



WCB Roundup

Autumn 2010.

Children and VI services



Radio UCAN

Also in this issue:
WCB Looks to its Future
VI Regional Roadshows
UCAN Productions



WCB Considers its Future

Wales Council for the Blind is the umbrella agency for the visual impairment sector in Wales tasked with supporting and developing the visual impairment agenda, and representing the many local societies and clubs operating in Wales.

WCB is currently considering how best to deliver this role in the future. This discussion has been driven by WCB's belief that there will be increased financial pressure within the sector due to the financial climate, whilst demand to support the visual impairment sector grows as public services are withdrawn.

WCB wants to ensure that the resources it deploys are used to best effect, reducing duplication within the sector, and maximising the practical support it can give to the many local clubs and societies within Wales.

Three outline business cases have been received by the Board of Trustees and accepted for consideration by WCB's membership. The cases are:

- The continuation of WCB as an independent charity. This case represents WCB continuing as a Welsh membership agency, continuing to support work across social care, the third sector, and national and local government.
- WCB forming a new Welsh agency along with Sight Support from South East Wales, and Vision Support in North Wales. The new Welsh organisation will continue to provide an umbrella role to the sector with enhanced capacity and geographical coverage.
- The winding up of WCB and the RNIB Group continuing to provide an umbrella role to the sector with enhanced capacity and geographical coverage.

WCB's membership will vote on the cases on the 8th December 2010. The favoured option will subsequently be developed to a full

business case for presentation to stakeholders during 2011.

Peter Curtis, Chair of WCB says:

“The time is right for WCB to take a critical look at how it can best support the work of the eyecare sector. Each of the options under consideration offer advantages to Wales, despite being very different in nature. By letting the membership choose how to proceed, WCB will get a clear mandate as to how best to support Welsh agencies.”

Phil Stevens, Director for Wales Council for the Blind adds:

“WCB is keen to establish how best to provide the essential services that enable and empower blind and partially sighted people achieve independence and equality, even if achieving this means discussing our own strategic future. We’re pleased that the deciding body will be our members, to whom outcomes will be the important issue.”

The three cases are at www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/wcb_future_main.php. If you wish to discuss this further, please contact Phil Stevens on 02920 473 954 or email phil@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Wales Council for the Blind AGM

WCB’S AGM will be held in the Oriel Suite of the National Museum Cardiff in Cathays Park on Wednesday 8 December 2010 at 1 pm. The vote to decide which of the three outline business cases should be developed to a full business case will take place at this meeting.

WCB Members should have received all AGM papers by now. Contact Bec on 029 20473954 if you have any queries.

If attendees wish to take the opportunity to visit the museum before the meeting, their website <http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/cardiff/access/> has details of facilities for visually impaired visitors.

Launch of Eccentric Viewing survey

The Macular Disease Society has partnered with Wales Council for the Blind (WCB) to launch a survey to assess the extent of Eccentric Viewing (EV) technique offered by the statutory, health, social care, voluntary and community sector across Wales.

The overall aim of the joint initiative is to map the current provision of eccentric viewing services to improve signposting for those with macular disease and other forms of central vision loss. The results will also be used to inform future policy and campaigning work in Wales and the rest of the UK.

Cleon Hutton, EV Project Development Worker for the Macular Disease Society, said: "WCB is a fantastic partner in working to support the survey to gather data from across Wales. The results from this survey will help to better signpost those for whom the EV technique might work, and we hope to use the results with partners in Wales to share best EV practice, support development, policy and campaigning work."

WCB will be distributing the survey to its contacts across Wales and will also help to provide statistical analysis of the results.

Phil Stevens, Director of Wales Council for the Blind, said: "This is a great opportunity to work with the Macular Disease Society to find out the landscape of Eccentric Viewing provision in Wales and demonstrates the positive role WCB plays in Wales."

To take part in this survey you can complete it online at www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/evsurvey.php. To find out more about the initiative, contact WCB on 029 20 473 954 or email consultations@wcb-ccd.org.uk. Alternatively, contact Cleon Hutton at the Macular Disease Society, 01264 350551 or email cleon@maculardisease.org.

Children with a Visual Impairment: what services are available?

Each edition of Roundup focuses on a theme: in this quarter we're highlighting a range of services that address the needs of children with a visual impairment. This is not an exhaustive overview, but it gives a flavour of what work is going on out there.

RNIB Cymru's Sophie Dymont gives us a detailed look at what work she is doing to improve the level of service available to young people in those critical 'transition' stages: between school and college, college and employment.

