



# WCB Roundup

Winter 2009.

## New support launched for local societies.

It's been a busy time here at WCB. We're pleased to launch a new range of free services to help provide support to Welsh clubs and societies working with people with a visual impairment.

As part of our new commitment to help support clubs, we've launched a range of free services that make it easier to plan, coordinate and communicate with your members. WCB can produce Braille and audio CDs of your materials for free. We've launched a new free membership coordination service, creating and maintaining a private and secure electronic database for your members.

If your society or club is looking to develop new services, WCB can offer a free service to develop your club or society's business. This free 'health-check' gives you a personalised report for your organisation suggesting funding sources, services you could provide, or ways of better supporting your members.

Nowadays, many people hear about their local services for people with a visual impairment through the internet. WCB can design, produce and host a free webpage for you.

Finally, our new website is designed to keep local societies and visually impaired clubs up to date with what's going on.

The new website can be found at: [www.wcb-ccd.org.uk](http://www.wcb-ccd.org.uk) or you can call us on 02920 473 954.

## Appointment of NALSVI Chief Executive.

There have been two recent developments at the National Association of Local Societies for the Visually Impaired. Firstly, NALSVI is delighted to announce the appointment of it's first Chief Executive, Angela Tinker. Angela has met representatives from the larger societies in Wales, and outlined her plans that will deliver real help to smaller societies looking to develop their services. NALSVI offers support, development and advice to local societies and clubs operating in the field of visual impairment.

Wales also welcomes Anita Davies from BridgeVis and CIB as the new Welsh representative for NALSVI. In the next magazine, we'll be talking to Anita about the role of NALSVI, and working to develop their work here in Wales. In the meantime, if your society hasn't joined NALSVI, WCB strongly encourages you to contact them on 01777 705299, or email them on [sue@nalsvi.org](mailto:sue@nalsvi.org).

# New device guides the way.

A mature student at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC) has developed a satellite navigation system for visually impaired people. Jason Perkins has developed 'Peepo' to complement the work of guide dogs.

A handheld GPS allows visually impaired users to speak into the device, clearly stating where they wish to go, which then uses sat-nav technology to find directions.

Followed by subtle steering by way of pulse zones and vibrations at the user's finger tips, the user is then carefully guided through to their destination, with a separate sensor notifying when the user is travelling in the correct direction.

The palm sized product, which is able to fit onto their guide dog's metal lead, is designed so that the lead can still slip through the owner's fingers, carefully avoiding any discomfort and ensuring the natural reach of the user is unaffected.

Additionally, there is an accessible 'return home safely' button, along with volume control. The device reached the UK shortlist for the Sir James Dyson International Design Award, and also won the People's Choice category for the UK in the same competition.



## What do you think?

This is a pilot edition of what we intend to be a quarterly newsletter aimed at highlighting the work of Wales' local societies for visually impaired people. Please complete the attached questionnaire and return it to us at WCB. We need to know what you think about this newsletter and what you want from it.

# Improving homes for people with sight loss.



A new 'Good Practice Guide' from the Thomas Pocklington Trust identifies changes which can be made to any home, at low cost, to make life easier for people with sight loss. The following key points are identified:

- Improve lighting – people with sight loss benefit from good general lighting and task-specific lighting. Lights should be able to be dimmed, shaded to avoid glare and available to illuminate dark areas such as inside cupboards.
- Use colour and contrast – using colours that reflect light, and contrasting colours to differentiate an object from its surroundings, helps people to make the most of their sight.
- Avoid clutter – it is much easier to move around, and to find things if pathways, both inside and outside, are kept clear of clutter.
- Avoid glare – glare creates dazzle that makes it hard to see. Use non-

reflective materials, lamp shades and vertical blinds.

- Use accessible appliances – which are easy to locate and use.

The guide includes checklists for each room, allowing areas of improvement to be identified.

The report can be downloaded from [www.pocklington-trust.org.uk](http://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk), or you can contact the Pocklington Trust by ringing 020 8995 0880 or writing to them at

5 Castle Row, Horticultural Place, Chiswick, London, W14 4JQ.



# Guides for parents with disabled children.



Working Families, the charity which helps children, working parents and carers and their employers find a better balance between responsibilities at home and work, has produced several publications of interest to parents of disabled children. A free guide 'Getting into Work – a guide for parents of disabled children returning to work' has practical advice including where to find jobs, writing CVs, time off

and flexible working. 'Make it Work for You – Work-life balance with a disabled child' gives advice based on the experiences of parents who combine work and caring, and costs £5.50.

The free factsheet 'Childcare for Disabled Children' gives advice on the particular issues faced by parents of disabled children.

The publications can be ordered from the website, [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk), or by ringing Working Families on 020 7253 7243.

