**Signpost Winter 2024/25 - Issue 18**

**The front cover shows and image of two brothers, who are supported by the charity, holding a bee home that they have made whilst attending the Children and Young People’s Residential. The bee home is in a shape of a large flower.**

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## Welcome to the Winter 2024/25 Edition of Signpost

We are bringing you another packed edition, brimming with stories and news from the charity, the people we support and beyond.

The interview with Claire Sisk, Disability Awareness Content Creator, who is blind, gives me confidence that brands and organisations are being encouraged to think about accessibility in the planning stages, so it becomes a forethought, rather than an afterthought.

Enclosed in this edition you will find details of our Winter Appeal, which is replacing our customary Christmas raffle. I hope you can still support us in this current climate and cost of living crisis, which I appreciate is tough for everyone, including ourselves. No matter how small your donation, we will put your money to good use and help, support and inspire over 8,000 people in Surrey who are Deaf, hard of hearing, blind, partially sighted and deafblind.

I am over the moon we have won the Community Impact Award at the Visionary 2024 Awards, sponsored by Specsavers, for our community hubs. I am immensely proud of the work of the entire team setting these up across Surrey. The new dates for 2025 are featured on page eight and nine.

Wishing you a very happy festive season and I look forward to seeing you in 2025.

Best wishes

Clare

## Contact Details

This edition of Signpost has been sent to you as someone who requested information from us. If you would like Signpost in a different format, please let us know. If you’d rather not receive our magazine, you can unsubscribe by emailing gdpr@sightforsurrey.org.uk or contact our Helpdesk.

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**Text:** 07860 026 269

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**SignLive:** sightforsurrey.org.uk

**Email:** info@sightforsurey.org.uk

**Website:** sightforsurrey.org.uk

## Christmas Opening Hours

### 2024

Tuesday 24th December – Open 9am until 5pm

Wednesday 25th December – Closed

Thursday 26th December - Closed

Friday 27th December – Open 9 am to 5pm

Monday 30th December – Open 9am to 5pm

Tuesday 31st December – Open 9am to 5pm

### 2025

Wednesday 1st January - Closed

Thursday 2nd January – Open 9am to 5pm

## 2025 Diaries

Organise your life! The large print 2025 diaries are in stock, and we are ready to take your orders and dispatch. The 2025 calendars are available in multiple sizes including an A3 wall calendar, A4 and A5 desk size and a very handy pocket size. To order your diary please contact our Helpdesk, our contact details can be found on page 2.

## Surrey Connect

Surrey Connect is a safe and reliable on demand bus service, run by Surrey County Council, that runs across Surrey Monday to Friday from 7am to 7pm and Saturday 8am to 6pm. Adult single fares start from £2 for a journey under 5 miles. Children under 11 years must be accompanied by an adult. You could use this service to visit our Resource Centre, or to join one of our Meet Up Catch Ups. To find out more, or to book, please visit [www.surreycc.gov.uk](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk).

## Introducing Disability Awareness Content Creator, Claire Sisk

Claire Sisk slid onto our mobile phone screens in December 2020. Claire is a Disability Awareness Content Creator turned TV presenter, who is blind. Here we caught up with Claire.

### How did you end up doing what you do?

“I never set out to be a content creator – it happened by pure chance when I posted a video of myself crossing the road on my private Facebook account and it sparked an unexpected wave of reactions. People I hadn’t spoken to in decades reached out, telling me how amazing it was and how they’d never considered the challenges I face. Encouraged by several of them, I decided to share it on mainstream social media. Not long after, I was accused of faking my blindness because I was seen using my phone in a supermarket. That moment really hit me - if a stranger could question my reality, what might my friends and family think, watching me live my everyday life? So, I started posting more, determined to raise awareness and share the truth of my experiences. By October 2021, for Blindness Awareness Month, I decided to start posting daily videos showing how I navigate life. Many of those videos went viral, and that's when everything really started to take off.”

