

Wales Council of the Blind Roundup

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Autumn 2016



HOUSING.

Focus on Vision Support:
featuring an interview with longest-
serving member, **Blodwen**
(pictured here with her husband, Jim).

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EDITORIAL.

Welcome to the latest edition of Roundup.

Inside is the usual roundup of developments in the sector. But remember that you can keep up-to-date through our e-bulletin Sylw. Articles are posted to our website www.wcb-ccd.org.uk and a digest of these is sent out fortnightly via email. Contact bec@wcb-ccd.org.uk to ask about signing up for these.

The theme of this issue is housing and we start by giving details of the new Managing Better scheme, which is intended to help older people with sensory loss with housing problems. We also interview one of the scheme's caseworkers to see how it works 'on the ground'.

The Thomas Pocklington Trust has produced a wide range of guides and reports on many aspects of housing, and we have produced a summary of these documents.

Of course, it is not only older vision impaired people who experience issues related to housing, and we asked some young people about their experiences of moving to university.

Our featured organisation in this edition is Vision Support. We give a short history, speak to their longest-serving member and outline the range of services they provide.

Also, we have enclosed a WCB Individual Membership form. Lifetime membership for sight impaired people costs just £1 so if you, or someone you know, would like to join, please complete the form and return it to Rebecca at WCB in the envelope provided.

Our next edition will look at the Lottery-funded **Community Voice** portfolios across Wales and how disabled people have

engaged with the various portfolios. Please send articles and notices to richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk

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Further copies, in audio CD or large print formats, are available. All editions are online at

<http://www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/roundup.php>

with audio at

<https://soundcloud.com/wales-council-blind>

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WCB Roundup is sent to more than 1200 people, in a variety of formats. We are a not-for-profit organisation that hopes to recoup its costs. We seek advertisers for our newsletter so that we can continue to produce this valued journal. Advertisers will reach a readership of individuals with sight loss, optometrists, ophthalmologists, rehabilitation officers, social workers, and organisations working for blind, partially sighted and disabled people.

Our rates are (per edition):

Full A4 page: £150 (black and white) £250 (colour)

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Enclosures: single sheet A4 750 copies, supplied in a ready-to-go format: £200.

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To advertise in many editions, please contact us for discounts.

Contact Ann via ann@wcb-ccd.org.uk or

telephone 02920 473954.

WCB NEWS.

Your Voice: a Shared Vision.

West Wales Group Meeting

We had yet another great turnout to our event in September with participants coming from Ceredigion, Carmarthen and Pembrokeshire.

Care and Repair

Peter Morgan from Care and Repair outlined the new Managing Better service, a partnership project with RNIB Cymru and Action on Hearing Loss. The service will support older people residing in Wales to live independently in their own homes. (More is given in the article elsewhere in this edition).

Ein Llais, Ein Storm

Megan John and Mared Jarman came along to talk about an exciting new project called Ein Llais, Ein Storm.

Megan and Mared are both founder members of UCAN Productions, which is an arts organisation working across Wales to develop vocal and physical confidence in young blind and vision impaired people.

In partnership with Wales Council of the Blind, they will aim to give young adults across Wales the opportunity to have their voices and opinions heard through regional groups and social media to help shape services and support for vision impaired people.

For the second half of the meeting, we broke into discussion groups and posed the following questions:

As a blind or partially sighted person, what is the most important service or piece of information you have received to help you?

We received a good response to this question and some of those included: technology solutions, (speech and screen readers); understanding my eye condition to enable me to source the most relevant service or product; the Rehabilitation Officer; You Can Do IT (IT training service); WCB IT Assessment; Low Vision Service; help from RNIB's Raise project as well as their counselling service; registration - as it opened up a gateway to services; Access to Work as a concept (but have seen increased barriers recently); v.i. bowls club; Guide Dogs; support from husband (single people are more vulnerable); Social Services; telephone counselling from the Macular Society; Online Today; My Guide (but this is not available everywhere).

What is the one thing that would make a significant difference to your wellbeing?

Comments received included: driverless cars; more volunteer drivers in rural areas; a guide dog; more help with mobility/rehabilitation when you want it; a device like UCAN Go but for outside use; increase in TV audio description; better transport links; exercise; raised awareness amongst society about sight loss; improved employment opportunities; accessible information to include technology to reduce further barriers; education amongst family, friends and colleagues about their sight condition and the barriers faced; specialist vi counselling; more training in medical settings (All Wales Standards); awards system for hospital wards; talking buses; more Braille on products with use by dates (Co-op is a good example of using Braille); equipment rental scheme (hire purchase instead of buying expensive equipment outright).

Other comments received:

There were mixed feelings about Third Sector counselling services; lack of support from GPs and a difference in culture between hospitals (the Heath Hospital and Morriston Hospital give a completely different quality of service to people with sight loss).

WCB Storm Event.

Ein Llais Ein Storm, Our Voice Our Storm is WCB's new young adult project.

WHAT? A Storm Event is an opportunity for us vision impaired young adults to get together and discuss all things sight loss! We want to know what you care about! What you think of the services available in Wales! We want to hear what you have to say! Come join us at our first Storm Event.

WHEN? Wednesday 30th of November - 5:00pm-late

WHERE? Urban Tap House, private upstairs bar and cwtch area, 25 Westgate St, Cardiff.

Contact us on:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/StormWCB

Twitter: [@StormWCB](https://twitter.com/StormWCB)

E-mail: mared@wcb-ccd.org.uk or megan@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Telephone: 029 20 473 954

WCB Membership.

