

# Warwickshire

# Vision

Winter 2022

WARWICKSHIRE  
**VISION**



A view from the office in Market Place on a winters evening

Supporting people living with sight loss since 1911





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## Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are expressed to Warwickshire County Council and all contributors to the magazine. We also thank Kenilworth Talking News Association for producing the digital audio version of Warwickshire Vision.

## Editor's Note

Hi everybody, my name is Sam Davis and alongside my work as Marketing Officer, I have been responsible for the Warwickshire Vision magazine for the past two years. This will be my final magazine for Warwickshire Vision before moving on to a new role. It has been an absolute joy reading and sharing your stories over the last two years and I wish all of our readers the best for the future.

# CEO Welcome

I would put the Winter season fourth if I was to rank all seasons, I much prefer the longer days and warmth that comes later in the year. But it is this time of year when many of us plan a change or resolve to do something differently for the year ahead.

In my case, it is generally the new instrument or language I am going to learn, or more accurately, start to learn in January before my initial enthusiasm wains and by March, has gone completely. The few months of learning the banjo will live long in the memory of my family and friends!

These changes that we resolve to do can be very exciting. This is because we have control and can choose to make the change.

But there are other changes which can impact on our lives, which we have very little or no control over, and which can make us feel very anxious. We are certainly living in times when there is great uncertainty and change which none of us can control.

As we start to live more normally after the pandemic, the news is a constant reminder of the challenges we and others are facing in 2023. Whether it is the impact

on our pockets or waiting times at the hospital, it feels like there is one thing after another.

I'm reminded of one of my favourite quotes,

"No matter how much falls on us, we keep ploughing ahead. That's the only way to keep the roads clear."

I think this must have been written by someone working for the County Council's Highways Department, but it seems very appropriate right now.

Warwickshire Vision Support has been "ploughing ahead" since 1911 and has endured through many difficult times. I look forward to the challenges of 2023 and seeing how we rise to meet these as an organisation, with as much if not more enthusiasm as when I first reached for the banjo!

Best wishes

Keith



**Keith Eales**

# News Round Up

## WVS Awarded Rehabilitation Contract

We are delighted to announce that we have been awarded the contract to provide rehabilitation services on behalf of Warwickshire County Council from January 2023.

The award of the contract means that we will continue to be the main Rehabilitation Service provider to adults living with visual impairments within Warwickshire.

Our Rehabilitation Service gives people experiencing and living with sight loss, the best possible opportunity to develop new skills, remain safe and live full and independent lives. This includes:

Getting out and about safely and using public transport - including the use of mobility aids, learning routes to and from key locations and how to understand and interpret sensory street infrastructure.

Building confidence and moving safely around the home - addressing issues such as effective lighting and maximising usable vision.

Health and safety in the home - particularly when cooking



and making hot drinks. Our Rehabilitation Officers can help with using household appliances safely and introduce the use of specialist equipment. In addition, our Rehabilitation Officers provide unbiased advice about what equipment might be of benefit to suit different lifestyles.

Communication support and correspondence -

Rehabilitation Officers can help support with correspondence and communication. This may include the use of magnifiers to help with reading and the use of telephones and assistive technology.

Our successful bid was built on a solid foundation of high-quality



service delivery over the last few years. This extends from our ECLO (Eye Clinic Liaison Officer) service which is present at the point of diagnosis, to the many community-based services we deliver for ongoing and long term support, all of which were showcased in the bid alongside the work of the Rehabilitation team. WVS is uniquely placed to bring all of these services together which makes it easier for our service users to connect to the right service for them,

The new contract begins in January 2023, and is a two-year contract with a two-year extension, so we will hopefully be the main provider of rehabilitation to people with visual impairments across Warwickshire until the end of 2026.

If you are interested in using our Rehabilitation Service, you can be referred via a number of different



A picture of somebody receiving support from our rehab team

ways, including your low vision clinic, the local authority or even by making a self-referral.

Do not struggle alone, we are here to help and our aim is to keep people living independently for longer and enjoying fulfilling lives.

If you feel you need some support due to your deteriorating eye sight then do not hesitate to contact us.

Please call 01926 411331 or email us at [enquiries@warwickshire.vision](mailto:enquiries@warwickshire.vision)

## Window Displays

We have started to decorate our office window in Market Place to reflect the changing seasons.

Two of our wonderful volunteers Rosemary Way and Sandra Verney decorated our office window, with Autumnal leaves.



WVS office window, covered with posters and fake autumnal leaves

# WVS Volunteers Win 'Unsung Hero' Award

We were delighted to attend the Volunteer Awards in October, an event delivered by Warwickshire & Solihull CAVA and supported by Warwickshire County Council (WCC), Stratford District Council (SDC) and Warwick District Council (WDC).

It was a wonderful evening which recognised and awarded the impact that volunteers are making in our local community. There were 67 nominations for the awards which were judged by a panel ahead of the awards.

Our volunteers came home with the "Unsung Hero Award" - which is great recognition for our fantastic volunteer team.

We also had the opportunity to talk to everybody about the impact of our Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, and share the stories of the hard work undertaken by our volunteers that helped achieve the award.

Thank you again to Warwickshire & Solihull Community And Voluntary Action, and to all of our volunteers who work tirelessly to help support the local Warwickshire community.