## New teaching pack will help children with low vision.

The Wales Low Vision Advocate has developed a 'Low Vision Toolkit' with funding from the Welsh Assembly Government in partnership with RNIB. It consists of seven modules which can be used flexibly to give children and young people with sight problems information about their condition, and what they can do to make the most of their useful vision. Topics covered include use of low vision aids and the importance of lighting.

Thought to be the first such teaching aid in the world, the bi-lingual pack will be provided free to all specialist



teachers working with visually impaired children across Wales.

Local Societies who deliver work with young children would benefit from obtaining a copy of this pack. Contact RNIB Cymru on 029 2045 0440 for more details.

# UK Vision Strategy.



The UK Vision Strategy is a ground-breaking project to develop a unified plan for action on all issues relating to sight loss and eye health across the four countries of the UK. In September, the first Welsh meeting took place, which aimed to publish a Welsh action plan in early 2010.

Over 30 organisations and individuals will work to develop the Strategy for Wales during the autumn and winter. This includes people with sight loss, users of eye care services, eye health and social care professionals and statutory and voluntary organisations. The UK Governments have also given their support to the Strategy. It is the first time that such a breadth of groups have come together to set the direction for eye health and sight loss services.

The UK Vision Strategy aims to:

- improve the eye health of the people of the UK
- eliminate avoidable sight loss and deliver excellent support to those with a sight problem
- enhance the inclusion, participation and independence of blind and partially sighted people.

It's expected that the Welsh Plan will be an anchor point for future work here in Wales. The Strategy Group is coordinated by RNIB Cymru and WCB, and in the next issue we'll be outlining the issues relating to its impact on the work that the eye health sector does in Wales. With the important role that local societies play in Wales, we'll be looking for societies to participate strongly, so watch this space.

# Free electronic pocket magnifiers launched in Wales.

At Wales Council for the Blind, access to information is one of our most important priorities. It has been estimated that 80% of school tasks are based on vision, which indicates the enormous difficulties experienced by visually impaired children as they progress through school and beyond. "It is therefore imperative that appropriate levels of intervention and support are available to all visually impaired children and young people."

People with sight problems across Wales have access to the Low Vision Service provided for by the Welsh Assembly Government. This service offers Low Vision Aid assessments and provides a range of products, including optical magnifiers, to visually impaired people free of charge. However, research by Cardiff University concluded that children were not using the magnifiers provided. The children explained that the main reason for their disuse was the distasteful designs of the optical magnifiers. The children preferred electronic pocket magnifiers because of their increased magnification capabilities and stylish designs.

An electronic pocket size magnifier is a device powered by battery, which is used to display enlarged images on an integrated screen. They are often referred to as "pocket size" because they are small, portable, more discreet and more socially acceptable than some other types of low vision aids. There are several

types of electronic pocket size magnifiers, which allow the user to alter colour contrast levels as well as achieve good quality, high levels of magnification.

The Low Vision Scheme across Wales plans to extend its provision by including electronic pocket magnifiers for children to use at home. As such, Wales Council for the Blind carried out a six month project which independently reviewed all of the electronic pocket magnifiers on the market. The project enabled us to identify a clear list of products that would be suitable for children and young people to use.

WCB, jointly working with the education authorities, conducted 18 focus groups across Wales and worked with 44 children with sight problems. During focus groups, the children had an opportunity to review each magnifier in relation to features such as durability, portability, design and many more. The feedback from the children was used to produce a ranked list of products. The five products which performed best according to the children were the SmartView Versa+, the SmartView Pocket, the Compact+, the SenseView P430 and the Looky. WCB selected these as the preferred products to be considered for provision through the Low Vision Scheme.

The manufacturers / suppliers of these products were contacted by an NHS agent acting on behalf of the Low Vision Service, and invited to participate in a competitive tendering process. As a result,

the Compact+ was selected and will be provided free of charge to children with sight problems across Wales, for use at home. By February 2010, all areas of Wales will have access to this extension in provision through the Low Vision Scheme.

Since the conclusion of the project, the Welsh Low Vision Service has decided to provide the selected product to visually impaired adults as well as children, meaning that all people with sight problems may be entitled to an electronic magnifier, if the optometrist feels it will benefit them.

A full copy of the report is available at [http://www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/files/reading\\_with\\_confidence.pdf](http://www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/files/reading_with_confidence.pdf)

If you require the report in alternative formats please contact Sophie on 02920 473 954 or via email: [sophie@wcb-ccd.org.uk](mailto:sophie@wcb-ccd.org.uk).

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## Our Local Societies.

If you would like to contact any of the listed societies, please contact Wales Council for the Blind and we'll put you in touch. And if your society isn't listed here, let us know.

