

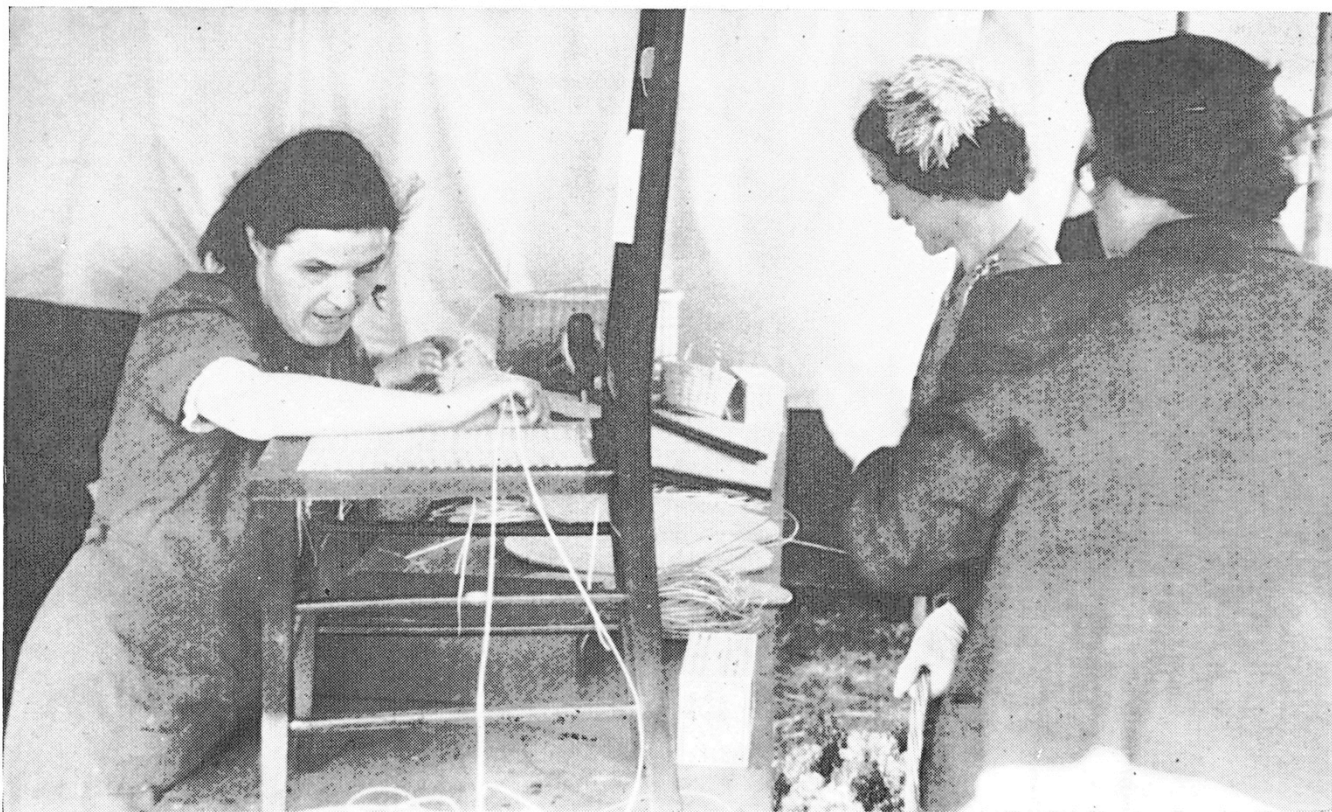
Wales Council of the Blind Roundup

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Wales Council of the Blind 80th Anniversary Special Issue

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EDITORIAL

This edition has been a real pleasure to put together as it is a celebration of 80 years of Wales Council of the Blind. I would like to thank everyone who contributed testimonials and pieces about WCB for this edition - it's thanks to you all that there is something to celebrate.

I'll keep this brief, but the next edition of Roundup will look at developments in ophthalmology and eye care within the NHS over its 70 years – another thing to celebrate!

- *Richard Bowers*

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WCB Roundup is sent to more than 2500 people, in a variety of formats. We are a not-for-profit organisation that hopes to recoup its costs. We seek advertisers for our newsletter so that we can continue to produce this valued journal. Advertisers will reach a readership of individuals with sight loss, optometrists, ophthalmologists, rehabilitation officers, social workers, and organisations working for blind, partially sighted and disabled people.

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80 Years of WCB

A busy umbrella

It's easy to assume that we've always had standards, that government knows exactly what people with sight loss need and that professionals understand each other perfectly. Sadly, that's not always the case. And that's why we need Wales Council of the Blind (WCB) as an umbrella organisation.

I once took part in a training session with ophthalmologists, orthoptists, optometrists and opticians. Others had equally confusing job titles to outsiders, like rehabilitation officer and mobility officer. And I wasn't the only one unsure what these jobs involved, as became clear when we had to explain what we did. "I don't really know what orthoptists do," said an optometrist. "I'm glad you admitted that," said a rehabilitation officer, "because I don't know much about orthoptists either."

"Well," said an orthoptist, "This is probably a good time for me to confess that I don't have much idea what a rehab officer does." And so we spent a handy half hour learning exactly what it was we all did and how we could work better to help patients and service users.

Heads together

It's events like this that bring people together and lead to those often small changes like hospital staff guiding you to a seat. But events don't happen unless someone organises them. And that's one significant way that WCB makes a difference.

A prime example is the Wales Annual Eyecare Conference which WCB holds every September. The Conference brings together 150 or more people working in eyecare plus some of us with poor vision. It's an opportunity to learn, share and perhaps find ways to ensure that next time your hospital appointment comes in a format you can actually read.

Two way flow

Another way WCB improves life for people with less than perfect vision is as a single point of contact. WCB channels ideas, opinions and sometimes gripes to the Assembly Government and other organisations. Similarly policymakers, researchers, businesses and others use WCB to share information or ask us what we want.

Just look at any issue of Roundup or the Sylw newsletter to see how much information flows in both directions. Sounds simple, but if WCB wasn't here, that information sharing wouldn't happen and there would be much less coordination and cooperation.

Setting standards

People often complain about a postcode lottery when it comes to services. So WCB has a role in setting and monitoring the standards of services too. For example in 2001 WCB kick-started an initiative which ultimately led to benchmarking Local Authority services.

That's not to say services for vision impaired people are identical across Wales. After all Barry is a very different place to Barmouth or Bangor. But that

WCB inspired benchmarking work helps to reduce the variations in education, health and welfare services.

These are hardly headline grabbing activities. Booking venues, bringing people together and publishing newsletters can't compare with opening a new hospital or launching a new service. Yet if it wasn't for WCB making the small things happen, many of the big initiatives would never get off the ground either.

John Sanders, July 2018.

A Word from Vaughan Gething, AM, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services.

I recognise the important role the third sector has in delivering improvements for people in Wales who are Blind/blind/living with sight loss. There has been encouraging progress in the provision of eye care services in Wales and the Wales Council for the Blind has made a key contribution to this.

Working in partnership with the Welsh Government the Council develops the agenda for the annual national eye care conference and leads on facilitating the event, ensuring attendance from a wide range of stakeholders. Whilst the conference is primarily aimed at health professionals, social care and third sector, post conference analysis has shown attendance is wider, with representation from the education sector and, most importantly, patients. This is primarily due to the hard work and commitment of the Wales Council for the Blind.

Cardiff Institute for the Blind (CIB) and WCB have had a long and rich history together. The two have previously been close neighbours and staff have had and continue to have a close relationship. The role WCB has in supporting and bringing together other charities in the sector is an important one, as is their work in coordinating responses and scrutiny of Welsh Government work. They are passionate about ensuring services provided to blind and partially sighted people, such as rehabilitation and Access to Work, are universally available and of a high standard. We'd like to wish WCB a very happy 80th anniversary and our best wishes for the future.

From all at CIB

Wales Council for the Blind

... as it once was called. How we tried to get that title changed! But Trustees and members, less radical than the staff, were very reluctant to give up the well-established and recognisable title. With changing times, the new title is now much more in keeping with the zeitgeist.

When I started in WCB, the organisation was getting a rap over the knuckles from the Welsh Office for relying financially on them and for not being more pro-active. Tackling this was a situation which I relished. I have always strongly resisted the idea that a charity is a business. It's sensible to be business-like in terms of efficiency and effectiveness but never a business. However, I borrowed the business approach of looking for our unique selling point or USP. It was clear that firstly WCB alone represented v.i. just in Wales and secondly our membership consisted of all the v.i. organisations and local authorities in Wales. From that standpoint emerged the dreaded 'list of lists', that is the contact details of all relevant organisations, professionals, groups and individuals concerning v.i. in Wales. It was a nightmare for the staff getting it together and maintaining it until we recruited our volunteer Anne to manage it. The benefit was that we could gather information and views from all those sources and we could circulate information appropriately. The magic of networking!

We have been very fortunate in Wales in having a third sector structure with formal access to Assembly Ministers as laid down in the Government of Wales Act. Through WCVA it also facilitated alliances and shared agendas. Another network! As a result we helped form a Wales Disability Reference Group, working together with Disability Wales, Learning Disability Wales, Wales Council for the Deaf and Mind Cymru. In this way we were able to share specialities and build a strong disability lobby. It was a very pleasant and co-operative group to be part of and I am happy to admit that I learnt a lot from my counterparts in those organisations.