CEO Keith Eales, Fundraiser Martyn Parker and Councillor Gill Cleeve, the Mayor of Stratford



Martyn accepting the award from Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi, Mayor of Warwick

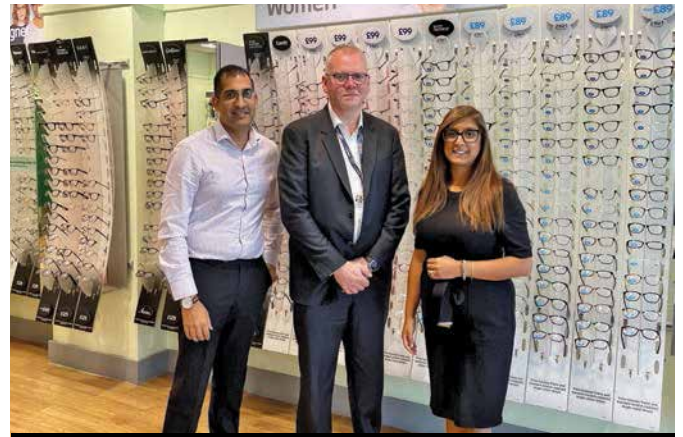
# WVS Collaborates with Specsavers for World Sight Day

For World Sight Day, Warwickshire Vision Support met with representatives from Specsavers to promote better eye health across the county after Specsavers conducted a survey that highlighted that more than half of people in the West Midlands (53%) don't know what glaucoma is, despite it being the world's leading cause of irreversible blindness.

It revealed worrying misconceptions around glaucoma (a group of eye diseases that damage the optic nerve) – 69% of people in the West Midlands don't worry about it because they think 'it's rare', while 59% wrongly believe it can be 'cured'.

Alarming, a third of people in the West Midlands (34%) still don't know how often they should visit their optician for a routine check-up and the same percentage either can't remember their last eye examination, or have NEVER had one.

According to the RNIB, 63,600 people in the West Midlands are estimated to be living with glaucoma. This is expected to rise to 73,800 by 2032. This represents an increase of 16% in only a decade.



CEO Keith Eales at Specsavers

Keith Eales, CEO, Warwickshire Vision Support, says: 'Since the pandemic, local sight loss charities across the UK have seen a significant increase in people seeking support.'

'Many more people are registering as blind or partially sighted or having problems with their vision. Living with sight loss causes challenges and difficulties regardless of circumstances. However, knowing that sight may have been saved can cause additional stress and anxiety.'

'That is why it is so important that we all keep fighting for early intervention and care – to give everyone the best possible chance of retaining sight for as long as possible and ensuring if their vision does deteriorate or is lost, then care and support is available locally.'



# Gone But Not Forgotten

We cannot begin to express how saddened we were at Warwickshire Vision Support to learn of the passing of one of our volunteers, Bob Hessey.

Bob was a volunteer at our Rugby Vision Support Centre for many years and was much-loved by all of the support centre attendees, staff and volunteers.

He was well known for always making the coffees at the support centre, and in his years with us, grew very close to the charity and all of its people.

Bob's kind and cheerful reputation preceded him, even inspiring an attendee at a different support centre to write the poem below about Bob a couple of years ago - despite having never met him but having heard all about him.

Our Grants Officer Matt Hinks grew up in Rugby, worked with Bob, and remembers him fondly:

"Bob Hessey was one of the duty managers at the Ken Marriott Leisure Centre in Rugby where I worked during my University holidays. He was a brilliant boss, a proper gentleman and devoted family man, made me laugh a lot every day, he looked out for everyone and was universally respected and liked. Only now do I know about the amazing contribution he made to Warwickshire Vision Support.

My late Dad was an auditor for Rugby Borough Council and he also worked with Bob, they got on brilliantly, so he was a real family friend. My Dad last saw him at St. Cross Hospital as they shared the same medical consultant, and I think they had a few laughs despite the sad situation both were in. I spoke with Bob a few months before he passed away and it was great to catch up with him." Thank you Bob, for everything, and may you rest in peace.

**Coffee Bob** (By Paul Bowler)

*It's just like he's been there waiting  
Just for you at the door  
With a cheerful greeting, then  
He's off ready to pour  
The beverage of your choice  
Even before you're sat  
There it is waiting for you  
On a lovely place mat  
They say he knows everyone  
By drink first, then by name  
He's built a reputation  
That's reached countywide fame  
If he's got a spare moment  
He'll sit and chat with you  
Helping put the world to rights  
Till someone needs a brew  
"Coffee Bob" they've nicknamed him  
You'll always find him there  
No matter what the weather  
Be it stormy or fair  
At 10am on Wednesday  
He's there to lend a hand  
So let's toast him with a drink  
"Coffee, Bob, would be grand!"*

# Vision Support Centres and Clubs - Timetable

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

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

Whilst every care has been taken to ensure our centres and clubs are COVID safe, please note that your attendance will be at your own risk.

Please note: All our centres and clubs will follow this timetable indefinitely, excluding for any bank holidays and the Christmas period where all vision support centres and clubs will be closed from Monday 19<sup>th</sup> December to Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> January (inclusive) – except for Alcester VSC which will be having a Christmas Party on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> December.

## Weekly Centres

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

## Monthly Centres

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

## Clubs

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

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

Area	Time	Date
Atherstone	10:30am – 1:30pm	Every other Wednesday
Kenilworth	2pm – 4pm	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month
Leamington Spa	10am – 12pm	1 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month
Rugby Hillmorton	7.00pm – 9pm	3 <sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month
Rugby (VIP)	2pm – 4pm	2 <sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month
Southam	2pm – 4pm	2 <sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month
Stratford	2pm – 4pm	Every other Thursday



# Vision Support Centres

## - Upcoming Agendas

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

Our Vision Support Centres provide the following:

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

new products for visually impaired people.

