

henshaws

community
services

beyond expectations

Hello Newsletter

Summer 2020, Greater Manchester

We are a charity that helps people living with sight loss and a range of other disabilities achieve their ambitions and go beyond expectations.



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The photograph on the front cover shows our Senior Rehab Officer, Simon, holding a white cane and stood in front of a house. Simon was interviewed by BBC North West Tonight about his experience of social distancing as a visually impaired person.

Hello and welcome to the Summer 2020 edition of the Henshaws ‘Hello’ Newsletter.

“I hope that this newsletter finds you and your loved ones in good health and spirits, despite the pandemic situation that we are still experiencing. These are unprecedented times, and we have been doing our best to reach out to the most vulnerable of our service users across Greater Manchester - from the early days of lockdown where we were helping people with deliveries of essential items, to our new telephone befriending service to help to reduce social isolation, and our remote Living Well with Sight Loss courses and virtual coffee mornings.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete our Covid-19 survey during the first ten weeks of lockdown, either online or over the telephone; we have included an analysis of the results in this newsletter, which I hope you find interesting. The survey revealed that many people within the sight loss community had to rely on the support of family, friends and neighbours during the initial lockdown phase. We want to ensure that blind and partially sighted people are not the forgotten community across Greater Manchester - charities like ourselves are playing a vital role in ensuring our community get the support they need.

We have also included information about our new 'Community Confidence' strategy to help our service users come out of lockdown and re-gain their independence, as well as a flavour of the new support material that we have been producing to help our service users as part of our Covid-19 response; if you haven't already, please visit the new 'Covid-19 Resources' section of our online Knowledge Village to access our support material. If you require any further support please do get in touch with us, and we always welcome your feedback."

- Robert Cooper, Director of Community Services

Community Services News

Report of Covid-19 survey findings

The Covid-19 pandemic is the biggest health crisis for generations, and it is having a devastating impact on the lives of people across the world. The measures that the UK government have taken to address the crisis, including restrictions on movement and social distancing, are necessary

to save lives. However, the restrictions required by all of us since 23rd March 2020 have other consequences and implications, particularly so for people already facing challenges in their everyday lives through sight loss.

That is why here at Henshaws, we realised this pandemic presented us with a unique challenge and we needed to establish its impact on our community so that we could track how best to support people and evidence the issues they are facing. Our survey with 955 people, carried out from week 1 to week 11 of lockdown, has identified how the crisis affected people with sight loss in particular ways, and has highlighted the following key issues:

- The overwhelming majority of our respondents were not contacted by their local authority sensory team during the early stages of this pandemic.
- 41% of the people we spoke to did not receive any of the public health messaging about coronavirus/Covid-19 in a format which was accessible to them.
- One quarter of respondents were informed they were at very high risk from coronavirus (extremely vulnerable and should be shielding).
- There was considerable variation across Greater Manchester with regard to the support people with sight loss received during this time.

As a result of sharing our interim findings with our partners across Greater Manchester, and the wider visual impairment sector, we are pleased to be able to report that across Greater

Manchester all ten local authorities have now agreed to send priority information out to the 11,000+ people who are registered blind or partially sighted in their areas. This, coupled with our own intervention, has meant that communication has been made to 14,000+ people across our region.

As the impact of the pandemic and the restrictions on everyone's lives continues, it is possible that more people with sight loss are going to struggle to cope. We will continue to use these findings and work with our partners across the health, social and third care sectors in the hope that we can come together to look out for those who are most at risk in our community, and ensure they are not marginalised at this unprecedented and difficult time.

Our findings raise some critical questions which we must address to ensure we are better prepared to respond to the needs of our community in the future.

- Kevin Brady (Chair of Henshaws Trustee Board)

Our 'Community Confidence' strategy

The next phase of our service strategy this year will focus on 'Community Confidence,' with the key aim to enable and/or re-enable people living with sight loss to have the confidence to live independently in their community despite the impact of Covid-19. We will provide a range of services which are designed to enable and/or re-enable people living with sight loss to have the confidence to actively engage in their community digitally or physically, including:

- Our First Step Team will provide Information, Advice and Guidance to help people live alongside Covid-19.

