print books are getting a bit difficult, then why not get into audio books? Talking books have come a long way since cassettes and the clumsy old RNIB machines.

These days electronic and digital devices have made printed material widely and easily accessible to visually impaired people. Here are some of the options:

CDs

You can buy these easily but check whether they have been abridged, as you might prefer the full-length version.

Kindle Books

Can be listened to or read on a Kindle player, a pocket sized device which has built in accessibility features - like being able to change print size and background colour to suit you, for example white letters on a black background. Or you can use a Kindle App to read Kindle books on your own PC, smart phone or tablet, which you might find preferable as you will already be familiar with using these devices and their special accessibility features.

DAISY Books

(Digital Audio Information SYstem)

This audio format can be on CDs, SD cards and USB memory sticks to make a wide range of printed material available to people with vision loss. There are several types of DAISY player, from desktop to small portable models. They all have advanced features such as enabling the user to place bookmarks, navigate by paragraph or line, skip chapters or regulate speed of speaking voice.

RNIB Talking Books

The RNIB has a library of over 23,000 unabridged audio books, available in a wide range of formats. The subscription fee of £50 a year was abolished last year to celebrate 80 years of the service and books chosen from their catalogue are sent and returned post-free. There is also a new on-line service using OverDrive, where books can be streamed direct to your PC using a special app.

RNIB also produces audio versions of several popular periodicals and magazines in different formats. Subscription costs vary but these are usually less than you would pay for the printed version.

For more information on RNIB Talking Books and periodicals, contact **0303123 9999** or visit www.rnib.org.uk

Public Libraries

All libraries have large print books and CD audio books, which are free to VIPs. Warwickshire Library Service also use its own version of OverDrive for which you will require a special app. As this service is quite new, you should contact your local library for more details on how to use it.

Calibre Audio Books

Being a smaller charity, Calibre's catalogue is not as extensive as RNIB's; but the choice of more than 8,000 titles, fiction and non-fiction, recorded by professional actors and broadcasters. There is no subscription charge, but there is a one-off administration fee of £35. They provide unabridged books on CD, MP3 and memory sticks by post as well as a streaming service. Details: www.calibre.org.uk or **01296 432229**

Listening Books

Another charity that provides a range of over 7,000 audio books in all the usual formats, including a streaming service. Subscription is from £20 to £45 a year, but those who find it difficult to pay the fee can apply for free membership. Details: www.listening-books.org.uk or **0207 407 9417**

Computer Software

All of the above formats can be accessed on your computer. You can also get special software, such as Dolphin Guide, which is designed to simplify the process. This will be

useful to those who are familiar with the Guide programme, which enables the user to change font, alter speech etc. to suit personal need.

If you would like to know more about how to access talking books on your PC, tablet, or smartphone, or if you are not sure which Kindle or DAISY player would suit you, make an appointment to see our IT Officer, who will be pleased to help.

Editor

Bee Aware Scheme

The Bee Aware Scheme is a national initiative to promote the inter library loan of alternative format material on behalf of blind and partially sighted people. It is accessible through local libraries.



What's on the Television?

Modern televisions include Electronic Programme Guides. The EPG enables viewers to scroll through the programme schedule. This on-screen information can be read out using text-to-speak technology. However, at present it is only available on some Panasonic and Samsung televisions.

Royal Shakespeare Company

This year the RSC is putting on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford; it is the nation's favourite Shakespeare play and is a light romance. The matinee performance at 1.15 p.m. on Saturday 2nd July will be Audio Described.

AD provides an audio description of each scene and the action as it unfolds. In addition there is a touch tour 2¼ hours before each AD performance.

Hamlet has the world at his feet. He is young, wealthy and living a hedonistic life studying abroad. Then word reaches him that his father is dead. Returning home he finds his world is utterly changed, his certainties smashed and his home a foreign land. Struggling to understand his place in a new world order he faces a stark choice. Submit, or rage against the injustice of his new reality.

AD performances of *Hamlet* will take place on Saturday 16th April at 1.15 p.m. and Wednesday 25th May at 7.15 p.m.

Cymbeline is ruler of a divided Britain. When Innogen, the only living heir, marries her sweetheart in secret, an enraged Cymbeline banishes him. Distracted by Innogen's marriage, Cymbeline is blind to the actions of a powerful figure behind the throne who is plotting to seize

power by murdering them both. AD performances of this romance will take place on Saturday 23rd July at 1.15 p.m. and Thursday 11th August at 7.15 p.m.

There are also performances at the Swan Theatre in Stratford.

Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe tells the story of a brilliant but embittered academic, a solitary scholar who has exhausted the confines of human knowledge. Frustrated with the futility of religion, law and science he is desperate for a deeper understanding of the universe - and for the worldwide fame that it will bring. Risking everything, he conjures the demon Mephistopheles and asks him to strike a deal with Lucifer. Twenty four years of absolute knowledge and infinite power in exchange for his soul.

Despite being tormented by doubt, Faustus agrees to the deal and signs in blood. But as he begins to revel in his new powers, the world around him starts to collapse and the clock inexorably counts down to the final moment of reckoning.

Doctor Faustus will be performed on Thursday 5th May and Friday 24th June, both at 7.30 p.m.

Don Quixote has spent a lifetime reading books on chivalry and decides to embark on a quest of his own. Taking up a lance and a sword, he sets out to become a wandering

knight, defending the helpless and vanquishing the wicked. Hopelessly unprepared and increasingly losing his grip on reality, he travels across Spain accompanied by his faithful and equally ill-suited squire. With each calamitous adventure they experience, the romantic ideal of Quixote's books seems further away than ever.

The comic tale of Don Quixote adapted from the novel of Miguel de Cervantes can be seen on Thursday 28th April at 7.30 p.m. and Saturday 14th May at 1.30 p.m.

The Alchemist is a hilarious satire by Ben Jonson that shows how vain humans can be. When London is hit by an outbreak of the plague, the wealthy Lovewit flees to the country, leaving his townhouse in the hands of his trusted butler, Jeremy. But no sooner has his master left than Jeremy begins turning the house into a den of criminal activity. Assuming an alias, he recruits fellow conman Subtle and prostitute Doll Common to help him and sets out to rip-off half of London.

Soon every knock at the front door is another unwitting victim begging to be relieved of their cash. Things couldn't be going better for the gleeful trio until they receive a very unwelcome visitor.

The Alchemist can be seen on Saturdays 16th July and 6th August at 1.30 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

There are seven allocated parking bays for blue-badge users on Waterside, directly outside the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and ten further bays on Chapel Lane, the road opposite the Swan Theatre. They are free of charge and do not have a time limit.

There are four seats available at every performance in the front row of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and Swan Theatre stalls for VIPs. Please ask Box Office staff about the availability of these seats when booking your ticket.

Assistance dogs can be taken into the auditorium, or left with a member of staff in the foyer. If you wish to bring your assistance dog with you please tell Box Office staff when booking your seat.

Touch tours are free and can be booked at the same time. They offer the opportunity to get close to the set, costumes and props used in the play. During a tour backstage, the audio describers will guide you through important props and character costumes used in the production.

Tickets for productions in Stratford-upon-Avon for disabled people are £16. If you require the services of a companion their ticket will also be £16. To book please call **01789 403436** or on-line using the access booking form at www.rsc.org.uk.

Midsummer Night's Dream - A Wicked Tale

Sheila Venville, Warwick



If I were Titania, Queen of fairies
From William Shakespeare's play,
But in the vernacular of the modern day -
'cos if I was conventionally gay
I wouldn't give an ass a butcher's hook,
A labouring oaf a second look -
I'd want an equal partnership.

Perhaps, Ganesh the god I'd choose,
Elephant head with chubby limbs
Behind the trunk might do.
Horus the birdlike god could
Transport me off to Egypt,
His kingdom witnessed by his crown.

If I were Titania, with a minotaur
I'd dine on human flesh
And life would have a short address
Bequeathed our shared astrology.*
Maybe a centaur I could ride,
His human head would put aside
His views of sexual proclivity
And we'd revel in the base activity.



* The English astrological sign of the writer is Taurus the bull.

Sheila is a member of the Spa Writer's Group

Facts and Features

Fundraising can be an Art Form

Phil Arkell, Fundraiser

Warwickshire Vision Support is extremely fortunate to have so many generous Volunteers who donate their time and energy to help us support visually impaired people across the county. With more than 300 Volunteers supporting our activities, I was spoilt for choice when it came to choosing an unsung hero for this fundraising article.

John Davis the Volunteer (not to be confused with John Davis our Manager) joined Warwickshire Vision Support just 18 months ago when his late wife Carol lost her vision following an operation. John contacted us for support but sadly, Carol passed away just a few weeks later following a cardiac arrest.

John had made a pledge to his wife that he would continue to lead a full life and approached Warwickshire Vision Support to see what he could do to help others. Since then, he has become a keen Home Visitor in Alcester and Studley and helps out at the Alcester VIP Club.