- IT Training (appointment required)

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

Listed below is the most recent agenda covering the topics for our sessions in January and February 2023

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

### **Nuneaton: Open every Thursday from 9:30-11:30am**

Vision Support Centre Agenda	Date
Social Sessions	5th January
Kitchen Equipment Demo	12th January
Activity - Quiz	19th January
Social Session	26th January
Speaker - TBC	2nd February
Time Telling Equipment	9th February
Activity - Seated Exercise	16th February
Social Session	23rd February

## **Stratford-upon-Avon: Open every Tuesday from 9:30-11:30am**

Vision Support Centre Agenda	Date
Social Session	3rd January
Speaker - Citizens Advice	10th January
Kitchen Equipment Demo	17th January
Activity - Quiz	24th January
Social Session	31st January
Time Telling Demonstration	7th February
Speaker - TBC	14th February
Activity - Seated Exercise	21st February
Social Session	28th February

## **Royal Leamington Spa: Open every Monday from 9:30-11:30am**

Vision Support Centre Agenda	Date
CLOSED - BANK HOLIDAY	2nd January
National Energy Action	9th January
Health Watch Warwickshire	16th January
Hearing Assist	23rd January
Activity - Show & Tell	30th January
Social Session	6th February
Kitchen Equipment Demonstration	13th February
Activity - Seated Exercise	20th February
Speaker - (Integrated Care Strategy)	27th February

## **Rugby: Open every Wednesday from 9:30-11:30am**

Vision Support Centre Agenda	Date
Demonstration of Penfriend 3	4th January
Social Session	11th January
Activity - Quiz	18th January
Speaker - TBC	25th January
Activity - Seated Exercise	1st February
Social Session	8th February
Demonstration of Time Telling Equipment	15th February
Speaker - Rugby Talking Newspaper	22nd February

# Features

## My Sound Cinema

mysoundcinema.com is the first online cinema dedicated to audio-described film which was launched to coincide with Blindness Awareness Month.

My Sound Cinema is a new video-on-demand platform explicitly created with the visually impaired people (VIP) community in mind. All films are audio described (AD), and the player is entirely screen-reader accessible.

On Friday 30<sup>th</sup> September, Edinburgh-based agency Screen Language launched the My Sound Cinema platform in the UK & Ireland. The streaming platform - the first of its kind in the world - will give visually impaired film lovers the opportunity to enjoy movies in a fully accessible online environment, providing a single location for AD screenings of new and existing cinema releases.

Audio descriptions are often commissioned for films screened at cinemas, festivals and online.

However, according to Screen Language's own research and feedback from RNIB and Sight Scotland, these audio descriptions rarely reach their intended audiences.



### my sound cinema logo

Meanwhile, the NHS reports that in the UK, more than 2 million people are living with sight loss. Of these, around 340,000 are registered as blind or partially sighted. RNIB estimates project the number of people with sight loss in the UK in 2050 will be 4,145,000.

Consequently, there is a huge potential film audience that is not currently being served by mainstream cinema provision. My Sound Cinema seeks to fill that gap.

Ahead of its launch, the platform has already received the official support of RNIB and Sight Scotland, with funding from Innovate UK, Creative Informatics, Film Hub Scotland and The Space.

Elena Zini, Screen Language founder, said: Many brilliant audio-described film titles are waiting to be made accessible to the blind and visually impaired audiences they were created for. We cannot wait for the most accessible virtual cinema yet to open its curtains!



Craig Spalding, CEO of Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans, said: We're delighted to support the My Sound Cinema project offering people with sight loss a single platform to access film and cinema with audio description. This new video-on-demand service has been made with visually impaired people at its centre and offers blind and partially sighted people a place to enjoy entertainment that has not always been easily accessible..

Find out more about My Sound Cinema:

**Web:** [www.mysoundcinema.com](http://www.mysoundcinema.com)

**Twitter:** @MySoundCine

**Facebook:** @MySoundCine

## Australia Here I Come!

We want to wish good luck to George Barret, a long term member of Warwickshire Vision Support and regular frequenter of the Leamington Vision Support Centre as he ventures off to live in Australia.

We celebrated his last day at the centre with cake and celebrations before he emigrated to Melbourne in Australia to live with his daughter.

George is 91 years old and has travelled to Australia 17 times before he finally decided to leave to live in Oz for good.

We are sad to see him go, but wish George good luck in the future from all at Warwickshire Vision.



