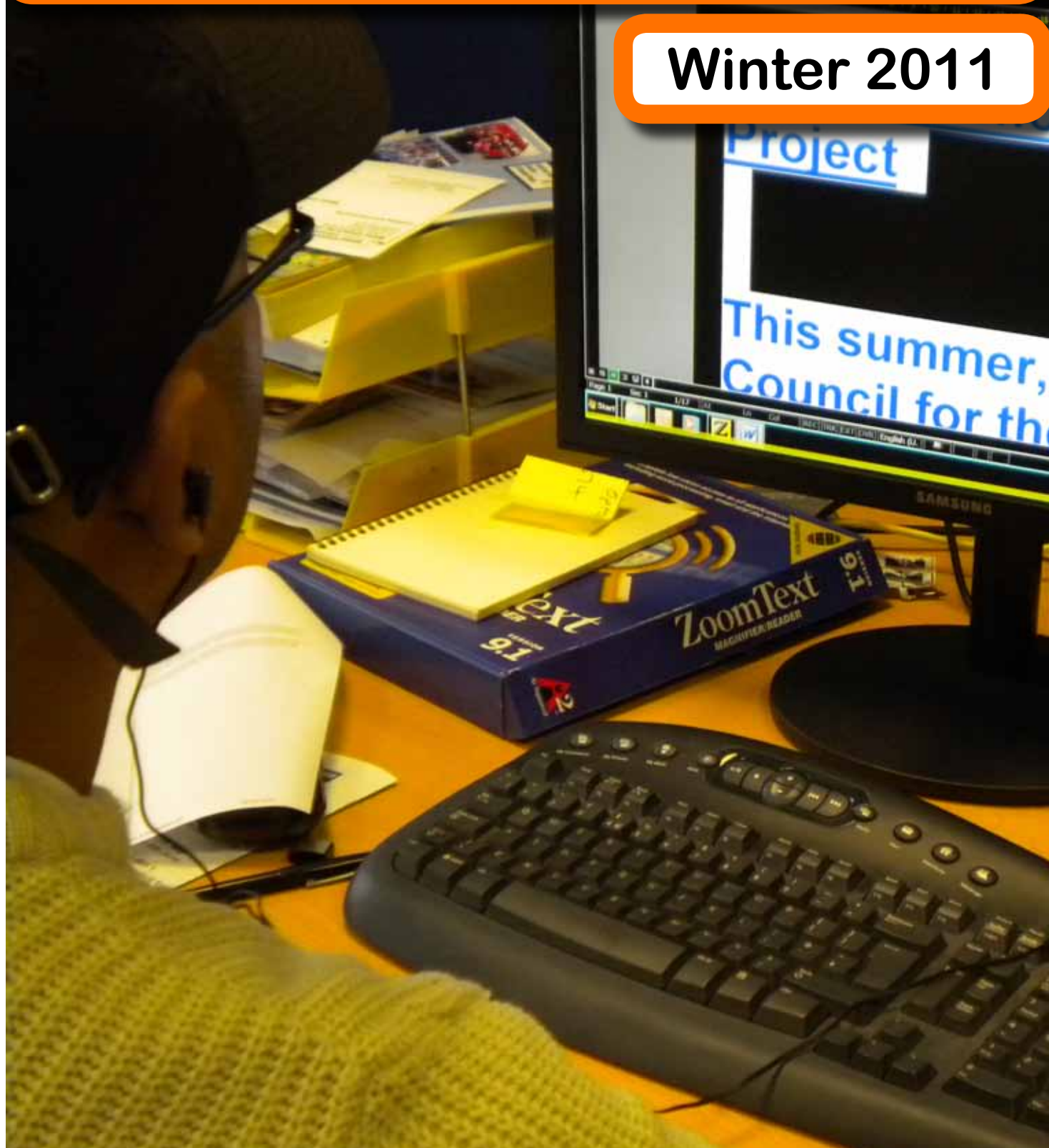


WCB Roundup

A newsletter for local VI Groups in Wales

Winter 2011



Technology Special

WCB AGM 2010

WCB to explore developing a new Welsh agency with Sight Support and Vision Support

Wales Council for the Blind has been looking at the best way to support sight loss services across Wales and at its AGM held on Wednesday the 8th December, its membership voted to pursue the option to work in collaboration with Sight Support and Vision Support to create a new Welsh sight loss organisation. This new organisation will draw on the strengths of its partners to extend support for the visual impairment sector in Wales, aiming to develop new, high quality services across the Principality.

The decision to form a new coalition of sight loss services in Wales presents a real opportunity to work with our national partners to further work in Wales supporting people with sight loss. During the course of 2011, WCB will be consulting across the sector to make sure the new organisation meets the needs of local clubs, societies and Wales' statutory partners and puts people with a visual impairment at the heart of service delivery.

Peter Curtis, Chair of WCB: "WCB has worked for many years to put the needs of people with a sight loss at the heart of policy making and service development. The decision to form a new agency alongside Wales' largest local societies will help ensure a vibrant future for local societies, and a new chance to collaborate with our sector partners. We believe this will ensure the best outcome for the many thousands of people in Wales with a sight loss."

WCB will work with its partners to produce a full business case during 2011 that will detail the structure of this partnership. This business case will then go back to the membership of WCB for approval.

During the forthcoming months the day to day work of WCB will remain unchanged. WCB will still provide local societies with the support they need to be able to help their members, we will still be campaigning for improvement in the services they use, and its networks will still support development and collaboration in the field of health and social care.

During the spring, WCB will be undertaking a series of consultations with its members, so stay tuned for details!

For further details, please contact Phil Stevens, Director of Wales Council for the Blind on 02920 473 954, or email phil@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Departures

Welfare Rights Officer

Emma Non-John, our Research and Information officer has left WCB in order to set up a new business with her husband. Emma has been part of the team here for over 15 years, and been a huge and vital asset in our work. Emma's capacity to undertake research will be sorely missed in the organisation, and I'm sure that friends and colleagues of WCB will join us in wishing Emma all the very best for the future.

Funding Manager

Dilwyn Price, our Funding Manager, is to leave WCB towards the end of March. Originally seconded to WCB from Barclays Bank over a decade ago, Dilwyn proved to be a great asset to the organisation around the roles of fundraising and financial planning: tough tasks in the Third Sector in any climate, let alone the current one. Staff and colleagues shall miss his dry wit. We wish him the very best in his future plans.

DLA Higher Rate Mobility

Following a great deal of lobbying from the VI sector, a change in the law means that from 11th April 2011 some visually impaired people will be eligible to claim the 'Higher Rate Mobility Component' of DLA.

Eligibility

From that date, visually impaired people who are under 65 will be eligible for the higher rate mobility component if they:

1. have been certified by a consultant ophthalmologist as 'severely sight impaired' or 'blind'

AND 2. are severely visually impaired.

Satisfying the age and certification criteria is fairly self explanatory however satisfying the 'severely visually impaired' criteria requires further explanation.

What constitutes 'severely visually impaired'?

The criteria takes into account both visual acuity and visual field.

Visual acuity is measured on the 'Snellen Scale' and is a measure of central vision and how well a person sees detail. Visual field is what a person can see around them – sometimes called peripheral vision.

