



Wakefield District Sight Aid

Parkside Centre, Leeds Road, Outwood, Wakefield WF1 2PN
01924 215555 – admin@wdsa.org.uk – www.wdsa.org.uk
President: The Lord St Oswald Company No. 7432897 Registered Charity No. 1140483

Hello everyone and welcome to our Autumn 2020 newsletter!

What an extraordinary time it has been since we last wrote to you. We have missed seeing you at coffee mornings and social groups, Demo Days, and on trips. Although we have not been able to meet face to face, we have enjoyed getting in touch with you all by phone, especially those we've not spoken to in a long time. It is great to reconnect with so many people - we just would have preferred it to have been under nicer circumstances. A big thanks to all our volunteers who helped us with this.

As we usually do at this time of year, we have included our annual member survey with the newsletter. To reflect the changing times we find ourselves in, you will notice we have included some specific questions relating to the COVID-19 situation and how we can best adapt what we do to help support you safely. More on that below.

We are also delighted to enclose a passenger assistance card, courtesy of our colleagues at Arriva Yorkshire, who have provided these free of charge for all WDSA members. These cards, designed to be used on public transport but helpful in lots of areas of life at the moment, are discreet and easy to use, and help people to understand if you have a disability that may not be obvious, like sight loss. We hope that these cards might help you feel more confident if and when you do want to start getting out and about again. There are other things that can also help, which we have mentioned later in the newsletter.

Take care and stay safe,

Hayley Grocock, Chief Executive Officer

Wakefield District Sight Aid charity news

We wanted to include a few words from each of the staff team, so they could share with you their thoughts and experiences during lockdown.

Update from Nicola Ellis, our Service Support Co-ordinator

During lockdown we felt it was important to make contact with all our members (over 1,000 of you!) as a check in that you were OK and that you had the support you needed. This was a huge team effort along with our amazing volunteers, and everyone was most grateful for the call. Of course if you have met me you know I love a good natter so it was a great task for me!

Update from Nicola Ford, our Sight Loss Advisor

Well, what an incredibly strange few months it has been (and continues to be!). I am hoping that you have all kept safe and well. There have been many challenges facing us all and it hasn't been easy. However, there have been some benefits. The suspension of home visits (in accordance with Government guidelines) has given us the opportunity to contact every service user. At the beginning of lockdown when there was so much uncertainty and fear, this proved to be an extremely worthwhile exercise and one that many of you told us you were very grateful for. It also gave us the benefit of reconnecting with some of you that we hadn't had contact with for many years. It feels like we have been busier than ever during this period! So, as much as the home visiting is paused, at least I have still been able to assist many with a supportive chat, posting out bits of equipment and general reassurance. We have worked well with our partners across the Wakefield District to provide the best support we have been able to during the uncertain times. In recent weeks, I have been able to get out and visit people in gardens and on door steps and I hope it isn't too much longer until we find the "new normal" and home visiting can once again resume. I look forward to seeing your smiling faces once again, although mine will be hidden behind a face mask!

Update from Bev Poppleton, our Operations Manager

Like most of us the last few months have presented many challenges but it also presented me with a wonderful highlight of helping with the telephone calls to some of you lovely people. It was so nice to speak to you and to help in what ever way I could. I am really looking forward to meeting up with you at our social events when it is safe to restart these. Until then, look after yourselves and keep safe.

Office availability

At the moment, our office is not open for visitors and our groups can't run in the normal way, but please remember we are still here for you. If you need anything, even just a friendly chat, please call the office on 01924 215555 and leave a message. One of us will get back to you as soon as we can. We will update you as soon as things change. If you are online, you can stay in touch with the latest news via our website, Facebook and Twitter pages. There is also a list of helpful numbers for support from other organisations at the end of this newsletter.

Social groups

Current Government guidance around socialising with people outside of your household currently means that our social groups sadly have to remain suspended for now. We are mindful that many of you will be missing our coffee mornings, younger members social group, outings and other events, particularly as we move into winter.

We are therefore looking at starting some "virtual" social groups that could be done over the phone or via the internet. There are lots of options that make it easy for small groups of people to come together virtually, so if you would be interested in joining such a group, whether you usually come to our events or not, please ring the office on 01924 215555 and leave us a message to register your interest, and let us know what might work best for you. Once we have an idea of numbers, we can start looking at how to make this happen. If this idea is popular and works well for people who also find it hard to get out and about in normal times, we will consider keeping these groups going on a more permanent basis. So, please get in touch today and help us work out the best way of connecting you with like-minded people and hopefully new friends!

