

Viewpoint

Your local sight loss charity news

Issue 09 | Winter 2019

In this issue:

6 A very special friendship

10 Losing sight doesn't mean losing out on life

14 Are you really safe to be driving?

Pull out Mobile Sight Centre dates P12-13

CEO's welcome

It's been a very busy few months and I would like to start the New Year with a big "thank you" to the many loyal and enthusiastic people who help make NAB tick.

Firstly, to our staff who do such great work on your behalf, and then...

To our wonderful volunteers, some of whom were presented with their long-service awards by our President Lord Lieutenant, David Laing, at our AGM last October.

David is pictured left with Lesley, Sue, Margaret, Gemma and Wendy, and three more of our volunteers are on the Front Cover - Luisa, Claire and Ann.

Next up, thanks to everyone who responded to the consultation on our name - over 600 of you!

The trustees listened to your views and acknowledged the negative connotations around the word 'blind' as well as the 100 plus years' of value in our name - and almost 30 years in the NAB brand.

The majority of respondents didn't think we should change our name and this, together with the cost, led trustees to decide to keep the name.

However, it was clear from the consultation - and it was really important we asked - that we need to do more to explain that we help people with all stages of sight loss.

With that in mind they also decided that in future we would look to promote ourselves as NAB - with a new explanatory strapline -

rather than use our full name.

Finally, a huge thank you to everyone who responded to Northamptonshire County Council's consultation on ending the service they commission from us.

As part of our campaign we welcomed Victoria McDonald from Channel Four News (pictured above) to the Northampton Sight Centre. With our Community Support Worker Rebecca Cargill, she visited Jenny Hedges at home to find out about the positive difference our services have made to her.

STOP PRESS....

Northamptonshire County Council have confirmed our funding for next year. We are absolutely delighted by this news and grateful for such a thorough consultation by the Council which recognised the significant difference our services make to blind and partially sighted people in the County.

Regular monthly donations help us do more

A Standing Order allows you to donate a small amount every month and make a lasting commitment to transforming the lives of visually impaired adults and children across Northamptonshire.

A regular donation of:

£5 will provide a talking newspaper for someone who is partially sighted or blind, reducing isolation and improving well-being

£10 will help keep our Mobile Sight Centre on the road, taking our advice and guidance out to the community where they need it most.

£20 will enable one of our Community Team to make a home visit, improving the life of someone living with sight loss and increasing their independence.

If you would like to set up a Standing Order, please complete the enclosed form and return it to us in the freepost envelope or call 01604 719193 if you would prefer to do it over the phone.

Northamptonshire Association for the Blind Registered charity No. 201240

Gone fishing!

When champion visually impaired archer Deb Wright isn't firing off arrows at a target she can often be found sitting by the riverbank fishing!

It is a new and challenging outdoor pursuit for Deb, who only three years ago could not have dreamt what lay ahead for her.

Depressed and feeling isolated after six years of failing eyesight, she was looking for an active interest. She was advised to try archery, and hasn't looked back since.

This year she successfully defended her indoor and outdoor titles at the British Blind Sports National Visually Impaired Archery Championships, also coming second in the Open VI category at the National Disability Championships.

And now, for something completely different! Like a duck to water Deb has taken up fishing and, as the photo shows, netted her first sizeable tench.

"My partner sets up my pole line and puts the bait on," she explains. "I cast out, and use a waggler float with a contrasting coloured tip to help me know when I have a bite. I love it!"

A very special friendship

Gemma and Leonora are the best of friends. Once a week they put the world to rights over a cup of tea, or sometimes do a bit of baking together.

But this is no ordinary friendship. It might seem an unlikely match, but despite their 60-year age gap, these two women enjoy a close bond of understanding, trust and mutual benefit.

Gemma is a young mum and part-time biomedical scientist in her late 20s. Five years ago she joined NAB's team of Home Visiting Volunteers and was introduced to Leonora.

Leonora was recently widowed and feeling lonely and depressed. Her eyesight was deteriorating with age-related macular degeneration, and she was beginning to find everyday tasks difficult.

Private and independent-minded, she was reluctant to accept help. But eventually she agreed to weekly visits from Gemma, who helped with her correspondence and catalogue orders, and

took her out on occasions to a coffee shop or into the gardens around her apartment.