However, it is in the realm of fundraising that John has been an inspiration to me. After a career in the oil industry, he took early retirement to become a full-time professional

painter. Specialising in watercolour landscapes, John sold an average of 100 paintings per year during his professional career. Now aged 84, he paints mainly for pleasure and takes on the occasional commission, he also teaches weekly classes at his home studio and gives lectures to local art societies.

For the last year, John has asked that anyone who commissions a painting should make a donation to Warwickshire Vision Support in lieu of payment. He also donated 100 packets of Christmas cards featuring one of his paintings for us to sell at our Clubs and Vision Support Centres.

So the next time you are looking for that special personal gift for an art lover, why not give John a call on **01789 488457** - you can be assured not only of the perfect gift but also that your commission will help visually impaired people in Warwickshire.

So far, John has raised nearly £1,000.

On behalf of Warwickshire Vision Support, I would like to thank John Davis and all the other Volunteers who give so much of themselves to help us to help you.

John Davis



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A unique and portable handheld video magnifier, with a generous 13-inch widescreen and a sliding camera for fluent reading.

To request further information and/or a home demonstration, call Freephone:
080 8090 8090

or browse online:
www.optelec.co.uk



A Day in the life of a Smart Phone – Part 1

When we began the IT training programme back in 2013, we knew that digital technology was taking over as the main means to access information and to communicate with others. But what we did not realise was the enormous power and impact that these devices could have over the daily life of a person living with sight loss.

To illustrate the potential of the smart phone, we thought we would take an average day and consider all the different ways in which a visually impaired person could use their phone to make life that little bit easier. Of course in the real world, you would perhaps only use a small number of Apps that suit your needs but we thought it would be fun and illuminating to include as many Apps as possible (an App is a small programme or tool that is downloaded onto your phone.)

Before we start we should create the context for our day. We are going to use a smart phone - this could be a £600 Apple iPhone or an £80 Android Phone – in our experience you can do pretty much the same things on all devices. We are also going to assume that the person has little or no vision – you might be surprised to hear that you can still use a touch screen phone with no vision at all. Part 1 will look at morning activities – in later articles, we will look at getting out

and about, entertainment and saving money through internet shopping and switching services.

At 7.00 am I am woken by the alarm on my phone. I find the alarm really useful because I can set it to go off at the same time every day or have different settings for each day of the week. What's more, I can set the alarm to go off periodically throughout the day to remind me when to take my tablets – I am not particularly forgetful but it is comforting to know that I have that reminder.



Even before I lost my vision, getting dressed was a decision making minefield – what am I going to wear? Which clothes match? And, of course, what is suitable for the weather outside? Sadly, my smart phone cannot make me stylish but it can help me to make the right choices. I click on my BBC Weather App to get the local weather forecast: I have even set a number of favourite locations so if I am going into Birmingham or Coventry I will not be caught unawares by a sudden downpour. Now, having lived with sight loss for some years, I have developed various strategies for organising and choosing my clothes to avoid the dreaded colour clash. But sometimes things get mixed up in the wash and often one item looks similar to the next. At this point, I use my Colour ID App – it is really simple, I just point the phone camera at the item and it tells me the colour. Its great for simple designs and colours but don't bother if you have a psychedelic wardrobe.

Once downstairs, I like to check my diary and plan the day. My phone has a calendar App that helps me to keep everything organised. What I like about it is that I do not have to type in the events. I can just push a button and tell the phone to make a specific appointment on a given day and time: if it is a regular occurrence, I can ask the phone to make the appointment for every week or every month. I can even ask the phone to

give me a reminder before the event to make sure that I am well prepared.

The one thing I used to dread in the morning was the clatter of the letter box as a mountain of junk mail tumbled to the floor. Trying to sort the wheat from the chaff is bad enough, but when you find the letter you have been expecting, it can be so frustrating to have to wait for a visitor to read it to you, or to sit there with a magnifying glass reading one character at a time. Now, I just use my phone. Its great! I bought this App that takes a picture of the letter and then reads it to me. Depending on the App, I can either use a cardboard template that houses my phone so that the camera is exactly at the right distance for taking a picture of an A4 letter. Alternatively, I can line up the camera myself using sound and vibration alerts to guide me. Once the camera is in the right position, it takes a picture and converts the typed text into speech. It is really empowering to be able to read my own post and then make my own plans.

