

WCB Roundup

The newsletter of Wales Council for the Blind

Winter 2011/12



Photo by Lensmonkey Copyright RNIB Cymru 2011

Disabled People take to the streets...

A thousand people marched in Cardiff last month to protest against Government cuts to disability benefits and services.

If you want to add your voice to the protest, there's still time.
Visit <http://thehardesthit.wordpress.com> to find out how to get involved.

Celebrating the Sector at 2011 Eyecare Conference

On a beautiful sunny September day, professionals from across the sight loss sector descended on the School of Optometry in Cardiff for the 2011 Eyecare Conference. The conference, put on by WCB and supported by the Welsh Assembly Government, brings together professionals working across health, social care, and the third sector to talk about the key issues and developments in the eye care sector.

We were thrilled to have the conference opened by the Minister of Health and Social Services, Leslie Griffiths AM, who gave an excellent summary of the huge amounts of work taking place in Wales. Services like the Wales Low Vision Service lead the world, and the audience was pleased to hear of the commitment from the Welsh Government to improving the eye health of people living in Wales.

This year, the conference was delighted to welcome Professor Peter Coffey from the London Project to Cure Blindness, who gave a fascinating update on the development of stem cell research. His presentation explained



how many eye conditions could one day be treatable by injecting the eye with stem cells grown in laboratories. Whilst there's still much to do, his presentation explained how much progress is being made in this fascinating area of work.

Next up was a whistle stop tour of services available in Wales by Dick Roberts, the ophthalmologic adviser to the Welsh Government. His overview of how things have progressed was informative, giving the audience a good overview of services.

Sharon Beckett of Sight Support and Tom Margrain of Cardiff University spoke to the audience about depression in people with a visual impairment; Professor James Morgan spoke about the benefits of moving to an electronic patient record that could revolutionise the way that patients access their information; and Mike George from Optometry Wales informed the audience of the services available from optometrists across Wales.

The Wales Annual Eyecare Conference always offers a chance for people working in the eye care field to come together and catch up with each other. This year the event was delighted to have Richard Leaman, the Chief Executive of the Guide Dogs Association, launch the Depression Study into Visual Impairment over lunch, giving the attendees a chance to see first hand the work taking place to identify and reduce depression in newly diagnosed visually impaired people.

The day was a huge success, and WCB would like to formally thank the Welsh Government for its support of the event.

If you'd like to attend next year's conference, which is free to attend, please contact WCB on 02920 473 954, or email bec@wcb-ccd.org.uk.

Visit http://www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/conference/conference_2011_files.php to download some of the presentations.

Each Roundup focuses on a theme, and in this edition the theme is emotional support, wellbeing and counselling for visually impaired people. Due to the volume of articles, this has been bound as a supplement and shall be distributed separately.

The theme for the next edition will look at collaborative working and the role of local VI societies. Please contact richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk (or telephone Richard on 029 2047 3954) if you would like to provide an article on this topic - or on visual impairment in general. The provisional deadline is 1st February 2012.

Wales Council for the Blind: Looking to the future

As the team here at Wales Council for the Blind are working hard to bring the latest issue of Roundup to you, so too has the final work been taking place to prepare for our historic Annual General Meeting.

This year, Wales Council for the Blind are asking its members to approve a merger with Sight Support, the sight loss charity based in Wales, to form a brand new, pan-Wales agency. It's a huge occasion. We hope that our members will approve the decision to create a new agency that has ambitious aims to help promote the many local clubs and societies working hard in Wales.

Listening to Wales

Over the last 18 months, WCB has been listening to the views of people with a sight loss, and our members, as to how the new agency should be run, and what people thought of how things are currently going. It's been brilliant to hear directly the voice of people with a sight loss through the Roadshows that took place over the summer, giving us a real insight into the challenges faced by people with a sight loss, and how the new agency can make a real difference.

It's been a humbling experience for WCB to hear about the many services that are being provided to people across Wales by the network of local clubs, charities and societies. There's a huge amount of work taking place. Even in areas where there are currently few services, there is a real ambition to develop and grow new services.

