

Keeping you informed of local sight loss news

Visible

 **Vision**
West of England

Summer/Autumn 2020
**Bristol, Bath &
South Gloucestershire Edition**

 **Wiltshire
Sight**

Welcome to our latest edition of Visible, Vision West of England's bi-annual newsletter.



I'm writing this introduction from my desk in my living room, with little idea of what the rules of lockdown will be by the time you read this. These have been challenging and unprecedented times for all of us. However, for people with sight loss, the impact on daily life has been even greater.

Many of us have turned to the internet and social media to carry on as best we can with daily life, but we know that so many of our clients do not have access to technology to keep in touch with friends and family, or to try and book a slot for a home shopping delivery. Our challenge over the past few months has been to find new ways to continue to provide the support people need during this difficult period.

Many of the blind and partially sighted people we serve are amongst those most at risk from coronavirus, so from the moment the country went into lockdown, our staff and volunteer team were on the phones, focusing all their efforts on making sure that people with sight loss have support in place for essential daily needs, and that they had someone to talk to for emotional support. In tandem we have been finding new and creative methods to facilitate social gatherings, recruit and train volunteers for befriending, and to work effectively with local communities, other charities and local authorities to ensure we reach as many people as we can and provide a coordinated and efficient response across the region.

In this edition of Visible, you can read about the way we have been adapting our services, but do be reassured that these are temporary measures – we know there is no real substitute for face-to-face support, and will revert to full services across the region as soon as it is safe to do so.

Also in this edition you can read some stories from our dedicated staff team, our clients, and our fabulous volunteers. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all our staff and volunteers for their on-going commitment to supporting local blind and partially sighted people during this period - you've been fantastic. With your support and dedication, we will get through this, and continue to provide local support for many years to come.



Thank you. Stay safe, and best wishes
Mike Silvey, CEO



Join a weekly lottery, supporting Vision West of England
from just £1 per week!

For just £1 per week, you could win:

£25,000
for
6 matching
digits

By entering
the lottery,
you are both in with a
chance to win yourself,
and you're supporting
your local sight
loss charity!

£1,000
for
5 matching
digits

£25
for
4 matching
digits

Five entries
in to next draw
for 3 matching
digits

Register online:
www.bit.ly/lottery-sign-up
or call us to register: 01380 723682

You must be 16 or over to enter, and rules can be found at www.unitylottery.co.uk

Bits and Pieces

Outpatient Treatment for Eye Conditions

We know many of our clients are feeling more anxious than normal at the moment, in particular about attending their outpatient appointments at the hospital. Please remember that failing to have treatment for eye conditions could lead to a worsening of your condition or to permanent sight loss. Unless the hospital has contacted you to cancel or rearrange your appointment, we would urge you to attend as planned. The hospitals are very well set-up now to ensure the safety of patients, with physical distancing measures in place, masks and hand sanitiser provided, and coronavirus patients are kept very separate. If you have any concerns do ring the hospital for advice, but please don't forget your appointments!

Friends in need, friends indeed

In response to the virus lockdown, in late March we launched a new telephone befriending service, matching willing volunteers with people across the West of England who are isolated and looking for a friendly voice at the end of the phone. We had a fantastic response to our call for volunteers, and we now have pairs of

people all over the region hating away on a regular basis. Hopefully some relief during these strange and often lonely times. Do give us a call if you would like to take advantage of this new service.



Resource purchasing

Unless government advice changes, our Resource Centres in Bristol and Devizes will be reopening in June. We will be putting physical distancing measures in place to ensure you can browse and try out our range of daily living aids, lighting, magnification and technology with a Sight Loss Advisor available to provide advice and guidance. You can now buy resources direct from us - payments can be made by cash, cheque or card, and we can now even take contactless transactions. If you are unable to travel, many resources can also be ordered through us over the phone, delivered to your door.

Living with Sight Loss course – at a distance

In mid-May we launched our first Living with Sight Loss course run over video/phone conferencing. Run over 5 consecutive weeks, the course provides support and information to help people adapt to life with sight loss and to support everyday living. Packed with hints, tips and practical demonstrations aimed at encouraging continued independence, the course also connects people going through similar experiences and provides opportunities for peer and group support. If you are interested in joining our next course, please do give us a call. Our intention is to run the course face-to-face again when it is safe to do so, but for now, the distance course is working well.