We have recently sent out forms calling for membership of Wales Council of the Blind. If you wish to become an individual member (blind and partially sighted), there is a lifetime nominal membership fee of £1. If you, or someone you know, would wish to join, please complete the enclosed application form or contact Rebecca on 029 20 473954. Email bec@wcb-ccd.org.uk

HOUSING.

Managing Better - Helping older people across Wales Manage Better and stay safe in their own homes.

The new Managing Better service - a collaboration between RNIB Cymru, Action on Hearing Loss Cymru and Care and Repair Cymru - employs Caseworkers in every part of Wales, helping older people (50+) who live in poor housing, have a sensory impairment and are frail, have dementia, or are vulnerable in other ways. The service works with primary healthcare practitioners, GPs, hospitals, social care, and third sector organisations to reach older people most in need of help, to keep them safe, warm and independent at home.

The Managing Better Caseworkers, working out of local Care & Repair Agencies, visit older people in their own homes, assess their needs and identify bespoke solutions to the housing problems they face. (We talk to Sandy Davies, Managing Better Caseworker for Bridgend, later on).

The partnership enables Care and Repair to reach vulnerable older people before they suffer a crisis such as falling at home, calling an ambulance, and presenting in hospital or GP surgeries due to cold, damp, unsafe housing. It also makes sure that the Managing Better Caseworkers access the knowledge, skills and services of Care and Repair and the specialist sensory loss organisations.

The following are key components of the service:

- A face-to-face home visiting service personalised for individual occupants, not the house;
- A person-centred, problem-led service offering an individually tailored approach;
- A listening, choice-based and problem-solving service, shaping a service outcome from the aspirations of the older person, through managing risks and presenting 'informed choices', where necessary referring on for specialist support;
- The service standards are strongly based on maintaining dignity & respect, maintaining regular, clear and accessible communication;
- The initial service is assessment based (Healthy Home Assessment) combining a client information profile and a housing assessment (often supplemented by a more comprehensive technical service);
- The client service will be managed by the caseworker with the agency managing any building work (from a leaking tap to an extension);
- There is a service that assesses the ability to 'manage the lived environment', with reference to care needs, personal resilience, digital inclusion and financial inclusion;
- We offer welfare benefit entitlement checks, support form-filling and liaise with partners around the process and/or potential appeals;

- Where relevant there is a ‘hand holding’ approach and more intensive support for accessing housing grants, brokerage and leveraging-in benevolent funding or private funding.

Health Specific

The Managing Better service aims to work in a more formal and potentially integrated way within health settings to provide the service for older people, 50 years and over, with relationships developed that encourage health partners to refer clients on a ‘*our patients are your clients*’ basis to the Managing Better Service, as a mode of prevention.

Housing Specific

Care & Repair’s core services are provided for home owners and older people in the private rented sector, but Managing Better makes a new offer:

- Access for cross-tenure client group (home owners, private rented and social housing);
- Ability to negotiate environmental support with social landlords;
- Be sensitive to the need to explore wider housing options.

How can we work better together?

In the belief that community services are stronger working together there is a basic service specification for ‘Managing Better’ and what it seeks to deliver is made clear:

- An assessment of housing hazards and practical interventions; (adaptations, repairs, modifications, etc.) professionally supervised to lower risks to independent living and poor health;
- Managing building works through recommended contractors and a trusted in-house brand;
- Brokering solutions and ‘hand holding’ where required;

- Income maximisation and digital & financial inclusion;
- Utilising our ‘conversation with the client’ to ensure good health and independent living is assisted through prompts, information and advice;
- Accessing effective local partnerships for our clients through a referring-on process where we have no responsibility or expertise, such as:
 - Rehabilitation, assistive technology, personal function-analysis; and training support, regaining confidence through skill repair/enhancement;
 - Sensory loss clinics;
 - Befriending and advocacy;
 - Care needs;
 - Primary care/pharmacy services;
 - Specialist debt advice;
 - Counselling services;
 - Emotional/psychological support;
 - Employment and access to rights;
 - Gardening services;
 - Professional Exercise/Mobility support.

The service hinges on a Managing Better Caseworker, who is the person responsible for conducting an assessment and has the skills to work with people with sensory loss.

The work of a Managing Better caseworker.

Sandy Davies is the Managing Better Caseworker for Bridgend. She is in the unique position amongst her colleagues of having a background in working with sensory loss. As a former rehabilitation officer she is able to bring expertise and impart knowledge to the Care and Repair teams and has a special relationship with the local authority sensory team in her area.

She tells us about the kind of work she does to support older people with sensory loss such as organising adaptations their homes and help with securing financial assistance.

Her clients are referred to her in various ways. One way is from an Eye Clinic Liaison Officer at the hospital.

“Say the patient was going to be certified as sight impaired, the ECLO would send a referral form to me. We've got tick boxes on our form: falls prevention, lighting, home adaptations, security, welfare benefits. I would make an appointment and go out and assess.”

Referrals might also come from the hospital Occupational Therapist.

“I was on a hospital ward yesterday. We've got a hospital discharge service in Bridgend so we're fortunate, but this particular person had sight loss and was having problems administering his insulin. He's been in hospital for ten weeks and they were keen to discharge him but he couldn't administer his insulin because he couldn't see it. The district nurse can only go in twice but he needs to do it four times a day. So I was trying to get the nurses to teach him because he's going to be discharged in two weeks. But his home doesn't have adequate lighting, so I'm arranging for our technician to go in and install whatever lighting is needed and ramps and grab-rails. It needs to be done before he's discharged.