For the purposes of satisfying the criteria for the higher rate of DLA people are said to be severely visually impaired if:

A. they have a visual acuity, with appropriate corrective lenses if necessary, of less than 3/60. (This means that they can only read the top line of an eye test from 3 metres away)

OR

B. they have visual acuity of 3/60 or more, but less than 6/60, with appropriate corrective lenses if necessary. (This means that they can only read the top line of the eye test chart from 6 metres away); and they have a complete loss of peripheral visual field; and they have a central visual field of no more than 10° in total i.e. severely restricted central vision (tunnel vision).

These two routes to entitlement encompass people who have:
No perception of light; perception of light only; perception of hand movement; and a visual acuity of 3/60 with a total or extensive loss of field.

Evidence of entitlement

As well as having to be satisfied that a certificate has been issued extra evidence may have to be obtained to decide if a person is severely visually impaired. If the certificate does not contain this information, then a report may have to be requested from the hospital. If the report is based on an examination more than one year ago and the case is for disallowance, a report from an optometrist registered with the General Optical Council or an orthoptist registered with the Health Professions Council should be obtained in case there has been a deterioration.

Moving forward

From Nov 2010 the Pensions, Disability and Carers Service will be contacting current VI claimants to discuss whether or not they will be eligible. For those VI claimants who believe they may be eligible it would be best to start gathering necessary evidence now i.e. BD8/CVI or a consultant's report noting visual acuity and visual field.

Where as a result of the changes those already receiving DLA become entitled to the highest rate of the mobility component existing awards will be replaced and the highest rate awarded from the 11th April 2011 (subject to the 3 month qualifying period if necessary).

New claims received by the DWP that satisfy the test for the higher rate should be awarded the lowest rate until 10th April 2011 and the higher rate from the 11th April (again subject to the 3 month qualifying period).

From 11.4.11 if people do not satisfy the conditions to get the higher rate mobility component on the criteria above they can only get the higher rate mobility component on the previous eligibility criteria that they are both blind and deaf.

Census 2011



WCB is asking for help from local societies to promote the forthcoming Census to your members. We want to ensure that people with visual impairment in Wales know that an important document will be sent to them in early March. We would like your help to tell your members about the Census, and to explain how they can get assistance in completing the form if they need it.

The Census will take place on 27 March. It can be completed online or sent back in the prepaid envelope that comes through the post with the form.

Remember, the Census asks everyone the same questions on the same day. The form looks big and complicated, but it isn't when you get started. If you're having difficulty, however, help is available – just call the number on the front of the form.

We'd welcome your agency putting the following article in any magazines or news leaflets that you produce between now and the end of March. If you have the opportunity to contact your members, including via existing telephone befriending services, please let them know that the Census will be arriving shortly.

WCB and Census have prepared the following short text - please feel free to use this in any communication you have with your members:

"The next Census in England and Wales will take place on 27 March 2011. The Census will be delivered to your door in a large envelope, and is very important.

"The data collected by the Census is completely confidential and is never shared with any other body or Government Department but

is used to calculate the amount of funding any Local Authority will receive from the Government and to aid the planning of services such as housing, transport links, education, healthcare and social care. Completing your Census form will help your Authority get the funding to which they are entitled from the Government, which could ultimately make all our lives better.

“It not a widely known fact but not making a Census return for yourself and the people with whom you share your home can carry a fine of up to £1,000. So fill the form in. If you wish to receive a large print, audio or Braille version, please contact the number on the front of the form. If you wish to receive help in completing your form, you can contact this number.

“The form can be completed online or sent back in the prepaid envelope that comes with the form. Remember, the Census asks everyone the same questions on the same day. The form looks big and complicated, but it isn’t when you get started – it is a form containing tick-box questions about you and your family to which you are sure to know the answers. But if you’re having difficulty, we can help – just call the number on the front of the form.

“If you have not made a return in the 10 days after Census Day, a Collectors will come to your door to make a follow up. Census collectors are checked and will carry I.D. But some people might take this as an opportunity to pose as Census staff in order to gain access to you home so, do ask for their identification and if you are in doubt call the Police, who can check that there isn’t a bogus caller at your door.”

We hope that you’ll be able to assist us in ensuring that people with a visual impairment can take part in the Census, be counted and make a difference.

Technology for People with a Visual Impairment

Each edition of Roundup focuses on a theme: in this quarter we're highlighting the range of services and products that improve access to information via hardware and software solutions. This is not an exhaustive overview, but it gives a flavour of the ways in which blind and partially-sighted people access information.

Traditionally, the solution was to convert documents created for a sighted readership into 'alternative' formats: chiefly Braille, audio cassette, large print. In the last 20 years or so, computerisation of information has become standard practice: writing directly into word processors, writing web pages, producing accounts in computer spreadsheets and so on. This has meant that the information is stored at point of creation in a form that can readily be converted to other formats. Consequently, the tools have been developed to carry out this conversion directly, rather than forcing us to rely on the time-consuming and costly traditional methods.

This edition highlights some of these technologies and the people using them. We also give a list of contacts for further information on products and resources.

The theme of the next edition shall be services for Black and Ethnic Minority People with a visual impairment.

Please contact richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk (or telephone Richard on 029 20 473954) if you would like to write something about the service you or your organisation offers in relation to the theme or visual impairment in general. The provisional deadline is April 30th 2011.

Access to Work - practical help at work

Access to Work can help you if your health or disability affects the way you do your job. It gives you and your employer advice and support with extra costs which may arise because of your needs.

About Access to Work

Access to Work might pay towards a support worker or the equipment you need at work. It can also pay towards the cost of getting to work if you cannot use public transport.

Who can get Access to Work?

You may be able to get Access to Work if you're:

- in a paid job
- unemployed and about to start a job
- unemployed and about to start a Work Trial
- self-employed

and your disability or health condition stops you from being able to do parts of your job.

Your disability or health condition may not have a big effect on what you do each day, but may have a long-term effect on how well you can do your job.

How to contact Access to Work

If you feel that the type of work you do is affected by a disability or health condition that is likely to last for 12 months or more, contact your regional Access to Work contact centre to check whether you can get help. If you live in Wales telephone 029 2042 3291. Alternatively, ask the Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) at your local Jobcentre about Access to Work.

Getting help – the process

If you are likely to be eligible for Access to Work, you will be sent an application form to fill in and send back. When the completed form has arrived back, an Access to Work adviser will contact you. The adviser will usually speak to you and your employer to reach a decision about the best support for you. In most cases, this can be done over the telephone, but a visit can be arranged if necessary.

Sometimes specialist advice may be needed, which the Access to Work adviser will help to arrange. For example, your adviser may arrange for a specialist organisation to complete an assessment and recommend appropriate support. In this case, a confidential written report will be sent to the Access to Work adviser, who will use this information to help them decide on the right level of support - the provision of access technologies for example.

Your employer's responsibilities

Once your adviser has decided on the package of support they feel is appropriate, they will seek formal approval of their recommendations from Jobcentre Plus. You and your employer will then receive a letter informing you of the approved level of support and the grant available.

