

ViW Roundup

The newsletter of Vision in Wales
(formerly Wales Council for the Blind)

Autumn 2012



In this issue: Wales Eyecare Conference

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WCB becomes Vision in Wales.

General Manager Owen Williams introduces the new organisation.

Wales Council for the Blind is the umbrella agency representing visual impairment within Wales. We work to campaign, lobby and support the improvement of services for people with sight loss. WCB seeks to expand its current remit to provide a platform for the voices of vision impaired people to be heard.

From previous editions of Roundup you may be aware that Wales Council for the Blind's members were consulted about the make-up of a new organisation. We can announce that the members voted for the name to be changed to Vision in Wales and, subject to approval from the Charity Commission, to adopt new articles of association.

Vision in Wales shall continue WCB's role as the umbrella organisation serving the vision impairment sector in Wales. However, there is a new feature within Vision in Wales that will give the sector a stronger voice.

Vision in Wales' Articles of Association sets out a way of letting its members contribute to setting priorities and work streams. This is achieved through the establishment of Regional Steering Groups to inform Vision in Wales' work. Four new Regional Steering Groups will be established across Wales covering North, West, South East and South Central. Each group intends to offer a platform for local clubs, charities, national agencies, statutory services and people with sight loss to get together and contribute to directing the work and resources of Vision in Wales. It's likely that priorities may vary from region to region, and we want that to be reflected in our work.

Vision in Wales' board of trustees shall comprise five trustees nominated by Sight Cymru and one person nominated from each of the four proposed regional steering groups making a board of nine people in total. Therefore, we shall soon be asking for nominations to the regional groups and for the groups to nominate Trustees to the board of Vision in Wales.

We are looking for your support in taking this forward, so watch this space for further information about this exciting new development for the sector in Wales.

Change of name for WCB Roundup

As the organisation's name is changing, we are considering changing the title of our newsletter. If you have any suggestions for a new name, do let us know by sending an email to richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk.

Power for Life

Western Power Distribution (WPD) operates the electricity distribution network in the Midlands, South Wales and the South West. Put simply, our role is to ensure the power network of poles and pylons, cables, wires and substations – the infrastructure that we all rely upon to live our lives to the full – delivers electricity to our homes and businesses around the clock.

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- Ring and tell you about planned interruptions to your electricity supply.
- Keep you as informed as possible in the event of an unplanned power cut.

To register as a Priority Services Customer, simply call **0845 724 0240** or visit our website **www.westernpower.co.uk**

Wales Eye Care Conference

Vision in Wales (formerly Wales Council for the Blind) was again pleased to be asked to organise the Wales Eyecare Conference at the Cardiff School of Optometry and Vision Science. This annual event had been established by the Welsh Government to showcase health and social care developments and best practice in the field of vision impairment. Each year a range of speakers shares its knowledge and expertise from specialist fields of research or service provision. The attendees usually comprise a mix of clinicians, researchers, social workers and service users. Here's a whistle-stop tour of some of the talks this year.

Lesley Griffiths AM, the Welsh Minister for Health and Social Services, gave the opening address.

The Minister explained that improving access to co-ordinated services across primary, secondary and social care will enable Welsh Government to achieve significant improvements in the health and well-being of individuals living with eye problems.

The Minister promised the enhancement of the Wales Eye Care Service (more about this below). Patients across Wales will be able to access these modernised services by April 2013. The Minister is grateful to Optometry Wales for working closely with Welsh Government on this.

She expressed her commitment to developing an Eye Health Care Plan for Wales, which will set out a clear vision for the provision of eye care services over the next five years. The key aims are: preventing poor eye health and visual impairment (including reducing levels of avoidable sight loss); improving eye health outcomes; early identification and intervention; providing high quality, efficient services; ensuring patient focused delivery and integrated services.

These will be achieved by: raising public awareness and developing an eye health promotion and public education strategy; ensuring there are effective screening programmes in place, including one for children across Wales and for children in special schools (more about this later); and the establishment of Ophthalmic and Diagnostic Treatment Centres across Wales to reduce levels of avoidable sight loss.

Nik Sheen launched the Eyecare Service Wales in a presentation highlighting what the service means for patients: care closer to home; a seamless service across primary and secondary care; making best use of optometrists' core skills; offering services outside normal working hours; building an accredited, skilled workforce; reviewing and monitoring services within a consistent, Wales-wide context.

The service includes 'Eye Health Examination Wales': amalgamating the former WEHE and PEARS initiatives to serve people with acute eye problems, those who are at risk of eye disease and those who would find losing their sight particularly challenging.