George Barret

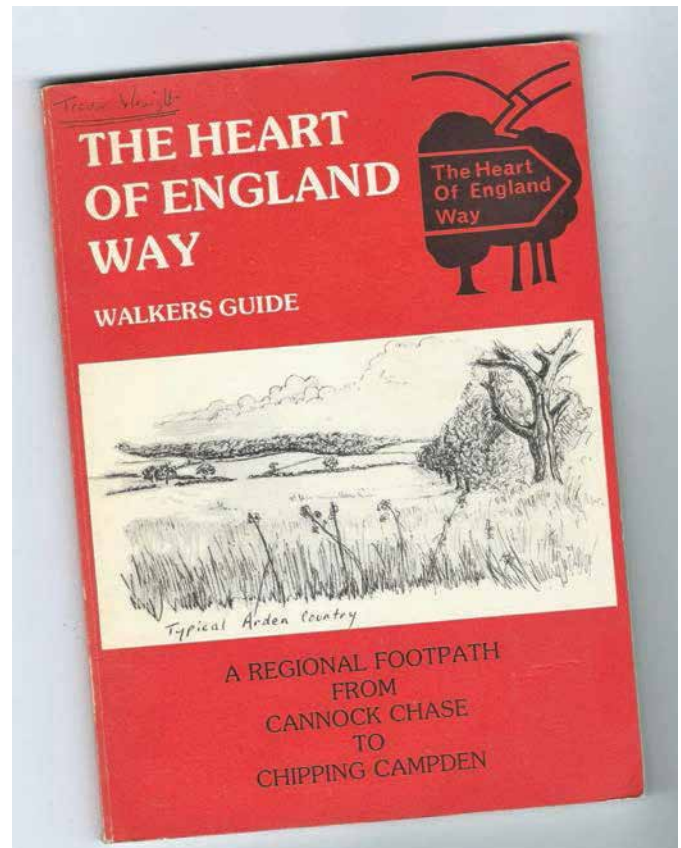
# John Watts - Walking in Warwickshire

At our Vision Support Centres, we host many different people from all walks of life, all with interesting and unique stories to tell. Hilda, a member of our Alcester vision support centre, shares the story of her late husband John, whose contribution to Warwickshire and the surrounding areas will leave a lasting impact and has even resulted in a road in Alcester being named after him.

John Watts was the chairman of the Alcester Civic Society Walks Group for many years, and was instrumental with forming the definitive map of Alcester in 1974, fighting to preserve the existence of footpaths that were threatened with closure. He was a founder and Chairman of The Heart of England Way for which he worked tirelessly surveying and setting out routes whilst organising the growth of the organisation.

John had always had a keen interest in walking, it was one of his many passions and something that he liked to do often. He was often found disappointed however, at the complete lack of footpaths and walking routes available.

In the early 1970's, John was determined for the implementation



Heart of England Way - Walkers Guide by John Watts

of local footpaths to become reality and began campaigning for footpaths to be made, working hard against the protests of various farmers and landowners.

After many years campaigning, and with the backing and support of the Alcester Civic Society, John's idea was finally put into fruition, which led to the creation of the 100 mile long 'Heart of England Way', joining 'The Cotswold Way' and 'The Staffordshire Way' to make the long distance path in 1977. He is also responsible creating 'The Arden Way' around 10 years later.

To tackle this monstrous task of creating these footpaths, John got in touch with various rambling groups, and allocated a 10-mile section to different rambling groups to pioneer the best routes to use. John was heavily involved in the mapping process, and even created some of the maps himself by hand!

After working tirelessly surveying and setting out the routes, John began organising the growth of the Heart of England Way organisation and sat on the board as chairman. He became very popular amongst local walkers and arranged a monthly Sunday and Wednesday walking group. John would also work to find bed and breakfasts in the area that would be willing to accommodate walkers (as not many were willing),

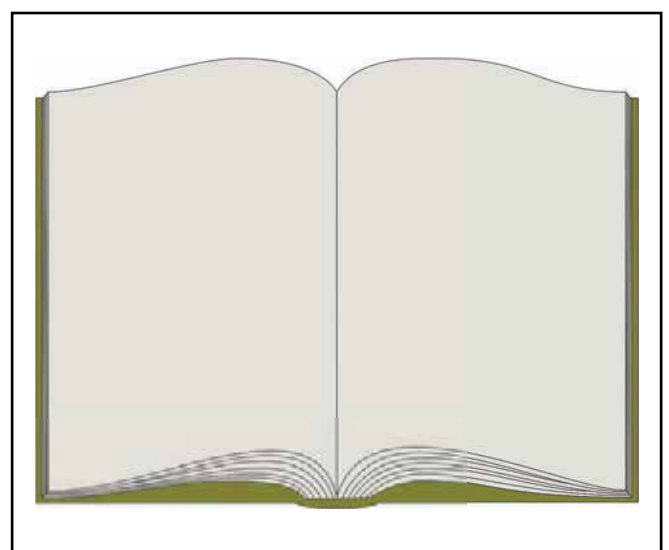
and created reports of usable local amenities for the walkers which he frequently updated. He also assigned a wardens group to make sure the stiles and signage was accurate, helping create a nice and fun environment for his fellow walkers.

John's legacy of creating these very popular footpaths is something that made him very popular in the walking community and despite his passing, his work will live on for generations. So much so, that Alcester are planning to name a road after him in his honour. His wife Hilda said that John was an absolute gentleman, she's not 100% sure that he would have liked the idea of having a road named after him, but said he definitely deserves it after all of his hard work.

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## Share Your Stories

If you have a story either of yourself or from a friend or loved one that you would like to share with WVS and the larger local vision impaired community then please get in touch. We are always looking for more stories to share with the people we support and help celebrate their achievements. If you would like to share something please get in touch by emailing [enquires@warwickshire.vision](mailto:enquires@warwickshire.vision) or calling 01926 411331



An Illustration of an Open Book



# Sense's Telephone Activity Sessions

Did you know that blind and partially sighted people are twice as likely to be inactive than people living without sight loss?

While an interesting fact, this probably doesn't come as much of a surprise to some of our readers. Entering the world of exercise can be debilitating, especially when living with a visual impairment.

As you already know, having a visual impairment means that you sometimes have to be extra cautious, as there can often be many hurdles and barriers to overcome before a visually impaired person has the same level of accessibility as a fully sighted person.

However, the world of exercise and being active doesn't have to be limited to the great outdoors, there are many resources available to help you get the same results, but from the comfort of your own living room.

The team at the charity Sense went out to achieve exactly that, something that encourages exercise, is social, and most importantly, is accessible. In doing so, they created their new Telephone Activity Sessions.

