

WCB Roundup

The newsletter of Wales Council for the Blind

Spring 2012



Collaboration in action: members of Rhondda Cynon Taff Council urban planning & regeneration team, ROVI from RCT and Andrea Gordon, Guide Dogs' Engagement Manager, looking at proposals for regeneration in Aberdare Town centre.

In this issue: Collaborative Working

Moving Ahead: An update on the creation of the new charity for sight loss

Back in December 2011, the membership of Wales Council for the Blind (WCB) voted to merge with Sight Support to create a new organisation. In this article, Phil Stevens, Director of WCB talks about the work and how it's progressing.

How is the work going?

From the start of the process, the main intention for the merger was very simple. We wanted to do more for people with a sight loss in Wales. As you can imagine, the amount of work that needs to be done is huge, and we're really excited about the support for the new agency we're getting across Wales.

As of February, Sight Support and WCB have set up a working group looking at how the new agency should work.

Anything you can share with us at the moment?

Well, we still have quite a bit of work to do, but there are a few things that we can talk about that we're really excited about. The first is that we intend to reinforce the amount of support we can give to clubs and societies. We intend to appoint two full time workers that will be able to work on behalf of societies on issues such as finding funding, setting up new services, or helping to find and support members. We'll be talking to local societies in the near future to see how they would best use such posts.

Another thing we're very excited about is the intention to greatly increase the links of the new agency to the whole of Wales. One thing we heard from consulting was that people wanted to have their voices heard across Wales. The new charity will give West and North Wales much more opportunity to connect to the new organisation.

Will any existing services end when the new organisation launches?

Quite the opposite! We're planning a huge increase in the capacity for the new charity to support clubs and societies. There'll be new posts appointed to really develop the support. We want to make sure that local societies can continue to grow and play a central part in providing services to local visually impaired people.

We're currently members of WCB. Will we still be able to be members of the new organisation?

Very much so. The new organisation intends to have a much broader membership, allowing individuals to join as well as clubs and societies. We're forming a new membership policy that we think will offer the chance to raise the voice of people with a visual impairment. We still are working from the basis of being an umbrella agency.

Will you still be campaigning for people with a sight loss?

Yes. There are many things that we'd like to see changed, and we have from the start planned for the new organisation to have more opportunity to campaign. We're worried about the changes to welfare benefits, the increasing perception that people with sight loss are 'scroungers', and the need for people to be able to access timely, quality services. Currently, we intend to have four times our current capacity to campaign for services.

Will the new agency work with every club and society?

The new agency aims to use the skills of the broadest possible number of partners. We think that we'll achieve this by working with everyone, regardless of size. From the start, we felt that grass roots clubs and societies create better local delivery solutions, and that building

a supportive environment for local clubs and societies to grow is essential to devolve responsibility away from doing 'to' visually impaired people, but 'with' visually impaired people.

Local societies report falling numbers of aging members, or may be facing difficulty in attracting funding for new projects. Often they wish to run new services but cannot recruit volunteers. The new agency will be able to offer far more support to them in the future.

How will the new organisation provide services?

Sight Support provides a number of services in the South East of Wales, and it's the intention to carry on providing these services. We believe that the best providers for services in other areas are the local societies and clubs. We want to see everyone in Wales being able to access a basic raft of services, and want to talk to local clubs and societies about how these can be provided if this is not already being done.

How can we get involved in the work to create the new organisation?

We'd be delighted to hear your views and thoughts on what you think we should be doing. You can write, call us on 02920 473 954, or email me on phil@wcb-ccd.org.uk. If you'd like us to come and visit your group, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Lastly, the big question – when's the new organisation going to launch?

Well, there's a lot of work to do, but we're working hard to complete all the work by the Spring of 2012. WCB will be writing to all our members nearer the time to give more information.

COLLABORATIVE WORKING

Each issue of Roundup focuses on a theme, and in this edition, that theme is Collaborative Working – the ways that local societies can increase their effectiveness by partnership working with other organisations. In the current financial climate, such an approach has obvious potential benefits.

We start with an article by Paul Swann of Disability Wales, who describes how DW has a long-standing commitment to working with other organisations to improve the lives of disabled people, and how this is even more important in the face of the UK Government's welfare reforms. The Guide Dogs organisation recognises this approach as fundamental to the achievement of its objectives, and their Collaboration Development Manager, Caoilfhionn Lee, describes some of the many projects that Guide Dogs has developed with partner organisations. We then look at how joint working has contributed to the success of the Annual Minority Ethnic Health Fair, describe how the QWEST project uses the complementary strengths of RNIB and Sight Support, and outline some of the initiatives which VI Merthyr have taken in their area.

Although collaborative working offers benefits, it is also important that organisations are aware of potential risks before making any commitments, and we conclude with a summary of Wales Council for Voluntary Action's guidance on Partnership Working, which includes a useful checklist.

From Partnership to Co-Production

Paul Swann, Policy Officer (Independent Living), Disability Wales

As the national umbrella organisation of disabled people's organisations, Disability Wales - now celebrating its 40th anniversary - has a longstanding commitment to developing collaborative partnerships which support its aim of achieving rights, equality and Independent Living for all disabled people.

