

The Sight & Hearing Service Newsletter for Visually Impaired People

***Technology and Equipment Issue
January - April 2015***

Welcome to the second edition of the newsletter which is recorded by members of the team so you can get to know us by our voices. This print copy is taken from the audio recordings and is also available via our website at: www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/sightandhearing. The audio version is available on CD by request.

Our mission statement

'We are the Sight and Hearing service. Our customers are people who are blind, partially sighted, deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind. Our goal is to promote independence, equality and inclusion by providing a personalised service which will enable a person to have choice and control over their life. We will do this by using our specialist knowledge and skills to work with the person, their carer, family, community and services to achieve a positive outcome for them.'

What's in this issue?

Hello and welcome to the Sight and Hearing service Newsletter for visually impaired people in Tower Hamlets. My name is Jo Bell and I have a rundown of what you will find in this second edition of the Sight and Hearing Service Newsletter released January 2015.

Coming up we have:

- Page 3** John Osborne talking about VocalEyes;
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- Page 10** I'll be telling you about Tower Hamlets Health Trainers, and finally;
- Page 11** Iain Birrell has some handy top tips.

We hope you find this edition enjoyable and informative. Please do contact us with any feedback or queries and let us know what you would like to hear in future editions. The team can be contacted on **0207 364 6656** or email: **sightandhearing@towerhamlets.gov.uk**

Now it's back to John.



VocalEyes

Hello, this is John Osborne welcoming you to the second edition of our newsletter. Many thanks to those of you who have given us feedback.

What I wanted to talk about today was audio description. Now, I've enjoyed this for many years. I've been to lots of shows and I find it invaluable. Maybe you've never tried it. There is an organisation called VocalEyes and their telephone number is **0207 375 1043**. They are continuing to look at what they can audio describe. They started with one or two musicals and now they are building a big sort of 'circle' of different types of events that they can audio describe.

With audio description, you only pay half price for you and one additional person, so you buy your ticket at half price and then your friend or whoever comes with you can also go at half price. They will also invite you sometimes to meet the people that are in the show and will show you all the various things that are on the stage. I have found this to be very useful and we often get seats very close to the front. I would encourage you to try it.



Beyond Barriers

Hello, my name is Ashrafia Choudhury. I'm the Chair of Beyond Barriers. Beyond Barriers is a user led organisation for blind and visually impaired people living in the borough of Tower Hamlets. We meet twice a month; every second Thursday and last Thursday of the month. Every second Thursday of the month we have a guest speaker who comes in and tells us information about what's happening in the borough. On the last Thursday of the month we usually go on outings such as the theatre, cinema, gallery, walks...we will consider any suggestions from the group. Also, throughout the month we also get together and do activities such as bike riding; going to

the gym; we go to the tennis; we have coffee mornings; we have also been doing a tea dance.

For more information you can contact me on **0795 651 0008**. My email address is **ashrafia1@btinternet.com**. Many thanks.



Sight and Information Day

Hello, this is Kathy Kohler, the team manager of the Sight & Hearing Service.

Last time we spoke, we were publicising the Sight and Information Day. This was an event that we held at the end of September, it was fantastically successful, and I want to say a big thank you to all of you who attended.

We were absolutely delighted with the number of people who came and there were people from all over the place; people from Morpeth School, some of our service users who we had not seen for quite a long time, and others that we are involved with, also staff from other organisations and lots of staff here from the building we work in.

On the day we had stalls held by Compass Wellbeing counselling service, our own team did a stall, the Children's Sensory Team; Telorian; Real; RLSB; a whole range of different agencies and in addition we had Khin, who is an Optometrist who actually did eye health care checks, which were very popular.

We got brilliant feedback afterwards and lots of people said they want it to be a regular event, at least annual, and we are looking forward to holding another Sight and Information day in conjunction with Public Health.

So thanks again to everyone and all the best!



Living With Sight Loss Course

Hello, my name is Carol Excell and I am a Senior Rehabilitation Practitioner in the Sight & Hearing Service. I want to tell you about the Living with Sight Loss Course. This is a course which is run by Action for Blind People.

Over a period of 6 weeks, different topics were presented by a variety of speakers who spoke about how their service could be used by visually impaired people. An example of topics covered included travel services, new technology useful to visually impaired people, employment services and emotional wellbeing to name a few.