Telephone social groups

All of our social groups have been suspended since late March. But we know how valuable these groups can be to people, so wherever possible, we have re-launched social groups to meet over the phone until we are able to start face-to-face again.



With a bit of research, we found some software that enables us to dial out to people who struggle to dial in to conference calls, and it seems to be working well. In the new world we find ourselves in, creative solutions are required!

Disability legal advice

The Disability Law Service provides free legal advice to disabled people and their carers to ensure they have access to justice and receive what they are entitled to. Their team covers issues relating to Community Care, Employment, Housing and Welfare benefits, and they are well versed in the changes brought about by COVID-19, how these are impacting disabled people and how to use the law to react. The service can be contacted on 0207 791 9800.

Rehabilitation service South Gloucestershire

Please note that our rehabilitation team are still working during the period of lockdown, providing essential equipment via post and doing training and advice over the telephone as much as possible. Normal service will of course be resumed as soon as possible.





We are excited to be producing our first impact report which will be published this summer. It will enable us to share the positive differences and outcomes our services have brought to people's lives over the last year. We are proud to share with you some of the highlights.

"The support has given me so much more confidence - it has opened my eyes to what I can do, a 100% improvement to my life. I can now get out and about and have even been able to go fishing again!"

94.9% report an increase in confidence

71.4% say they feel less isolated

93.3% say they are better able to manage day-to-day

100%



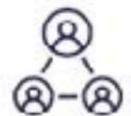
1795 clients supported in 2019/2020



657 new clients over the past 12 months



2442 information and advice sessions provided



837 attendances at social groups



47 people attended training courses - since Nov 2019

98.6% of clients rated our services good or excellent

On September 1st this year, Vision West of England will change its operating name to Sight Support West of England. We will of course be writing to everyone to let them know about the formal change nearer the time, but we thought this newsletter would be an opportune moment to spread the word.

Why are we doing this? Nobody likes a name change, and no organisation would choose to go through the hassle of changing its name unless it had a very good reason for doing so! We believe we need to change as we have had so much feedback from our clients and supporters that our current name does not work well. It does not describe what we do, it is too long (and cannot easily be shortened), and it does not sound like a local charity – which is important, as we need people to support us!

Why 'Sight Support'? No name is ever perfect, or to everyone's taste, but we went through a process of drawing up key criteria for the new name and considering a wide range of possible options. Sight Support was the one name which stood out, meeting all of our criteria and receiving a positive reaction from staff, Board and crucially, the group of local visually impaired people who were consulted.

Why now? Vision West of England was launched in May 2018. We are still a young organisation, and as such, we are not yet as well known as we would like. If we are going to change to a name which works for us in the future, the sooner the better!

Aren't name changes costly and a waste of money? Not in our case. We are lucky in that we have very little stationary or merchandise with our name printed on it, so we estimate the whole change will cost us less than £1000. We will continue to use any leaflets or fliers that are already printed before printing new ones, and changes to our website etc. can be done inhouse.

We also believe that our new name will work much better for local fundraising events and campaigns, so in the long run will have a very positive impact on our ability to raise money to fund our work. This is one of the key reasons for change . . . Watch this space!



Tips and Tricks in the Kitchen



Being able to prepare meals is an important part of living independently, sight loss shouldn't prevent you cooking dinner and if you enjoy cooking there's no reason why you should stop. We've collected some of your handy hints to help make navigating your kitchen and cooking meals a little bit easier, and of course to help you stay safe.



- 1 Use long arm gloves to remove things from the oven and brightly coloured oven shelf protectors can be useful too.
- 2 Use stick on LED lights in dark cupboards or under cupboards in workspaces to give extra lighting.
- 3 Organise your cupboards so that items of the same type are in the same place, for example soup on one shelf and tea on another. You could use boxes and trays to separate different items.
- 4 Using elastic bands around items can help identify them particularly if packaging is similar.
- 5 Use a pizza cutter when slicing sandwiches instead of a knife.