It is the responsibility of your employer - or you, if you are self-employed - to arrange the agreed support and buy the necessary equipment. Your employer can then claim repayment of the approved costs from Access to Work.

Your Access to Work grant

The amount of help which you may receive from Access to Work will vary depending on how long you have been employed, what support you need and whether you are self-employed.

Access to Work can pay up to 100 per cent of the approved costs if you are:

- unemployed and starting a new job
- self-employed
- working for an employer and have been in the job for less than six weeks

Whatever your employment status, Access to Work will also pay up to 100 per cent of the approved costs of help with:

- support workers
- fares to work
- communicator support at interview

Access to Work pays a proportion of the costs of support if all of the following apply to you:

- you're working for an employer
- you've been in the job for six weeks or more
- you need special equipment

The precise level of cost sharing is determined as follows:

- employers with 1 to 9 employees will not be expected to share costs
- employers with 10 to 49 employees will pay the first £300 and 20 per cent of costs up to £10,000
- employers with 50 to 249 employees will pay the first £500 and 20 per cent of costs up to £10,000
- large employers with 250 or more employees will pay the first £1,000 and 20 per cent of costs up to £10,000

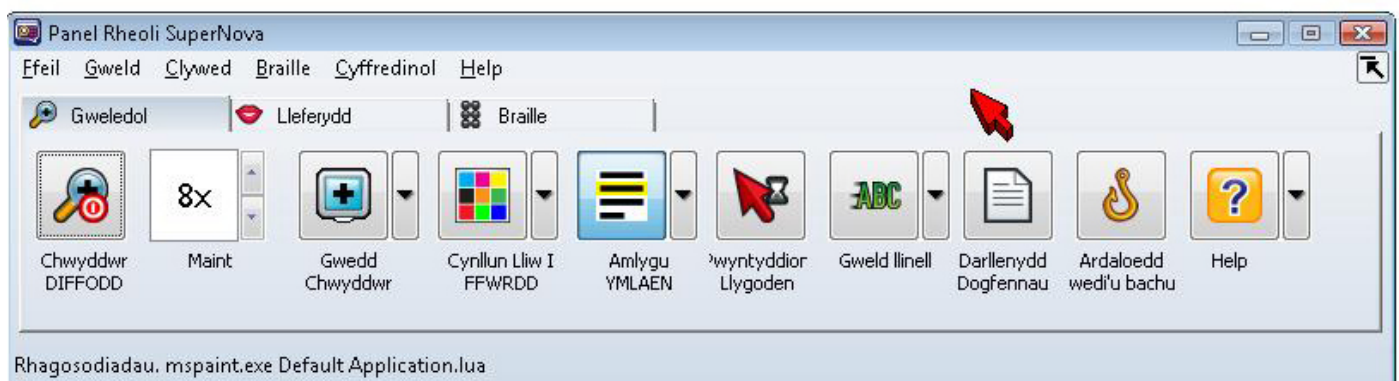
After between one and three years, Access to Work will review your circumstances and the support you're receiving.

More choice for Welsh screen reader users

Screen readers, as their name would suggest, are products which reproduce information which appears on-screen in synthetic speech enabling someone with little or no vision to interact with computer based information. We will look at a number of Welsh synthetic voices that are available to buy or download free of charge. We will explore their functionality and the quality of the voice used.

Dolphin Computer Access Ltd.

The first stop in our journey is at Dolphin Computer Access Ltd. Dolphin was the first company to produce a Welsh Synthetic voice. SuperNova Access Suite (formerly Supernova), SuperNova Reader Magnifier (formerly LunarPlus) and SuperNova Screen Reader (formerly Hal) all include a Welsh synthetic voice. All SuperNova editions are also available in Welsh, with Welsh menus and button descriptions, etc.



In January 2006, Dolphin's Orpheus (Welsh) synthetic voice was incorporated within all of their screen reading products enabling users to have all on-screen text including menus, web pages, emails, word documents, etc read to them out-loud in Welsh.

One person who uses the Welsh synthesiser within an employment setting stated that it has worked well within her role. She said that

the quality and accuracy was quite good. She went on to say that one or two words came out wrong but you get used to it.

You can listen to Orpheus Welsh and other languages supported by Dolphin by visiting:

<http://www.yourdolphin.com/productdetail.asp?id=5&z=24>

Welsh BrowseAloud

Some County Councils have speech-enabled their websites with a product called BrowseAloud, which will allow people to hear online content being read aloud.

BrowseAloud is a text-to-speech solution that reads all accessible web content aloud in a high-quality human sounding voice which can be altered to suit the individual's specific needs. As online content is read aloud, words are highlighted; a useful tool which aids literacy and comprehension.

Denbighshire Council, which has BrowseAloud available on its site, said that by speech-enabling a website with BrowseAloud, people who may have difficulty accessing online content will now be able to navigate a website with greater ease and confidence.

This is particularly useful for people with literacy difficulties, dyslexia, mild visual impairments, or for those who speak English as a second language. The Welsh voice developed by Bangor University was launched in May 2009. BrowseAloud Welsh version also includes an English voice. It highlights text as it's spoken and can read PDFs in their original format and MS Word documents. It also has the ability to convert online text to MP3 and a screen masking facility which benefits those with certain visual impairments and learning difficulties.

For further information visit www.browsealoud.com.

Welsh Synthetic Voice - automated speech software

RNIB Cymru celebrated the launch of the Welsh Synthetic Voice (automated speech software) on 4 August at the S4C tent on the Eisteddfod field. The new voice will enable the computers of blind and partially sighted people to read aloud information in Welsh on screen. RNIB Cymru has been working in partnership with IVONA (Text -To-Speech) to develop a Welsh Synthetic Voice.

The software, which will be free to download for individuals, will have many applications including surfing Welsh language websites, downloading and reading Welsh language books and receiving texts in Welsh.

This software will help people with sight loss access vital information on line, for example train timetables and health information and will be particularly useful to blind and partially sighted children learning Welsh in school and allow them greater access to curriculum materials alongside their sighted peers.

Comments welcomed

If you use any of the products mentioned in the language of Welsh and you would like to comment on the quality of the speech or the difference it has made to the way that you read text, for example, please contact Owen Williams at WCB.

Reading machines

At present there are no reading machines that can scan and read Welsh text. HumanWare is looking to include a Welsh synthetic voice within some of their products including the EyePal Solo and Zoom-Ex. Watch this space!

Supernova Version 12 release shakes up the screen magnifier market

Our ICT Development Manager, Owen Williams, visited Dolphin Computer Access' offices in Worcester to review the latest version of Supernova magnifier (formally known as Lunar) prior to its recent launch. One of the biggest improvements he found as a partially sighted user is the improved text smoothing technology. The text was smoother and clearer even at higher levels of magnification.

ZoomText screen magnifier released its version of text smoothing technology, 'xFont', in 2005 (patent pending). The improvement in text clarity makes Dolphin's Supernova magnifier a quality and affordable solution. Owen was also very impressed with how easy it was to use the magnifier using multiple monitors. He added that having the ability to have two monitors running screen magnification would prove very useful within his role, as well as support his sight impairment.