My first Chair of Trustees was Jack James, a councillor from Pembrokeshire, a small pugnacious but formidable man who in spite of his blindness was a smart operator. He told me once that he was on over thirty committees and chair of seven. "When I think about it" he told me "the power I have sometimes frightens me". He loved Southerndown, the home specialising in v.i. residents which we ran. Regular visits in his company were part of my diary. He was passionate about keeping it going and we did so until 2009 when the funding problems could no longer be overcome, as with many other homes. What we were very proud of at Southerndown, in spite of financial difficulties, were the career structure we introduced, the programme of staff training and the full activities programme we ran. The latter included

reminiscence sessions, music and movement, arts and crafts, special events such as French Day with French food and music and a register of all the individual residents' activities.

Another of the Trustees who will live forever in my mind is Norman Follis. He had been totally blinded in a pit explosion at the age of 22 but had continued to read and educate himself and to fight for the underdog. Nothing stood in his way. When I organised a dinner for the Trustees, we had been recommended a particularly good restaurant but I questioned it because there was a difficult winding spiral staircase. But Norman said firmly "If the food's good, book it!".

I was never one for an early start and, travelling up from Swansea, I was usually greeted with a large mug of tea at about 10 a.m. However I loved to work late when I had the time to phone Trustees, members and contacts for unhurried conversations about progress in their area as well as for their opinions on our work at WCB and any current development. Poor Maldwyn James of Ceredigion was often the recipient of one of my calls but always listened very patiently and gave me his advice!

When I started, the AGM was a necessary but unexciting event, attended by members out of duty and to meet friends and colleagues. One of our initiatives was to develop it into a national conference. We tried to hold it always in mid-Wales, equal convenience for all, as we said, equal misery for all, as others said! But we worked hard on transport. To start with, we organised it as a gigantic consultation on the important issues for v.i. people in Wales. The invitations went wide to all corners of Wales. On the day, to accommodate all disabilities, we had interviewees, tables for writing down comments and for recording views as well as the conventional 'workshops'. In subsequent years we focused each conference on one of the issues identified: Health, Employment etc.

It always took the unlimited effort and time of our small staff to realise these events but one of my happiest memories is the meal we usually had together at the end of each conference and the ride home, full of anecdotes and, even at that exhausted stage, new ideas.

Mind you, they didn't all go smoothly. We used to organise the agenda very carefully as a progression through the subject. At one conference, our key speaker, a well-known professional opening the programme, had refused the offer of a lift. Unfortunately, being from outside Wales, he was of the opinion that Newtown was an hour away from Cardiff and so arrived halfway through the day, thereby disrupting the programme.

On another occasion we featured registration as the topic which was a very contentious subject. Because of the complex nature of the arguments, I asked Joyce Chatterton (RNIB Wales Director) to present a 'Socratic dialogue' with me, to lay out the arguments for and against. Before we finished the carefully prepared dialogue, one of the audience started heckling us, shouting at us to get on with the AGM! The Chair unfortunately gave in so the dialogue was never completed.

One very happy memory I have is of the AGM/National Conference on Access in 1999. After the day's programme we had a live band to entertain us. Much to everyone's surprise, our v.i. Chair, Cllr. Peter Curtis from Flintshire, went to the band and asked to borrow a guitar; then he stunned us by playing with them for the rest of the evening! We hadn't known that he was a rock musician and had been playing in a band for many years. Opportunely the conferences enabled us to develop a v.i. strategy for Wales. Later the UK organisations took up our idea and created a v.i. strategy for the UK.

Out of that original consultative conference, we identified the Projects we needed to pursue to develop the conditions in Wales. Our first Project on IT for v.i. people was funded by the Welsh Office and we were lucky to have Dylan Evans with us for 4 years. After that, we managed to fund special Projects by ingenious means. One of the first was Welfare Benefits, when first Jonathan Roberts and then Emma Non John helped people with appeals and tribunals. Emma achieved a 100% success rate as well as writing and circulating guidance for others. We learnt from her of how ill equipped assessors and tribunals were to understand v.i. She told us of one case where the tribunal remarked that the appellant had been blind for two years so should have got used to it by then and not needed the extra help!

Another Project was the Awareness Training which we delivered to staff and companies all around Wales. It was unique in that it was not a personal view of sight impairment but, novel at that time, an objective structured session led by trained v.i. people, with a sighted assistant. This was created by Vicky Richards and subsequently managed by Nicola Jones. Vicky then went on to focus on v.i. rehabilitation during which she raised the profile of rehabilitation and built up a network of Rehabilitation workers in Wales.

We were lucky in our contacts with the civil servants in our main funding body. Rosemary Evans, our contact in the Welsh Office, could appear to be quite intimidating but she was so much on the side of those with disabilities or disadvantages that we fared well with funding. Later an angel in the shape of Gerry Lynch from the Welsh Government provided us with substantial funding for key initiatives. When he visited us, we always attempted to bribe him with chocolate biscuits!

Probably one of the endeavours that I was most proud of was in bringing together representatives of the Welsh Assembly Government, the Welsh Local Government Association, the Directors of Social Services Wales, Rehabilitation Officers, specialist v.i. social workers and v.i. people under the banner of *Best Value* to set service standards for v.i. people in Social Services.

We were always creative in overcoming funding problems by maximising our advantages. Richard started with us as a one-day a week Finance Officer but we soon tapped into his other talents and he ran a Transcriptions service, recording and transliterating texts for members and customers. Simultaneously he also became our Information and Arts Officer, hence the current journal. How to get a quart out of a pint pot!

Success against the odds characterised Nicky Malson's Sports Project, himself registered blind. He did marvels with little funding, physical difficulties with transport and venues and persuading people to support and carry out events. To raise funds for this project, we did a sponsored 'Walk down Wales' on two occasions. The first in 1997 went down the west coast, Bangor to Swansea, the second in 1999 down the east, Mold to Pontypridd. Three v.i. members joined Nicky. Shamed by their efforts, I signed up as well and even persuaded my two sons to join in. They were hilarious seven-day journeys in which the blind often led the sighted! I remember at the end of one day, too tired to look where I was going, plunging into a stretch of wet cement to be hauled out by Kathleen Morris, one of the v.i. walkers!

Funding is a permanent headache for third sector organisations and one piece of luck for us was to get Dilwyn Price on secondment from Barclays Bank as our Business Manager. Working away quietly at our financial problems, he saved the money situation numerous times and helped us squeeze more results out of a tight budget.

Our Beca has been a linchpin of the organisation. When she first joined, she was young and not very experienced but when our Administrator left at short notice Beca fearlessly took on the job. After that, we saw Bec take on any problem coming her way and beware anyone who thought they could take her or WCB for a ride!

It was always my hope that when I finished in WCB, I would be succeeded by a Director who was v.i. This didn't happen straightaway but I'm delighted that Owen is now in that position. When we first knew him as a volunteer, we soon spotted his potential and recruited him as a young Trustee. When Dylan left, we convinced Owen that he was eligible to apply for the post of IT Officer and fortunately he did. For some years he continued developing IT assessments and support across Wales and helped hundreds of people obtain appropriate

equipment both at work and at home. He built up an empowering network of expertise across Wales. Sadly this was one of the occasions when the politicians let us down by failing to fund it long-term. Had they done so, Wales would have had a unique and comprehensive free service. The good news is that Owen stayed with us and is now fulfilling the ambition of v.i. people's interests being represented by a v.i. person.

When I left WCB, the staff knew that I didn't want any presentations so they made up a booklet of anecdotes of my adventures and misadventures. And there were far more than I can or should recount here. That volume has a treasured place on my bookshelf. In my memory, we had a great team, it felt like a family, and I think that we made some solid progress for v.i. people in Wales.

Vanessa Webb, WCB Director 1991-2008

Since its inception in 2004, The **Low Vision Service Wales** has always received enthusiastic and unwavering support from WCB. As WCB now celebrates its 80th year this is a timely opportunity to acknowledge how the WCB team's warmth, generosity, and 'considerable diplomatic skills' have played their part in helping the LVSW to grow and develop into the world leading service that it is today. As chair of the Low Vision Advisory Group, Owen Williams presides over a wealth of multidisciplinary talent. This includes representation from social services, rehabilitation and habilitation, education, the optometric profession, Welsh Government and a variety of those who represent the all-important patient voice.

Wales Council for the Blind can always be depended on to provide invaluable advice and guidance to professionals and patients. They play a pivotal role in the annual Wales Eye Care Conference which grows in strength each year.

In summary, Wales Council of the Blind provides the foundation for the services provided for people with sight loss in Wales. Without WCB, Wales would not boast the world leading multidisciplinary support for people with sight loss that it does.

Vision Support would like to take this opportunity to thank WCB for all the support given over the years. The work you do in supporting and developing local societies for the blind across Wales is critical. Whether you are a small society of volunteers or a bigger organisation like ours the quality of information produced, the body of knowledge that can be drawn on and the personal support given is always useful and much appreciated. Put this together with a dedicated attitude to campaigning on behalf of people with vision impairment and you have an umbrella organisation that is vital in preserving an independent voice for the sight loss sector.

80 years of work is a real achievement, there is a lot to celebrate, congratulations WCB and long may you continue.

A Word from our Chairperson.

When Wales Council of the Blind was established in August 1938, reaching your 80th birthday was relatively uncommon. Fortunately, nowadays a large percentage of people reach that age and many of them are still healthy and enjoying life.

For a small charity to reach that age is something to celebrate and, fortunately, WCB in its 80th year, is in an extremely healthy state. Back in the 1940's and post-war, WCB was 'managed' by a large committee made up of County Councillors and Officials from the Welsh Local Authorities and Health Boards, plus representatives from the local societies and associations for the blind and partially sighted across Wales. In more recent years the number of trustees has reduced considerably as WCB has modernised its governance in accordance with advice and instructions from both the Charity Commissioners and the Welsh Government, our major funder.