And that's why WCB is asking members to support the merger. More and more clubs and societies are asking Wales Council for the Blind for assistance, advice and support. By merging with Sight Support, we'll have more resources to meet this demand, and with a new network of staff based across Wales rather than just in Cardiff, we hope that this support will help local societies grow across Wales.

WCB and Sight Support share the belief that there is a strong role for the many independent clubs, societies and charities in Wales. From the start of discussions around creating a new agency, WCB and Sight Support wanted to ensure that the new agency will be able to provide real, practical help to societies who wish to remain independent and effective.

Getting people connected to their local society

During the series of Roadshows that took place across Wales, we heard many stories of blind and partially sighted people not being aware of services available locally. They were often surprised to hear that many services were available from local clubs and societies. One key intention behind the merger is to allow us to increase the promotion of the many services available in Wales, ensuring that people who lose their sight can get connected to services quickly.

Meeting the needs of local societies

WCB undertook a questionnaire at the beginning of the year that asked what were the challenges being faced by local societies across Wales. The biggest challenges reported were getting new members to join, attracting volunteers, and seeking funding for new projects. To address these, the new agency will have a network of officers tasked with working with local societies to help attract new members, support them to attract, train and keep volunteers, and assist in seeking funding. Rather than trying to do this from Cardiff as WCB has previously done, we intend to have these officers based across Wales, delivering the work where it's needed. These services will be available to existing WCB members, and we hope that it will allow clubs and societies to thrive.

National Campaigning

Over the last year, many local societies and clubs have reported that things are harder and harder for their members. People with sight loss

face growing cuts to services, changes to welfare benefits, growing unemployment, and cuts to vital services. We believe that Wales Council for the Blind and Sight Support have complementary skills that work well together. Sight Support has a long history of service delivery that can help support and grow the sector, whilst WCB is strong on national and strategic issues. We believe that by merging we can create a unique Welsh voice that we aim to use loudly and clearly.

What will the new agency look like?

The aim of the merger is to achieve more with the resources that we have. We plan to have more services operating across Wales, whilst reducing how much is spent on internal costs such as administration.

The new agency will have four key teams: a service provision team handling the contracted work we do; one team dedicated to helping local clubs and societies; one team campaigning for positive policy by the Welsh Government, the NHS and other such agencies; and a fourth team providing support and assistance to the agency.

What next?

WCB has asked its members to vote to support the merger at its AGM taking place on the 9th December 2011. If the majority of voters agree to the proposal, work to launch the new agency will begin immediately. We hope to launch the new agency in April 2012.

We hope that our members will share our vision of a new, independent agency in Wales, and look forward to hearing your views at our Annual General Meeting.

Wales Council for the Blind's 2011 Annual General Meeting is taking place from 2pm to 4pm on Friday, 9th December, 2011 at the Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff.

To book a place, please contact us on 02920 473 954. or email bec@wcb-ccd.org.uk

HAVE YOUR SAY!

Consultation on CSSIW Engagement

The Care & Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW) has launched a consultation to identify how it can increase its engagement with service users, carers and anyone with an interest in social care and social services.

To download the consultation document, go to CSSIW's website, <http://wales.gov.uk/cssiwsuite/newcssiw/publications/ourfindings/allwales/2011/engage/>. To order a printed copy in a range of formats, telephone 0300 062 8800 or send an email to cssiw@wales.gsi.gov.uk. Responses must be received by 5 January 2012.

Seeing it my way

'Seeing it my way' is a new initiative developed so that every person with sight loss across the UK gets the support they need. It sets out a range of outcomes that visually impaired people have identified as important to them, such as the need for emotional support, mobility and independence. To ensure that the right outcomes have been identified, visually impaired people are being asked to complete a survey which asks for their views. You can access the survey by going to the UK Vision Strategy website, <http://www.vision2020uk.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy/>.

