

# News & Views

Winter 2023



*Stall holders and visitors at National Eye Health Week Event in Flitwick.*

*Kite flying experience National Eye Health Week. >*



*Asda collection with George and Marufa in Dunstable for National Eye Health Week.*



*Tandem bike experience National Eye Health Week.*



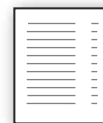
*Steve Bewley, Eye Clinic Liaison Officer, with Kathie, SCB's Low Vision Advisor, at Moorfields.*

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# Message from the CEO

Carol O'Brien

Dear Readers,

As we transition into autumn, it brings me great pleasure to share with you the highlights of Sight Concern's activities throughout the county during National Eye Health Week. Thank you to our dedicated staff, volunteers, colleagues, and to each of you for supporting us at our numerous events, visits and workshops.

In this issue, we launch two services this autumn: the Bedford coffee mornings and the pioneering peer support calls for the newly diagnosed.

These initiatives show our commitment to enhancing the lives of those affected by sight loss.

A special note of appreciation is due to our funders, the Harpur Trust and the Panacea Charitable Trust, for their recent grants, which significantly contribute to our work – with you on your sight loss journey.

Lastly, I am delighted to share a moment captured at the Biggleswade event, featuring my family and I, whose ages in the photo above span from 16 to 96.

*With warm regards,  
Carol O'Brien,  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Sight Concern Bedfordshire*



# National Eye Health Week

What a week was had! National Eye Health week in September saw lots of different events and visits going on. We met new and existing clients as well as working with other local organisations in Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton who share what they can offer our clients in way of support also. We raised awareness on how to keep your eyes healthy, spoke to local business about what services we offer, visited the hospital Eye Clinic Liaison Officers in both Bedford hospital and Luton and Dunstable hospital, a mindfulness session, seated yoga session, kite flying, lawn bowls, tandem bike riding and much more! Read in more detail below:



*Lin, Sight Concern's Low Vision co-ordinator, at Moorfields South Wing.*

## **Bedford IT Club – National Eye Health Week**

As part of National Eye Health Week, Bedford I.T. Club looked at the importance of protecting your eyes from the sun.

Did you know that your eyes are 10 times more sensitive to UV light than your skin?

This photo shows some of the I.T. Club members 'making a spectacle of themselves' trying on the new Cocoons sunglasses.

They are available to purchase from Sight Concern, some of us have already ordered a pair.



## **Maureen Sheridan - Sensory Impairment Advisor- National Eye Health Week**

Maureen hit the towns of Flitwick, Ampthill and Shefford to discuss Sight Concern Bedfordshire and what we can offer. Maureen spoke with charity shops and coffee shops who were happy to listen and take information to



put up in their shops. Maureen also dropped in to Ampthill Town council, Ampthill and Shefford libraries as well as a sheltered housing complex. Maureen also joined our friends from Blind Veterans and their clients and enjoyed chatting to everyone there. We would like to say a huge thank to everyone that took the time to speak with Maureen and we look forward to sharing more information on how we can support in the future.

### **Low Vision Clinic – National Eye Health Week**

The Low Vision team promoted National Eye Health Week on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> September 2023. We attended Moorfields North and South Wing eye clinics and were also joined at our Low Vision Clinic in Bedford by Steve Bewley, the Eye Clinic Liaison Officer at Moorfields and Abeda from Bedford Citizens Advice Bureau. We gave information and advice on eye health focusing on three main areas:



*Client, Maureen Copperwheat, pictured with Pauline, our Low Vision Volunteer.*

**Protecting your eyes** – The effects of damaging UV light can be cumulative and over a long period of time your risk of developing cataracts and other age-related eye conditions increases. We demonstrated our range of protective sunshields that are available to purchase.

**Eating Well** – Eating a healthy balanced diet can reduce your risk of developing common eye conditions and look after your overall eye health. Eye friendly nutrients are found in many fruits and vegetables including spinach, broccoli, cabbage, avocado, blueberries and peaches. Clients could take home some free fruit and vegetables after their appointment.