I am proud to be the Chair of our Board of Trustees and particularly proud that it has a majority of members who have significant visual impairments. Likewise, our fabulous Chief Executive, Owen Williams who heads a small and loyal team of Officers, the wonderful Richard and Rebecca, and several great volunteers, who do so much behind the scenes.

Much as it is an honour to be Chair, my trustees, colleagues and I realise that we have an awesome responsibility to continue to work as hard and as well as we can, in order to help make the lives of the visually impaired in Wales better.

Although we celebrate our 80th birthday this summer, our aim remains, along with our many good friends in other partner organisations – RNIB Cymru and Visionary to name just two – to see the eradication of blindness and eye disease before we achieve another 80 years.

Janice Powers, Chair WCB.

The Welsh Rehabilitation Officers Forum would like to wish Wales Council of the Blind a happy 80th birthday.

We would like to also thank WCB and their highly motivated and professional staff for all the support they have given us over the years.

We have built a strong partnership and worked in collaboration that has led to have a direct impact on the work we do as rehabilitation officers. WCB has over the years secured funding for the development of our profession, which has fed in to our continuous professional development. This year we have used this funding for all rehabilitation officers to have a training on Dementia and sight loss. The funding has also been used to pay subscriptions to the overarching professional body for Rehabilitation workers across the United Kingdom.

WCB has played an integral part to drive up standards of our practice and link us directly with our partners in Health, Social Care and in the third sector.

There is still much more work to be done to improve and streamline services for people who are blind and partially sighted across Wales and we look forward to building on this with WCB in the many years to come.

*Ian Moran,
Chair, Welsh Rehabilitation Officers Forum*

Radnorshire Association for the Blind has been receiving help from WCB going back to the late 90s and always found great help and advice.

During the past eight to nine years as Hon. Sec. to Radnor Association for the Blind I have found how helpful it is in my role to be a member of WCB. Many times I have produced documents to be printed for our committee meetings etc. which I email to Bec at WCB who rapidly prints and posts them back, often by return of post!

Other help comes from Bec in attending our meeting as a committee member affording us quick answers to many of our questions brought up.

I can say that the RAB committee are extremely grateful for all the help they receive from WCB.

Mike Edwards, Radnorshire Association for the Blind.

WCB time – a volunteer's journey.

My time with WCB started back in February 2011 and is thanks to Sophie Dymont who was the transitions officer for the RNIB at the time. I first met Sophie in September 2010, having been out of school for 4 years and no real idea as to what I was going to do. We looked at a couple of options that didn't materialise and then, in January 2011, she suggested WCB as a possible volunteer opportunity as she thought it would be a good starting point to gain experience of an office and a good match. So, despite being nervous and lacking in confidence, having not been in a working environment before, I agreed to go along with Sophie to meet Owen and Rebecca to have a chat to see what work I could do with them. After a good meeting, where I explained my sight loss, what I could and couldn't do and what accessibility requirements I had, we agreed that I would start off doing one morning a week and see how it goes from there. Quicker than I could have imagined, I began to grow in confidence, break out of my shell and get my feet under the desk. This was due to the relaxed environment I now found myself in and the kind, welcoming nature of my new colleagues. Next thing I know, it is 7 and a half years later and I'm a part of the furniture.

I can remember my first day as if it were yesterday, I was incredibly nervous, not sure of how I would cope, would I fit in etc. Upon entering the office, I was warmly welcomed by Dilwyn who then introduced me to Ann. A short time after the rest of the office turned up and introduced themselves to me: the walk into the unknown had begun...

As for what I do in the office, aside from answering the phones, dealing with our stationery and printer suppliers, I'm in charge of getting our newsletter Roundup packed up and mailed out once a quarter, as well as other mailouts throughout the year. I like to run the production line with military precision and, being somewhat of a perfectionist, I believe if a job is worth doing, do it properly. My approach often brings amusement to others in the office to which I say "you do your job, I'll do mine". My other job is to get the WCB Xmas dinner organised and, like my attitude towards a mailout, I like to be efficient and prompt to avoid disappointment, meaning a date, time and venue is booked in the diary by August.

As well as experiencing the highs and lows of office life, I have also had to contend with the personal lows of considerable sight loss over my time at WCB. Now there is never a good time to lose your sight but one thing I have realised is that there is a good place to be in and around when that happens. The help and support, whether that be on a practical level with adjustments made so I could carry on, or on an emotional level, giving me time to get away from office life for a time until I was feeling myself and up to being around people again, has been faultless and one of the many strong characteristics of the WCB staff that makes it a great place to work in.

So from one morning a week to now being a part of the office furniture in the space of seven and a half years, it has certainly been an adventure with ups and downs along the way, working relationships formed but more importantly for me, new friendships made with those colleagues I have worked with, both past and present.

I'd just like to take this opportunity to thank Owen, Rebecca and Richard for all you have done for me, right from my first day and welcoming me into the unique world of WCB, you've all played your part in supporting me through tough times as well as sharing in many a laugh and good times. This help and support has always been and will always be appreciated, so thank you.

Dewi Osborne.

Volunteering for WCB.

'We're looking for someone who takes pleasure in producing order out of chaos' - that's how my association with WCB started. The charity was looking for a volunteer to organise their library, which had been neglected due to the many other demands on the staff. I'd been fortunate to take early retirement from a career in information technology, and was looking for a volunteering opportunity where I could put some of the technical and organisational skills I had acquired over my career to some use – and also learn something new myself. Although plenty of charities were looking for volunteers, there weren't any that seemed quite right for me. However, I was interested in working in the disability sector, and thought that I might enjoy sorting out the library for a few weeks.

That was quite a few years ago now, and I'm still here! Once I'd got the library under control, and had got to know the team, we started to identify other areas where I could help, and my role has evolved considerably over time. I've been involved in various activities over the years: for a while, I assisted some of WCB's fantastic vision impaired volunteers in delivering awareness training to organisations, but my main focus has always been on information-related tasks. I helped develop a 'Service Database' of information about organisations and services in the sector, and started to use our website to publicise news and events. Since then, we have launched our quarterly magazine Roundup, and become Twitter users.

Ensuring that vision impaired people in Wales, their families, and the organisations and professionals working with them, are aware of events, activities and news which may be of interest is an important part of WCB's role, so I thought I would summarise the various communication channels that we currently use.

Roundup

This magazine, Roundup, is produced four times per year. In addition to the regular features such as events and news, each issue has a theme. These have included such varied topics as sport, political engagement, shopping, education and employment. Roundup is produced in a range of accessible formats, and has a circulation of around 2,500. It also reaches a wider audience via our website, and Twitter.

WCB Website – www.wcb-ccd.org.uk

Our website is frequently updated with items of interest, including events, opportunities, consultations, reports and other publications. As the umbrella organisation for vision impairment in Wales, we aim to provide a 'one-stop shop' for any information which is relevant to the sector. Many organisations contact us with events which they want publicised, but I also check organisations' websites regularly for the latest information.

Twitter - @walesblind

Since 2013, we've been using Twitter to communicate information relevant to the sector, and also as a source for news which will interest our followers. Social media has had a bad press recently, but when used positively it can be a very powerful tool for communication across boundaries, particularly for disabled people. Becoming one of our followers is a great way to keep up to date with news.

Sylw Bulletin

Don't worry if you're not a Twitter user – you can still get the latest news by signing up for our fortnightly email bulletin Sylw. It is designed so that readers can quickly identify items of interest, as it contains a brief summary of all current items, with a link to the full details on our website if you want to know more. Sylw has a circulation of around 500.

We are always interested to hear from readers, so if you have any events you want us to promote, ideas for topics you would like us to cover in future issues of Roundup, or just want to give some feedback, do get in touch.

As for me – I think that I was very fortunate that I found WCB. It's been a great place to be a volunteer. The people are great, and I feel that they appreciate my contribution. Although I only spend one day per week in the office, technology makes it easy for me to keep in touch from home, and I enjoy the challenge of making sure that we report any relevant information. I've learned a great deal and hope to be here for a few more years!

Ann Pankhurst

Guide Dogs Cymru offers our best wishes to WCB on its 80th anniversary! We very much appreciate your support and commitment to bringing the sector together, to being a voice for blind and partially sighted people across Wales, and for the enthusiasm and sincerity you bring to the work we do together. Without WCB, services for people with sight loss across Wales would be much diminished.

Optometry Wales are truly delighted to have had the privilege of working alongside WCB over the last 10 years. We rely on organisations like WCB to act as the mouthpiece of the patient, the service user and the public, a role they execute with determination, pride and perseverance. WCB are known to stakeholders such as Welsh Government and Optometry Wales for always acting with professional integrity, understanding and compassion. They are committed to delivering an excellent service to their members and as a result of their hard work and determination they are a pleasure to work with. They are relied upon in the sector to offer an outstanding service. Thank you and Happy Anniversary WCB.

John Roberts remembers.

In May 1995, I was elected to (Shadow) Isle of Anglesey Unitary County Council that would come into force in April 1996.

When April '96 dawned, as well as the Council's own committees, each member was expected to represent the Council on "outside bodies." One of my outside bodies was the Wales Council for the Blind - an organisation I'd never heard of!

I believe I made my debut at an AGM held at Rhayader, with Gwilym Charles Williams, the then Director of the North Wales Society for the Blind, in the Chair. I knew Gwilym from Urdd activities and he made me feel very much at home. As usual, at that time, we stayed overnight at Rhayader as there was a Conference the next day. On the evening of the AGM some entertainment had been arranged and, this time, it was to be line dancing with a local group leading the way.

During the evening, I noticed that a number of the members, with sight impairment or completely blind, with a little direction, were performing well compared to yours truly with the proverbial "two left feet!"