- Our Patient Support service will ensure anyone with sight loss, or newly diagnosed with sight loss, has the support they need when attending NHS services and appointments.
- Our Enablement/Rehabilitation service will support people to create their own personal road map and give them the confidence to engage or re-engage in their community.
- Our Digital Enablement/Rehabilitation service will support people to embed technology into their personal road map.
- Our Counselling service will support people to overcome the emotional impact Covid-19 has had on them and their wider support network.
- Our Knowledge Village will provide people with a digital library to support their personalised road map.
- In addition, our Children and Young Peoples service will support young people and their families to create a personal road map, with specific focus on re-engaging with school life, and providing a peer to peer support network.

In addition, we will work in tandem with our NHS partners to ensure people newly diagnosed with sight loss have the support they require, ensuring no person is diagnosed without support.

We will provide support to our Social Care/Sensory Teams to ensure people diagnosed with sight loss receive appropriate and accessible information, advice and guidance they need and are fully informed about the support Henshaws can offer.

We will provide support to our business community to ensure their staff are trained and are aware of the small but significant

steps they can take to ensure their service is inclusive to people living with sight loss.

We will also ensure we evidence the impact Covid-19 has had on people living with sight loss.

Lottery funding for Trafford, Manchester and Salford

We are very pleased that we have been able to secure funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to enable us to continue to offer our services in the boroughs of Trafford, Manchester and Salford. This funding will cover several staff posts who will be responsible for delivering services such as Living Well with Sight Loss courses, digital enablement training, and social groups, with the aims of increasing independence, confidence, well-being, and peer support networks.

Recruitment to posts is currently in progress, and we will let you know the details of service provision as the project gets underway.

Support through the Covid-19 pandemic

We have been producing and sharing information with our service users throughout the lockdown period, either online or over the telephone, but we thought it would be useful to share some of our guidance here too, which we hope you find useful.

Top tips for social distancing if you are visually impaired

Our Senior Rehab Officer, Simon, who has low vision himself, has written the following top tips to help with social distancing:

Tip 1: Don't be put off letting people know you have a visual impairment. Sometimes we keep it quiet and don't want others

to know. Well now it's time for a change, let it out of the bag! The difference it makes when people know is amazing.

Tip 2: If you've got a cane, use it and keep it in view at all times. I know not everyone knows what a white cane is, but most do. It makes you noticeable, that's why a symbol cane is called "symbol", to let others know. Obviously if you've not learnt the skills you need, use the cane as a symbol cane.

Tip 3: Take your cane if you're with someone; hold it to the side and make it obvious you're together and being guided. You could fold your long cane in half, so you don't get tangled or kick it up into your face.

Tip 4: If you're using your long cane, make it obvious you're using it. Keep your starting sweep obvious, make sure your arc is wide enough. Sometimes we keep it tight as we learn to use a cane more efficiently. Using a bit of three-point touch keeps it noisy. This is where you add an extra tap to check your shoreline, it will help people hear you coming. You could increase your arc width as long as you don't compromise your safety, for example in a shop.

Tip 5: Keep to the inner shoreline, away from the kerb, let others step out into the road, make your path definite and confident.

Tip 6: If you think someone is too close, tell them you have a visual impairment and ask them are they at the correct distance. It'll help you test the distance when they answer. If they are not it may prompt them to move away.

Tip 7: If you don't have a symbol cane (the short one) you could buy one from the RNIB or ask your local sensory team to supply you with one.

Tip 8: There are lots of other ways to make yourself visible; maybe a high vis vest or sash. Some shops and venues use the sunflower lanyard to help identify hidden disabilities. It's what you feel comfortable with; maybe take your magnifier, it may help visually explain to others.

Tip 9: If you're using public transport, ring for and book assistance if possible. Ring the bus company and ask: "What can I expect on the bus such as layout, etc?"

Tip 10: One thing I'll be doing is assuming my hands need washing the minute I leave the door. I've really tried to get out of the habit of touching my face, that's easier said than done! If you can get the correct hand wipes or sanitiser, put it in your pocket.

Tip 11: Disinfect your cane handle and the end - if it's been on the ground it could have all the usual things on it you find on a pavement! Disinfect what you feel needs it, and when you've done wash your hands.

Please remember to keep up to date with current social distancing guidelines, which can be found on the Government website. Above all, stay safe.

Coming out of lockdown

During lockdown many of us who have been living with sight loss for some time may have lost some of our independence, so we need to think about getting on with the new norm. For those who are new to sight loss, here are some of the mainstays that

will help you move on (and for those who know them, let's get them up to speed and ready for action!)

