



Staffordshire Sight Loss

Spring Newsletter 2020

Welcome to our Spring newsletter. We hope that you and your families are all well and staying safe during this difficult time.

We set Staffordshire Sight Loss Association up back in 2017 to provide face to face services for people living with sight loss in North Staffordshire. Due to the pandemic, like all other organisations we have had to suspend delivery of face to face services for the safety of our volunteers and the community that we serve.

We are however still here if you need us, we are still delivering services, just in a different way and we will explain how this is working further on in this newsletter.

1. Some good news...

Although this is a difficult and uncertain time we would like to share some good news with you. We have recently been awarded a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund. We have been awarded £140,478 to deliver our Independence and Wellbeing project over the next 2 years. This funding means that we will be able to develop our

current services, launch some new services and make our organisation stronger and more sustainable going forward.

For those of you that have been with us from the beginning, you will know that we started out in 2017 as a group of local volunteers with an idea about starting a new charity that would provide much needed services chosen and designed by the community that we work in.

Since that time we have worked hard to bring you as many services as we could with the limited budget that we have had and we have achieved some really positive outcomes for the people that we have supported. Our social groups have grown over that time and we have also held some successful events.

This funding is a massive achievement for us as an organisation and we are committed to making this project a success. It will enable us to:

- launch our Community Hubs which will be community based drop ins where you can try and test equipment, aids and technology, seek advice, collect information or just have a coffee and chat with our volunteers
- launch a new Technology service that will support people to use equipment such as computers, phones, tablets, video magnifiers, scanners and smart speakers
- provide more social and peer support opportunities across North Staffordshire including accessible activities,
- reach more people with our Independent Living Service where we provide advice, information, help with forms, benefits, grants for equipment, housing issues plus much more

It will enable us to take all of these services out into local communities across The Staffordshire Moorlands, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent. We plan to ensure that all of these services are available at venues that are accessible to everyone in North Staffordshire. You told us that although services have traditionally been delivered in Hanley this does not work for everyone and we feel that it's time that this changed.

This project centres on the need for face to face services that obviously we can not deliver at present. We do however have a lot of work to do to set all of this up and rest assured that we are working hard during this time to ensure that once the restrictions are lifted we will be in a position to deliver these services as soon as it is reasonable to do so.

In the meantime we are delivering online and telephone based services with the support of the National Lottery and we will tell you more about these and how to access them later in this newsletter.

We want to say a huge thank you to the National Lottery Community Fund for their belief in us as an organisation and we want to thank everyone who plays the National Lottery as it is you that makes projects like this possible for charities such as ours.

Team Restructure

The funding has enabled us to hire our first staff members and as a result of this our former Chair and Founder Suzanne Roberts has been appointed as our new Service Manager. After leaving her role at the RNIB, Suzanne has worked hard over the last 3 years as a volunteer along with

the rest of the committee to set the charity up and to deliver frontline services. She will be running the charity alongside our trustees and will still be very much involved in service delivery. She is very excited about the project, her new position and what this means for the future of Staffordshire Sight Loss.

New Chair

Our restructure has also meant that we have appointed a new Chair and we are delighted to announce that Andrea Scott has taken up this role. Andrea has been involved with the charity since it began in 2017, she is a local volunteer, mum and guide dog user.

She has been a trustee involved in important decisions about the charity from day one but she has also been involved in many aspects of service delivery for the charity including helping with enquiries, managing our facebook page and organising and helping out at events.

2. Our current services

Due to the coronavirus we have had to adjust the way that we deliver our current services, for safety reasons our usual social groups have been temporarily cancelled and we are unable to visit people to provide advice and support. We are however providing the following services:

Weekly Facebook live video updates

Suzanne is recording weekly Facebook Live Video updates from the Staffordshire Sight Loss Facebook page. These are at **10.30 am each Wednesday** and she is updating on what we are doing as a charity, what other organisations are offering at this time, along with covering a variety of useful topics and chatting with guest speakers.

It is an interactive video where you can join her to just listen or you can share your ideas and thoughts, ask questions, or interact with each other in the comments section and she will read and respond to what you have to say throughout. Videos remain on the page after each event so you can catch up with these at a later date, they are also shared on our Twitter page (@SightLossStaffs)

Zoom Video Social Groups: 2pm every Monday

Zoom is a video meeting platform that has been talked about a lot in the media in recent weeks. It is a way that we can all connect through our devices via video link.

We have held our first few Video groups which started on Monday 6th April and we have had an average of 10-12 attendees each time. It has been lovely to catch up with people, to find out what people are upto and to share ideas and tips for coping with social distancing and isolation.

To join the groups you need a device such as a phone, tablet or computer that has a microphone and preferably a camera. You can access the link to the meeting on our social media pages however it is easier to access via an email link and we would recommend that you get in touch with your email address if you would like to be invited to the meeting. You do not need a Zoom account, you just click on the link and it should take you through to the meeting. Depending on how your device is set up you may need to enter a Meeting ID and password. All attendees appear in a box on the screen and we can all hear and interact with each other.