Abergele Club for the Blind	Porthmadoc & Criccieth Blind Society
Aberystwyth & District VI Club	Prestatyn VI Club
Barry Visually Impaired Persons (CIB)	Radnorshire Association for the Blind
Bell Bank Club	Rhondda Blind Society
Blackwood VIP Club	Rhuddlan Club for the Blind
Bridgevis	Risca Visual Impairment Group
Caernarfon VI Club	Sight Support
Cardiff Institute for the Blind	The Bedwas VI Club
Cefn Mawr Blind Club	The Deeside Club for the Blind
Ceredigion Association for the Blind	The VIPs
Cowbridge VI Group and Gardening (CIB)	The Vision Club
Eyeline Port Talbot	Tywi Branch Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire
Friendly Club of the Blind	Blind Society
Gwent VI Bowling Club	V I Merthyr
Insight	Vision Support
Llandovery & District Blind Association	Visual Impairment Brecon
Macular Disease Society Cardiff	Vision Impaired West Glamorgan
Merthyr Eyelights	Welshpool & District VI Club
Merthyr Institute for the Blind	West Glamorgan Visually Handicapped
Monmouth Club for the VI	Group
Mynydd Mawr Branch, Carmarthenshire	
Blind Society	
North Wales Society for the Blind	
Pembrokeshire Society for the Blind	
Penarth Blind Club (CIB)	



# Nystagmus Network.



Nystagmus Network has appointed John Sanders as its UK development manager. John will be providing information and emotional support to nystagmus patients by phone and email. He will also be giving talks about nystagmus, its effects and the latest developments in research and treatment.

John said: "I have nystagmus, so I know from personal experience how it affects people both in practical and emotional terms. From the support I've had through the Nystagmus Network, I also realise how much we can do to help people overcome the serious challenges presented by nystagmus." John is based in Cardiff, but has already travelled across the country in his new role supporting people affected by nystagmus. If you would like to invite John to visit your society, you can contact him on 0845 634 2630 or email him on [john.sanders@nystagmusnet.org](mailto:john.sanders@nystagmusnet.org).

# Guide Dogs: 'Britain robs blind children of their childhood'.

Guide Dogs has published on their website their belief that the UK is neglecting blind and partially-sighted children and young people – which leaves them lonely, isolated, unable to make friends and fearful of the future.

They claim some 18,000 youngsters under 17 are missing out on crucial mobility, independence and life skills. Without them they can't get around safely on their own or carry out simple daily tasks like getting dressed after PE, cooking a meal or going shopping.

Guide Dogs research shows that Government failure to provide national guidelines and standards has led to patchy provision in the UK by local councils with 30 per cent – around 6000 youngsters – not receiving any mobility training and 9000 receiving no support in those daily living skills.

Those youngsters who do receive training often find it inadequate, piecemeal or not even offered until they reach secondary school, leaving them lonely, isolated and over-dependent on their families.

How does your local society respond to the needs of children? WCB will be looking at local society provision for children in the near future.



# South East Wales.

**'Word Up' campaign promotes use of local libraries.**

Cardiff Institute for the Blind (CIB) is keen to encourage more people to take advantage of the library services on offer to visually impaired people in their local library. Following the success of the 'Word Up' campaign that CIB ran at libraries around Cardiff and the Vale last year, they have visited libraries in the Vale again. The campaign aims to bring public libraries and blind and partially sighted people together to improve access to books and information.

The theme for this round was Audio, and demonstrations of various products, including Talking Magazines, speech scanners and audio-described CDs, were given. Library staff were on hand to answer any questions about their services, whilst a representative from the RNIB Welfare Rights Service was available to give benefits advice.

**Gwent Association raises awareness of sight loss in BME communities.**

Gwent Association for the Blind (GAB) are working to raise awareness of sight loss in the black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, and to make people in these communities aware that many of the conditions which may affect them are preventable.

Current research indicates that:

- 1 in 10 people from ethnic minority

backgrounds over the age of 65 will experience serious sight loss

- People from South Asian descent are six times more likely to develop diabetes
- 1 in 5 people with diabetes are unaware that loss of sight is a complication of diabetes
- Cataracts are twice as common in Asian people and occur ten times more frequently in people with diabetes
- Even without diabetes Asians are more likely to develop cataracts earlier than a Caucasian
- Asian people are also at a particular risk of developing acute glaucoma
- People from African and Afro-Caribbean background are four times more likely to develop glaucoma.

The key to preventing these problems is regular eye examinations and a healthy diet. GAB was able to explain this message to 14 members of Newport's Chinese community, who visited their office recently to find out about the resources available there.

**Large response to GAB's GP services questionnaire.**

A recent questionnaire on the services provided by GPs received a large response from GAB members, and highlighted that staff in GP's surgeries need to show a far greater understanding of the needs of visually impaired people. GAB is now offering training to surgery staff in an attempt to improve the situation.