Independence: I suppose we've got to ask ourselves, how are we doing for independence? It's been really easy to let people do things, making a drink, a quick sandwich, someone to pop to the shop with. Well let's think about those people going back to work; I'm not saying we've all become lazy, but it's been nice to share the load. Yes, it's time to dust off those skills and strategies and get back to a more independent life.

Motivation: Some of us will battle with drive, "why bother"? Well we need to bother; plus, you wouldn't be reading this if you weren't bothered. At some point you wanted to do something, you probably didn't know how. Now it's the reverse, you probably know how to do it, you just need to decide you want to do it and have a go.

Confidence: Tough one this to put back, it takes time. Some of the time is planning, remember the old saying "failing to plan is planning to fail". Think about what you'll start with and plan, plan and then plan some more. Start to build up confidence, start pushing the limits of what you do (if it's safe). Get back into it and it'll become second nature again; I'm not saying anything is easy, but practice makes perfect and adds confidence.

Skills: Have a think about what you learnt yourself and have been taught by others. You may need a bit of refresher training. Cast your mind back to what and how you learnt, why you learnt and how you felt when you'd achieved it. There's nothing

more satisfying than cracking the skills and adding to your independence.

So, what can you do if you're struggling for ideas to help you move forward from the lockdown? Why not give us a call on 0300 222 5555 - we have a team of enablers that can offer practical help. They will have ideas and solutions to your problems or will know someone who does. Why not give us a call for a friendly chat, maybe make a Personal Plan. You may feel like joining one of our Living Well with Sight Loss meetings, or we have peer support groups and can offer counselling too.

Looking after your mental health

With our lives seemingly turned upside down, it can be difficult to stay positive and keep a healthy mind. It is key however to try and overcome the negative emotions that you feel and do things that are good for your mental health. We've put together some tips to help you look after your mental health:

Tip 1: Have a routine

Imagine driving endlessly without a destination - this is what having a day with no structure can feel like. When you have no structure to your day it negatively effects your mental health as you have too much time on your hands to dwell on the bad. Give your day purpose by having some routine (even if it's two or three things a day that you want to complete), get up at a similar time each day, and have times in the day that you want to have something done by. Also, make your weekends feel different to your weekday- have a lie in or have something special for dinner and have something to look forward to in the evening.

Tip 2: Try and see the time in lockdown as a gift

What did you want to do before lockdown but could never get around to? See this time as a gift as we are indoors being kept safe, not because we are being punished. Get planning for things you'd like to do when this is over, such as take up a new hobby.

Tip 3: Keep in touch

This time can feel lonely for us all but more so if you are out of touch from family and friends - communicate with those you may have even lost touch with over the years (at least we all have something in common that we can chat about since we are all going through the same pandemic!) Try and think of creative ways to socialise - possibly quiz nights over the phone with family/friends.

Tip 4: Keep positive

Be grateful for the things in your life that others are not fortunate enough to have. Keep your mindset positive and think about things that you can do and not things that you cannot.

Tip 5: Practice breathing techniques or even do some yoga

Practice breathing techniques to keep you calm and bring you peace. Try and take an hour out of every day to practice some mindfulness. Shut everything else out and play relaxing music, then sit with your eyes closed and take deep breaths in and out.

Tip 6: Take care of yourself

This could possibly be the most important of them all - do some exercise and eat as healthy as possible. A healthy body equals a

healthy mine. Enjoy yourself at the weekends by having a glass of wine if that's what you enjoy (it's all about balance).

Our Services

Living Well with Sight Loss courses

If you're wondering, "What's next for me?" then why not join one of our Living Well with Sight Loss meetings. We meet once a week for four weeks, covering a wide range of topics to help you live well with sight loss. We'll explore what's available and useful to help keep you independent.

We are currently delivering these meetings over the phone or by video call (don't worry we'll help find the right way for you to join a meeting!) Then when the time is right, we'll start holding these meetings in person. At the end of the course you will understand what services are available to you both locally and nationally to support you to live independently; you will have gained the support of others new to sight loss and possibly made some new friends; be more knowledgeable about simple technologies that can help with daily tasks; and have an improved confidence about moving forward and where to go if you ever feel stuck.