Inspiring, encouraging, challenging

Peter Ellwood's talk was a call to arms. Peter worked with epidemiologist Archie Cochrane and succeeded him as Director of the Medical Research Council unit in Wales. As a background to his plea, Peter gave a beautifully illustrated tribute to Fred Hollows (1929-1993) whose work in ophthalmology internationally involved the establishment of the Aboriginal Medical Service, the National Trachoma and Eyehealth Programme and organised the setting up of a factory in Eritrea to manufacture inexpensive intra-ocular lenses for use in underprivileged communities. Over 100,000 Aborigines were examined and tens of thousands treated by his team. It is

estimated that through his work, over a million people around the world have had their sight restored.

Peter outlined a survey conducted in Ferndale in the Rhondda (led by Archie Cochrane) of over four thousand people in 1964. In part it aimed to determine the prevalence of eye disease, notably Glaucoma, and to conduct a randomised trial of a Glaucoma treatment. The shortcoming of this survey was that a follow-up study was not completed. However, an important output of the Ferndale study was Fred Hollows' contribution to the literature on Glaucoma and intraocular pressure for the British Journal of Ophthalmology.

After this work in South Wales, Fred left to set up in Australia. His extraordinary career there brought him many honours including twenty-three national and international awards and a number of commemorative stamps (and an Australian dollar coin) celebrating his work. He died in 1993 aged 63 and is believed to be the only medic to receive a state funeral.

Throughout his career he collaborated with orthoptist Gabi Hollows and together they established the Fred Hollows Foundation to ensure that the work with people in underprivileged communities would continue.

Yet, argues Peter, despite the magnitude of Fred's contribution to his field, there is little recognition for him in Wales where he once worked. Fred wrote of his time on the Ferndale study that 'without that project in Wales my work amongst the Aborigines and in other countries would not have achieved what it did'.

So, Peter's first plea is to include a Fred Hollows commemorative panel in the new Cochrane Centre in Cardiff.

His next plea was for all of us in Wales to get healthier! Citing a Welsh Government report, Peter argues that 10% of NHS costs

in Wales are due to unhealthy behaviours: drinking, smoking, obesity, lack of exercise and poor diet. He also went on to say that, in a 30 year study, those participants who brought 4 or 5 of these behaviours into safe levels reduced the incidence of diabetes by 72%, heart disease and stroke by 67% and dementia by 68%.

He went further to propose that these behaviours have likely impacts on eye health: **smoking** is likely to increase the risk of cataracts and macular degeneration; **obesity** increases cataracts, macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy; **saturated fats** increase macular degeneration; while **exercise** can reduce the risk of glaucoma and macular degeneration. These eye health impacts need to be properly investigated, Peter believes, and he feels that there is enough material in these health claims for numerous studies. It's up to the professionals in the sector, he says, to get on with it.

However, only 7% of people in Wales meet 4 out of the 5 targets – so there is a great deal of work to be done in building awareness of healthy lifestyles. That's where the Champions for Health initiative comes in. Champions for Health encourages people working in the NHS to improve their own health and thus to act as examples to the wider public. More information is available at www.championsforhealth.wales.nhs.uk

So, Peter's rich presentation inspired us by the example of Fred Hollows, encouraged us to up our game in epidemiology and preventative measures and challenged us to improve our health.

Are they being served?

Elaine Kelleher, Rehabilitation Officer for Visual Impairment in Bridgend, gave a compelling talk from her newly published study on Children's Services in Wales. Growing Up and Moving On is a survey of what each agency in Wales is doing to support young

people with sight loss through education and social care. Elaine gave an up-to-date picture of service provision in relation to mobility and independent living skills with examples of good, collaborative working – as well as examples of gaps in provision.

In her report, she quotes from parents:

'The fear of not knowing what to expect was the worst. It was only by talking to another parent that I realised what support was available.'

'I didn't know that there were specialists in social services who provide independence skills'.

'He was registered in 2005 but it took 6 years to get a Registration Card. We didn't have a visit from social services'

The main findings relate to habilitation provision by education and social care which has been found to vary widely between authorities. In 18 authorities, mobility specialists in education provide mobility skills training to children and young people with VI in Wales. In the other 4 authorities this service is provided by Rehabilitation Officers Visual Impairment (ROVIs) based in Social Services. Mobility specialists in education incorporate provision of independence skills in their roles as much as possible. In 12 authorities ROVIs provide habilitation for children as well as providing rehabilitation for adults. In the other 10 authorities habilitation is not provided.

Examples of good communication across services are highlighted and recognition is given to innovative and collaborative working by determined individuals to improve services and promote sharing of information with the needs of the child or young person at the centre.

The whole report can be downloaded at www.wcb-ccd.org.uk or ring Vision in Wales on 029 20 473954.

Continuing the theme of children's services, **Nathan Davies** summarised the results of a pilot project to provide optometric support in special schools and outlined some of the recommendations.

The Welsh Government funded the pilot vision care programme for children and young people in special schools in Wales as part of the Children's Low Vision Project.