Those who attended came from Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham and found it refreshing to meet with other visually impaired people who had experiences in common, tips, advice and many amusing stories to share with each other.

The course was run in March of this year and was a huge success with all who attended saying how informative, positive and extremely useful they had found the course.

The course was run for one day per week from 10am to 4pm with participants bringing their own lunches or eating at a variety of places nearby. Tea, coffee and biscuits were provided.

The next course, which is highly recommended for all visually impaired people, will run again in March 2015, so if you think you would like to attend, please contact the Sight & Hearing Service on **020 7364 6656** or email us at **sightandhearing@towerhamlets.gov.uk** or text on **07960 862 033** quoting “**Living with Sight Loss Course**”.

Editor: Please note that transport is not provided.



Rehab Officer Role

Hello this is Chanelle Joseph here, Rehab Officer in the Sight & Hearing Service and I'm here to tell you a bit about what I do and what is involved in being a Rehab Officer for visually impaired people in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

The aim of a Rehab Officer's work is to promote the independence of visually impaired people, reduce risks related to vision impairment and to help people make the most of any remaining vision they have.

When it comes to independence, we as Rehab Officers want to help visually impaired people do as much as they can for themselves, so that they don't always have to rely on someone else for everyday tasks. For example, if your visual impairment makes you worry about falling over and travelling outdoors on your own, then we can work with you to teach you to use safe ways of getting about and using a white cane to protect you from accidents when you travel. This area of work is called orientation and mobility training; it can include learning routes to the GP or shops, it can also include learning safe ways to use buses and trains or practising crossing roads.

In Tower Hamlets Sight & Hearing Service you are lucky to have a number of Rehab Officers with over forty years' experience collectively, working with people with all types of visual impairment. Orientation and mobility training is just one part of what we do, but there is so much more, which you will find out in future newsletters. So do stay tuned and let us know what else you are interested in hearing about.

Bye for now.



Sensory Equipment

Hi, my name is Mary and I work for the Sight & Hearing Service. We have a range of equipment that might make your day to day tasks easier.

Are you having difficulty making a cup of tea without overfilling the cup and scalding yourself? A liquid level indicator is a device that alerts you to when your cup is full. It has two settings, so can be used not only for filling a cup with water but also to add milk, if you desire. Then rinse and dry with a soft cloth. The liquid level indicator also has a magnet on it so you can pop it on the fridge door and never forget where it is.

Are you having problems because of poor lighting? This might include reading your mail, your favourite magazine or sitting down to dinner and not being able to see your meal properly. We may be able to provide task lighting to enable you to enjoy these activities.

Getting up for work, study or to get the kids ready is hard enough, but at this time of year it's an added drag, with the dark, cold, mornings. We have a range of talking timepieces which will ensure you manage to meet and maintain these important commitments in your life.

In order to take advantage of the range of equipment we have, you will first need to have an assessment and meet our eligibility criteria. Once this has been done, one of the team will show you how to use the equipment safely and effectively. Contact Duty on **0207 364 6656**, Monday to Friday, 9am-1pm if you feel you would benefit from an assessment.



Penfriend

Hello, I'm Azima Khatun, one of the Rehabilitation Officers in the Sight & Hearing Service. Today I wanted to talk to you about the Penfriend, which is an audio labeller. It enables people with a visual impairment to easily record their own identification labels for everyday objects. It's extremely versatile and can be used to identify music, films, toys, toiletries, kitchen items, food and clothing using the special laundry labelling pack.

It's quite simple to use; you would place a label on the item that needs to be identified, hold down the record button on the Penfriend, touch the label and record a message. To play back, you would simply touch the label with your Penfriend and listen.

The Penfriend is available from the RNIB and Amazon.



Smartphones and Apps for People with Visual Impairments

Hi this is Rhona, Social Worker in the Sight & Hearing Service. Today I would like to talk to you about useful smartphones and 'apps' for people with visual impairments.

Smartphones have modernised how we communicate with each other and transformed the market for people with visual impairments. People with visual impairments may require text-to-speech support, screen magnification or colour contrast to assist with using technology. Smartphones today can meet requirements such as adjustable contrast and font size, large display screens and Braille display phones.

