

Vision North Somerset Newsletter

Reg Charity 1165364

November 20

Celebrating 45 years of being here for you (1975 – 2020)

What important things happened in 1975?

Margaret Thatcher defeated Edward Heath in the Conservative Party leadership election, the comedy film Monty Python and the Holy Grail and Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody' were released, former racing driver Graham Hill, 46, died in an air crash, the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act came into force - but, of course, the **most** important thing that happened that year was that Vision North Somerset was born (as Woodspring Association for Blind People).

From our early days in a couple of rooms in Roselawn, next to the Town Hall for a peppercorn rent, moving to the Lauriston Hotel with a dedicated resource centre and onto Neva Road in 1999, we have continued to offer counsel, support and practical help to visually impaired people in North Somerset.

Many of you will recall the landmark developments as our charity strived to provide the best possible service for local people experiencing sight loss. In 1997 we took over the local authority rehabilitation service which had previously been provided from Bristol and in 1999 we began to deliver the registration service for people who have recently lost their sight. We are also proud of our voluntary activities and greatly value

our team of volunteers who help us to provide our social clubs, IT support, benefit applications and much more.

We are proud that Vision North Somerset has been here throughout the years to help our Service Users, particularly during this very difficult year of 2020. Sadly, a big party is not possible, but we hope you agree that our achievements are something special to celebrate in our 45th year.

A message from Chairman Ian Parker and the VNS Trustees

The coronavirus pandemic has presented challenges for many of us – not least the staff and volunteers at Vision.

Thank you to Nikki, Anna, Julie, Polly, Jo, Dave, Michele, Martin and Julian who, under the committed leadership of Nina, have managed to keep our service running during these difficult times. We are particularly grateful to the volunteers who have changed from their usual roles to provide telephone support to our Service Users.



The Trustees and I could not be more proud of them all, and grateful that they have achieved so much, selflessly and with good humour, while also dealing with the effects of this crisis on themselves and their own families.

We know the staff have greatly missed the face to face contact that they usually have with each other and with you, our Service Users; however, they have been busy working from home, keeping in touch and providing telephone support and, where necessary, a doorstep service has helped to meet the

most urgent needs. Getting to grips with technology – learning how to link home to office, learning how to organise virtual staff meetings and trying to keep as many people as possible informed via social media has been a huge challenge – and they have had to figure all this out for themselves on top of their usual roles.

Despite the difficulties the team has also found time to be innovative and creative. They have instigated a new audio telephone book club, a new telephone social club and discussion groups (see the video on our website) and these have been welcomed and a great success with our Service Users.

September saw major changes with staff coming back to work in the office. Of course, we have to make sure it is safe and we are not yet able to fully get back to the way things were before lockdown. Meeting people face to face is not without its risks and we have carried out a very careful risk assessment to ensure staff and Service Users alike are kept safe.

Vision North Somerset is definitely open! Whatever your need please phone first to discuss the best and safest way that the team can help you. The staff cannot see you without an appointment so please do not visit Neva Road unannounced.

For the time being our social clubs will remain closed – but as soon as it is safe for groups to meet, we'll let you know. We are committed to following government guidelines and no doubt things will change in the future. Don't hesitate to ring if you have any questions, the staff will be happy to explain new procedures and how we plan to keep people safe. We will post changes on our website and, if you use social media, you can follow us on Facebook.

Thank you David

David Godly, Service User, volunteer, Trustee and friend to many at VNS has decided that the time has come for him to step down as a Vision Trustee after many years of service.



David's commitment, life experience and unique perspective as a visually impaired person have enabled him to make a valued contribution as a member of our Executive Committee. He has helped to shape our charity and supported its development into the wide reaching and vibrant organisation that we have today. An organisation that has at its heart the needs of the people who use our services; people like David himself, with his first-hand experience of living with sight loss.

As a Trustee, David has supported the purchase of our premises at Neva Road, faced challenging times in managing significant budget cuts in our Council contract back in 2013 and shared the delight of our Big Lottery award in 2018.

In 2005 David won the National Volunteer of the Year Award. He enjoyed a trip to London and was presented with his award on stage at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, by actress Sally Lindsay from Coronation Street.