Five special schools, which had all reported that vision screening did not take place, took part in the pilot project. The schools sent information about the project, including a consent form, to the parents and guardians of all the pupils. The project engaged an optometrist who carried out sight tests in school with all pupils who had consented to take part, including those who already wore glasses and those with known visual impairment.

Over a third of all children in the study had never had a sight test and almost a half had some form of ocular disorder: including squint, inflammation of the eyelids and Nystagmus.

The need for appropriate interventions was demonstrated in two case studies. In one the mother of a child with autism and Downs Syndrome had been asked to leave the optometrist's practice because the child's behaviour was upsetting the other patients. In another the child was using an inappropriate head rest that was quite possibly aggravating Nystagmus to the point that the child was trying to pull his head in the opposite direction.

In both cases the situation would have been resolved had there been an optometrist visiting the special schools. Nathan's study recommends that such a service should be provided: one that links in with other health professionals such as the school nurse and dispensing opticians.

Singing from the same songsheet

A plea for joined-up working was also the theme of another talk. The Third Sector is a growing universe in which many charities are formed each year to address needs within often specialised areas. With increasing workloads imposed upon officials in the public sector comes a pressure for charities to coordinate their lobbying to Government.

Julie Thomas, Chair of BridgeVIS and Ruth Nortey from RCT Homes gave their views of the negative effects of uncoordinated working, admirably illustrated by Julie with the aid of a Rubik's Cube! Sharon Beckett of Sight Cymru and Ceri Jackson of RNIB explained the Next Steps for Wales, a forum for the coordination of effort in the sector. Ultimately, this would provide a mechanism for focused messages to be fed back to the Welsh Government in a way that makes the best use of the limited opportunities for an audience with Ministers.

To the wider community, Next Steps may sound like another talking-shop, but it's a necessary forum to ensure that the key agencies in Wales are working together to avoid duplication of effort and to promote greater awareness of each other's work-streams. It also makes the best use of the Welsh Government timetable at a time when many interest groups are knocking on the Minister's door to promote their views.

Invisible sight loss.

Ansley Workman and Jo Lawson, who both work on Independent Living projects at RNIB, presented a body of work around supporting people with sight loss in Care Homes and people with sight loss and a learning disability. In both cases, there is a risk that sight loss goes undetected or simply ignored as being of secondary importance. For instance, there is a high incidence of

dementia amongst people living in care homes (around two thirds) and in these cases sight loss is often marginalised or left undetected. This may be due to a culture of focusing support on the symptoms of dementia but also because people with dementia may not be aware of, or able to express the existence of, a sight problem.

Similarly, people with a learning disability are at risk of not getting the necessary support. These individuals are less likely to use routinely primary health services and are less likely to access eye care services. However, people with a learning disability are ten times more likely to have a serious sight problem.

These problems can be addressed. Jo reported positive outcomes from interventions in a case study where the individual, who had a learning disability, was unable to focus on any given image, unable to judge distance, sensitive to glare and experiencing falls due to living in a poorly arranged environment (low-contrast, low lighting). After support she was immediately able to move about her own home and improved her mobility, posture and emotional wellbeing. She was able to visit friends without assistance and there was a decrease in the 'challenging behaviours' previously reported by care staff. This resulted in increased confidence, self esteem and independence whilst saving something in the region of £15,000 a year in support costs and treatments.

Advising the Government.

At the close of the conference delegates saw Dick Roberts hand over his role of Chief Optometric Advisor for the Welsh Government to Dr. Barbara Ryan. We hope to feature an interview with Barbara about her work and aspirations in the next edition of Roundup.

A Personal Story – How ZoomText has changed my life.

Bethan Morgan, is 38, and has had RP (retinitis pigmentosa) for 15 years. Recently her condition has deteriorated to severe blindness and she has had to give up work. This is her story of how use of ZoomText software has changed her life.

In March 2011 I noticed a big change in my vision at work. I worked at a ladies' boutique, but my blurred vision was making it difficult to use the till and make transactions on the card machine, so I felt I had no option but give up that line of work. I was very down as I had previously been forced to leave a job as a mobile hairdresser when I had to stop driving, and there were not many employment opportunities in my area.

In 2005 I had done a course at the Royal National College for the Blind at Hereford and gained my NVQ in administration so I had keyboard skills, but then my sight was much sharper and I could use the screen as a normal sighted person. Now I felt I was at a dead end: only people that have sight loss can understand how I was feeling, you go so down and feel so alone, grieving for the loss of your sight.

With the support of my family, I contacted the job centre who put me in touch with the local secondary school where I could do a course to update my computer skills. Despite being told that screen magnification would be provided, when I arrived I discovered that this was not the case and was told that there was no way I could do the course locally. I was devastated, but wasn't going to give up because I felt I deserved better. I had worked all my life and I wanted to work again.