*Steve Bewley, Eye Clinic Liaison Officer, pictured with Kathie, SCB's Low Vision Advisor at Moorfields.*

every two years (or more often if recommended by your optometrist) even if you don't require glasses. Symptoms of eye conditions are not always obvious and an eye examination will not only detect problems with your vision but can uncover a number of other health conditions.

The event was very well attended and we really enjoyed engaging with so many new and existing clients. Following her appointment, Wendy Read (pictured right), expressed her gratitude saying, "You were all exceptionally kind and helpful and made me feel really welcome. Luckily a knowledgeable man from Moorfields was present and gave me some valuable advice which I have followed up. I am now on the Moorfields waiting list which I am delighted about. The vegetables were delicious and the magnifying glass is brilliant. My visit to you was very enjoyable and most importantly very productive. Thank you all so much."



*Client Wendy.*

## **Youth Forum**

Youth Forum produced Sight Concern's very first Tik Tok content for National Eye Health Week. The members came up with 3 scenes to highlight the importance of looking after your eyes.

Scene 1: Set in an optician's, explaining the importance of getting your eyes checked.

Scene 2: Took place in a restaurant, with unimpressed guest being served vegetables.

Scene 3: A reluctant sunshield user finds out why it's important to wear them.

Thank you to all our Tik Tok stars for helping to create a masterpiece, head over to Sight Concern's Tik Tok account if you'd like to see how much fun they had in the process! A big thank you to our Youth Forum volunteers, who I think had just as much fun...

"I can honestly say I had a great time helping Youth Forum members create the video, not only did I laugh so much it hurt, but I also went home full of joy after watching how much they had enjoyed themselves and bonded together."



## National Eye Health Week Event – Flitwick

What a fantastic event was had, we welcomed new and existing clients to our exciting event at Flitwick Community Football Centre and had our friends from other local organisations join us, helping support our local communities with we would like to say a huge thank you Blind Veterans, Citizens Advice Luton, Bedford Borough Citizens Advice, Mind BLMK, Bedfordshire Sight Loss Council, Voiceability, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, Bedford and Luton Recovery Collage and Circle Health.

Our visitors got so much out of being able to talk to other organisation who specialise in such important areas. There was a lot of practical fun on the day too, we had lawn bowls, kite flying and tandem bike riding, many of visitors tried these out and commented on how they would not have had the confidence to try these opportunities had it not been for the event. We also had a seated yoga session delivered by Recalibrate with Keeley, a Mindfulness session delivered by Mind BLMK and an inspirational talk from Sassy Wyatt, creator of 'Blind Girl Adventures'.

So another huge thank you to our activities volunteers John, Lionel and Tom, and for our sessions to Keeley from Recalibrate, Jeanette from Mind BLMK and Sassy.



*Above: Sassy Wyatts inspirational Talk.*

*Right: Kite flying experience.*



*Visually impaired UK B3 >  
Singles gold medal winner  
John Hollowell, Lisa from Sight  
Concern, John's wife and  
bowling director Beata Hollowell,  
along with Clare and Jess from  
Sight Concern, holding the many  
medals and trophies John has  
won.*



# Volunteer News

## Whipsnade Zoo Walk of the Week

SocialEyez members were invited to take part in a private Walk of the Week at the zoo on Tuesday the 10<sup>th</sup> October. Community Engagement Officer Patrick and the rest of his team are in the process of making the walks more accessible for visually impaired visitors and the group were delighted to accept the invitation. And what a great day it was!

We were met by Buffy who led the walk, taking the group to the brown bears and wolverine. We were then treated to a specially organised feeding of the African wild dogs and a visit to the giraffes with a to explore their grooming equipment. The afternoon was packed with a variety of animals, with the feeding of the one-horned rhino stealing the show!

This was Buffy's first Walk of the Week that included visual descriptions and she did a marvelous job. The group were impressed with how much description she gave and how informative she was about each animal; her directions and cues to avoid trip hazards were very much appreciated by the group. Patrick and team looked after us throughout the day, and the feedback on how to improve accessibility in the zoo was well received.

SocialEyez were glad to be part of the project and are looking forward to the accessible walks being available to the public in the future.

## Volunteer Updates

A huge thank you to all our volunteers who helped at our National Eye Health Week! Dave, Mary, Lionel, and Tom were a huge help, and it was great to see everyone having so much fun. A big welcome to Matt, Julie and Will, our newest members of the volunteer team!