For instance, DW chaired the Coalition on Charging Cymru - a consortium of national disability organisations - which, after 10 years of campaigning and lobbying, achieved a commitment from the Welsh Government to cap home care charges to a maximum of £50 per week. This goes some way towards ending this additional tax on disability and to realising the goal of free home care.

DW was also instrumental in setting up the Disability Hate Crime Action Group, an informal partnership of organisations including Safer Wales, the Equality & Human Rights Commission and Police, which shares information aimed at increasing the reporting of, and convictions for, disability harassment.

In partnership with the Bevan Foundation, Oxfam Cymru and several other organisations, DW helped establish Cuts Watch Cymru, which is monitoring the impact of benefit and public service cuts in Wales. DW is also working in partnership with a wide range of organisations to challenge the coalition government's welfare reforms.

Disability Wales is currently working collaboratively with the Welsh Government to produce a Framework for Action on Independent Living. The goal of the Framework is to eliminate the wide range of social, environmental, institutional and attitudinal barriers that disable people. In effect, the project aims to implement the Social Model of Disability, which the Welsh Government adopted in 2002.

With disabled people's rights being eroded by the UK government's welfare reforms and the tabloid media's stigmatisation of benefit recipients, the need for disability organisations to collaborate effectively has never been greater. The abolition of Disability Living Allowance and the Independent Living Fund - benefits designed to compensate for the additional costs of disability which a previous generation of campaigners fought long and hard for - is a body blow to disabled people's capacity for Independent Living.

The partnership - or "social contract" - between government and the people is being re-written in the interest of reducing the national debt, subsidising bank and big business profits and maximising executive bonuses. Fortunately, the Welsh Government have recognised the potentially devastating consequences of this policy direction for the Welsh people and is committed to mitigating the impact as far as possible.

The Framework for Action on Independent Living is being developed within this challenging economic and political context. The Welsh Government recognise that delivery of Independent Living, and of one of its key components, Citizen Directed Support, requires whole system transformation. This might seem unlikely in the current economic conditions, but there's opportunity in every crisis and a growing belief that if tired ways of thinking and oppressive bureaucratic structures can be dismantled, then together we can achieve the seemingly impossible.

Partnership Working

How might we go about this?

DW's Independent Living NOW! campaign, which secured the Welsh Government's commitment to developing the Framework for Action on Independent Living, was built on informal partnership working with national disability organisations and local disabled people's

organisations.

One of the partnerships took the form of a round table meeting of national disability organisations. This group reviewed DW's draft Manifesto for Independent Living and suggested some amendments to accommodate different organisations' priorities. This improved the document considerably and enabled us to present a strong case to the Welsh Government for a more strategic approach to Independent Living.

The Welsh Government's Independent Living Project is located within the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Division and reports to the Minister for Finance and Leader of the House, Jane Hutt AM, whose portfolio includes equalities [1].

One of the Independent Living Project's first steps was to re-convene the round table meeting of national disability organisations to confirm that the priorities identified in the Manifesto remained valid. This led to six working groups being set up to identify ways to take the project forward.

These groups are wider partnerships of professionals and citizens who have expertise and experience in the priority areas of information, advice and advocacy, transport, housing, employment, person-centred technology, and access to the built environment. Additional work on the Manifesto priority of personalised care and support is being taken forward through other Welsh Government workstreams and by the Wales Alliance for Citizen Directed Support [2].

The role of partnership working in developing the Framework is vital in helping to clarify the nature of the issues and to identify solutions and levers for making progress. But how can the wide scale systemic transformation of public services be achieved?

Co-Production

The Welsh Government's policy statement "Better Outcomes for Tougher Times - The Next Phase of Public Service Improvement" acknowledges that:

"the scale of the challenge (facing public services in Wales) is such that we need a radical transformation in the way public services are planned and delivered...We are committed to meeting the needs of citizens through collaboration rather than competition. This means partnership with all those working in public services...above all, with citizens and communities. Their voices must be centre stage in driving improvement."

In response, a Third Sector Partnership Council paper titled "Public Services, Towards a New Model" suggests that:

"An approach that is more explicitly based on principles of mutualism, cooperation, community development and self-help can contribute to this challenge."

The paper asks the question, "Can we develop a new public service approach that draws on both the traditions of mutualism and co-production, and the commitment to citizen-centred public services?"

What is co-production?

The Co-production Practitioners Network define it succinctly as "the design and delivery of services by citizens and professionals in equal partnership" [3].

An earlier WCVA paper defines co-production as "co-design and co-delivery of public services, where activities and services are designed and delivered by a wide range of actors...It means investing in community capacity and initiative in order to provide mutual support that complements, and reduces demands on, other services." [4].

Another paper, titled 'Beyond Direct Delivery' and published by SOLACE Wales (the professional society for senior strategic managers working in local government), says:

"Essentially, co-production appreciates the central significance of the 'core economy' to a healthy society. The core economy refers to family, neighbourhood, community and civil society and co-production means strengthening and working with these elements. In practical terms, this means building on people's strengths, rather than focusing on their areas of need, recognising their contributions in the home and community and building social networks and positive relationships with family, friends and community" [5].