“This type of client is urgent. There are two hospital generic caseworkers – hospital-to-home – they go and do ward rounds and if they see someone with a sensory loss they refer them on to me.”

The role of the local authorities is important within the various pathways:

“The hospital pathway is where I work with the ECLO, where the Certificate of Visual Impairment gets passed to Social Services. Another referral could come where the sensory team in the local authority has identified a housing issue and they refer it on to me. They might think the front door is not secure, for instance.”

Because there is too much risk in sending some people to their homes without the necessary adaptations, the service has to be responsive.

“Our caseworkers and handyman can get out very quickly. It's a very quick turnaround. Out of these cases the sensory ones are referred on to me.”

Sandy's role is to offer the additional expertise and knowledge required to effectively support people with sensory loss.

“I go out and do a full sensory and Healthy Home Assessment first - those assessments are preventative and personal to that individual.

“These assessments are quite long and can take up to two or three visits. If the client is deaf or hard of hearing it can be very difficult. Our training covered lip-reading and using devices like a portable loop system. When the person has a hearing aid we can put this around their neck to aid communication. It gets the assessment done a lot quicker.

“RNIB is doing training with all technical officers and all caseworkers across Wales so our staff will have the Visibly Better training.”

The service works best as a collaboration. The importance of coordinating activities with other partners is crucial to maximising benefit.

“The relationship with sensory teams and elsewhere only works with dialogue and good communications. I believe that good practice will come when every Managing Better caseworker gets an opportunity to go to a Sensory Team meeting and do joint visits with the rehab.

“If you've got lots of people going out to somebody's house, the client hasn't got a clue who each one is. “I don't know who they are”, they say. The ECLO and I are trying to identify joint visiting opportunities so we can go out together and make it easier for the client. It cuts down on time for that person. During our assessment we'll be able to get enough information and coordinate better.”

But what impact does it have on the waiting times for rehabilitation support?

“It could work better because if we go to assess the client together, it might be that the rehab officer doesn't go back in until we've done our work – our lighting, the driveway, the building work, whatever needs doing to make rehab safe and effective.

“So I meet with the sensory team regularly in Bridgend. Most of the ECLOs are referring in to both services. The ROVIs can't get to do rehab if the lighting is not good. Rehab is all about orientation, mobility, daily living and communication, so it gives them more time to do that.

“We're very specific - our role has a very tight remit. We're meant to be looking at home safety, home security, falls prevention, maximizing income (we refer all our welfare rights clients to RAISE*), Council Tax Reduction, fuel poverty. I have one client who's in a right mess with their energy bills because they can't read them and they're ringing up the provider and the provider is getting narked with them because of their hearing

loss. We go through this with them and get a better deal for them sometimes.”

The remit of the caseworker is the same throughout Wales but it will operate differently at a local level depending, for instance, on the composition of sensory teams and the availability of funding streams.

“A big part of our role is getting grants in. Every Care and Repair agency will have various pots of money. Some have Hardship Funds or we can get help from other sources. You have to find out their occupation because they might be eligible for other sources of help such as CISWO, the miners' benevolent fund.

“We work very closely with the local authority because if we identify a need for a bathroom adaptation or a stair lift we have to get an occupational therapist to do an assessment. We have to tap into funds in the local authority and the local Care and Repair.”

The service delivers throughout Wales, but how does that work with the various boundaries – the Health Board areas and the Local Authorities?

“Care and Repair Cymru is an umbrella organization for thirteen local agencies. Some authorities have merged so there are not twenty-two agencies.

“For instance, our ECLO, Maureen Griffiths works in Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot. It's quite difficult for her because when she's in Port Talbot she's referring to NPT Care and Repair Managing Better and when she's in Bridgend she's referring to me. But then she can also refer to the caseworker in the Vale because some of her clients live there. So she's actually working with three authorities and two health boards.

“I have a lady who moved from another authority to Bridgend. She bought a house and didn't know about Care and Repair. The house needed a new roof, bathroom, kitchen, windows – it was gutted. A lot of that work could have been done through a Disabled Facilities Grant but by the time she'd been referred a lot of it had been done and paid for. But she'd gone to the hospital and the ECLO, Maureen, referred her on to me so I went out. The jobs I identified were a toilet that was separate to her bathroom; the stairs were dangerous; she wasn't on a means-tested benefit, she had hardly any savings left. I referred her to the Sensory Team. I filled out the council tax reduction forms, so then she came onto a means-tested benefit and that allowed me to go out with an occupational therapist and get a wet room installed.”

So, what kind of support is there for people with hearing loss?

“Sometimes the caseworker can go out and not know until they get to the home environment that the patient has hearing loss because they might have arrived at the hospital without their hearing aid.

“We've got a very good sensory team in Bridgend that can support people with hearing loss. But a lot of authorities don't have that, so it could be that the Managing Better caseworker is the first person out there who deals with the hearing loss part. There is always a risk that people with a hearing aid may not enter the service; audiology clinics, for instance, don't necessarily refer on.”

What kinds of tenant are supported?

“We work cross-tenure: homeowners, private landlords, estate agents. The only people we don't see are residential and nursing homes. However, the owner has to give their permission. Sometimes the agents will transfer the tenant to more suitable accommodation.”

Do landlords get asked to contribute to the cost of adaptations?

“It depends on what the work is. A stair-lift would come through a local authority grant so it wouldn't impact on a private landlord. On the other hand I have one client where the landlord is paying for all the work.”

