

# News & Views

Spring 2024



*Family Group  
10th Anniversary.*



*George and Usef meet  
Sarah Owen M.P.*



*Tony receiving his  
award at Friday Club.*



*Lisa, Jess, Will and Clare with  
Bedfordshire Magistrates' cheque.*



*Professional Vision Services  
Flitwick drop-in day.*



*Family Group – volunteer helps  
with tactile Snakes & Ladders.*



*Youth Forum joins Guide Dogs UK  
cookery class.*

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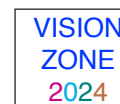
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# Message from the Operations Manager

Clare Anderson

It's been a cold and wet few months but I am hoping this Spring edition of Sight Concern Bedfordshire's News and Views is welcomed alongside some sunshine and the beauty of nature taking on its spring blooms.

As always, we can't thank everyone that supports us enough, the wonderful team at Clapham Methodist Church have chosen us as their charity of the year and put on a fantastic coffee morning to raise funds for us. The Sharnbrook Learning For Pleasure Group have been fundraising for us also and are often in touch with a new donation. These donations really do support the fantastic work we deliver across

Bedfordshire and Luton. If you are from an organisation that would like to know more about us for becoming your Charity of the year, please do not hesitate to contact us for a chat.

I am always walking through the offices to find thank you cards on display from our clients to the whole team and individual members of staff for their support whether they work in the Low Vision Clinic, one of our Visual and Sensory Impairment Advisors, or a team member who has answered the phone or sent some information out. So, this is really a thank you for the 'thank you's'! It is lovely to hear from you and your kind words, we love the work we do and hearing about your positive experiences.

You will read on in this edition that one of our very valued team members is retiring – Usef the wonder dog! Usef is our VI Champion Georges Guide Dog who is now taking his well earned retirement, but it goes without saying he will forever be part of the Sight Concern Bedfordshire Team. Thank you, Usef, for all your hard work, enjoy your rest.



*Clare and Usef.*

## Jessica Gets Onboard with Sailability

How often do you do something for the first time? Not often for most of us, as adult life is full of things that need to be done with little space for a new interest.

Sailing has been suggested to me quite a few times over the years and for many reasons I have not found the time.

Well... I found the time and a place and a driver and a friend to go sailing!

So, after a bit of arranging days that suited everyone, we all jumped in the car and headed towards Caldicot near Milton Keynes to a lovely lake where Sailability Milton Keynes meet two or three times a week.

This amazing community group have made sailing really accessible. We started our morning with a chat with some of the volunteers who described the two types of boat they had. A small Trimaran, a slim boat with outriggers and a single tall sail and a dinghy which is a more traditional boat shaped boat, also with one sail. We then filled in the appropriate forms over a cup of tea and cake (all provided) in the sun outside the clubhouse while the boats were being set up.

When it was my turn, I was guided down to the slipway where the Trimaran was on the ramp out of the water on a sort of frame with wheels. I was able to familiarise myself with where i was to sit and where ropes were on dry land before I got in which was very helpful.

Once in the boat I was pushed out onto the water, and we floated! I obviously knew it would float but the feeling of going from rumbling down the concrete to almost weightlessness was quite special.



*A photo of the volunteers getting the boat, with Jessica on board, into the water.*

I had a lovely volunteer who came out with me, he sat on a mat strung between the main body of the boat and the left outrigger. I sat on a seat which was only an inch or two off the floor of the boat and my legs were stretched out in front. I had full control of the steering which was a metal rod with a curved handle that is right in front of you. To turn the boat left, you move the handle to the right and to turn right, you move the handle to the left, luckily, I caught on quickly.

We had to catch the wind to move across the water by having the wind come from the side and so there was a lot of very slow lefts and rights to start with and this continued long enough for the land team to send out the emergency power boat to tow me into the wind!



Once we found some wind it was wonderful! It was so quiet and so smooth. I trailed my fingers in the water, and I could feel how fast we were going and found that it was surprisingly warm. After a short while I tried finding the right spot where the wind is fastest, without assistance, which was a challenge.