Then I was put in touch with a rehabilitation officer, Evelyn Wigley, who was great, and told me that Jill Cassidy from WCB had recently been appointed to do everything with computers for

the blind. I was thrilled as I could see light at the end of the tunnel at last.

Within a week I had a phone call from Jill, and she came out to my home, which means so much when you don't drive. She brought her laptop and demonstrated all the different software. We decided to try out ZoomText 10, and Jill arranged for me to have a 60 day trial, and set it all up for me. Those 60 days were fantastic and although it had been a few years, I hadn't forgotten how to touch type. Jill phoned regularly to find out how I was getting on and her support was priceless. I now know I couldn't be without Zoom Text, which is my new friend in life. The software gives you the size of magnification you need and lets you choose whatever colour background you prefer. I always have white print on black background as it traps the glare on the screen - it is amazing! Jill arranged for me to do a course on using ZoomText in my own home, with a great tutor from the organisation u2candoit. I recommend everyone to do this course as it was so much fun.

The software costs around £420 and I was lucky to have funding from the Ceredigion Association for the Blind and will forever be grateful to them. I always try and support their fundraising evenings to raise money for the blind in our county. I was very grateful for the hard work of my rehabilitation officer and Jill. Now I am on my computer every day and the future now looks much brighter. I can even do the paperwork for my husband who is a farmer, which saves us having to employ someone, which is great.

My thanks go to Jill Cassidy for all the guidance and support she has given me. We are often in touch by email and I am looking forward to starting as a volunteer with WCB, working with Jill on the ICT project in Ceredigion. I don't want visually impaired people of this country to have the feeling I had of closed doors when you want to use a computer, because there is help and

guidance out there. I would like all workplaces, schools and colleges in Wales to know about the different software so that everyone has the same opportunity. Why shouldn't all of us blind and visually impaired people be able to have employment like everyone else?

Have Your Say!

Refresh of UK Vision Strategy

The UK Vision Strategy was launched in 2008 and set out a framework for improvement and change with specific five-year aims. Now the organisations behind the strategy have launched a consultation exercise to refresh it, with a view to a relaunch in June 2013. It is important that as many Welsh stakeholders as possible get in touch and share their thoughts on the consultation document, as the revised strategy will inform the next stage of the Wales Vision Strategy.

The three key outcomes of the original Vision Strategy were:

- Improving the eye health of people across the UK
- Eliminating avoidable sight loss and delivering excellent support for people with sight loss
- Inclusion, participation and independence for people with sight loss.

The consultation outlines progress in these areas and asks whether respondents still feel that the issues are a priority. There is also the opportunity to add your own comments.

You can obtain a copy of the consultation document and respond on-line by visiting the website www.vision2020uk.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy/, or telephone 0207

391 2221 to obtain it in print, or in a range of accessible formats. Responses must be received by 16 November 2012.

Welsh Government Consultations

Details of WG consultations can be found on their website, <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations>. The following may be of particular interest to people with a visual impairment:

- The People's NHS - a chance to give your views on a new compact between the Welsh Government, the NHS and the public (closes 24 October)
- Blue Badge Scheme in Wales: Planned changes to the automatic eligibility criteria (closes 30 October)
- Consultation on options for the future of the Community Facilities and Activities Programme (CFAP) - (closes 31 October)
- Reform of the administration and approval of independent schools in respect of special educational needs (closes 1 November)
- Together for health - delivering end of life care (closes 5 December)
- Draft road safety delivery plan (closes 13 December)
- Framework for action on independent living – a chance to comment on proposals aimed at supporting disabled people to live independent lives (closes 20 December). See the next item for more on this.

Framework for Action on Independent Living

The Welsh Government is seeking views on its draft Framework for Action on Independent Living for disabled people by 20th December. The framework focuses on practical action in relation to the priorities identified by disabled people. It does not aim to cover every aspect of independent living but it does represent an important first step towards achieving a strategic approach to independent living in Wales. Its aims are:

- to set out a positive vision for disabled people in Wales in the context of recession and welfare reform;
- to challenge stereotypes and negative attitudes;
- to set out a strategic approach to disability in Wales;
- to set out what the Welsh Government is doing to promote an inclusive and enabling society.

The priorities for action have been identified as:

1. Information, advice, advocacy and peer support.
2. Accessible and supported housing.
3. Personalised care and support.
4. Person-centred technology.
5. A barrier-free transport system.
6. Accessible and inclusive places.
7. Employment, including self-employment.

Your views are sought on specific detail in the proposals. You can obtain a copy from Jacqueline Nicholls, Welsh Government, on 029 2082 5707 (ask for your preferred format). Please send comments to Richard Bowers at Vision in Wales, 2nd Floor, 22 Hallinans House, CF24 0DB. Email richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk

I Matter – We Matter

The consultation on the Social Services (Wales) Bill proposes a statement of national outcomes for social services and social care services. In the last issue of Roundup, we mentioned that a group of organisations working in these fields in Wales were planning a campaign entitled ‘I Matter – We Matter’, which will ensure that the views of citizens are taken into account when defining these outcomes. As an example, if people feel that it is important that they are able to participate in community activities such as sports clubs, this should be defined as an outcome which will form the foundation of Social Services in Wales.