Annual survey

As you know, every Autumn we send a survey to all our members, asking for your feedback on the services you may have received from us during the previous year. However, because we have not been able to operate as normal for over 6 months, we realise that these questions won't apply to most people, so the survey is a bit different this year.

Because the world is changing and we don't know how long we might have to do things differently for, we would be very grateful for your thoughts on how we might adapt what we do to support you best in the coming months. We hope the questions we have included give you the opportunity to share your thoughts and concerns with us, and we always welcome the chance to have a more in-depth chat, so please get in touch!

If completing the survey is challenging for you, please ring the office and leave a message, and one of the team will be happy to give you a call to go over your answers by phone. You may remain anonymous if you wish.

Help with social distancing

A symbol cane is a small, folding white cane designed to let others know that you have a visual impairment. This can be a particularly helpful way to make others aware that you may not be able to see well enough to maintain social distance. We can provide symbol canes free of charge, please contact the office to find out more.

The Partially Sighted Society are selling bright yellow lanyards at £1.80 each, which have the words "Visually Impaired (with the part/sight symbol) I cannot see to socially distance!" written in black. To find out more or order a lanyard, you can contact them on 01302 965 195 or reception@partsight.org.uk.

The Hidden Disabilities Store also has a range of sunflower lanyards and ID cards, including face covering exemption cards, that help indicate that you may need additional support, help, or a little more time. The full range is on their website at <https://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com/shop.html> (unfortunately it is not currently possible to contact them by telephone).

Living Well With Sight Loss course

Traditionally, these courses have been delivered face-to-face by colleagues from RNIB and held in Wakefield City Centre. However, due to the current situation, these are now being run as telephone courses – maximum 90 minutes per session, for a six week block. This is great news for people who are shielding, or who have lost confidence during the lockdown period and need some encouragement to feel confident in getting out and about again.

If you are newly diagnosed, feel nervous about navigating the world at the moment, or just feel that now is the right time for you to start getting out

and about more, the course allows you to meet and share experiences with people in similar situations, aims to boost confidence and deliver practical advice and useful information and resources available across the Wakefield and Pontefract district.

Please contact the office on 01924 215555 and we will be more than happy to provide you with more information and add your name to the waiting list. We are very pleased to announce that we are now a Delivery Partner for the Living Well With Sight Loss course, meaning that we will be able to deliver courses ourselves using the RNIB's course framework and hopefully increase the frequency of courses being delivered in Wakefield as a result! We hope that in the future we will be able to return to delivering courses face-to-face too, so we will have waiting lists for both telephone and face-to-face courses, depending on your preferences. We are very grateful to our colleagues at RNIB and at Wakefield Council for their support in helping us to bring this valuable opportunity to more local people across Wakefield.

Funding

We are a small, local, independent charity, and the only charity providing on-the-ground support for all visually impaired people across Wakefield. We are independent of all national charities, and receive no funding from large charities such as RNIB or Guide Dogs.

The COVID-19 crisis has caused huge financial uncertainty and the need for small charities like us who provide vital support for people in their communities is greater than ever, at a time when it is even harder for us to raise funds.

Sadly, this year we will be unable to hold our usual Christmas Prize Draw. The draw takes at least three months to plan and we rely on volunteer support in the office to help with the administration of the tickets, prizes and ticket money in the lead-up to the draw. Because of social distancing, we can't have people in the office to help, and many of the places we would usually approach for prizes will find it difficult or impossible to support us this year. The Christmas Prize Draw is our biggest fundraiser of the year outside of sponsored events, and none of those have been able to take place this year either. Businesses that support us through collection boxes have been closed for months, and we have not been able to send any volunteers out to exchange collection boxes in any case.

Now, more than ever, we are so thankful for the generosity of people who donate to us. If you would like to set up a regular gift or make a one-off donation, our bank details are below (we can also accept cheques posted to the office). If you are a UK taxpayer, you can increase your donation to us by 25% at no extra cost to you, simply by completing a Gift Aid Declaration (available by contacting the office).