“One homeowner struggles to get in and out of her property and feels isolated. She's had a number of falls. She has two entrances to the house, so we could put a pathway with a ramp and galvanized steel rails to one of them. She needs grab-rails on most of the doors; she needs the bathroom adapted and needs a stair-lift because she struggles to get upstairs so sleeps downstairs. It's not worth looking at the outside environment at the moment; we need to get it safe inside. But in this case we're meeting the family half-way – we'll pay for the interior and they'll pay for the exterior adaptations.”

* more about RAISE in number 23, Spring 2016 edition of Roundup

To find out about the Managing Better Service please contact the Project Development Officer, Stephen Thomas, at Care & Repair Cymru on 02920 674830 or email stephen.thomas@careandrepair.org.uk

To make a referral to the Managing Better service call 0300 111 3333 or email managingbetter@careandrepair.org.uk

Independent living - resources from the Thomas Pocklington Trust.

The Thomas Pocklington Trust is a charity committed to increasing awareness and understanding of the needs of people with sight loss, and to developing and implementing services that meet their needs and improve lives. They fund a programme of social research that aims to identify practical ways to improve the lives of vision impaired people, and have produced a range of reports related to housing and independent living. In this article, we give an overview of relevant publications and guidelines.

Housing for People with Sight Loss – a practical guide to improving existing homes.

This good practice guide looks at how home adaptations, routine maintenance and refurbishment can make any home safer, easier to live in and more pleasant. It covers general principles such as improving lighting, avoiding clutter, use of contrast and avoiding glare. It also stresses the importance of involving people in any decisions about their home. Specific areas of the home (such as halls and stairs, kitchens and living rooms) are then examined and detailed advice and recommendations are given for each of them. The guide concludes with a comprehensive series of checklists for each area. The guide will be a valuable resource for people with sight loss, their families and professionals.

Lighting your home to make the best of your sight.

Good lighting can help make the most of your sight. This guide is full of practical advice for lighting homes for people with sight

loss. Covering topics from choosing the best light bulb to decisions around light fitting installation, this guide will demonstrate how to create a safer home which enables you to remain as independent as possible.

Assistive and inclusive home technology guide.

This guide covers a broad range of high- and low-tech products used for a variety of activities around the home, from online shopping and reading to health and fitness. It gives hints and tips on getting to grips with technology for the uninitiated, including what kinds of products to purchase; information on available funding and a handy checklist and questions for occupational therapists and support workers to identify the needs of their clients and help plan a way forward.

Choosing cookers, ovens, hobs and microwaves.

As cooking appliances move towards the trend of touchscreen interfaces, they are becoming less accessible to people with sight loss. This practical guide outlines how to choose the best home appliances for sight loss.

Good practice in the design of homes and living spaces for people with dementia and sight loss.

Design guidance has previously been separately produced for people with dementia and people with sight loss. These guidelines, which prioritise the person and their individual needs, are intended to create enabling environments that are sensitive to the needs of people with sight loss who also have dementia.

You can download these documents, and many other guides and research documents, from the Thomas Pocklington website: <http://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/research-independent-living/>.

Ever increasing circles.

Four vision impaired young people told us about making the move to University. We start with Kiel J Gibson.

When I was asked to write about my own experiences as student with a visual impairment, the phrase 'ever increasing circles' seemed to be the most fitting title. It sounds flowery I know but let me explain. Living on campus has many benefits, you're closer to the university facilities, and it is easier in a sense to move around. In my first year I received some temporary help towards mobility on campus, my accommodation at Staffordshire University in Stoke-on-Trent was no more than a 10-minute walk from the train station. Shops were not too difficult to find either, it seemed as though the transition between home and independence would be smoother than I had expected.

But then, slowly, problems became more apparent. True, I had had mobility training, but it was often in the morning, when not too many people were around. When my classes began, moving around campus became much more challenging: many of the buildings had rows of random bollards which were difficult to detect even in the day time, and the layouts of the building inside were equally as confusing. A lot of the time the class schedules and room numbers were hard to read and because campus was much busier I often struggled to recognise landmarks I'd memorised previously.

Eventually I got to a stage where these things became less of a problem, but sure enough there was yet another circle of problems to get over. Building works to and from my house were inconvenient for many reasons - the noise, of course - but more often because I sometimes had to walk along the road to reach the other side of campus. Pavements were sometimes impossible to navigate without some embarrassment taking

place; there were times it was hard to know where the barriers and cones were placed, because they very often got moved around.

I can say that for the most part my house had no major issues, it was simple enough to get around, in my experience it was only challenging when you had to head out the door for what really should be a liberating experience. If we can make universities aware of how their accommodation as well as the surrounding areas affects people with visual impairments, maybe we can help to overcome these issues and make university a much safer and enjoyable time for everyone.

Hannah told us about student life at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Over three years of university I spent each year in a different type of housing. Halls of residence for my first year, a four-bedroom house for my second, and a two bed flat in my final year. Each had its own hurdles and experiences, but I think the one that started my independence and gave me so much to carry through life was living in halls of residence.

It's a giant leap going to uni and moving away from home being without family 24/7. I can remember feeling sick to my stomach with nerves, but also a lightness that I'd have so much freedom. One of the biggest challenges I face day-to-day is meeting new people and telling them that I am vision impaired. Not because I'm ashamed to have a disability, more that I get tired of the same answers and questions when I tell people: 'you don't look like you have bad eyes'; 'how do you cope?' I can't remember much of the conversations that I had with my flat mates about my disability, but from what I do remember they were all very understanding and didn't actually ask stupid questions. They were fine and accepted me and treated me like anyone else with 'normal' vision.