The campaign is now underway, and wants to hear the views of people who are receiving support now, or expect to do so in the future, and of those who support others (either as paid work or as a friend or relative). The conversation is focused around the following key questions:

- What things are important in your life?
- What helps you to do these things?

To join in and register your views, visit the website www.imatterwales.org.uk, where you can see videos of some of the views gathered to date.

The theme for the next edition of Roundup will be the arts. If you wish to make a contribution on this topic, or on any aspect of visual impairment, please contact richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk or telephone Richard on 029 2047 3954.

Advertisement Feature

UltraCane improves mobility

The UltraCane is an award winning electronic mobility aid for the visually impaired, designed to address issues of safety, confidence and dignity that can be compromised when walking around in a 21st century environment. It works by giving users adequate warning of obstacles ahead of them, both in their path and at head height. The handle of the cane is a handset fitted with transmitters and sensors. Buttons in the handle vibrate when the sensors detect that an obstacle is near. The strength of the vibration indicates the proximity of the obstacle, helping the user to walk around it easily and independently.

Bill Gulliver MBE, one of the first people in the country to use an UltraCane, comments, “I am a blind person, living in a sighted world but I have a window on that world that is inaccessible to other people and using an UltraCane allows me a much deeper appreciation of it. The developers of the UltraCane considered the protection of the user very carefully and built in both a short and a long distance preview, of up to several metres, so users have sufficient time to safely avoid obstacles. With daily practice most users find they can soon walk as smoothly and effortlessly, as sighted people. The feedback from the UltraCane’s sensors is conveyed silently through vibrating buttons in the handle. This means the user still has their hearing sense available to detect bird song or traffic hum, whilst the brain is simultaneously interpreting the tactile information.”

The UltraCane was developed by mimicking the echolocation of bats which use wide ranging ultrasound to build a ‘spatial map’ of their surroundings, allowing them to effectively ‘see’ in the dark. UltraCane can be contacted at 01423 359 711 or visit www.ultracane.com.

Events

Goalball 'Have a Go' session

Goalball is one of the paralympic sports, and is played by visually impaired athletes (who are blindfolded) using a ball with bells inside. Now Goalball UK are launching new clubs around the country, and are holding free 'Have a Go' sessions for potential players. There will be an event in Cardiff on Saturday 27th October, with a view to establishing a club in South Wales.

It will be held at Fitzalan High School, Lawrenny Road in Cardiff from 10.30 am to 12.30 pm, although the location for the new club has not yet been confirmed, as it will depend on where key members come from. For more information, visit Goalball UK's website, www.goalballuk.com/. To book a place, send an email to Kathryn at kathryn@goalballuk.com.

Professional Development Day at RNC

The Royal National College for the Blind (RNC) in Hereford is organising a Development Day for professionals working with visually impaired adults on 1st November, giving them the opportunity to find out how the college helps people who are blind or partially sighted move into employment or self-employment.

To attend, or find out more information, please call 01432 376 621 or email info@rncb.ac.uk.

Free training day for families of visually impaired children

'Movement Matters' is a joint initiative set up by the National Blind Children's Society (NBCS) and Guide Dogs to help children and young people achieve independence and mobility within their family environment and in the wider world. As part of this initiative, families are being offered the opportunity to attend free training days.

The events will offer interactive training and information sessions which include printed advice and information sheets as well as follow-up support for attendees from a mobility instructor for children and young people. There is a training day on Saturday 24th November at Queen Alexandra College in Birmingham. To find out more and book a place, contact Stephanie Village from NBCS on 0121 423 4892 or send an email to stephanie.village@nbcs.org.uk.

There will be other opportunities to attend this training – dates will be publicised on WCB's website www.wcb-ccd.org.uk when available.

Events at New College, Worcester

New College, the national residential college for young people aged 11 to 19 who are blind or partially sighted, is offering several events this autumn.

8 November – Workshop 'Introduction to supporting VI students'.

This event is for teaching assistants and learning support assistants who have recently started working with VI students in a mainstream school. Topics covered include understanding the

impact of visual impairment on learning; adaptation of materials; and effective strategies. There is a charge of £70.

17 November – Family Day

Family Day is a fun and exciting day for any family who has a child with a visual impairment. The day offers a range of activities for all ages and parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters are all welcome! Activities will include climbing wall, pony rides, art workshops and a tour of the college. It includes a free lunch and refreshments.