Lisa Petrie, from Guide Dogs in Scotland, outlines her work as Young People's Advisor and announces the innovative Buddy Dog scheme, that improves a child's wellbeing and prepares him or her for future guide dog ownership and the responsibilities it brings.

We are also told about the work of the National Blind Children's Society, UCAN Productions and the Gwent Visual Impairment Service.

Finally, there's a note on the Disability Living Allowance and how it relates to children and a list of other organisations and contacts.

The next edition of Roundup shall focus on Information Technology and other forms of technological assistance, so please contact richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk (or telephone Richard on 029 20 473954) if you know of any products, initiatives, training schemes and so on or would like to write something about the service you or your organisation offers. The provisional deadline is January 31st 2011.

RNIB Cymru's Transitions Officer

Sophie Dymant has been working for RNIB Cymru since January this year. She tells us about her job as Transitions Officer and some of the great projects she is involved in.

Transitions Officer is an exciting role to develop and one which is brand new within RNIB Cymru. It involves working with young people between the ages of 14 and 25 to help ensure that they experience a smooth transition from school to Further Education, Higher Education and/or employment. There are various ways in which I can support young people through this process but in this article I will focus on a few examples.

Seeking employment

RNIB Cymru employs a number of individuals who have sight problems through the DWP's Future Jobs Funds scheme. The scheme gives people the opportunity to enter the workplace and develop their skills and experience. These placements last for a six month period and RNIB Cymru is dedicated to ensuring that employees are equipped with the necessary skills to have the best chance of employment success when they leave us. The Transitions Officer plays an important role in working with these employees to provide advice, guidance and support in terms of job searching and application processes throughout their time with us. I work closely with individuals to locate employment opportunities and support individuals through the application process and help them prepare for interviews. I have been working with one individual who is 23 years old and has been working with Insight Radio. He has gained a wealth of experience throughout his time with us and I have been assisting him in locating and applying for jobs as his contract draws to a close. Before coming to RNIB, Danny had applied for numerous jobs but had not been called for an interview in over two years. Working closely with the Transitions Officer Danny has developed

his application and interview skills and has applied for two jobs. Danny was delighted to hear last week that the first application he submitted had been successful and he has been called for an interview.

Support at school

Another part of my work involves visiting individuals at school to offer advice and guidance through their transition to college or university. I recently visited a Year 12 pupil in North Wales who is considering an undergraduate degree in economics at Manchester University. He was keen to know about the support he would be entitled to so we discussed the Disabled Students Allowance and the different forms of support this will enable him to access.

Young people in Wales have responded well to this one-to-one advice and guidance service. People often know very little about the support that's available beyond school and it's important that they are made aware of things like Disabled Students Allowance or the Access To Work Scheme so that they have the confidence to believe that they can achieve their aspirations and be supported in doing so.

Support Towards Employment Programme (STEP)

RNIB Cymru research ascertained that there are 140 people who have declared a visual impairment studying at Higher Education Institutions throughout Wales. A partnership with University of Wales Newport will enable us to pilot work with undergraduates at universities in South Wales. Part of the project will involve setting up a 'buddy' system to ensure that blind and partially sighted students have a network of peer support when they arrive at university. A four day residential programme is planned for July 2011 during which participants will be able to develop confidence, plan for their futures and practice job search, application and interview skills.

Transitions Guide

Over the summer I am producing a Transitions Guide for young people which will briefly outline the support and services available to assist them through their journey from school to FE, HE and on to employment. This guide aims to empower young people by providing the information they need to make their own informed choices about their future. It will for the first time equip them with one concise, accessible document containing all the relevant information, such as Disabled Students Allowance and the Access to Work Scheme, and will signpost them to agencies to approach for support such as Disability Employment Advisors.

The Transitions Guide will be available from 10th November 2010. To order a copy or for more information on any of the work outlined above please contact Sophie Dymont on 02920 449 571 or email sophie.dymont@rnib.org.uk



Sophie's Top Tips for Graduates

1. Form a disclosure strategy where you plan how you tell an employer about your sight loss. This enables you to positively discuss your sight loss on your own terms and retain a focus on your own skills and abilities.
2. Many employers are unaware of the Access To Work scheme. Discuss this with your potential employer. This will deal with any worries they may have about additional costs, raise their awareness about the help that is available and allow them to focus on your skills and abilities.
3. Find out what the interview process involves in advance. It may include a written test so you'll need to request that this is made available in your preferred format.

