

Newsletter April 2021

Welcome to the first newsletter under our new name, Vision & Hearing Support. We have an update on our services and how to access them safely; we will be looking back at our achievements in 2020/21 and what we have planned across Gateshead and South Tyneside in the coming year. We have also included some examples of how our work has helped people. Alongside this we have information from our Partners across the sector and an update about the new Eye Hospital at Sunderland, including joining details for upcoming consultation workshops.

Thank you to everyone who has donated to Vision & Hearing Support. 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 in this newsletter.

New Vision, New Name

On 1st March 2021, we changed our name to Vision & Hearing Support. This name change reflects the Charity's development and recent incorporation of services for people who are D/deaf, hard of hearing and those with tinnitus.

In South Tyneside and Gateshead over 11,700 people live with sight loss and over 1,800 are registered blind, in addition, over 65,500 adults in this area are deaf or hard of hearing.

The Charity was established in 1996 for the benefit of those with vision impairment. The changes reflect the Charity's objectives which are primarily to provide services for the benefit of visually impaired people to including those who are deaf or hard of hearing. This is particularly significant in today's world as we know we know that sensory loss is ever increasing and that those with sight and hearing loss are experiencing significant difficulties with Covid-19 measures such as face masks, social distancing and navigating shop layouts.

The Charity's innovative approach to activities was recognised at the 2019 Opticians Awards where our Optometrist, Stephanie Cairns, received the Low Vision Award, then later in the year at the Visionary UK Awards 2019 the Charity won both the Collaboration Award, and the Visionary Choice Award. Vision and Hearing Support provides a bespoke service to help individuals maintain independence and promote good mental health and wellbeing. The support available for sensory loss includes equipment, rehabilitation, personal assessments and planning, counselling, and digital assistance. In today's environment this support is needed more than ever as the impact of Covid-19 and the associated restrictions disproportionately affects those with sensory loss.

Throughout the pandemic the Charity has continued to operate and supported almost 3,500 individuals by providing a combination of welfare calls, personal assessments, equipment deliveries and rehabilitation activities. As a result of receiving support from the Charity, 93% said they were able to live more independently, 90% said they felt less isolated, 91% were more confident and 96% reported an improvement in their emotional health and wellbeing.

Lin Elder-Atterton, Chair of Vision and Hearing Support said "It

has been, and continues to be, a challenging time for the charity sector, but I'm delighted that our organisation has been able to move forward, develop our services and look to the future.

Coronavirus has given us an opportunity to develop innovative solutions throughout the pandemic and our dedicated team has worked tirelessly throughout the last 12 months ensuring clients are safe, supported, and secure.

It is our intention to continue to expand our activities and provide outstanding services for those experiencing sight and hearing loss across the South Tyneside and Gateshead area. The quality of our work will remain paramount as we move forward to the next stage of our journey”.

Our Achievements 2020/21

Despite the challenges of Coronavirus, our services were adapted to enable us to provide the support, information, advice & guidance our clients needed. The pandemic brought major changes to our lives, yet the Team adapted and worked effectively and efficiently from home. They seized the opportunities and challenges presented, and continued to work together as an enthusiastic team, providing a personal, caring and professional service. As a result we have;

- **Made over 8500 calls providing professional Information, Advice and Guidance**
- **Carried out 299 Assessments for personalised support plans**
- **Delivered over 2700 pieces of equipment to help people live independently**
- **Ensured that benefits of £9525 per week, or £495,300 per annum, are being claimed by those entitled to them**
- **Our Volunteers have made over 4100 befriending calls to those isolated during the pandemic**

These activities have led to;

- **97% of our clients experiencing improved wellbeing**
- **96% can live more independently**
- **95% are more confident and empowered**
- **91% feel less socially isolated**

Become a Trustee

It is an exciting time to join Vision and Hearing Support as we embark on a new journey supporting people who are D/deaf and hard of hearing whilst continuing to develop our excellent vision support activities. We are recruiting for new Trustees to help plan our strategic direction and keep the Charity on track. We are particularly looking for people with lived experience of sensory loss to help inform our services and specifically have a vacancy for a Gateshead representative. We are also seeking individuals who bring experience in finance, health, or social care services.