Co-production can transform public services. With the equal participation of citizens and professionals as a core principle, co-production can fundamentally change the way that public services are delivered. By commissioning sustainable models of service delivery which reduce need, rebuild the social infrastructure and shift the balance of power, cultural change can be achieved [6].

For this reason, Disability Wales and WCB are currently working in partnership with several County Voluntary Councils to deliver training funded by the Big Lottery Community Voice Fund which aims to enable disabled people to engage meaningfully and effectively with professionals in commissioning processes.

The Occupy Movement's slogan "We are the 99%" may have trumped David Cameron's "We're all in this together", but the Prime Minister's rhetoric does have a small grain of truth in it. If we are to emerge successfully from this crisis then we need to forge new partnerships across all sectors of society and develop new ways of co-productive working.

To quote another Tory Prime Minister, "There Is No Alternative".

References

- [1] bit.ly/WGilp
- [2] <http://wacds.org.uk>
- [3] <http://coproductionnetwork.com/>
- [4] <http://bit.ly/Codesign>
- [5] <http://bit.ly/BeyondDD>
- [6] bit.ly/ChallCoProd

See also <http://bit.ly/NestaPaper>

Working in Partnership

Caoilfhionn Lee, Collaboration Development Manager, Guide Dogs

2011 was a big year for Guide Dogs. Not only did we celebrate our 80th anniversary, we also made some significant changes to the organisation to ensure that we can now deliver on our “Building Extraordinary Partnerships” Strategy.

We know we cannot deliver achieve our ambitious goals alone. We believe the changes we have implemented will strengthen the collaborative opportunities that currently exist in Wales and across the UK and will allow us to work much more closely with a range of organisations on a variety of issues to achieve common goals. We have created a number of roles dedicated to facilitating dialogue with other organisations to identify and develop collaborative opportunities.

Working collaboratively is not new to Guide Dogs, but we do feel we can do it better and in a way that supports even more blind and partially sighted people. We now have a number of new posts to increase the number of collaborative partnerships and their effectiveness. At a national level there is a Collaboration Development

Manager, at a regional level we have Engagement Managers, and at a local level we have put in place Community Engagement Officers.

A great example of simple but powerful collaboration is “Walk a Mile in My Shoes” - WAM. WAM is designed to improve awareness and understanding of the challenges to safe independent mobility for blind and partially sighted people. The idea is for people to experience what it would feel like to be blind having to navigate and negotiate obstacles in a pedestrian area. It also gives participants the chance to meet a number of local stakeholders to hear their thoughts on improving the environment for blind and partially sighted people. We generate press and public interest by inviting a local Assembly Member to lead the walk in a blindfold, and elected members, who either join in the walk in blind fold or as observers.

We also ensure that the relevant local society for blind and partially sighted people is aware of what will take place and they often send staff to support and take advantage of networking opportunities. We also ensure to invite the relevant Access Group. In many cases Access Groups have positive relationships with councillors and are valuable allies in achieving an inclusive environment for everyone. They regularly review plans and act as consultees for the council. Their technical knowledge can also support blind and partially sighted residents who might find accessing print plans difficult or impossible.

Finally we ensure that local Guide Dog Owners and long cane users come along to “tell it like it is” for their own area.

The WAM routes are planned carefully to include typical street environments, and so far we have had several local press articles, a piece on Insight Radio, and a reporter from BBC Radio Wales who took us up on the blind fold challenge in Llandaff High Street.

WAM aims to involve key people in a local community to champion a better environment for blind and partially sighted people, to raise

awareness and crucially, to build collaborative dialogue and positive engagement. Eventually we will “walk a mile” in every local authority in Wales, working with our partners and involving the community as well as key decision makers in each area, and taking the message out in a very practical and participative way.

We are also piloting a service which is a partnership between Guide Dogs and local blind societies, which helps people with sight loss get out of their homes and back into the community. My Guide aims to reduce the isolation that many people with sight loss experience, helping to rebuild their confidence and regain their independence.

Very simply, Guide Dogs supports local organisations to recruit and deliver VISION 2020 endorsed sighted guide training for volunteers. The service users and CRB-checked My Guide volunteers are then matched and work in partnership for three to six months, setting clear goals together. During the partnership, My Guide volunteers regularly guide service users to social and leisure activities, e.g. the shops, a café, or even the local bingo. My Guide volunteers then train up members of the service user’s community (e.g. family, friends, members of local clubs) to support their ongoing independence.

What is important for the successful delivery of My Guide is the exit strategy. Guide Dogs role is to train and empower the local society to be in a position to deliver the service autonomously. Before entering into partnership we look to set an agreed period of delivery and support – this timeframe will differ from organisation to organisation.

By working together and combining our strengths Guide Dogs and local blind societies are helping support more blind and partially sighted people at a local level. One of our My Guide partners is Sight Support Gwent. Sharon Beckett their Chief Executive commented: “This is the single BEST incidence of partnership working we’ve ever had. Guide Dogs were genuinely looking to us, the local societies, for absolute

equality.” To help support the partnerships at a local level we have a dedicated Sighted Guide Ambassador for Wales.