The courses we have planned over the next few months are as follows:

Bolton: 11am on 3rd, 10th, 17th and 24th August

Oldham: 1.30-2.30pm on 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th September

Tameside: 1.30-3pm 23rd and 30th July and 6th and 13th August

If you are interested in attending a course, please get in touch with our First Step team (call us on 0300 222 5555 or email info@henshaws.org.uk)

Patient Support Service at eye hospital locations

Are you concerned about your Manchester Royal Eye Hospital or Altrincham Hospital appointment, or have general questions about your eye health? Our two Patient Support Officers, Gail and Sue, can answer your questions, give an update on outpatient appointments, and make all the relevant referrals that you could benefit from.

You can contact our Patient Support Service either by calling 0300 222 5555 or emailing patientsupport@henshaws.org.uk

Children and Young People's Service

Our Children and Young People's (CYP) Service team in Greater Manchester and Merseyside specialise in working with children and parents with sight loss, offering information, advice and guidance, and practical and emotional support.

Our families receive their own dedicated CYP newsletter and can keep up to date with all our events in our Facebook groups. Please call on 0300 222 5555 for more info about the services we offer to young visually impaired people and their families.

Counselling service

It can be difficult to come to terms with being diagnosed with sight loss. It's perfectly normal to feel overwhelmed, but it can help to have someone to talk to who can empathise and help

you process the many emotions you can feel after your diagnosis; that's why we offer counselling across Greater Manchester. We are also offering counselling to those service users who are struggling mentally throughout this time.

Our Community Counsellor, Deborah Haydock, is currently offering telephone sessions for people living across Greater Manchester. Please contact us on 0300 222 5555 for more details.

Telephone befriending service

We asked Helen Brazier, one of our Trustees, volunteers and service users, to tell us about the new telephone be-friending service that Henshaws has started since lockdown began.

“I imagine that, for most of us, coronavirus came out of the blue and turned our lives upside down. A few months ago, you would have found me at least once a week at Manchester Royal Eye Hospital, sometimes attending the glaucoma clinic but more often volunteering on Henshaws’ information desk. Come lockdown and we had to suspend the work of the volunteer team with no idea how events would unfold over the coming months.

One solution proposed by the Henshaws team to try and tackle the issue of social isolation during lockdown was to establish a telephone befriending network. With my experience at the eye hospital, I am used to listening to people and with time on my hands, I volunteered to test this new approach.

Over a few weeks in May I called about 30 people who had said that they would welcome further contact. Most of the people I spoke to are in their 80s or 90s and live alone. They were all

immensely appreciative of the practical support they are receiving locally on a daily basis, but without exception they were pleased to receive a call and have a chat lasting anything from 5 minutes to an hour.

Most of the time our conversation meandered around the tales of people's lives, relationships, romances, families, homes, work, hobbies, politics, and historic and current events. Sometimes a question or problem cropped up that I referred to the expert staff at Henshaws. At the end of each week, I reported to the Henshaws community team and we reflected on what we had learned.

From my experience as a telephone befriender, I suggest that there's great potential to develop this role. It's not something that could be delivered at scale by staff but it would be an ideal role for volunteers. You could contribute safely from home, spending as much or as little time as you like but, above all, make a difference to people's lives at a difficult time. If you're interested in finding out more, please contact Henshaws on 0300 222 5555."

Digital services

Many of our service users have had the support of the Digital Enablement Team before this unprecedented period of disruption due to Covid-19. Due to the lockdown, we haven't been able to support people in our conventional way by meeting up face-to-face at venues across Great Manchester. But that's not to say we haven't been busy, far from it!

Over the first 12 weeks of lockdown, the team have been

supporting people with all their technology needs - we made over 1,468 telephone calls and supported 925 people. It has never been as important for people to have the ability to communicate, access information and be able to simply read the post that drops through the letterbox, and our Digital Team are here to help you get connected and/or stay connected with mainstream or specialist products and services.

Our support is totally free and includes assessments, training and telephone support. Until such time as the venues we deliver our services from re-open, it is our intention to carry out home visits if you live in Greater Manchester. Here is a quick summary of how our Digital Team can help you gain greater independence:

Skills for Seeing: Having a macular condition need not mean losing your independence. Some people can learn to use any undamaged parts of their central vision. We can teach two techniques, Eccentric Viewing and Steady Eye Strategy that can help you with activities like reading, getting out and about, cooking, looking after yourself or watching TV.