Sense's Telephone Activity Sessions



are a range of free audio-described physical activity sessions that help you to keep active at home. These sessions are delivered directly to you by expert instructors over the telephone.

Once you have booked to take part in the sessions (which can be done either through Sense's website or via emailing them directly), Sense will add your details to a platform called MeetUp Call. This platform will call out to you at the start of every session you are signed on to. All you need to do is answer the phone the same way you usually would.

There are 5 – 10 minutes at the start of each session which is dedicated to waiting for people to join which gives the listener a chance to socialise with one another before the session begins. At the end of the

activity, all you need to do is just hang up the phone and the session will be over.

If you have any specific requests then feel free to share them as each of their sessions can be tailored to meet the needs of each individual.

Determined to remain as active as possible, Telephone Activity Session attendee Shirley signed up for a weekly telephone dance class organised by Sense Active, delivered by Step Change Studios, and hosted on a telephone conferencing call platform.

Shirley said, "At Broadway Gardens we have a Lifestyle Coordinator who put the dance class flyer through the door. I saw it and thought immediately - I want to do that!"

Every Wednesday at 11am, Shirley receives a phone call through Meetupcall, answers the call, and places her phone on loudspeaker, so she has both hands free to do the class.

Dance teacher Zoe welcomes Shirley and everyone else taking part, and explains some simple movements for the class to try. Zoe then plays a selection of songs from across the decades for the group to follow from the comfort of their own home. "She has a nice tone in her voice and the instructions come across very clearly, 10/10!" says Shirley.

For Shirley, having a class to look forward to, and a phone call to listen out for every Wednesday, is very important. "It's something to look forward to" she says.

"I'm not tech-friendly, so it's definitely useful to do it over the phone"

"The mental benefits are no end. It gets the endorphins going, it's very lifting and you feel better for having done it. I enjoy it. I feel as though I'm not just sitting here, I've actually done something for myself".

For more information or to book a session contact Hannah Lane at [Hannah.lane@sense.org.uk](mailto:Hannah.lane@sense.org.uk) , call **07825 174 938** or visit [www.sense.org.uk](http://www.sense.org.uk) for more information

### **Session Timetable**

#### **Seated yoga (50+)**

Mondays: 11:00 am – 12:00 pm

#### **Movement with imagination**

Tuesdays: 11:00 am – 12:00 pm

#### **Seated dance:**

Wednesdays: 11:00 am – 12:00 pm

#### **Seated pilates:**

Thursdays: 11:30 am – 12:30 pm

# Meet The Trustees: Stacey

As a charity, Warwickshire Vision Support is guided and governed through our diverse and experienced board of trustees.

In this series, we talk to WVS trustees to learn more about their background and what they hope to achieve with WVS.

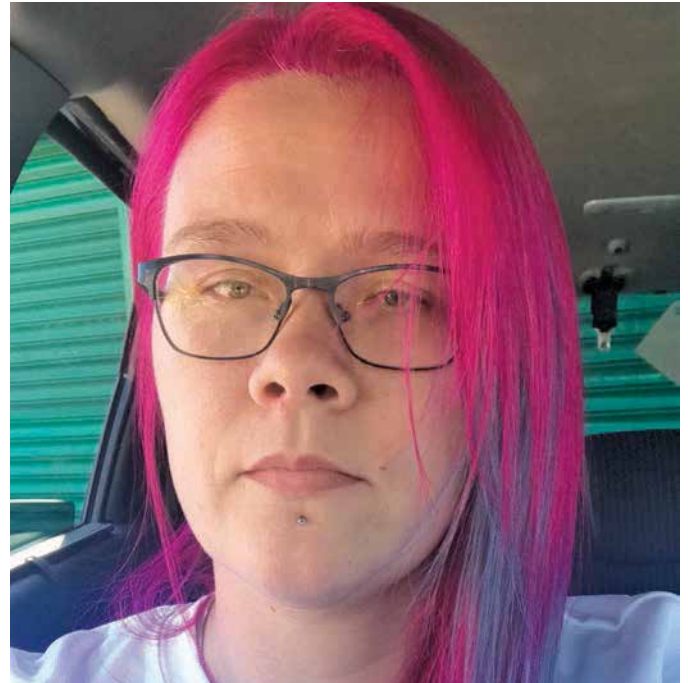
Today we talk with Stacey Fennell, who tells us about her experience as a WVS Trustee so far.

**Could you tell us a bit about your background and what brings you to WVS today?**

I have always in one way or another been involved in charity work. I had some spare time and as I was looking through the volunteering posts I came across WVS trustee role. The charities I have always worked for have been animal charities but when I saw this role I knew it's where my next steps had to be me. My family have a long history of visual impairment, and in the past WVS has supported my family in different ways so I already knew of the amazing work they do and to be part of that, for me, is fantastic.

**Do you have a visual impairment yourself, and if so, would you mind sharing your sight loss journey?**

I have had Retinitis Pigmentosa



Stacey Fennell

since birth and acute angle closure glaucoma for the last 10 years (that's when I was told about it) and up until 2019 it never really had any major effect over my life. Unfortunately in 2019 it took 6 weeks for cataracts to take the vision from my right eye (which is my 'best' eye) which also flared the glaucoma. Thankfully replacement of the lens followed by laser treatment eventually sorted this issue for me.