These two examples demonstrate that collaborations can take many forms. However, what they don't show is that collaborating is not always easy! At times be messy and difficult. However there are a number of things you can do to ensure the best outcome possible when working collaboratively with another organisation.

1. All partners should have an equal voice, otherwise it is not a partnership
2. Have a clear understanding of what the outcomes of the partnership are and how these outcomes will benefit both your organisation and service users
3. Understand what kind of investment each partner will make to achieve the partnership objectives – time and money
4. We all have a finite amount of time and money. What will you not be able to do if you invest in this particular partnership? Is this the best use of your resources?
5. It's important to understand what each partner is prepared to commit both financially and time wise
6. Think about the risks and what could be trigger points for disputes
7. Identify who will oversee the governance of the partnership
8. Identify who will implement the partnership
9. Put together an implementation plan with key dates and milestones and outlining clearly who will deliver what
10. Commit to reviewing plan regularly and adjust accordingly
11. No partnership lasts forever. Discuss when this partnership might end and how that would look
12. Ensure that you there is written understanding outlining the above points which is agreed by all partners
13. Communicate regularly with each other. It is the best way of ensuring that you achieve the outcomes you hope for
14. Finally and most importantly the person from each partnership

who is responsible for driving the partnership needs to feel genuinely passionate about the outcomes. Without energy and enthusiasm from all parties the collaboration will most likely stall.

The above tips won't apply to all collaborative partnerships as some are less formal than others but we find that reviewing them individually and with your potential partner is really helpful to tease out the challenges and opportunities working in partnership offers.

Guide Dogs is incredibly excited at the collaborative opportunities that exist in Wales to support more blind and partially sighted people and we look forward to building on existing partnerships and creating new partnerships throughout 2012.

Guide Dogs Contact Details

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Andrea Gordon, Engagement Manager, Wales andrea.gordon@guidedogs.org.uk

Nathan Foy, Community Engagement Officer, Wales, nathan.foy@guidedogs.org.uk

Neil Howe – Sighted Guide Ambassador, Wales, neil.howe@guidedogs.org.uk

Partnership Working - Annual Minority Communities Health Fair

This annual event provides a good example of how different organisations can work together successfully and use their different strengths for the benefit of local communities. The event's aim is to promote healthy living styles for minority ethnic individuals and communities across South Wales, and improve their communication with health providers. Sight Support play the main role in organising the event, but the involvement of a wide range of voluntary groups such as MEWN Cymru, BAWSO Women's Aid and Cardiff Minority Ethnic Elders is seen as key to its success.

Ethnic communities are regarded by health providers as 'hard to reach', and individuals may be reluctant to attend such an event. The involvement of groups which are already working with them is seen as crucial - as well as providing valuable contact lists to the organisers, invitations can be issued by the groups themselves, making attendance far more likely. Visitors to the Fair may be greeted by a familiar face, as volunteers from the groups provide support at the event.

The success of this approach can be seen by the involvement of the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. The Board has previously provided a speaker on the day, but after seeing how the event has been able to engage with ethnic communities, they have become one of the organisers of the 2012 event. As well as providing valuable funding, the Health Board will have a dental van at the event and their staff will be in attendance to carry out health checks such as blood pressure tests.

Partnership working - RNIB Cymru and Sight Support

Since July 2011, RNIB Cymru and Sight Support have been working together on the QWEST programme. This programme is designed to work with clients over the age of 16, living in Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen and Caerphilly, and who are not in full time education or employment, to support them to learn new skills and break down barriers to work.

Support for clients has been tailored to individual need and has included both one-to-one and group activities, including basic computer training, confidence building and life coaching, workshops with guest speakers and employability skills. All of the 19 clients who have taken part have reported an increase in confidence. Four have continued with computer lessons in community education centres, two are in the process of having interviews for work and one has set up her own business.

By working in partnership, with Sight Support leading the project and delivering the administrative support and RNIB Cymru providing the training and employment expertise, we believe we have been able to offer a more comprehensive service to our clients, which has ultimately left them better placed to access employment, training and other opportunities.

Collaborative working in Merthyr

Visual Impairment in Merthyr Tydfil (VIM) has seen the benefits of collaborative working. The group has established close links with the Eyelights Club as their services are complementary – VIM provides services and support, whereas Eyelights is more of a social group for visually impaired people in the area. Representatives of the two groups have had occasional meetings with groups for hearing loss which has resulted in the development of an evolving, but already excellent, sensory garden in Merthyr's Cyfartha Park. They have also met with local councillors, particularly the very supportive Equality Champion and Visual Impairment Champion.

An effective Forum meets quarterly to make provision for the needs of County Borough residents with sensory impairment. This is attended by social services, the local sensory groups, and national charities with interest in the sectors. They sustain each other as much as possible, and let the public know what is available. The groups have provided some of the funding for the MIDEAC (Merthyr Tydfil Demonstration and Exhibition Centre) centre, which contains a sensory rehabilitation room, with aids for people with sensory loss, tinnitus, vertigo etc.