Dolphin Computer Access is the only UK Supplier of access software that offers a discount directly to the individual. Access software for many people is considered too expensive but even with an improvement in features and quality, Supernova magnifier can be purchased, on-line, by someone who is sight impaired, for as little as £200 if an unlock code is ordered. It would be nice if other suppliers of access software were able to take Dolphin's lead and offer individual discounts.

There is a range of low-cost and even free screen magnifiers on the market but it is fair to say that the text displayed on-screen is not as clear as the above mentioned products.

If you are interested in using such software it is advisable to download trial versions prior to purchase from the relevant suppliers' websites.

An Apple a day keeps the Doctor happy!

By Dr. Rhianwen Stiff

Until recently, I've been suffering from a bad case of gadget envy. The i-revolution was a mystery I had reluctantly assumed I would never be able to be a part of. What was the point in purchasing an expensive all-singing, all-dancing iPhone when my less than perfect eyesight wouldn't be able to let me take advantage of all the accessories and apps.

And then, my 13 year old nephew (yes, sometimes with gadgets it takes a child) casually mentioned that I might like the new iPhone as it could, "magnify stuff". Being of an age where cynicism comes naturally, I wasn't entirely convinced until a visually impaired friend lent me her phone..... and I've not looked back.

I decided to buy an iPad. I didn't need another phone, and the larger screen size of the iPad means that when I use magnification (which is in-built as standard and is so easy to trigger using touch-screen commands), I still get a decent field of vision. No more do I have to strain to find a cursor on a computer screen - it's so much easier with touch screen technology when your finger acts as the cursor. There's no additional software to purchase and get installed - it all comes as standard.

And if magnification doesn't work for you, there is the option of in-built audio description. When activated, simply touching the screen will trigger the iPad to read aloud the name of the app or programme or accessory that lies beneath your finger.

Why do I like Apples? It lets me feel in control. Although I constantly use hardware and software specifically designed for VI persons, it's so nice to be able to pick up and use a standard piece of kit and feel part of the wider world - sharing with VI and sighted friends alike.

...and some more comments on Apple products...

Nathan Foy from Guide Dogs uses voice over on his iPhone. Nathan previously used TALKS and now finds that he has access to more mainstream applications - Apps - for finding what's on in the cinema, for example. It is worth mentioning that not all applications are accessible to blind users but, once you've got used to using the keyboard, it is great for normal everyday functions.

Nathan has also found that he is using his PC, running JAWS, a lot less. Nathan's favourite app is a Google application that enables you to take a photo of an object and then Google will search for a match and then tell you what it is, as well as giving you information and articles on it. Guide Dogs have launched an iPhone app called 'Go

The Apple iPad with keyboard dock.



Walkies' to build awareness of and participation in its Go Walkies events. The app will show dog owners new and interesting routes for walking their dogs, and provide information on local go walkies events.

Owen Williams, WCB ICT Development Manager, has also been converted to an Apple lover for much of the same reasons as Rhianwen. However, when using a MacBook, he does feel that Zoom, the built-in screen magnifier, appears too distorted and even blurred at higher levels of magnification. So will we see the likes of SuperNova Magnifier, ZoomText Magnifier or MAGic available as an app?

Many of HumanWare's customers are now using their portable BrailleNote Apex & Brailiant Braille displays to give them Braille access to their iPhone and iPad whilst out and about.

For people who prefer to use a Mac or MacBook, they still get the same Braille support, but in addition can use the Zoom-Ex (a portable & fast OCR system).

Suppliers are already looking to connect portable video magnifiers to the Mac or MacBook to enable someone with a sight impairment to make print and handwritten materials bigger, as well as for distance viewing, in environments such as a classroom.

If you would like a demonstration of any of Apple's products you could visit their store in St David's Centre in Cardiff. Sadly this is the only Apple store in Wales. The nearest store to North Wales is in Liverpool with that for Mid Wales being in Birmingham.

Technowatch

An online resource showcasing the latest technology innovations to help blind and partially sighted people get about has been launched by Guide Dogs.

Technowatch will help Guide Dogs meet its strategic aim to help more blind and partially sighted get about independently. It features products from around the world in four categories:

- Wayfinding and Orientation,
- Obstacle Detection,
- Remote Activated Signs
- Miscellaneous.

Products include the Kaptan Personal GPS Voice Navigator, a tiny voice-activated wayfinder that uses GPS signals, plays music.

Besides the products, the site also contains technology research papers and a feedback system that allows users to comment on products.

These comments will be fed back to manufacturers to improve future product designs.

Guide dog owner and Guide Dogs' employee Peter Barker said: "Technowatch is a really exciting development. Not only does it provide a means for blind and partially sighted consumers to input feedback to suppliers, but it gives researchers somewhere to promote their findings. Technology moves quickly, so this site will be a really important way for blind and partially sighted people to keep up with developments that could improve their quality of life and independence."

Recent developments in medical research

There are a couple of interesting developments which have been reported in the press recently regarding treatments for sight problems. In Germany, a number of people have been fitted with an experimental chip behind the retina, which allows a patient to detect items with their eyes. Whilst some patients noticed no difference as their condition was too advanced, the majority were able to pick out bright objects.

The best results were obtained in a man with Retinitis Pigmentosa who was able to recognise cutlery and a mug on a table, a clock face and discern seven different shades of grey. He was also able to move around a room independently and approach people. In further tests he read large letters set out before him, and was able to notice that his name had been misspelled.

The chip works by converting light that enters the eye into electrical impulses which are fed into the optic nerve behind the eye. It is externally powered and in the initial study was connected to a cable which protruded from the skin behind the ear to connect with a battery. The team are now testing an upgrade in which the device is all contained beneath the skin, with power delivered through the skin via an external device that clips behind the ear.

Although the research is very promising, it will be some time before the success of the approach is proved, and it is ready to be made widely available.

Meanwhile, research in America has suggested that the use of laser treatment could make surgery safer for patients with cataracts, although it takes longer than conventional surgery and would be more expensive. The laser beam is designed to cut through to the lens of the eye and cut it into fragments for removal. The researchers claim that the cuts were twice as strong and five times as precise as the current surgical method of treating cataracts.

In a trial of 59 eyes with cataract, there were no differences in important outcomes, such as safety, side effects or improvements in vision, between those treated by laser and those by conventional surgery. The results of the initial trial have been favourable, but a properly designed randomised trial is now required to test the safety, acceptability and outcomes of the innovative technique.

Accessible mobile phones

Our ICT Development Officer is frequently being asked questions regarding the accessibility and suitability of mobile phones. In the current world where internet, email and text messaging are beginning to dominate as channels of communication it is important that people with sight problems are not left out of this important social network.

For many people the mobile phone is an essential tool for communication; however their complexity and design has often made them difficult for blind and partially sighted people to use. A number of factors including the size and shape of buttons and the size of text and icons on their screens, compound to make their use difficult or in many cases, impossible.

The RNIB has produced two factsheets about mobile phones for blind and partially sighted people. They are a great place to start when deciding which phone would work best for you.

