



Tel: 0191 478 5959

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## Newsletter December 2020



In this edition we have information about coronavirus support in your area; we'll be looking back at 2020's achievements and what we've got planned across Gateshead and South Tyneside next year. We've also included some examples of how Sight Service has helped people through the different services available.

**Thank You** to everyone who has donated to Sight Service. Your generosity is particularly welcome this year as we face additional challenges because of coronavirus. The donations we have received have helped us develop our new projects, you can find out more on pages 8 and 9.

## Our Achievements 2020



In the face of Coronavirus, we worked hard to adapt our services to keep them available and provide the support that is needed. The Team have remained positive throughout the pandemic which has seen us move to home working, in some cases home-schooling, or looking after pets, shielding or caring for vulnerable relatives. Despite all of the challenges the year has brought, we have;

- Made over 7000 calls providing professional Information, Advice and Guidance
- Carried out 145 Assessments for personalised support plans
- Delivered over 1000 pieces of equipment to help people live independently
- Ensured that £258,232 benefits are being claimed by those entitled to them
- Our Volunteers have made over 3000 befriending calls to those isolated during the pandemic

These activities have led to;

- 96% of our clients experiencing improved wellbeing
- 95% can live more independently
- 93% are more confident and empowered
- 90% feel less socially isolated

### Annual General Meeting (AGM)

As we were unable to hold a face-to-face meeting for the Annual General Meeting of the charity on 26th November 2020, we conducted the Members vote remotely by either telephone, paper or online.

Thank you to everyone who voted, we received 18 votes for the following resolutions at the AGM;

- 1.18 Members voted to approve the Annual Report and Annual Accounts. No Members voted against or withheld their vote.
- 2.18 Members voted for Haines Watts to be reappointed as independent auditors/examiners. No Members voted against or withheld their vote.
- 3.18 Members voted that Trustees are to determine the auditors remuneration. No Members voted against or withheld their vote.
- 4.18 Members voted to re-elect Mrs Lin Elder-Atterton as a Trustee to the Board. No Members voted against or withheld their vote.

5.17 Members voted to elect Mr Ian Hickson as a Trustee to the Board. No Members voted against, 1 Member withheld their vote.

Following the count, we are delighted to re-appoint Mrs Lin Elder-Atterton MVO as a Trustee and Chair of the Board and welcome Mr Ian Hickson to the Board as a new Trustee.

We have also welcomed Councillor Alex Geddes, Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council, as a Co-Opted member of the Board.

We are recruiting for new Trustees, including a service user from the Gateshead area. If you have experience in finance, health or social care services and are interested in becoming a Trustee please give us a call on:0191 478 5959 or email; [contactus@sightservice.co.uk](mailto:contactus@sightservice.co.uk)

### **[Coronavirus support in your area](#)**

We appreciate that coronavirus is still causing additional challenges for many people in our communities. If you need extra help, both Gateshead and South Tyneside Council's have dedicated help lines to call;

- Gateshead - 0191 433 7112
- South Tyneside - 0191 424 7575

Those classed as clinically extremely vulnerable should register with the Government's shielding service at [www.gov.uk/coronavirus-shielding-support](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-shielding-support)

## Low Vision Service



Our Low Vision Service continues to provide an integrated assessment service, rehabilitation and equipment support for Gateshead residents. The Optometrists, Rehab and Enablement Teams have been working hard to develop a remote low vision assessment that can be carried out without having to come into the clinic. The clinics are back up and running for essential face to face appointments in line with Government guidelines for Coronavirus.

The Low Vision service includes; a detailed examination with

an Optometrist, a personal plan to help you achieve your goals, advice, support and equipment to help you maximise your remaining vision and Rehab intervention to help you find the best use of the equipment available to you.

This year, almost 1000 people have been in touch with the service for support.

To contact the service or make a referral please call the Team on 0191 4785959.

### **Assessment Case Study**

A client was referred to us from Adult Social Care, he was recently registered as SI and been living with visual impairment for a number of years due to a stroke. Our client had been 'muddling through' and 'just managing', completely unaware of the support available to him. With a secondary eye condition now impeding his visual impairment he was recently registered as Sight Impaired.

We contacted the client having received his Certificate of Visual Impairment. Due to Covid restrictions and concerns about shielding, the Assessment of Need was completed over the phone with the client and his wife.

The couple were taken aback at the level of support we could offer, including support in applying for benefits, assistive technology support as well as aids and adaptations in the

home. Within two weeks of the referral being made our Enablement Officer has completed his assessment and delivered various aids and pieces of equipment. As a result, this person is becoming more independent, confident and more aware of the various support networks that are open to him and his family.

If you feel that we could help you in any way, please don't hesitate to contact us. You can refer yourself into the service and we will be more than happy to assist.

### **Amazon Fire Project**

We have been working with RNIB to distribute 10 Amazon Fire Kindles to blind and partially sighted people in Gateshead and South Tyneside. One of these devices was allocated to Miss S (names have been changed).

Miss S is profoundly deaf and registered sight impaired and uses her mobile phone and British Sign Language to help her communicate. Because of her sight loss Miss S is struggling with text on her phone. When it was suggested to her that she join our kindle project Miss S was delighted that she could be part of the project.