- 6 A Liquid Level Indicator will let you know when your cup is full, it has two metal prongs that hook over the side of the mug and when the liquid you are pouring reaches the top and touches the prongs, it will beep, so you know to stop pouring.



- 7 When making drinks consider the colour of your cups so they contrast with the liquid and you could use a tray to create a contrast with the cup. There are also machines that will boil and dispense one cupful of water at a time.
- 8 Consider colour and contrast for things such as mugs on work surfaces, plates on tablecloths to help highlight different items. You can also colour contrast food that you are chopping, for example use a white chopping board for a red pepper.
- 9 Pressing a metal comb into an onion will avoid any cuts whilst chopping. You can cut between the teeth of the comb and avoid the knife slipping out.
- 10 When slicing vegetables angle the knife away from the body and fingers slicing diagonally rather than directly down. Holding items with a fork can also keep your fingers away from the knife when cutting. Using scissors for certain chopping tasks can be helpful.
- 11 Use tactile, audible and talking equipment such as weighing scales, timers and measuring spoons.
- 12 Using raised brightly coloured dots on kitchen equipment can help with setting temperature dials on ovens, setting timings on microwaves and marking programme settings on washing machines.



Thank you to everyone so far who has given us your top tips. If you would like more information on any of these tips, or help purchasing equipment mentioned here, our Sight Loss Advisors are always happy to help. If you have any hints or tips which you think could help others, please send them in and we will happily collect and share them. Email: handyhints@visionwestofengland.org.uk

Where you can find us (by appointment only!)