Smartphones, Tablet and Computers: Smartphones are accessible for anyone living with sight loss, even if you are totally blind. Think of a smartphone as a sophisticated computer, that can make telephone calls! Learning to operate a smartphone with no sight will take some time, and will most likely need some support in the beginning, but it is totally possible. If you have some useful vision it's easy, as both Apple and Android (Samsung) smartphones have easy to set up features that allow you to adjust your phone in all sorts of clever ways, like increase the font size for example. You can always use the benefits of voice commands too, like Siri, Alexa,

and others. There are so many mainstream apps like WhatsApp, Facebook and specialist apps too, like the fantastic Seeing AI and Be My Eyes which you may find of benefit.

Digital Video Magnifiers: With digital video magnifiers you can perform your daily reading and viewing tasks again! Text that used to be too small, can now be enlarged to the size that is ideal for you, in the colour settings you prefer. These come in different sizes depending on your needs. Some digital magnifiers can also read the text for you.

Smart Readers: This type of technology uses Artificial Intelligence to literally read out the text for you. Basically, these devices take a photograph of your text and convert that text into speech. These simple and intuitive devices will read any text you put in front of it, such as the morning paper, your favourite book, text messages, emails, and more. We carry products from both industry leaders OrCam and Optelec/Enhanced Vision.

Synapptic: If you are fairly new to technology, have little or no vision and would like to access a smartphone, a Synapptic phone may be for you. These phones are simple and easy to use with a clear and simple interface. Many of the features can be accessed using voice control, including making calls, sending texts, sending emails, reading printed text, searching the web, or listening to Audiobooks, radio or TV.

In Your Pocket: If you have low vision or no vision at all and you want to have books, newspapers or magazines read to you, then 'In Your Pocket' may be the device for you. Very simple and easy to use, there is no screen and only one button to press.

Just ask for a book and In Your Pocket will start reading the book to you. The device can also make calls and send text just by using your voice.

Oxsight Glasses: These are designed for people with peripheral vision loss, sometimes known as tunnel vision. The glasses use intelligent image interpretation technology and algorithms to enhance and increase the quality and field of vision. The glasses have seven modes that enhance vision in various scenarios and it is easy to switch between modes.

If you would like any help with your existing equipment or want to discuss how new technologies could help you, then please do not hesitate and get in touch with us on 0300 222 5555 or email us at info@henshaws.org.uk

Tech Talkers Still Talking Tech!

Back in March, when the decision was made to cease face-to-face support, our Digital Team were determined to continue to provide as much of their service as possible, using any means available to them. This included the monthly Tech Talk meetings.

At Tech Talk we discuss the latest tech news, new ways to use existing tech, and personal knowledge and experience. The groups are a mixture of beginners and experts, and plenty of knowledge is shared around. Given that Tech Talk is normally a meeting that takes place in a room with numerous people sitting in close proximity (at various locations across Greater Manchester), the safety of group members meant that we needed to find another way to make this happen - along came Virtual Tech Talk!

The first Virtual Tech Talks took place in March using Skype, but by April we turned to Zoom. Zoom proved more popular as it was easier for participants to access the meetings. Although an app needs to be downloaded onto mobile devices, you do not need to create an account and can literally just tap on a link, sent before the event, to access the meeting.

The great news is that Virtual Tech Talk attendance has been broadly similar to Tech Talk in the traditional format, with new members attending all the groups. We look forward to being able to host Tech Talk in the traditional format when it is safe to do so, but in the meantime, Virtual Tech Talk will remain, giving Tech Talkers the opportunity to keep talking tech!

If you would like to find out more about Tech Talk, please contact Richard Powell on 0161 786 3654 or richard.powell@henshaws.org.uk or Chris Garry on 0161 786 3665 or chris.garry@henshaws.org.uk

Henshaws Knowledge Village

Henshaws Knowledge Village continues to grow with new content, including a brand-new section called ‘Health and Wellbeing.’ In this section, we have videos of some easy stretching exercises you can do at home, as well as an audio described yoga session from our Trafford-based instructor Elli, and even a laughter yoga video to try! There are also guides to looking after your mental health, and a blog written by our counsellor on the stages of grief associated with sight loss.

Please make sure you visit our Knowledge Village to explore our valuable resources at www.henshaws.org.uk/knowledge-village

You can also subscribe to our YouTube channel at

www.youtube.com/user/Henshaws1837

In the first 12 weeks of lockdown, our website was visited by people from every continent in the world (other than Antarctica!), with 18% of all visitors coming from abroad! In June alone, our videos on YouTube were viewed more than 12,000 times!

