

WCB Roundup

The Newsletter of Wales Council for the Blind

Summer 2012



In this issue: Welfare Benefits & Financial Support

WALES COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND: THE NEW CHARITY EMERGES!

As many members will know, Wales Council for the Blind is undergoing an exciting process to expand its work alongside Sight Support. We're pleased to give our members an update on how that work is progressing.

In this article, Phil Stevens, Director of WCB, spills the beans on how the new agency will look and for the first time, shares the new name, Vision in Wales.

So what's the new agency going to look like?

During our consultation, WCB heard from many of our members who said how they valued the neutrality of the charity. From the start, it was clear that we wanted to preserve the independence during the process of working with Sight Support. We believe we've created a new approach to working with Sight Support that will ensure that the new agency's role of campaigning and developing the sector is separate from the delivery of services and contracts that many local societies undertake.

This has been done by creating a new 'family' of agencies. Wales Council for the Blind will become Vision in Wales. It will remain an independent charity in its own right, with its own charity number (in fact, its existing one!). It will still be a membership agency, offering support to agencies working with people with a visual impairment, together with its own Board of Trustees. Its work will be informed by four new Regional Steering Groups, which anyone can join, covering the North, West, South East and South West of Wales.

These new Steering Groups will allow for much more local participation than WCB's existing process. We hope that local societies, people with a visual impairment, and the statutory authorities will join these groups to help steer the work that Vision in Wales will do in each of the regions. We'll be setting up these regional groups over the

summer and autumn.

Sight Support will become Sight Cymru, a new national charity that will deliver charitable services (such as resource centres, advice and support to people with a visual impairment). This new charity will have its headquarters in Pontypool and can be considered the parent arm to the whole new family of agencies. It will provide funding to Vision in Wales to enable it to deliver more development and assistance than WCB could do.

The final part of the family will be Sight Support Trading, the existing contract arm that provides rehabilitation and social care services on behalf of local authorities. This 'provider' arm is completely separate to Vision in Wales, and this process will ensure that Vision in Wales will continue to provide independent assistance to local societies, free from any requirement to 'sell' services from Sight Support Trading.

The new family of agencies will have a single Chief Executive that will oversee the work across the three agencies, helped by a Deputy to ensure everything gets done (which will be a big help considering the new agency will have over 30 staff compared to WCB's existing 6!).

The 'Next Steps' process – helping local charities grow

A key goal we've always wanted to achieve is to provide more support to local societies that want it. Many societies and clubs would like to provide more services, but are unsure of how to go about doing it, or feel it's a bit of challenge. Vision in Wales are appointing new staff called 'Development Officers' who will be tasked with working on behalf of the local societies to set up new services, attract new members, and help ensure that local and regional charities have a strong and vibrant future.

We'll be drawing on the skills of WCB's past work of helping local societies become all that they wish to be, and ensuring that wherever

you live in Wales, people with a visual impairment can obtain high quality services. Vision in Wales will continue to work with both national and local charities and clubs to bring people together, agree local priorities and work together.

So when's it all going to happen?

Over the next few weeks, WCB will be writing out to its members to ask permission to undertake all these changes. WCB will hold an Extraordinary General Meeting in July to obtain the permission to go ahead with these changes. We'll be writing out with all the full details, including our new governing document, and asking for our members to approve it. Subject to approval, Vision in Wales will be set up soon after that, and we'll be holding the formal launch in the autumn.

We're all very excited about this change. It's a great chance to really grow and provide more assistance to people across Wales, and create a new culture of working together.

If you'd like to chat about these changes, or talk about how they will affect your local club or society, please don't hesitate to contact WCB. You can write, call us on 02920 473 954, or email me on phil@wcb-ccd.org.uk.

Could you receive Roundup electronically?

If you would be happy to receive your copy of WCB Roundup electronically, rather than on paper, please send an email to bec@wcb-ccd.org.uk.

We are happy to continue sending paper copies, but if an electronic version is acceptable to some of our readers, it would enable us to keep costs down, reach more people and help the environment.

WELFARE BENEFITS AND SOURCES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The theme for this edition of Roundup is particularly topical, as welfare reforms and the recession are causing concern to many people in Wales. Yet a recent survey for charity Turn2us suggested that, across the UK, there is a low level of awareness of the financial support which is available, with nearly two-thirds of those people living in low income households not claiming benefits for which they may be entitled.

The aim of this section is to give vision impaired people and local VI societies an overview of the financial support which may be available, and how they can access it. To start, WCB's Rebecca Phillips, who also works as a benefits advisor through Sight Support, describes a typical day, to give readers an idea of how they can be helped to access support. We then have a brief summary of state benefits, a look at other concessions for disabled people such as railcards, and give details of some organisations which provide advice on welfare benefits and which can help you to make a claim.

Another source of support is grants, and we give details of organisations which may be able to help with the additional costs of having a sight condition – or help you to find out about potential grants.

Finally, we take a broader look at the area of benefits advice with an article from one of the major sources of help - Citizens Advice. It starts by describing the different ways that CA can help people, with particular reference to support for disabled people, then looks at how the organisation uses the information gained from its advice work to identify problems within the system, and lobby for change.

The information here is not exhaustive, but we hope that it will give readers some idea of what might be available, and where to go for further assistance.

A day in the life of a Welfare Benefits Advisor.....

