

# Signpost Spring/Summer 2020

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## A case of Coronavirus

Our world and life as we know it all changed dramatically on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March when a nationwide lockdown was announced by the UK Government and social distancing became the new norm.

Only a handful of retailers remained open and thousands of businesses had to transfer to 'working from home' (WFH) where possible. Sight for Surrey reluctantly closed its doors knowing that many clients rely on our help and support and would struggle without it. From our Helpdesk Advisors to our Habilitation Workers, we quickly adapted our services to enable us to continue providing support in different ways.

One of the first points of call for Sight for Surrey is our Helpdesk, which receives an average of 15,000 calls a year. All Helpdesk staff had calls transferred to mobile phones, so lines of communication have been kept open. Our Assessment and Rehabilitation Team have helped some extremely vulnerable people during lockdown, in particular an individual that had no money, no food, no help and no family support - they were distraught. We coordinated emergency rapid support from other agencies and we will continue to help and support this person. For Deaf people, contact options of FaceTime, Skype and SMS have continued with staff working remotely from home on laptops and mobiles. The team are also busy providing important BSL updates on Facebook to translate the Government's updates to ensure Deaf people have access to all the latest guidance, the videos have been viewed by over 40,000 and are rising! As social distancing meant the Deaf Community Group were no longer able to meet up, Joe Collins, Deaf Community Officer, decided to introduce his members to Zoom. Ten members first logged in and numbers are growing each week. The Deaf Zoom group takes place every Thursday at 11am until we are out of lockdown. For our latest news and information on services, including Deaf Tea & Coffee

gatherings, please follow us on Facebook @Deaf Services Team at Sight for Surrey.

During this period we have witnessed many acts of generosity and kindness by members of the public, and Sight for Surrey are delighted to be on the receiving end. A small group of Design Technology students from The Royal Alexandra & Albert School in Reigate made 25 PPE masks and generously donated them to Sight for Surrey. This will enable us to continue providing 1 to1 support and help for some of the most vulnerable people who are deafblind.

Our telephone befriending service has been warmly received. One client said, "I would like to thank you for organising a befriender. I am overjoyed this service is available and it has given me great comfort in this current situation, a lifesaver"!

Bob Hughes, Chief Executive at Sight for Surrey told Signpost, "I am immensely proud of the resilience and go-getting attitude that all the staff at Sight for Surrey has shown. We will not let the Coronavirus stop us from delivering the best help and support to people across Surrey."

## **Deaf Community News**

### **The Birthday Club**

Two clients have recently celebrated milestone birthdays. One member of our Deaf Community Group, Clive, celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday at one of the Deaf Community Get-Togethers just before lockdown and was treated to cake and a BSL rendition of Happy Birthday. The birthday cake was shared around with all and everyone enjoyed a slice or even two! Then Wendy from Addlestone, who is also supported by Sight for Surrey, celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in lockdown. Her volunteer home

visitor, Malcom, helped organise a special birthday cake, card and flowers all donated and delivered, socially distanced of course, from her local Co-op store. Cheers to you both!

Do you know a company, school or community group who raise funds for charities or would like a talk on our work? Please do nominate Sight for Surrey and help us support more people in Surrey who need us.

## **fundraising**

### **Did you take the 2.6 Challenge?**

The 2.6 Challenge was a UK mass participation event launched in the wake of the COVID-19 to 'Save the UK Charities'. Many charities fundraising income came to an abrupt halt due to the cancellation of all sporting events.

An amazing bunch of Sight for Surrey fundraisers came forward including Hannah Barnard, aged 8, who cycled 26 laps around her garden, and raised £535! Hannah, lives in Hersham, came up with the fundraising idea as brother, James, is supported by Sight for Surrey.

Another fabulous fundraiser is Lee Roake, who walked 2.6 miles with his Dad, Anthony. This might not seem much but Lee has been blind since birth. Dad Anthony was due to run the London Marathon for Sight for Surrey and raise money to help us continue providing help and support to children like Lee. Well done boys!