### What is next for you?

“I'm continuing to work with brands and companies to ensure that accessibility a priority. Through my social media and presenting on \*This Morning\*, I'm committed to raising awareness and showing that accessibility benefits everyone. My focus is on giving others hope - because I know first-hand how isolating and frustrating the journey can

sometimes feel. I want to be a positive impact, to show that no matter what life throws at you, there's always a way forward. Together, we can create a world that’s truly inclusive and uplifting for all of us.”

### What kind of apps or technology do you use to help you create

**your social media content?**

“VoiceOver on my iPhone is like my personal assistant, helping me stay connected and create content. Unfortunately, none of the social media apps are fully accessible, but over time, I’ve figured out how to make them work for me with a few creative workarounds. My iPhone camera and VoiceOver are my go-to tools. Editing, though, is a real challenge. Most editing apps aren’t accessible, and there are ones that make you edit second by second. It can take me hours just to edit a few seconds of footage. Whenever I can, I get some sighted help because, honestly, it’s exhausting.

### What would you say to other blind or partially sighted people that are wanting to pursue a career in media?

“I want you to know that your vision loss doesn't define your capabilities. The world needs your unique perspective and voice. There’s real power in sharing your story, in being authentically yourself, and in representing those who might not often see themselves reflected in the media. The journey might feel daunting at times, and there will be moments where you’ll feel like the world wasn’t built with you in mind, but don’t let that stop you. Use those moments as fuel to create something that others can connect with. Surround yourself with people who see your potential, and don’t be afraid to ask for support.

Pick up that mic, record that video, share your thoughts. The more you put yourself out there, the more the world will start to make space for you. Your journey can inspire others, and every step forward creates a path for the next person to follow.”

Follow Claire on Instagram at @canseecantsee

## Deaf Coffee Morning Dates

Our Deaf Coffee Mornings are a great meeting place for the Deaf community to get together and have a good old chat over a cuppa or a coffee. They take place once a month between 10am and 1pm in Woking and Redhill. Often, they have guest speakers attending which have previously included Yvonne Cobb, celebrity Deaf Chef. Other speakers and activities include Christmas decoration making, flower arranging and scam avoidance with Surrey Trading Standards.

### 2025 dates are as follows:

**Redhill, Redhill Methodist Church, Gloucester Road, Redhill, RH11 1BP**

Tuesdays, 10am to 1pm.

14th January, 11th February, 11th March, 8th April, 13th May, 10th June, 8th July, 12th August, 9th September, 14th October, 11th November, 9th December.

**Woking, Pret a Manger, Unit 41, Wolsey Walk, Woking, GU21 2XX**

Thursdays, 10am to 1pm.

23rd January, 20th February, 20th March,17th April, 22nd May, 19th June, 17th July, 21st August, 18th September, 23rd October, 20th November, 18th December

There is no need to book just turn up ready for tea and chitchat! A British Sign Language Interpreter will be present.

For more information please contact our Deaf Services Team on **SMS**: 07860 026 269, **FaceTime:** dutysw@sensoryservices.org.uk, **Skype:** sensory.services or **SignLive via**: sightforsurrey.org.uk.

BRITISH TELECOM (BT) DIGITAL SWITCHOVER DEADLINE **EXTENDED**

The BT Digital Switchover completion deadline has been delayed until January 2027 because of the oversight of the needs of older people and those who are disabled.

### What is the BT Digital Switchover About?

All UK landlines are being switched from an analogue system to a new digital service. Digital lines will be easier to maintain and provide a better service.

This should be a very simple and straight forward changeover as all anyone needs to do is plug their specialist phone into their new Smart Hub 2 that BT supply. However, if the Smart Hub 2 is not in the place you usually have your phone, you need to request a free Digital Voice Adapter so you can continue using the equipment you have been supplied at a location in the home that suits you.

In addition, you will be entitled to a free ‘battery backup unit’ to keep your phones working in case of a power cut. The battery backup works for up to 12 or 24 hours and will provide one hour of calls in to your home and one hour of calls out.

