

Signpost Winter 2025/26 - Issue 20

The front cover of the magazine shows Calum with one of our Sensory Specialist workers, Laura.

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Welcome to the Winter 2025/26 edition of Signpost

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming economies, industries, and daily life at an unprecedented pace. The AI economy is now worth over £23 million in the UK alone and the emerging technology could be transformative for the Deaf and vision impaired communities.

Throughout this edition of Signpost, you will see how AI is helping the people we support to remain independent which is at the heart of everything we do.

Our Winter Appeal, which is enclosed with this edition, shows how our Meet Up Catch Up groups, and AI, are helping break down social isolation barriers that many people with a sensory impairment face, and with your generous donation we can help more people like Gus, Valerie, Ossie and Evie stay connected with friends and family.

No matter how big or small, your donation will help future generations living with a sensory loss.

Best wishes
Clare Burgess

Our Contact Details

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Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey, Rentwood, School Lane, Fetcham, Surrey, KT22 9JX. Registered Charity Number: 1121949.

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 by contacting our Helpdesk.

Christmas Opening Hours

Wednesday 24th December – 9am to 5pm

Thursday 25th December – Closed

Friday 26th December – Closed

Monday 29th December – 9am to 5pm

Tuesday 30th December – 9am to 5pm

Wednesday 31st December – 9am to 5pm

Thursday 1st January – Closed

Friday 2nd January – 9am to 5pm

2026 Diaries

Do you still love a diary to write all your appointments in? We have a selection of large print diaries in our Resource Centre including an A3 wall calendar, A4 and A5 desk size and a very handy pocket size that you can carry around. To purchase your diary please contact our Helpdesk, our contact details can be found on page 2.

Blinded by Methanol

Calum story was all over the news when he went on national TV to warn others of the dangers when travelling to countries where methanol poisoning is a concern. Calum became blind after consuming alcoholic drinks laced with the deadly chemical in Laos, South Asia.

The day after consuming the drinks Calum and his friend took a 24-hour bus ride to Vietnam. During the journey both Calum and his friend were unwell and experienced some light sensitivity, and they assumed they both had a stomach bug. As they crossed the border from Laos to Vietnam, Calum noticed his vision was not quite right and eventually his world went black.

After three weeks in hospital in Vietnam, Calum was flown back to the UK and admitted to a hospital in London for further tests. Calum was referred to us by the hospital in London and told us, "I received a call from Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey following the referral, offering help and support but I declined at first as I thought my sight might return, but when that didn't happen I got back in contact with them.

First, I received help from Gary, their Technology Trainer who showed me how to use a screen reader and voice over for iPhones which was really helpful as I hadn't been able to communicate with my friends since the incident."

Calum also received an assessment followed by daily living skills training which he told us, "Made such an improvement to my life. The liquid level indicator made a big difference as I could do something by myself like making my Dad a cup of tea."

Laura, one of our Sensory Specialist Workers, then started mobility training with Calum, showing him how to use a long cane and progressing to routes outside. Calum said, "The mobility training has been amazing, as for a while I couldn't go out at all."

The first route on Calum's agenda was to the gym. Laura carefully planned the safest route and broke it down into stages, which they practised together for weeks. Calum also practised this route with a friend, and in early September Calum stepped out from his house alone for the first time and walked to the gym unaided, ten months after losing his sight.

Laura said, "I knew he could do it and I am so proud of Calum."

Calum said, "I never thought I would be able to walk this route by myself. I have been practising a lot but always with someone. The first time from my house to the traffic lights and then from the top of the road to the gym, it's a good feeling, I feel a great sense of accomplishment. Without the help of Laura and the charity I wouldn't have been able to do this, I am so grateful."

For help and support please make a referral via our website sightforsurrey.org.uk or use the contact details on page 2.

Finding Friendships

Our award-winning Meet Up Catch Up community hubs are now an established date in the calendar as an open and friendly opportunity for people to come together, have a natter and forge new friendships. Take Tori and Gus who have been coming to our Epsom hub for the past year.

Gus was told about our hubs through the Communicator Guide service we provide and is enabled to get to the hubs by one of our lovely volunteer drivers.

Gus said, "It's great how the community are so eager to help each other out, like Tori and Marie who I met at the Meet Up Catch Ups who both help me out."