The Conference, at Rhayader, was on Education and the guest speaker was David Blunkett, the Education Minister in Tony Blair's Labour Government, who was himself blind. One anecdote I remember from his talk was how somebody from his constituency would telephone the police and complain that they had

seen David Blunkett driving his car and the date of this annual complaint would invariably be April 1st!

For a decade I wandered across different venues in Mid-Wales to meetings and it was always a pleasure to talk to members about their day-to-day problems and how they overcame them.

One unfortunate incident, I remember, occurred at Builth Wells. Gwilym Charles and I decided to go for a walk- to escape from a very noisy Heavy Metal group! On our walk, I was unfortunate enough to trip and dislocate my shoulder bone (and we hadn't been near a pub – honestly!)

Fortunately, there was a small hospital in Builth but I was sent on to Hereford. Therefore, I sampled the Welsh National Health and Ambulance services and the English Health Service and they were all excellent.

Of course, the success of any organization depends on its staff. And so does the Wales Council of the Blind. Over the years I got to know them and found them an enthusiastic and dedicated crew under the then leadership of Vanessa Webb. Indeed, I arranged for a member of staff to visit a school on Anglesey, with a person who used a guide dog, for the children to get some idea of a blind person's world.

In 2001, I became the County Council's representative on the North Wales Society for the Blind and remain on its Board. Though I finished representing the County Council on the Wales Council for the Blind, since 2008, very pleasant memories remain about; i) a very enthusiastic and dedicated Staff; ii) members who were not willing to let their disadvantages defeat them; iii) members with a very positive attitude towards life.

To the Wales Council of the Blind – Thank you for all your past work and every good wish for the future.

John Roberts, Llanfair P.G., Isle of Anglesey.

Happy anniversary from your friends at the North Wales Society for the Blind!

The North Wales Society for the Blind is proud to have been associated with the Wales Council of the Blind since its inception 80 years ago,

We are thankful for the guidance, counsel and support we have received from the WCB over the years. We are proud to have worked with you on a number of ground-breaking and innovative projects that have vastly improved the choices and opportunities available for sight impaired and severely sight impaired people throughout Wales.

As the umbrella agency representing vision impairment within Wales, your tireless campaigning, lobbying and support over the past eighty years has dramatically improved services and opportunities available for people with sight loss.

The organisation provides an essential platform for vision impaired people to raise their concerns and express their wishes. Your work to bring the sight loss sector together has enabled charities and associations to work together to identify gaps in service provision and to share their expertise and resources to develop new, innovative and consistent services throughout Wales.

Your support has enabled the NWSB to grow and continue to develop and provide the essential services our members tell us are important to them.

UCAN Productions has been working in partnership with the Wales Council of the Blind for the past two years on the Our Voice Our Storm/Ein Llais Ein Storm project as part of the 3 year Sustainable Social Services Grant, specifically working with young adults offering opportunities for young people to have their voices and opinions heard.

Everyone at UCAN values this partnership project, as WCB clearly supports and promotes not only the opinions of young people, but also provides valuable opportunities for their professional development. The project is managed by two of UCAN's founder members, Megan John and Mared Jarman, who have successfully built a network of young vision impaired people across Wales.

UCAN is all about helping blind and partially sighted children and young people build their confidence so the Storm project was a perfect fit for us. We are delighted that WCB sees the importance of engaging and involving young people in their projects and we look forward to many years of partnership working in the future.

Jane Latham, Development Director, UCAN Productions

Ceredigion Association for the Blind.

Twenty-five years following my retirement as a departmental head in education I breathed a sigh of relief. I was free to pursue my long-delayed interest in music and gardening. No such luck! Little did I know that I would be persuaded by a colleague from the Social Services Department to become the secretary for the Cardiganshire Association for the Blind. I must admit, I was not aware of the existence of the association. Mrs Marion Jones, Chairperson, assured me that I was suitable for the post and would settle in easily. Brave words!

On reflection, meeting Jo Harrison, the retiring secretary, was without doubt awe-inspiring. Why? Jo had the knowledge, being partially sighted, an enormous amount of energy and determination to succeed in all projects she initiated. She expected much from me as well. Highly excitable at times, especially when discussing a proposed project, you were expected to 'keep up', as occasionally she reminded me, and show equal determinism and enthusiasm. Even to this day I have very fond memories of Jo.

In the following years with the support and guidance from the Director of Wales Council for the Blind, which I greatly appreciated, the varied detailed aspects of the work involved became much clearer in time. Meetings with various

representatives of social services, WCB and other individuals, experts in their field, widened my knowledge of the field and its complexity.

Quarterly meetings with elected representatives became an enjoyable experience and a learning curve. A career in administration and management allowed me to ease into the post. Careful planning and assisting in improving the condition of lives was rewarding.

As a newcomer, I was indebted to staff of the Wales Council of the Blind for their continued guidance and willing support during this period and ever since. Taking on the role of Vice-Chairperson and subsequently Chairperson, therefore appeared to be a simple task. I am indebted to the two clubs – Aberystwyth and Cardigan – who continue to work well and are well structured.

Twenty-five years seems to be a lifetime and has passed without incident and has been extremely enjoyable.

As a small group of volunteers, the Association has endeavoured to improve the quality of life of blind and partially sighted people. I am proud to have been a part of the organization.

I would like to thank the officers of Wales Council of the Blind and members of the executive committee who stoically 'stand up for their rights' for those who needed, and still need, assistance – long may it continue.

Maldwyn James, Chairperson, Ceredigion Association for the Blind.

Visual Impairment Merthyr.

Wales Council of the Blind helped us to establish VIM - a sight support charity for the Merthyr area. WCB has continued to support us by helping distribute our newsletters and continue to provide support and advice through meetings and visits to our members.

Southerndown Residential Home for the Blind and Elderly.

It was, as they say, the end of an era when, in June 2009, Margaret and I walked out of Southerndown Residential Home for the last time. "Who was Margaret?", I hear you ask. Well, I'll come back to her later - first a little bit of history.

When we look back at the history of WCB we have to acknowledge how entwined the organisation has always been with the residential home at Southerndown in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Occupying an iconic position, with views out to the Bristol Channel, Southerndown Home has always been a well known landmark locally with its attractive twin towers and conical roof turrets. Its existence can be traced back to 1899 when it was owned by the Marquess of Bute and Sir J Talbot Llewellyn. They passed it to the Dun Raven Estate Company in 1937, but the first mention of the house being used for "the blind" was some 11 years later in 1948. A report in our archives states that it was purchased in 1948 by a Captain Andrew Fletcher and was opened as a guest house specifically for the benefit of blind visitors in June that same year. I recall an old picture in the attic at Southerndown showing guests arriving by horse drawn carriage from Southerndown Road Railway Station.

Just after the First World War a lady named Ethel Rawden became a key figure and the driving force behind WCB. She was WCB secretary and benefactor from 1924 (when it was just South Wales and Monmouthshire) and held office throughout the Second World War and until 1959. In all she served the organisation for 35 years, nearly half its life to date. In those days we had no Director or Chief Executive and her role was very much as the leader of the charity's operation. The archives are not clear whether Ethel Rawden ever owned Southerndown Home, in her own right, but she was unquestionably the main catalyst behind the building being dedicated for the use of blind people.

In 1938 the fusion of the North and South Wales V.I. Regions took place, and only 10 years later the operation of the Southerndown Home was launched by Ethel Rawden under the auspices and control of a new (all Wales) WCB organisation. The home was not just a residential care home at that time but offered respite holidays for visually impaired people to enjoy specialist care, personal support and, of course, the bracing sea air.

Later, the building of Southerndown Home was passed to the Welsh Churches Act Trust (WCAT). A note in our archive suggests its purchase had been funded by a legacy from Ethel Rawden, rather than being conveyed directly, but the truth is we don't really know why. The property continued to be used for the benefit of blind and partially sighted people mainly from Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

WCAT were no doubt delighted to lease the asset to WCB thereby entrusting us to fulfil this covenant on their behalf. It is likely that the WCAT are still bound by the wishes of Ethel Rawden's Trust in matters relating to the property or indeed its sale proceeds, if it ever sells. The last time we checked the building was in a very dilapidated state and they had struggled to sell the empty home.

Interestingly, Southerndown village seems to have been a geographical centre for V.I. service provision in those days because just a few hundred yards along the coast road was the Sunshine Home for blind babies. The house was opened by Princess Margaret in 1954 and only closed in the 1970s.

The survival of WCB itself soon became dependent on the viability of Southerndown Care Home as it became too great a financial liability to close it. When it comes to funding Care Homes nothing has changed over the years. It is interesting to read in the archives that even in those early years the home was often barely viable as a business. The accounts for 1952 shows the home incurring a deficit of £447 for the year. That seems a small amount perhaps but in those days the entire staff wage bill for a year was just £1,380. That wouldn't pay for one Care Assistant for a month now!

It was quite an achievement, therefore, that the home survived until 2009 (71 years) before its closure. WCB still had very little reserves of cash then and subsidising the annual trading losses of the home was no longer an option for us, as a charitable organisation. We were very fortunate at that time in forging an alliance with Hafod Care Association who agreed to take on all our residents and staff by moving them to a nearby care home at Brocastle, which had been newly built with all the latest facilities etc. The lease was surrendered back to the Welsh Churches Act Trust and thus we ended our long association with Southerndown Residential Home.

My first direct contact with the Home came in 2003. The joint managers at that time were Jane Roberts and Lynne Butler-Thomas. My role was just to handle the invoicing and book-keeping, although that expanded quite quickly to a more general financial management role. Whilst Jane and Lynne provided the day to day management of all care, staff and operational matters, ultimate control always rested with Vanessa Webb as Director at WCB in Cardiff. Vanessa's passion for the sight loss sector ensured that the needs of our visually impaired residents were always high on the agenda whenever she chaired the regular management meetings.