The rules apply to any phone company, no proof is needed, such as a Certificate of Vision Impairment or any other documents.

To request a free voice adapter please call BT on 0330 1234 150, text the word ADAPTER to 61998, or text 150 from a BT mobile.

## Meet Up Catch Up Near You!

Our monthly community hubs named Meet Up Catch Up have been running for nearly one year now and are proving to be a popular date in the diary for many of the people we support. They take place in various venues across the county between 10am and 12pm every month. It’s a chance for people to get together in a relaxed atmosphere and meet other people with similar sight and hearing impairments, who appreciate and understand each other, and have a nice cuppa and maybe a hob nob too!

Please don’t just take our word for it here is what some of our regular attendees have said about our Meet Up Catch Ups:

“I woke up today so excited to come to the Meet Up Catch Up. I haven’t been to a social event in a while and was a bit nervous, but you’ve all been so welcoming.”

“It was so lovely to come and have someone understand my access needs. I look forward to seeing you all next month.”

So, what are you waiting for? Get your diary out and make a note of the Meet Up Catch Ups near you!

**Epsom, Epsom Social Food Hall (near the library), Epsom Square, Epson, KT19 8AG**

**3rd Tuesday of the month**

* 21st January 2025
* 18th February 2025
* 18th March 2025
* 15th April 2025
* 20th May 2025
* 17th June 2025

**Fetcham, Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey, Rentwood,**

**Last Tuesday of the month**

* 28th January 2025
* 25th February 2025
* 25th March 2025
* 29th April 2025
* 27th May 2025
* 24th June 2025

**Godalming, The Wilfred Noyce Centre, Crown Court, High Street, Godalming, GU7 1DY**

**1st Thursday of the month**

* January – no meet up
* 6th February 2025
* 6th March 2025
* 3rd April 2025
* 1st May 2025
* 5th June 2025

**Merstham, Merstham Village Hall, Station Road North, Merstham, RH1 3ED**

Thursday, term time only.

**New Haw, New Haw Library, 28A The Broadway, New Haw, Addlestone, KT15 3HA**

**3rd Wednesday of the month**

* 15th January 2025
* 19th February 2025
* 19th March 2025
* 16th April 2025
* 21st May 2025
* 18th June 2025

**Oxted, Oxted Library, 12 Gresham Road, Oxted, RH8 0BQ**

**2nd Wednesday of the month**

* 8th January 2025
* 12th February 2025
* 12th March 2025
* 9th April 2025
* 14th May 2025
* 11th June 2025

Keep a look out on our website for the remaining dates for 2025 at sightforsurrey.org.uk/events/ or contact our Helpdesk for further details.

## Happy 21st Birthday Friendship Group!

Don’t we all wish we were 21 again! Well for our Friendship Group their wish came true when the group went out for a slap-up pub lunch to celebrate their 21st year as a group bringing together people in Surrey with combined sight and hearing loss.

Julie inherited the group from Royal Association for the Deaf and has led the group from strength to strength and loves spending time with everyone.

Julie devises a wide and varied range of activities for the group to participate in each month including a Pets as Therapy dog petting session, cycling around Bushy Park, boating at Earlswood Lakes, gin tasting and a visit to Mercedes Benz World to name a few. She likes to add a new activity or two each year following feedback and suggestions from the group members.

Regulars to the group include Sarah who has been coming to the group for ten years, Roy for seven years but topping the leaderboard are Anne and Russell who have been coming to the monthly meet up for 17 years!

## Join in the Fundraising Fun in 2025

As a charity, we rely on the generosity of our supporters to help fund certain activities and services like our Eye Clinic Liaison Officers (ECLO), Volunteer Service, Community Hubs, Technology Experts and Artificial Intelligence (AI) support. To help us continue providing these vital services we need to ask for your help in raising funds.

From sky dives, wing walks, runs, cycles, swims to sponsored bake sales and themed nights, or making us your charity of the year, we would love to have your support.