Guide Dogs.

Lisa Petrie tells us about the work she's involved in at Guide Dogs.

As Guide Dog's National Young People's Adviser my role is to facilitate good practice in developing and co-ordinating the educational needs of staff in preparing them to work with Children and Young People as part of the Young People's Guide Dog Service. I also develop and maintain productive links with organisations both to provide information and to work in collaboration to enable events such as experience days and Guide Dog Experience Camps to take place. I am the main point of contact within Guide Dogs for the Young People's Guide Dog Service and can be contacted via e-mail at lisa.petrie@guidedogs.org.uk or on 07990540165.

Guide dogs for young people.

The Guide Dogs organisation recently removed the lower age limit for having a guide dog to allow under-16s to become guide dog users. The decision to give someone a dog is now based entirely on our assessment of the individual's needs and lifestyle, rather than the arbitrary measure of age.

One thing that is different for the younger owners is the agreement. All guide dog owners sign an agreement committing them to the care and responsibility for the dog. However, for the under-16s, the parents or guardians are asked to sign the agreement instead, and the child signs the "Young Person's Commitment". This is not only to do with legal concerns, but highlights the need for a partnership between the child and their family.

Before a person can train with a guide dog, we assess their mobility needs and suitability for a dog. Young people go through immense changes physically and emotionally, and their lives can change as

they leave home, start work and go to college. If we feel someone is not ready for a dog we may be able to offer alternative support, or signpost them to other services to help develop their independence skills.

Working with children and young people requires additional skills and knowledge, so Guide Dogs has developed a specialised training programme to address this. The comprehensive three day course covers issues including safeguarding, supporting transition and working with other agencies and professionals. We also look at communication, and the different ways that young people learn compared to adults. This is followed by a five day placement and a supervision period. We have trained 120 people in the last 18 months, to get our team ready for applications from young people.

Guide Dogs must ensure that a dog arrives at a time in a person's life when they are able to cope with the commitment. We need to equip young people with all the skills they need to work with and care for the dog.

Taking a dog into school for the first time demands the support of many professionals including head teachers, SENCOs and mobility specialists. We provide all the information and advice needed to prepare the school staff, students and premises to welcome a dog.

We find that schools are open to the idea of guide dogs for their blind and partially sighted students, and a recent statement from the DCSF supported our work with young people.

A Rehabilitation Officer is involved in the initial assessments to check if a young person is suitable for working with a guide dog: this involves getting to know more about the person, including their family, their abilities, lifestyle and needs.

Most referrals come in from parents and mobility instructors. The young person's mobility instructor plays an important role and they

are present during much of the assessment process, when the young person's mobility around the home is observed. We are working with instructors to help them understand who is an appropriate candidate to be referred for a guide dog. Working with the family is very important. Of course the young person will need to understand the long term responsibility they are taking on, but we need to ensure everyone in the family understands the full implications of a dog joining the household, possibly for the first time.

Before the guide dog arrives, the young person undergoes preparatory training: this means learning to follow a dog, and how to communicate with it effectively through foot positions, arm signals and voice commands and intonation. Harness work is also done, so that the individual can get used to doing without the tactile clues she would get from a long cane. The intention is that the young person will have all the skills in place by the end of our training, so that he or she is ready to make the transition to being a guide dog owner when one becomes available.

The dog chosen for a young person would need to be adaptable, sensitive and calm. They have to deal with many changes in location and the busy nature of a teenage lifestyle. They need to cope with being looked after by different people during the day if they can't remain in a classroom for any reason. They also have to be calm enough to remain quiet for long periods to avoid disrupting classes.

Once a dog has been found, it has to be prepared for life at school, and the young person is trained in working with the animal, getting a chance to bond with it. Other preparation may include planning routes within the school and working with teachers and the young person's closest school friends so that, for example, they understand the dog's needs and the importance of not playing with it when it is working.

Experience from the three year pilot study suggests that dog ownership had a positive effect not only on mobility but on many

other areas of life. Health, confidence and quality of life all showed improvements.

For more information on guide dogs for young people contact your local Guide Dogs for the Blind District Team, details on www.guidedogs.org.uk/adviceandservices/local-district-teams/ or telephone Guide Dogs on 0845 3727499.

Pilot of New Buddy Dogs Service



Another new development from Guide Dogs which is aimed at enhancing the lives of blind and partially sighted young people is the provision of 'buddy dogs'. A buddy dog will increase a young person's confidence and wellbeing and possibly prepare them for future guide dog ownership.