Mobile phone factsheet (extract)

This factsheet is written for people who have some useful vision and want a new mobile phone that is easy-to-see and easy-to-use. The phones mentioned in this factsheet have been specifically designed to be easy-to-see and easy-to-use and are available from RNIB.

These phones range from a simple four-button speed dial phone to a stylish clamshell phone with Bluetooth and a radio. The RNIB continually searches for new easy-to-use mobile phones to give blind and partially sighted people as wide a choice as possible.

Mobile phone software factsheet (extract)

This factsheet gives details about software that can be added to some mainstream mobile phones to enlarge the text on screen, or read out screen information and echo button presses. The factsheet also highlights several GPS software programmes which, combined with talking software, make a talking portable navigation system.

Downloads

The two factsheets are available to download in Word or PDF format from the RNIB's website, www.rnib.org.uk

Order print, Braille or audio

These factsheets are also available for free in large print, Braille or audio. You can order from RNIB's online store or by telephoning RNIB on 0303 123 9999.

If you are still unsure you can always visit a high street mobile phone distributor such as Orange, Vodafone or the Carphone Warehouse and ask for a demonstration.



Communicate, navigate, enunciate!

The following article has been supplied by Humanware.

HumanWare's DeafBlind Communicator opens a world of communication possibilities for people who are deaf and blind. The DeafBlind Communicator allows a person who is deaf and blind to communicate directly for the first time with their doctor, bank manager, bus drivers, shop assistants, sighted family and friends, by simply activating a face-to-face chat. Deafblind users can also communicate via TTY and SMS Texting.

HumanWare continually strives to develop innovative technology for the visually impaired. The Trekker Breeze all-in-one handheld talking GPS device was designed to make life easier for people who are blind or partially sighted.

It's as simple to use as your TV remote. The Breeze can be controlled by one hand. The device will announce to you the names of streets, junctions and landmarks as you walk. A destination address can be entered into the Breeze, by using the keys like a phone keypad. Breeze will guide you safely along your routes. As you walk, it will automatically tell you where you are, when to turn, distance to the next junction and with the press of one button, how to get back.

BrailleNote Apex, the latest addition to the BrailleNote family of notetakers. Apex is the smallest, thinnest, lightest notetaker available running KeySoft technology. Whether you are a busy professional or a hardworking student, today's connected, digital world is all yours with the sleek and powerful Apex. With the Apex, built-in options are at your fingertips to access Web pages, download e-mails or retrieve files from your wireless or Ethernet network. There are 3 available USB ports for connecting to printers, embossers, hard drives, flash drives and more.

Eye Pal Solo offers the simplicity of placing your letter, book, newspaper article or magazine on its surface: it will start reading automatically. The speed of the Eye Pal Solo is phenomenal, as soon as you place a printed document onto the unit it starts to read within seconds. The unique hand-motion control allows you to stop reading by moving your hand under the camera. To resume reading, wave your hand again and Eye Pal Solo will continue from the point where it stopped reading. The Eye Pal Solo gives people the independence to read their own mail privately and identify junk mail after just the first sentence.



Braillenote Apex



Trekker Breeze

SmartView Versa starts where the magnifying glass stops, and magnifies images up to 15x. This light, easy to use handheld magnifier has an auto-focus camera and a 4.3" colour LCD Screen. An independent survey¹, conducted by Wales Council for the Blind, concluded that 70% of visually impaired children preferred the portable electronic magnifiers produced by HumanWare. In addition, the Versa can be connected to the TV for increased magnification.

Contact details given in the 'Useful Contacts' section below.

Footnote 1. 'Reading With Confidence - a report on the provision of electronic pocket magnifiers for children with sight problems in Wales' - WCB Summer 2009. 52% of the children who reviewed the product selected the Versa+ as their preferred magnifier and a further 18% preferred to use the Smartview Pocket.

An intuitive reading assistant for printed text

The following article has been supplied by Optelec.

Rediscover the joys of reading anytime and anywhere with the Optelec ClearReader+, combining fast text recognition, a choice of high quality naturally sounding voices, and all in an attractive portable design.

Imagine listening to printed correspondence, daily newspapers, magazines and favourite books as the Optelec ClearReader+ begins reading them aloud within a few seconds - and all at the press of a button.

Enjoy instant reading - simply switch-on, scan the printed reading material and start listening in an instant, using a choice of naturally sounding voices.



Add a separate Magnification Feature Pack and connect with a computer-style monitor and view the text on the screen as it is read aloud as it were in large print.

Key benefits:

- Click and begin listening in a few seconds
- Intuitive operation - simple adjustment controls for play, pause, forward, back, reading speed and voice selection
- Compact, portable and easy to carry with a built-in carrying handle
- Modern, stylish look
- Built-in high quality stereo sound speakers
- Integrated object lighting for reading in places with poor external lighting
- High quality multilingual text recognition with 4 selectable voices in up to 4 different languages including UK-English voices (Daniel and Serina) and an Indian-English voice (Sangitta)
- Headphone connector - connect a headset and listen discretely
- Use from mains power or from the rechargeable Li-ion batteries providing up to 5 hours continuous use
- Automatically recognises columns

Contact details given in the 'Useful Contacts' section on the next page.

Useful Contacts

In this section, we have gathered together some contacts which may be useful as sources of help with technology and suppliers.

British Computer Association of the Blind.

The British Computer Association of the Blind (BCAB) is a lively community of blind and partially sighted computer users. We offer training, discussion, networking and help to all our members.

Established in 1969 we're the oldest computer association for blind and partially sighted people in the world. Our membership includes people of all skill levels, interests and abilities.

BCAB is actively involved in a number of key areas:

- Promoting and encouraging the use of technology amongst blind and partially sighted people.
- Campaigning vigorously for equal access to computers, software and the Internet.
- Organising specialist training for people at all skill levels.
- Providing networking opportunities for people working in the IT industry.
- Publishing news and information relevant to blind and partially sighted computer users.

Find out more at www.bcab.org.uk or phone 0845 430 8627.

Access technology suppliers

Blazie

Blazie resell access software and Braille products, as well as providing JAWS scripting development and specialist training. Visit them at www.blazie.co.uk. Tel: 020 8582 0450

Claro Software

A company that develops and licenses assistive software, including speech technology, image technology and touch technology. Visit them at www.clarosoftware.com. Tel: 0177 297 7888

Dolphin Computer Access Ltd.

Dolphin manufactures and sells software to help people with sight impairments, as well as providing accessibility solutions. Trials can be downloaded from www.yourdolphin.com. Tel: 0845 130 5353

Enhanced Vision

Enhanced Vision sell a comprehensive range of desktop, portable and versatile video magnifiers.

Visit: www.enhancedvision.co.uk. Tel: 0115 944 2317. Independent Vision is their regional distributor for Wales and can be contacted by email at enquiries@ivmere.co.uk or by telephone on (01747) 863406

Force Ten Company

This company sells a range of low vision and talking products, Braille products, daily living aids, access software and even sell second user products. To find out more visit www.forcetenco.co.uk or telephone them on (01372) 450887

Hagger UK Ltd

Hagger provides a one stop independent living aids solution. They can supply you with products and services that can help with your hearing, vision, mobility, or educational needs. www.hagger.co.uk or telephone them on 0845 882 0505

Hands free computing

This company specialises in voice recognition software. They can assess your needs and provide you with assistive technology, ergonomic solutions, specialist training and advice where appropriate. Visit them at www.hands-free.co.uk or Tel: 0845 899 0880.