Rebecca Phillips' description of a typical day shows how a trained Welfare Benefits Advisor can help a wide range of clients to get financial and other support to make their lives easier.

9 am - I arrive at Sight Support's office in Pontypool to check emails for any new referrals. Then I'll type up support plans for clients I've recently visited and prepare the paperwork for my visits that day.

10 am - Supporting People team meeting. I meet up with Trish, Kath, Wendy and Sharon to discuss cases of relevance to whole team. For instance, whilst visiting a client for a Welfare Benefits assessment, I picked up that she would benefit from a visit from a Supporting People Assessor as she was having difficulty getting in and out of the bath.

11 am - I'm visiting a client who is vision impaired and suffers with severe arthritis, which means their mobility is restricted and they are in constant pain. I run through any benefits she is currently receiving and ascertain whether she should be on the Higher Rate of Attendance Allowance because her nighttime needs have increased.

12.30 pm - A visit to a young male who has recently lost his vision and is worried that he would be unable to continue his full-time employment. I'll check to see if he meets the criteria for Disability Living Allowance and also talk to him about Employment and Support Allowance - an extra benefit to assist him financially as he has limited capability to work.

2.30 pm - Home visit to an elderly person with a hearing and vision impairment that cannot be corrected by spectacles and hearing-aid. I previously assessed his benefit needs and as a result ordered the Attendance Allowance claim pack. I've come today to help him complete the form.

4 pm - Return to the office to type up the support plan for today's clients and post the completed Attendance Allowance form.

4.30pm - Check my emails to see whether I have received any new referrals whilst I was out of the office. Finally, a check to see which clients I have booked in for the following day and prepare the papers I will need to take with me.

If you live in Caerphilly or Blaenau Gwent, the team can help you. For more info, see the contact given at the end of this section.

Benefits for disabled people

Disability Living Allowance has been in place for almost twenty years with very little change and the government believes that it no longer reflects today's understanding of disability.

Therefore, from April 2013 the **Personal Independence Payment** will replace the Disability Living Allowance. At the moment this change will affect people aged between 16-64. There is no automatic transfer to Personal Independence Payment. If you are already receiving DLA you will need to make a new claim for the new benefit when invited.

If you have been granted a life or indefinite award of DLA, you will still need to be assessed for the new benefit. This is because the new benefit will have different entitlement criteria to DLA. Most people will be asked to attend a face-to-face consultation with a health professional as part of the claim process. The health professional will then advise the decision maker at the DWP who will, in turn, decide your entitlement to Personal Independence Payment.

At present, people claiming Disability Living Allowance can be passported to other benefits such as the Blue Badge, Carer's Allowance and Mobility schemes. Although there is no certainty as yet, the DWP do intend to maintain these wherever possible.

This new benefit will have different entitlement criteria to those for DLA and these have not yet been set. The DWP are currently requesting views on this. If you would like to contribute to the consultation, it can be found at: www.dwp.gov.uk/pip and the deadline for responses is 30th June 2012.

If you would like further information about Personal Independence Payment, there are various documents available at: www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2010/dla-reform.shtml

Employment and Support Allowance In 2008, Employment and Support Allowance replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on incapacity grounds for new customers. In order to qualify for Employment and Support Allowance, the individual must score 15 points or more by matching their issues to one or more of the ESA descriptors. However, for people with a vision impairment, the face-to-face assessment process is flawed. There have been instances whereby the health care professionals do not have sufficient knowledge or understanding of sight loss and the barriers they would experience. For this reason, some people with a vision impairment have been refused the Employment and Support Allowance and therefore deemed 'Fit for Work'.

Carer's Allowance

Carer's allowance is a benefit paid to people who are caring for a disabled person for at least 35 hours a week whether the care is given during the day, evening night or weekend, as long as it totals 35 hours.

It is paid if you care for someone receiving Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance care component (at the highest or middle rate) or Constant Attendance Allowance.

You do not need to have paid any National Insurance contributions to qualify for Carer's Allowance and you will be credited with Class 1

National Insurance contributions while receiving it. Carer's allowance is taxable.

You must be at least 16 years old to claim Carer's Allowance. There is no upper age limit for claiming Carer's Allowance, although if you are receiving a State pension or another benefit, you may not receive any or all of the Carer's Allowance. However it may still be worth applying for as you could receive extra benefits such as pension credit and / or council tax/housing benefit. You will not be entitled to the Allowance if you are in full-time education or if you are working and earning more than £100 per week after deductions.

Pension Credit

Pension credit is a benefit with two parts:

Pension Credit Guarantee Credit.

This provides a guaranteed level of income for people over the qualifying age, which is gradually rising from between 60 and 65. Your Guarantee Credit is worked out by comparing your income with the amount the government thinks you need to live on. Your weekly income is then topped up to a minimum level set by the government.

Pension Credit Savings Credit.

This is paid to people aged 65 and over. It is worked out by looking at the level of retirement provision you have made. It may be paid as well as the Guarantee Credit or on its own.

To find out whether you are entitled to pension credits, contact the Pension Service on 0800 99 1234. You will be asked questions about your income and savings so it is advisable to know this or have this information to hand prior to contacting them. You can also visit their website for more information on: www.direct.gov.uk/en/pensionsandretirementplanning/pensioncredit

Attendance Allowance

If you are over 65 and have a disability such as blindness, you may be entitled to claim Attendance Allowance - a tax-free benefit worth up to £77.45 per week. It is not means-tested, and is intended to help to pay for the help which disabled people need to live independent lives.