David would say that even this exciting event was surpassed when he was presented to Her Majesty the Queen in 2007, when he was helping at our exhibition stand at the Winter Gardens.

Many of our Service Users know David as a volunteer and a friend; he has been a befriender, run a computer club, helped with fundraising and much more. Always willing to do that bit extra – David's home became the substitute Drop-in Centre whilst we were undergoing refurbishment at Neva Road and David and his wife Jenny welcomed old friends and new for coffee and a chat.

In recognition of David's enormous contribution to VNS, the Trustees agreed that a room in Neva Road should be named after him – and are delighted that in future we will refer to our David Godly Resource Centre. Thank you David for supporting Vision North Somerset and being such a vital part of our team.

Welcome Martin!

Just to introduce myself, I'm Martin Rees, the new Rehabilitation Officer and I started at Vision in April 2020. I've worked with Nina and other Vision staff members before so I'm not entirely new. The team is fantastic and it's great to be on board. I've had a varied 20 plus years as a rehab officer, from working at RNIB Bristol for 8 years to being self-employed for 12 years and even working in and even a different country (Wales)!



The rehabilitation service here at Vision is designed to help people to stay, or become, independent and provide any training or information that may help this process. We try to help with everyday problems people might be experiencing with their visual impairment. This could mean anything from marking microwave oven dials with raised coloured dots so people can

feel or see the dial, to white cane training and travelling outdoors on buses and trains.

We tend to look at three broad areas:

Mobility training

- Problems getting around the home e.g.: stairs / steps
- Problems with getting around outdoors e.g.: lack of confidence, crossing roads, locating kerb edges
- Sighted guide training for family / carers
- Possible use of white canes

Independent living skills

- Making hot / cold drinks
- Using microwave oven
- Using cooker
- Using washing machine
- Marking equipment with coloured raised dots

Communication

- Telling the time
- Using the telephone
- Reading and writing
- Using magnifiers

We can also look at how to use colour contrast to best effect. If you are interested in computers, ipads and iphones and would like advice or training then our dedicated IT expert Jo Healy is here for you to consult.

We have a resource centre full of gadgets that people can visit to try (by appointment only).

We can also refer to many of the other services that Vision provides, and others that we don't provide, such as adaptation with the home and care packages.

The above are just examples of what we might be able to do to help increase or maintain a level of independence. It is by no means exhaustive and will depend on the individual as to what we do. So, I'll be out and about visiting as soon as we're allowed!

Nikki's year so far

For me, as Vision's Registration & Equipment Officer, I had a bit of a steep learning curve when we went into lockdown. Most of March was spent cancelling home visits and arranging exactly how I was going to work from home. As many of you who have met me over the years know, technology is not always my strong point, but I have to say that it has certainly saved the day in these last 6 months!



As lockdown progressed, many eye clinics were cancelled and postponed and so I received less referrals and new eye registrations from both the Bristol Eye Hospital and Weston General Hospital. This meant that I could work with my colleagues on actively telephoning many of our older Service Users and talking through how they were coping with, not only the practical issues of lockdown, but with the social isolation that it brought. I had so many lovely conversations with people who have recently used our services and with people who haven't needed any input in 10 years or so.

For me and my family it has been a very crazy time. Over the course of a weekend, me and my husband had to arrange the house so that both of us and our 3 school age children could all live together for 24 hours a day and come out the other end unscathed! But 1 drum-kit, 7 chickens, a home-gym, 5 work-stations, 3 school classrooms and umpteen cakes later we are thankfully all still here to tell the tale. My sincere thanks go to our wonderfully supportive Chief Executive, Nina, and all the staff at Vision North Somerset, and my thoughts go out to so many of our service users who have gone through such very difficult times. I look forward to meeting with many of you again soon.

Superb IT learning.

Jo provides our Technology Advice service, set up as part of our In Sight, In Touch project funded by the Lottery, has had a busy year. Jo, who is herself visually impaired, provides a much-needed service of 'digital inclusion' for our Service Users.



Jo says – “The Technology Advice service has been busy since the start of lockdown. I could no longer go out to visit people at home or see them at Neva Road, but I have been giving advice and teaching by telephone, email and video link.