*A close up of Jessica on the water steering the boat.*

I was sailing for just over an hour which went by so quickly. I didn't want it to end, I wanted to sail to a new location and have a coffee and then sail some more but sadly my dream had to wait. We went back to shore where the boat was pulled back up the slipway where I could get out and was guided back to the clubhouse to share my FIRST experience of sailing.

You can email Sailability on [sailabilitymk@gmail.com](mailto:sailabilitymk@gmail.com) for more information.

The first session is free and after that it's £10 per session. If you want to try sailing or want to get back into sailing the wonderful people at Sailability Milton Keynes will make the experience a very memorable one.

## Fabulous Fundraisers

Staff member Lisa and Trustee David joined Clapham Methodist Church for their Coffee Morning on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> February.

It was a jammed packed morning with stalls including: Barain Buys, CDs Books and Puzzles, Cakes and a Raffle. There was a great turnout, with lots of visitors and whopping £455 was raised.

Clapham Methodist Church has a social committee (Diane, Rosemary, Peggy, Jady, Clare, Carolyn, Sue, Helen and Maggie) who jointly organise coffee mornings, concerts and other events to raise money for local charities.

We are lucky enough to be the church's chosen charity for two years and received a donation of £200 that was raised at the Christmas Carol Service.

We would like to thank everyone that nominated us, and for all the hard work that has already gone into fundraising for us!



*Photo shows stall holders, tea makers and organisers from Clapham Methodist Church.*

# Moorfield Patient Focus and Support Group

In December, Kathie and Gill from the SCB Low Vision Team were invited to the Moorfields Patient Support Group at King's House, Amptill.

The group is organised and hosted by Steve, the Moorfields Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO).

We enjoyed a delicious two course Christmas meal in the fabulous company of patients, eye clinic staff and volunteers (*picture below*).

The group is held regularly every few months and hosts various guest speakers, including George, our own Visual Impairment Champion, who give informative talks about different eye conditions and available support.

Further information from Steve Bewley either in person at the eye clinic or via email at:

[ECLOMoorfields@bedfordhospital.nhs.uk](mailto:ECLOMoorfields@bedfordhospital.nhs.uk)



# A much loved member of our team has retired

A much loved member of our team has retired today - Usef the wonder dog, our VI Champion George's guide dog. Usef will be hanging up his harness and is considering taking up golf, which would involve three of his favourite things – walking, balls, and of course food in the club house afterwards!

Usef is continuing to live with George and his family for his well-earned retirement. Thank you Usef the wonder dog for your loyal service and waggy tail as well as keeping George safe on his travels! George is now on the waiting list for a new member of the team. Updates to follow. You can still find George out and about across Bedfordshire at our outreach events.



*Puppy Usef.*



*Usef on the corner spot at Kenilworth Road, ready to take a Premiership corner for the Hatters.*



*Usef outside SCB's office looking up at George wearing very smart Cocoon Eyeshades (available from Low Vision clinic).*



*Close up of Usef's face looking very happy during a 'Take on 250' sponsored walk last year.*



## Upcoming Events

Our Visually Impaired Champion George and his team are out and about across the county this Spring for more fun meeting you all. Come along to our stand at the following free events for information and advice about services and living aids to support blind and partially sighted people. Please drop by and chat with us, we'd love to meet you!

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> April – Asda's in Dunstable**, Court Drive, Dunstable LU5 4JD from 10am – 3.30pm, fund raising and awareness raising.

### ***Optelec Vision Zone events in April:***

**Monday 15<sup>th</sup> April** – Vision Zone Luton at The Olive Tree Church, 42 Blenheim Crescent, Luton LU3 1HB from 10am – 2pm

**Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April** – Vision Zone Biggleswade at The Weatherley Centre, Eagle Farm Road, Biggleswade SG18 8JH from 10am – 2pm

At the Optelec Vision Zone events, as well as meeting Sight Concern, you can see specialist low vision equipment supplier Optelec demonstrating their latest magnification equipment and giving you the chance to get hands-on too.

Also, there will be stands from Age UK, Blind Veterans, RNIB, Synapptic and Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service.