WCVA Guidance on Partnership Working

Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), the organisation which supports Welsh voluntary groups, has a range of information about 'Working with Others' which includes a factsheet on Partnership. This article gives a brief summary of the points covered.

1 Benefits & Risks

Working in partnership with another organisation has many potential benefits. These include the ability to access additional resources; increasing your organisation's skills and capacity; increasing the reach of your services and possible savings in time and money. However, before entering into such an arrangement it is important to consider problems which may arise. Risks include loss of autonomy, differing levels of commitment to the project and potential hindrance to existing work. The partnership could change the way that your organisation is viewed by others, and staff members' feelings of allegiance to their own organisation could affect their commitment to the new arrangement.

2 Possible Structure

The document identifies four different models of partnership working: separate organisation, 'virtual' organisation (without legal changes), co-locating of staff (where staff remain in their original organisations) and a steering group without dedicated staff resources which co-ordinates delivery across organisational boundaries. The choice of structure will depend on factors such as the size of the organisations involved and scope of the work. The document discusses the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

3 Essential Elements

Regardless of the structure, partnerships must have a Board or Steering

Group with recognised authority, which is responsible for ensuring delivery of objectives.

Organisations asked to join a partnership must be clear about what is expected of them. This is particularly important as the term 'partnership' can be used to define a wide range of relationships, ranging from allowing your organisation's name to be used in support of a project, through to junior membership and joint partnership, where responsibility is shared equally.

4 Checklist for setting up a partnership

The document contains a detailed checklist for those setting up a partnership, which is reproduced in full here:

4.1 Establishing clear roles.

- Are the roles and responsibilities of all partners clearly defined and agreed?
- Is there a lead partner?
- Is their role clearly defined?

4.2 Establishing an appropriate structure.

Does the partnership constitution and structure define:

- Who employs any staff
- Who administers the day to day activity
- Who contracts with delivery bodies
- Which body makes the final decisions
- Who is responsible for financial control and auditing

Are the members of the committees, groups, etc all defined?

Are the meetings for the first six months scheduled?

Is there a clear strategy to involve the wider community in the partnership?

Are there clear written procedures to prevent conflicts of interest?

4.3 Establishing common goals

Has the partnership agreed a vision and aims?

Is the vision supported by the local community?

Do the community know what the partnership exists for?

4.4 Building capacity of partners.

Do any partners require training in technical skills to participate fully in decision making?

Do the partners know each other?

Do partners share a good understanding of the issues being tackled? Is any briefing required?

Is there a budget/time set aside for training/capacity building for partners?

Further information:

To read the full document, go to www.wcva.org.uk and look under 'Information' for Information Sheet 3.3, or ring WCVA's helpdesk on 0800 2888 329.

We would like to thank all the authors for their contributions to this feature.

HAVE YOUR SAY!

DWP Consultation on Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

The Department of Work and Pensions has launched a consultation on the second draft of the assessment criteria for Personal Independence Payment, which takes account of comments on the first draft. The DWP is keen to get the views of disabled people and the organisations which represent them on this important change.

You can download the document, and access it in audio format from the DWP website (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2012/pip.shtml>). Responses must be received by 30 April.

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:

- Children & young people's continuing care guidance (closes 13 March)
- Draft Breaks for Carers for Disabled Children (Wales) Regulations 2012 (closes 28 March)
- Options to replace the Social Fund Community Care Grants and crisis loans for living expenses (closes 30 March)
- Protecting children in Wales arrangements for multi-agency child practice reviews - Draft guidance (closes 2 April)
- Proposals to reform and modernise the NHS (Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992 (closes 27 April).

EVENTS

VICTA Events

VICTA (Visually Impaired Children Taking Action) is organising two events for young people:

The 18-25s week-end takes place from 9th – 12th March, and involves a programme of outdoor activities, plus Karaoke, food preparation and a trip to a local pub. There is a nominal charge of £25.

The Transitions weekend is aimed at young people with a visual impairment who are making the move from 6th form or further education to university, and takes place from 28th -31st August. There is a nominal charge of £40.

The venue for both events is the Caldecotte Project near Milton Keynes, and the cost includes accommodation and transport from Milton Keynes station. Places must be booked in advance. For more information and an application form, visit the VICTA website, www.victa.org.uk; send an email to admin@victa.org.uk or write to:

VICTA, PO Box 5791, Milton Keynes, MK10 1BE

Soccer Sight

A football sports camp will be held from 2nd – 5th April for young people with sight loss and their families. Children (aged 8 - 16) will have the chance to try their hand at Paralympic sports and to take part in sports media workshops and sports quizzes in a brilliant event at the Royal National College for the Blind in Hereford.

For more information, send an email to info@rncb.ac.uk or telephone 01432 376 391.

RNIB Children and Young People's Showcase

RNIB Cymru is holding a Children & Young People's Showcase event at the Holiday Inn in Cardiff on Friday 9 March 2012. Its purpose is to provide information on the work that RNIB is doing with partners to support visually impaired children and young people.

Places must be booked in advance and there is a charge of £45 for the first person from an address or organisation, with subsequent people from the same address/organisation charged at £30. For more information, contact Nathan Davies on 01558 65 02 81 or email nathan.davies@rnib.org.uk.