If you would like to receive monthly e-mails so you can keep up to date with new content on our Knowledge Village, make sure you join our mailing list through the website at www.henshaws.org.uk/sign-up-knowledge-village

Volunteer News

We would like to thank our team of volunteers for all of their hard work during the lockdown period; our dedicated volunteer Group Leaders across Greater Manchester have been keeping in touch with their group members to make sure they are kept up to date with news from Henshaws and to carry out informal welfare checks. This is, as always, very much appreciated.

Fundraising News

Henshaws Hundreds Challenge (21 - 30 September)

Launching at the start of National Eye Health Week, for ten whole days, Henshaws Hundreds is a fundraising challenge where you set your own goals. It might be a hundred laps of your garden, a hundred metre sprint, or a hundred miles running, walking or riding a bike. You choose your distance, and your own way of achieving your goal, whilst raising funds to

support people with sight loss. You don't even need to leave the house - some of our supporters have said they'll be using exercise bikes and rowing machines to get to their hundred, while others are joining forces with friends and neighbours to turn their hundreds into thousands. We'd love to tell you more about it, so please visit www.henshawshundreds.org.uk to find out more, or please contact the team at Henshaws.

Gifts in Wills

Henshaws has been supporting people with sight loss for 183 years, and each year almost a quarter of our voluntary income comes from gifts in wills; in fact, the organisation was set up as a result of a legacy from Thomas Henshaw. We are so grateful to those supporters who have included Henshaws in their will, and for the legacy donations which have kept our services going throughout lockdown.

We are aware that making a will requires some forethought and planning and is often one of those things that people can easily put off, or not get round to. There are lots of good reasons to make a will, and we want it to be easier for our supporters to write their will. Henshaws will shortly be introducing a free, online will writing service for supporters and donors. Of course we hope that anyone taking advantage of this service will want to include a donation to support those with sight loss, but this isn't compulsory and the service is free. To find out more visit www.henshaws.org.uk or contact us on 0300 222 5555.

Thank you for your support

At the beginning of March, as the number of coronavirus cases

was growing, we recognised the impact of panic buying, social distancing and potential lockdown would have a disproportionate effect for many people living with sight loss. We also recognised we might need to deliver new services or find new ways of delivering existing services.

At the same time, we were forced to cancel much of our fundraising activity and the organisation was facing the prospect of increased costs and a loss of income. Times are still uncertain but the team at Henshaws would like to thank all of those who supported our fundraising appeal. To date we have raised £185,000 and this has helped recover some of our lost income and helped us to re-engineer and maintain services during the pandemic.

The appeal is still open and anyone who wants to donate can do so online by visiting our [website](#) or by contacting the Henshaws team.

Timetable of Groups and Activities

Due to Covid-19, we have had to close our hubs and postpone any face-to-face meetings and events until government guidelines enable us to re-start our programme of regular sessions. However, we do have some activities that are being carried out over the telephone or using technology, as follows. If you would like to know more details about any of these listings, please get in touch with us on 0300 222 5555.

Bolton

Virtual social groups (over the telephone)

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1.30pm-2.30pm

If you are interested in joining in, please contact Carlton on 0300 222 5555 or email carlton.milenkovic@henshaws.org.uk

Tech Talk (video conference call on Zoom)

First Thursday of the month, 10.30am-11.30am

Oldham

Tech Talk (video conference call on Zoom)

Fourth Wednesday of the month, 10.30am-12.30pm

Tameside

Virtual social group (over the telephone)

Fridays, 1.00pm-2.30pm

If you are interested in joining in, please contact Maria on 0300 222 5555 or email maria.booth@henshaws.org.uk

Trafford

Tech Talk (video conference call on Zoom)

Fourth Thursday of the month, 10.30am-12.30pm

Arts and Culture

Poems for a Plague Year

‘A poem a day keeps the blues away’ is audio describer Anne Hornsby’s personal approach to surviving the coronavirus clampdown. As an audio describer, Anne is an excellent wordsmith, and she is now using her talents to create witty poems. Her reflections on life in the grave new world we now

inhabit are recorded in the verses she posts on Facebook or emails to friends; here is just one of them:

The Situation (22 March 2020)

'I am a gentle parasite
Who lives on arts and culture,
I spend my days describing plays
And films and art and sculpture,
But I cannot describe to you
The paintings on the wall,
When they have closed the galleries
And there's no access at all.
With theatres closed, no musicals,
No drama and no shows;
It's hard I know for all of us, when there's
No place left to go.
I am already missing all my blind and VI friends,
It will be so good to see you, when this crisis ends;
I miss my brilliant colleagues in theatres and galleries,
I couldn't do my job at all without your expertise.
Special love goes out to those in longer isolation.
See you on the other side of this awful situation.
Please stay safe all, and let's meet when
We're free to go out once again.'

