



Sandwell Visually Impaired (SVI) Newsletter Issue 8 Spring 2008

SVI aims to make living and/or working in Sandwell better for vision impaired people like us. Welcome to our newsletter.

A new life for our newsletter

The Sandwell Partnership are so impressed with the success of our newsletter (we've attracted 200 new members in the last 12 months) that they are giving us another 12 months grant of £1,600. This will enable us to send the newsletter out in any requested format, to all 1,600 people registered with sight loss in Sandwell. This ensures that there will be another four issues, and will cover 2008 and early 2009. It's great news. Heartfelt thanks to the Sandwell Partnership for their generous support.

SVI aids staff recruitment

SVI have scored a first in Sandwell. Three committee members have undergone training to enable them to engage in the selection and interviewing of all new post holders in the council's Vision Services. Other council departments have been impressed with our professional approach

and they have asked us to help support their staff recruitment.

Training for this role will be ongoing and next time we will ensure we achieve a better gender balance. We certainly felt the loss of our better halves!



Pictured above with their certificates of competence are Saeed, Graham and Bernard.

Inside this issue

News round-up	2, 3
Bowls for everyone	3
Newsletter feedback	4
Action for Blind People	4
MP3 players in libraries	5
Arthur moves on	6
A greener Sandwell	6
Gardening tips	6
Healthy hints	7
Congratulations Dave	7
Stop press	8

News Round-up

SVI members enjoy an even better meeting

Over 50 SVI members attended a happy social meeting on 19 March. We tried a different meeting format; judging by the members' reaction it's here to stay!

We had two light refreshment breaks of 30 minutes each. This helped to create a more relaxed social atmosphere. People who wished to leave early were able to do so in the second break at 3.30pm.

If you are not an SVI member and would like to join us for future events, return the membership form enclosed with this newsletter.

The interesting talks given are summarised in this article. In depth reports appear on our website on www.sandwellvisuallyimpaired.org. If you do not access the site but would like a copy of any of the articles referred to here please let us know. We will send them to you in the format of your choice.

Staying Safe

This talk, by Emma from the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Unit, dealt with the help available to vulnerable people who



are subjected to anti-social behaviour (ASB).

Emma told us about what we can do if we are having problems with neighbours, or other people in the area. She urged us all not to suffer in silence. It's up to us to make use of the help available from the Unit.

Contact the ASB helpline 0845 359 7500, open until 8pm.



Songs from the shows

Helen, our assistant secretary, has a rare talent; she is a member of a

well known amateur operatic society. At the open meeting she entertained us with three great songs from three well-known musicals. Helen has cut a CD, priced at £10.00, with all proceeds going to research to fight blindness. Helen's on 07879 402 713 or e-mail helenrourke106@hotmail.co.uk.

Foundation Hospital Trust

The Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital Trust have big plans to seek Foundation status, coinciding with the

building of a new, relocated hospital in Grove Lane Smethwick. The benefit will be greater public and patient accountability, and the opportunity for everyone to become a trust member; even a Board Governor! There was much lively debate on the presentation by Tim, who represented the NHS. More info and membership application forms from Jeanette on 0800 023 4267 or email foundation@swbh.nhs.uk or download from their website www.swbh.nhs.uk.

Here to Help

The Council's Vision Services now have a slot at all our 'open' meetings. This allows for both SVI members and Vision Services staff to meet and share information on roles and experiences. Arthur, the Sensory Impairment Manager, spoke on the role of Polly, a member of his team who has responsibility for information and counselling.

Need help? Both can be contacted at Vision Services on 0121 558 5555.

You can also ask Vision Services for their new Sensory Impairment booklet. This has been produced with the help of people with sensory impairments, including SVI members.

Bowls for everyone



Fancy a game of bowls? One of our members, Stuart, is looking for people with sight loss who would like to try their hand at flat or crown green bowling.

He's negotiating to use the greens at the former GKN sports ground in Thimblemill Road, Smethwick and he has already arranged some indoor training sessions at the gym of the Hadley Playing Fields, next to Shireland School off Wilson Road. It's a small group yet but who knows; we could grow to become the national blind team champions!

Woods for both flat and crown green play are needed, so if you know anyone who can spare these, Stuart would be delighted to hear from you. He's on 0121 429 8104, or Mobile: 07766 70 40 70 E: stuartnhammer@talktalk.net

Newsletter feedback

About 50 of you have responded with great comments on the value of the newsletter and the website. Over 95% of you thought the usefulness and content of the newsletter good and wished to continue to receive it. The surprise was that 5 people (10% of respondents) wished for a different format.

We would love to know how best to serve you. Please tell us on the enclosed form what format you would prefer if it's different to what you're getting. Keep the feedback coming; it's highly valued.

Comments like:

- 'Keep the good work going';
- 'Over all fantastic'; and
- 'I did not know about bus hailers before reading the newsletter';

give the editorial team a welcome buzz. Thanks.

Your requests for more information on employment are met in this issue with a feature on Action for Blind People who have real expertise and want to help.

As for beauty tips; how about sharing yours with us and we'll spread the word!

If you wish to comment but did not receive an evaluation form with the winter (Dec/Jan) newsletter, please advise and we will post one to you.

Action for Blind People comes to Sandwell



The mobile information unit

The Action team headed by Cormac, brought their mobile information unit to Oldbury town centre on the 13 March 08. Advisors promoted the support services they offer and they demonstrated those on living aids and assistive technology.