Humanware

HumanWare manufacturers and sells a comprehensive range of access technologies including video magnifiers, Braille products and reading machines. To view their products visit www.humanware.com. Tel: (01933) 415800

Optelec

Optelec manufactures and sells a range of video magnifiers, reading machines, Braille products and optical magnifiers. To view their products visit www.optelec.co.uk. Tel: (01923) 231313. Adapt-IT is their regional distributor for South Wales. Tel: 0117 9574598

Pamtrad

Pamtrad sell a range of products including talking watches, optical magnifiers, large button telephones, access software such as iZoom, electronic magnifiers, reading machines, Braille products and public accessibility consoles. You can view their products at www.pamtrad.co.uk. Tel: 0115 9816636. JarikStaffs are Pamtrad's regional distributor for Wales and can be contacted by telephone on 01785 600327.

Professional Vision Services

This company resells a range of access software, electronic magnifiers (CCTVs), Braille products and mobile phone solutions. All of their products can be seen at www.professional-vision-services.co.uk. Tel: 01462 420751

RNIB

RNIB sell a range of assistive technologies and daily living products via their website www.rnib.org.uk or telephone 0303 1239999.

Sight and Sound Technology

Established 30 years ago they supply equipment and services to people with sight impairments. Provide a range of access software, video magnifiers, Braille products, scan and reading machines, mobile phone solutions, training and scripting. To view their products

and services visit www.sightandsound.co.uk. Tel: 0845 6347979

Techno-Vision Systems

A company that specialises in reselling Duxbury Braille translation software, various Braille embossers and JAWS (screen reader) along with other products for people with a sight impairment. Visit them at www.techno-vision.co.uk or Tel: 01604 792777

VisionAid Technologies

This independent company re-sells access software, video magnifiers, reading machines, Braille products, large print keyboards and more, giving people the chance to choose the best product for them. Visit www.visionaid.co.uk or Tel: (01775) 711977

VisualEyes

VisualEyes resell a range of access software, as well as a comprehensive range of electronic magnifiers (CCTV's). To learn more about their products visit www.visualeyesuk.com or telephone them on 01623 754646.

It is important that someone has an opportunity to try before they buy. Many of the suppliers listed are happy to visit you to demonstrate their products. This service is offered free of charge.

If any organisation is missing and you feel that they should be included contact WCB.

For independent advice on all ICT enquiries, please contact Owen Williams, our ICT Development Manager, by email to owen@wcbccd.org.uk or by telephoning him on 029 2047 3954.

Sources of funding

For an up-to-date list of grant-giving organisations for purchasing Access Technologies, contact Owen Williams on 029 20 473954. Alternatively, visit www.turn2us.org.uk

Training providers across Wales

Sight Support

This organisation provides free IT training (in Supernova, Guide, ZoomText etc.) to VI people either at the resource centre at Bradbury House, Pontypool, or at the client's home. Contact Andrew Hillier on (01495) 763650.

North Wales Society for the Blind

The society can provide training in-house on Guide, ZoomText and Supernova applications, as well as basic IT skills. For further information, contact Marian Radcliffe on (01248) 353604.

Vision Support

Vision Support provides IT Training across North Wales to anyone with sight loss living in Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Conwy. They teach computer skills to everyone with sight loss: basic skills to more advanced techniques such as downloading music and photos. They use the most up to date technology that will both magnify the screen and also talk to you. You do not need to be registered blind to access this service.

Contact Keith Brown at Rhyl Resource Centre (01745 338914) or Gwersyllt Community Resource Centre (01978 269400) to find out more.

UCanDoIT

UCanDoIT offer home training services to disabled people. The course is based on the Internet and email. They have one tutor based in Wales and she teaches JAWS and screen magnification software to people in Neath and surrounding areas. You can find out more about UCanDoIT by visiting them at www.ucandoit.org.uk or telephone them on 020 7730 7766.

(For a list of self employed access technology trainers please contact Owen Williams on 029 2047 3954).

Forthcoming events

Visual Impairment Regional Roadshows

This summer, Wales Council for the Blind with its partners are running six roadshow events for visually impaired people across Wales. Every event will comprise of 'client-centred' workshop and drop-in sessions through which clients will have an ideal opportunity to:

- Voice or share their opinions, concerns, viewpoints and experiences regarding NHS and other services.
- Find out about (or even try out) the latest visual aids and computer technology currently available on the market.
- Find out about local and national 'third sector' services and the assistance and support they can provide.
- Gain tips on maintaining safety at home.
- Find out about visual aiding items like magnifiers, liquid level indicators etc. and the 'Low Vision' services that provide them.
- Find out about welfare benefits they may be entitled to.

We would not only welcome, but relish your collaboration in promoting and encouraging your clients to attend these events, so that they can acquire the information, advice, help and support not only to enhance their 'quality of life' but to improve their independence.

The dates of the roadshows are:

17th May - Wrexham Memorial Hall

25th May - St Peters Church, Cardiff

1st June - Newport Leisure Centre

8th June - Bangor University

15th June - Carmarthen Leisure Centre

22nd June - Dylan Thomas Theatre, Swansea

If you wish, you're more than welcome to attend in order to promote the services you deliver to local people.

If there are any queries, please don't hesitate to contact Javid (Roadshow coordinator) on 02920 473954. Thank you.

Minority Ethnic Communities Health Fair

Monday 7th March, 2011

City Hall, Cathays Park, Cardiff. CF10 3ND

9.15 am – 3.00 pm

Encouraging Greater Health Awareness in Minority Ethnic Communities

MEWN Cymru, Sight Support, Ethnic Minority Communities First (Cardiff), Voluntary Action Cardiff, BAWSO Women's Aid, CMEE, Race Equality First, and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board are jointly organizing this event. The purpose is to raise awareness and contribute to the development of the health and wellbeing lifestyle of members of the minority ethnic communities in South Wales. The Fair will encourage and support people to look after their own health with practical advice about how people can have a healthier lifestyle. Particular emphasis will be given to health conditions which are predominant in minority ethnic communities such as diabetes and diabetic retinopathy, heart problems, strokes, glaucoma, sickle cell, mental health, etc.

This event will provide an opportunity to have a Health MOT including:

- blood pressure,
- cholesterol checks
- diabetes check in the Diabetes Mobile Unit.

Entry to the Fair is free and there will be refreshments and lunch available.

News Items

Domestic Abuse of Disabled Women in Wales.

A survey being conducted by Disability Wales with assistance from Glamorgan University and Welsh Women's Aid is available for completion online. The confidential survey aims to gather information about a cohort of people who experience multiple discrimination and social exclusion: namely disabled women with experience of domestic abuse.

The questionnaire asks questions concerning the type of abuse and the services and support you may have received. It is online at www.dadw.org. You can contact the researcher, Marilia Angove, directly on 01443 482590 or email mangove@glam.ac.uk.

Guide Dogs launches informative DVD.