I don't know about you, but I am a real list maker. Whether it is the weekly shopping list or a simple to-do-list, I am lost without them. But as my vision deteriorated, I found that I would misplace the list or that I could not read it because of poor lighting. I have solved this problem with what are called voice memos. I can create lists, notes or reminders that I can

play back when I need them. I can even convert my voice into text lists that the phone will read back to me when I am walking down the aisle of the local supermarket. It is just so convenient and because I always have my phone with me, when I want to add to the list, it is really easy to do so.

In this first article, we have covered just a few of the tools available on any smart phone that can make your life easier. In future editions we will cover different areas. Of course, not all Apps work perfectly, and some are more appropriate than others, but we believe that with the right phone and the right training, technology really can make a difference to the way you live your life.

The digital world is here. It might be a challenge to bridge the digital divide but the benefits are plentiful.

If you want more information about the IT Training Programme, please call us on **01926 411331** or visit your local Vision Support Centre.

New NHS Information Standard

In July 2015 the Standards Committee for Care Information (SCCI) approved the 1605 NHS Information Standard.

The new Standard includes rules about

- How and when NHS and adult social care services record your

information and communication needs

- Sharing your information and communication needs across services (with your permission so you don't have to keep requesting alternative formats)
- How your information and communication needs are met.

Healthcare providers must fully implement the Standard by July 2016. To ensure your NHS information is accessible, your GP must be notified officially about what format you need.

The Blind Leading the Blind

It's a common phrase, but when thought about in reality, it's a bit scary. However, that's exactly what happened when Daniel Kish, known as Batman, led Ethan up and down a 1,400' mountain - safely. Both of them were armed only with their white canes and used a system of echolocation for navigation.

Ethan is 10 years old and gained a place at St Mary's School for Music. He has been blind since birth and cannot read music but can imitate the sounds he hears on the piano, and also composes. He will be the first blind pupil at the school.

Daniel lost his sight within months of his birth and taught himself to navigate around his environment by using echolocation. He makes a clicking sound with his tongue

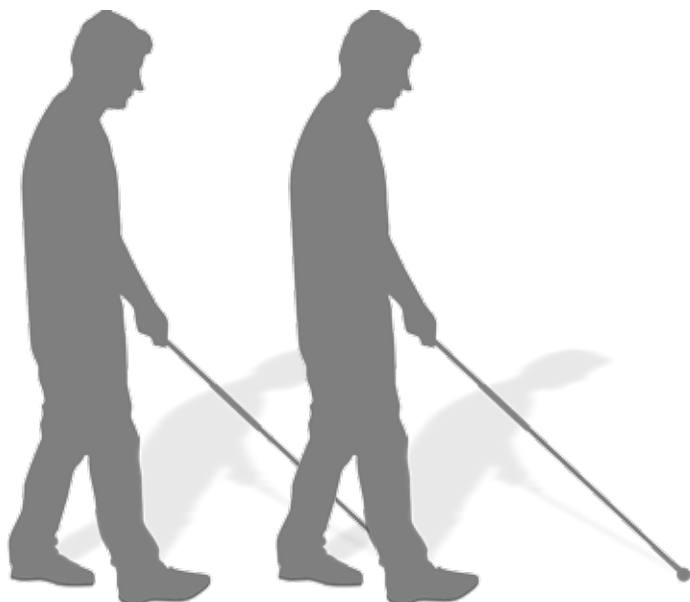
against the roof of his mouth and then listens: the distance between him and objects near to him affect the density of the sound returning to him.

Daniel taught Ethan to use his system of echolocation. First, he learnt to use the system of clicks to build up a sonic representation of the room he was in. He moved on to learning the route he needed to navigate safely to reach his new school. He also had to learn to navigate around the school.

At the end of his first term at the school Ethan was due to play a solo in the school concert. He found his own way to his chair on the stage.

Now that he has learnt this system of echolocation he feels that he is 'not walking around blind', he is 'seeing in a different way'.

As they climbed the mountain they passed sighted climbers and when they reached the top Ethan 'listened to the view'.



Laser Danger

Just as we flinch automatically at a sudden and unexpected loud noise, it is a natural reflex for people to blink when a strong light is shone into their eyes. It is the body's natural reaction to what it recognises as danger.

Hand held lasers, that may be as small as a ballpoint pen, are sold at some corner shops as toys. They cost less than £10. Lasers can also be bought on-line. The beams from these lasers can reach up to 37,000 ft, and there have been cases of laser pens being shone into pilots' eyes as they come into land.

A consultant ophthalmologist at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield is calling for the sale of hand-held laser pointers to be banned.

Mr Quhill has treated 10 children who have permanent damage to their retinas. He says that there are no medical or surgical treatments that can reverse laser retinal injuries. He has discovered that within the last 4 years at least 47 children have suffered permanent eye damage, including blindness, from hand-held lasers. It is reported that devices bought as toys have caused many of these injuries.