For example: John wanted to be able to read books again, but could no longer read print. After discussing the available options with John and his wife, Diane, they decided to buy an Amazon Echo. I talked Diane through setting up the device and sent advice about which voice commands to use. As they were already subscribed to the Audible book library, a talking book

service, John is now able to access books again and has been able to join the telephone book club we are running.

If you would like advice by telephone please call Vision North Somerset and leave a message for me, I will get back to you as soon as I can.

If you would like to investigate other services we provide then please visit our website, or give us a ring.”

Another service set up as part of our In Sight, In Touch project - Connect Me: Staying connected in uncertain times

Since the first lockdown in March we have been exploring ways of keeping our social groups and Service Users connected in these difficult times.



Vision is also looking at new ways of helping people who have experienced sight loss to connect by phone. In the next couple of months, we will be setting up general chat and catch up phone calls for small groups. If you would like to connect with other people in your area who have experienced sight loss for a friendly and informal chat, without having to travel, please contact Polly at the office or email connectme@visionns.org.uk

Vision is now using a new telephone conferencing package that rings participants in the safety and comfort of their own home. This allows small groups to have a chat together by phone. It's easy to use as all that is necessary is for the group members to answer the phone at the pre-arranged time. It also doesn't cost participants. Since we first started using this system, we have supported the Portishead social group run by Pam Johnson

and friends to meet monthly by phone. This fun and friendly group has met for a chat and a catch up right from the very start of lockdown. Many have found it a really useful way of keeping in contact during the pandemic.

In the same way, The VNS book club has met monthly by phone since March. During this time the group has read audiobooks such as Chocolat by Joanne Harris, Life of Pi by Yann Martel, Driving over Lemons by Chris Stewart, non-fiction books by Bill Bryson and many more.

The audiobooks have been supplied by Calibre audio book library. The book group has eight enthusiastic members meeting monthly by phone to discuss books and have a catch up.

We don't want the current group to get any bigger but, if there is enough interest, we look forward to starting another group in the near future.

Please contact Polly if you would like more details. It doesn't matter where you live – if you enjoy books this could be for you.



Congratulations and thanks to Aileen

This year we are delighted to celebrate our volunteer Aileen who has dedicated over 30 years of volunteering to our charity. Aileen has been leading our social group at the Good Companion Club and caring for members in an outstanding volunteer role. She goes above and beyond to make sure everyone is welcomed and included. Thank you, Aileen, from all of us.

Thanks to all of our volunteers

The coronavirus pandemic has meant that many of our volunteers have not been able to carry out their usual face to face roles. Many have helped to maintain contact with our Service Users by telephone to provide some social contact and to make sure people have what they need to stay safe. Thanks to all for staying on board.

Another very important occasion this year

The 75th anniversary of the end of WW11 – when we have seen some very special commemorations on VE Day and VJ Day. We salute all our veterans. VNS Trustee John Brice, himself a veteran, is active in veterans' associations, including Blind Veterans UK. John says – *“I value the help and support I receive. There are times in life when we all need a helping hand and, if you are an ex-serviceman or woman, your past service will come to aid your future.”*

It is the same camaraderie as when you were serving and helped comrades – remember? Service Users, their family or friends can contact John via VNS and he will be happy to put them in touch with the appropriate organisation to offer assistance.

As John reminds us – *“The lives and privileges we enjoy today are by courtesy of those from many countries and religions, or none, who fought, suffered, were injured or died, in uniform or otherwise, during World War 2. The world today is far from perfect, but we are fortunate to have the legacy we have been gifted.”*

Funding Appeal

Please read our Annual Appeal explaining the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the finances of our charity. Please do help if you can, even small amounts make a difference. Whilst celebrating our 45th year – we want to make sure we continue to help people for many more years into the future.

Open for business!

We are all looking forward to hearing from you.

- Nina Farr – Chief Executive
- Martin Rees – Rehabilitation
- Nikki Derrick - Registration
- Anna Flint - Advisor
- Julie Lynham – Advisor
- Jo Healy- Technology
- Polly Price– Connecting People
- Michele Blake – Volunteers
- Dave Raby – Hearing Loss
- Julian Beale – Finance and Administration

Stay Safe – with best wishes from all at Vision North Somerset.

Vision North Somerset

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