The 'Guide Dogs Could Change Your Life' DVD is available now for both prospective guide dog owners and partner organisations.

Providing an overview of how to apply for a guide dog, it is a concise twelve minute film, presenting information about Guide Dogs, the organisation and explaining in detail the application process through a series of potential clients.

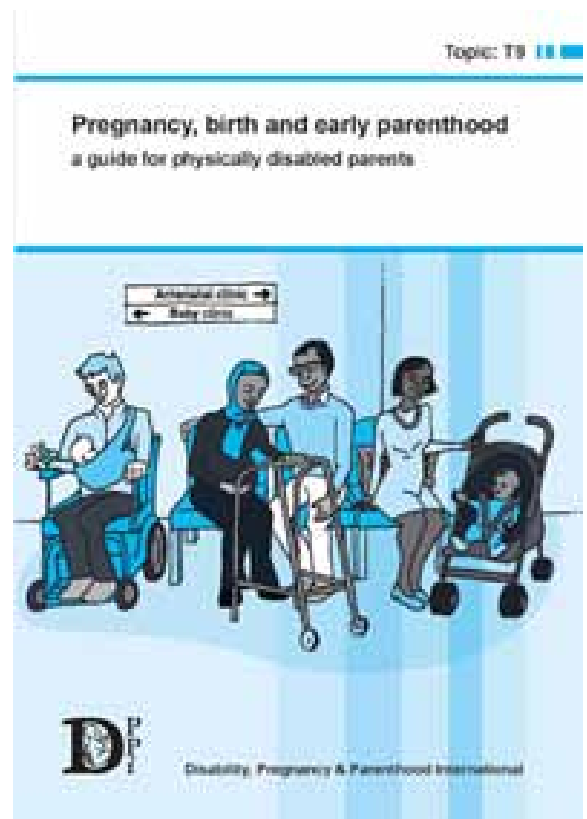
The DVD details the three-step application process and shows how Guide Dogs works with clients in assessing their vision and mobility.

If you require further information or would like a copy of the DVD, please call 0845 372 7499. The DVD is available in Welsh, Punjabi, Urdu, Gujarati, BSL Signed and English Signed. (Ring from a landline and you will be diverted to your local district team).

New guide for disabled parents.

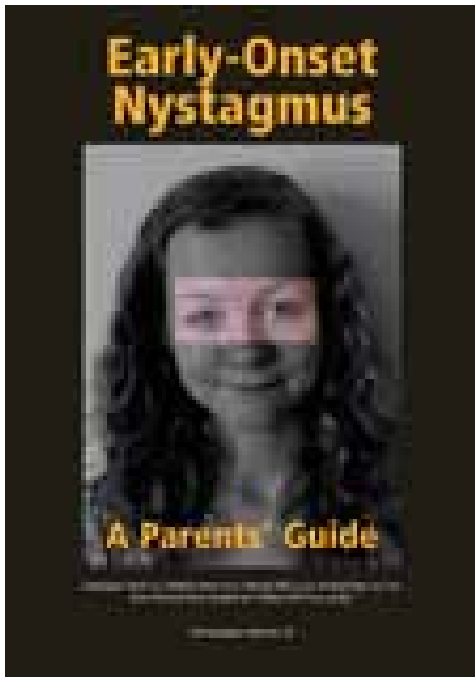
'Disability, Pregnancy and Parenthood International', the charity which promotes better awareness and support for disabled people during pregnancy and as parents, has produced a new guide, 'Empowering physically disabled parents in pregnancy, birth and early parenthood'.

The guide suggests how disability in pregnancy can be better handled by all concerned. While specialised facilities may be required in some cases, the problem is often one of attitude, and problems can be resolved by lateral thinking. The guide will be of value to health professionals as well as disabled people themselves.



The guide is free to disabled parents, and costs £15 for professionals, and can be ordered by writing to DPPI, National Centre for Disabled Parents, Unit F9, 89/93 Fonthill Road, London N4 3JH. Please enclose details of your name, your full address including postcode, state whether you are a disabled parent or give details of your organisation (if relevant). There is also a freephone number for enquiries: 0800 018 4730.

Parents Guide to Nystagmus available



'Early Onset Nystagmus - A Parents' Guide' is now back in print, and available from the Nystagmus Network. Although aimed at parents, the guide also provides invaluable information for anyone working with children who have the condition, such as teachers and health professionals. Cost: £10 (or £6 for NN members) and is available in alternative formats. Go to www.nystagmusnet.org for the on-line shop, or email shop@nystagmus.org.

Befriending service for people with RP

'RP Fighting Blindness', the organisation for people with Retinitis Pigmentosa, has launched a telephone befriending service for people with the condition. Trained volunteers with a knowledge of RP will make regular calls to those who are interested, and it is hoped that they will be of particular benefit to people who find it difficult to attend the organisation's meetings. The service offers a social link on a more personal and longer term basis than the Helpline, with regular calls being made by the volunteers for as long as they are welcomed.



The scheme was launched following intensive training of the volunteers, though initially at least it will not be made available to minors (under 18s).

If you would welcome a friendly phone call once or twice a month from one of the team, please contact the office on 01280 821334 or

by email on tbs@brps.org.uk .

The TBS is completely confidential, calls are not discussed with anyone else and no record is kept of the content of befrienders conversations. Calls can be stopped at any time.

Research on Lighting.

Lighting has already been proven to help people with sight loss make the most of limited vision. Now a further challenge exists - discovering what specific lighting works best for different forms of sight loss. In a new paper, Matching lighting to sight loss, published by Thomas Pocklington Trust, seven key research questions are posed which would fill in missing data and help improve the quality of lives and independence of people with sight loss. These include:

- Key questions on how light works for people with sight loss:
- Its effect on safe movement: not just through brightness but also its role in balance and way-finding.
- Its influence on a healthy circadian system, the body's natural regulator of sleep and wakefulness.
- The impact of different wavelengths of light on colour perception.
- The effect of indirect glare, both from lighting and from reflected light on walls and ceilings, on people with sight loss.

Other key areas of research include: the specific tasks people with sight loss want and need to do, and which controls work best for them when switching lights on and off, and when dimming them. The important role of optometrists is also raised, with a question of how to provide them with information about lighting so that they can pass it on to people having eye tests.

You can obtain a copy of the report from the Pocklington website, www.pocklington-trust.org.uk, or telephoning 020 8995 0880.

Focus on: British Wireless for the Blind

British Wireless for the Blind (BWFB) is a national charity that provides specially adapted audio equipment for people living with sight loss. All of BWFB's radios are made available on free permanent loan to blind and partially sighted people who qualify, and they are available to purchase for those who don't.

They provide sets ranging from small, easy to use analogue and digital radios, to CD Players, cassette players and internet audio systems, and all of them are designed to be easy to use for those who are blind or partially sighted. You



receive full support in using your set and there is help available if you have any problems using it.

If you are interested in something a little more hi-tech then perhaps you might be interested in The Sonata, BWBF's latest and most innovative product. The Sonata is an internet audio machine which allows the user to access audio files available on the internet, without the need for a computer. All you need is an internet connection in your home. The Sonata allows you to access worldwide radio stations, podcasts, audio books, magazines, newspapers, publications and many more all at the touch of a button. It is fully-voiced with only five buttons so it's incredibly easy to use.