To qualify for Attendance Allowance, your disability must be severe enough for you to need help with activities such as washing, dressing and eating, or supervision to avoid putting yourself or others in substantial risk. You can get the benefit even if you are not receiving the care that you need.

For full details, visit the UK Government's Directgov website, www.direct.gov.uk or ring the Benefit Enquiry Line on 0800 243 355.

Concessions for Visually Impaired People

In this section, we outline some of the concessions which are available for disabled people, and give contacts for further information.

Information is correct at the time of writing, but is liable to change.

Disabled Person's Railcard

If you are visually impaired, and can produce evidence of this (for example, a Certificate of Visual Impairment), you can apply for a Disabled Person's Railcard, which allows you to get 1/3rd off most rail fares throughout Great Britain. If you are travelling with an adult person, he or she can also get a reduction of 1/3rd on the price of their ticket. There is a charge of £20 for a one-year card, or you can get a three-year card for £54. You can download an application form from <http://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk>, which also has full information on the scheme. Otherwise, telephone 0845 605 0525 or email disability@atoc.org. The postal address is:

Disabled Person's Railcard Office
PO Box 11631, Laurencekirk,
AB30 9AA

Train travel without a railcard

If you are registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired and you are travelling with another person, concessionary discounts on fares, up to 50% off, apply for both you and your companion *without the need for a railcard*. You cannot get a discount if you are travelling on your own, and the discount applies to adult fares only. You must show a document confirming your disability when you buy your ticket and when travelling. It must be from a recognised institution, for example, Social Services or your Local Authority. Tickets can be purchased from staffed National Rail station ticket offices.

Blue Badge Scheme

People who have a signed Certificate of Visual Impairment or who receive the higher rate of the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance may be eligible for a Blue Badge, enabling certain parking concessions to your driver when you are a passenger. Blue Badges are issued by local authorities, who will provide full details where parking is permitted when the badge is issued .

Badge holders are also exempt from toll charges at certain bridges, tunnels and river crossings. The UK Government website, www.direct.gov.uk has details (look under 'Disabled People', then 'Motoring and Transport'). You usually have to apply in advance for this, however, Blue Badge holders are exempt from toll charges at both Severn Bridges (on the M4 and M48) – just drive to a manned toll booth and present your badge.

TV Licence Concession

If you are registered blind, or severely sight impaired, you can get a 50% reduction in the cost of a TV licence (but note that, currently, licences are free for all people over 75 years). To find out more, telephone the TV Licensing Helpline on 0300 790 6071.

You can also download the application form from the TV Licensing website, www.tvlicensing.co.uk (look under 'popular licensing topics').

If you have been blind for some time, but have only just found out about this concession, you can apply for a refund, backdated as far as April 2000 (but note that you will need to provide evidence of entitlement if you do this). Details of how to claim a refund are on the website, or can be obtained from the helpline number given above.

Free Directory Enquiries from BT

If you can't read or hold the phone book due to visual impairment, illness or disability, you can apply for free 195 directory enquiries. You're not charged extra to be connected to a number if you're registered with the 195 directory enquiry service. Registered customers also don't pay the BT 1471 and BT 1571 call return fee, which BT usually charge on top of call charges.

Call 0800 587 0195 to request an application form. Your form will need to be signed by a medical professional who knows you, such as your doctor or nurse.

BT Basic

BT Basic is a low cost telephone service available to people in receipt of certain benefits, including Employment Support Allowance and Pension Credit, and who are the named BT account holder. The cost is currently £14.40 per quarter, made up of line rental plus a call allowance of £4.50. However, this is an account aimed at low users and there are strict restrictions on the number and type of calls that you can make (for example, calls to mobiles are not included), so please check carefully whether this package is suitable for you before signing up.

You can find out more about BT Basic and download a guide to the service by going to BT's website, bt.com, and looking under 'Products and Services' then 'Services from BT'. For more information and an application form, telephone 0800 800 864.

Cinema Exhibitors' Association Card

This is a national card which entitles a disabled person to one free ticket for a person accompanying him or her to the cinema. The card costs £5.50 and is valid for one year. You must be registered blind, or in receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance, and evidence of entitlement must be provided. The application form can be downloaded from the website www.ceacard.co.uk.

For more information, telephone 0845 123 1297 or send an email to info@ceacard.co.uk.

Council Tax Reduction

Disabled people are helped with their Council Tax through the disabled band reduction scheme. This makes sure disabled people don't pay more Council Tax because they needed a larger property due to their disability. The disabled person can be an adult or child. However, having a disability does not automatically entitle you to a reduction. For more information, contact your Local Authority.

Concessionary Bus Pass

Blind and partially sighted people are entitled to free travel on local bus services across Wales at any time of day. The scheme also provides free travel for companions of disabled people. To apply for a concessionary bus pass, contact your Local Authority.

Access to 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, and can pay towards the costs of getting to work, a support worker or specialist equipment. The telephone number for the Access to Work Contact Centre in Wales is 029 20 423 291.

Disabled Students' Allowances

There are several allowances available to assist students in higher education with the additional costs of studying related to their disability. They are not means tested, and do not have to be repaid. Areas covered are the costs of a non-medical helper, specialist equipment, travel, and other course-related expenditure.