The Seabourne family, including Kasper the dog, all got involved in running up and down the stairs in their house 260 times in under 26 minutes and raised £293 for Sight for Surrey. Thank you team Seabourne!

## **Dame Judi lends us her support**

We were thrilled to receive the following words of encouragement from none other than Dame Judi Dench recently. We are chuffed to bits she recognises the valuable work we do and we hope to continue receiving her support.

“Suffering from macular degeneration myself, I know how important it is to receive support - you realise gradually how impossible it is to cope without the help of another pair of eyes. Sight for Surrey has my full support in the essential work they do.

## **Deaf Youth Activities Group**

The Deaf Youth Activities Group managed to squeeze in a couple of meetings before lockdown. The group took part in a Sports Taster evening in Redhill, where they could try their hand at badminton, table tennis, squash, yoga and Pilates. For some this was the first time trying these sports and great fun was had by everyone. It was a wonderful opportunity to learn a new sport in your own language as three out of the five instructors were Deaf themselves. Interpreters were provided for the other two. Susanna from Sight for Surrey tried Pilates for the first time and now takes part in an online class each week.

In January the group got involved in The Leonard Cheshire ‘Care & Share’ project and helped make up a number of personal care bags for the homeless. The group also wrote personal messages in each card and these were delivered to a homeless centre in Guildford.

Katie tells us why she likes coming to our events and activities.

“I am a young Deaf adult so it is important to meet other Deaf people so I don’t feel isolated. If it wasn’t for the group then I wouldn’t see old and meet new faces that often.”

The Deaf Youth Activity Group meets up once a month. If you would like to come along to the next meeting, please contact us for more information. Our full contact details can be found at the front of the magazine.

## **Deafblind Community**

### **Steampunk!**

Our deafblind Friendship Group held a 'Steampunk' workshop at the Sight for Surrey offices a few months ago. The Friendship Group comprises people with sight and hearing loss and Sight for Surrey provide a communicator guide for each person, who can provide clear speech support, deafblind finger spelling, hands on signing, as well as visual frame close-up British Sign Language. An interpreter, provided by Sight for Surrey, is present at all social events to support with communication.

Steampunk is a retro futuristic design incorporating lots of different materials from different periods of history. Sight for Surrey gathered all the materials required for this activity.

Being deafblind can be incredibly challenging but the works of art produced from this session were amazing and will be treasured for many years. If you would like to learn more about the support and help we can provide, please see our contact details on page 2.

### **Recycle Your Ink Cartridges with us!**

Please don't put your old ink cartridges into the bin but send them off for recycling for free and we can receive £1 for every cartridge recycled. All you need is one of our free **Recycle 4**

**Charity** bags and we will send these out to you. Just contact Rebecca Dorkins on 01372 377701 or email [rdorkins@sightforsurrey.org.uk](mailto:rdorkins@sightforsurrey.org.uk) to request a bag or two. Further information can be found on [www.recycleforcharity.co.uk](http://www.recycleforcharity.co.uk).

## **A Week in the Life of a Sensory Specialist Worker**

Laura Palmer is a Sensory Specialist Worker and has been working for Sight for Surrey for 4 years. In this issue of Signpost, Laura gives us a peek into her working week.

### **Monday**

My first visit is to an elderly lady who lives alone. She is house bound with poor mobility and has Macular Degeneration, an eye condition which may result in blurred or no vision in the centre of the visual field. She is keen to use a magnifier so she can read again. Normally people would visit our resource centre to try out a range of magnifiers but she is unable to leave her home, so I was able to demonstrate a selection of them to her. We went through the correct technique to use a magnifier and she was delighted to be able to read again.

Next on my visit list is John and today is the last of six mobility training sessions. John has Congenital Glaucoma and in 2010 his eye sight deteriorated leaving him registered blind. Glaucoma affects the peripheral vision, but in John's case he has now lost the majority of his vision and can only see shadows and light/dark.

Mobility training is about learning to get around safely. Initially John and I came up with a list of places he wanted to visit independently and today we are walking from John's home to the pub and back. I have been working with John for a few years and we have covered cookery, ironing and long cane

training and with my guidance he is now able to independently access his local shops. Today we looked at a busy crossing outside a pub that he would like to go to in the future. This involved using his long cane correctly, feeling for clues (such as blister paving), indent crossing whilst listening to the sounds of cars to decide when to cross safely.