# West Wales.

## Survey of ICT needs in Ceredigion.

Access to information is a barrier faced by many people with sight problems and one which can easily be overcome with improved levels of awareness and an increase in the provision of equipment. Research conducted by WCB earlier this year suggests that 80% of those with sight problems in Wales are unable to read their own post. This is indicative of the enormous difficulties experienced by visually impaired people in relation to communication.

To help improve access to information and communication, WCB is working in conjunction with Ceredigion Association for the Blind, to look towards providing ICT assessments and demonstrations of equipment at home to people with sight problems. We mailed out to 352 visually impaired people in Ceredigion. Each person received a large print letter and audio CD, whilst others were sent Braille copies. They were asked if they would be happy to complete a questionnaire over the telephone which was designed to find out more about the barriers people come up against in relation to communication. Consequently, 25 people kindly got in contact to complete the questionnaire and we were surprised to find that 100% of respondents are unable to read their own post and rely solely on others to assist them in doing so. The respondents identified a lack of training, the cost of equipment, a lack of knowledge about

the equipment and support available and technical difficulties experienced when using equipment, as the main barriers to accessing information.

In addition to obstacles which make reading things such as letters and household bills difficult, limited vision can make tasks like reading medicine bottles and cooking instructions impossible, which often leads to them being completely dependant on fully sighted helpers. With the correct advice and knowledge of the support and the vast range of equipment available, such barriers can be broken down. Often a simple piece of equipment can empower those suffering from sight loss and greatly increase their sense of independence, by minimising the occasions when they feel obliged to rely on others.

WCB hopes to take forward the findings from the Ceredigion survey by developing a model of support to offer to areas of Wales where there is a demand for advice.

# North and Mid Wales.

## Family Support Group Launched in North Wales.

Vision Support, the organisation supporting visually impaired people in Cheshire and North Wales, has launched a new Family Group, working in partnership with the National Blind Children's Society. The group is for families of children with a visual impairment in North Wales, and will meet regularly on an informal basis. The aim is for families to meet and talk about shared issues. Through the involvement of the group it is hoped that parents will be able to attend family activities, receive up to date advice and information on a variety of subjects from education to benefits, as well as being able to influence local services developed for their children. Events planned for the coming months include a Christmas party, and a trip to Chester Zoo.

For more information please contact:  
Karen Davies, Vision Team Co-ordinator  
Tel: 01745 584597  
Mobile: 07836 549955  
E-mail [kdavies@visionsupport.org.uk](mailto:kdavies@visionsupport.org.uk)

## Fire Safety Advice for Visually Impaired People.

As part of a campaign to improve safety in the home, the Cheshire Fire Service has given the following specific advice for visually impaired people to Vision Support:

- Put a coloured sticker on your smoke alarm if you have trouble seeing it to test it, or ask your local Fire Service if they can provide a coloured cover.
- Consider fitting bump-ons (also known as plastic blisters) to appliances as a way of making sure they are switched off properly.
- Check electrical leads regularly by touch. If they are frayed or faulty don't plug them in or switch them on. If electrics are giving off a burning smell turn them off and unplug them immediately.
- You may also want to consider placing a tactile indicator along your escape route to make it easier to find the exit.
- Register with your local Fire Service if you have sight difficulties. This will mean a fire crew is made aware of your circumstances in the event of an emergency.
- Contact your local fire and rescue service or social services if you need practical help tailored to meet your needs. They may be able to fit a smoke alarm for you or provide other safety equipment.

# Focus on Bridge Vis

## What is Bridge Vis?

The Bridgend and District Visual Impairment Society provides support to blind and partially sighted people OF ALL AGES within the Bridgend County Borough.

They provide direct services such as computer training, yoga, supported walks and social groups as well as advice.

Services currently available are:

- an Eye Clinic Information Desk where volunteers provide information and support at eye clinics to patients experiencing some form of sight loss

- A telephone information line
- Rambles and walks
- Bat walks
- Coffee mornings
- Computer training at Bridgend College
- Computer support via email.

Services planned for the near future include a gardening club, youth forum, yoga and dance classes.

If you are interested, or know of anyone who may be interested, in taking part in any of these activities, or who is willing to volunteer their help, please contact Anita Davies on 07929 280518 or Pat Davies on 01656 872000.

## WCB's Link Officers

The staff at WCB are points of contact for our member organisations and have been allocated regions by county. If you have a query or would like to tell us about your organisation's activities, please contact the relevant officer below on 029 20 473954.

Phil Stevens: Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea.

Rebecca Phillips: Powys, Monmouthshire, Blaenau-Gwent.

Sophie Dymant: Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion.

Nicola Lewis: Torfaen, Newport, Caerphilly.

Richard Bowers: Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wreccsam.

Dilwyn Price: Gwynedd, Anglesey, Conwy.

Owen Williams: Carmarthenshire.

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