*Zookeeper supporting SocialEyez member Jeff, while he feeds a one-horned rhino.*



*Socialeyez members and volunteers standing in front of the elephant paddock.*



## Bedford Coffee Mornings – coming soon!

Join us for the launch of our Bedford 'drop-in' coffee mornings at The Pavilion At The Park, Bedford Park on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024 at 10.30am!

There is no need to book a place, pop along for a chat and to meet our volunteers, who will be on hand to help with seating and placing orders, until 12.30pm. Our monthly meet ups will take place on the last Friday of every month and warmer weather will see the addition of our resident kite flyer Lionel, who be giving people the opportunity to fly a kite.

Please arrive before 11.30am to guarantee volunteer support; for more details, please contact Lisa Drummond on **01582 256093** or email [lisadrummond@sightconcern.org.uk](mailto:lisadrummond@sightconcern.org.uk)

## Peer Support Calls

Our Peer Support Call service launched at the beginning of October. Our Peer Support Volunteer, who has lived experience of sight loss, is here to help those who are newly diagnosed or have had a significant deterioration. You may want to talk about your experience of sight loss or listen to someone else's, or talk about how other people behave towards you, or the challenges you face at work.

You could have concerns about your families' or friends' reactions and their worries. Talking to our Peer Support Volunteer could help you navigate these challenges and assist you with things that are new; for example, reading, travel and conversations.

Unlike our Telephone Befriending service, Peer Support Calls will last for short period of time for each person who accesses the service. If further help is needed, we will guide you to other support available. Please contact Lisa Drummond on **01582 256093** or email:

[lisadrummond@sightconcern.co.uk](mailto:lisadrummond@sightconcern.co.uk) for more details, or to be placed on the waiting list.

## Above and Beyond

This quarter's 'Above and Beyond Award' winner is our very own Lin Ventriglia for her long-running volunteer role with our Bedford IT Club, from back when computers were steam-powered! We have had several nominations from members of the IT Club, one saying: "Lin has always gone the extra mile to make sure that all IT club members get the most out of it,

including helping members to get to the sessions, and any other way she can help people, nothing would ever be too much in terms of helping someone."

Congratulations Lin and thanks for all your time and effort given to the IT Club! Your volunteering is priceless to Sight Concern and its service users, thank you.

This leaves the door open for your nominations for next quarter's 'Above and Beyond Award'. If you know anybody or any service or business in Luton and/or Bedfordshire who goes the extra mile to help our VI community, then we need to know!

Let's celebrate this together in 2024. Please nominate by emailing: [georgehogman@sightconcern.org.uk](mailto:georgehogman@sightconcern.org.uk) or calling us on **01234 311555**.



*Lin receiving her award from George.*

## Fund Raising Concert **Carol O'Brien**

A concert was held to fundraise for Sight Concern. Richard and Mary who with keyboard and vocals provided us with a covers of great songs including "Over the Rainbow" and "Mustang Sally". Stuart sang and played his Ukele, using folk music to tell a story. We were delighted that the concert raised £312. Thank you to the musicians and the audience for a lovely afternoon.

Here are Sight Concern's Trustees at Luton Stopsley Men's Working Club for the Bedfordshire Magistrates Charity Quiz. The Sight Concern team came joint 2nd and raised £1104. Photo (*below left*) showing from left to right: Quiz master Darren Bell, organizer Trish Jones, Catherine Winstanley who chose Sight Concern, Jamile (Trustee), Organiser Philippe Hucklesby, Adrian (Trustee), Martin (previously Trustee, but roped back in for his amazing Quiz trivia), Carol, Simon (advisor to the board), Organiser Tony Reynolds and Joanna (Trustee).



*Bedford Magistrates Fundraising quiz for Sight Concern.*



## Out and About with George

Sight Concern's George and Usef the wonder dog have been incredibly busy over the last few months.

We started off National Eye Health week at ASDA's in Dunstable, raising awareness of Sight Concern and fund raising from the very generous shoppers there. Then I gave a talk to Sharnbrook's 'Learning for Pleasure' group who have very kindly made us their 'charity of the year'. They presented us with a cheque for funds raised so far. Some very delicious tea and cake was also on offer! I'm sure I put a couple of pounds on during my couple of hours there! A huge thank you to the group for all of their efforts.