For information about what is available, contact Student Finance Wales. Their website, www.studentfinancewales.co.uk has full details, including a useful guide, 'Bridging the Gap', which can be downloaded. You can also telephone them on 0845 602 8845.

Tax advice service for VI people

RNIB and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) have a Tax Advice Service to help visually impaired people with tax and benefit issues. The service will also let callers know about the services from RNIB and Action for Blind People which could help them. To contact the service, ring 0845 330 4897.

Home Heat Helpline

If you are worried about your energy bills, or struggling to keep warm, it's worth making a free call to the Home Heat Helpline on 0800 33 66 99. They can tell you whether you may be entitled to grants to insulate your home or improve its fuel efficiency, and let you know whether your energy supplier offers a scheme to help those in financial difficulties.

They also give general advice about reducing energy costs. If you have internet access, their website, www.homeheathelpline.org.uk has some useful information and factsheets.

VAT exemption

If you are registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired you can claim VAT exemption on a range of assistive technologies. The product has to be solely designed for a disabled person or customer. It is only the designer or manufacturer who is able to determine whether the goods qualify for zero-rating. Such products include electronic magnifiers, screen magnifiers, screen readers, reading machines, Braille products, etc.

In order to obtain the VAT relief the customer is required to complete an eligibility declaration form which is available from the supplier or by contacting the VAT Relief for Disabled People help line on 0845 3020203. You could also visit the HM Revenue and Customs website. Please ask if you can claim VAT exemption before you place your order.

Money Saving Expert

If you have internet access, it is worth having a look at www.moneysavingexpert.com, and signing up to their weekly newsletter. The site contains information and tips on how to save money in a huge range of areas such as banking, insurance, utilities and travel, as well as information on benefits, and news of special deals from shops and service providers. It also covers topics such as the effect of changes announced in the Budget.

Other Concessions

Many theatres, leisure centres, tourist attractions and other providers of goods and services provide discounts to disabled people or a person who accompanies them. However they are not necessarily publicised, so it is always worth asking.

If you are aware of any other concessions which may be of interest to readers of Roundup, please let us know.

Welfare Benefits - Where to get help

The following organisations can help you to find out if you are entitled to welfare benefits:

Name	Contact Details	Further Information
Sight Support	01495 763650	For vision impaired people in south east Wales
RNIB	0303 123 9999	For vision impaired people in the UK
Turn2us	0808 802 2000	UK-wide organisation
Contact a Family	0808 808 3555	For parents of disabled children
Citizens' Advice	08444 77 2020	This is the contact number for Wales.
Age UK	0800 169 6565	For over-50s. Your local branch of Age Cymru can help with form filling.
Blind Veterans UK (formerly St Dunstan's)	0800 389 7979	For vision impaired ex-service people who are members of the organisation

RNIB Cymru's Welfare Rights Service

Jo Lawson is RNIB Cymru's Independent Living Manager

RNIB Cymru's Welfare Rights service assists blind and partially sighted people to claim the support they're entitled to. Last year, our six Welfare Rights Officers saw 732 people, more than half of whom weren't claiming the correct benefits. As a result of our support, those people are now an average of £57.06 a week better off. In total, last year we helped blind and partially sighted people claim an additional £1.5million.

You can contact RNIB Cymru's Welfare Rights Service via the main RNIB helpline, 0303 123 9999, or there is a special email address for people in Wales: RNIBCymruWRT@rnib.org.uk

We're currently seeing increasing numbers of clients requiring our support as a result of the Work Capability Assessment process; with the Government's plans to replace Disability Living Allowance with a new 'Personal Independence Payment', we're expecting our services to be even more needed in the years ahead. We want to make sure our service is able to meet that challenge, which is why we're looking for volunteers to help support our work. The volunteers will provide vital information that will inform how we shape the service to better suit the needs of our customers, and ensure its sustainability. A crucial role of the volunteers will be telephoning clients, to gather information on the quality of the service they have received and the difference the service has made to them. Volunteers will also be on hand to respond to any questions, concerns or worries people might have.

Full training will be given, and all out-of-pocket expenses reimbursed. If you, or someone you know, is looking to use their spare time to support a good cause, and would like to learn new skills and meet new people, then we would love to hear from you. For more information, visit <http://bit.ly/rightvol> or speak to Jo Lawson, RNIB Cymru's Independent Living Manager, on 02920 449554.

Sources of Grants

In this section, we identify a few of the organisations which offer grants, or who can help you to find one.

VICTA (Visually Impaired Children Taking Action)

VICTA support visually impaired children and young people by providing funding for equipment (CCTVs, laptops, Brailleurs, sensory toys etc) and for vacation schemes such as those run by Action for the Blind. There are full details of how to apply for a grant on the website, www.victa.org.uk. You can also email admin@victa.org.uk or telephone 01908 240831 for more information.

Royal Blind Society (RBS)

The RBS offers annual and one-off grants to people who are registered as blind or partially sighted, and are on a low income. The grants are intended to help with the extra costs associated with visual impairment, and applications must be made on an individual's behalf by a professional welfare worker (for example a social worker), or by an official of an organisation such as a local blind society or Citizen's Advice. For more information, telephone 01903 857023, or go to www.royalblindsociety.org.