For an informal discussion about becoming a Trustee please call Sarah French on 07796 816607 or email; sarah.french@visionandhearingsupport.org.uk

Our Services

A lot has changed over the last year, including how we have been delivering our services. With the addition of hearing services, we thought it would be helpful to provide a quick recap of what we can do to help people with sensory loss.

Our Pathway integrates a range of activities aimed at maintaining independence, improving mental wellbeing, and reducing social isolation. Our interventions ensure that people with sensory loss:

- **can live more independently,**
- **are less socially isolated,**

- are more confident and empowered,
- experience improved wellbeing,
- People and organisations are more aware of sensory loss and how to make services/ activities more accessible.

We do this by providing:

- **Personal Assessments – Available to people who are blind, partially sighted, D/deaf or hard of hearing, our comprehensive Assessment considers all aspects of your life and helps us create a bespoke support plan to meet your needs.**
- **Visual Rehabilitation – providing mobility training, safer living environments and specialist equipment advice.**
- **Enablement – Our Team of experts provide Information, Advice and Guidance alongside aids and adaptations to help you live independently. This service is available for people who are blind, partially sighted, D/deaf, hard of hearing, Deaf/Blind or who have dual sensory loss.**
- **Vision Support – our Vision Support project promotes social activity, advice for technology and peer-to-peer support. We have recently launched an employability project to help people secure or remain in employment. We will be developing this service over the coming months to include enhanced hearing support.**
- **Low Vision – the community-based service integrates optometrists into the rehabilitation and enablement teams, providing a unique model of preventative eye care.**
- **Training – Sensory Impairment Awareness Training helps businesses and employers understand the needs of those living with sensory loss and can be tailored to fit the needs of specific situations.**

- **Living Well with Sight Loss – our quality assured programme of peer support helps people adjust to their sight loss and prevent future mental health problems. We hope to establish a peer support programme for people who are D/deaf or hard of hearing in the coming year.**

Project Updates

In our last Newsletter we introduced some new projects funded by the ‘Coronavirus Community Support Fund’ to the end of March 2021.

Our additional Rehab support has helped us respond to covid measures being implemented in shops, public spaces and hospitality venues. We have designed a bespoke Vision Impairment Awareness Training (VIAT) course for businesses and organisations to improve their accessibility and communication with people with sight loss. The training has already been provided to Groundwork, Blissability and ACTS (Age Concern) in South Tyneside, where 25 employees and voluntary personnel are now able to take forward their knowledge of Visual Impairment, not only to help their clients, but hopefully pass their awareness onto others in the wider community.

Feedback questionnaires are returning with comments such as “This has to be one of the best online training sessions I have done in quite a while, the content and length of the training was perfect”, “Very enjoyable and informative. Thank you” and “it really was a great course, and you do an amazing job”

Vision and Hearing Support offer VIAT all year round and it is out intention to start more interactive sessions as soon as we can safely do so. This will include Sighted Guide Training and demonstrating the equipment we issue on a regular basis.

Over 90 enquiries were received about our Counselling

service and the feedback from those participating has been excellent. Unfortunately, the project is on hold whilst we secure funding to keep it going. We are expecting news about grant applications in the coming weeks and will provide an update via our facebook page [@visionandhearingsupport.org.uk](https://www.facebook.com/visionandhearingsupport.org.uk)

We received 88 referrals to the digital support and volunteering project and 48 people signed up for telephone befriending. We recruited 8 students from Newcastle College Health & Social Care course and 4 vision impaired clients as volunteers.

From these projects and using the results of our client surveys, we have developed some new programmes for the coming year.