John said “Laura is very good at her job and without Laura I would have been stuck inside”.

## **Tuesday**

Into the office for my Duty slot today. Duty involves processing referrals and giving specialist vision advice over the telephone. One of the calls today was relaying information about changes with TV licensing regarding visual impairment.

## **Wednesday**

Today I visited a gentleman who wears hearing aids in both ears and has recently been diagnosed with Macular Degeneration. I carried out a specialist assessment of his needs and issued a portable task lamp to help with reading, a big button amplified telephone to assist with his sight and hearing loss, and a liquid level indicator to assist with pouring liquids. I also applied a tactile bump onto his left hearing aid box so he could distinguish between the two. Something as simple as this has enabled him to find the correct hearing aid for his ears.

## **Thursday**

Today I visited a man in his home, who has recently had a stroke. The stroke has caused a left sided hemianopia (vision loss in both eyes). He would like to be independent in the kitchen again and return to cooking meals for his children.



Today we looked at using a PENfriend (audio labeller) to label food items. This will enable him to know the difference between the tins in cupboards, something he struggles to do.

## **Friday**

Rarely will I see someone with just vision impairment. Usually people have a combination of health needs. Today I visited a lady with vision impairment, cataracts and Dementia. A different technique is required when teaching skills to a person whose memory has been affected. I have been teaching her to move around her home safely and have outlined her doors with red tape; she can see the tape and no longer bumps into doors. We have been working on a technique called 'trailing' so she can move around her home safely.

Finally I visited a lady in her thirties. She has Retinitis Pigmentosa and has peripheral vision loss. She is a long cane user and I visited her at work today to show her the general layout of the office and where the stairs are positioned. She has been frequently bumping into people and feels that general route training has enabled her to gain confidence and independence.

After every visit I write up my notes, it is vital to record a summary and list recommendations, including agreed goals.

As a Sensory Specialist Worker, every day is diverse – this is because every person is different – and that's what makes the job rewarding and special.

## **Keeping connected**

A popular and growing area of Sight for Surrey's support services is in the Technology & Equipment sector.

Run by our Assistive Technology Specialist, Gary Eady, Sight for Surrey's Assistive Technology sessions highlight the software and hardware required in order to access computers, Smart Phones and Tablets, if you are blind or partially sighted. In addition, Gary's sessions cover an array of other gadgets, including the Amazon Echo with Alexa and Google Home Smart Speakers.

### **Screen Readers**

A screen reader is a piece of software that converts text and graphical information from a computer screen, into natural sounding speech. JAWS (Job Access With Speech) is probably the most used world-wide screen reader and provides unrivalled support when creating, editing and formatting documents, e-mail messages, spreadsheets and presentations. It is able to read web page content and interact with online forms found on shopping and banking sites.

Two other popular screen reading programs on the market today are SuperNova Screen Reader and NVDA (Non Visual Desktop Access). In order to use a screen reader effectively, you must have good keyboarding skills and should ideally be a touch typist. Learning how to use a screen reader can be difficult and frustrating at first, but the rewards are most definitely worth it!

## **Screen Magnification**

A screen magnifier is a program which allows a person to enlarge text and graphics displayed on a computer screen. Common features include the ability to change the size of the text and menus, change the screen colours, change the size of the mouse pointer and to have text highlighted as you navigate.

Screen magnifiers are most suitable for a person who has a degree of useful vision. Popular screen magnifiers include SuperNova Magnifier, ZoomText and the Magnifier built-in to Windows 10. Some screen magnifiers even have an element of speech built in, for assisting you when reading long passages of text.

## **Smart Phones and Tablets**

Today, almost every Smart Phone or Tablet has a screen reader built into the Operating System. It is usually found in the Accessibility section of the device you are using. When turned on, the screen reader can read the content of the screen by you dragging a finger around the display. What is under your finger is read aloud!