Can you persuade a member of your family, or a friend, to take the plunge and sign-up to do something special for Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey during 2025?

Over the past year we have had people take on all sorts of fundraising challenges and in return for your gallant effort, we will give you tons of support, lots of fundraising and training tips and a branded t-shirt to wear on the day of your challenge.

For more inspiration, or if you have a fundraising idea, then please contact our friendly fundraising team on fundraising@sightforsurrey.org.uk.

## Golf Day

The Guildford Lions organise a Golf Day every year, benefiting a local charity, and this year we were very lucky to be selected as their charity of choice!

Clandon Regis Golf Club in Surrey was the venue for this year’s golf day and 63 people signed up to play the stunning 18-hole course, Stableford style, which kicked off with a bacon roll on arrival plus a two-course lunch all for just £85.

Do you play golf and would like to organise a charity golf day for us at your local club? We would love to hear from you, our contact details are below.

For more inspiration or if you have a fundraising idea, then please contact our friendly fundraising team on fundraising@sightforsurrey.org.uk.

## Pedal Power Across the Isle of Wight (IOW)

After receiving a First-Class Honours degree in Media and Communication, and inspired by her dissertation, ‘Disabled People Using Their Voice’, Alison decided to use her voice and fundraise for Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey as she took on an epic cycle challenge across the Isle of Wight.

Alison, who has Retinitis Pigmentosa, along with her pilot, Paul, and other family and friends, cycled 71 miles across the Isle of Wight (IoW) over two days in July. The landscape was much more challenging than Alison ever imagined, with some significant climbs, over 1,000 metres in elevation in total!

Alison requested donations to us in lieu of presents at her, and her daughter’s, joint graduation celebrations, and her 30th wedding anniversary party. Nearly £3,000 has been raised to date!

Alison told us “I want to encourage and empower people who are vision impaired and wary or frightened of tech to have more employment opportunities and maximise their capabilities, as I went back to university to gain a degree after struggling to get a job interview as a vision impaired woman.”

Thank you to everyone that has heard Alison’s voice and donated to her fundraising cause.

Feeling inspired? If you would like to take on a fundraising challenge for us like Alison, please email our Fundraising Team who will help you set up your challenge, please contact them on fundraising@sightforsurrey.org.uk.

## Breaking Down Barriers

The next Breaking Down Barriers Workshop is taking place on Wednesday 29th January 2025.Breaking Down Barriers is a workshop for professionals in Surrey to gain an overview, understanding and appreciation of inclusion, accessibility and independence for and with people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, blind, partially sighted and deafblind.

This workshop will inspire and empower you to become a champion for access and inclusion in Surrey, helping to break down the barriers so everyone can embrace an independent life at home, at work and in our communities.

Tickets cost just £30 per person so don’t delay and book your tickets today! To book a place on Breaking Down Barriers please visit our website [www.sightforsurrey.org.uk/events/breaking-down-barriers-workshop](http://www.sightforsurrey.org.uk/events/breaking-down-barriers-workshop) and follow the link to EventBrite.

## Artificial Intelligence (Ai)

The world of Ai is on fire with advances in technology and the growth of accessibility apps. Here our AI Trailblazer, Keith, shares his two favourite apps.

### Roger Voice App

Roger Voice ([rogervoice.com](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cllighting%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CContent.Outlook%5CQXBR2ER4%5Crogervoice.com)) is the app to download if you are Deaf or hard of hearing to facilitate communication. The app leverages real-time transcription technology to convert spoken language into text, allowing users to engage in phone conversations and is available to download via Android and Apple iPhone.

**Key features include:**

1. **Real-time Transcription**: Converts spoken words into text during phone calls, providing instant transcription to the user.
2. **Multi-language Support**: Offers transcription in multiple languages.
3. **Voice Synthesis**: Enables users to type responses which are then converted into spoken language, allowing for two-way communication.
4. **Accessibility**: Designed with an intuitive interface to ensure ease of use for people with varying levels of ability.
5. **Customisation**: Provides options to adjust text size and language preferences.