RNIB

RNIB offer grants to help blind or partially sighted people live independently in their homes. Grants cover items such as carpets and furniture, white goods and other domestic appliances. You must be in receipt of a means tested benefit. For more details, ring the RNIB helpline 0303 123 9999, send an email to InfoResourceTeam@rnib.org.uk or go to www.rnib.org.uk and follow the links from 'living with sight loss'.

Gardening for Disabled

The Gardening for Disabled Trust offers grants to individuals in order that they may continue to garden, despite advancing illness, age or disability. In order to apply for a grant, individuals must be a member of the trust's Garden Club and have a written note from their GP, social worker or occupational therapist, describing their impairment.

The Trust's committee meet once a month to consider applications. For more details, visit the Gardening for Disabled website <http://www.gardeningfordisabledtrust.org.uk> or write to the Secretary at PO Box 285, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 9JD.

Turn2us

This organisation does not offer financial support itself, but it holds details of hundreds of grant-giving national, regional and local charities. In most cases, charitable funds have been set up to help particular groups of people who have something in common. This may be a specific illness or disability, a job or profession that the individual currently or previously worked in, nationality or faith, or a more general grouping such as 'older people' or 'children'.

You can contact Turn2us on their free helpline 0808 802 2000. If preferred, arrangements can be made for a Welsh speaker to call you back. You can search their database yourself by going to the website www.turn2us.org.uk and following the links to 'Grants search'.

Contact a Family

The Contact a Family free Helpline 0808 808 3555 can advise you on organisations which give grants to families with a disabled child.

The Cambrian Trust

The Cambrian Trust gives assistance to those who are blind or partially sighted and under the age of 21 years. Preference is given to those born or resident in Wales, or who can demonstrate a connection with Wales. Grants are meant to promote education and to provide for care and maintenance. This includes such things as computer equipment, holidays, training and recreation. Grants are not usually awarded for more than £300-400 and ideally the Trust looks for a contribution from the applicant or other source towards the full cost. The Cambrian Trust is administered by WCB, and an application form can be found on the WCB website, www.wcb-ccd.org.uk.

The Jonathan Young Memorial Trust

The Jonathan Young Memorial Trust is a small local charity based in Nottinghamshire which makes grants to disabled people to help them with the cost of computer equipment. You can find out more on the website www.jonathan-young-trust.co.uk, or telephone them on 0115 947 0493.

Local Vision Impairment Societies

Some vi societies, such as the Ceredigion Association, provide grants, so it is worth contacting your local group. Owen Williams at WCB can provide advice on identifying sources of grants in your area – you can contact him on 029 2047 3954 or via email on owen@wcb-ccd.org.uk.

The Citizens Advice service

The service is made up of Citizens Advice Bureaux which provide advice to the public and Citizens Advice which provides training, information systems and operational support to the bureaux.

Our advice is:

Independent – we will always act in the interests of our clients, without influence from any outside bodies.

Impartial – we don't judge our clients or make assumptions about them. Our service is open to everyone, and we treat everyone equally.

Confidential – we won't pass on anything a client tells us – or even the fact that they've visited us – without their permission.

Free – no-one has to pay for any part of the service we provide.

In 2010/11, Citizens Advice Bureaux in Wales helped 114,000 people and advised them about 402,000 advice issues. Adviceguide, our public advice website, had 470,000 visits to the Wales pages.

There are 23 Citizens Advice Bureaux across Wales, delivering quality assured advice from 247 locations.

You can get advice, in Welsh or English

- by phoning Adviceline Cymru on 08444 77 20 20
- online at www.adviceguide.org.uk/wales.htm.
- face-to-face with an adviser locally.

If you phone us, we will:

- give you the information you need to manage your problem yourself, or
- tell you how to get help from a specialist organisation, or
- arrange a full advice interview for you.

The Welsh Government funded Better Advice, Better Health service gives access to CAB advice from a variety of over 150 healthcare settings in Wales. So, if your enquiry cannot be sorted out on the phone, there is probably somewhere quite close by where you can talk to an adviser face-to-face. The Better Advice, Better Health Advisers may also be able to provide you with a home visit in special circumstances .

Advisers recognise that one problem often causes or results from another so, rather than addressing a single issue at a time, they will help you look at your situation holistically. This way, other potential problems can be identified early to prevent them becoming more serious.

Bureaux will advise on discrimination issues, including disability discrimination. Our websites are accessible for visually impaired people, and bureaux will make adjustments for clients, such as sending letters in large font.

Of the 1,630 people who work for the service in Wales, 1,206 are volunteers and 424 are paid staff. Bureaux take measures to ensure that their staff and volunteer workforce is reflective of the communities they serve and strive to be inclusive.

Our guiding principles are to 'value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination'. We know that it's only by having diverse staff and volunteers that we can do these things properly. We are committed to equality of opportunity in recruitment and training, and offer a warm welcome to every volunteer, whatever their background.

Bureaux recruiting visually impaired volunteers receive support from Citizens Advice in various ways, for example doing an IT assessment to advise on equipment; assisting in fundraising for aids and adaptations. We have a Disabled Workers Group that all disabled workers in the Citizens Advice service can join. It provides support and guidance and

promotes equal opportunities for all disabled workers, whether paid staff or volunteers.