“At the time I was single and working full time,” recalls Gemma. “I was looking for a meaningful volunteer role and the idea of a Home Visitor appealed to me.”

Initially she was just as nervous as Leonora, but it didn’t take long before they both realised how well they’d ‘clicked’.

“My confidence grew as our friendship blossomed and it became apparent that even little things I could do to help, - reading a label or finding something she’d lost - actually made such a difference.”

Gemma married a year or so later and when in 2017 she became mother to Thomas, she was soon taking him to visit Leonora.

“I felt such a connection with Gemma right from the start,” says Leonora “and her baby has brought me so much pleasure too. He’s given me a brand new interest.

“It takes a lot of trust to invite a stranger into your home. But Gemma has never let me down. We laugh a lot and she always has a smile on her face. She lightens my life.”

As to the age gap, Gemma says: “Five years ago I couldn’t have imagined having a friend who is 90! But Leonora has helped me to see life from a different perspective. It’s a real gift, and I don’t want it to end.”

News and events.

We have had a very busy few months over the late summer, Autumn and Christmas period. Here’s a quick round-up:

It was a lovely sunny day when a group from Kettering Sight Centre visited the impressive Boughton House Gardens.

Some weeks later members were able to get “close up and personal” with some beady-eyed visitors when the Centre hosted a Falconry talk and display.

It would not have been Christmas without a visit to the panto for our enthusiastic Children and Families group.

Members of our Northampton Social Group enjoyed a festive Christmas lunch.

Thank you to our Rushden Branch who raised £590 at its annual quiz night and fish and chip supper and the Stanwick Hand Bell ringers rang in Christmas at the end-of-year party.

Thanks so much to Brixworth-based CPL Aromas who took part in this year's Dragon Boat Race at Wicksteed Park raising an amazing £1800.

As our charity partnership continues with Northampton Town Football Club, we took part in a 'blind' penalty shoot-out with players Kevin van Veen and Billy Waters to raise awareness of living with sight loss. Here's our team!

Our very own Laura Desborough was nominated for a Pride of Northamptonshire award and we were very proud!

And finally a huge thank you to Matt and Rachel who ran the Northampton Half Marathon and raised £600.

Losing sight doesn't mean losing out on life

Ten years ago, Hugh Spence sat "doodling" on a GCSE exam paper. He couldn't see the questions on the page, and knew that his sight was deteriorating.

Within six months he was totally blind – a devastating blow for a 17 year-old. It was a difficult time, but today Hugh can look back, not with regret, but with pride and great positivity.

He is a valued member of staff at Northamptonshire Association for the Blind (NAB), heading up our Children and Families Service. He has his own flat, does everything for himself and enjoys a busy social life.

In fact, Hugh is adamant that were it not for his blindness, he would never have done half of the things he's achieved.

Like entering (and winning) the County's "Strictly"-based Dancing with Asda competition some years ago; white water rafting or abseiling down the Northampton Lift Tower. His next challenge will be a sky dive in aid of NAB.

Hugh was born with Sarcoidosis, a rare inflammatory condition that can affect many parts of the body, including the eyes. It was diagnosed when he first started school and over the coming years his sight worsened.

“At school I was often angry and disrespectful of authority. I thought that since I couldn’t see to do the work I might as well just play around,” he said.

When NAB’s Community Support Worker responded to a call from his parents, Hugh was heading for failure in his GCSEs and had become depressed and isolated.

With rehabilitative support things very gradually started to change. He became a valued “regular” at NAB’s Northampton Centre.

With growing confidence Hugh took a course in Health and Social Care. Shortly afterwards he became assistant on the newly-established Children and Families Support Service, which he now oversees.

“Leaving home at 24 was a big step for me,” Hugh recalls “but now I cook, clean and do everything for myself, including shopping and paying the bills.”

Hugh travels the country as a member of Northants Steelbacks Visually Impaired Cricket Team and is comfortable going solo on buses and trains using his white cane. And he’s never without his smart phone!

“I wouldn’t change my life for anything. I believe life is what you make it. By remaining positive, you can live life to the full and realise your ambitions. I may have lost my sight, but I have found myself in the process.”