At its peak the Home provided a residential home and specialist care for around 43 service users. WCB always insisted that every member of staff, from managers to cleaners, attended our V.I. Awareness Training courses annually. This certainly helped to reinforce the specialist nature of the home ensuring that the residents received the additional consideration and support that their sight loss required.

In return, running the home provided WCB with many opportunities to research into and operate good practices, many of which these days are the stock in trade of V.I. Rehabilitation professionals. We were able to try out different colour schemes and lighting solutions which residents found helpful. Ceri Powell, a member of the Southerndown staff, ran the activities for residents at the home and these were designed to be inclusive for people with sight loss. Large print cards for Bingo, tactile activities like pottery classes and of course music in all forms helped to keep people engaged. For some time Vanessa pursued extensive plans to create a sensory garden in the grounds around Southerndown but, sadly, lack of money put an end to these dreams.

Witnessing first hand the challenges facing residents with sight loss encouraged us to be creative with the care we provided. The experience gained fed into our general Awareness Training courses and provided evidence to support recommendations to the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales on how to best meet VI needs of people in care settings.

The Home was a major employer in the village and was always well supported by local people and many of the residents' families. Annual summer fairs, held on the impressive front lawns of the house, sponsored walks (in fancy dress) and firework displays every November were always a good source of fundraising and these were organised by friends of the home known as the "Comforts Committee". The committee included several local people, many of whom had been employed at the home previously and wanted to continue the relationship and involvement they felt. Its purpose was very clearly to provide those extra facilities and social gatherings which the business of the home could never afford and it did so very successfully. Without the support of local people the home could not have flourished and being rather remote in location we depended upon the village population to provide many of our staff. At times this support was severely tested. Who could forget the occasion our sewage pipes caused a terrible overflow in a neighbouring doctor's house. Or indeed the time one of our fireworks veered off course and embedded itself into the same doctor's conservatory roof. I don't think we ever had a bill for either "attacks"!

This close community support can be best illustrated by telling you about Margaret, the lady I mentioned at the start of this piece. When I met her she was in her 80s. She lived locally in St Brides and had been a cleaner and laundry assistant at Southerndown for many years. When eventually she was persuaded to retire formally, she still insisted on coming to the home every Sunday evening, as a volunteer, to help out with any sewing or clothing repairs needed for the residents.

When the staff and residents all moved, we had three or four weeks hard work emptying the home of all furniture, decorations and equipment quite apart from a mountain of old paperwork accumulated over seventy years. Over those last weeks Margaret worked tirelessly from room to room, dusting, cleaning and polishing, until she was satisfied it was ready for inspection by the Landlord. She

was as sad as any of us to see the end of an era at Southerndown with all its memories. Her voluntary work typified the effort that so many people made to provide a caring home for hundreds of residents over its lifetime.

WCB says a big thanks to all of them.

Dilwyn Price

The Welsh Association of Visually Impaired Bowlers

(WAVIB) would like to congratulate Wales Council of the Blind on reaching this milestone. To have been providing a service for 80 years is something to be immensely proud of.

We have valued this commitment and appreciate the keen support given to us in setting up and maintaining our website, as well as acting as a point of contact for queries. All these things help to promote visually impaired bowls in Wales, a sport where sight loss need not be a barrier and we are glad to have Wales Council on board helping to spread the message.

Happy Birthday and here's to your 90th.

RNIB Cymru would like to congratulate WCB on their 80th anniversary. WCB provide an invaluable source of information and advice for people with sight loss and organisations across Wales. The team are always supportive and helpful and we look forward to continuing to work together to make positive change happen in Wales. Happy Birthday!

Ansley Workman, Director, RNIB Cymru

Tom Robards remembers his first job with WCB ...

I joined WCB way back in early 2002 as a fresh-faced Cardiff University graduate. As first jobs go, I really landed on my feet. In Rich, Bec, Owen, Vanessa, Dilwyn, Nicky and Nicola I couldn't have asked for a more welcoming and supportive group of colleagues. Their passion for WCB's inspiring and vital mission was unwavering and I learnt a huge amount during my time there. In my role, I was tasked with collating and disseminating valuable research which aimed to fundamentally change lives, as well as supporting on a ground-breaking Arts Conference for the visually impaired, and even being lucky enough to help represent WCB at the Welsh Assembly. My positive experience at WCB led me to continue in the not-for-profit sector and I worked on behalf of Amnesty International, Medecins Sans Frontieres, and UNHCR during my time living in Australia directly after leaving Cardiff. Sincere thanks to my former colleagues at WCB for a great first job experience, and I wish you all the best for a long and inspirational future, continuing to transform lives and make a positive difference to those living with visual impairment in Wales.

Tom Robards, WCB Information Officer in 2002.

... and Adam Cameron remembers his time working on the WCB Roadshow.

During my role as a Roadshow Coordinator for Wales Council of the Blind I must admit I enjoyed every minute of it. Richard, Owen and Bec, with whom I had the pleasure of working, were a really good bunch to work with. We also had a damn good laugh in the process. As I am blessed with a naturally gifted propensity to wind people up, I vividly recall surreptitiously switching off the air conditioning every time I accessed the office in the summer. Air-con-reliant Richard and Owen, who were more sensitive to the summer heat, always discovered the air-con being off a few hours later and for a while couldn't work out who the culprit was. When they questioned me, I simply said 'I don't even know where the switch is, I've got a visual impairment, remember?' However, as all deceptions come to an end, so did mine and it was the vigilant nystagmus eye of Mr Owen Williams who caught me in the act and immediately pounced on me, laughingly of course. Jokes aside, Wales Council of the Blind is one of the best places I have worked and this is a testament to the friendly and approachable nature of its staff.

Adam Cameron, WCB Roadshow Coordinator.

Sight Cymru has had a long and unique relationship with Wales Council of the Blind. The two organisations have worked for many years to raise the profile of sight loss to Welsh Government.

The minority ethnicity work has been a feature of the partnership. With Sight Cymru's expertise and WCB's funding, we've been able to provide a much-needed window into why some people at greater risk of sight loss just don't take up services. And the work in schools that has had a dramatic impact on the number of children visiting optometry is another example. The funding also enabled us to conduct a set of Specialist Worker events.

We feel it is crucial to highlight the benefits of small organisations, often those with volunteers rather than paid staff, that can get overlooked when the going gets tough with the bigger charity players.

Sight Cymru wishes WCB the very best for it's 80th birthday, although it can't resist saying 'We're 150 years plus, stripping, nrgh nrgh nrgh'. Penbloed Hapus, WCB!

Sharon Beckett, CEO Sight Cymru.

Vicky Richards reflects on the WCB Awareness Training project.

When I joined WCB as their Awareness Training Officer, I inherited a training structure that had been developed by Director, Vanessa Webb, and my predecessor, Carole Evans. My first session was delivered to two specialist social workers for VI in Cardiff. The course covered the now familiar territory of types, causes and definitions of different sight conditions, the effects they have on the individual on daily living, and the practical aspects of communication and guiding for people working with vi individuals. This was in the early nineties and the thinking back then was quite new: the focus was on challenging misconceptions of 'blindness' so that a greater awareness would lead to a use of a range of practical solutions to improve access. Key to the myth-busting was an early decision to have the sessions delivered by people with sight loss.

To make this happen, I recruited a number of volunteers. The first were Jo Harrison and Neville Jenkinson but these were followed up by Brenda Bowen-Jones from Cowbridge, Pauline Dutton and Kevin from Mold, Mary Gittins and

Owen Williams from Rudry, and Mary Ings from Cardiff. I ran this project over a six-year period before joining Neath Council as a Rehabilitation Officer.

The training was tailored to the context. Whether the setting was a residential home, a leisure centre, a school or a hotel, we would adjust the course materials to suit the particular circumstances in which trainees were likely to encounter people with sight loss. One of our more unusual sessions was delivered to caving instructors! The courses were generally half a day long, but there was an option for an afternoon of specialist training in, for example, accessible information.

Assisting the trainers took me all over Wales resulting in me getting lost in Newport and the back lanes of Rudry, being besieged by grim weather in Cardigan, and struggling to find Jo's house in Ceredigion.

The venues we used were variable. We had to make do with what we were given; one session at a residential home took place in a vacant bedroom – I had to sit on the bed! Also, risk assessments did not feature highly – we were leading blindfolded people across roads and up and down stairs. But, thankfully, we all came out of it alive.

WCB Conferences were good fun. These would be opportunities to give awareness training to staff at the venue. These tended to be overnight stay events, with the AGM on the first day and a conference on the second, so there was plenty of scope to train a range of people, including restaurant staff. It was great to see them put into practice what they had learned. The evening often had drinks, a quiz and live music resulting in the inevitable 7 am hangover. One particular challenge presented itself in the form of arranging the furniture. After laying out the chairs for the conference our Director, Vanessa, would come in and completely rearrange them!

We ran social events for the volunteers in recognition of their hard work. These would also be great opportunities to share ideas and experiences. The volunteers made it happen and they provided the continuity, allowing my many successors – Vikki Burge, Paula Hayden, Nathan Foy, Nicola Lewis – to carry on the project. All in all, WCB's training project had a great team delivering some valuable awareness, some of whom have now sadly passed away but left their legacy of making a difference for people with sight loss. I will always treasure these experiences and memories.

Vicky Richards, WCB Awareness Training Officer.

As the **Macular Society** Regional Manager for South Wales it has been my experience when working alongside WCB to have always been part of a friendly professional working relationship.