1. **Bedminster**

2. **Bath**

3. **Keynsham**

4. **Bradley Stoke**

5. **Yate**

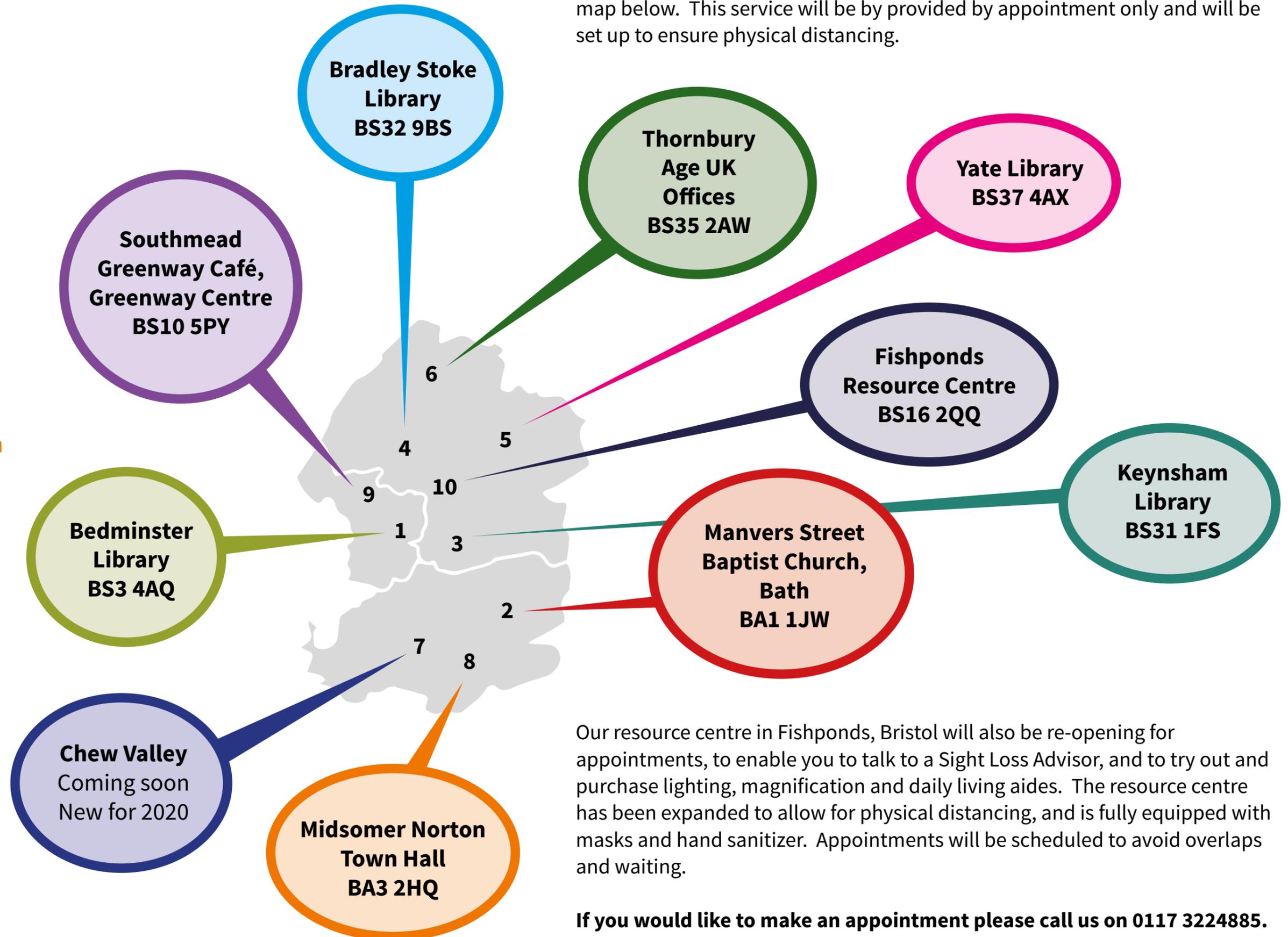
6. **Thornbury**

7. **Chew Valley**

8. **Midsomer Norton**

9. **Southmead**

10. **Fishponds**



As lockdown restrictions ease, our team of Community Sight Loss Advisors will start to offer face-to-face support in locations across the region, to help with needs which cannot be addressed over the phone, including demonstration and training on technology and daily living aids. Locations are detailed on the map below. This service will be provided by appointment only and will be set up to ensure physical distancing.

Our resource centre in Fishponds, Bristol will also be re-opening for appointments, to enable you to talk to a Sight Loss Advisor, and to try out and purchase lighting, magnification and daily living aids. The resource centre has been expanded to allow for physical distancing, and is fully equipped with masks and hand sanitizer. Appointments will be scheduled to avoid overlaps and waiting.

If you would like to make an appointment please call us on 0117 3224885.

Technology in your Pocket



So many of us these days have a smart phone or tablet sat on the table next to us or in our pockets, but are we all making the most of them? These devices all have features built in and Apps that are downloadable, that can not only make them easier to see but can assist with accessing documents and reading printed mail. Just a simple thing like changing the settings on your phone to high contrast can make a big difference. Here are a few examples of the simple things you can do to make your phone or tablet work for you:

Text-to-speech features Nearly all phones and tablets now have built-in text to speech readers – on Apple devices this is called ‘Voice Over’, and on Android devices it is called ‘Talk Back’. These features enable everything on the screen to be read out loud to you. The first time you enable this feature on your phone or tablet you will be offered a tutorial to help you understand how it works and what it can do.

Larger Text If the standard print is too small, why not make it bigger? Within the display or accessibility options on your device, there is an option to increase the standard font size. For some people, this simple fix can be enough to make the phone screen readable again.

Voice Assistants All smart devices now have built in Voice Assistants. These assistants can do anything from making a call to giving you directions. The best thing about the voice assistant is that you do not even need to pick up your device to use it, you can talk at your phone and ask it to send a text message or call a number in your contacts.

A great example of this is OK Google, a piece of software that allows you to control your device using your voice, simply by saying ‘OK Google...what is the weather going to be like today?’

Magnification or Zoom

Every smart device has the ability to magnify what appears on screen to a suitable size using your finger tips. So, if any of the print is too small to read, you can make it bigger with a few taps on the screen.

Text to Speech Apps Did you know you could have your letters read to you using your smart device? There are many Apps which use your device’s camera to take a photo of printed documents and then read it back to you in a clear synthetic voice. These Apps can be downloaded free, and are brilliant for anyone who struggles to read print.