If you do not have internet access, telephone Stephanie Village at the National Blind Children's Society on 01278 764 771 for a copy of the document or to give feedback by phone. Responses must be received by Friday 16 December.

Welsh Assembly Government Consultations

Details of WAG consultations can be found on their website, <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations>, which is regularly updated. The following ones may be of particular interest to visually impaired people:

- Local participation strategies for ages 0 -25 (closes 23 January 2012).
- Equality Act 2010: Duty on schools and Local Authorities to provide auxiliary aids and services for disabled children (closes 3 February 2012).

NEWS AND INFORMATION

Don't miss out on Attendance Allowance

If you are over 65 and have a disability such as blindness, you may be entitled to claim Attendance Allowance - a tax-free benefit worth up to £73.60 per week. However, research suggests that many people are unaware of this benefit, which is not means-tested, and is intended to help to pay for the help which disabled people need to live independent lives.

To qualify for Attendance Allowance, your disability must be severe enough for you to need help with activities such as washing, dressing and eating, or supervision to avoid putting yourself or others in substantial risk. You can get the benefit even if you are not receiving the care that you need.

For full details, visit the UK Government's Directgov website, www.direct.gov.uk or ring the Benefit Enquiry Line on 0800 243 355. Organisations such as Citizen's Advice can provide assistance with completing the claim form.

Sight Support Team win MDS Award for Excellence

In the last edition of Roundup we reported that Lissa Gomer, Eye Clinic Liaison Officer and her team from Sight Support had been nominated for an award from the Macular Disease Society for their work at the Royal Gwent Hospital's Eye Clinic. Congratulations to the team, who won the 'Support Service Award' for the outstanding care which they have provided to people with macular degeneration.

New Publications from RADAR

Disability charity RADAR has recently issued two publications which may be of interest to visually impaired people. 'Doing Careers Differently' looks at how people with a disability or long term health condition can have a successful career, and considers topics such as choosing a career, rethinking your career if you have recently been diagnosed with a disability, and career development. It can be downloaded by going to the website, www.radar.org.uk, then looking under 'Publications'.

'Children First' is an updated version of RADAR's guide for parents, carers and professionals working with disabled children, and it offers up to date information and useful contacts, which will extend reader's knowledge and awareness of some of the obstacles faced by disabled children and their families, whilst providing useful advice which can help these to be overcome. The price including delivery within the UK is £9.99 and it can be ordered from the website.

For those without internet access, the telephone number for RADAR is 020 7250 3222.

New Young Persons' Group in Rhondda Cynon Taf

Interlink, the Community Voluntary Organisation, has awarded a grant of £800 to a new young persons' visually impaired group based in RCT. The group, set up in August 2011 by Rebecca Jones, Cardiff Vales and Valleys Locality Development Manager for Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr, is aimed at young people aged 16 - 25. The purpose of this group is to provide an environment where young people can feel comfortable to express themselves.

They can talk about their sight loss with peers, participate in activities and not be afraid of having to be the only one needing extra help or guidance, and fundamentally to develop in confidence. As well as shopping and cinema trips the group is also keen to engage in the more adventurous activities such as rock climbing and rafting. The group is run monthly. For further information please contact Rebecca Jones on 01443 486731 ext. 4160.

Torfaen VI Gym & Social Club

If you live in Torfaen and have sight problems, why not join the Torfaen VI Gym and Social Club? The aims of the club are to help members keep fit and healthy, try new activities and meet other people.

The club meets weekly at Torfaen Leisure Centre for use of the gym, and for an opportunity to chat and socialise. Members also go on a range of social events such as meals, shopping trips and days out. If you are interested, contact Sight Support on 01495 763650.

Macular Disease Society (MDS) celebrates 25th anniversary with art exhibition

The year 2012 marks the 25th anniversary of the MDS. To celebrate this, the Society has announced that it will be holding an art exhibition, and is inviting members, supporters and the general public to submit works of art. It is not necessary for submitting artists to have macular disease, but the work must help to educate and inform the viewer about the condition. In addition to being shown in the exhibition, art works will be shown in a virtual on-line gallery, and will also be considered for inclusion in the MDS's 2013 calendar.