Our policy work

The Citizens Advice service doesn't just exist to provide advice in times of crisis - we also campaign for changes to policy and practice that benefit millions of people each year by preventing problems arising in the first place.

Evidence-based lobbying

The hundreds of thousands of problems that clients tell us about are evidence of the enormous scope for improving policies and practices. It is the case-notes recorded during interviews with clients that form the foundation of our award-winning evidence based policy work. We use these case-notes, anonymously, to demonstrate to policy makers and service providers, the impact of their decisions, and to lobby for improvement. Our case-notes are detailed and our geographic coverage is extremely wide, giving us a vast body of evidence on the problems that people are facing.

This unique and important insight empowers us to:

- expose inadequate or unfair laws, policies and practices;
- respond with authority to Government consultations;
- recommend how resources can be targeted most effectively.

This helps us secure positive changes for thousands of people who never directly access the CAB service, in addition to the many thousands in Wales who do.

Double Disadvantage is our report about three groups of CAB clients supported by the Financial Inclusion Fund (FIF) disability project. They are people with a physical disability including sensory disabilities; people with learning difficulties; and parents of disabled

children. We have drawn on the experience of some of these people to build our understanding of the problems they face, both as people with debt problems and as disabled consumers. The report highlights the difficulties faced by people who were often dealing with a double disadvantage that caused or substantially contributed to the financial difficulties they experienced.

Desperate Times, Desperate Consumers contains evidence on the consumer problems caused or exacerbated by the recession. The current economic recession has provided rogue traders with opportunities to make money out of desperate consumers who are seeking to manage their more restricted finances. Citizens Advice Bureaux in England, Wales and Scotland have been reporting scams and sharp practices experienced by consumers who are looking for work, training or affordable accommodation, trying to cut their expenditure or increase returns from investments, looking for credit to make up the shortfall and to reduce their debt repayments.

Welfare reform is a major priority for Citizens Advice's policy and campaigning work. Bureaux in Wales have provided detailed evidence and have taken part in surveys on a number of aspects, notably the Employment and Support Allowance and the Work Capability Assessment.

Several changes suggested in our evidence were accepted by ministers.

Tribunal hearing delays were reported by clients to a number of bureaux in South Wales. Vale of Glamorgan CAB took up this issue on behalf of the group, raising the matter at the Tribunal Users' Group.

Citizens Advice responded to the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan. Our recommendations covered issues including an income maximisation strategy for Wales; extending eligibility for free school meals; payments for school trips; housing benefit take-up, and combating fuel poverty.

Citizens Advice representatives met with Welsh Water and the Consumer Council for Water to discuss debt collection practices after several bureaux raised concerns based on their clients' experience. Regular meetings with Welsh Water are continuing with the aim of improving collection practices.

More about our policy work and the Citizens Advice service is available on our website at www.citizensadvice.org.uk. For advice use our Adviceguide website at: www.adviceguide.org.uk/wales.htm or phone Adviceline Cymru on 08444 77 20 20 .

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

If you find the information in this section useful, or are aware of other sources of help which would be of interest to visually impaired people in Wales, please let us know.

HAVE YOUR SAY!

Welsh Assembly Government Consultations

Details of WAG consultations can be found on their website, <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations>, which is regularly updated. The following ones may be of particular interest to visually impaired people:

- Consultation on statutory guidance on play opportunities (closes 25 June)
- A White Paper for Better Homes and Communities (closes 17 August)
- Active Travel (Wales) Bill (closes 14th August)

DWP - Further consultation on Personal Independence Payment

The Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) has launched a further consultation related to the Personal Independence Payment (PIP). 'DLA reform and Personal Independence Payment – completing the detailed design' asks for views on specific proposals regarding eligibility to the benefit; payment for certain groups such as care home residents; reassessing DLA claimants and passporting arrangements.

The DWP is particularly keen to get the views of disabled people and organisations which represent them. You can read the consultation document on the DWP website, <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2012/pip-detailed-design.shtml>. The closure date is 30th June 2012.

Coming soon.... 'I Matter' promotional campaign

A group of organisations in the health and social care field in Wales, including the Wales Disability Reference Group, want to ensure that the views of citizens are taken into account in the work which the Welsh Assembly Government is doing to transform social services. They are proposing to undertake a national 'I Matter' promotional campaign, probably in late June/early July, to try to identify the key things which people want from their lives, and the support which needs to be in place to ensure that these things happen.

We want to ensure that the views of visually impaired people are heard in this campaign, so once firm details are available, it will be publicised on WCB's website, www.wcb-ccd.org.uk.

Give your views on priorities for research into sight loss

If you are affected by sight loss or an eye condition; if you're a carer for someone with sight problems or you are an eye health professional - you may want to take a short survey and help change the future of eye research! The Sight Loss and Vision Survey will - for the first time - identify your most pressing unanswered questions about the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of sight loss and eye conditions. This will ensure that future research can be prioritised according to the needs of patients, carers and eye health professionals.

This initiative will be overseen by The James Lind Alliance, a non-profit making organisation funded by the National Institute for Health Research, ensuring the exercise produces an unbiased result, with equal weighting given to the views of the different participating groups. So whether your interest is personal or professional, whether you are concerned about glaucoma or eye conditions relating to diabetes, your opinions will count.