The buddy dog is placed with the family and the young person is given the opportunity to take on some responsibility for it, like feeding or grooming. This will also help us to assess the young person's ability to care for and accept a dog into their home, the suitability of a dog to their lifestyle and whether a guide dog would be a suitable mobility aid for them in the future. The aim will be a long-term placement, with the parents taking ultimate responsibility for the dog. The dogs used will be guide dogs that have been withdrawn / retired early from training or working – but have the right skills and temperament to make great buddy dogs.

Guide Dogs will retain legal ownership of the dog, maintaining regular contact and providing financial and ongoing practical support from technical staff as required.

The organisation is looking for families with a blind or partially sighted young person under the age of 16 who could benefit from this service. Only a limited number of people will be involved in the initial pilot; however all applications will be placed on a waiting list and assessed accordingly.

If you know a young person who might be suitable, contact Sian Caine-Southward or Graham Kensett at Guide Dogs by email on sian.caine-southward@guidedogs.org.uk or graham.kensett@guidedogs.org.uk .



The National Blind Children's Society.

The National Blind Children's Society Family Support and Information Service offers immediate and ongoing emotional and specialist practical support and information from first diagnosis of a visual impairment. It is one of five key services whereby, through its Team Around the Family, the charity can help the estimated 24,000 children and young people in the UK who are blind or partially sighted.



The NBCS Family Support Service, founded in 2004, is widely acknowledged to be the first point of referral for families of children diagnosed with a visual impairment. NBCS will then refer the child, as appropriate, to the local authority sensory support services and other relevant VI support organisations. Many national and regional children's and specialist eye hospitals advise parents to contact NBCS for information and support.

An increasing – and encouraging – point of contact for NBCS is through the families themselves, particularly extended family members such as grandparents. They are given information and emotional support as well as practical help and confidential advice. NBCS family support officers can take on a keyworker role, to be a single point of contact with the various medical, social and educational professionals the family might be dealing with throughout their child's development.

On diagnosis there may be a sense of loss, anger, confusion or frustration and parents and carers often feel isolated and without crucial information – feeling that there is no one who really understands their situation. NBCS employs a team of experienced family support officers, educational advocates including qualified teachers of the visually impaired (QTVI), an accredited information

and communications technology assessor, a counsellor and other recognised and highly respected specialists. So far over 3,500 families are being helped with ongoing emotional support, advice, information and practical help at and around the time of diagnosis and at crucial stages in the child's life.

How the NBCS can help.

Starting with a clear and up-to-date explanation of the child's eye condition, NBCS provides such general and specialised information as: a listening service; early years support; contact points; toy and equipment manufacturers; guidance on how to answer concerns of friends and family; DLA and benefits guidelines; who's who; accessing statutory services; parent-friendly information sheets; Direction Point directory; and 'Tom's Visit to the Eye Hospital' booklet for children.



Families may also be referred to any of the other four of NBCS five key services. These are: educational advocacy; access technology; recreational activities; and CustomEyes books. These books are large-print fact and popular fiction titles and school revision guides tailor-made to the specific needs of individual children.

For more information about the work of the
National Blind Children's Society go to

www.nbcs.org.uk

or call

01278 764 764

Building confidence and skills: UCAN

A highlight at the launch of the Wales Vision Strategy earlier this year was a performance by two young musical people. It was a real pleasure to hear Eleanor and Joseph sing and play to a large audience in the Neuadd, the reception area of the National Assembly Senedd building. Everyone present was moved and entertained by the brother-and-sister-duo's blend of music and witty banter.

Eleanor and Joseph are members of UCAN Productions. UCAN was set up by actor Bernard Latham and his wife Jane Latham to enable access to the arts for children with a visual impairment. The company boasts an impressive record of achievement including performing to over 17,000 people in 90 public performances.

Their performances are the culmination of weeks of dedicated work. The Arts Council, WAG and Welsh European Office initiative 'Reaching The Heights' project, for example, provides drama and confidence-building workshops as part of the lead-up to a live theatre performance. These sessions develop the performance skills of young people and give them the confidence to tread the boards in front of big audiences.

They have other projects up their sleeves: UCAN Talk is a social networking web site supported by Cardiff City Council for visually impaired young people, combating isolation and building friendships. Radio UCAN (see cover), funded by the Big Lottery People and Places Fund, has presented programmes developed by UCAN members while sound specialist, Alex Rees, helped young people from Cardiff, Neath, Swansea and Port Talbot hone their music for broadcast on Radio UCAN via Insight Radio, which is part of RNIB Cymru.