New College Worcester Events

New College, Worcester, is holding an outreach open day for education professionals who support young people with sight loss and parents of potential students on Thursday 26 April 2012. Attendees will be given a tour of the college and will have the chance to meet teachers and find out more about curriculum areas of their choice.

The College also has a Family Day on 7th May for any family with a visually impaired child. The day offers a range of activities for all ages and parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters are all welcome. Activities will include bungee run, pony rides, obstacle course and independent living skills.

Both events are free but places must be booked in advance. For more information and an application form, visit the College website, <http://www.newcollegeworcester.co.uk>, or telephone 01905 763933.

Wales and West Vision Conference 2012

This unique one-day conference is aimed at anyone involved with sight loss and supporting people with sight loss, across the public, voluntary and private sector. It will be held on Tuesday 19th June at the Caerleon Campus, University of Newport.

The conference will bring together professionals from all sectors working to prevent sight loss and those providing services to people with sight loss. It is an excellent opportunity to find out about innovative and leading edge research which has been taking place in the UK. It is also a chance for professionals from different organisations to meet and share ideas and discuss the future and the way forward.

There will be a presentation by Dr V Sundaram (Institute of Ophthalmology, University College, London) on 'Prospects for Gene Therapy for Retinal Disorders', and an exhibition at lunchtime of technology companies, charities and other organisations in the field of sight loss.

Conference fee: Normal price: £90 per delegate (including refreshments and lunch) **SPECIAL EARLY BIRD OFFER** : Book before 2ND JUNE 2011 and you pay only £80, and if two or more book from the same organisation you pay only £75 per delegate. For more information, contact Nirmala Pisavadia, Development Manager, Sight Support on 01495 763650 or email nirmala@sightsupport.org.uk.

NEWS AND INFORMATION

Adviceline Wales – Single Contact Point for Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice now has a single contact telephone number for people in Wales who need help with issues such as money matters, family problems and discrimination. The number is 08444 77 20 20.

Citizens Advice is the largest advice-giving network in the UK, and the advice it gives is free, confidential, independent and impartial. For more information on the range of issues that it deals with, go to www.adviceguide.org.uk.

Debenhams Personal Shopping Service for VI Customers

Department store chain Debenhams has launched a personal shopping service for its visually impaired customers who want to buy clothes. The service has been designed with the help of RNIB, which has given guidance on the problems faced by customers with sight problems and helped to train store staff on issues such as guiding and describing the key features of a garment.

The service is free, and available in all Debenhams stores but an appointment must be booked in advance by ringing 08445 61 61 61. The idea for the scheme was born when a visually impaired person was featured in the TV show 'How to Look Good Naked'.

Tax advice service for VI people

RNIB and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) have launched a new Tax Advice Service to help visually impaired people with tax and benefit issues. The service will also let callers know about the services from RNIB and Action for Blind People which could help them.

The service can provide information on topics such as the Blind Person's Allowance (currently £1,980), tax credits and VAT exemption on adapted equipment. To contact the service, ring 0845 330 4897.

Launch of Wales-wide sight loss support service

Thanks to a grant from the Big Lottery Fund, RNIB Cymru is expanding its Eye Clinic Liaison service to cover the whole of Wales. The service has already been running in some areas for a number of years, offering emotional support and practical help to patients in eye clinics at the point of diagnosis.

Sue Neale has been working as an RNIB Cymru ECLO at Singleton Hospital in Swansea for the last 18 months: "We see people of all ages, from all different backgrounds and with all different eye conditions. What they have in common is the need for some support to help them adjust to life with sight loss, but what that support will be will vary from person to person. For some people, it might be making sure they're able to access welfare benefits, for others it might be about making them aware of equipment and technology that can help them live safely and independently in their own homes, and for others it might be telling them about the support groups and social activities available in their

area for blind and partially sighted people. Often, what people value most is just having someone to talk to: a sympathetic ear, who can take the time to listen and to reassure them that they're not alone."

For further information, please contact John Tucker, RNIB Cymru's South Wales ECLO Manager: 02920 449566/ john.tucker@rnib.org.uk .

Deafblind Cymru 'In Touch' befriending service

Deafblind Cymru has launched a new 'In Touch' volunteer befriending project for individuals with combined sight and hearing loss over the age of 50. Funding for the project has come from the Big Lottery Fund.

There are over 16,000 deafblind people aged over 50 in Wales, and this can be a very isolating condition. The In Touch Wales service aims to lessen this social isolation, by linking them with a volunteer 'Befriender' socially on a regular basis. The In Touch Wales service also aims to increase independence, confidence and self-esteem, hoping to ultimately increase their quality of life.

Volunteering for the In Touch Wales service involves spending a few hours every fortnight with your friend doing things you both enjoy. You can take them for a drink or a bite to eat, help them do some shopping, go to the local leisure centre, or simply stay in for a chat. In Touch Wales also aims to provide, or link people to, a 'Handyman' service to help with basic DIY tasks around both the house and the garden, as well as assist those who still wish to carry these tasks out themselves.