I have asked on many occasions for help and support and have always been greeted with enthusiasm and encouragement from the team, whether it be developing services, attending information days or speaking at events. I find the Wales Council of the Blind's fortnightly bulletin informative, topical and up to date. I have attended the Wales Eye Care Conference for the past 2 years and thoroughly enjoyed both experiences.

Happy Birthday WCB. May you still be providing the same level of service in another 80 years.

Adele Francis, Macular Society.

Emma Non John tells us about her time at WCB.

I joined Wales Council for the Blind as Welfare Rights Officer in 1995. I knew nothing about WCB when I saw the job advertisement, but wanted to apply my legal qualifications to hopefully make a difference. After getting the job, and staying for fifteen enjoyable and rewarding years, these are a few things that come to mind when I think back about WCB.

We were definitely Wales-wide. We held conferences in some of the remotest parts of the Country, and often at the bleakest times of the year! We were also most definitely Welsh at heart, even Rich (I think either we adopted him, or he adopted us somewhere along the line).

We weren't a Council in the way that most people in Wales think of a Council. We did get quite a few phone calls about grass cutting, garden clearance, fence issues, rubbish collection etc mind! I'd say we were more of a family than a Council, a family that included the staff, the Visually Impaired Members, the Volunteers, and even Mike Chick the photocopier agent.

We were definitely a charity for the Blind (or the Visually Impaired) only. There was no muddying the waters in terms of the service we offered, even though it

often restricted our chances of better funding. We wanted to do what we did to the best of our ability. It didn't matter where you came from, or the degree of visual impairment, WCB would help if it could.

The staff were resilient and persevered. We had very little resources (we weren't seen as the 'big guns' and didn't strive to be). We just wanted to go about our business in a low key but effective way. As a consequence we seemed to get less than others, although bigger is not always necessarily better. What we lacked in profile we made up in dogged determination. We made things happen with what little we had.

There was consideration of others and compassion in abundance. The Visually Impaired clients showed warmth and kindness in return. Often they had a right to feel aggrieved and angry at the treatment they had received from the Agency workers and Tribunal Panels but they acted with nothing but dignity. This still amazes me.

WCB gave me the most varied work experience. This included 'effing and blinding' at the photocopier, socks 'drying' on the kettle, and decapitating sheep on a drive through the Brecon Beacons (and the clients were meant to be the visually impaired ones!).

Finally, having moved to WCB (the Voluntary Sector) from the Public Sector, and having left WCB to go to the Private Sector, I can honestly say that it is the one place where an awful lot more was done with an awful lot less.

In short we did the most we could to improve clients' lives in the way and to the extent we could. I hope we made a difference and continue to do so.

Welfare Rights Officer – Emma Non John.

WCB is **Vision Impaired West Glamorgan's** "Go To" place for help and advice. We are one of the many small organisations who believe in a better life for people with sight loss, and WCB brings us together. In a practical way, WCB supports us with our newsletter, and because of its experience working in the third sector, can always be relied upon to give us great advice!

Owen Williams tells us about his journey through WCB from volunteer to director.

I was first introduced to WCB in 1993 whilst studying at the University of Glamorgan. Vicky Richards initially recruited me as a volunteer and I still remember fondly spending time with her surfing at Rest Bay, Porthcawl, for example, as part of an awareness-raising session. Soon after this I met Vanessa Webb, who was, and still is, an inspiration to me. It didn't take long for Vanessa to see something in me and I was appointed as a trustee, deputy treasurer.

Working with WCB inspired me to write my final-year dissertation on sight loss and assistive technologies. During my third year at University, I spent 6-months with WCB on a work placement, under the supervision of Dylan Evans. I graduated from University in the summer of 1996 but, unfortunately, that summer proved challenging as I spent 3-months in Hospital. Looking back on it now it seems like fate and that my path to WCB had been mapped out for me. Once I was well enough to work a job came up with WCB as Computer Officer, I applied, got it, and never looked back.

My first role was to help blind and partially sighted people gain access to information using a computer, reading machine, video magnifier, etc. This role was highly rewarding but brought home some real frustrations around the cost of equipment and training, as well as the lack of grant-aid and funding opportunities.

In 1999 WCB received Welsh Government funding to set up a network of assessors across Wales and to establish a set of quality standards in relation to assessing, supporting and training requirements. This project highlighted further the need for people with sight loss to be assessed by specialists. WCB went on to produce a series of communication reports to inform this work. Working with Vanessa and later on my mentor, Dilwyn Price, we sought funding for an all-Wales service but sadly our ideas were ahead of their time and although they gained support we couldn't secure funding to make our vision a reality.

In 2001, I carried out my first Access to Work assessment. This was to be my first of many as in 2002 WCB was awarded one of the two contracts to assess people with sight loss in Wales. During this time I assessed nearly 600 people all across Wales and in a variety of employment settings. The role was rewarding and working directly with other people with sight loss was the most enjoyable part of my time at WCB to date.

During this time, I also undertook a range of Educational Assessments through the Disabled Student Allowance grant, as well as continuing to support people outside of education and employment.

There are a number of stories I could share with you about my travels but this one in particular still makes me laugh.

It was a wet and grey winter morning and my driver, Ken, and I were off to West Wales to carry out a technical assessment on a young man outside the education system. We had arranged to meet the father of the son in a lay-by near their home as it was difficult to find. Ken pulled up behind a car and jumped out to check if it was him.

When Ken climbed back into the car I asked "Was that Mr. Rice?"

He replied with "Yes, that's Mr. Rees" and that we were to follow him. I thought nothing of the slight difference in the name and just put it down to a misunderstanding. So off we went, following as best we could as he clearly enjoyed driving quickly through the country lanes. By the time we caught up he had parked his car at a gate and had got out and climbed it. I got out of the car and followed. We were in the middle of nowhere. We stopped at the gate and I asked Ken if he could see a house. He said that there was one at the bottom of the field. We looked at each other, shrugged and climbed over the gate. I was wearing a suit that day and carrying a briefcase. As I caught him up I noticed that the mud was 6-inches up my trousers and that my new shoes were sinking with every step into the field.

"Mr. Rice, Mr. Rice!", I shouted!.

He stopped and turned to me and said "My name is Mr. Rees: the field drains well!"

Bewildered by this I replied with "You're Mr. Rice and I am here to assess your son?"

He replied with "No, my name is Mr. Rees and you're here to buy my field." We stood speechless for a while before going our separate ways.

WCB ran a children and young peoples trust fund called the Cambrian Educational Trust Fund. The fund awarded small grants for computers, access software, iPads and more. From 2008 onwards I managed the fund. It was great to be able to assess and provide funding to purchase what I had suggested to the client.

In 2009, the Low Vision Service Wales announced plans to extend its provision by including electronic pocket size magnifiers for children to use at home. To build evidence to support this initiative, the Cambrian Educational Trust Fund financed a research project, led by Sophie Dymont, on the suitability and use of a range of products. It was a real pleasure to manage Sophie, and the findings from this influential project directly contributed to the decision to make electronic

pocket-size magnifiers available, through the Low Vision Service in Wales, to people with sight loss of all ages.

In November 2011, we decided no longer to provide Access to Work assessments. My role changed to a more strategic role and in 2012 I became General Manager of Vision in Wales (formerly Wales Council of the Blind). In 2014 our members voted for WCB to return to an independent organisation and to change our name back to (the slightly adjusted) Wales Council of the Blind to reflect our role as the voice of people with sight loss in Wales.

In 2014 I was appointed as Director of WCB. We have worked hard to bring the sector together on a number of themes and collaboration will continue to be at the heart of what we do. Over the last 25 years, I have been lucky to work with so many amazing people. Welsh Government Section 64, and most recently, Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant funding has enabled WCB to influence change and to support people with sight loss to live independent lives. New projects, WCB Storm for example, have enabled us to reach more people and to seek a broader spectrum of opinion.

Our readership of Roundup (our quarterly magazine) has grown and this helps us to promote the wide range of services and support offered by our members and partners, as well as to provide people with choice, where choice exists.

It has been a real pleasure to be part of such a warm and friendly organisation for so many years. I would particularly like to highlight the hard work, dedication and loyalty shown by Rebecca Phillips and Richard Bowers but a huge thanks go out to all of the amazing staff, trustees and volunteers - including Ann and Dewi - that have supported WCB over the years and made us into the organisation that we are today.

Owen Williams, Director WCB.

Wales Council of the Blind is a caring, well organised and informative agency, respected by all the organisations they serve and support. I have, as a development manager for the **International Glaucoma Association** (IGA) working in Wales, found the staff to be friendly, obliging and enthusiastic, always willing to help, whenever I require information or wish to attend their group meetings. Happy 80th Birthday.

Eryl Williams, IGA

Rebecca Phillips on her twenty five years with WCB.

It was October 1993 and I was delighted to be invited to an interview for the role of Clerical Officer at Wales Council for the Blind. The letter stated that it was an all day event! This did worry me slightly. What would I be expected to deliver over the course of a day? It turned out to be very enjoyable, especially since I was the successful candidate! I was delighted, and here I am, 25 years later.

When I started work at WCB, there was no Internet, Microsoft Windows or mobile phones. We relied on MS DOS (Disk Operating System) to store our database of contacts, Dictaphones recorders and typewriters. Our monthly stationery orders consisted of liquid tip-ex, typewriter ribbons, Dictaphone tapes, and 5 1/4 inch floppy disks.

During the 90s, one of my roles included typing the dictated notes of our Director, Vanessa Webb. I'm sure she won't mind me saying that some of these recordings were a real source of amusement. Vanessa would often dictate whilst travelling in the car, capturing the sound of car horns and the occasional expletive, whispered recordings from bed and the sloshing sounds of bath water. In all seriousness though, Vanessa was an inspirational boss who always offered support, guidance and encouragement.