Also, Sight Concern is joining many other local support organisations at free coffee morning drop-in sessions organised by East Bedford Primary Care Network at Christ the King Church Hall, Harrowden Road, Bedford, MK42 0SP from 10am – 12pm on the following dates:

**Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May and Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June.**

You will be able to access free support and information, or you can just pop in for a chat, or a free cup of coffee/tea and biscuits. These events are usually on the first Thursday of each month.

Keep an eye on our social media channels for news on other events.

We hope to see you at one or more of these days out and about around the county!

# VisionZone 2024

enhanced  
vision

Freedom  
Scientific

Optelec

SCHWEIZER

## Solutions for Low Vision

Would you like to find out more about assistive technology, Support, Services, Groups and much more!

Our Vision Zone events bring together a variety of excellent services and charities covering your local area.

No matter what your sight loss condition we are here for you. Whether it's just to gain knowledge or hands on experience of new technologies, entry is free to our events, and our friendly staff will greet you with a warm welcome.

**Monday 15<sup>th</sup> April – 10am to 2pm**

**The Olive Tree Church, 42-46 Blenheim Crescent,  
Luton, LU3 1HT**

**Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April – 10am to 2pm**

**The Weatherley Centre, Eagle Farm Road, Biggleswade, SG18 8JH**



Only at  
Biggleswade



**R N I B**

See differently



**Bedfordshire  
Fire and Rescue Service**

**0800 1456115**

**[www.lowvisionshop.co.uk](http://www.lowvisionshop.co.uk)**

## Happy 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday Family Group

Just over 10 years ago, three friends came together over a coffee with their ideas of how to support children living with sight loss and their families.

Jessica (volunteer) had fond memories of the coffee mornings for the parents of visually impaired children at Chantry Primary School, where she attended when she was very young, and loved that the children were allowed to join in for an hour. Her mum continued the friendships with the people she met there, and this made her think about how isolating it can be for parents as much as it is for the children.

“I think we succeeded in the basics and the families do the rest and make it so worthwhile. We started with ideas and made it a reality that I'm very proud of today.”

Phyllis (volunteer) worked with visually impaired children for nearly 30 years, and was Jessica's teacher while she attended Chantry, she had concerns about the lack of opportunities for young visually impaired children and their parents. She had retired from teaching visually impaired children and wanted to contribute to the ongoing needs of families she had known or whom she would meet.

“What else would anyone want to do with the first Saturday of the month!”

Mark (staff member) had met a parent of a visually impaired child, who had explained that their child attended a school in Luton with a Visual Impairment Provision which meant they were taken to and from school by local authority transport. Due to the transport arrangements, the parent didn't get the opportunity to meet the other parents and chat at the school gates.



*Photo shows a young girl at Family Group proudly holding a number 10 colouring in sheet.*

Mark was already helping families get the financial support they needed through his work with Sight Concern Bedfordshire and saw an opportunity to connect the families together.

“I get more (or as much) out of running Family Group as the people that come. It is an absolute delight and a privilege.”

Since Family Group was created it has supported many families across Bedfordshire over the last 10 years and is still going strong with its fun packed monthly sessions. The milestone was celebrated at the February meeting, but we think it deserves another big celebration (and a thank you to those who have supported us) later in the year...watch this space for more information on our Family Fun Day!

## Youth Forum Get Cooking

Youth Forum were delighted to have Guide Dogs UK habilitation specialists, Lisa, Jo and Orla come along for a cooking session to show the group some independent living skills. The group given specialist equipment to use such as non-slip matting, talking scales and cutting guides; along with cooking hacks like tearing peppers, to ensure the activity was as independent as possible. It resulted in a fun packed session with some fantastic flatbread pizzas, and some Rocky Road that looked delicious!

“I really enjoyed the session it was educational and fun! I hadn't used the cutting guide before; it made it much easier to slice things and kept my fingers safe. The Rocky Road was delightful, and I did manage to save some to share with my family!” *Usman, Youth Forum member.*

*Photo shows three Youth Forum Members and volunteer Jessica sat round a table proudly holding the Rocky Road they made with Orla, Lisa and Jo stood beside them.*



# Volunteer News

We celebrated the end of another year of amazing support from our volunteers, with coffee mornings at Wardown Park Café, Luton and Cloverdale Retreat, Bedford. These events were particularly special as not only did we get to thank our volunteers for all the hard work they do, but we were able to present some rather fantastic Service Awards!