Our Digital Vision Support project aims to support people access online services safely and use digital tools to increase independence. This work is being led by Karen Mallet who will be organising workshops, resources for staying safe online as well as developing a digital assessment to understand what will work best for you.

Our new Employability Vision Support work led by Craig Riach will help people of working age access employment advice, training and skills and volunteering opportunities alongside employer information to increase support in the workplace. This project aims to bridge the gap between children's and adult services and improve the transition pathway to increase engagement.

Coronavirus, one year on

We are hopeful that the impact Coronavirus and the associated restrictions has had on people's daily lives is reducing, and that we can return to 'normality' after a truly devastating year.

We have continued to deliver our services, albeit remotely or for essential appointments only, and are looking forward to welcoming people back into the centre in the coming weeks and months.

We will continue to follow Government guidance alongside the UKs Roadmap out of lockdown. All access to The Bradbury Centre for Sight is by appointment only. This is to help manage the numbers of people on site and maintain social distancing.

The Team are working hard to schedule our Living Well with Sight Loss sessions and we are planning digital and cyber security workshops to help people stay safe online. Further information will be posted on our facebook page @visionandhearingsupport or you can contact us on 0191 4785959 for more information.

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

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

The NHS, Local Authority and hospital response to the vaccine rollout in both South Tyneside and Gateshead has been excellent. There are several sources of information if you have concerns or questions about getting a vaccine.

For local South Tyneside information including transport, housebound patients, and unpaid carers, please visit: <https://www.southtyneside.gov.uk/article/71758>

For information about the vaccination programme in Gateshead please visit <https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/17185/Vaccinations>

TV Licensing changes for over 75's – 'to pay or not to pay' or pay a reduced fee!

The BBC have identified that a small percentage of over 75-year-olds have yet to arrange their next TV License whether paying in full, obtaining one free or at a reduced cost. Free TV Licensing is only available now for over 75s if they or their partner receive Pension Credit. However, people who previously received their TV License free (by being over 75) can apply for a reduced fee TV License if they are certified as Severely Sight Impaired (Blind). Certification is via an Ophthalmologist and an issued BD8 form or more recent CVI (Certificate of Vision Impairment) proves eligibility. Only those registered as Severely Sight Impaired (or Blind) can apply for a reduced fee TV License at a reduction of 50%. If you have yet to arrange your TV License or are struggling to pay, or your circumstances have changed, telephone the BBC Helpline on 0300 790 6151 or you can visit online at tvl.co.uk/75 If someone other than the BBC has offered to help you arrange your next License (scammers will try anything) please visit the BBC Helpline or report it to; <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/cyberaware/home>

Plans unveiled for new £36 million Eye Hospital in Sunderland

South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust has unveiled plans to build an iconic new Eye Hospital in the centre of Sunderland as part of the City's ambitious Riverside Sunderland masterplan.

Sunderland Eye Infirmary is one of very few specialist standalone eye hospitals in the whole country and the region's only dedicated centre for ophthalmology care. It is home to the Regional Cataract Treatment Centre and widely regarded across the NHS, both regionally and nationally, as a centre of excellence for eye services, caring for patients from

across the North East, Cumbria and beyond.

The current facilities on Queen Alexandra Road in the South East of the City are now over 75 years old with a costly and aging infrastructure that does not reflect the world class treatment and outstanding NHS care taking place inside.

Building a brand new, fit-for-purpose Eye Hospital has long been part of the Trust's strategic ambitions and has now been made possible thanks to partnership working with Sunderland City Council.

All clinical services currently provided from Sunderland Eye Infirmary will transfer to the new state-of-the-art facility to be delivered from a new modern, purpose-built environment in a much more accessible City centre location. As part of its plans, the Trust is also keen to continue expanding its specialist ophthalmology services in the community through its satellite hubs across South Tyneside, Sunderland and Durham, including the introduction of a new clinic at Cleadon Park Primary Care in South Shields.