In February national news reported that a transatlantic flight from Heathrow had been forced to turn back when a laser beam had been

shone into the plane's cockpit. Initially it was reported that the pilot had become 'unwell' but later, that his sight had been affected.

In 2006 eight laser attacks on planes were reported and by 2014 the number had risen to 1,440. We hope that the pilot will not suffer permanent consequences.

In 2010 a law was passed that allows offenders to be charged with 'shining a light at an aircraft in flight so as to dazzle or distract the pilot', and they can be sent to prison.

Making your Claim

PIP, Personal Independence Payments, is a name that has been around for some time. Anyone who was under 65 in April 2013 and received Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will be invited to claim PIP.

The Department of Work and Pensions will be making this invitation from October.

The Legal Rights Service of the RNIB has put together a PIP toolkit to help everyone with sight loss to understand how PIP works and to complete the claim forms. The toolkit can be used on line by visiting rnib.org.uk/PIPtoolkit or telephone **0303 323 0227**

Accessing Money

'Holes in the wall' as they have been known, or ATMs, are the machines that can allow you to access cash at any time (presuming you have sufficient funds in your account). They are now becoming increasingly accessible, as most of the high street banks have made their ATMs talk.

If you have not used one, here's how

- You'll need some headphones, but banks with talking ATMs often provide them.
- ATMs inside banks are usually the quietest, and there are staff there if you get stuck.
- If you use only one earphone you will still be able to hear what is going on around you.
- To the right of the screen, sometimes at the bottom, is the headphone socket, also the slot for your card, and the horizontal slot that dispenses the bank notes.
- Below the screen to the left is the keypad for inputting your PIN and for responding to the questions to make your selections.
- Don't forget to remove your credit card, money and headphones.



Chip and Signature Credit Cards

Rosalie Visick

When Chip and Pin credit cards were introduced Chip and Signature credit cards were also available. As I was registered partially sighted at that time I realised I could have problems seeing the numbers on the keypad when using my cards. (As well as my bank card, I use the cards of two major high street retailers.)

I arranged with my bank and the two high street retailers to have Chip and Signature Credit cards. When using one of these cards it tells the person ringing up my sale that it is a Chip and Signature card. I am given the till slip to sign and return to the cashier, who then gives me my copy of the receipt.

If you are visually impaired, use a Chip and Pin card, and wish to change it to a Chip and Signature card, all you need to do is visit your bank or telephone your High Street retailer and request this to be done.

P.S. At a recent meeting I was surprised how many visually impaired people were unaware of the Chip and Signature card.

Age UK Warwickshire

Barry Collier

Our aim is to assist over 50s to continue enjoying choice and independence in how and where they live their lives and support

older relatives and friends. 50 is the minimum age for our services.

We are an independent registered charity within the Age UK family operating across Warwickshire. With some local variations, services are provided in all areas of the county.

Our charitable income is principally raised from shops, insurance services, legacies, donations and fundraising activities. This, plus partnership working with local statutory bodies and other organisations enables us to offer an extensive range of services. These are used by over 10,000 people annually and delivered by a combination of staff and volunteers.

The services focus on Information and Advice, Overcoming Loneliness, Home Support, Home Safety and Adaptations, Health and Wellbeing and Money Matters.

For full information on our services and shops please visit www.ageukwarwickshire.org.uk or contact our offices at:

Leamington Spa (Head Office)
8 Clemens Street CV31 2DL
01926 458100

Rugby - Claremont Centre
43 Clifton Road CV21 3QE
01788 552540

Atherstone - Partnership Centre
Colleshill Road CV9 1BN
01827 717172

Stratford on Avon - Briar Croft,
Alcester Road CV37 6PH
01789 205059

Warwickshire Vision Support Invitation to a General Meeting

On: Monday 18th April 2016

11.00 am (coffee will be served from 10.30 am)

At: Leamington Spa Vision Support Centre
Chandos Court, Chandos Street
Leamington Spa, CV32 4YU

This will be an informal meeting offering the opportunity to:

- Ask questions, but if detailed answers are needed please submit in advance in writing
- Socialise and meet some of the Directors/Trustees and Staff of Warwickshire Vision Support.

The meeting will finish by 12.30 pm

Acknowledgements

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We acknowledge the use of information from Daily Telegraph, The Times and Vision.

Views expressed in Warwickshire Vision are not necessarily those of the management of Warwickshire Vision Support.

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Website: www.warwickshire.vision