To find out more about what UCAN are up to, go to www.ucanproductions.org or get in touch with Jane Latham on jane@ucanproductions.org or telephone 07812 051815.

The Gwent Visual Impairment Service

Gwent Visual Impairment Service (GVIS) is a regional specialist education service, hosted by Caerphilly Borough Council and supported by Blaenau Gwent Borough Council, Monmouthshire County Council, Newport City Council and Torfaen Borough Council.

GVIS aims to support the successful inclusion of children and young people with visual impairment (VI) or multi-sensory impairment (MSI) in their local communities, nurseries, mainstream and special schools. Pre-school intervention programmes are developed for the under-threes and can be delivered either in group settings held at the GVIS Centre or within the home. These encourage the engagement of parents in activities that promote early developmental skills.

GVIS aims to ensure that choice is offered to children, young people and parents/carers. Expertise and resources are available to schools to enable full inclusive access to the whole curriculum. Partnership working is established to support and meet all needs, with the aim of ensuring that all children and young people achieve their optimum potential within their local schools alongside their siblings and friends. There is a commitment to the child/young persons' needs, which is regarded as the primary focus of our work.

The team includes people with a range of relevant skills, such as teachers and learning assistants for VI/MSI, an outreach worker, mobility officers, a family support worker and an independent living skills coordinator.

GVIS is able to provide a range of services in relation to individual needs. We work in partnership with children and young people with VI/MSI, parents, schools, education/career services and medical agencies to meet individual needs as identified through the assessment process.

We welcome enquiries and referrals from anyone involved with

children and young people who may have concerns regarding a possible visual or dual sensory loss. A full assessment of functional visual or dual sensory loss is needed before the individual needs of the child or young person can be fully understood and met in practical terms of curriculum access.

Consultation with parents, education and medical professionals may be sought following the assessment to ascertain if there are any additional concerns or needs. After assessment, consultation and evaluation, we can then determine if support is needed for the child or young person.

Support varies according to the individual needs of each child or young person. It may include fulltime classroom support for a child or young person with very little/no sight who uses Braille to access the curriculum.

Weekly support sessions may be provided for other children and young people. Advice and guidance to schools is provided on a termly or annual basis.

**“This trail blazing centre is a wonderful example of truly collaborative working and is a real credit to the strength of the relationship between Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen and Caerphilly LEAs.”
- Jane Davidson, Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, WAG, December**

Some children and young people benefit from the emotional support provided by our family support worker.

We aim to provide a comprehensive package of support, tailored to meet the different needs of each child or young person, wherever they live and whatever the circumstances.

GVIS is located at Brecon House, Llantarnam Park, Cwmbran, within a suite of offices. An assessment and family Centre is attached and this consists of specialist teaching and plays rooms used by children, young people and their parents/carers for various activities.

How to find us...

Gwent Visual/Multi Sensory Impairment Centre

Address: Brecon House, William Brown Close, Llantarnam Business Park, Llantarnam, Cwmbran, Torfaen, NP44 3AB.

Telephone: 01633 645420

Fax: 01633 645499

E-mail: gwentvisualimpairmentservice@caerphilly.gov.uk

Disability Living Allowance for Children

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is the main benefit for disabled people and is intended to cover the additional costs of being disabled. It is not means-tested or taxable, and can also lead to an increase in other benefits, so it can make a real difference to the income of the families of disabled children.

Contact a Family, the charity for the families of disabled children, has produced a 'Guide to claiming DLA for Children' which explains the process of claiming DLA for the first time, helps parents and carers to work out whether they may be entitled to the higher level payment, and also gives information on challenging a decision. You can order or download the Guide from Contact a Family's website, www.cafamily.org.uk (go to the 'Publications' section, browse by subject, then choose 'Financial'). You can also order a copy by ringing the helpline on 0808 808 3555.

The free helpline is open from 9.30 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday and provides information and advice on a wide range of issues affecting the parents of disabled children, such as education, benefits and tax credits, local sources of support and medical information.

Useful Contacts

In this section, we have gathered together some contacts which may be useful for the parents of visually impaired children.