Staff at Sunderland Eye Infirmary have welcomed plans for a new hospital. Clinical Director for Ophthalmology services and Consultant Ophthalmologist Mr Jean-Pierre Danjoux said:

“Staff at the Eye Infirmary are absolutely thrilled at the prospect of a brand new hospital as there is no doubt that our current building is dated and no longer fit for purpose. The services we offer are nothing short of world class with outstanding patient feedback and they deserve an environment to match. Today's news is testament to the perseverance and ingenuity of our leadership team, who, by working in partnership with the Council, are now turning our dream of a new facility into reality for patients.” Plans to build a new Eye Hospital in Sunderland have only been made possible thanks to strong collaboration between the NHS and the local authority. Funding for the development has been

provided by the local authority and will be repaid by the Trust to allow the relocation of the hospital to a much improved City centre location on the former Vaux site.

Mr Ken Bremner MBE, Chief Executive of South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust said: “Our ambitions for a new Eye Hospital in Sunderland have been a long time in the making. Announcing our development plans is a historic moment for the Trust and represents a major investment into the local NHS thanks to our collaboration with Sunderland City Council.

“In these uncertain times and especially as we continue to battle the COVID-19 pandemic, this is an extremely positive and welcome development and demonstrates our commitment to working with local partners to deliver the very best healthcare for the people we serve. We now look forward to involving patients, staff and the wider public in the design process ahead and as we work together to progress plans to the next stage.”

Over the coming weeks a series of virtual engagement sessions will take place as follows and people can book onto the sessions via www.stsft.nhs.uk/neweyehospital:

- Tuesday 27 April 10am – 11am**
- Thursday 29 April 2pm – 3pm**
- Tuesday 4 May 1pm – 2pm**

The Trust is keen to hear from as many people as possible to ensure the design of the new Eye Hospital provides the optimal experience for patients, staff and visitors. Work is also taking place with The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) to ensure the new hospital design is built around the needs of those with sight impairments.

Plans for a new Eye Hospital in Sunderland have been fully supported by the region’s NHS. Sir Liam Donaldson,

Chairman of the Integrated Care System across the North East and North Cumbria said: “This exciting development builds on Sunderland’s great tradition in eye surgery. It also shows how, in the midst of the extraordinary pressures of the pandemic, the NHS is still innovating and looking to the future needs of patients. The new Sunderland Eye Infirmary will shine as a beacon of excellence in the North East’s NHS for years to come.”

The announcement represents the latest boost for Riverside Sunderland, which is undergoing rapid regeneration in line with the Council’s delivery plan to transform the area into a dynamic urban quarter, where up to 2,500 people will live, 10,000 will work and thousands will visit.

The new Eye Hospital will stand alongside The Beam; City Hall, which is nearing completion, and two further commercial properties that are being developed as part of Legal & General’s £100m commitment to the site.

Councillor Graeme Miller, Leader of Sunderland City Council said: “We are delighted to work with the Trust on this exciting development for the City and help deliver a new world class facility for Sunderland Eye Infirmary as part of our Riverside Sunderland plans. We look forward to working with the NHS in the weeks and months ahead as plans progress.”

Healthcare leaders will use the feedback gathered over the next few months to shape its plans for a new Eye Hospital before submitting a formal planning application at the end of May. The Trust hopes to start building work in 2022 (subject to planning approval) and is aiming for the new Eye Hospital to open in 2024. For more information visit: www.stsft.nhs.uk/neweyehospital or email stsft.SEI@nhs.net. We are working with the Trust and have arranged a dedicated focus group for clients of local sight loss organisations and groups. A letter providing further details has been included as a supplement

to the newsletter.

Vision Support Case Study

We worked with Mr X through our vision support project. Mr X is a 38-year-old gentleman who was living in residential care but moved into independent supported living accommodation in December 2019.