Smartphones assist the visually impaired user with everyday tasks to include banking, shopping, and scheduling appointments. They also have many useful features to manage

your day, such as taking notes, checking emails, recording meetings and they also offer a GPS navigation system for mobility and local information.

The iPhone handset by Apple has a built-in screen reader called VoiceOver and a screen magnification feature called Zoom. The later iPhone models have a feature called Siri which is a voice activated personal assistant. This allows you to ask specific questions, for example, “what is the weather like in Birmingham today?” and it will provide you with the answer.

There are a large range of smartphones available to suit individuals’ needs from top of the range to simple handsets that range in price. Most mobile phone companies provide information and demonstration about suitable smartphones.

Secondly, ‘apps’ which is short for ‘applications’, are computer software designed for mobile devices such as smartphones. They allow you to perform a wide range of tasks more efficiently to meet individuals’ needs.

Apps range in price from free to over £50 for specialist programmes. There are useful apps for people with visual impairments that you can download onto your phone such as:

- **Money Reader**, which costs £4.99. This tells you the amount of money you have when placed in front of the camera.
- **Blind Navigator**; this app is free. This app has several functions to include message and voice reader, colour identifier, appointment scheduler and GPS navigator.
- **BrailleBack**: This app is free. This app helps blind users to make use of Braille devices on their phone. It works together with the **TalkBack** app which is an accessibility

device that helps blind and visually impaired users interact with their devices.

That's all from me today.

Editor: To keep up to date with useful apps for visual impairment we recommend you check out RNIB's App of the Month.



Health Trainers

Hello. This is Jo Bell and I've got some information to share with you about the Health Trainer Service. This is a free service to anyone who lives in Tower Hamlets who would benefit from some guidance and motivational support around healthier living. This could be around fitness, healthy eating, stopping smoking or improving emotional and mental wellbeing.

At your initial assessment with your Health Trainer you will be asked some questions about your current lifestyle and you'll set some goals to achieve the changes that you want to make. They will take your height and your weight and at the Osmani Centre they have a special scale which calculates body mass index, fat percentage, muscle mass and bone density, among other things. You can go back to see your Health Trainer every 6 weeks or so to keep track of your progress.

After your assessment you will be able to access the full range of activities that the Health Trainer service provides. These include things like gym, sauna and swimming sessions, walking groups, gardening, healthy eating sessions, yoga, Zumba and daily lunchtime meditation at the London Buddhist Centre. The activities are either free or very low cost. There are four Health Trainer centres in the borough and they each have their own timetable of activities which are updated every three months.

The centres are: the **Osmani Trust**, the **Bromley-by-Bow Centre**, the **Stifford Centre** and the **Poplar and Limehouse Health and Wellbeing Network**. If you would like to find out more, you can contact the Health Trainers on **0208 709 9845** or ask your GP to refer you.



Iain's Top Tips

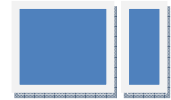
Hi, welcome to this edition's top tips.

- **How many times do you get in the shower and reach for the shampoo, only to discover it's the conditioner? Try putting an elastic band round one bottle to distinguish it from the other.** The same technique can be used to tell the difference between salt and pepper grinders, or if you're like me and buy store brand ketchup etc., you can use it to tell the difference between ketchup, brown sauce and mayonnaise. Using different size bands can also help you to differentiate between more than two bottles at a time.
- **Maximise your residual vision by sitting with your back to the light source, such as the window or lamp.** This can improve your reading and dining experience, especially important as it gets darker outside during the winter.
- **Do you carry cash when you go out, but feel anxious about bringing it out in public to pay for things?** Try sorting your money before you go out, either by using different compartments in your wallet or purse or putting it into different pockets. That way you only have to take out what you need when you need it.

Well, that's it for this edition's top tips. See you next time. Ciao!



This is John back on microphone. Thanks for listening. We hope that you've enjoyed our newsletter and we look forward to your feedback. Happy New Year to you all.



What is the Sight and Hearing Service?

The Sight and Hearing Service helps anyone who is deaf, blind, who has a hearing loss, visual loss or a dual sensory loss. To access the services people must be over 18 years of age and live in Tower Hamlets.

- We want this newsletter to contain information that you want to know about. Please contact us with any suggestions or topics that you would like us to cover.
- Would you like to be first in line to receive future editions? To subscribe, please get in touch with your contact details and preferred format.

Contact us

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