Submissions can be in any medium including painting, drawing, etching, ceramics, sculpture and textiles, but photography and video are not eligible. To submit a work, the first stage is to send a digital photograph of the work to the MDS at PO Box 1870, Andover, SP10 9AD or email it to art@macularisease.org. The submission must be accompanied by a submission form which can be downloaded from the website www.macularisease.org. The MDS telephone number is 0845 241 2041.

Free Field Studies Weekend Residentials for 10-16 year olds.

Rhyd-y-Creuau, the Drapers Field Centre, Betws-y-Coed.
17-19 Feb; 27-29 July; 17-19 August.

This is a great chance to find new friends, try new experiences (such as rock climbing, pond dipping and shelter building), experience a break from home and have fun whilst enjoying time outdoors.

For further information please contact Lesley Inganni, Action for Blind People, telephone: 01642 233 439 or 07703 099 354 or email lesley.inganni@actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Annual Minority Ethnic Communities Health Fair

Monday 27 February 2012

This annual event, organized by Sight Support and other organizations, aims to promote healthy living styles for ethnic minority individuals and communities living in South Wales. It will provide an opportunity to bridge the gap between health providers and individuals thereby improving communication and understanding of communities' health needs and service provision.

There will be particular emphasis on health conditions which are predominant in minority ethnic communities such as diabetes and diabetic retinopathy, heart problems, strokes, glaucoma, sickle cell, mental health, etc.

This event will provide an opportunity for community members to have a Health MOT including blood pressure, cholesterol checks and once again by popular demand we shall have the Diabetes Mobile Unit. Over 500 people attended the 2011 event.

Entry to the event is free to the public and there will refreshments and lunch available. It runs from 9.15 am to 3 pm on 27 February at City Hall, Cathays Park Cardiff.

Any organisation wishing to book a stall at the event should contact Ziad Khan on 029 2047 3954 for a booking form. Booking must be received by 3 February.

Welsh Braille New Testament

The Welsh Braille New Testament is available. A limited number of copies of this ambitious undertaking are available. If you know of any organisations or groups who would be interested in retaining a copy please contact WCB on 029 20 473954 and we shall refer you to a contact.

Pin Kings rule at UK sports competition.

Two visually impaired Bowlers struck gold last weekend in Swindon. Keith Williams from Blackwood, who attends the Blackwood Blind Club and Paul Matthews, his partner from the Rhondda, last weekend competed in the UK British Blind Sports Pairs Competition held in Swindon. To qualify for the final they had to play 8 matches in their group. These matches took place in Bowlplex Nantgarw over a period of about 16 weeks. The top 3 from each of the 4 groups went through to the Final on 19th November in Swindon. A total of 12 teams played



11 games on that day, after which there was a little time for relaxing before the Awards dinner in the evening. The event was sponsored by Primary Club who attended the dinner along with the Mayor of Swindon. It was a surprise to Keith and Paul when it was

announced that Pin King Strikers had come 1st. They were presented with their trophies and a cup by the Mayor of Swindon. So they are now ranked 1st in the UK. They were the only team from Wales, and it was a great achievement. Keith was also in the team that won the 4s Championship in 2007, although it was the first time Paul had been in a UK Championship. Keith and Paul bowl regularly in Bowlplex Nantgarw, and it just shows what can be achieved by visually impaired people.

CVV teams up with Gavin & Stacey's Melanie Walters in new audio project

Cardiff, Vales and Valleys is working with acclaimed actress Melanie Walters on a new project to help improve the well-being and happiness of people with sight loss through audio downloads. Melanie, who played Stacey's mother Gwen in TV comedy hit *Gavin & Stacey*, is also an experienced Pilates Instructor and director of her own company Practical Pilates. She has now launched Club Self Help with Personal Development and stress management specialist David Briscombe, to help the mind as well as the body.