At the beginning of the project Miss S said that she would like

to use the kindle to read books and watch Netflix. Miss S struggled to use the device at first but got support from the Vision Support Team and her partner. Miss S now uses the device to keep in touch with friends on Facebook, watching the news headlines and programs on Netflix. Miss S reported that when using her phone she had to hold it close up to her face to see it, which can cause eye strain. Miss S said that she can use the kindle much easier and independently.

Miss S is hoping to develop the activities she does on the kindle over the next upcoming months and that she is very grateful to Sight Service and RNIB for giving her the opportunity to own a kindle.

### **The impact of Coronavirus**

141 surveys were asked between 18<sup>th</sup> May and 19<sup>th</sup> June 2020 to determine how people with sight loss were being affected by coronavirus and what their main concerns for the future were.

Our telephone survey identified that;

- 41% are worried about 'getting out and about' and reduced 'confidence' after lockdown. Many are struggling with social distancing and are fearful of public places.
- 80% are feeling "down", "depressed", "lonely" or "anxious" because of coronavirus and lockdown measures.

In addition, the volunteer led Telephone Befriending service has made over 3000 befriending calls resulting in;

- 92% reported feeling less isolated
- 92% felt improved emotional health & wellbeing
- 94% want the calls to continue
- 94% rate our calls as very important to them

The results of these surveys are being used to inform our future activities, services and strategy to ensure vision impaired people have the support they need coming out of lockdown and into the future.

### **Doubling our Efforts!**

It has become very clear from talking to clients that Visual Impairment (VI) remains widely unknown, un-appreciated and misunderstood. Clients inform us they are going out less because of their worries and reactions of others. Clients have stayed home saying they would be unable to gauge a socially distanced 2 metres. They hear reports of social rebuke

(people who are VI being told to 'back off') and those who have been asked to leave shops as they have 'picked items up and put them back'.

In response to this, Sight Service is doubling our effort, and workforce, to ensure Visual Impairment is widely acknowledged and at the same time, we are increasing support for those who have lost their place in their community, more so this year than ever.

Firstly, we would like to introduce Cathy Woodward, on temporary secondment from the Wilberforce Trust, York. Cathy is an experienced Rehabilitation Worker who is keen to work with those people who want to get out and about in the outside world, especially those whose confidence and independence has taken a hit this year. Alongside this Cathy will be helping local shops, businesses, care homes and so forth, to promote visual impairment awareness so that clients can return to their community safe in the knowledge they have support from others to do so. Welcome on-board Cathy!

If you would like to know more about how Cathy (and our resident Rehab Mike) can help you and others, then please get in touch.

Secondly, our new Counselling Service is now up and running; led by Claire Campbell the vision impairment counselling service is free of charge, and is currently offered via telephone. It has been a challenging year, and we are here to support people with sight loss experiencing anxiety, depression, and

other emotional issues. Counselling can help you work through your problems in a confidential environment, and help you find solutions to Life's challenges. Our Counsellor specialises in working with sight loss, and has developed the service to make it as accessible as possible. If you or somebody you know would like to access this service, please call us on 07917 980927, or email [claire.campbell@sightservice.co.uk](mailto:claire.campbell@sightservice.co.uk)

Finally, Ellie Mahoney has been appointed as our new Development Officer. This role is focusing on our digital offer such as assisting clients who wish to explore use of Zoom/Teams to keep in touch with family & friends, setting up digital "how to" guides with our Vision Support workers to demonstrate to clients the use of devices such as Alexa, Amazon Kindle, downloading apps. She will also be developing our tele-support offer, exploring 'group chats' and recruiting new volunteers to help us increase the service.

These new projects are funded by the 'Coronavirus Community Support Fund' up to the end of March 2021 and we're working hard to secure additional income to make them a permanent part of our service.

### **Telescope Study**

Do you have Dry, Age-related Macular Degeneration (Dry

AMD)? Take part in TELESCOPE, a new genetic screening study to help advance AMD research!

The TELESCOPE study is a Genetic Screening study that will help us see if you have rare variations in specific genes and qualify to join other research studies.

Sight Service is supporting the collection of genetic samples from eligible clients. Your genetic sample will help the researchers see if you have rare variations in specific genes.

More information about the research and how to register will be available on our website and facebook page in the New Year. If you are interested in taking part, please contact Stephanie Cairns on 0191 4785959.

### **Membership**

Sight Service membership is free this year and members will receive invitations to our Forums, AGM and other events throughout the year.

We aim to hold two Member Forums this year which will focus on our services and provide an opportunity to put forward ideas and suggestions. One of these will also include our annual AGM where we will review our activities and financial information from the previous year.

Sight Service membership is free this year so please contact us to register. You can call us on 0191 4785959 or email at [contactus@sightservice.co.uk](mailto:contactus@sightservice.co.uk)

## **Christmas Wishes**

Finally, we would like to wish all our clients, friends and supporters a very safe and happy Christmas! We hope to be able to see much more of you in 2021 as and when restrictions ease, until then please stay safe and keep in touch.

## **Alternative Format**

If you would like to receive this newsletter in an alternative format, please contact Sight Service on 0191 478 5959 or email [contactus@sightservice.co.uk](mailto:contactus@sightservice.co.uk)