Bank: Barclays Bank Plc
Account: Wakefield District Sight Aid
Sort code: 20-89-68
Account number: 73031519

Newsletter

The newsletter is available in large print, Braille, audio CD or USB stick, or by email. Please contact us to request a different format. If you receive the newsletter in an audio format, please don't forget to return the padded mailing envelope, and your USB stick (if you receive one) to us so we can use them again. Thank you. If you would prefer not to receive the newsletter in future, please contact the office on 01924 215555 or admin@wdsa.org.uk to opt out.

Your contact details

During lockdown, it came to light that the contact details we held for quite a number of our members were out of date. Please get in touch to let us know about a change of address, email address or telephone number. You may also ask to be removed from our database completely at any time. If you would like to know what details we hold for you, we would be more than happy to provide you with a full record on request.

Useful numbers

RNIB Helpline - 0303 123 9999 (8am-8pm weekdays, 9am-5pm on Saturdays).

Glaucoma UK - 01233 64 81 70 (Monday to Friday 9.30am – 5.00pm) or email helpline@glaucoma.uk.

Macular Society - 0300 3030 111 (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm), or email help@macularsociety.org.

Blind Veterans UK – supporting ex-service men and women of all generations with sight loss - 0800 389 7979.

Association of Blind Asians - 0113 210 3347 – this Leeds-based charity can help with benefit claims, advocacy, aids/adaptations, social events and emotional and physical exercise. Find out more about the support they offer online at www.abaleeds.org.uk or via their Facebook page www.facebook.com/ABALeeds.

The Silver Line - 0800 4 70 80 90 - The Silver Line is the only free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Wakefield Council – for all general enquiries, please call 0345 8 506 506. For Social Care Direct, please call 0345 8 503 503.

Turning Point Talking Therapies – a self-referral service supporting people experiencing mental health difficulties, including anxiety, low mood, depression, and stress. There are a number of free online wellbeing workshops also available during lockdown. Contact them on 01924 234 860 or email wakefield.talking@turning-point.co.uk.

Live Well Wakefield – supporting healthy living for people in Wakefield, including support to manage long-term conditions, befriending, and support during COVID-19. You can self-refer by calling 07881 595448 or by completing a self-referral form on their website here: <https://www.livewellwakefield.nhs.uk/referrals/new>.

In memoriam

Sheila Rayner

We are deeply saddened to share the news of the passing of longtime friend and member of WDSA, Sheila Rayner, after a short illness, aged 62. Sheila and her husband Alan kindly recorded and produced the audio version of our newsletter for many years. She was well-known in the local community, doing so much to support people with sight loss, including running the VIPs group that meets fortnightly at The Red Shed in Wakefield. We would like to share the following short eulogy, written by Alan, in Sheila's memory:

“Sheila was a qualified Rehabilitation Officer for blind people, with a lifetime's personal experience of visual problems and their associated mental and social issues. Sheila's natural inclination was to help anyone struggling with a problem, irrespective of who they were if she had a solution or could point them in the direction for an answer. Her kind and easy-going nature endeared her to everyone who she met, and she is sadly missed by all who knew her. A lifetime Leeds United fan, she was delighted earlier in the year to get the chance to go to a match at Elland Road thanks to the help of Wakefield District Sight Aid. This was a day that she thoroughly enjoyed, and was second only to her wedding to Alan at Elland Road on 10/10/2010. She leaves a devoted husband Alan, daughter Dianna, son Terry, grandson Gordon and sister Sue. Her passing leaves a big hole in all our lives and she will be sadly missed and always in our thoughts and prayers.”

Doug Dale

We were also very sorry to hear that Doug Dale, who had a long history of community work and political activism locally, passed away peacefully in August aged 89. Doug was involved with the charity from about 1990 when he became our representative on the Community Health Council. In this capacity he became a member of our Management Committee. When our Chairperson had to resign for health reasons, Doug took on that role and served in that capacity for several years until he had to retire from it because of his own health problems.

Doug was a very friendly person and loved chatting to our service users. He took part in the line dancing sessions which we put on during one summer, which was good fun. In his earlier life he had been in the Merchant Navy and often referred to himself as the “ancient mariner”! He could tell us lots of stories of his adventures on the high seas.

Doug was very committed to working in the community, which he did both through working with our charity and his political work. He wanted to make things better for people.

Our love and deepest sympathy to Sheila and Doug's families, and our sincere gratitude for everything they have done for the charity over the years. They will both be remembered fondly by all who had the pleasure of knowing them.