For more information about the service, please contact project manager Ross Evans on 07950037823 or email him at ross.evans@deafblind.org.uk.

Babies with sight loss wanted for Great Ormond Street Hospital Study

The Optimum VI project is a Great Ormond Street Hospital study into the early development and support of babies and young children with vision impairment. The study team are looking for babies and infants aged 0 to 15 months with severe visual loss/visual impairment to take part - and are keen to recruit participants from Wales.

The early months of life are an important time for assisting and supporting the development of children with visual impairment. The aim of this study is to learn more about the early development of such babies and young children and investigate how different methods of early intervention and care might best help this development. The project will last up to two years, but with only once a year contact with the research team. Home visits can be offered if travel to London is not possible. Children with additional disabilities such as hearing loss will not be able to participate.

If you would like to find out more, please contact the researchers, Dr Michelle O'Reilly and Dr Elena Sakkalou on 020 7599 4121 or 020 7599 4124 or you can send an email to e.sakkalou@ucl.ac.uk.

New VI football club in Conwy

A new football club for blind and partially sighted juniors and seniors has been started at the Y Morfa Leisure Centre in Cader Avenue, Kimmel Bay, Conwy. Sessions will be held between 2 pm and 4pm on 11th and 18th February, and 3rd, 10th, 17th and 24th March.

For more information, and to register an interest, please contact Mark Richards, Disability Sport Wales Development Officer on 01492 575593 or 07733 013304 or email mark.richards@conwy.gov.uk.

New British Wireless for the Blind (BWBF) representative for Wales

David Loveridge is the BWBF's new Regional Development Manager for South Wales. The Charity has regional workers across the UK and was established in 1928 to help ease the loneliness and isolation of blindness with specially adapted audio equipment, provided free for life to UK-registered blind and partially sighted people, over the age of eight, who are in financial need.

One of David's first tasks will be to further support Agents of the Fund – those individuals and organisations that help to distribute and promote BWBF's specially modified audio equipment to visually impaired people. David Loveridge said: "Many of our agents have been doing an excellent job over the years and part of my role will be to support them, work with them to develop the service and help them ensure that all those who need one of our radios have access to the most suitable set."

The Charity has a range of specially modified audio equipment available to visually impaired people including DAB and FM radios; CD and Tape players and even an Internet Radio called the Sonata. Many of the sets are made by Roberts Radios and come in charcoal with contrasting yellow controls to help those with residual vision. Many of these key controls also have raised tactile symbols for further ease of use.

With the number of registered blind people growing steadily, the demand for their sets is increasing daily. BWBF's newest set, the Sonata internet audio player, is an interesting addition to their product range as it means visually impaired people without a computer, PC skills or any special installation knowhow, can now access internet content anywhere in the world in their own home through a broadband internet connection.

David Loveridge said: "This is the first internet audio player specifically

for users with sight loss and BWBF has always strived to be at the forefront of technological innovation. We've been testing the Sonata for use by visually impaired people for some time now and are delighted with the positive response. It really is a life altering tool for those suffering with sight loss.

The Sonata, like many of BWBF's specially modified sets, is very simple to operate: it is controlled completely by using an 'OK' button and by listening to the prompts. Users can listen to their favourite radio programmes, podcasts, talking newspapers, shopping catalogues, radio dramas like the Archers and music stations from anywhere in the world with ease. It also comes with hundreds of classic books free of charge, bringing hours of wonderful literature to the listener – all at the touch of a button.

Another goal that David hopes to achieve is to encourage individuals and organisations involved in the sector to get in touch and to find out for themselves the impact BWBF's radios and audio sets have on the lives of people with sight loss.

David said: "I would love to meet up with anyone that supports individuals with sight loss to listen to them and also to showcase our specially modified sets and to tell them more about the work of BWBF. Certainly, if there are any rehab officers and social workers for the blind; Associations for Blind people; Occupational Therapists; Opticians; Talking Newspapers; social groups supporting visual impaired people that want to know more about BWBF and / or would like to refresh their knowledge of our work, I'd be happy to visit them"

To find out more about BWBF and its specially adapted audio equipment visit: www.blind.org.uk or contact David on 07540 724064 or david@blind.org.uk.

Free Intermediary Training from Turn2us

Local visual impairment societies in Wales may be interested in free training from Turn2us, the organisation which helps people in financial need gain access to welfare benefits, charitable grants and other financial help.

Turn2us has received funding from the Millennium Stadium Charitable Trust to target some of the more rural or isolated areas of Wales through their intermediary training programme. Up to six interactive training workshops will take place at community venues and facilities across coastal and rural parts of Wales over the next 12 months, details as follows:

Llandrindod Wells – Friday 9 March 2012 - 09.30 or 13.30

Bangor - Thursday 26 April 2012 – 09.30 or 13.30

Carmarthen – Thursday 17 May – 09.30 or 13.30

Aberystwyth – date in June 2012 to be confirmed

The 3.5 hour interactive training workshop on the live website will benefit any workers or volunteers supporting individuals in financial need who may not have the resources to use Turn2us themselves.