Also in the Accessibility section on your device, you will find options for increasing the size of the text and changing the foreground and background colours. Taking advantage of some of the Accessibility features found on Smart Phones or Tablets, can take away much of the frustration often caused by the inability to see clearly.

To put your name on a waiting list for a 1 to 1 or group Assistive Technology learning session with Gary at our offices in Fetcham, Surrey, please email [communications@sightforsurrey.org.uk](mailto:communications@sightforsurrey.org.uk) or call us on 01372 377701.

## **Sight Loss at Sixteen**

Niamh Butler was like any other 12 year old, she had just started secondary school when a routine trip to the opticians flagged a problem. Signpost went to meet Niamh and talk to her about her eye condition and how Sight for Surrey has helped her.

### **Tell us about how your sight loss came about?**

I have a rare genetic condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa. My Great Grandfather went blind through it in his 50's but it skipped my Mum, and no other member of the family had been diagnosed with it, so we assumed his sight loss was a one-off. After a routine trip to the Opticians in November 2014, a swelling in my retina was noticed after which I was referred to Great Ormond Street and later diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa at 12 years old.

At the time of my diagnosis I had no vision loss so I didn't really believe it would affect me. However in the summer of 2018, my vision started to deteriorate.

## **How did you find Sight for Surrey?**

Once I received my Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI), my Mum learnt about Sight for Surrey and the support that was available. Getting a CVI opens up a network of support and help.

## **What help and support did you receive from Sight for Surrey?**

They assigned me a Habilitation Specialist, Carol Perryer, her job is to teach me how to become independent again. Carol has been teaching me how to use a long cane, sighted guiding me through routes into town and home so I can go out shopping and meet friends by myself. Stuff I used to do but since my sight deteriorated have stopped, so I feel like I am getting my independence back. We are currently working on walking routes to and from school into town. Next we are going to tackle train travel & busy road crossing, as I need to travel into London. Then it's onto organising my room, Carole will show me ways of identifying different types and colours of clothes through touch, buttons, collars and sleeves.

I am also part of the 11UP social group at Sight for Surrey. They organise lots of activities during the year for children and young adults with vision impairments. I have taken part in cooking with Carol, pizza making, sky walking, a residential camp, sky diving and an assault course.

## **What has been the most valuable support you have received from Sight for Surrey?**

Long cane training as it has enabled me to be independent again.

## **What words of advice would you give to others experiencing sight loss?**

Take all the support on offer. Emotionally, losing my sight has been very difficult to come to terms with, as it has come on so rapidly but with the support of Sight for Surrey I am getting through this.

## **You have changed schools recently what is your new school like?**

Last year I started at Oxted School which has a dedicated VI department. They have all the VI equipment I need and they understand my needs. Starting a new school at 16 has been challenging but I am learning Braille, studying A-level Maths & Psychology and I would love to go on to study Psychology at University and have a career within the industry.

## **Muhaam Flowers**

Muhaam was born with the eye condition Cone Dystrophy, a group of rare eye disorders that affect the cone cells of the Retina, affecting colour and fine detail that leads to vision loss over time.

Muhaam has been receiving help and support from Sight for Surrey since he was just three. He is now taking mobility lessons, learning the skills he needs to enable him to be a safe, confident and independent child. During a mobility lesson while practising long cane and safe road crossing skills, Muhaam and Alison stopped and bought some tulip and daffodil bulbs. They planted them back in October and waited. Muhaam has been

very patient and it has now paid off with a beautiful display of bright red tulips and scented daffodils!

Thanks to Children in Need and Lottery funding, Sight for Surrey has enhanced our training programme enabling us to offer much more.

Alison Holt, Habilitation Worker, told Signpost “Muhaam is full of creativity and fun, and a joy to teach”!

## **Fun for the kids**

Before lockdown our children’s team put on, cheese making, soft play and a pottery event for our VI children and their families. Not to let lockdown spoil all the fun, the imaginative children’s team produced a fortnightly newsletter with lots of fun activities for all the children to do at home. You can download it from our website [www.sightforsurrey.org.uk](http://www.sightforsurrey.org.uk) .