4 December – Outreach Day

Aimed at educational professionals working with visually impaired young people, and the parents of visually impaired students, Outreach Days offers the chance to meet subject teachers, get hands-on experience of specialist equipment, and get practical support and advice on specific curriculum areas of your choice such as Maths, PE, Music, Science, Braille etc. They are free but an optional lunch is provided at a charge of £5.

There will also be Outreach Days on the following dates in 2013: 14 February; 23 April; 3 July.

Places on all these events must be reserved in advance. To find out more and make a booking, telephone the College on 01905 763933 or book on-line at www.newcollegeworcester.co.uk.

News and Information

New Resource for People with RP

'RP Fighting Blindness', the organisation for people with the eye condition Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) has developed an on-line resource to help people find their way through the many agencies, issues and questions that they are facing after diagnosis. It will also be of use to anyone who needs to know more about RP and its symptoms, such as families, friends, teachers and employers of RP patients, and health and social care professionals.

The UK Care Pathway for People with RP starts from the initial diagnosis and deals with issues such as how the condition will affect you, the various professionals and their roles in providing help and support, continuing care and what to do if something changes. There are also separate sections for other groups with an interest, for example, families and GPs. You can find out more, and access the Pathway at <http://rppath.wordpress.com/>.

The RP Pathway has been developed with funding from the UK Department of Health. Although there may be some minor differences in the ways that patients in Wales access services (because health issues are the responsibility of the Welsh Government), all of the principles of the pathway are equally applicable to Wales, making it a very valuable resource for anyone with an interest in RP.

Accessible Post Offices

Research by Consumer Focus Wales, Action on Hearing Loss Cymru and RNIB Cymru has identified significant barriers to accessing post offices for people with sensory loss. Members of Action on Hearing Loss Cymru and RNIB Cymru conducted a 'mystery shopper' exercise at 150 post offices across Wales. Experiences were mixed, with one third of participants with sight loss encountering problems caused by obstacles and trip hazards when entering the post office, and four out of five visits conducted by people with hearing loss uncovering a lack of a working induction loop. Whilst some participants found staff to be helpful and knowledgeable, others reported concerns over staff's inability to respond to their needs.

Ceri Jackson, Acting Director of RNIB Cymru, said: "For many people across Wales, the Post Office is much more than just a place to post a letter. It's at the heart of the community, enabling local people to access a wide range of services without having to travel too far from home. With sensory loss affecting one in five people in Wales (and with those numbers expected to increase significantly in the years ahead), ensuring services are accessible is not only 'the right thing to do'; it also makes sound business sense. Ultimately, the fact that one in six visits resulted in the person with sensory loss saying they would not feel confident to use that post office again isn't good enough."

Talks are now underway with Post Office Ltd to discuss how improvements can be made. A full copy of the report is available from www.consumerfocus.org.uk/wales.

A myth-busting guide to buying energy saving light bulbs

As old-fashioned light bulbs are finally phased out, the sight loss charity Thomas Pocklington Trust, together with independent consumer research charity Ricability (Research Institute for Consumer Affairs), has published an essential guide to buying energy saving light bulbs. Getting the right lighting is crucial for older people and especially those with some level of sight loss. The new guide, *Choosing Energy Saving Light Bulbs For Your Home*, provides what everyone needs to know about buying energy saving bulbs. It dispels some common myths and shows that the new bulbs can be just as bright, effective and easily controlled as the old ones.

Sarah Buchanan, Research Director, Thomas Pocklington Trust says: "Older people and people with sight loss don't need to worry about switching to energy saving light bulbs. Our new guide explains which bulbs to buy for different areas in the home, for different levels of lighting and for a quick delivery of the light that's needed. We know from research that having the right lighting dramatically improves the lives of people with sight loss. This new guide will help them achieve it."

The traditional, incandescent light bulbs have been withdrawn from sale and now everyone will have to buy energy saving light bulbs, but many people have been deterred from changing to the new bulbs as early versions were slow to warm up and gave off a blue/white light that people didn't like. Now the new guide shows that a bigger, better range is available. By explaining which bulb works best for specific needs the guide dispels myths and demystifies the choice of which bulb to buy.

You can download a copy of the guide at <http://www.ricability.org.uk> (look under 'Consumer Reports') or

order a copy by ringing 020 8995 0880 (audio/Braille) or 020 7427 2460 (print).

Launch of new digital inclusion project

RNIB Cymru has just launched its new 'Get Connected' project, to help people with sight loss get online and access a wide range of digital services. Funded by the Welsh Government's Communities 2.0 project, the service will provide training sessions in community venues and home visits, giving people an introduction to using a computer and the internet. From helping people connect with friends and family via email, Skype or social media, to helping them save money by shopping and paying bills online, the project aims to make a real difference to the lives of blind and partially sighted people by giving them access to the same online advantages enjoyed by their sighted peers.

For more information about the project, please see <http://bit.ly/get-connected-cymru> or call Michelle Herbert, Digital Inclusion Manager, on 07789 397037.