For no-obligation information about these radios, a demonstration of The Sonata, or for any other information please contact Sophie Jones, Midlands and Wales Regional Development Manager, on 07540 72463 or visit the website, www.blind.org.uk for further information.

West Wales

Stepney Centre for the Visually Impaired

The following exhibitions have been scheduled:

British Wireless for the Blind - March 28th

Dolphin (Access Technology) - May 16th

Sight & Sound (Access Technology) - May 23rd.

Stepney Centre is the home of the Carmartheshire County Blind Society. They will be featured in the next issue of Roundup.

Tel: 01554 784 958.

Ceredigion ICT Project

Jill Cassidy was appointed on 1st May as ICT Development Officer for Ceredigion. Based upon a questionnaire sent around the county, 45 v.i. people requested a home visit to assess their ICT needs.

Jill started to visit clients in August and to date has assessed/booked in 34 people who completed the initial questionnaire.

Since October, 16 referrals have been received. These include a growing number of people interested in mobile phone and computer technology. Repeat visits have also been made to see clients who need further support or information, or who wish to borrow a product on trial, or have a demonstration of a product.

A number of products have been loaned to the project by suppliers of low vision products, enabling clients to be shown the types of equipment available without the pressure of salesman. Where appropriate, products have been loaned to clients so that they can try them out in their day to day lives. A small budget was made available to provide training for a number of users who already had computer software at their homes. A specialist trainer was brought in to

provide one-to-one training to progress the clients understanding of the software and enable them, predominantly, to find their way around the internet.

Jill is talking to the Aberystwyth Visually Impaired Club on Monday 21st February. As well as discussing the project, she has been given the loan of two reading machines to show to the group. These will be kept on loan for a short period to show other clients in Ceredigion. Giving people with sight problems the time and opportunity to try out equipment within their own home has been of huge benefit to them and the project.

As well as receiving advice and guidance, clients have provided feedback which includes four main themes:

- An overall uncertainty regarding what technology is available
- Insufficient funds available to individuals to buy equipment and technology
- Lack of transport to access local facilities and socialise
- Lack of regular contact from caring organisations providing general support

Future Work

Jill and Owen have also met with Howard Jones from Ceredigion Local Education Authority. Howard was supportive of Jill contacting the school age visually impaired children. There are 33 children with sight problems supported by the education authority. Each family will be written to and offered an assessment at home to support them to study/complete homework outside of school, as well as communicate with friends, etc. Only 2 children had already been referred to the project.

The Cambrian Educational Trust Fund has agreed to award a grant of £200 towards each of the 33 children, if a need is identified. The Cambrian Educational Trust fund provides grants and funding to

support children and young people with sight problems under the age of 21. A grant will only be awarded after an assessment of need.

The access to mobile phone and computer technology is a growing area of concern, with the lack of access to these technologies beginning to isolate people from the communications of their family and friends around them, as well as missing out on the resources of the internet and internet shopping. There is no central help or ongoing support other than through suppliers, which is often sparse or must be paid for. Mainly people have asked for a basic level of help predominantly whilst they adjust to the technology, and may need a few meetings to help them learn and memorise it. The need to explore these new technologies and not only support them but promote them would seem to be a good investment for Ceredigion.

North Wales

Rehabilitation Centre in Llandudno.

A Grade II listed building in Llandudno is being refurbished to house a rehabilitation centre for visually impaired people. Working to the stringent guidelines of both the planning authority and Cadw (Wales' body for the retention of the character of listed buildings) St. Dunstan's started a programme of refurbishment and building that will extend the property. The building was recently used as the North Wales Medical Centre, but was originally built as a convalescent home at the turn of the 20th Century.

Acquired in 2008 by St. Dunstons, the development work commenced in May 2010 by Wynne Construction. The centre will boast high dependency nursing beds, the 'Help for Heroes' rehabilitation gym, training kitchens, craft workshop, bedrooms, lounge and dining room.

For more information, contact Catherine Goodier on 020 7616 8367.

South Wales

VIM

Visually Impaired Merthyr Tydfil was organised in Feb 2007. We have been involved in equipping the sensory room in the MIDEC rehabilitation centre. The local authority provided a room, but the four groups which support people with hearing or sight loss joined to provide equipment in addition to what the community donated. Last week we delivered the final item on our Rehab Officer's wishlist. We are now working with CVV to find volunteers so the centre can be open to the members of the public who need support with sensory loss. There is also a smart house on the site with equipment for people with other disabilities, and the volunteers will be trained to demonstrate the aids and equipment there. We believe this is a unique facility.

We are also involved in developing the Sensory Garden in Cyfarthfa Park. This garden has raised beds with plants which can be rubbed by fingers to experience their fragrance; a water feature which provides a relaxing background with its audible flow and splashing; tactile objects; and a short flat walk with the sounds of distant traffic from the valley below. A grant of £5000 has just been received from Merthyr Valley Homes to provide a mosaic feature for sighted visitors. A visit to the garden followed by refreshments in the Castle tea rooms would be a good diversionary break for a group.

Our main work, of course, is supporting residents with sight loss, by sending out a quarterly newsletter, by phone visiting and by generally being available to encourage and help.

For more information about VIM, please contact Morgan Evans (Chair) on 01685 772135 or visit www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/vim.php

Guide Dogs Information Stand.

Guide Dogs Information Officer Nathan Foy will be holding a regular afternoon information stand and drop in session at the Connect to Cardiff (C2C) on the ground floor in Cardiff Central Library from 12:00 to 16:00.

With an aim to be more accessible to people who would like some information about the Guide Dogs range of services, either for themselves or a family member or friend, this informal setting is ideal to ask any questions or simply take a few leaflets.

The information stand will be there every 3rd Tuesday of the month starting on February 15th and continuing on:

Tuesday 15th March

Tuesday 19th April

Wednesday 18th May

Tuesday 21st June

Tuesday 19th July

Tuesday 16th August

Tuesday 20th September

Guide Dogs would like to try this approach in other parts of Wales, so if there is somewhere central in your area where you think a similar information stand and drop-in session would be particularly beneficial, please contact Nathan:

nathan.foy@guidedogs.org.uk

phone 0845 3727405

mobile 07795 611477

Wales Council for the Blind comprises the following team of officers:

Phil Stevens, Director: phil@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Rebecca Phillips, Administrator: bec@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Richard Bowers, Communications and Transcriptions:

richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Nicola Lewis, Awareness Training: nicola@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Owen Williams, ICT Development Officer: owen@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Jill Cassidy, ICT Development Officer (Ceredigion):

jill@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Javid Sarwar, Roadshow Project Worker: javid@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Roundup is published quarterly by Wales Council for the Blind. It is also available in Audio CD format. Further copies can be requested from:

Richard Bowers,
Wales Council for the Blind,
2nd Floor, Hallinans House,
22, Newport Road,
Cardiff CF24 0TD.

029 20 473954

Please send articles and news items to the above address and mark the envelope "Roundup". You may also send to richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk

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