I have some of the best friends anyone could ask for from living in halls. We all bonded in this way of living independently for the first time, though I would get annoyed at how messy our kitchen would get sometimes. The boys in the flat were lazy and never did the dishes. That didn't stop any of us from having an awesome time socialising and living what we thought at the time was the high life. It was comfortable and no one had to pretend to be anything. I was in a flat that had more space than some of the others so it was easier to move around in my room without walking into things all the time and bumping my toe/leg or arm on walls and desks.

The staff at the residence office were amazing. Lisa, the halls manager, was someone who would always be willing to have a chat with you about how you're doing or any concerns that you may have had. She helped me and the girls in my flat put the guys straight about the cleanliness of the kitchen, and she would check in on me to make sure I was doing well and there weren't any problems with my room or getting around the residence.

I think if I hadn't been so open about my disability, or confident in the way I talked to everyone about it, my experience would have been a lot different. I would have struggled a lot more and been hiding part of me from the friends I'd made. Being able to speak up confidentially helped me to adapt to being independent with my friends a lot easier, and I've learned a lot of independence skills from doing so. I've also learnt some hard lessons that I've definitely built on from being in halls, but it's worth it for how I shaped the rest of my university experience. If I could sum up my experience of living in student accommodation it would be that it's life changing and prepares you for the real world a lot more than you may think it will.

Ben Richards from Barry made the move to the University of Gloucester.

I took a gamble and put myself in at the deep end, choosing to attend the University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham. I was lucky enough to secure my accommodation on campus for my first year. The university was really helpful in understanding that, with my sight, this was the most appropriate accommodation for me: I couldn't have agreed more! I was given a room on the first floor, meaning I only had one set of stairs to climb. For me this was ideal as I have never been a fan of ground floor accommodation but also I wouldn't have been happy being on the higher floors because the amount of stairs could have been an issue, especially after a student night out!

My room was spacious enough and having the luxury of an ensuite bathroom with a shower was literally a lifesaver. The space I was given allowed me to feel more confident in my flat ensuring I could live independently; it also enabled me to adjust to the surroundings comfortably. The flat was brand new - the whole block was only two years old - and it was a lovely building with excellent facilities and well looked after. I loved my student accommodation and although I was limited to a one-year tenancy the people, the facilities and the location made my first year of university probably the best of my life! Looking back now it was certainly a great experience and that single year helped to shape who I am today. So apart from my rough and, at times, difficult university experience I must say thank you to the University of Gloucestershire for giving me the best year of my life!

Jake Sawyers from Port Talbot studied at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David's.

This year I made the slightly terrifying transition from being a full time student to being a graduate - a confused, slightly lost but, overall, optimistic graduate. But enough about that. Let's go

back in time to my three years of university life. Uni accommodation comes in all different shapes and sizes depending on where you decide to go. You'll have a lot of questions before you move in, just like everyone else. Will I get my own bathroom? Am I catered for? Double or single bed? Why won't the washing machines accept my pound coins!? But going to university with sight loss brings about its own crazy questions. Before I give you some insight of what it's like being a blind student, let me give you some details about where I lived. I was able to live on campus, about a minute walk from my lecturers and the student union, for my entire three-year course. In my first year I was provided with two meals a day, I lived with seven other boys and we shared two bathrooms. In my second and third year I shared a room with my boyfriend. We had an en-suite and shared a kitchen with eight others. So my accommodation situation was defiantly unique and came with its own pros and cons.

Living with so many different people was definitely an experience to say the least. However, I wouldn't have changed any of it. Honestly, my sight loss impacted very little on my university life, inside and outside the classroom. I am, however, aware of how great my situation was. I actually went to university with about six friends from my college. This made the initial socialising aspect a bit easier as I already knew half the people I would be living with. My campus was also very small, it was a little community where everyone got to know everyone very quickly. Thirdly, I was on an acting course, so there were no big lecture halls, very little written work and performing folk are all super-nice. The school of performing arts at UWTSU treated you as an individual and not a number. So all this together resulted in a very positive university experience.

As far as sight loss is concerned my words of wisdom are: this may or may not be the first time you've lived away independently for more than a week; you won't be the only one; everyone is going to be experiencing new things, getting stuff

wrong and slowly becoming an adult. Don't be afraid to tell people what you need, be it your housemates or lecturers. You are paying to be there, it's not mandatory; you should be getting the most out of this amazing experience. Yes, I understand it's not always easy but it's a great habit to get into. Also, do your dishes because those things pile up FAST.

WCB would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this feature. If you have any comments on this topic, please let us know.

FOCUS ON VISION SUPPORT.

Vision Support is a well-respected North-East Wales charity, providing person-centred services that meet the needs of adults and children with vision impairment across Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Conwy.

Established in 1876, the charity's mission is to promote the continuing independence of individuals living with sight loss, and to raise awareness of the needs of vi people living within the local community. It has more than 150 staff and volunteers working to achieve this aim and to deliver a range of services.

Founded under the name The Chester Association for the Home Teaching of the Blind, the original focus was to send home teachers out to educate people with visual impairments in applicable skills. In the first year, 79 people were visited. By 1907, a new scheme of work was adopted to ensure that as many people as possible were earning a wage, with the Society employing blind workers such as a music teacher and brush maker. Leisure activities were also provided, such as a library of 'embossed literature'. In 1958, the Society purchased 'talking book machines' to be lent to members.