## **A Legacy Makes a Lasting Memory**

During these turbulent and unprecedented times we received the wonderful news that a very generous and sizeable legacy was coming our way. The late Mrs Kathleen Mary Trotman, known affectionately as Mollie to her friends, who sadly died in January 2019, left £50,000 to Sight for Surrey in her Will.

Mollie was a life-long resident of Woking, teacher and lecturer at Brookwood College in Secretarial Studies. Mollie was helped and supported by Sight for Surrey for a number of years and remembered Sight for Surrey in her Will as she wanted to give something back to those that helped and supported her. It is

amazing and generous gestures like this that allow Sight for Surrey to plan and invest in new products, facilities and events to keep supporting you now and in the future.

## **Will you remember us?**

After you have made provisions for your loved ones, can you leave Sight for Surrey a gift in your Will? Leaving a sum of money to us will help ensure we can continue to provide essential services to Surrey residents with a sensory loss. Please contact [communications@sightforsurrey.org.uk](mailto:communications@sightforsurrey.org.uk) to receive a legacy pack.

## **A HUGE THANK YOU TO...**

Sight for Surrey applies for grants from charitable foundations throughout the year to enable us to continue supporting our clients. During the Coronavirus lockdown and the cancellation of all our fundraising events, talks and activities we are extremely grateful to all the additional funding made available to us.

We have received emergency COVID-19 funding so far from:

- Tesco's Bags of Help - £2,000
- Heathrow Community Trust - £1,100
- Thomas Pocklington Trust - £10,000
- Community Foundation Surrey - £4,600



We have received funding for our Eye Clinic Liaison Officers from:

- Community Foundation for Surrey (Surrey Heath Fund & Pargiter Trust Fund) - £2,800
- Tesco Bags of Help Centenary Fund - £10,000
- Care Farnham - £1,000
- M&G plc - £1,900
- Toyota Fund for a Better Tomorrow - £1,800
- Tesco's Bags of Help - £1,166 towards our Eye Clinic Liaison Service at Ashford Hospital

We have also received funding from:

- Vision Foundation - £10,000 towards our Eye Clinic Liaison Officers and Benefits Services
- Community Foundation for Surrey Reigate & Banstead Community Fund - £1,500 for our Redhill Communications Class
- Elmbridge Borough Council – two grants from their Partnership Fund and their Annual Grant Scheme for our outreach team, benefits service and Children and Young People's work in Elmbridge totalling £2,150
- Ulverscroft Foundation - We received a generous grant to fund the purchase of equipment and cover staff costs to produce our magazines and information publications in an accessible format to our existing VI service users and new referrals

Thanks also to: Ewell Parochial Trust, The Borrowes Charitable Trust, E F and M G Hall Charitable Trust, The C M Lowe Charitable Trust, The Edgar Lawley Foundation, The Mrs Yvonne Flux Charitable Trust and The Lynn Foundation.

## **Grants at work**

### **Community Foundation Reigate & Banstead**

Sight for Surrey provides many free classes, clubs and activities for everyone to take part in and this is only made possible by grants from charitable foundations and trusts. Our Communications Class is one of those and we were delighted to receive a grant from the Community Foundation for Surrey to enable us to continue providing this support. Gareth Owen, Chair of the Reigate & Banstead Community Fund Panel, paid us a visit at a recent class to see how the grant supports those with a sensory loss and enriches their lives. Thank you to the Community Foundation for Surrey.

### **Toyota Fund for a Better Tomorrow**

Sight for Surrey has received a donation of £1,800 from Toyota's Fund for a Better Tomorrow. The money will help fund an Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO) at Epsom Hospital, a vital link between the Ophthalmologist and accessing benefits and services for anyone diagnosed with a vision impairment.

Once diagnosed with a vision impairment, many are left without on-going support and advice. This is where Sight for Surrey's ECLO step in, providing a bridge and helping hand.

Toyota CSR & Environmental Affairs said, “The ‘Eye Clinic Liaison Officers’ project is undoubtedly a worthy recipient and we know the contribution will go towards helping people to overcome day-to-day challenges.”

End of Signpost Magazine