You can read Anne's poems on Facebook at
www.facebook.com/mindseyedescription or email her at
mindseyedescription@gmail.com

Pandemic Poems

Pandemic Poems is a large collection of poems on the audio platform Soundcloud. The idea of recording a poem each day of

the lockdown was conceived by the actor Samuel West and the poems are read by him and other favourite actors including Eddie Redmayne, Paterson Joseph, and Juliet Stevenson.

Some poems begin with a little context, placing the work and the author in their time. They range from Shakespeare's sonnets to poems by Spike Milligan and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Philip Larkin to lyrics from the drum n' bass band The Prodigy. Find new favourites and rediscover old ones here <https://soundcloud.com/user-115260978>

Manchester Art Gallery online

The popular and long running Making Conversation workshops normally meet every month in the studios at Manchester Art Gallery, and are designed for both visually impaired and sighted people. Anyone can now join in via Manchester Art Gallery's website: <https://manchesterartgallery.org/exhibitions-and-events/exhibition/be-inspired/>

We start by spending time with an artwork, thinking about what it means to us and then making something in response, using materials from around the house. This could be poems, letters, drawings, costumes, collages, rubbings, sculptures etc. There is no right or wrong here, just enjoy the artworks and playing with materials. It is also not compulsory to make something! The session is put together by a team of local artists; Niki Colclough, Naomi Kendrick and Helen Newman, and is updated monthly.

You can also learn more about the Collections and artists who have exhibited at MAG. Each artwork in the Collections section of the website includes description and interpretation information. Explore over 25,000 objects of fine art, decorative

art and costume, developed over 200 years and still growing, at <https://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/>

Bringing the outside inside - The Twitter Birdsong Project

We're all missing the outdoors, so here's a website that brings birdsong into your home. Lev Parikian describes himself on Twitter as a conductor, writer, and atrocious birdwatcher. He's recorded the songs of British birds to help you identify those dawn choruses that seem so loud nowadays. They are arranged in groups in a day-by-day learning session, but there's also an index so you can search for a favourite bird. Visit the Twitter Birdsong Project at <https://levparikian.com/index.php/twitter-birdsong-project/>

The Harris Museum & Art Gallery

The Harris in Preston now has audio description available, online, for some of their current exhibitions. One of these is "Unfurlings" which is an exhibition of banners created by groups of people living with dementia, or supporting those with dementia. In addition to a description of the banner, you can hear poems commissioned from Ian McMillan and a little about each group. <https://www.theharris.org.uk/product/the-unfurlings-banners-for-hope-change/>

The Tate Gallery Online

The Tate offer in-depth audio descriptions and interpretation of some key artworks from their collection at www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern/audio-description-tour-tate-modern

The artworks include Claude Monet's "Water-Lilies", Matisse's "The Snail" and Picasso's "The Three Dancers".

VocalEyes "The Interval"

The Interval is the witty title of a new weekly posting from VocalEyes, designed to fill the gap until their regular monthly update on live audio described events resumes publication. This is the best source of VI-friendly arts resources during the pandemic.

A growing number of production companies and arts venues are offering remote access to their performances and collections, and the VocalEyes team are sharing an assorted collection of links to some of the best content being streamed by arts and heritage organisations across the UK and the world, plus material from their own archives. To receive The Interval by email, contact enquiries@vocaleyeyes.co.uk

Memories of VE Day 1945 (by service user Norma Holt)

"It has been a spectacular day - we have heard everything from VE Day on radio and watched TV this afternoon, and will be watching TV again later.

I remember VE Day, I was 13 and staying at my friend's house overnight who lived three doors away. Her parents woke us up with the news and we all went outside. We lived in a cul-de-sac and all the neighbours were out greeting each other, laughing and crying, but so happy and excited and singing. Somebody dragged out a piano, drinks and food seemed to appear from nowhere. I ran to my home and called out through the letterbox 'the war is over'. My Dad was on leave at that time.

What an exciting time we had, dancing and singing, but many were tearful, some sad, but so many happy and looking forward to seeing boyfriends, husbands, and some sons. Some of my friends hadn't seen their dads or brothers for a couple of years. Altogether a very joyful night that I have never forgotten.”