Visit our Mobile Sight Centre in a town near you

Northampton Area

Brixworth Library, Spratton Road, Wed 11:30am - 12:45pm, May 8

Northampton Market Square, Fri 10:00am - 2:00pm, Jan 11/25, Feb 8/22, Mar 8/22, Apr 12/26, May 10/24, Jun 14/28

Moulton Village Autos Stocks Hill, Wed 1:30pm - 2:30pm, May 8

Northampton St Crispin Retirement Village, Off St Crispin Drive, Duston, Wed 2:00pm - 3:30pm, Feb 20, May 15

Northampton Richmond Village, Bridge Meadow Way, Grange Park, Thu 10:00am - 12:00pm, Apr 4

South & West Northants Area

Brackley Town Centre Piazza, Town Hall, Market Place, Wed 10:00am - 12:30pm, Feb 6, Mar 6, Apr 3, May 1, Jun 5

Daventry Town Centre Near Shopmobility, New Street, Wed 10:00am - 1:00pm, Jan 16, Feb 20, Mar 20, Apr 24, May 15, Jun 19

Deanshanger Memorial Community Centre/Library, Wed 10:30am - 12:00pm, Apr 17

Long Buckby GP Surgery car park, Station Road, Wed 2:00pm - 3:00pm, Apr 24

Potterspury outside Post Office, High Street, Wed 12:30pm - 1:30pm, Apr 17

Towcester Waitrose car park, Water Lane, Wed 1:30pm - 3:30pm, Feb 6, Mar 6, Apr 3, May 1, Jun 5

Kettering, Corby & Oundle Area

Burton Latimer Library, High St, Wed 10:00am - 11:45am, Apr 10

Corby Town Centre Close to Corby Cube, George St, Fri 10:00am - 1:00pm, Jan 18, Feb 15, Mar 15, Apr 18, May 17, Jun 21

Corby Retail Park Phoenix Park Way, Fri 1:30pm - 3:30pm, May 17

Desborough Town Centre Co-op car park, Gladstone St, Wed 9:45am - 11:00am, May 8

Oundle Town Centre Co-op car park, St Osyth's Lane, Wed 10:00am - 1:00pm, Mar 13

Thrapston Town Centre Outside Barclays Bank, High Street, 1:30pm - 3:30pm, Mar 13

Wellingborough & Rushden Area

Raunds The Square, off High Street, Wed 12:30pm - 2:15pm, Apr 10

Earls Barton Medical Centre car park, Aggate Way, Thu 1:45pm - 3:00pm, Apr 11

Rushden Town Centre Mid'Care Imperial Court, Duck St, Wed 10:30am - 12:30pm, Feb 13

Irchester Working Men's Club car park, Wed 1:45pm - 2:45pm, Feb 13

Wellingborough Town Centre, Pedestrian Area, opp. Hind Hotel,
Thu 10:00am - 1:00pm, Jan 10/24, Feb 14/28, Mar 14/28, Apr
11/25, May 9/23, Jun 13/27

Are you really safe to be driving?

If you have poor or failing sight and are still driving.... think again!

You could be a danger to yourself as well as others. If you have an accident your insurance could be invalid, you could lose your licence and even face a hefty fine!

In a recent crackdown three English police forces tested every motorist they stopped to ensure they met the standard of vision for driving. Anyone who didn't, immediately lost their licence.

Importantly, the resulting data will help reveal the extent of the problem on our roads today.

Giving up driving is one of the hardest things to come to terms with when your sight becomes poor. It's a threat to independence, lifestyle and even livelihood.

"But I only drive locally – I don't go far," is often said. It's a tough decision to stop, but

accidents can happen right on your doorstep. Is it really worth the risk?

Losing your licence is an automatic consequence of being formally registered as sight impaired (by a hospital ophthalmologist).

However, registered or not, you should notify the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), if you are in any doubt that your vision is affecting your judgement.

According to high street opticians Vision Express as many as 4 out of 5 drivers may be overdue on a sight test. So do make it a regular commitment!

To meet the standard motorists must:

- be able to read a car number plate (one made after 1 September 2001) from 20 metres,
- have a visual acuity of at least 6/12 on the Snellan scale and,
- an adequate field of vision (as advised by an optician).

Motorists who wear glasses or contact lenses must wear them while driving.