*George with Ven and Kate from Sharnbrook Learning for Pleasure.*

We've been attending monthly East Bedford Community drop-in coffee mornings at Christ the King Church Hall which are on the first Thursday of every month (excluding January, next stop February). This event has really started to take off with lots of local organisations and charities attending, as well as plenty of members of the public, not forgetting free tea and coffee and cake. There's a theme emerging here! Next dates are Thursday 7th December 2023 and Thursday 1st February 2024.

We then moved onto the Festival for Older People in early October which is an annual event run by Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire at the Rufus Centre in Flitwick. This event attracts hundreds of people from across Bedfordshire with the whole ground floor of the Rufus Centre taken up with stands. Next it was the Ageing Well Exhibition in Bedford at the Corn Exchange, another large event with plenty of stands and people. Again, free tea, coffee and biscuits available too along with packets of Haribo – yum yum!



*Photo at Older persons festival.*

Sight Concern, in union with Optelec Limited, held a Vision Zone roadshow at the Weatherley Centre in

Biggleswade where lots of people from Biggleswade and surrounding villages came along to see us, as well as magnification equipment from Optelec, Age UK Bedfordshire and several more organisations including Blind Veterans.

On Tuesday 6th February 2024 we have a Professional Vision Services Drop-in day at The Rufus Centre, Steppingley Road, Flitwick MK45 1AH from 10am – 2pm. Come along and check out Professional Vision Services' selection of digital magnifiers and CCTV reader machines as well as chat with our Sight Concern team

Sight Concern gives a massive thanks to all the volunteers who made these events possible. If you're thinking about volunteering for Sight Concern please contact Lisa Drummond on **01582 256093** or email:

[lisadrummond@sightconcern.co.uk](mailto:lisadrummond@sightconcern.co.uk)

## George Dickens Trust

A huge THANK YOU to The George Dickens Trust for their generous donation that we put to good use enabling us to give the following items out at our Low Vision Clinics.

We were able to purchase 80 liquid Level indicators to give to Service users/Clients who would find them useful. These produce a warning sound when the fluid reaches it allowing you to fill a cup or glass with liquid without it spilling over. This device can be used on jugs and (cold)cooking pots too.

In addition, we purchased a large number of Bump ons with the donation. These are useful self-adhesive little bumps that can be attached to appliances around your home for example on a washing machine dial to mark the wash cycle you use, or perhaps on the dials on your hob to indicate where the high position is, or maybe on a bunch of keys to highlight which is the front door key, buttons on a remote control or important keys on a computer keyboard.

A useful little addition to any pocket or handbag are the small pocket sized magnifiers we purchased, these are very discreet due to their size and can be helpful in so many situations where you may not want to get your larger hand magnifier out.

Finally, the donation enabled us to enhance our Demonstration items with



magnifier stands. These can convert your illuminated hand magnifier into a stand magnifier (as shown in the photo) these have two positions and enable you to use your magnifier hands free. Ideal for applying nail varnish, clipping you nails or threading a needle. It keeps the magnifier steady for those fiddly jobs.



We really appreciate all donations and always put them to good use helping to keep everyone as independent as possible.



Community Central Drop-in held on the last Wednesday of every month from 1pm - 4.30pm at Lewsey Farm Community Centre, Landrace Rd, Luton, LU4 0SW.

### **Join Sight Concern Bedfordshire**

For advice and support on living with, or caring for, someone with sight loss. Technology advice; making the most of your devices. Visual awareness and sighted guide advice for those caring for someone with sight loss. Our Community Central partners will also be on hand to give advice and support:

### **Disability Resource Centre:**

Working with local communities to support anyone with a disability or health condition.

### **One Stop Advice Centre:**

For welfare benefits, debt, housing and immigration advice.

### **Community Needs:**

Supporting educational, recreational and leisure time activities for the wider community.



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**Low Vision Drop-in day**

**10am-2pm 6<sup>th</sup> February at the Rufus Centre**

**Steppingley Rd, Flitwick, Bedford MK45 1AH**

In association with





# 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

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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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