This was a very hard journey for me, this was the first time that my vision had ever affected me and I found it very hard to deal with. There was a support employee at the hospital in Coventry (I know now to be an ECLO) who helped me get in touch with the people I needed (and didn't know

about) and this was a huge help for me, this supported me through a very tough time. Strangely it was as this dilemma was coming to an end that I found the Warwickshire Vision Support trustee position.

In 2020 the exact same happened in my left eye and very quickly cataract took the vision and flared the glaucoma. Unfortunately by this time we were in a global pandemic and took over a year to be able to get the operation I needed. On the bright side I got the operation and I now have 2 new 'clean' lenses and can see! My peripheral vision has reduced further, I can't see in the dark at all but my central vision is quite good now, right eye is so close to being 20/20!

### **How long have you been with Warwickshire Vision Support and how are you finding it so far?**

I started with WVS in 2020, I applied not long after the pandemic started and I am absolutely loving it.

I have just taken on the role of board secretary, only minuted one meeting so far but I am loving the extra challenge. I am working with other trustees who are very dedicated to the charity and have a real passion for supporting people with sight loss and this is amazing. I have had the chance to visit support centres and meet some of the service users and staff and I hope in the near future I will be able to free up some time to

be a telephone friend support for WVS service users as well.

### **What do you plan to achieve as a trustee with WVS?**

WVS already do amazing work with the people of Warwickshire however there are still many people living with sight loss that do not know about the support that is out there, these are the people that we need reach out too. For me, I would like it to be able to get WVS more well known around Warwickshire area, ensure all the services we currently offer are being used to their full potential and develop on existing services to be able to offer more to the visual impaired community.

### **What's your vision for the future of supporting people with sight loss?**

It's very hard to pin point exactly what needs to be on offer as everyone's sight loss journey is different thus their needs are different and can change. However, more support during times of difficulty, having the knowledge that there is support out there before life changing events occur and ensuring that support is there from the beginning but not necessarily stopping when everything is 'ok'. Ongoing support where required whether it be support groups, friendship groups, phone calls... Basically what WVS are doing but reaching out to more people.



# Warwickshire Vision - A Royal Connection

We, like the rest of the nation and the world, were devastated to learn of Her Majesty the Queen's passing in September.

Warwickshire Vision Support has always had somewhat of a royal connection. Not long before her passing, our volunteers were the proud recipients of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the highest award a voluntary group can receive in the UK, which recognises outstanding work by volunteer groups to benefit their local communities. The award was created in 2002 to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee. Recipients were even announced on 2nd June, to coincide with the anniversary of the Queen's Coronation.

The award was given to our volunteers for their outstanding work during the pandemic, which upon receiving the award, resulted in two of our representatives being invited to a celebration at Buckingham Palace.

Additionally, going back to 1988, when Warwickshire Vision Support were known as The Warwickshire Association for the Blind, we had our very own resource centre on



The Queen Mother at WVS (1988)

Puckering's Lane, Warwick, which was officially opened by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother in a grand ceremony.

Since Queen Elizabeth died in September, many people have shared their memories of meeting her, but surely few would have had an encounter as unusual as that related by WVS member Peter Wright. Here's his story:

"When I was a boy we lived in the Warwickshire village of Fenny Compton, where my policeman father had seven villages under his charge. He would often take me with him when he went on police business and I never knew where we were going or what it was about until

we got there but it was always interesting.

One day, when I was about eight years old - I remember it was the year before the war started so would have been about 1938 - we walked about a mile from our house, which was also the police station, to the Fenny Compton/Wormleighton crossroads.

There was little or no traffic in those days so, apart from two lads on a motorbike, who were told to move on, it was completely deserted. We stood there and waited, and waited, and I had no idea what we were waiting for, and then a huge black limousine came slowly over the hump backed canal bridge. My father directed it to the right towards Wormleighton, where it pulled into a gated field entrance.

From where I stood I could see the chauffeur open the doors for two adults and two children to get out, then he got out folding table and chairs and a hamper of food. I had no idea who they were but while they were having their picnic the chauffeur strolled over to us and offered my father a Woodbine cigarette and stood there chatting to him.

After a while he said to my father 'Is this your lad?' And when my father said yes, he said would I like to meet the royal family.

He took me by the hand and



WVS at Buckingham Palace

introduced me to the King and Queen, who smiled and nodded but Princess Elizabeth was the only one who sort of held out her hand for me to touch her fingertips. Princess Margaret, who was younger and about my age, just sat there giggling!

Then I went back to my Dad, the chairs and table were folded up and put away and they all got back into the limousine and drove off.

I never told my school mates about it the next day because they would have teased me and said I was making it up, but I wasn't.

These days it's even harder to believe a story about the royal family stopping to have a picnic in a quiet Warwickshire lane with no security officers, just one village policeman. But it's perfectly true. I was lucky enough to be that policeman's son, and it's a memory I will always cherish."

# Advice & Guidance

## Keeping Your Eyes Healthy

National Eye Health Week is a campaign run to raise the profile of optics as it encourages the public to be 'eye-aware' with a series of initiatives inspiring greater uptake of routine sight tests and highlighting the role of healthy lifestyles in preventing avoidable sight loss.

As part of National Eye Health Week, which took place earlier in September, we asked our ECLO (Eye Clinic Liaison Officer) team to share with us some of their top tips on maintaining eye health.

To improve the health of your eyes, eat a balanced diet. This means plenty of eye-friendly fruit and vegetables with all the right nutrients - like spinach, red peppers, kale and dark green vegetables, leeks, broccoli, eggs, peas, avocado, peaches and blueberries. Bright coloured fruit and vegetables, and also fish high in Omega 3, such as salmon, sardines, mackerel or tuna.