If you have a diagnosed sight problem affecting both eyes (or the remaining eye if you only have one eye) you are obliged to notify the DVLA.

Keeping safe when out and about

Do you feel worried sometimes when you're out and about?

Then why not join the Keep Safe Scheme.

The scheme was launched in this county in 2011 for people with learning disabilities and to provide reassurance for their families when they were out alone.

It has now been expanded to encompass people with other disabilities – and NAB has become a key partner in the initiative.

A Keep Safe Card is issued to the person concerned.

It holds some basic details about his/her needs and personal contact details in case of emergency.

It also suggests how to help and support the card holder.

If feeling unsafe or needing assistance, the person can show the card to a member of staff wherever they happen to be - in shops, libraries, leisure centres and so on.

The Scheme has been widely publicised to ensure as many staff as possible in such premises are aware of it and able to respond.

Cardholder information is also held on a secure database by the three emergency services.

To apply tel: 01604 888963.

Email ldpb@northamptonshire.gov.uk or download application form from the website www.keepsafenorthants.org

Look out for Malcolm down your way!

It's the start of another busy year on the road for our Mobile Sight Centre Officer Malcolm Greenway pictured here with some local celebrities!

During 2018 he welcomed hundreds of visitors on board the vehicle and dealt with a wide range of equipment needs and general enquiries.

He listened to your concerns and responded to requests for more frequent stops. So for example, the vehicle will now be visiting

Northampton Market Square and Sheep Street in Wellingborough twice instead of once a month.

Malcolm is also looking for new venues and opportunities to “drop in”.

So if you have a busy social meeting or event that would welcome a visit do let Malcolm know.

“We’ve reached a lot of new people this past 12 months,” he says... “particularly people who have moved into the area and others who’ve been introduced to us by existing users of our services. People who are wanting information or specific equipment like talking clocks and liquid level indicators and others who value the chance to touch base now and then for a reassuring chat.

Don’t forget to check out the dates in your area on pages 12 and 13.

So spread the word – NAB is coming to town!

Katie’s tips for coping with the mental stress of sight loss.

Coming to terms with sight loss can be a major challenge, not only in practical terms but on a psychological level too.

With mental health now high up on the nation’s agenda, we asked Katie Berill – pictured here with her husband Gregg – to share with us her views on coping with stress and staying positive. Katie (32) was diagnosed with Stargardts in 2017 but says she’s not letting it stop her!

Here’s her top tips:

1. Try not to think too far ahead. Live in the moment – it’s easier than it sounds and has helped me a lot.
2. Talk with others who share your condition. I went a stage further and set up my own Blog www.katiesvision.co.uk and a ‘closed’ support group on Facebook (search UK Support Group for Stargardts and Juvenile vision loss.)
3. Practice ‘mindfulness’. There are a lot of good Apps to help you with this (try Headspace) or local groups. Mindfulness helps you achieve a mental state by focusing your awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting your feelings,

thoughts and bodily sensations.

4. Take 5 mins just to sit quietly and relax. It's such an easy first step to take but so many of us don't!
5. Share your anxious feelings with someone you trust. This helps me talk through and clarify my feelings.
6. Write down your worries and thoughts - I have focused on doing this in my Blog but it's just as effective if you write down on paper or in a diary!
7. Try to have at least one nice thing a week to look forward to, even if it's just going out for coffee.
8. Look for support groups and charities that can help you, if you need it. Just knowing who's out there really helps..... just in case.
9. And remember, it's ok not to be ok!

Stargardt disease is also known as Stargardt macular dystrophy, juvenile macular dystrophy and fundus flavimaculatus. Stargardt disease is an inherited eye condition that affects your macula which is the tiny central part of your retina, the light-sensitive layer at the back of your eye. It causes a reduction in your central detailed vision, which is the vision you use when looking directly at something. It doesn't usually affect your peripheral or side vision. As an inherited condition, Stargardt disease is caused by a mistake in one of our genes. The faulty gene leads to a build-up of a waste product, lipofuscin, and this will eventually damage the cone cells in the macula.

Focus on Myopia.

Myopia – or short-sightedness – is on the rise. In fact, it has reached epidemic proportions on a world-wide scale.