Quick Guide to Nystagmus for Teachers

The Nystagmus Network has produced a quick guide to the condition for teachers. The concise 10-point guide explains that Nystagmus is more complex than being short sighted, and cannot be corrected with glasses. It describes the practical problems which pupils face: for example sharing books with others is not possible as they need to get close in order to read. Copies of the guide can be downloaded from the website <http://www.nystagmusnet.org/>.

International AMD Awareness Week 2012 puts the focus on prevention.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of low vision and blindness in people over 50, and it affects 25-30 million individuals in the Western world alone, yet very few are aware that AMD may be prevented by following a few very important suggestions. In response to this, the AMD Alliance International [AMD AI] chose 'prevention' as the theme for the 2012 AMD Awareness Week in September. They have produced the following advice on how AMD can be prevented, or its progress slowed.

1 Eye Examinations: "Everyone over 40 should have a dilated eye exam and follow the eye doctor's recommendation for regular eye exams, even if their vision seems perfect," said Narinder Sharma, President and CEO of AMD AI. "Education and early detection are the keys to preventing AMD or slowing its advance."

2 Pay attention to diet: Eat dark green, leafy vegetables and fish. NEI researchers found that people who eat food rich in lutein and zeaxanthin, two anti-oxidants from the same family as beta carotene, are at lower risk for AMD. These foods include kale, mustard greens, collard greens, raw or cooked spinach, among others. When it comes to fish, they found that people whose diets contain a lot of omega-3 fatty acids (DHA and EPA found in fish, especially salmon) are also at less risk for advanced AMD. As little as one serving of fish per week may be helpful. Nuts, olive oil, and fruits are important, too. They also contain vitamins and minerals that play a role in AMD prevention.

3 Don't smoke. In addition to the role of diet, research has shown that AMD is two to three times more likely among tobacco smokers, and that the risk is dose dependent. In other words, the more a person smokes, the greater the risk and the

faster the progression of the disease. Controlling weight and cholesterol are also important.

4 Test vision daily using the Amsler grid. The Amsler grid resembles graph paper except for a dot in its center. It helps detect AMD or AMD progression. The user is instructed to hang the grid on the front of the refrigerator or in a similarly convenient location; to cover each eye in turn; to look at the central dot with the uncovered eye; and notice whether any lines appear wavy or broken. If so, or if the lines look worse than before, it is important to see an eye doctor.

<http://www.amd.org/living-with-amd/resources-and-tools/31-amsler-grid.html> has Amsler grids available at no cost.

For more information on Macular Disease, contact the Macular Disease Society on their freephone number, 0300 3030111.

New Group for Young People Launched

A new social group, BMEV (Black and Minority Ethnic Vision), for young people has been launched. The group offers visually impaired young adults from minority ethnic communities an opportunity to meet and get to know one another and share information and knowledge about coping with sight loss.

Formed by Ziad Khan, BMEV will be inviting expert speakers to group sessions to advise and inform the members on available support. This includes welfare rights, access to work, new assistive technology and independent living. For further information contact Sight Support on 01495 763650.

First realistic Welsh language 'voices' developed

Natural sounding Welsh language text-to-speech voices have been made available to the public for the first time. Developed by the RNIB and text-to-speech software company IVONA, with Welsh Government funding, the new voices will make a real difference to blind and partially sighted Welsh speakers and learners. Until now, people who rely on screen reading software to use computers haven't been able to access websites, exchange emails or read or write documents in the Welsh language. The voices are being made available free to both individuals and non-commercial organisations, and there is expected to be a significant level of interest from schools and colleges. They are available to download from <http://welsh.ivona.com/>.

17-year-old student Elin Williams is one of those looking forward to using the new voices. She said: "I am very excited about the development of this new software. This new Welsh synthetic voice will help me access the computer in my first language. I don't live at home in Wales, so one of the reasons I'm so looking forward to using this new software is that it will allow me to keep in touch with Welsh family and friends through emails and Facebook in my mother tongue. The new voices will also help hugely with my studies as I am hoping to continue with my Welsh A-level. As I do my work primarily on my laptop, the new Welsh voice will make my studies more accessible and will make using the internet for research in Welsh a lot easier as well."

Higher Education Guide for Disabled Young People

If you are thinking of studying in higher education in 2013, a new guide from Disability Rights UK provides a valuable source of information to help you make the right decisions.

‘Into Higher Education 2013’ includes up-to-date information on tuition fees, repayment methods and the support that will be in place for 2013 entry, and has a series of case studies describing the experiences of students with disabilities. You can download the document from the Disability Rights UK website, www.disabilityrightsuk.org, or order a copy from the free student helpline, 0800 328 5050.

Driving when you have macular degeneration

The Macular Disease Society (MDS) has produced a new information leaflet giving advice on driving if you have been diagnosed with the condition. It does not necessarily mean that you have to stop driving as many people still meet the legal requirement and can continue to drive legally and safely.