Club Self Help provides 'mind audio' downloads from its website, of the kind familiar to people who have used Paul McKenna tapes to help give up smoking and lose weight. CVV is now working with Melanie and David to develop probably the world's first mind audios specifically for people with sight loss. These will help overcome such problems as anxiety, lack of confidence and fear of going out.

Carys Henry, head of user engagement at CVV said 'we were extremely excited when Melanie approached us to work in partnership to develop downloads tailored to the needs of our members. We will be monitoring their effectiveness in what we believe is an important new development for people with sight loss in Wales and beyond.'

Piloting of the project began with CVV in Swansea where members met Melanie and David and listened to a mind audio narrated by Melanie herself. For more information on Club Self Help visit www.clubselfhelp.com

The photo (top right) shows David Briscombe far left, with Melanie Walters and CVV members in Swansea.

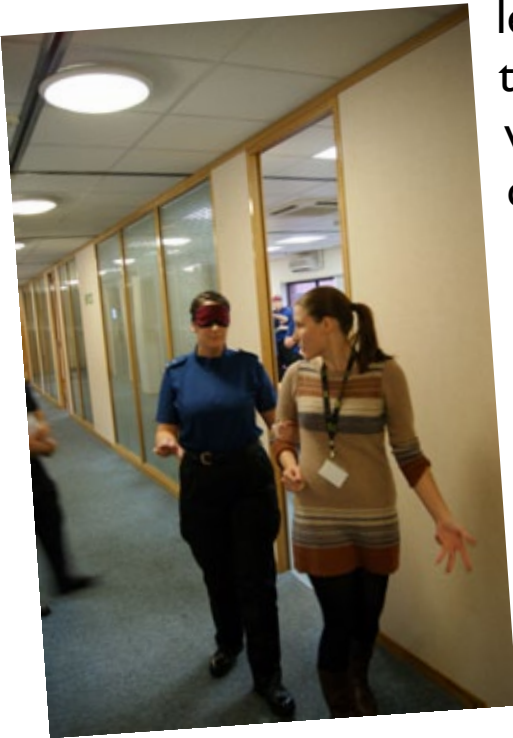


WCB Training News

Carl Sargeant AM, Minister for Local Government and Communities, joined the Chief Inspector of Gwent Police, Carmel Napier, at a WCB VI Awareness Training Course in November. The course, aimed at getting newly appointed PCSOs up to speed in understanding the needs of vision impaired people in their communities, formed part of their intensive six week training programme. The Minister was on hand to observe the session as Gwent Police is the first force in Wales to be training the new Police Community Support Officers under a Welsh Government funded scheme.

Heather Powell, Community Cohesion Coordinator for Gwent Police said 'the training prepares them for a role within our Neighbourhood Policing Teams. PCSOs are members of support staff who work to complement and support police officers, providing a visible and accessible uniformed presence to improve the quality of life in the community and offer greater public reassurance'.

The half-day workshop followed a morning session focusing on Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people delivered by Sarah Lawrence of Deaf Friendly Business Solutions. After lunch, Nathan Foy from Guide Dogs



led the group of twenty officers through the issues and practicalities surrounding visual impairment such as guiding skills, communication skills and accessible information. Heather said 'The WCB input was part of a Communication Awareness day, where PCSOs receive an input on working with people with different communication needs, including visually impaired people and Deaf and Hard of Hearing people'.

Five hundred new PCSOs are being recruited throughout Wales and WCB aims to deliver training to each of these. Gwent

Police has signed up for their remaining four sessions and inquiries have come in from Dyfed Powys. Nicola Lewis, WCB's Training Development Officer, said 'these sessions reinforce our belief that getting v.i. awareness to frontline services has real benefits for everyone, not only blind and partially sighted people'.

Roundup is published quarterly by Wales Council for the Blind. It is also available in audio CD format. Further copies can be requested from Richard Bowers, Wales Council for the Blind, 2nd Floor, Hallinans House, 22 Newport Road, Cardiff CF24 0TD. Telephone 029 2047 3954

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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