Document Transcription If you have an electronic document that you are struggling to read, the website RoboBraille can instantly transcribe the document into a format that is suitable to for you.

If you’d like guidance on how to adjust your phone or device settings or need some help using a new application, our team of Sight Loss Advisors are ready to help, **call 0117 322 4885**.



Listen to daily news



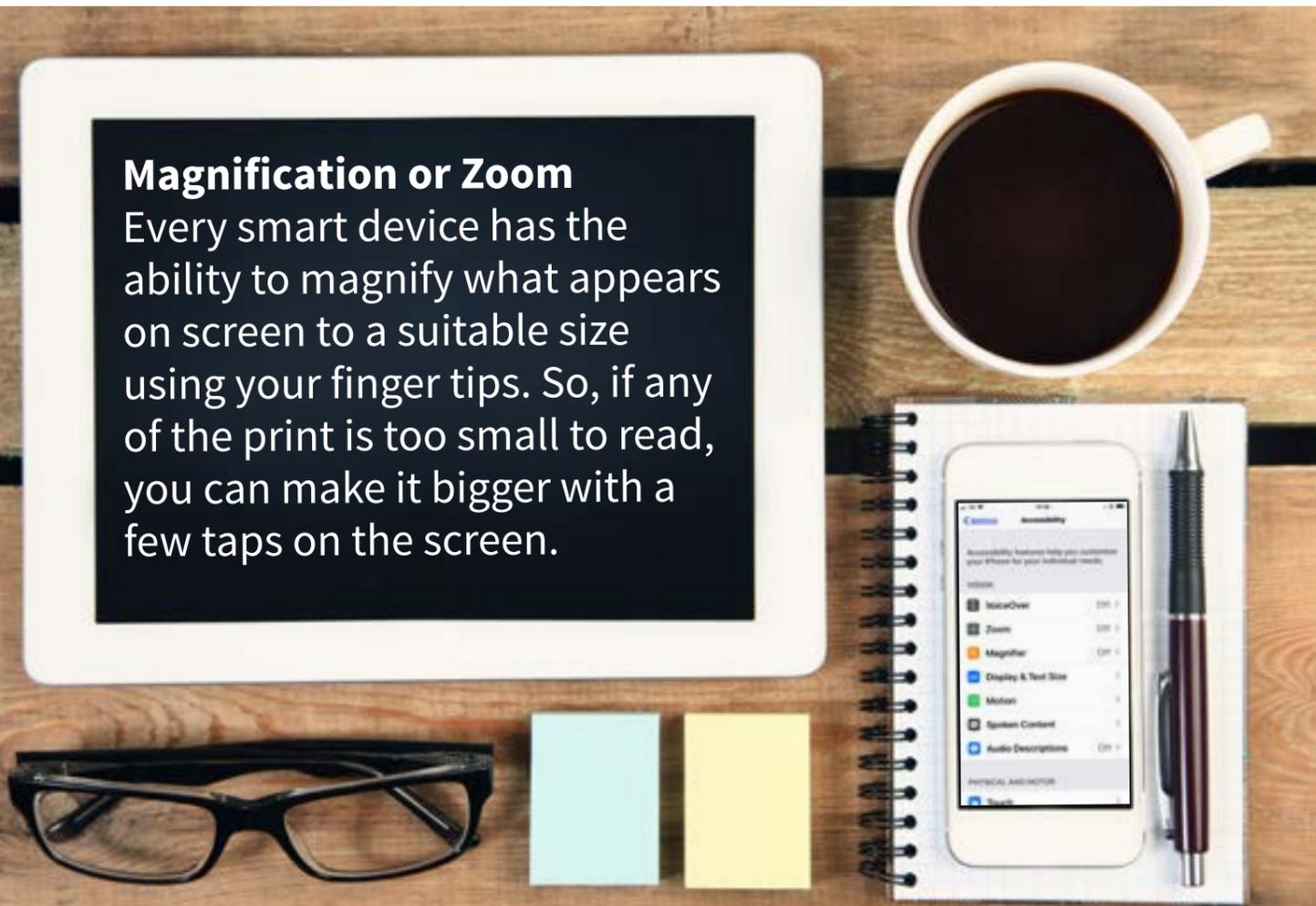
Copy & paste any text



Scan a book



Upload a document



Meet the Team

Sarah is our Family Services Sight Loss Advisor and runs Zoom Club, our club for visually impaired children, young people and their families. Sarah joined the team in 2015 and has been integral in building up our children and young people's services.