You can download a copy of the leaflet from the MDS website, www.maculardisease.org (look under ‘Information’) or telephone 0300 3030 111 for a copy.

New Helpline number for discrimination issues

The Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline has been replaced by a new Equality Advisory Support Service with effect from 1st October. The new telephone number is 0800 444 205, and there is also a textphone number, 0800 444 208. The lines are open from 9am to 8pm, Monday to Friday, and 10am to 2pm on Saturdays.

The new service is aimed at individuals who need more expert advice and support on discrimination than advice agencies and other local organisations can provide. To find out more, go to the website <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/equality-advisory-support-service/>.

RNIB Cymru celebrates 10 years of membership

This year, the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) celebrates its tenth anniversary as a membership organisation. There are currently over 1,000 members in Wales, who enjoy a wide range of discounts and benefits but also play a vital role in shaping the organisation's work.

RNIB Membership is open to all blind and partially sighted people and their family, friends or carers. It brings together people with sight loss and provides a community where people can share their experiences and knowledge with each other and RNIB. Members have been an integral part of several high profile RNIB campaign successes including increasing audio description on television by 20 per cent and new European regulations to improve disabled people's rights on buses. Members also worked with Debenhams to help staff understand the issues visually

impaired people face when shopping for clothes and their feedback has shaped the training Debenhams staff now receive.

Gwenda Fitzpatrick, RNIB Cymru's Membership Officer, says: "Everyone gets something different from their RNIB membership: whether it be getting involved in the campaigning and governance side of things, or whether it's making new friends and socialising a bit more. Members in Wales benefit from a range of discounts on products and services, can keep up-to-date through our regular newsletters and members' magazine, and are welcome to attend any of the many events we hold right across Wales each year. If you or someone you know might be interested in becoming a member, then I would urge you to get in touch."

For more information about RNIB Membership email membership@rnib.org.uk, ring 0303 123 5555, or visit www.rnib.org.uk/membership.

Can you spare 90 minutes to sit for a FREE Eye Examination?

Cardiff University student optometrists offer a FREE Eye Examination and FREE contact lens trials to all students, their friends & family, and the general public during term time (October to March) at Cardiff University Optometrists (Eye Clinic). These examinations are run as part of the students' training to professional standards, and are an essential part of their degree, leading to their final qualification. The students will conduct the eye examination supervised by a qualified optometrist.

As a token of our appreciation, anybody who sits for an eye examination in the student clinic will receive a **20% discount off the cost of new spectacles** (terms & conditions apply). To arrange an appointment please telephone **029 20874357** and ask for an appointment in the student clinic. Clinic times are

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday at 10am & 2pm and Friday at 10am.

Should you wish to see our resident optometrist, the appointment will take approximately 30 minutes. NHS Examinations available if eligible. T & C apply.

We also run a **Free Low Vision clinic** which aims to maximise any residual vision or remaining eyesight with the help of magnifiers or other specialised aids. These are held on a Monday morning and afternoon.

Cardiff University Optometrists, Maindy Road, Cathays, Cardiff CF24 4LU. <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/optom/eyeclinic/index.html>

Advertise in ViW Roundup.

ViW Roundup is sent to more than 500 people, in a variety of formats. We are a not-for-profit organisation that hopes to recoup its costs so that we can serve blind and partially sighted people in Wales, and seek advertisers for our newsletter so that we can continue to produce this valued journal. Our rates are as follows (per edition):

Full A4 page: £125 (black and white) £200 (colour)

1/2 A4 page: £75 (black and white)

1/3 A4 page: £45 (black and white)

Enclosures: single sheet A4 500 copies, supplied in a ready-to-go format: £100. Enclosures (such as booklets): please ask for quote. To advertise in many editions, please contact us for discounts.

If you are interested, please contact Dewi Osborne via dewi@wcb-ccd.org.uk or telephone 02920 473954 to find out more.

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Lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year

For more information, log on to: wwutilities.co.uk



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Roundup is published quarterly by Vision in Wales. It is also available in audio CD format. Further copies can be requested from Richard Bowers, Vision in Wales (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 ViW, 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.



Sight Cymru

is seeking

2 x Project Officers – Pontypool

To work in our new Sight Centre Cymru signposting service
£18,500 pa.

Ideally you'll have excellent customer service and interpersonal skills; experience of providing telephone services to people with sight loss, working with databases and taking part in research and evaluation activities. Ability to communicate in English and Welsh is advantageous.

For more information and application pack, contact
hr@sightsupport.org.uk or phone 01495 763650. Closing date:
23 Nov 2012. Interviews: 30 Nov 2012.
Sight Centre Cymru is funded by Big Lottery Wales



LOTTERY FUNDED

The cover photo shows members of Vision in Wales at the Wales Eye Care Conference.