I have fond memories of working with amazing colleagues. Although we all had our own job descriptions and workload, everyone mucked in during busy periods. There always was, and still is, a real team spirit.

For many years, Deborah Tugwell and myself managed the Administration department. Deb's sharp wit and no-nonsense attitude and my easygoing, laid back approach created the perfect recipe for a great friendship and working relationship.

As a Wales-wide organisation, WCB held meetings all over the country but one venue in particular stands out to me, the old quarrymen's cottages in Nant Gwrtheyrn, north Wales. A delightful place but the drive down into the quarry is definitely not for the faint hearted, especially at night. The serpentine shape of the sharp descent and sheer cliff edges made the journey similar to that of a white-knuckle ride, but it was well worth it. On a clear day the views over the Llŷn Peninsular are spectacular.

Twenty-five years sounds like a long time, but the time really has flown by. I have worked with many wonderful people, not just within WCB but also with colleagues within the sector too. I would like to thank everyone who has supported WCB and long may we continue.

Rebecca Phillips, Engagement Officer, WCB.

Bridgevis wishes WCB a happy 80th birthday and wishes to thank you for all your support over the years. We are so grateful that you have printed our information leaflets which enable us to advertise our services to those with sight loss. Thank you for serving at some of our coffee mornings, we are very grateful. We and our members find the information on your newsletters invaluable and we wish you every success for the next 80 years.

Richard Bowers reflects on the changes in his 25 years with WCB.

The first object in the 1962 Constitution of the Wales and Monmouthshire Regional Council for the Blind reads:

To receive and circulate information of interest to Blind and Partially Sighted persons and/or persons working on their behalf.

After all these years, this remains a core objective for Wales Council of the Blind. Other ambitions now seem rather antiquated: *to encourage, subject to proper supervision, the provision of work for Blind and Partially persons in the Area* has not been one of the Council's objectives for as long as I've been here. But throughout my time, access to information has been a key enabler for people with sight loss and its dissemination in a chosen format has been an aspect of WCB's work that I am proud to have been at the centre of for twenty-five years.

When I first joined WCB, not long after Vanessa Webb became its Director, I took on the job of handling finances and payroll. Then, an opportunity arose to carry out transcriptions – braille, audio cassette and large print versions of internal documents such as the Annual Report and minutes of meetings. This came to be financed in some measure through commissions from outside agencies; most notably the Welsh Office and, subsequently, the National Assembly for Wales. In the early years of this service, audio cassettes were used.

Most of the material I read onto tape was pretty dry stuff: policy documents; minutes of meetings. Newsletters were a little more engaging and varied and one highlight was a pilot project to produce the daily Western Mail in a weekly digest form. This involved a team from the Women's Institute who would select the stories over the week to read. Lucy Toop (who was working with us on marketing at the time) would read alongside me selections on-the-fly from the week's editions. We'd immediately duplicate the recording to go out in the post that day. Conscious that yesterday's news is today's chip wrapper, we were keen to mail

these out in the fastest possible time. It was a very popular – if short lived – service but the typical lack of funds meant the pilot project never became an ongoing service.

The Welsh Office helped us to upgrade our equipment a couple of times. Thanks to their ‘slippage funding’ (underspent funds from the Section 64 pot) we were able to move from the tape-and-razor world of editing to – initially - digital recording and subsequently to computer-based recording and editing. Cassettes were soon replaced by CDs. What we now take for granted in terms of easy access to audio and video production – achievable even on our phones today – was an expensive and slow process in the ‘nineties. The first blank writeable CDs WCB bought retailed at around £15 each! Now they cost a few pence.

During this time, I was excited to take on the task of connecting WCB to the World-Wide Web. A free email service with web-space (remember Freeserve?) enabled us to communicate with a small, but growing, number of people via email lists and on our first website. In my mind’s ear I can still hear the characteristic squawk and squeal of the modem dialling-up.

We were mindful that many people did not have access to the internet and often that access was not vi-friendly in any case. To fill that gap we produced Sylw!, a print and audio bulletin that contained expanded versions of the material we posted online and circulated via email. This was to benefit people with no access to our online material. This then grew into the Roundup you are currently reading. I say ‘grew’ because it now contains more than just news and notices; articles on specific themes are the life blood of the newsletter in its current form and we hope to expand on this model in the future.

I’ve had some great people working with me over the years. Many, like Dewi Osborne and Ann Pankhurst currently, devoted their time voluntarily to WCB and helped to keep alive those functions that either fall outside a staff member’s remit or simply get put on the back burner. David Price, for example, was a great help to me in cataloguing our recordings as well as making recordings himself.

One area I definitely needed help in was Welsh language! I have listened to, and edited, hundreds of hours of Welsh language recordings. These were voiced by Julie Paschalis, Tim Saunders, Dafydd Jones, Dewi Savage and others over the years and I shall be eternally grateful for the many happy days spent with them – often debating linguistic niceties or simply laughing at some curious translations. Dewi in particular would regale us with funny anecdotes from his life as an actor.

I speak of those times in the past tense largely because advances in technology heralded the decline of transcriptions as a service for WCB. We continue to make audio CDs but braille is rarely requested. Braille displays and computer speech software deliver those functions today. Similarly, there is little demand for Welsh language versions; not because of changes in the use of the language but

because policies have been modified to allow for a more reactive approach to providing Welsh materials, often to reduce costs and save resources. Our emphasis in recent times has been on signposting and providing information. Our newsletter, our online information in the forms of Sylw and Perspectif, our twitter feed, our e-bulletins and the assistance we give to our members with producing or distributing their own newsletters are all in keeping with our umbrella role and help to make connections between various organisations and individuals. We want to keep passing information between professionals and disabled people so that the range of services, support and opportunities keeps flowing. 'To receive and circulate information of interest' is the rather timid phraseology of an age when charities did *for* people what these days we do *with each other*, collectively and connectedly. Today WCB is fashioning this flow of information and knowledge into a more flexible and wider-reaching service.

Richard Bowers, WCB Communications Officer.

WCB NEWS

WCB has moved!

In June, Wales Council for the Blind moved to a new office in Hastings House, Cardiff. The full address is: Unit 2.2, Hastings House, Fitzalan Road (entrance next to Knox Road car park), Cardiff CF24 0BL.

Our telephone number (029 2047 3954) is unchanged.

Wales Eyecare Conference

You can now book your place on this year's Wales Eyecare Conference, which will be held on Monday 17th September at Cardiff University School of Optometry and Vision Sciences.

This year's event will celebrate 70 years of the National Health Service, and we will be joined by Vaughan Gething AM, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services. A full programme will be published soon. To book your free place, go to <http://eepurl.com/dAX17H> or contact Bec at WCB on 029 2047 3954.

Your Voice: a Shared Vision

Contact Rebecca, WCB's External Engagement Officer, if you wish to attend our regional meetings. 029 20 473954 or bec@wcb-ccd.org.uk. There will be meetings in September for the West Wales and South East Wales groups.

ACROSS THE SECTOR

Macular Society Technical Support Service

The Macular Society has launched a new technical support service, to help people affected by macular disease to get the most out of gadgets such as smartphones and tablets. If it is successful, the Society plans to develop the roles of existing digital volunteers, and potentially recruit new helpers, to deliver support regionally at macular support group meetings all over the UK.

You can find out more about the service on the Society's website, <https://www.macularsociety.org/form/technical-support-service-request>, or ring their helpline on 0300 3030 111 and select option 2.

Family & Social Group in Bridgend

Anita Davies, the parent of a child with sight loss who also has sight loss herself, is looking to set up a local family social and support group in Bridgend, in partnership with a qualified teacher of vision impaired children.

They are planning a social meeting for families with sight loss, which is open to everyone regardless of the level of sight loss and who has it. All ages from young children to young people are welcome, and the group will give opportunities for families to meet in a relaxed and informal venue.

If you are interested in attending future meetings, or would like more information, please contact Anita on her mobile 07929280518 or email Anita@holisticvision.co.uk.

Personal Transcription Service

RNIB's new Personal Transcription Service aims can take your printed material, such as books and letters, and transcribe it into an accessible format. Formats available are audio, Braille, large and giant print, electronic text, tactile diagrams and images, and accessible sheet music and musical scores. The service is available in English and Welsh.

To find out more, visit the Personal Transcription Portal at <https://personaltranscription.rnib.org.uk/> or contact RNIB's Cardiff Transcription team by emailing cardifftranscription@rnib.org.uk or calling 029 2082 8540.

Change of name for RP Fighting Blindness

RP Fighting Blindness, the organisation which supports people with retinitis pigmentosa and funds research into the condition, is to change its name to 'Retina UK'. The charity is not expanding its remit, but it is hoped that the change of name will enable it to reach more people.

Recent Awards

Congratulations to the following:

- Vision impaired paralympic skier Menna Fitzpatrick, awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list.
- Fay Jones from Holyhead, who was a winner in Wales Council for Voluntary Action's Volunteer of the Year Awards for her 'exceptional voluntary contribution' to helping vision impaired people in North Wales. Fay, who has macular degeneration, volunteers for RNIB Cymru, and her achievements include setting up a Listening Books Group on Anglesey.
- Welsh vision impaired bowlers. Wales hosted the UK VI Bowling Championship at Llandrindod Wells recently, and finished as runners up to England. There were five medals for the Welsh team: Julie Thomas (gold), Toby Warren (silver), and Steve Whitmore, Madelaine Roberts and Sheila Kinch (bronze).

A helping hand with taxes

Did you know that RNIB has a tax team that supports blind and partially sighted people with tax, tax credits and HMRC issues across the UK? The team, based in Liverpool, is supported by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Mark Rogerson from RNIB's Tax Advice Service told us how the team makes a difference to the lives of blind and partially sighted people.