Partners and supporters of the initiative include the College of Optometrists, RNIB, Guide Dogs and the Wales Vision Strategy Group. You can find out more, and complete the survey on the website www.sightlosspsp.org.uk , or telephone 020 7264 3900 to answer the questions or request the form in an alternative format. The closing date is 31 July 2012.

EVENTS

Wales & West Vision Conference 2012

As mentioned in the previous Roundup, this conference will be held on Tuesday 19 June at the Caerleon Campus, University of Newport. The conference will bring professionals from all parts of the sight loss sector together with those providing services to visually impaired people. It is an excellent opportunity to find out about innovative and leading edge research which has been taking place in the UK, and for professionals from different organisations to meet, share ideas and discuss the future and the way forward. There will also be the opportunity to find out about and try the UltraCane, a mobility aid for visually impaired people which is designed to address issues of safety, confidence and dignity.

The fee is £90 per delegate (including refreshments and lunch) For more information, contact Nirmala Pisavadia, Development Manager, Sight Support on 01495 763650 or email nirmala@sightsupport.org.uk.

QAC Sight Village

QAC's Sight Village will be held in New Bingley Hall, 1 Hockley Circus, Birmingham B18 5BE on Tuesday 17th and Wednesday 18th July. The exhibition gives visitors the opportunity to find out about the latest technology, products and support services for visually impaired people, and will be of interest to people with sight problems and their families, professionals supporting them and businesses who want to improve their services to VI customers.

Entry is free, and although places can be booked in advance, this is not essential. For more information, visit the Sight Village website, www.qac.ac.uk/sightvillage, send an email to sv@qac.ac.uk or write to QAC Sight Village, Court Oak Road, Harbourne, Birmingham, B17 9TG.

Action for Blind People – Mobile Sight Loss Information Service

The Mobile Sight Loss Information resource vehicles enable visitors to try for themselves the latest technology and gadgets to improve daily life for blind and partially sighted people, and will be in the following sites in Wales during the summer:

Tuesday 12 June - Holyhead (Morrison's supermarket car park)

Wednesday 13 June - Tywyn (venue to be confirmed)

Thursday 14 June - Bala (Green car park, Heol yr Orsedd)

Tuesday 21 – Thursday 23 August – Visiting Merthyr, Radnorshire and Brecon, (venues to be confirmed)

The mobile will be open from 10 am to 4 pm at each of these venues.

When available, venues which had not been confirmed at the time of writing will be put on Wales Council for the Blind's website wcb-ccd.org.uk and the AFBP website, www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk, or can be found by ringing the RNIB Helpline, 0303 123 9999.

Diabetes UK Cymru Family Events

Diabetes UK Cymru have announced two family events in Wales, with the aim of supporting families living with the condition. They will be held in Plas Menai (near Bangor) on 21st July, and Cardiff on 28th July. The interactive one day program will provide unique, informative and fun activities that focus upon the impact of diabetes upon the families' lives. The events will also provide the opportunity for families to share experiences whilst developing skills and confidence in managing the day to day challenges of diabetes. The cost is £10 per family. To find out more, and book a place, visit the Diabetes UK Cymru website, www.diabetes.org.uk, or telephone 029 2066 8276.

‘Musicians in Focus’ Events

Musicians in Focus, the organisation which supports visually impaired musicians, is running two free events as part of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama’s Summer School Programme.

A three day course for visually impaired people who want to develop their musical skills will be held from Tuesday 24th to Thursday 26th July. It is open to people of all ages, and previous musical experience is not required. Students will take part in workshops in which they will gain experience in using music technology (with assistive software), Braille music, performance and improvisation.

These sessions will be delivered in a supportive environment and led by expert tutors who are highly experienced in tailoring music activities to students’ individual requirements. There is no charge, but there is a registration fee of £5.

The course is non-residential, however for those aged 18 years and above who require accommodation, a special rate has been negotiated with the College’s nearby halls of residences of £110.00 per week or £30 per night. To book this accommodation, please contact Rebecca Evans 029 2022 7615.

There is also a free, half-day seminar giving advice to teachers, parents and carers about teaching music to visually impaired students. Subjects for discussion include access to music technology, accessible teaching materials, mixed visual ability groups, teaching methods and instrumental teaching. The seminar is on Wednesday 25th July from 2pm to 5pm.

For more information on either of these events, please contact Jackie Clifton from Musicians in Focus on 029 2023 1113 or send an email to jackie@musiciansinfocus.org.

NEWS AND INFORMATION

Bear with nystagmus gets his own website

For several years, the Nystagmus Network has been using the character of Northwick the Bear to help explain this eye condition to children who are affected by it - and their families. Now Northwick has his own website, www.northwickbear.com.

This new website showcases the resources that are available to enhance the understanding of nystagmus. There are three stories about Northwick which can be downloaded, a gallery of pictures, illustrations and photos of Northwick in action. There are also links to the Nystagmus Network website which provides access to free resources like the popular story cards for schools and hospitals, also to the online shop where the original “Tales of Northwick” book and CD and greetings cards can be purchased.

For general queries, the Nystagmus Network has a telephone helpline: 029 2045 4242.

Welsh Government launches new Blue Badge scheme

The Welsh Government has launched a revised Blue Badge scheme for disabled parking, which is expected to be much more secure, and reduce misuse of the system. The new Blue Badge cards will be made of plastic, and include a photograph and information which can be checked against a central database, making activities such as copying and misuse much more difficult.