**Our 5 Year Service Award went to:** Peter Gyles and Margaret Devlin.

**Our 10 Year Service Award went to:** Jessica Collett, Tony Glynos, Cheryl Benfield, Pauline Clark and Joyce Gregory.

Thank you to everyone who supported us this year!



*Cheryl and Pauline with their awards at the Bedford coffee morning.*



*Jessica showing off her award in Wardown Park café.*

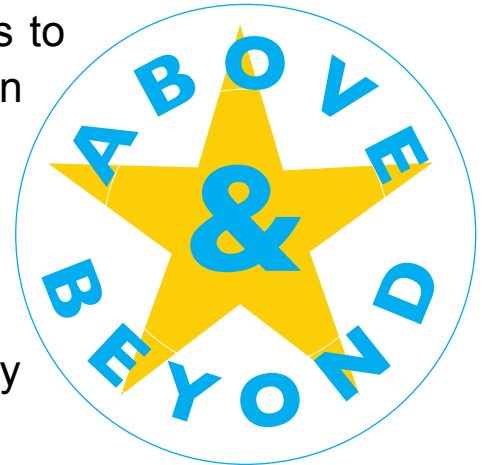


*Tony receiving his award at Friday Club.*

# Above and Beyond

This quarter's Above and Beyond Award goes to the volunteers who help make the Sight Concern Family Group as successful as it is.

The Family Group recently celebrated their 10th birthday and have gone from strength to strength making a difference to local visually impaired children and their families.



Mark Chapman, Family Group staff member, said this:

“Sight Concern Family Group wouldn't have started without volunteers Jessica and Phyllis. They were there right at the start when things were just an idea, without them the idea might not have even occurred. A small team of people, who wanted to create a group where families could meet in a safe and fun environment. It wouldn't be able to keep going without their ceaseless dedication.”

Sight Concern would like to congratulate the Family Group volunteer team for ten years of service to the community.

This now opens the door for your nominations for the next Above and Beyond Award.

If you know of a service or organisation that goes ‘above and beyond’ to help people with sight loss and make your life easier that is worth celebrating, please nominate via the usual channels by emailing:

[georgehogman@sightconcern.org.uk](mailto:georgehogman@sightconcern.org.uk)

or calling us on **01234 311555**

# Supporting Sight Concern Bedfordshire

If you would like to support this work by donating to us, you can:

**Set up a standing order** – to donate regularly. This will help us plan ahead to structure our services and activities. If you wish to donate in this way please contact Alison Taylor on **01234 311555** or email:

[office@sightconcern.org.uk](mailto:office@sightconcern.org.uk) for a copy of the form and support with completing it.

**Debit/Credit card** – please contact Alison Taylor on **01234 311555** or email [office@sightconcern.org.uk](mailto:office@sightconcern.org.uk)

**Online** – via the Donate Now button on our website:

<https://www.sightconcern.org.uk/>

**JustGiving page** – <https://www.justgiving.com/sight-concern>

**Facebook** – via our Sight Concern Bedfordshire page:

<https://www.facebook.com/sightconcernbeds/>

**By Cheque** – to Sight Concern Bedfordshire, 116 Bromham Rd, Bedford, MK40 2QN

**By Leaving us a gift in your will** – When arranging your affairs, please consider us in your last will and testament by leaving us a lasting legacy to support blind and partially sighted people across Bedfordshire.

Please contact us with any queries on **01234 311555**

Email [office@sightconcern.org.uk](mailto:office@sightconcern.org.uk)

Thank you for your support.



## Getting in Touch

Please contact us by telephone or email

10am to 3pm Monday to Friday

Telephone 01234 311555

Email: [office@sightconcern.org.uk](mailto:office@sightconcern.org.uk)

Website: <https://www.sightconcern.org.uk/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sightconcernbeds/>

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