Your eyes need oxygen to stay healthy and comfortable. Regular exercise will allow your blood to carry plenty of fresh oxygen to your eyes.



Drink plenty of water (2-3 litres a day) - to prevent dehydration, which can cause dry eyes and blurred vision. Consistent dehydration can result in sore, gritty and irritated eyes.



Make sure you get plenty of sleep (approximately 8 hours), your eyes will feel bright and refreshed in the morning.



Studies show that smoking increases the risk of many eye conditions, which include Age Related Macular Degeneration, Cataracts, Glaucoma, Diabetic Retinopathy and Dry Eye Syndrome. Excess Alcohol consumption can also affect your eyesight and an increased risk of eye disease.



The rays from the sun contain ultraviolet (UV) light. This UV light that can give you sunburn and will harm your eyes. Protect your eyes against UV light with a pair of good UV filter glasses. If you go skiing, wear UV goggles as the UV light is especially strong on ski slopes. Protect your eyes with goggles if you are taking part in DIY, or sports that risk harming the eyes.



Regular eye checks are important for everyone. Some eye conditions do not have symptoms but can be picked up in an eye test. Eye tests can also show problems with other aspects of your health.

Your eyes should be examined every two years, or more often if an optician recommends. If you have a sight condition these check-ups should be more regularly. If you notice any changes to your vision, seek medical advice immediately.





# White Canes - A short guide

Navigating safely and effectively is one of the many difficulties that living with a visual impairment can inflict upon an individual

To counter this, many people with visual impairments use some variety of white cane as their main mobility tool, which for decades has also been symbolic of a VI person's independence.

A white cane is a device used by many people who are blind or visually impaired. A white cane primarily allows its user to scan their surroundings for obstacles or orientation marks, but is also helpful for onlookers in identifying the user as blind or visually impaired and taking appropriate care.

There are many different types of canes, each suited to a different purpose. They are as following:

**Long cane:** Designed primarily as a mobility tool used to detect objects in the path of a user. Cane length depends upon the height of a user, and traditionally extends from the floor to the user's sternum. It is the most well-known variant, though some organisations favour the use of much longer canes.

**Guide cane:** A shorter cane, generally extending from the floor to the user's waist, with more limited potential as



A person using a white cane

a mobility device. It is used to scan for kerbs and steps. The guide cane can also be used diagonally across the body for protection, warning the user of obstacles immediately ahead.

**Symbol cane** (sometimes known internationally as an identification cane): Used primarily to alert others that the user is visually impaired, but not to the extent where they require a long cane or other variant. It is often lighter and shorter than the long cane, and has no use as a mobility tool.

**Support cane:** Designed primarily to offer physical stability to a visually impaired user, the cane also works as a means of identification. It has very limited potential as a mobility device.

**Kiddie cane:** This variant functions exactly the same as an adult's long cane but is designed for use by children, and is thus smaller and lighter.

It is thought that people with visual impairments have been using canes for mobility for centuries, but the first recorded use of a white cane comes from 1921, where James Biggs, a photographer from Bristol, became blind after an accident and was uncomfortable with the amount of traffic around his home. He then painted his walking stick white to become more easily visible.

Then, in 1931 in France, Guilly d'Herbement launched a national white stick movement for blind people. On February 7, 1931, Guilly d'Herbement symbolically gave the first two white canes to blind people, in the presence of several French ministers. 5,000 more white canes were later sent to blind French veterans from World War I and blind civilians.

The long cane was improved upon by World War II veterans rehabilitation specialist, Richard E. Hoover. In 1944, he took the white cane and went around the hospital blindfolded for a week. During this time he developed what is now the standard method of "long cane" training or the Hoover Method. The technique is to swing the cane from the center of the body back and forth before the feet. The cane should be swept before the rear foot as the person steps. Before he taught other rehabilitators, or "orientors", his new technique he had a special commission to have light

weight, long white canes made for the veterans of the European fronts which is what is used today.

The white cane is paramount for many. We asked our expert rehabilitation team for their top tips on keeping your white cane usable and safe, this is what they had to say:

- Make sure you keep your cane clean – this is to ensure that the cane keeps its reflectiveness and remains highly visible to others
- Replace the tip once they become worn, this is to make sure that you are receiving the correct feedback so you stay aware of your surroundings
- Make sure you are using the correct length cane – our team can advise you on the correct length for you
- For children, ensure that the cane is replaced regularly as the child grows so that they continue to use a cane that is the right size for them.

If you are interested in using a white cane, please get in touch with our team as we can provide them free of charge to those who need them.

We can also assist you with any queries or concerns that you might have around using your cane and teach you how to effectively use it.

Simply call us on 01926 411 331 or email us at [enquires@warwickshire.vision](mailto:enquires@warwickshire.vision)

# Be Seen Be Safe

by Andrew Baker

Ponder this, December in Warwickshire has on average the lowest amount of sunshine with just 61 hours. That's just over five hours of sunshine a day in midwinter. As much as we like to stay in a warm cosy home going outdoors is often a necessity, meeting friends, that trip to the shop or just to get some fresh air. We need to be seen to keep safe and to let the other road users know that we are there.

Being seen is very important for our safety. Many serious accidents happen because drivers do not see pedestrians until it is too late. To make ourselves make visible, we need to have something reflective so we can be seen when car headlights are shining towards us. Your white cane is reflective but you can stand out more to drivers and other road/pavement users by carrying or wearing good LED lights. They are inexpensive readily available and used by Cyclists, Runners, School Children, Pedestrians even dogs have illuminated collars or harnesses.