Vision Support has always been overseen by a board of trustees whose job it is to ensure that it meets the needs of its service users. A notable trustee was the Reverend Eustace George Auden, who served the charity from 1932 to 1954 and was related to the renowned writer W. H. Auden.

In 1990 the society changed its name to the Chester, Cheshire and Clywd Society for the Blind to reflect its increased geographical coverage, and following local government reorganisation in 1997, it became the Cheshire and North East

Wales Society for the Blind. In 2001 the Society merged with Vision Enhancement Services and took the working name of Vision Support. The first of its innovative Mobile Resource Centres, covering North Wales, was launched in 2002.

Vision Support provides the following services to its clients:

CLUBS

Rhyl Visionaires

This club meets on the last Wednesday of each month between 11-12.30 at Vision Support in Morfa Hall, Rhyl.

Tel: 01745 338914

Rhyl Walking Group

A walking club that meets on the second Wednesday of each month at 11am at Vision Support, Morfa Hall, Rhyl.

Tel: 01745 338914

Prestatyn Visionaires

This club meets on the first and third Wednesday of the month between 10am and 12 noon at Nant Hall Church, Prestatyn.

Tel: 01745 338914

Visionaires Ten Pin Bowling

Ten pin bowling club for over-18s meeting at Ffrith Astro Bowl, Prestatyn. Contact below for dates.

Tel: 01745 338914

Mold Visionaires

This club meets on the first and third Wednesdays every month between 2-4pm at Llys Jasmine, Mold.

Tel: 01352 751921

Allotment/Gardening Club

A gardening club based at an allotment in Prices Lane, Wrexham.

Tel: 01978 318813

Wrexham Visionaries

This club meets on the first Monday each month between 11am and 1pm at Vision Support, Room 33, AVOW, 21 Egerton Street, Wrexham LL11 1LW
Tel: 01978 318813

Crown Green Bowling - Wrexham

Bowling club that meets every Wednesday at 10.15 at the Bowling Green, Bradley Park Cricket Club, Wrexham.

View Craft/Art Group

This arts and crafts club meets every Tuesday from 10am - 12 noon at Wrexham Library, Rhosddu Road, Wrexham LL11 1AU
Tel: 01978 358738

Visionaires Social Club - Wrexham

Social Club taking place at Vision Support, Room 33, AVOW, 21, Egerton Street, Wrexham LL11 1ND on the first Monday of each month from 11am - 1pm.
Tel: 01978 318813

Ruthin Social Group

The group meets on the second Wednesday of every month for coffee, company and practical advice and support. 11am-12.30pm. Venue: Presbyterian Church Hall, Wynnstay Road, Ruthin LL15 1AS
Tel: 01745 338914 or 07730 413996

18-55 Socialise Group

The Group welcomes new members and organises activities and events. For example, the group has been snow tubing at Llandudno Ski Slope and Snow Board Centre, organised a successful Band Night at the Centenary Club in Wrexham and taken part in Personal Development Workshops. In partnership with UCAN Productions, members of the group are also having Ukulele lessons.
Tel: 07730 413996

SUPPORT GROUPS

Macular Disease Support Group Conwy

Meets on the first Monday of the month from 10.30 to 12.00 at Craig y Don Community Centre.

Tel: 01248 680135

Deafblind Cymru - Conwy Group

Meets on the last Friday of the month from 11 am to 1 pm at the Ambassador Hotel, Llandudno LL30 2NR

Email: julie.daley@deafblind.org.uk or tel: 07940 854515

Let's Talk

Service users receive a regular (usually weekly) telephone call from a Vision Support 'Let's Talk' volunteer. As well as putting them in contact with any other Vision Support services that they may enquire about, they have a general chat.

Email: lwithington@visionsupport.org.uk or tel: 01270 873691

(RE)HABILITATION

Independent living advice

Vision Support's qualified rehabilitation officers focus on maintaining independence and promoting equality for anyone living with sight loss. They also have a team of Rehabilitation Assistants who demonstrate specialist equipment and support service users in their own homes. Note: The rehab workers are subcontracted to Social Services.

TRAINING

Computer Training - Rhyl

Learn to use computers - every Monday at Vision Support, Morfa Hall, Rhyl.

Tel: 01745 338914

Computer Training - Wrexham

Learn computer skills every Tuesday at Vision Support, Room 33, AVOW, 21 Egerton Street, Wrexham LL11 1LW.

Tel: 01978 318813

Online Today - IT Training

Vision Support has a team of staff and volunteers who will help you find out how to get the most of being online - from browsing websites and sending emails, to keeping in touch with family and friends and up to date with news and leisure interests.

Through home visits, events, one-to-one and group sessions and demonstrations of products such as laptops, tablets, smartphones and eReaders, you will find how easy it is to gain the basic skills and confidence to use technology.

Email: digitalinclusion@visionsupport.org.uk

RESOURCE CENTRES

Rhyl Resource Centre

The fully trained staff and volunteers at Vision Support's Rhyl Resource Centre demonstrate and sell specialist equipment to help with daily living. The Resource Centre has a range of information on Vision Support's services and other relevant services available locally and nationally. The centre is open Monday - Thursday, 10 am to 3 pm.

Email: ltwamley@visionsupport.org.uk or tel: 01745 338914

Halton Resource Centre

The fully trained staff and volunteers at Vision Support's Halton Resource Centre demonstrate and sell specialist equipment to help with daily living. The Resource Centre has a range of information on Vision Support's services and other relevant services available locally and nationally. Monday to Friday, 9.30 to 2.30. halton@visionsupport.org.uk or tel: 01928 582946

Vision Support Mobile Resource Centres

Vision Support have two Mobile Information Units that visit local communities making it easier for those unable to get to a resource centre to access information, services and equipment. Monthly schedules for the two units are published on the website. It is recommended that you ring the telephone number given to confirm that a visit is going ahead.