Children's Commissioner for Wales

The Children's Commissioner will stand up for all children and young people and in particular the most vulnerable in our society. They are particularly concerned about children and young people who are looked-after, children and young people with disabilities, gypsy traveller children and young people and those caught up in the youth justice system. Website: www.childcom.org.uk

Disabled Children Matter Wales.

The DCMW campaign is led by 10 organisations working with disabled children and young people. Website: www.dcmw.org.uk

Look (The National Federation of Families with Visually Impaired Children).

'Look' can help parents of VI children by providing practical advice, emotional support and information. Regional and national events give parents the chance to relax with their children, and talk to other families in the same situation. Membership is free. For more information, telephone 0121 428 5038 or email jane@look-uk.org. Website: www.look-uk.org.

Victa (Visually Impaired Children Taking Action)

VICTA provides support and information to parents, carers, VI young people and organisations. They make grants to individuals, groups

and research projects, for example, to purchase equipment or pay for participation in a vacation scheme.

For more information, see the website, www.victa.org.uk, send an email to admin@victa.org.uk, or telephone 01908 240831.

RNIB

RNIB's website contains a wealth of information for parents of VI children, including a discussion forum, tips from other parents (for example on feeding children and teaching them about everyday routines), and a guide to eye clinic appointments. The site is at www.rnib.org.uk – follow the link 'Parent' under 'Who are you?' on the left-hand side. The RNIB Shop, accessible from the same site, has a range of toys and games suitable for VI children.

There is a single helpline number for any query to RNIB: 0303 123 9999.

RNIB National Library Service

The RNIB National Library Service offers books for children aged over four years (for younger children, see item on ClearVision below). They also provide booklists to help children or parents find suitable titles. Young readers (up to 12 years) receive a book token on their birthday. To join the Library, telephone 0303 123 9999 or email library@rnib.org.uk.

ClearVision Library

ClearVision is a UK postal lending library of mainstream children's books with added braille. The books all have braille (or Moon), print and pictures, making them suitable for visually-impaired and sighted children and adults to share. There are over 13,000 books in the collection, including tactile board books, simple stories for young

children and stimulating books for newly fluent readers.

Membership is free for families of visually impaired children. For further information, see www.clearvisionproject.org, telephone 020 8789 9575 or email info@clearvisionproject.org.

Eye Care Wales

The Welsh Assembly Government's Eye Care Wales website has a section for children and young people, with information about free low vision assessments for children, and the services available to visually impaired children in Wales.

Website: www.eyecarewales.nhs.uk.

The Children's Low Vision Advocate for Wales, Nathan Davies, gives information and advice to parents of children with sight problems. He can be contacted on 029 2044 9552, or by sending an email to nathan.davies@rnib.org.uk.

SNAP Cymru

SNAP Cymru is a charity that offers information and support to families of children and young people who have special educational needs, including disability. They help families to make informed decisions about the education of disabled children, for example by providing confidential advice, access to a range of support services, and help with form-filling and understanding professional reports. Its services are free to families.

Their helpline number is 0845 120 3730, and the website www.snapcymru.org contains further information and a range of factsheets.

Forthcoming events

Visual Impairment Regional Roadshows

During early Spring 2011, WCB will be working jointly with partners across Wales to run six Roadshows across Wales.

The main purpose of the Roadshows will be to engage with local visually impaired people to:

- record their experiences of the services they have received in order to assist with future service planning
- promote services available to people with a visual impairment
- deliver short training and support interventions
- encourage better connectivity with local societies within each region

We would welcome the support and assistance of local Visual Impairment Societies across Wales to be part of these events and to promote them to their members. We expect that they will provide an opportunity to learn about new developments within the sector and also to help us to better understand the needs of visually impaired people in Wales.

Further information will be available shortly.

If you would like information sent to you directly, please contact: Rebecca Phillips (Wales Council for the Blind) on 02920 473954

News Items

WCB supports free membership of Nystagmus Network for people in Wales

As part of our strategy to promote good eye health, Wales Council for the Blind is offering to pay for people in Wales to join the Nystagmus Network (NN) for a limited period - until the end of December 2010.

Membership of the organisation will be of interest to people with the condition, and professionals. For more information about NN, visit their website www.nystagmusnet.org, or see the article in the Spring 2010 edition of Roundup. To get more information about the free membership offer, contact John Sanders on 0845 634 2630 or email him at john.sanders@nystagmusnet.org.

Home Heat Helpline



As winter approaches, many people worry about the cost of heating. The Home Heat Helpline is a free, not-for-profit phone line set up to help British energy customers who are struggling to pay their bills.