We make tax and HMRC issues clearer. We help people to claim extra tax allowances, such as Blind Person's Allowance and Marriage Allowance, which can reduce your tax bill and these can be transferred and backdated. Our tax service is free, confidential and available to people with sight loss, regardless of their age or income. We can arrange help with form-filling, completing your tax return, claiming a tax refund and resolving problems. We also advise customers about which products and building work are VAT-free, saving them more money.

Since the service started in 2011, we've helped over 34,000 people, identified £3million in extra tax allowances and tax credits.

We make sure people feel supported. We have access to a dedicated team within HMRC for people who need extra help with their tax and tax credits. We help customers who are unable to speak to HMRC directly because of hearing loss, dementia or living in a care home. We also have a factsheet in different formats with information on tax allowances and useful contacts.

We help customers to use HMRC's online services. HMRC have introduced the Personal Tax Account, which allows you to manage your affairs with HMRC online, similar to an online bank account, but for tax. But if you can't get online or the issue is more complex, we can help arrange for an adviser at HMRC to come to your home or meet you at a local venue. It's about making sure blind and partially sighted people are supported in all their tax-related queries.

You can contact RNIB's tax team by telephone on 0345 330 4897, emailing tax@rnib.org.uk or to find out more about the service visit [rnib.org.uk/tax](https://www.rnib.org.uk/tax).

CONSULTATIONS

Vision Support Survey

In April 2018, Vision Support, the organisation which provides services and support to vision impaired people in North Wales and parts of Cheshire, launched its new Community Empowerment Model. Now the organisation wants to find out what you think of their current services and what services and projects you would like Vision Support to develop in the future.

They also want to find out how they can use people's strengths, skills and experience to help with the delivery of services. For example, talking to other organisations, delivering digital inclusion training or running a group or activity. Please could you take a few minutes to complete an on-line survey here: <http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/DQDU0/>.

The survey is also available in other formats, just contact Vision Support or they can ring you and ask the questions over the phone if you prefer. The survey will be open until September.

A number of focus groups are also being held to find out your views and they are looking for people with sight loss to become members of a Sight Loss Steering Group. For further information please ring on 01244 381515.

OPPORTUNITIES

VICTA/RNIB Grant

RNIB and VICTA are offering a grant to young people with a vision impairment to enable them to study independently. If you are aged between 11 and 25 years and a UK resident, you may be eligible for an Apple iPad Air 2 (32 Gb) and case.

Successful applicants will be asked to pay 10% of the cost of the product as a one-off charge to cover VICTA's administration costs. To find out more about the scheme and make an application, visit the VICTA website, <https://www.victa.org.uk/rnib-product-grant/>, or telephone VICTA on 01908 240 831.

The Big Activity Challenge

Alström Syndrome UK (ASUK) is offering adults with the condition (aged 18 years and over) funding to try a new activity and then write about the experience for the ASUK Newsletter.

The 'Big Activity Challenge' is offering funding of £50 to £500 to pay for the activity. To find out more and make an application, visit the ASUK website, <http://www.alstrom.org.uk/asuk-big-activity-challenge/>, or contact Liz on 07517 278 946 or liz.loughery@alstrom.org.uk.

Stelios Award for Disabled Entrepreneurs

Once again, Leonard Cheshire Disability and Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou have joined forces to launch the Stelios Award for Disabled Entrepreneurs in the UK. The award recognises the exceptional spirit and business ability of disabled entrepreneurs.

The five finalists will each receive £10,000 to help establish or develop their business, with the overall winner receiving an extra £20,000. For full information about the award and how to apply, visit the Leonard Cheshire Disability website, <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/support-and-information/life-and-work-skills/employment-programmes/stelios-award-for-disabled-people>. If you require a different format, need help applying, or have any access needs please call 07738 329 515 or email steliosaward@leonardcheshire.org.

The closing date for applications is 1st October 2018

PUBLICATIONS AND RESOURCES

Housing and sight loss

The Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN), a leading 'knowledge hub' on specialist housing, has published a series of online resources related to

housing and sight loss, in association with the Thomas Pocklington Trust. It provides guidance, resources, reports and individual stories that explore the issues facing people with sight loss in their daily lives and show the importance of well-designed housing, practical advice and support, social connections and appropriate technology. The pages are divided into six key themes:

- Housing needs, advice and brokerage
- Design & lighting
- Enabling technology
- Health & wellbeing
- Work, income and benefits
- Personal stories

You can access this resource here:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/sight-loss-home-the-built-environment/>.

Understanding Albinism

The Albinism Fellowship has produced a new information resource for anyone affected by the condition and professionals working with them. Albinism is a rare genetic condition, which affects about 175 people in Wales. It limits the body's production of melanin (the pigment which gives hair, skin and eyes their colour) and can result in significant vision impairment.

To get your free copy of 'Understanding Albinism', get in touch with the Albinism Fellowship on 01282 771900 or via their website, <http://www.albinism.org.uk>.

PIP Guide from Disability Rights UK

Disability Rights UK has updated its guide to Personal Independence Payment (PIP), the benefit which replaces disability living allowance for people between the ages of 16 and 64.

The guide covers topics such as the PIP rules, the scoring system, filling out the claim form and what to do if you are not happy with your decision. You can download it, free of charge, from the Disability Rights UK website, <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/personal-independence-payment-pip>. You can buy a hard copy version for £4 from DRUK's shop.

EVENTS

Early Years Weekend

VICTA's Early Years Weekend for the families of babies and toddlers aged 0 to 4 years with sight loss will be held on Saturday 27th October to Sunday 28th October 2018 at New College Worcester, and bookings are now being taken.

The event is an opportunity for parents to gain information, attend workshops and meet other families with vi children, while the young ones enjoy fun activities, and it has proved popular in previous years. There is a charge of £20 per adult and £10 per child, which covers accommodation and meals.

To find out more and apply for a place, visit the VICTA website, <https://www.victa.org.uk/early-years-weekend-2018/>. The closing date for applications is 15th August.

Audio described gallery tour

The National Museum of Wales in Cardiff's next audio described tour will be on Thursday 13th September. This time the tour will visit the museum's art collection. You are welcome to bring your family or sighted companions with you, and guide dog puppy walkers are also welcome. A limited amount of guided assistance is available - please let the museum know if you require this.

To book a place, ring 029 2057 3240.

‘Living with sight loss’ courses in Powys

This autumn, RNIB is running free, two-day information courses in Welshpool (26th September and 3rd October) and Brecon (24th and 31st October). The venue for the Welshpool course is 1st Clive's Own Welshpool Scout Headquarters & Community Centre (COWSHACC), Oldford Lane, Welshpool, SY21 7TE. The Brecon course is at The Guildhall Brecon, LD3 7AL.

The courses enable those affected by sight loss either directly or indirectly to share experiences with others in similar situations and find out about national and local services. They also aim to help people affected by sight loss adjust to their sight condition, increase independence, boost confidence and be aware of and able to access ongoing support.

There will be talks from a number of service providers and a range of information on services and practical solutions will be discussed including:

- Welfare rights
- Getting out and about
- Tips and gadgets for everyday living
- Assistive technology, including tablets and phones
- Eye health
- Wellbeing
- Leisure, hobbies and interests

Courses start at 10.30 am and finish at 3.30 pm on both days. This will be a very relaxed and welcoming event so please come along and bring a friend.

Booking is essential. For more information or to book please call Keira Brooks Confidence Building Co-ordinator on 07864 954150, email lwslenquiries@rnib.org.uk or go to the RNIB website: <https://www.rnib.org.uk/our-services/living-with-sight-loss-courses>.

RNC ‘Have a Go’ weekend

The Royal National College of the Blind (RNC) is running a ‘Have a Go’ weekend on 27th/28th October, giving young people aged 13 to 17 years the opportunity to meet other people of their own age, make friends, have fun in a safe and inclusive environment and you experience what it’s like to live the life of an RNC student. A range of activities and taster sessions will be on offer, and parents are also welcome.

For more information, call 01432 376 621, send an email to info@rnc.ac.uk, or visit the RNC website, <https://www.rnc.ac.uk/events/haveago>.

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.

Power cut? Call 105 or 0800 6783 105

Sometimes power cuts can happen for reasons beyond our control. During a power cut we are able to help.

We know it can be particularly worrying if you rely on electricity for medical equipment or if you are elderly, very ill or disabled.

If you depend on electricity for a reason such as using a nebuliser, a kidney dialysis machine, an oxygen machine, a ventilator – or any other reason – you should register with us.

WPD provides a FREE Priority Service Register, which helps us to identify customers who may need a little extra help during a power cut.

If you join our FREE Priority Service Register we can:

- Give you a direct number to call in the event of a power cut so you can get straight through to us.
- Agree a password with you before we visit you, so you feel safe.
- Provide special help, if needed, through the RVS (Royal Voluntary Service) or British Red Cross.
- 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 join, call **0800 096 3080**, or visit our website **www.westernpower.co.uk**

Smell gas?

Staying safe in six easy steps

If you smell gas in your home or business, we're here to help. Here's what to do.

- 1 Call us immediately on Freephone 0800 111 999. We're available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and will send out an engineer to make your property safe.
- 2 Turn off all your gas appliances and, if possible, switch off the gas at the meter (unless the meter is in the cellar or basement, in which case don't go in).
- 3 Open windows and doors.
- 4 Don't use any electrical appliances or switch lights on or off.
- 5 Don't smoke or use naked flames.
- 6 If there's a smell of gas in the cellar or basement, please wait outside or with a neighbour.



**YOUR GAS EMERGENCY
AND PIPELINE SERVICE**



**WALES&WEST
UTILITIES**



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