These are being held each **Monday at 2pm**

If you would like any more advice on how to join our video social groups or if you are having difficulty accessing them please get in touch.

Telephone Social Groups

We are aware that not all of our members use social media or technology and we would also love to set up some telephone social groups should you prefer to chat with others in a group over the phone.

If you would like to take part in telephone group chats please contact us so that this can be arranged as these will only go ahead if people are interested.

Monthly online audio book club

One thing that has been greatly discussed at our online groups is that lots of people are using audio books as an enjoyable way to pass the time and we have decided to hold online and if requested, telephone audio book clubs.

This is where we all listen to or read the same book and come together to talk about it at an agreed time. The book that we have chosen for the month of May is called '**Kika and me: how one extraordinary guide dog changed my world**' by **Dr Amit Patel** which has been recommended by some of our social group members and has a 5 star rating on Amazon.

We will be holding a Zoom video discussion for our first book club meeting on **Friday 29th May at 10.30am** and again we can email you the link if you get in touch with your email address. We would love to also hold a telephone group version of this event for anyone who prefers this or

who doesn't use the internet so please get in touch if you would like this and we will arrange it.

We hope you can join us, if you need any advice about how to access audio books and there are several options available, some completely free, please get in touch for advice on 07931 327018.

Telephone befriending

If groups are not for you but you would like a chat on the phone with one of our friendly volunteers please get in touch. Over the next week we will be launching our new Telephone Befriending Service. Through this we can arrange for someone to call you for a chat, this could be weekly, fortnightly or as often as you choose.

Help with shopping and picking up prescriptions

We have some lovely volunteers happy to help with collecting shopping and prescriptions. There are many other local services also happy to help with this and we will include further information on what other organisations are doing to help later in this newsletter.

Facebook closed group

We also have a closed Facebook group that you can join via our main Facebook page. Chat to others and share useful information. This is managed by our Chair Andrea.

Independent Living Service

We are still able to provide advice, information and support with all aspects of independent living albeit over the phone. Contact us if you need advice about equipment that may

help, benefits, form filling, concessions, registration, housing issues etc. If you are unsure if we can help please get in touch anyway and if we cannot help we will always try to find another service that can.

Obviously some support can be difficult to provide over the phone however we are finding ways around the challenges that we are facing. For example we have still been helping with forms where people can post them to us or we can pick them up from you whilst adhering to social distancing rules.

Also, if you do not have a specific issue that you need help with but would like to have a chat with us about the types of things that we can help with, we might be able to offer advice about something you hadn't yet considered.

3. Ways that you can support us

Although it is fantastic news that we have been awarded a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund we are very conscious that we need to continue with our fundraising efforts to ensure that once that project ends in 2 years we are able to continue those services long into the future.

All charities are struggling to raise money at the moment as fundraising events, bucket collections etc. are cancelled and we appreciate that the situation has impacted many people who would usually donate financially.

Here are a few ways that you could support us, most of which will not cost you a penny:

Donate unwanted items

Many of you are telling us that you are spending this time in lockdown having a clear out. If you have any unwanted items that you do not mind saving for us until it is safe for us to collect them then please let us know.

We usually hold charity car boot sales and sell items on Ebay and this has been a successful way for us to raise money for the charity in the past. We would appreciate all kinds of items including clothes, toys, books, handbags, shoes, ornaments and other household items

People have also in the past donated unused gift sets, chocolates and bottles of alcohol that we have been able to use for tombolas and raffles and these are always welcome too.

Amazon Smile

You can now also support us when you shop with Amazon. When you shop at the Amazon Smile webpage Amazon will make a donation to us and this is at no cost to you.

All you have to do is to shop at Amazon Smile <https://smile.amazon.co.uk/> rather than the main Amazon page and choose Staffordshire Sight Loss Association as the charity that you would like to support. All products and prices are the same as if you were shopping on the main Amazon site.

Give as you Live

Help us to raise money when you shop with 4200 leading online retailers, again at no cost to yourself. You just sign up for a free Give as you Live account at www.giveasyoulive.com and then when you shop online

access retailer websites through the Give as You Live website and you will be raising money for us for free!

You can also access great offers and voucher codes this way. If you don't shop online why not ask your friends and family to support us this way.

Thank you for continued support.

Help us by giving us your opinions and ideas

We have always been a community-led charity, we are only interested in delivering services that our community tells us that it needs and wants and our new Lottery funded Independence and Wellbeing Project has been designed using the information obtained through community engagement and our steering groups.

If you would like to contribute your ideas about what we should be doing as a charity and how we should be doing it then you can do so at one of our Steering Groups. Once we are able to, we will be holding Steering Groups in Hanley, The Staffordshire Moorlands and in Newcastle so if you would like to attend one of these groups let us know so that we can send you an invitation

In the meantime we will be holding video and telephone steering groups so please get in touch to receive an invite.