Tori has been tutoring Gus to read Braille for free since they met. Tori started learning when he was four years old and now in his twenties is a proficient Brailist.

Gus said, “I am making progress with certain aspects of Braille but find others hard. I have got better at memorising the structure of the cells and dots, but I struggle with reading. I hope in time I will be able to differentiate words more easily but it’s not a quick thing to learn Braille.

Tori said, “I think Gus is a bit hard on himself as when we started a few months ago he couldn’t understand anything in Braille and now he can read a sentence. We get together about once a week plus I give him homework!”

It is wonderful to hear stories of how supportive our hubs are. To find your nearest Meet Up Catch Up please see the list below or visit our website www.sightforsurrey.org.uk/events.

Meet Up and Catch Up

Join our award-winning monthly Meet Up Catch Ups. Enjoy a relaxed and informal drop-in, make new connections, have a chat, cuppa and a biscuit or two. Dates for 2026 can be found below:

Epsom, 10am to 12pm

Epsom Library, 6 Epsom Square, Epsom, KT19 8AG

Every 3rd Tuesday of the month

- 20th January
- 17th February
- 17th March
- 21st April
- 19th May
- 16th June
- 21st July

Fetcham, 10am to 12pm

St. Mary’s Church Hall, 10A The Ridgeway, Fetcham, KT22 9AZ

Last Friday of the month

- 30th January
- 27th February

- 27th March
- 24th April
- 29th May
- 26th June
- 31st July

Godalming, 10am to 12pm

Oglethorpe Room, Wilfrid Noyce Centre, Crown Court, High Street,
Godalming, GU7 1DY

Every 1st Thursday of the month

- No hub in January
- 5th February
- 5th March
- 2nd April
- 7th May
- 4th June
- 2nd July

Merstham, 10am to 12pm

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

Thursdays term time only

- January 8,15, 22, 29
- February 5, 26
- March 5,12,19,26
- April 23, 30
- May 7,14, 21
- June 11,18,25
- July 2,9

New Haw, 10am to 12pm

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

Every 3rd Wednesday of the month

- 21st January
- 18th February
- 18th March
- 15th April

- 20th May
- 17th June
- 15th July

Oxted, 10am to 12pm – Oxted Library, 12 Gresham Road, Oxted RH8 0BQ

Every second Wednesday of the month

- 14th January
- 11th February
- 11th March
- 8th April
- 13th May
- 10th June
- 8th July

Coming to Terms with My Vision Impairment

Kesh was in the health and fitness industry for over 30 years as a fitness coach before teaching and presenting in the fitness world. “During this whole time, I never told anyone about my vision impairment, only my family knew,” Kesh told Signpost.

“I buried my head in the sand, but it got to a point this year that my vision had deteriorated so much I had to face up to the facts. Since doing that it’s been a big weight off my shoulders.”

Kesh developed myopia at the age of six years old and told us “I was one of two children in primary school who wore glasses, and it was a horrible time as I got badly bullied. By the time I was a teenager my prescription was -14 and my glasses were like jam jars.

In 2017 I was diagnosed with Glaucoma. I voluntarily gave up my driving licence after coming off my daughter’s scooter as I hit a crack in the pavement I didn’t see, and narrowly missed landing in the road, it was a wake-up call.

Throughout my 40's my vision slowly deteriorated, I had two eye operations which helped but still my vision deteriorated.

Now I am 52, and in February 2025 I was registered as Severely Sight Impaired. I didn't realise there was a whole community to support me, and I really want to get involved in advocacy.

I am due to start mobility training with Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey and I'm thankful for the next step in my vision impairment journey.

Are you struggling with your vision or hearing and need some help and support? Please visit our website sightforsurrey.org.uk and fill in our referral form or contact us using the details on page 2.

Volunteers Needed

We are in urgent need of new Home Visitors to visit some of the people we support in their home who are finding getting out and about a challenge. Can you help us reduce social isolation that many Deaf, blind, vision impaired and deafblind people can experience?

To become a volunteer Home Visitor, you just need to have an hour a week spare that you can dedicate to helping others in need in your community. We will match you with somebody that shares the same interests as you and lives nearby.

We also have other volunteering roles available including technology buddies, phone befrienders, children's events and hearing loss technology volunteers.