It is a refractive error. It causes things at a distance to appear blurry while close up vision remains sharp and clear. It happens when eyes become a little elongated, shifting the point of focus from the retina, at the back of the eye, to just in front of it.

Adults and children from as young as six can develop it. It can worsen during teenage years.

Myopia can be mild, needing no treatment, through to severe when it can significantly affect a person's vision and raise the risk of developing other eye conditions.

Causes?

Myopia often seems to run in families. However, modern lifestyle is definitely a factor!

We are all spending more and more time in “close-up” concentration, glued to our computers, laptops, gaming machines, smartphones and TVs (as well as books and magazines), for the purpose of learning, work and pleasure.

Screens are not thought to damage our vision. It’s the long periods of time we spend in front of them that’s the issue - often more hours a day than we actually spend asleep!

This can cause tired, dry or strained eyes – known as “screen fatigue”.

What are the signs?

- Headaches – tired eyes – blurred distance vision – squinting,
- Difficulty seeing to drive, especially at night.

In children:

- Rubbing eyes and/or blinking a lot,
- Sitting too close to the TV,
- Difficulty seeing the board at the front of a classroom

Can it be treated?

There is no cure but treatments include:

- wearing corrective glasses or contact lenses
- laser eye surgery (Not on NHS. For adults only)
- artificial lens implants

Guidelines for children

Continuous screen use for children under 10 should be restricted to a maximum of 40 minutes; older pre-teens to an hour and teenagers to 1½ hours – followed by an hour’s break.

Get them outdoors more (it breaks that close-up focus).

Turn off devices at least an hour before bedtime.

One in three of us are thought to be myopic.

By the middle of the century it is predicted that half of the world’s population will be affected!

This assistant answers you back...in a good way!

Did you get an "Alexa" or "Google" Voice Assistant for Christmas? If you didn't (and you don't already use one) it could be well worth considering as a present to yourself!

Voice assistants have taken off in a very big way in the last couple of years – on smart phones and as an everyday item of household equipment.

They respond to your voice. They will answer your questions, play your music requests, control your home's automatic devices and manage all sorts of basic tasks such as your calendar, shopping lists or emails.

You need a smart phone or tablet computer, together with Wi-Fi, to set them up but once installed they just sit quietly in the background, waiting for your command.

So, you can do away with talking clocks – just ask your assistant for the time. Check it for the weather before you go out or set a reminder for your doctor's appointment.

You can play bingo with it, engage it in a quiz or get it to help you relax by playing meditative music. Your assistant will even tell you a joke!

The most popular Voice Assistants for smart phones or dedicated home speakers are

Amazon "Alexa" Echo Dot range

Google Home

Apple's "Siri"

Microsoft's "Cortana"

Home assistants such as these retail at under £50.

And finally...Reading group's milestone

A reading group for visually impaired people has celebrated its 10th anniversary.

The group meets at Hunsbury Library on the second Monday morning of the month to discuss a chosen audio book and enjoy a chat over tea and biscuits.

Set up originally as a joint initiative by the Library Service and NAB, it soon became a sociable event, opening up over the years to embrace sighted members too. Audio books are provided free by Calibre Audio Library, either as a disc or on memory stick.

New members are always welcome. If interested contact

John Clarke. Email: jcclarke51@gmail.com

or via NAB on 01604 719173

Local to you - Social and Support Groups

Corby, Swan Gardens, Gainsborough Rd, 2pm - 4pm, 4th Tues of month

Long Buckby, Greenhill Court, Park Rd, 11am - 3pm, 3rd Thurs of month

Northampton, Delapre Community Centre, Alton St, 12:45pm - 3:30pm, 3rd Tues of month

Northampton Pub Lunch, The Trumpet Pub, Wellingborough Rd, 12pm - 3pm, 1st Tues of month

Wellingborough, Knights Court, Gold St, 1:30pm - 3:30pm, 3rd Thurs of month

Don't forget our local branches in Brackley, Kettering, Oundle, Rushden and Towcester run regular social groups & outings.

Ways to donate:

Text ISEE15 £2 to 70070

Go to: JustGiving.com/nab Where you can fundraise, donate once or set up monthly payments

Contact us:

Helpline: 01604 719193, Email: helpline@nab.org.uk

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