### The Clew App

The Clew app is available for Apple iPhone only and provides blind and partially sighted people with the opportunity to navigate unfamiliar surroundings within buildings.

The Clew app uses an iPhone camera and augmented reality function to guide users by allowing them to record routes from point to point. For partially sighted users, it provides an on-screen customisable map where users can change the route guidance colour to red, blue or green. For blind users, it provides turn-by-turn voice guidance along with haptic feedback to keep users on route. It also allows you to save journeys to a route list for future use.

If you need help downloading these apps, or any others, please contact
technology@sightforsurrey.org.uk.

## Fun at Juniper Hall

Every two years the Children and Young People’s Service (CYPS) team organise a residential weekend away for the children we support and their families.

For many, this is the only chance for them to have a really fun weekend away that is totally geared to them, and their vision impairment. This year ten families attended with a total of 38 people in attendance.

Everyone arrived on the Friday night and settled in. On Saturday they had fun and games on the field and then some travelled to Walton Firs Activity Centre for high ropes climbing. Then it was back to Juniper Hall for lunch followed by a Scavenger Hunt and Treasure Trail, making a wooden bee house, talk by a Beekeeper, making a beehive collage and sensory garden walk. The Saturday evening finished with a BBQ and campfire for everyone.

Before the families left on Sunday everyone took part in a pizza making activity, which provided them with their lunch. Children and adults enjoyed making the pizza dough, selecting their toppings and identifying and picking the fresh herbs from the garden.

“I really enjoyed learning about Bee Keeping.  Seeing the children have fun and socialise with each other has been a highlight.”

“This is a list of my favourite activities; The Campfire, The Bee Homes, The Scavenger Hunt, bunk beds, hot chocolate and having fun.”

A big thank you goes to The Powell Foundation for their funding which made this event possible.

## Hayley and Grace Jet Off to Los Angeles!

Hayley and Grace, who are both supported by the charity, were lucky enough to make it through to the finals of the Braille Challenge which took place in LA, along with another young person supported by our team. 50 children from Canada, the US and the UK were invited to attend the finals.

Grace explained how the competition worked, “You had 45 minutes for each task, the first task was speed and accuracy. I had to listen to four passages, and I had to type up what was being said as quickly and accurately as possible. The next task was proof reading, and we were given 10 paragraphs to read in braille and had to list the sentences that were wrong.

After lunch was reading and comprehension, here we were given six pages of Braille, and we had to read the text and then type up our answers using the Braille machine. Then there were four different charts and graphs and ten questions about each chart and graph. After that we swam in the pool to cool down from the competition stress!”

Hayley won the Sophomore category and told us, “Having the opportunity to travel to LA was an absolute delight. The most memorable part of the day was the moment we filed in, the atmosphere was full of support and encouragement, more than I could have ever hoped for. At that moment I realised it didn’t matter if I won or lost, what mattered was giving my best and enjoying every second of the day ahead.”

## Speech Banana

As the saying goes, if you know, you know, but do you know what Speech Banana is? The Hearing Loss Team at Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey use ‘Speech Banana,’ as one example, when assessing

anyone for their hearing loss. This method of assessment helps us determine everyone’s individual level of hearing loss and then our staff can recommend equipment and services to help.

Wendy, is a Hearing Loss Advisor and carries out all our hearing loss assessments, and draws up a blank audiogram with a speech banana to explain how hearing loss affects speech discrimination. The audiology department where the hearing aids are issued can often provide an audiogram to see each individual’s pattern of hearing loss, and we can often discuss that with them, and their families.

Many people think cochlear implants and hearing aids make people who are Deaf or hard of hearing hear everything, but they don’t. For many people who use this type of equipment to help them hear, they will still miss out hearing certain letters and vowels like th and ch.

Wendy recently assessed a person with hearing loss and learning needs, she needed to use a toy doll to show the individual how to use the hearing aid and equipment that she had recommended.