In addition, we also require Volunteer Drivers to bring the people we support into our offices in Fetcham and to our community hubs that take place each month across Surrey.

All these roles are voluntary, but we can reimburse you for your mileage at 45p per mile. The roles are fully flexible and can be tailored to your availability, you can choose to do as little, or as much as you want.

Volunteering is incredibly rewarding, but just don't take our word for it, here is what some of our volunteers have to say:

Volunteer David said, "The surprising reality about being a volunteer home visitor is that it's not about what you give as a befriender, but what you get back."

Volunteer Driver Gail said, "It is a privilege to help support such lovely people. I bring them into the charity for technology support and appointments at the Resource Centre. I am pleased to be able to play a small part in this service."

For more information or to register your interest in volunteering please visit our website sightforsurrey.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering

Deaf Café Dates 2026

Get yourself a cuppa and a cookie and be ready for a catch up as the dates for the 2026 Deaf Cafés have been confirmed. Our cafes are run by Cathy, our Deaf Community Coordinator, and bring together the Deaf community in a welcoming and supportive environment. A variety of speakers and services will be available each month bringing tailored information in British Sign Language (BSL). BSL Interpreters will also be present.

Cathy said, "If you are Deaf, or know someone who is Deaf, and lives local to Redhill or Woking then get them to come along. We are a friendly and welcoming bunch and would love to have more Deaf people join us."

Redhill

Every 2nd Tuesday of the month

10am to 1pm

Redhill Methodist Church, Gloucester Road, Redhill, RH1 1BP.

- 13th January
- 10th February
- 10th March

- 14th April
- 12th May
- 9th June
- 14th July
- 11th August
- 8th September
- 13th October
- 10th November
- 8th December

Woking

Every 3rd Monday of the month

11am to 2pm

Woking United Reform Church, White Rose Lane, Woking, GU22 7HA.

- 19th January
- 16th February
- 16th March
- 20th April
- 18th May
- 15th June
- 20th July
- 17th August
- 21st September
- 19th October
- 16th November
- 21st December

JOIN TEAM SENSORY SERVICES BY SIGHT FOR SURREY

Are you ready to do something extraordinary? Whether it's pounding the pavements of a half-marathon, cycling up country lanes, leaping from a plane, strapping in for a wing walk or a fun inflatable obstacle course – this is your chance to take on the challenge of a lifetime.

By joining our team, you'll turn your personal goal into lasting impact. Sign up for your chosen challenge, rally your sponsors, and you'll be changing lives from your very first mile, pedal, or jump.

We'll be with you every step of the way. From fundraising ideas and the encouragement of our team to a branded event-day t-shirt or vest – you'll have all the support you need to smash your target and enjoy the ride.

You can pick from a huge range of thrilling events – or dream up your own! Runs, cycles, obstacle courses, skydives, ultra-treks, even once-in-a-lifetime adventures. The choice is yours; the excitement is guaranteed!

Every challenge conquered means vital funds are raised. So why not make this your year to go big, go bold, and join Team Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey? Together, let's prove that nothing is out of reach.

If you would rather something not quite as exhilarating, maybe arrange a coffee and cake sale, quiz night or fishing match! Whatever you choose to do, we will be there to support your fundraising efforts.

Contact fundraising@sightforsurrey.org.uk for more information or visit our website for more information.

Deaf Awareness Training

We received a referral from a care home asking for a volunteer for a new resident. The person was experiencing a significant transition and language barriers as their only language is British Sign Language (BSL).

Our Deaf Social Work and Volunteering Teams worked together to identify the best approach to meet the person's needs. Our Social Worker, Susanna, developed an understanding of her needs by building a trusting relationship with weekly visits. It became apparent, that whilst her care needs were being met, her cultural and linguistic needs were not. As a result, she was becoming increasingly isolated and withdrawn.

We identified an opportunity to work with the care home to increase their Deaf Awareness, to support both the person and the wider team in understanding their needs.

Cathy, our Deaf Community Coordinator delivered Deaf Awareness Workshops for care home staff who were informed how important body language is for people who are Deaf, provided an understanding of Deaf culture and BSL to enable improved communication for the person. The volunteering team worked with Susanna and Cathy to identify, onboard and match an appropriate volunteer from the charity.