If you need advice, support or help, they have expertise on

- employment;
- housing issues;
- welfare rights and benefits;
- sports for youngsters; and
- holiday help.

Try them on: 0121 200 3930 or
Email: westmidlands@actionforblindpeople.org.uk

MP3 audio book player launched in Sandwell



Sandwell Libraries has launched its MP3 digital player service for people coping with sight loss or reading difficulties. It's a reading revolution and builds upon the growing demand for talking books.

This digital gadget, only slightly larger than a matchbox, displays some remarkable features, such as;

- Holds the equivalent of 20 tape cassettes.
- Simple to use; portable; easily carried in pocket or handbag.
- Skips chapters backwards and forwards and restarts where stopped.
- Can be played through an existing stereo system or connected to portable speakers.
- Is reloaded with another digital book recording at the library.

Gordon Griffin, a radio actor, gave a fascinating demonstration of his art and talked about the techniques and practice of recording audio books. He was supported by Clipper Books who only use professional actors/readers to read unabridged titles.

The well attended sneak preview of the MP3 player was held at West Bromwich Town Hall on the 25 January where the staff were marvellous in both welcome and service; instructing all on how to use their new MP3 players. Thank you to all that made it such a memorable experience.

Presently only available from the Central Library in West Bromwich; they're a wow; bound to be flying off the shelves; better enrol to get your copy quickly!

This year is the National Year of Reading, and we are pledging our support. Libraries have a good range of books on CD and in large print, as well as on the MP3 player.

WE SUPPORT
2008
NATIONAL Year
OF Reading

Arthur moves on



Arthur receives an award from Council Chief Executive Allison Fraser, at the Adult Services Shining Stars awards in 2006.

Well known to many of us, Arthur the Council's Sensory Impairment Manager is moving to the Macular Disease Society from the 1 May this year. He will lead on their Community Group Support and be their Northern Officer. That means he will continue to be involved in what's happening in our neck of the woods so we'll keep in touch.

Arthur has been a great friend to SVI, helping and supporting our development to national prominence. He says 'I've really enjoyed working with SVI and wish it all the best for the future'. A sentiment we share for and with him. Congratulations Arthur; we shall miss you.

A greener Sandwell

Sandwell Council are planning to go greener and save on precious landfill space by recycling more of what we throw away such as plastics and cardboard. They have sought the views of the Vision Access Group on what will best suit people coping with sight loss. Mary, Liz and Stuart represent SVI and meet Mike Lloyd the council's Access Officer to agree details. It's good practice at work!

Healthy hints

Are you interested in joining a group to learn more about what we can do to keep well? SVI and SAIBA are teaming up with the PCT to learn more. With the help of Emma and Helen of Cookwell and Slimwell we plan to provide a weekly event starting in early June, which will be tailored to meet our needs.

We are exploring using the Deaf Resource Centre in West Bromwich for Wednesday early evening sessions. These will include tips on healthy eating and light exercise.

Please let Bernard on 0121 525 2119 know if you're interested and we'll keep you posted.

How does your garden grow?

A pleasing and sensory outside space can be created no matter how small your garden, balcony, window box or plot of ground. Think about stimulating all of your senses to make your outside space a joy.

When planning your garden, consider:

- colour and contrast
- sound
- touch and texture
- fragrance

There are more hints and tips on how you can make the most of your garden on our website.

Have you got any gardening tips you would like to share? Get in touch, and we could publish them in the next newsletter and on our website.



Primroses brighten up the garden with vibrant yellows and purples

Congratulations to 777 hero Dave



World class athlete (and SVI member) Blind Dave Heeley has triumphed! He's achieved the triple 7; running 7 marathons on 7 continents in 7 days. Starting in the Falklands and finishing in London on the 13 April he's run over 190 gruelling miles. You're a star Dave!

'Jet lag causes the body clock to be all over the place; it's time to get up, but the body wants to sleep; quite an experience' quips Dave on nationwide radio.

Congratulations to both Dave and to his guide Mac for raising loss of sight awareness across the world in such an effective, challenging way. We owe you one Dave!

Stop press

We're still growing; the last newsletter brought another 40 members to SVI. We now have 350 members or 23% of the 1,600 people registered with sight loss in Sandwell. That's impressive; thanks for your support. We're delighted with this progress but we need to attract more members, for it's your support that gives us the strength to seek a much needed service improvement.

Membership

There's a membership form enclosed. If you're not sure you are a member, please fill in the enclosed membership form and return it to us in the self addressed envelope. Please include the envelope in which you received this newsletter. This will allow us to be sure who is returning the forms. If you need help to complete the form, please phone Bernard on 0121 525 2119.

Benefits of Membership

When you join SVI we will invite you to quarterly social meetings, with your travel costs met. This newsletter and our website are good examples of what we are doing, and more helpful activities for you are planned.

Website update

The SVI highly acclaimed website www.sandwellvisuallyimpaired.org is kept topical with in depth information of interest to all. There is even information in audio format: interviews with Blind Dave, and the Library Service talking about their mp3 player (see page 5). If you're able to visit it let us know what you think.

Feedback please

Are we meeting your needs? The editor would love to hear from you. Contact details below. Or pop your suggestions or questions in the enclosed envelope.

Congratulations to Blind Dave.

We're all impressed with Dave's recent marathon achievement. See article on page 7.

Visit our website
www.sandwellvisuallyimpaired.org

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