Mr X has Optical Hyperplasia and is registered blind. He has light and dark perception, and he can see some shapes.

Mr X has Cerebral Palsy which affects his mobility alongside other health conditions including epilepsy, a learning disability and Tourette syndrome.

We applied to RNIB to request funding for an Alexa Show device. The ways in which the Show helps are:

- Emotional wellbeing, Mr X is now able to contact his family and friends using his Show. His Parents and support worker bought similar devices so they can communicate with and see Mr X during calls.
- Although Mr X will always need supervision to take medication his Alexa allows him to set reminders so that he knows when it will happen providing some independence.
- Mr X cannot see well enough to use a diary or wall calendar so he uses the show to book and remind him of upcoming appointments.
- Mr X loves music and the device allows him to listen to the music he wants when he wants to listen to it. He no longer relies on a sighted person to choose or play music for him.
- Mr X is able to use the device to listen to books through Audible and other similar streaming services.
- Mr X uses the device to turn lights on and off with his voice.

Mr X has gained so much more independence in his everyday life after purchasing the Alexa device. Digital Vision Support – Focus on Alexa

Digital Devices

My name is Karen Mallett I have worked for Sight Service/ Vision and Hearing support for the last 6 years. I have recently taken on the role of Vision Support Officer/Digital. I would just like to tell you all a little bit about the Alexa device and how much it has helped me as a visually impaired person. I first received a device in 2017 and used it to listen to audio books, fast forward 4 years and I now use it for so much more. It has helped me a great deal. Below is a short summary of the device's abilities.

The Echo is a smart speaker; most basic uses are:

- 1. Checking time, date, news, and local weather,**
- 2. Listening to music,**
- 3. Listening to audible books,**
- 4. Make and receive hands free calls and so much more.**

The Echo Show is like the Echo but with a screen. With this you can do all the above with the main difference being that if both recipients have the show you can video call one another. When listening to music the device turns into a karaoke with the lyrics showing up on the screen. With the latest version of the show, it has the smart display and motion sensor which can follow you around the room during a call and can also be used as a security device accessible through your mobile app. This is just a snippet of what the Alexa devices can do. It can provide a great deal of independence to a visually impaired person living alone. If you would like to try out any of our devices through our equipment lending library or would like to discuss in more detail

how the Alexa device may benefit you, please give Karen a call on 07919407648 my working hours are Wed/Thurs 9-4:30 Fri 9-3:30. If I am not available, please just leave a message and I will contact you.

New Part Time Enablement Officer

Hello all, my name is Rebecca Miller, I am thrilled to be joining Vision and Hearing support as an enablement officer. I have been working with people who have hearing loss and/or Deaf British Sign Language users (BSL) for over 20 years in various roles in the North East.

My first role was working with young Deaf BSL users in a youth setting, then I became an Advocacy Officer for Deaf people in the North East of England, before working for the RNID and finally arriving at what I hope will be my final destination, Vision and Hearing Support.

I am very excited at getting to know all our service users, and look forward to meeting everyone when Covid Regulations allow. In the meantime, I'll tell you a little bit about myself. I was born Profoundly Deaf and wore hearing aids all my life till I was 36 years old, where I unexpectedly lost all of the limited hearing I had and was unable to hear anything. I was luckily a candidate for Cochlear implantation and was implanted as quick as I could have it, as in between this, I became a mum to a little girl, who is now 4 years old. Since being implanted I haven't looked back and love being able to hear various things that I had never heard before in my life even with hearing aids. My Favourite sound is water running, and I never thought I would detest the sound of a clock ticking!

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.

We are 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.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact Stephanie Cairns on 0191 4785959.

Membership

Our Membership is free and members will receive invitations to our Forums, AGM and other events throughout the year.

Vision & Hearing Support membership is free, please contact us to register on 0191 4785959 or email at contactus@visionandhearingsupport.co.uk

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