A member of the team from the care home shared *“the Deaf Awareness Training has made a big difference, and we can now see the resident’s face light up when we use our new skills to communicate to her in BSL.”*

A volunteer befriender will be visiting regularly to have a chat in BSL.

Cathy said, *“We have made a real difference as a team.”*

If your organisation is interested in receiving Deaf Awareness Training or would like to attend our Breaking Down Barriers workshop, please contact our Helpdesk – details on page 2.

Supercar Experience

For the vast majority of children we support they will never have the experience of learning to drive because of their vision impairment. So, imagine getting the opportunity to drive a car, and not just any car but a high-performance supercar around a racetrack!

This experience of a lifetime became a reality for a group of 13-18 year olds we support when we took them to Dunsfold Park in Cranleigh for a supercar experience and got the opportunity to drive a Porsche, McLaren, Audi TT and Nissan GT Turbo car around a race track each with an instructor to show them the way.

Each car had dual foot controls, and the young people were each given a safety briefing before embarking on their drive.

Hayley said, “the supercar experience was amazing and driving fast is always something I have wanted to do; a once in a lifetime opportunity. It is also great to meet up with the friends I have made through coming to these events.”

James went for a drive in the Nissan GTR and said, “I did it, I did it and I put my foot right to the floor!”

Tegan said, “It was great fun, and I put my foot down a few times. What a great experience.”

Looking for the perfect present? Give more than a present – give an unforgettable memory with Ablenet’s accessible experiences for people who are disabled or vision impaired. Enjoy the thrill of supercar driving, flying adventures, or heart-racing days out. Use code SFS2025 for 10% off at www.ablenet.co.uk/sight-for-surrey.

Help with Hearing Loss

Do you wear hearing aids or have hearing loss but still struggle to hear conversations when out and about, or people talking on the phone? Do you need help pairing your hearing aids to your phone or TV?

Or is the volume on your TV set so loud, so you can hear your favourite programme, but then you often miss visitors to the door as you can’t hear the doorbell?

More importantly can you hear your smoke alarm at home or fire alarm at work or a baby crying?

If you have answered yes to any of these then Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey can help you with a hearing loss assessment.

We have a small team of professional and highly skilled Hearing Loss Advisors that can come out to your home and undertake a thorough and detailed assessment. They can then recommend equipment to help you manage your hearing loss.

Rosina, who we assessed for her hearing loss said, "The help and advice coupled with the brilliant equipment I am now using; it has transformed my life."

To book a hearing loss assessment please use the contact details on page 3.

Christmas Carol Concert

The season of Christmas carol concerts is not far away, and the New Egham Singers final fundraising concert, in aid of us, is taking place on Saturday 6th December from 7.30pm at St. John's Church, Egham.

Come and listen to classic Christmas carols, plus the choir will be singing 'I'll be home for Christmas', originally sung by Bing Crosby, 'That's Christmas to Me', originally performed by the Pentatonix, and everyone's favourite, the theme song from the film Elf!

Drinks and refreshments will be served during the interval, and a cracking Christmas fundraiser will be held on the night, to get everyone into the spirit of Christmas, with all proceeds going to Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey.

To book tickets please visit neweghamsingers.org.

Fundraising News

Thank you to everyone that came and supported us at the Shere Hill Climb in September. The sun shone and the wind blew us around a bit, but we had a great day. Everyone loved the E-Type Jaguar we had on

display and enjoyed slipping into the car and putting on a fancy dress accessory or two, for a fun selfie. Come along and join in the fun next year! www.sherehillclimb.co.uk.

The Guildford Lions Golf Day raised a staggering £5,500 for us, thank you to everyone involved and who attended on the day.

Our Spring Raffle also raised a whopping £6,729. Thank you to each and every one of you that bought and sold tickets, we couldn't have done it without you!

Support After a Stroke

Patria had two strokes in February 2024 which resulted in Hemianopia, loss of one half of visual field in both eyes, and she was registered as Sight Impaired.

At the time of the stroke Patria was alone living in West Sussex and she struggled at home with the stairs and cooking in the kitchen. After having a fall Patria moved in with her brother who lived in Redhill in a ground floor flat as a temporary measure and once settled, she contacted Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey to organise help and support.