To make a booking or for more information, contact Pat Cripps, email pat.cripps@elizabethfinn.org.uk, or telephone her on 01676 541 654.

Face to Face Money Advice Service from Citizen's Advice

If your New Year's Resolution was to improve your financial health, you may be interested in face-to-face money advice sessions which are being provided across Wales by Citizen's Advice. The sessions offer people the chance to take control of their finances, for example by preparing a budget, finding out about different types of mortgage, planning for retirement, or finding out about the tax and welfare benefits systems. The service is impartial and there is no attempt to sell any financial products.

Sessions are community-based, and take place at advice centres and outreach locations - wherever possible accessible venues are used. Note that it is not debt advice, but may be appropriate once debts are under control. You can make an appointment by calling the appointment booking line, 0300 3300 520, or by sending an email to moneyadviser@citizensadvice.org.uk.

The sessions are provided in association with The Money Advice Service which has a website containing a wide variety of financial information: www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk.

New social group in the Flintshire Area

Vision Support is starting a new social group in the Flintshire area for anyone who is blind or partially sighted. There will be lots of exciting activities such as trips out, speakers and pub lunches. If you have sight loss and would be interested in joining this new group or maybe you would like to become a volunteer to help with running the group, please contact Nicky Stevens on 01978 269400.

Enhancing the enjoyment of watching S4C with Audio Description

During February a campaign on S4C is drawing attention to the Welsh language Audio Description service available, free, on most television sets. The service allows the blind and partially sighted to enjoy S4C programmes independently with the assistance of commentary.

Ten percent of the Channel's programmes offer this service and currently include Cefn Gwlad, Teulu, Rownd a Rownd, Llais i Gymru, Sam Hughes: Cowboi Penfro, Dudley ar Daith, Bro: Papurau Bro, 'Sgota gyda Julian Lewis Jones and Cofio.

One viewer who benefits from the service is Rhian Evans, 67, from Carmarthen. Rhian was 18 years old when she was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa. Her eyesight deteriorated gradually and by the age of 32 she was almost completely blind. Now, the Audio Description service means she can follow popular S4C series.

"In the past, I've started watching a series knowing that my friends are sure to talk about it, but have become frustrated and turned off the TV because I was not able to follow the story. But the Audio Description service allows me to watch popular programmes and join in the conversation with my friends," says Rhian, who until her recent retirement worked for Llyfrau Llafar Cymru producing audio books for the blind. "The problem is that many programmes begin with scenes and music and things happening, but no dialogue. The Audio Description commentary sets the scene for you between the bits where people talk."

The commentary may include descriptions of continuity in the plot, visual expression, body language, costume and scenery. "It definitely makes a difference when I go about choosing which programmes to watch," adds Rhian.

Rhian was recently interviewed about the Audio Description service on

S4C's weekday magazine programme Wedi 3. You can watch the footage on the Access Services section on the S4C website – s4c.co.uk

By changing the settings on your TV you can receive the service completely free of charge. For more details contact the S4C Viewers' Hotline on 0870 600 4141 (Calls should cost no more than 6p per minute from a BT landline) or visit the website - s4c.co.uk.

Change of name for St Dunstan's

St Dunstan's, the organisation which supports visually impaired ex-service people, has changed its name to 'Blind Veterans UK'. The new name is intended to make the organisation's purpose much clearer, so that more people become aware of what it does, and how it can help.

You can find out more about the change of name, and the services Blind Veterans UK provides on their website, www.blindveterans.org.uk.

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.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Wales Council for the Blind and, as much of the material is submitted by third parties, we cannot be held responsible for the accuracy of the information therein. We reserve the right to edit for publication.

OPPORTUNITIES



Sight Centre Cymru Project Leader

Sight Support is seeking applications for the post of Sight Centre Cymru Project Leader.

Starting salary £23,460 per annum. 35 hours per week.

This exciting new role is to implement a BIG Innovation Lottery-funded information project throughout Wales. It is a 3 year fixed-term contract starting in April 2012.

For an application pack please contact Emma Richards at Sight Support on 01495 763650 or email emma.richards@sightsupport.org.uk

. Packs are available in Braille, Large Print and Audio CD on request.

Closing date for receipt of applications: 5pm, 16th March 2012

Arweinydd Prosiect Sight Centre Cymru

Mae Sight Support yn gofyn am geisiadau ar gyfer swydd Arweinydd Prosiect Sight Centre Cymru.

Cyflog gychwynnol £23,460 y flwyddyn. 35 awr yr wythnos.

Pwrpas y swydd gyffrous hon fydd gweithredu prosiect wybodaeth a ariennir gan y Gronfa Loteri FAWR trwy Gymru ben-baladr. Cytundeb tymor sefydlog 3 blynedd fydd hwn yn cychwyn ym mis Ebrill 2012.

Am becyn cais cysyllter ag Emma Richards yn Sight Support ar 01495 763650 neu e-bostiwch at emma.richards@sightsupport.org.uk .

Mae pecynnau ar gael mewn Braille, print mawr a CD Awdio os mynnir.

Dyddiad cau ar gyfer derbyn ceisiadau: 5.00yh 16 Mawrth 2012