Other News

‘The Big Switch’ - Short Stories in Large Print

Swinton based creative writing group SWit'CH has published a collection of short stories in large print format for readers with a visual impairment. ‘The Big Switch’ is a compilation of extracts from some of the group’s previously published works. It is designed for easy reading with a font design developed by RNIB.

Eyestrain can become uncomfortable with extended periods of reading long works like novels, so the stories selected are short. Although the text is large, the book is normal size so it’s easy to handle. Big letters on clear white pages means it is a ‘page turner’ in the literal sense.

This initiative is supported by Salford CVS and NHS Salford CCG and the Third Sector Fund Grant. The book is available on Amazon for just £5, or by contacting Bill Cameron by email on switchswinton@gmail.com

TV licence reminder

Free TV licences, funded by the Government, for all over 75s will finish at the end of this month. From 1 August 2020, there will be a new scheme. So it might be worth noting that if you or someone you live with is blind (severely sight impaired),

regardless of their age, you could receive a 50% discount on the cost of a TV licence. This concession will cover anyone living in the same household (people who are partially sighted or sight impaired do not qualify for this concession). All the details, including the form you need to complete, can be found at www.tvlicensing.co.uk

Broad-Minded Coaching

Take that first step to helping yourself on your continued journey with Broad-minded Coaching, an electronic music, arts and well-being service led by life coach Lee Gosnay. Lee has completed Visual Impairment Awareness Training with Henshaws and made adaptations to start delivering bespoke electronic music sessions for anyone with visual impairment (including special sessions with some of our children and young people who access our services).

Lee says; “Coaching is about moving to the future, getting the best out of yourself in the present, removing any blocks, realising your potential and putting things in place to make things happen.” Go to www.broad-minded.com for more information under the Life and Wellbeing Coaching section, or email lee@broad-minded.com

A message from Bolton Newstalk

Bolton Newstalk records the local Bolton News every Sunday, along with any information from Bolton Council, Henshaws, SAVI etc. and this is then posted to a podcast, Alexa, and the British Wireless for the Blind Fund app. A master USB is also made which is copied on a Monday and sent out, free of charge, using

the Royal Mail 'Articles for the Blind', to 200 listeners. Anyone who does not have the means to listen to the USB, is given a USB player, free of charge. At present, due to coronavirus, we are only issuing Newstalk every other week.

COVID-19 Recovery Peer Support Group

Manchester Health and Care Commissioning has set up a Manchester COVID-19 Recovery Peer Support Group. If you are recovering from COVID-19 and interested in talking to others who are going through a similar experience, please text 07702-668169 with your name or email val.bayliss-brideaux@nhs.net. The group are meeting every Wednesday evening from 6pm. Expenses are being offered to support people joining the group.

Study on healthcare experiences of visually impaired people

What do you think about the way in which healthcare is provided for individuals with visual impairment? Is there any difficulty making or attending appointments? Do healthcare professionals and clinics take account of a patient's visual impairment? If you are visually impaired we would like to hear about your experiences; we are inviting you to join a study to investigate the experiences (positive or negative) of people with low vision, when they are interacting with healthcare services. We are looking for volunteers (aged over 18 years) to agree to be interviewed, over the phone, to find out their opinions. You will be asked a series of questions, and this will take up to 1 hour in total. This study has gained ethical approval from the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee. If you would like to find out more please contact Chris Dickinson by email at chris.dickinson@manchester.ac.uk or leave a message on 0161 306 3874 and we will call you back.

Where to find us

Our hubs are spread across Greater Manchester:

Altrincham Hospital - Railway Street, Altrincham WA14 2RE

Bolton - The Sensory Centre at Thicketford, 336 Ainsworth Lane, Bolton BL2 2QL

Manchester Royal Eye Hospital (MREH) - Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9WL

North Manchester - Venue to be confirmed

Oldham - Medtia Place, 80 Union St, Oldham OL1 1DJ

Salford - Room 2, Pendleton Gateway, Salford M6 5FX

Tameside - 3-4 Wellington Parade, Dukinfield SK16 4LE

Trafford - Venue to be confirmed

Wythenshawe - Wythenshawe Forum, Simonsway, Wythenshawe M22 5RX

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Henshaws

Twitter: www.twitter.com/Henshaws

Instagram: www.instagram.com/henshaws_uk

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