Email: information@visionsupport.org.uk or tel: 01745 338914

FOCUS GROUPS AND FORUMS

VI Voices North Denbighshire

The county steering group where people with a vision impairment can meet to exchange ideas and views about any issue. The group is supported by Vision Support and meets at the Library, Prestatyn LL19 9LH on the second Monday every other month between 2.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m.

Tel: 01244 381515

VI Voices Campaigning Groups

Vision Support's VI Voices groups meet in Llandudno, Prestatyn and Wrexham and invite speakers from various organisations to discuss a range of issues from 'A' Boards and street furniture to accessibility in health services. Get involved and make a difference. For further information, please contact Vision Support.

Email: janette.williams@visionsupport.co.uk

Tel: 01745 338914 or 07730 413996

VI Voices Wrexham

The county steering group where people with a vision impairment can meet to exchange ideas and views about any issue. The group is supported by Vision Support and meets at AVOW, Egerton Street, Wrexham LL11 1ND on the third Monday every other month between 2.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m.

Tel: 01244 381515

Contact details for **Vision Support** are:

Web: <http://www.visionsupport.org.uk>

Tel: 01244 381515

Email: information@visionsupport.org.uk

Planes, Trains and Shire Horses.

Blodwen is Vision Support's longest serving member from back in the day when the charity was called the Chester and District Blind Society. She is a guide dog user and has raised almost £17k for the Guide Dogs organisation.

Her childhood seemed idyllic. Her mother was a caretaker at the village school and her father worked for Lord Mostyn looking after shire horses.

“I used to go with my dad when he'd enter shire horses in competitions at carnivals. Sometimes I used to go to school on horseback. Luckily I lived in a village where everybody knew one another. There were a lot of youngsters my age and they used to come to my house for tea. We'd play games like 'top and whip' and I used to ride a bike. I started off with a three-wheeler and I managed a two-wheeler eventually. The roads were so quiet in those days.”

Blodwen was registered blind in 1937 at the age of 6. Miss Burgess was then in charge of the Chester and District Blind Society, which later became Vision Support. “I don't really remember her but I remember my parents saying she was a bit of a battle-axe. She wanted them to put me in a school – Henshaw's – but my parents said no, because they wanted get me to a good specialist to see if they could do anything with my sight.” Burgess replied that there's no point in doing that because they wouldn't be able to afford it! Blodwen's parents were determined so they made an appointment with a specialist. When he looked at her, he discovered some light perception so he felt optimistic and arranged for her first operation. “They operated – I had sixteen operations in one eye and two in the other. Anyway, he did bring a bit of sight back.”

This small restoration of vision enabled Blodwen to attend a regular school. “They were brilliant with me, I got the best attention. I couldn’t see the blackboard, though. When I was about sixteen there used to be a chap at Wrexham Society called Tom Evans who asked me ‘have you thought about what you want to do when you get older? There’s a place in Liverpool where you can learn a trade. If you’d like to go I can make arrangements.’ So I went to Liverpool to a blind school where I learned the knitting machine. I was there for three-and-a-half years.”

Blodwen met her husband Jim, a basket maker, at the school. She passed her trade exams and was asked to go to the workshops in Chester at the Blind Society to start a job. The Lower Bridge Street workshops were old with stone steps.

“There was a lady there who was blind, deaf and dumb. I used to help her all I could, but if anything went wrong with the knitting machine she’d take it out on me. She tried to push me down the stone staircase. If I’d gone down them I wouldn’t be here today.

“I nearly had a nervous breakdown. When we were down in Bridge Street the wages were very poor. I think I started in the workshops in the early 50s.”

An entry in the minutes for the society says that white canes were offered to the workers but they were refused by most.

“I wouldn’t use a stick. They gave me one and on the way home I bought a newspaper, wrapped it up in it and dumped it! Oh no, I wouldn’t be seen with a white stick. It’s pride.”

Blodwen worked under Miss Cartlidge for about three months at the workshops at Chester Blind Society in Bridge Street, which then moved to Abbot Park. Then Frank Broden from Rosset was in charge. “The place in Bridge Street was very old - a drab-

looking place. We came to Abbot Park and what a difference! A beautiful garden and all that.”

Blodwen applied to work from home because she was fed up of getting two buses to work each day. She worked this way for six years or so. She acquired a Harrison knitting machine, which is now in a museum in Northwich, and set up at home to produce, amongst other things, socks for King’s School.

“Football referees used to ring up wanting me to knit socks for them. You could do an ordinary pair of socks in about three-quarters of an hour. I had to finish them off by hand. I used artificial legs to put them on to press them. I had a big order from the Mannerly Clog Dancers in Frodsham. They were about thirty inches long and they were all white! But it was lovely when you saw the dancers and you’d think ‘I made them’.

“There were socks and wool everywhere. I had the machine in the corner by the fire in the living room. Happy days! A home teacher used to come out and fill in time sheets and all that. I used to get my wages off Cheshire County Council. The home teacher – ‘Uncle’ Tom – was a wonderful chap. They become like friends. When I was a home worker I still went to the workshops to say hello.”

Vision Support is totally different now to what it was. As a child, Blodwen didn’t have access to the range of services they offer today. The things that Vision Support do today would never have been contemplated by the organisation back then.