A Rehabilitation Support Worker (RSW) visited Patria at her brother's, and she told us, "The RSW explained all the things I didn't understand. I thought I was going mad as I couldn't locate things I had put down 10 minutes previously. They explained I was having visual hallucinations, very common with people with severe sight loss, called Charles Bonnett Syndrome. They also issued me with various pieces of equipment like a task lamp, liquid level indicator, bump-ons and a vision impairment badge I could wear when out, so people know I have sight loss.

I also received mobility long cane training which has given me my life back as I can now go out on my own, visit my daughter and go out walking which I love and have missed so much. Having the cane, people now keep their distance, whereas before I was getting knocked into, people can see the cane and know I have sight loss and are more respectful.

I also attend the Communication Class in Merstham, which I was reluctant to attend at first but I now love it. It is wonderful to speak to others in the same situation and makes me feel less isolated. During one of the classes I was shown how to use Siri on my phone so I can use it to call my brother, or 999 if I need help, which gives me peace of mind.

Another piece of equipment I was issued by the charity was Sun Shields which have been amazing as they stop the sun and glare from taking away the little bit of upper sight I have.

I have also had support from their Benefits team to help me receive what I am entitled to. If the team had not helped me, I wouldn't have known what to do."

Our Merstham Communication Class takes place every Thursday (term-time only). For more information, please visit our website www.sightforsurrey.org.uk.

Pi APP

Written by Keith, AI Trailblazer

With more and more people using Artificial Intelligence (AI) on a daily basis, we wanted to share with you a new app which competes with the likes of ChatGPT, Gemini and Claude to name a few.

Pi is a conversational AI app/assistant which aims to be more than just a fact-bot, it is designed to be empathetic, supportive and a companion to talk to at any time.

A major strength of Pi is its free live information feed. Users can ask about weather, transportation updates, news, or events in real-time and receive accurate, up-to-date responses.

Pi offers its conversational style and real-time information completely free. For people relying on assistive technology, not having to pay extra to stay informed removes an important affordability barrier.

Key Features of Pi:

- Free real-time information feed (news, weather, transport updates)
- Conversational AI companion with natural, friendly dialogue
- Accessible, uncluttered mobile interface for smooth navigation
- Available on iOS 14+ and Android 5.0+
- Completely free to use without subscription

Pi's free access, live updates, broad mobile support, and accessible design make it a practical everyday companion for those with sensory impairments.

Download Pi

The Pi app is accessible via mobile on both Apple iPhones and Android smartphones, available through the Apple App Store and Google Play Store.

To run Pi on an Apple device, you need iOS 14 or higher. For Android devices, Pi is compatible with Android 5.0 (Lollipop) or later.

<https://pi.ai/>

Ron Leaves a Lasting Legacy

Ron was a perfect gentleman, kind, welcoming with a great interest in others and how they were getting on. He was also always up for a good

debate and had vast knowledge of world affairs and the ability to discuss every subject under the sun! He read the newspaper every day and listened to the news and always wanted to discuss the latest world or political crisis.

Ron was supported by the charity when he was diagnosed with Macular Degeneration and provided with equipment to help him manage his sight loss at home.

He left over £50,000 in his Will to us and donated some high-tech sight loss equipment to the charity.

Lisa, Head of Fundraising, said, “we are truly thankful to Ron for remembering us in his Will and the money will be invaluable in supporting children and adults in Surrey with a sensory impairment.”

Change Starts with a Will

We have partnered with expert estate planners, Octopus Legacy, so you can write or update a simple Will for free saving you up to £150.

You can write your Will:

- Online at will.octopuslegacy.com/sightforsurrey-free and use the code SFS-FREE at checkout.
- Over the phone/video call by calling 020 4525 3605 and quote Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey.
- In-person (at home or in-branch). Call 020 4525 3605 to arrange.

With your support we can ensure no one faces sensory loss alone.

Optelec Advert

Would you like to try some of our products?

Optelec are world leaders in low vision magnification, supplying aids for people who are blind and partially sighted. Video magnifiers / optical magnifiers / text to speech reader software and much more. The electronic magnifier provides more than 100x magnification!

Ron, Redhill

“The electronic magnifier has made life so much easier. I can read my post, flip through magazines and even follow recipes again. I don’t know what I’d do without it.”

Please contact us:

0800 145 61 65

www.lowvisionshop.co.uk