The Helpline can provide you with straightforward, clear information on benefits and grants and give you advice on making your home more energy efficient.

It works alongside dozens of welfare organizations as well as all six major energy suppliers, so knows what services and options there are for people who need help — from grants for free home insulation and winter rebates to flexible payment plans and benefit entitlement checks. The following services are available from every energy supplier:

- The Priority Service Register — a special service for elderly or disabled people and those living with long-term health conditions that includes bills in easy-to-read larger text or in Braille, as well as security passwords and a free annual gas safety check.
- Grants for free home insulation
- Reduced or 'social' tariffs

For more information, telephone 0800 33 66 99. The line is open from 9 am to 8 pm, Monday to Friday, and 10 am to 2 pm on Saturdays. The website, www.homeheathelpline.org.uk, also contains a wealth of information and advice on the subject.

Letter from Santa for Visually Impaired Children

Do you know a blind or partially sighted child who would like to write to Santa and receive a reply in their preferred format? This year, RNIB will be helping Santa to reply to these letters. Last year, 256 children wrote in, and received replies with the help of RNIB – the preferred format was audio CD.

Letters (in any format) should be sent to Santa Claus, RNIB, PO Box 173, Peterborough, PE2 6WS by Monday 6 December, or emailed to santa@rnib.org.uk by 17 December. They must contain the child's name and address, preferred language (English or Welsh) and the format required: uncontracted Braille, contracted braille, large print (specify font size), audio tape, or audio CD.

Help WCB when you do your Christmas shopping on-line

If you shop on the internet, you can raise funds for Wales Council for the Blind at no cost to yourself by using Easyfundraising.

You can choose from over 2,000 of the UK's best known retailers, such as Amazon, M&S, Argos and John Lewis, and when you use

Easyfundraising's link, a donation of up to 15% of the purchase price is donated to WCB. It doesn't cost you an extra penny, and as many retailers offer a discount to on-line shoppers, you may even save money!

To find out more information about how the system works, register and start shopping, go to <http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/wcftb/>.

Finding Your Feet – Practical solutions to help you come to terms with sight loss

Finding Your Feet is a specialised programme run by Action for Blind People for anyone who is finding it difficult to come to terms with losing their sight, allowing those involved to explore, discuss and better understand the impact of sight loss. The programme takes place over three days at one of Action's hotels in the Lake District or Devon.

The programme offers a range of practical and emotional peer support designed to help people deal with the specific challenges that might occur with sight loss. Information and support are provided through a number of different interactive discussion groups and specialised workshops. All are delivered by expert facilitators who have either personal experience or a professional understanding of sight loss.

Family members, partners and friends who are also affected by these issues are also welcome to attend. The cost of the three day weekend is £110 per person. This includes two night accommodation, meals and the programme sessions, but does not include the cost of travel to and from the hotel.

Events are scheduled for the following dates:

27 - 29 November 2010 Windermere Manor Hotel
22 - 24 January 2011 Cliffden Hotel
12 - 14 March 2011 Windermere Manor Hotel.

For more information, telephone Heather Billington, the Finding Your Feet - First Steps Coordinator on 0151 677 2163 or write to her at

Action for Blind People, The Gateway Centre, 71 London Road, Liverpool, L3 8HY.

You can also find detailed information and application forms at the AFBP website, www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk.

South Wales

SWALEC Stadium Hosts Dual-Sensory Exhibition.

On Thursday 14th October, Swalec Stadium hosted the very best in local and national support for people with sight, hearing and dual sensory loss in Wales. For the first time this groundbreaking event, kindly supported by SWALEC, brought all areas of sensory loss together in Wales.

The event brought together a wide range of local and national organisations providing products, services and information for people with sight, hearing or dual sensory loss. The exhibition had 45 stalls ranging from technology companies providing the latest equipment in assistive technology, charities supporting people with dual sensory loss to organisations such as the police and the fire service. Experienced and helpful staff were at hand throughout the day to give advice and information.

Nearly 200 people attended this event ranging from service users, their family and friends, carers and also professionals working with people with dual sensory loss.

As well as the many stalls that people could visit there were talks throughout the day on different eye conditions, services available for people with dual sensory loss and important topics such as doorstep crime.

The event also gave people an opportunity to try leisure activities for people with dual sensory loss such as blind cricket, bowling and football.