How would you describe your job? The aim of Zoom Club is to ensure that local visually impaired children have the same access to fun and educational activities as their sighted friends and siblings. For me, this means organising a range of suitable events and activities to cater for all abilities, ages and interests, including a mix of sport and cultural events. We do get up to some mischief, it wouldn't be the same if we didn't!

What does a typical day look like for you?

My work on our Zoom Club activities begins long before the event itself. I gather feedback and ideas from families, and then find the right service providers who can make activities safe and fun such as climbing, cooking or theatre. I make sure the venues are accessible so this might involve arranging exclusive access to a site, having extra staff to hand and ensuring things like touch tours and audio description are available. My day can vary wildly, from answering the office phones to climbing huge scramble nets in treetops, balancing on beams and choosing which thrilling slide to get back down. Not for the faint hearted!



What are your biggest professional challenges? Ensuring that activities are safe and well prepared for the children taking part. Preparations include conducting on-site risk assessments, arranging the right number of supervision staff, ensuring additional safety measures are put in place, people have the correct training, and first aid kits are available. (Even with all this, my colleague still managed to injure herself falling off a haybale at one event!)

What gives you the most job satisfaction? I love my job, and I feel very privileged to have worked with some of our families over a few years now – I have seen children become so much more confident as they grow. This is by far the most important and rewarding part of my job.

Volunteering: At the heart of what we do

Your local sight loss charity needs you!

My name is Alice and I run Vision West of England's audio library from the Wiltshire Sight offices in Devizes. I first started volunteering here in early 2002 after seeing an article in the local paper looking for talking newspaper readers. I had just left a stressful job which involved a lot of travel and had taken the decision to be self-employed; reducing my hours gave me the opportunity to take on different challenges. I lived just around the corner from the Wiltshire Sight office, so I knocked on the door and soon after I joined the team of newspaper readers. Before long I was invited to record the audio newsletters, which I still do today.



About six years ago I took over the challenge of running of the audio library, with a catalogue of some 600 titles. The library is free to join and now has over 1250 titles; books are sent out by post, with no charge to the client.

I love the opportunity the library gives me to chat with clients who call or drop in; some prefer to choose their titles themselves, some tell me what types of books or authors they enjoy, others are happy to go with "Alice's potluck selection"! I feel very blessed to have good eyesight, but don't ever take it for granted. I enjoy my books and love that my volunteering role enables other people to continue to enjoy them too. I now enjoy listening to books too and often have one playing in the background in the office if I'm not disturbing anyone.

When I'm not at Wiltshire Sight, I'm generally to be found in court where I'm a local magistrate, or in my garden, or of course being the taxi service for a teenage daughter! My daughter sings in a local church choir and I seem to have been co-opted as mistress of the choir robes, and am always involved in organising the school's carol concerts. Life is always busy, which is why I enjoy my escape into the audio library.

Over the years I have built up great relationships with so many clients – volunteering has been so rewarding for me, I'm so glad I knocked on that door all those years ago! *Thank you!*

A better future for visually impaired patients

- the legacy left by Rosemarie Phillips

In April we received the very sad news that Rosemarie Phillips, a much loved and passionate campaigner for improvements in the care and support of visually and hearing-impaired people in Swindon had passed away.



Rosemarie was a well-respected community advocate for people with sensory loss and was instrumental in improving the care provided to those with sight and hearing loss at the Great Western Hospital in Swindon. Since becoming a governor of the hospital in 2013 she influenced many improvements in the care provided for those with eyesight and hearing loss, including the installation of hearing loops, clearer signage, and improved patient information.