One innovation you might think about an LED Lighted Beanie Cap, this rechargeable Running Hat Ultra Bright 4 LED Waterproof Light and it keeps your head warm and dry. This will help you to be seen and give you a handsfree light.



Do you have a long or guide cane? Then light your way in the dark with the Pharos cane light from Ambutech. This rechargeable cane light comes with three mounting brackets so that it can be fitted to illuminate your path and let other walkers see you more easily (not suitable for symbol canes) and can be purchased from RNIB for £17.00.

So please brighten up when going out in the dark this winter. If buying through Amazon, consider using AmazonSmile ([smile.amazon.co.uk](https://smile.amazon.co.uk)) it offers the same products, same low prices, and same services as the Amazon you know. Sign in using your existing Amazon account to get started. Amazon donates to your chosen charity. By selecting "Warwickshire Association for the Blind" Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible purchases (at no cost to you) to support the great work of Warwickshire Vision.

# IT Bits & Bytes

## Talking about Mobile Phones

by Ruth Okey

Warwickshire Vision Support has a range of mobile phones that can be demonstrated at a Vision Support Centre via an IT appointment.

There is no hard sell as we don't sell anything. It is just a chance to try before you buy particularly mobiles designed for VIP's which cannot be purchased on the high street.

If you have an existing smart phone and are having difficulty seeing the screen we may be able to adjust some of the accessibility settings to help you.

**Talking mobile phones** – designed for blind and visually impaired people. They are menu driven either by voice command or listening to options and selecting via a button or screen tap. As well as making and receiving calls, sending and receiving text messages, these “smart” phones have access to many apps including the major VI apps like Be my Eyes, document readers and item identification. They can also access online content including talking books, internet radio and podcasts.

**Smart phones** – accessibility settings can enhance screen information for people with some sight, otherwise inbuilt screen readers eg. Talkback or Voiceover can guide you. Dictation



A picture of a mobile phone

can be used to write emails and messages and speak screen or select to speak can read them to you. The smart assistant is also there for internet searches, making phone calls or adding an entry to your calendar.

**Large button mobiles** – often sold as senior mobile phones these have larger buttons and displays. There are many on the market and generally have limited functionality. Look out for devices with raised tactile buttons and good contrast between the buttons and case eg black buttons and a white body.

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



# Volunteering Focus

## Welcome Maria!

I am Maria Tongue your new Volunteer Co-Ordinator. A bit about me, I was born in Birmingham, but now live locally. I am married and have a 16 year old son who keeps me busy, with his basketball coaching and training.

I am currently sharing an office with Martyn Parker and his guide dog Harper. Would you believe I was scared of dogs? I had to build up trust and confidence with Harper but he is so well behaved I feel at ease

I started working at WVS in April, as an Admin Officer, I hadn't heard of WVS before and I was truly amazed by how much work they do for the visually impaired, I really enjoyed the idea of working for people and previously I had worked in a head office of a multinational company.

I love the office location in Warwick and listening to the church bells, and I am looking forward to the office refurbishment so it will be accessible to all.

I got involved in the DBS checks for volunteers and found myself applying for the Volunteer Co-Ordinator role, which to my delight I was offered the job

I officially started on 10th October so

it's still very early days. I had my first ever trip to Nuneaton recently,

I think the Coventry ring road is my new nemesis but I made it there and back in one piece.

I am currently making sure all the volunteer records and DBS checks are up to date and in line with current guidelines, so I may be contacting some of you in the future.

I am grateful for what our volunteers do and I know the people we support are eternally grateful for them giving up their precious time to be part of the WVS team.



Maria Tongue

# Fundraising Update

## Welcome Martyn!

Hello, I'm Martyn Parker, the new Community Engagement and Fundraising Officer for Warwickshire Vision Support. My role is to raise awareness of both WVS and sight loss in Warwickshire. I am also the community fundraiser, responsible for coordinating efforts to raise money to support our services. This includes such things as street and shop collections; supporting individual and group fundraiser's; attending events and talking to people about the work that WVS does.

I will also be visiting all the Vision Support Centres and Social Clubs over the next few months, so I can meet as many volunteers and service users as I can.

As a visually impaired person myself, I know many of the challenges faced by blind and partially sighted people as they try to live independently. I know, from my own experience as a service user, how important the services WVS provide are, and I can draw on this knowledge when I'm talking to potential funders.

We are a small charity, we rely on fundraising to support our services and, especially when times are hard, we need to do all we can to raise as much money as possible.



Martyn and guide dog Harper

So, if you know someone, or a group who can help, please pass them on to me. Anything from coffee mornings, quizzes, knitting challenges, pub crawls, walking, running, swimming, cycling, skydiving to sponsored silences (great for the kids!) or regular giving on our fundraising page; would be very welcome. WVS would support these efforts in every possible way; producing sponsorship forms, promotional material and publicity, attending events etc.

I am also interested in talking to groups about WVS, so feel free to tell me about any scouts/guides groups, Women's Institutes, Round Table, Lions, Knit'n'Natter, Coffee mornings, lodges, etc. who might be interested in learning about us, and maybe making a donation.

It's all about spreading the word about Warwickshire Vision Support to as many people as possible.

# Supporting people living with sight loss since 1911

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

For more information, please contact:

Warwickshire Vision Support

 01926 411331

E-mail: [enquiries@warwickshire.vision](mailto:enquiries@warwickshire.vision)

Website: [www.warwickshire.vision](http://www.warwickshire.vision)



@warksvissupport

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