## Did You Know We Stock the Following Equipment?

* Portable TV and Personal Listener – to hear the TV louder and clearer through a neck loop or headset wirelessly.
* Personal Listener (battery operated only) – has a microphone to help hear conversations clearer and louder anywhere.
* Doorbell with loud sound, different melodies and flashing light.
* Amplified corded and cordless phones
* NEW: Bluetooth TV and Personal Listener for Bluetooth Phonak, Danalogic Resound and Oticon hearing aids.

If you are hard of hearing and would like an assessment in your home, or to visit our Resource Centre to try out some equipment, please contact us through your preferred method of communication, our contact details are on page 2.

## Free Will Writing Service

At Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey we have teamed up with Will writing experts, Octopus Legacy to offer a free Will writing service all year round saving you £90!

Writing a Will is so vitally important and saves those left behind the task of sorting out your affairs. If you don’t write a Will the process for sorting out your affairs is long and complicated, and your money might go to the government, rather than people, or places of your choice.

Will writing with Octopus Legacy is quick and easy and they will help guide you through the process. It is 100% safe, and your Will is checked by the Octopus Legacy experts.

Call [0800 773 4014](http://tel:%200800%20773%204014/) to arrange an appointment to start your Will over the phone, or visit our website [www.sightforsurrey.co.uk](http://www.sightforsurrey.co.uk) to do it online.

Rebecca, who used to work for us, used Octopus Legacy to write her Will and left a percentage of her estate to us in her Will.

Rebecca was diagnosed with cancer in January 2016 and was told later that year she was cancer free. Unfortunately, the cancer came back in 2019. When she was given the news, it was terminal, she wanted to get her affairs in order and used our free Will writing service with Octopus Legacy. Sadly, Rebecca died in 2023.

## Volunteer John

John has been a volunteer for Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey since he started to lose his sight 34 years ago when he noticed, whilst trekking in The Himalayas, that he kept straying off the path! A year later he was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa, a genetic sight loss condition that gradually affects your peripheral vision.

Rather than think of what he could no longer do, John thought about the things he could do. He has volunteered in a variety of roles for the charity, including as an event volunteer, giving talks and speeches about

his lived sight loss experience, featured and been photographed in our leaflets and he completed four mountain fundraising climbs raising over £15,000 for local sight loss charities!

John now has only 5% of his central vision remaining but still goes target shooting and paints watercolours. Our Christmas card this year features one of John’s beautiful paintings. You can send one of our virtual Christmas cards featuring John’s painting through [www.dontsendmeacard.com](http://www.dontsendmeacard.com).

We have many different volunteering opportunities available. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer then please contact our volunteer team on volunteering@sightforsurrey.org.uk or contact our Helpdesk, our contact details can be found on page 2.

## Advert

Professional Vision Services are one of the oldest companies within the visual impairment field today; we manufacture our own products to maintain quality and service excellence.

Magnilink products have always been at the forefront of technology and built to standards ISO9001 and ISO4001.

### Desktops

Monitor size from 13 to 24 in / Magnification range from 2x to 60x / Folding, portable or standalone / Battery operated / Light for easy transport / Rotating cameras for hobbies and distance viewing.

### Reading Machines

* Scans text and reads aloud
* Portable / battery operated
* Voice change, speed and pitch
* Save options ideal for books

### Head Mounted

* Watch TV
* Ideal for hands free activities sewing, playing cards, changing plugs
* Battery operated
* Portable and Handheld
* Various size screens from 3 to 12 in
* Magnification range 3x to 16x
* Autofocus adjustment for ease of use

**Portable and Handheld**

* Various size screen from 3 to 12in
* Magnification range 3x to 16x
* Autofocus adjustment for ease of use

Please ring us on 01462 420 751 to book your no obligation FREE appointment with one of our qualified Low Vision Specialists.

We offer trial periods and a 30-day money back guarantee.

Please ring for a brochure of our full product range or visit [www.professional-vision-services.co.uk](http://www.professional-vision-services.co.uk).