Most recently, Rosemarie organised and generously funded the introduction of bedside patient information boards across the hospital. The information boards feature symbols that act as an easy and discreet way for staff to identify patients with sight or hearing difficulties, those at risk of falling, or with dementia. The boards ensure hospital staff and volunteers can make the appropriate adjustments to the care and support they provide and have improved the experience of a hospital stay for hundreds of patients.

A spokesperson for Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust said: "As a passionate advocate for people with sensory loss, Rosemarie's role as Governor saw her influence many improvements for those with poor eyesight



and hearing. Rosemarie's fellow Governors, members of the Trust Board and all those who worked closely with her are deeply saddened by her passing."

Alongside her role as governor, Rosemarie was also a well-known personality in the hospital's eye clinic where she worked as a volunteer providing valuable support to those visiting the clinic. Rosemarie's role was to talk to people visiting the clinic, to provide reassurance and support, and to let them know about support available from organisations such as Wiltshire Sight who could help them adjust to living with sight loss.



Rosemarie was also a member of the 'Let's Hear' group in Swindon, working to improve the availability of hearing loops across the town; a member of her surgery's Patient Participation Group and Swindon Borough Council's Equality Advisory Forum.

Rosemarie will be sadly missed by many of us, but her legacy will continue to be felt by so many people with sensory loss across the region who will benefit from her tireless efforts. Thank you Rosemarie!



Robert was a HGV driver, living with his family in Norfolk, when he had a stroke and lost his sight. Upon losing his sight, Robert's family situation broke down and he moved out, relocating to Wiltshire and sleeping on a friend's sofa.



“However much it may feel like it is, it isn't the end of the world . . . it will open up a whole new world to you.”

Robert felt extremely overwhelmed and daunted when he lost his sight, as he had to relearn how to do so much, in a new town with a very small support network. Robert was put in touch with Alan, one of our Community Sight Loss Advisers, and Alan took the time to listen and understand Robert's situation, providing support in all areas, from helping with new housing, to involving him in local sight loss events, including the monthly Community Tea.

Robert enjoys spending time in the local library and has discovered that he can still read large print books with the right lighting. He has also signed up to our audio library, receiving several books through his door each month. Robert looks forward to opportunities to meet with other people living with sight loss, such as at our regular drop ins and social events.

When we asked Robert what advice he'd give to someone who has recently started their sight loss journey, he said, “However much it may feel like it is, it isn't the end of the world. Approach it positively and take on the challenge and it will open up a whole new world to you.”

Two sisters who sadly passed away within a year of each other have between them left legacy gifts which will cover the full costs of two full-time Sight Loss Advisors for a whole year.

Barbara and Marjorie* both struggled with sight loss in their later years, but with support from us, they were able to continue to live at home and maintain their independence. They also attended a regular social group, meeting up with others in the area also living with sight loss.



And they thanked us in the most incredible way.

Barbara left a percentage of her estate, a 'residuary legacy', in her will. This type of legacy keeps its value in line with inflation. Her sister Marjorie, on the other hand, left a specific amount, called a 'pecuniary legacy'. The gifts they left between them will make a huge difference, funding two Sight Loss Advisors who can provide one-to-one support to over 800 people in the course of a year.

A legacy gift is a unique and very meaningful type of gift. It costs nothing in your lifetime, but from the moment you pledge, you know you are making a difference to others in the future. There are several ways to frame a legacy gift, so you can be sure your family and loved ones will be taken care of in any eventuality before your donation is committed.

If you would like to support us by leaving a gift in your will, please do contact us. Legacies need not be large to make a difference - we are extremely grateful for each and every gift, large or small.

Through their kind actions, Barbara and Marjorie really have left a true lasting legacy, which will have a real impact for so many people in the local community. We only wish we could have expressed our incredible gratitude to them in person.

**Names have been changed.*

If you or someone you know is losing their sight or living with sight loss, we can help.



Call us on 0117 322 4885 for Bristol, Bath and South Gloucestershire

Email - info@visionwestofengland.org.uk

Call us on 01380 723682 for Wiltshire and Swindon

Email - info@wiltshiresight.org

www.visionwestofengland.org.uk

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