The design has been standardised with other parts of the UK, and new cards will be issued to existing Blue Badge holders when their current one expires.

WAG invests in new eye examination technology

The Welsh Assembly Government has announced an investment of £753,345 in the latest technology for eye examinations. The money will pay for 18 fundus cameras, which enable optometrists to view the back of the eye and to take digital photographs. As well as helping in the diagnosis of eye conditions such as macular degeneration, the photographs will enable the progress of a condition to be monitored over time.

The cameras will be installed in the six Local Health Boards with a hospital eye service. As well as improving diagnosis, it is expected that they will improve the service provided by the NHS in Wales by enabling consultants to see more patients.

Guide to Assistive Technology in the Home

The Thomas Pocklington Trust has produced a new guide which describes how best to promote assistive technology (AT) to people with sight loss. It will be of particular relevance to staff in care homes and housing schemes, but will also be useful for professionals in the sector, visually impaired people themselves, and their families.

'Good Practice Guide 6: Assistive Technology in the Home' explains that, although the term can be daunting, AT includes any device or system which makes daily living easier. It also shows how visually impaired people can be given the confidence to try new technology, and includes several case studies. You can download the Guide from the website, www.pocklington-trust.org.uk or telephone the Trust on 020 8995 0880.

RNIB Cymru announces new acting director

Following the announcement that Sarah Rochira is to leave RNIB Cymru to become the next Older People's Commissioner for Wales, the organisation has appointed Ceri Jackson to the role of Acting Director.

Ceri has worked for RNIB for many years, in a variety of operational and management roles, and currently leads on RNIB Cymru's Sight Loss Prevention, External Affairs and membership work. She is also Chair of the Advisory Group for the Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Service for Wales, Chair of the National Eye Health Week Coalition and a founder member of the Wales Vision Strategy.

Recruitment of a permanent Director is expected to start shortly.

Visibly Better Awards

RNIB Cymru's Visibly Better accreditation scheme rewards housing associations and 'extra care' homes which have made their accommodation and services more accessible to blind and partially sighted people. Bronze, silver, gold and platinum levels are awarded to organisations that meet the specific requirements of the scheme. Now housing association Linc-Cymru have become the first organisation in the UK to achieve three Platinum awards simultaneously.

Sarah Rochira, Director of RNIB Cymru, said: "We are delighted to be able to award Linc-Cymru the Platinum level accreditation in recognition of their demonstrable commitment to making their accommodation accessible to blind and partially sighted people. We know that one in five people aged 75 and over are living with sight loss, and so designing accommodation in a way that enables people to live safely and independently should be a priority for all housing providers; we hope that others will now be motivated to follow Linc-Cymru's

example."

Mrs Rees is a tenant in Llys Enfys in Llanishen, one of the Linc-Cymru properties that has received a Platinum award. She says moving there has had a life-changing effect: "I felt extremely isolated and unsafe before moving to Llys Enfys. The staff within the scheme and the design of the scheme itself has helped and supported me and I have regained my independence and confidence".

For more information about the Visibly Better scheme, please contact David Watkins on 01792 325309.

Take the Plunge and help Vision Support

If you are feeling daring and want to raise money for people in North Wales with sight loss why not join Vision Support's daring skydivers on Saturday 11th August? If you raise over £395 by 11th July you get to jump for free!! Please look at www.theparachutecentre.com for guidelines and contact Simon at skydive@theparachutecentre.com to book your place and pay your deposit or alternatively, contact Jane Arends at Vision Support Head Office on 01244 381515.

To sponsor the skydivers go to Vision Support's website www.visionsupport.org.uk. One of the skydivers who may appreciate your support is rehab worker Hasmukh Dave who says:

'As an employee of Vision Support for nearly 5 years and working directly with people with visual impairment, I have seen changes Vision Support services make on individuals' lives. Over the past few years, I have supported family members and friends who have participated in different activities to raise fund for different causes. This year I decided to move one step forward and participate in tandem skydive to raise fund for Vision Support. I will do tandem skydive on 11th August 2012. Please dig deep and donate here: <http://www.justgiving.com/Hasmukh-Dave>'.

VI daughter inspires Offa's Dyke charity challenge

A Rhyl dad whose daughter is vision impaired walked more than 170 miles for Vision Support. David Thomas joined his two friends Douglas Lloyd and John Nixon in a sponsored walk along Offa's Dyke path, starting from Chepstow and finished in Prestatyn. Mr Thomas, aged 40 are still raising money for Vision Support, the charity which helped his three-year-old daughter Molly, who was born with scarring in one eye and a cataract in the other. "She is a really active girl," said Mr Thomas. "You would not notice really, the doctors say she should not be seeing what she is seeing so she has come a really long way. Vision Support has helped her to adapt to the school environment and they work closely with her to help her have the best learning experience possible." The trio of friends began their walk in the horrific wind and rain on 28th April and it took them 15 days to complete. If you would like to sponsor Dave and his friends contact go to <http://www.justgiving.com/David-Thomas13> or contact Jane Arends at Vision Support on 01244 381515.

Roundup is published quarterly by Wales Council for the Blind. It is also available in audio CD format. Further copies can be requested from Richard Bowers, Wales Council for the Blind, 2nd Floor, Hallinans House, 22 Newport Road, Cardiff CF24 0TD. Telephone 029 2047 3954.

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

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