However, the highlight of the event was a cookery demonstration by celebrity chef, Stephen Gomes, from Moksh Restaurant in Cardiff Bay who demonstrated cooking whilst wearing simulation spectacles (These are spectacles which reproduce the effects of various eye diseases such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy etc). Chef Gomes said "it certainly was difficult cooking with sim specs and gave me an insight to how a visually impaired person feels, but with careful training and rehabilitation one can still continue cooking and enjoy good home cooked dishes".

The event was organized by Sight Support and Chief Executive Sharon Beckett said "we are very grateful to Swalec Stadium for allowing us to use their facilities at no cost to host this important event".

For further information about the event and the charity, please contact: Nirmala Pisavadia – Development Manager, Sight Support, on 01495 763650 or nirmala@sightsupport.org.uk

West Wales

Pembrokeshire Blind Society

Pembrokeshire Blind Society is a charity for registered blind / severely sight impaired persons in the county of Pembrokeshire only. With no charge or membership fee the society currently has 300 members both adults and children. The ethos of the charity is:

'...to promote the material, mental and spiritual welfare of persons within the county of Pembrokeshire who are suffering from blindness, total or registered.'

Two part time project workers and up to twenty sighted volunteers coordinate and assist the Society with a great number of services:

- Introductory pack of information letters for new members;
- Newsletter and Monthly magazine on disc;
- Eight VI groups in Haverfordwest, Fishguard, Crymych, St. Davids, Milford Haven, Tenby, Narbeth and Pembroke;
- Gifts twice a year to all those registered blind;
- General advice and support;
- Support and discussion groups;
- Social events including excursions, Christmas lunches, art groups, drama groups, ladies' group, men's group, guest speakers, culture, hobby and interests;
- Sports clubs and support for social activity groups;
- Mini-bus transport collecting and escorting members to meetings and events;
- One-off grants for equipment up to a max of £500;
- Services of a Rehabilitation officer providing specialist assistance;
- Information in Large Print, Disc and some Braille.

For further information contact the Visual Impairment Team at Pembrokeshire County Council, via the Council's Contact Centre at County Hall, Haverfordwest, SA61 1TP, telephone 01437 764551.

North Wales

Official Opening of Vision Support's North Wales Regional Office

Over 80 people joined the Vision Support staff at Gwersyllt Community Resource Centre on the 8th October.

Guests included Assembly Members Lesley Griffiths and Mark Isherwood and also Wrexham MP Ian Lucas. The day started with guests arriving at 11 o'clock, followed by speeches at 11.30.



Services Co-ordinator Nicky Stevens started the proceedings off by welcoming everyone to the opening. Nicky explained her role as Services Co-ordinator was to support the volunteers and social clubs in Wrexham and Flintshire as well as manage the Rehabilitation Assistants

and IT Training Service in North Wales. However, Nicky said her main responsibility was to lead on community relations in North Wales and that Vision Support was working hard to broaden existing relationships with other organisations as well as build new ones.

Speaking to the guests, Miriam Wright said it was a pleasure to see so many familiar faces as well as so many new ones. Many of the guests invited were from other voluntary organisations throughout Wrexham and Flintshire as well as representatives from Social Services departments.

Miriam paid tribute to the fantastic venue that has been created as Gwersyllt Community Resource Centre but also said it is clearly not just the bricks and mortar that are making the venue such a success. The staff working in the centre have been extremely helpful and the other organisations in the business units are already supporting our fundraising ideas. Miriam talked about the importance of embedding ourselves in the community and how this will continue to strengthen over the coming months.

Phil Stevens, Chief Executive of Wales Council for the Blind made the journey up from South Wales especially to attend the opening. Phil said that whilst the new Government wanted to create the 'Big Society', this is something that many charities such as Vision Support have been doing for some time. Phil said he was always impressed by the commitment of the staff and volunteers at Vision Support to drive forward new ventures such as this new regional office whilst maintaining such high standards in their existing services.

Carl Pierce, chairman of Vision Support's board of trustees spoke to the packed audience about the services that Vision Support provides as well as giving a brief overview of sight loss and the problems it can cause. Carl said balancing the books to enable the charity to deliver such vital services is a challenge, but one we are always working hard on.

The final speech was from Keith Brown, IT Trainer in North Wales. Keith gave an excellent overview of the IT Training Service and also gave a couple of examples of just how learning to use a computer could change someone's life.

With the speeches over, everyone made their way through to enjoy a lovely lunch and plenty of networking.

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Please send articles and news items to the above address and mark the envelope "Roundup". You may also send to richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk

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