Join our Technology Steering Group

As we have mentioned, this year we will be launching a Technology Support Service that will provide people with the support that they need to use all kinds of technology. We are looking for people who want to help us to develop this service by joining our Technology Steering Group.

The idea of the group is that you can share with us how you use technology in your day to day life so that we can use this information to develop the new service. You may want to do some research for us or test out products or apps and report back with your findings.

If you have an interest in technology whatever your level of experience or expertise please get in touch to be invited to this group, we would value your input. We are going to launch this group via the Zoom Video Meeting platform until it is safe for us all to meet in person.

Our first Video Technology group will be held on **Friday 1st May at 10.30am**, please get in touch if you are interested and we will send you the link that you will need to access the meeting

4. Services provided by other organisations

Many organisations have started to provide services specifically to support people through the Coronavirus pandemic while others have had to change the way that they deliver services so that their support can continue at this time.

Here is a summary of what some organisations are offering but if you require more information please do not hesitate to get in touch

Some useful numbers for if you need:

- food
- a prescription
- someone to walk your dog
- emergency repairs

- gas or electricity meter top up
- to speak to someone

If you live in Stoke-on-Trent the COVID-19 Support Network has been set up

Website:

<https://corona19.vast.org.uk/individuals-requesting-support/>

telephone: 0800 561 5610

open 7 days a week from 9am till 5pm

If you live in Newcastle under Lyme

For non-Urgent support call 01782 742 800

Website:

<https://covid19.realisefoundation.org.uk/individuals-requesting-support/>

Open 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday. 9am -4pm Saturday and Sunday.

Staffordshire County Council- for the rest of Staffordshire

call 0300 111 8050, open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and for emergencies at weekends

National emergency helpline

0800 028 8327

Registered Charity: 1176919

size 18 font

Update Talking Newspaper

Weekly online editions of the talking newspaper are available via Soundcloud or on their website:

<http://www.updatestoke.org/>

They will also be sending out their usual edition via USB shortly

Father Hudson's telephone befriending

For over 55s- please get in touch for a referral into this service

An update from Royal Stoke University Hospital Eye Clinic

The Eye Clinic Help desk is currently open every Monday, please leave them a message if there is no answer and someone will get back to you as soon as possible

Contact with the help desk is currently only available over the phone and not in person, tel 01782 674332

At the time of writing this newsletter clinics are going ahead at reduced numbers to ensure that there are as few people as possible in the clinic at any time.

Low vision appointments for magnifying aids have been suspended until further notice. If you call to leave a message about a Low Vision appointment you will be contacted once this service is back up and running.

5. Other news

Poetry evening in Leek

We would like to say a huge thank you to our volunteer Gareth Knott who held a Poetry evening at the Foxlowe

Centre in Leek in January and raised a fantastic £402 for the charity.

The night was a huge success and was enjoyed by all, there was a variety of subject matter covered, some of it comedic, some of it touching and some of it dramatic.

Also a big thank you to everyone else who helped to make the evening a success including Mrs Patricia Knott and members of the Leek U3A creative writing group.

If you would like any support with setting up a fundraising event (when this is possible) please get in touch, fundraising packs available

6. Our contact details:

Telephone: 07931 327018- call, text or whatsapp message

Email: info@staffssightloss.onmicrosoft.com

Or get in touch via our social media pages:

- Search for Staffordshire Sight Loss on **Facebook**; or
- **@SightLossStaffs** on twitter

If you require this newsletter in an alternative format please let us know.

Also please note: if you are receiving this newsletter on a USB stick or CD it does not need to be returned.

7. Social group information

Finally, we regularly have guest speakers at our social groups, sometimes speakers provide information for attendees to take away but these are not always provided in a format that is accessible for everyone.

At the request of the group we are adding an extra section to our newsletter to include useful information provided at groups so that you have it in a format that is accessible for you

Social group on 26th February: Trading Standards

Luke from Trading Standards kindly came to talk to the group about how to avoid scams and informed us that unfortunately 3 million people fall victim to scams each year.

Useful numbers that he gave us are:

- Register with **Telephone preference Services (TPS)** to reduce unwanted sales calls. You can register for free on 0345 070 0707 or go to www.tpsonline.org.uk
- Register with the **Mailing Preference service (MPS)** to reduce unwanted mail. You can register for free on 0207 291 3310 or go to www.mpsonline.org.uk
- Register with the **Fundraising Preference Service (FPS)** to reduce unwanted charity contacts. You can register for free on 0300 303 3517 or go to www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/the-fundraising-preference-service
- If you need advice or want to report a scam, contact the **Citizen Advice Service Helpline** on 0345 040506

Social Group on 11th March: Stoke-on-Trent Adult Learning team

Karen from Stoke on Trent City Council's Adult Learning Team came to talk to us in March about the variety of training courses that they have available.

Obviously due to the current situation courses are not taking place at present however once the situation improves you can find out about available courses at www.stoke.gov.uk or by calling 01782 234775. The Adult Learning team is based at One Smithfield, Leonard Coates Way in Hanley.