“They were the wrong people who were in charge. Today, they’re a different kind of people.”

In recent times, Blodwen has volunteered for Guide Dogs raising money through challenges. She has raised almost £17k through various sponsored activities.

“I like doing challenges. I drove a car in the Reebok Stadium in Bolton. I'd never driven a car in my life! The co-driver said 'put your foot on the pedal' and I said 'where's the pedal?' I switched on the engine and thought 'Oh, my god, what am I doing here?!' He said 'Try to knock those people down!' It was Jim and a couple of friends! Then when I went on the back of a Harley Davidson I said 'don't go too fast, will you?' 'I'll only do 80, love!'”

Because she raised the most money on her driving challenge – over £3k - she won a prize - the chance to fly a four-seater Cessner plane over Liverpool.

“The pilot told me what to do but said 'we'll have to wait because Easyjet's ahead of us and we've got to wait for him to go through.' I said 'we can't argue with him!'”

“There was a plane flying next to us taking pictures. I thought 'Why am I doing this?' Coming down, though – the descent – oh, gosh! I was glad to get down, really!

“I wasn't satisfied with that so I said 'I really would like to drive a steam train'.” Guide Dogs arranged for Blodwen to drive the Llangollen steam train to Carrog.

“I had to wear a huge boiler suit about four sizes too big. It was a normal passenger train. If people had known it was a blind lady driving they wouldn't have got on!”

Having raised a considerable sum with the train driving, Blodwen wondered what to do next.

“I went on the skidpans with the Merseyside Police. Oh gosh, that's hair-raising! They have three skidpans: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly. We had to do the three. He said 'Hang on to your seat, we're going up the wall!' We just skimmed past the wall. It was good fun really. I did that twice and I thought 'I must do

something else.' I'd done trains and planes. I'll do a boat. I got in touch with Guide Dogs again and they arranged with Stena Line at Holyhead. They set a date for my 75th birthday and it was Guide Dogs 75th year. We were treated like royalty."

Blodwen took the controls at the bridge to steer her at 44 knots in rough water. The presence of her guide dog caused some concern. Some people thought there must have been a bomb aboard!

"They made a huge cake for my birthday and the crew all had a piece."

Blodwen would like to take on one more challenge and is open to suggestions!

ACROSS THE SECTOR.

Wales Eyecare Conference.

The theme for this year's Wales Eyecare Conference, which took place in September, was Innovation in Eye Services, Moving Forward. The conference was attended by delegates across Health, Social Care, Welsh Government and the Third Sector, as well as by individuals with sight loss.

Rebecca Evans AM, the new Minister for Social Services and Public Health provided the keynote speech and launched the new Certificate of Vision Impairment for Wales. She praised the Third Sector for working together to produce a patient information leaflet to be issued with the CVI.

Delegates heard from a range of speakers throughout the morning session on the innovative work that is happening across Wales in eye care services and social care. Themes included developing the One-Stop Cataract Pathway, developments around local vitreo-retinal services, the production of consistent documentation for cataract patients, securing accessible services close to patients' homes, developing the workforce, the Diabetic Eye Screening Wales Service and the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.

Richard Williams (Action on Hearing Loss Cymru) and Ceri Jackson (RNIB Cymru and Chair of the Wales Vision Strategy) provided an update on the All Wales Standards for Communication and Information for People with Sensory Loss. They reported on examples of good practice but highlighted that there is still much more work to be done.

James Ledger, a vision impaired athlete, reflected on his positive experience of accessing services and the confidence that he has gained through sport.

A highlight of the day was the theatrical sketches provided by members of UCAN Productions on what rehabilitation can do for young people and the challenges around gaining employment. Two inspirational videos were also shown on what young blind and partially sighted people feel about disclosing their sight loss and the support they have received. These videos were produced by members of UCAN Productions in partnership with RNIB Cymru as part of their Future Insight project.

The Eye Health Care Delivery Plan for Wales was launched at the conference in 2013. The plan was due to run until 2018. This will now be extended to 2020 in line with other Welsh Government delivery plans. The afternoon breakout sessions focused on the refresh of the plan with delegates indicating their 5 priorities for moving forward. We'll update readers on the

priorities when agreed by the Welsh Government.

Speaker biographies, presentations and a link to the Future Insight videos are available at <http://www.wcbccd.org.uk/conference/conference.php>.

Dr Barbara Ryan steps down

Dr Barbara Ryan has stepped down as chief optometric advisor to the Welsh Government, having completed her four-year term in the role. Dr Ryan said that it had been a “fantastic experience to work as a senior civil servant in Welsh Government. I found it interesting and rewarding to be involved in developing health policy and advising ministers,” she said, adding: “It was an especially good time because there was such a strong drive towards developing primary care, underpinned by the principles of 'Prudent Healthcare,' which require clinicians to work at the top of their licence and see patients as equal partners.” The chair of Optometry Wales, Andrew Riley, thanked Dr Ryan for “her enthusiasm and consistent hard work and effort to help facilitate change and improvement.”

He acknowledged how in the last four years Dr Ryan has “single-handedly helped to deliver a continuation of a world-class eye care service, utilising primary care optometrists in a community setting.” (*Source – Optometry Today website*)

New Macular group in Brecon.

Vision Impairment Brecon (VIB) has joined forces with The Macular Society to establish a new Macular Support group in Brecon. The group will meet on the last Monday of every month

starting in October 2016. For more information or to join the Macular Society, ring 0300 3030 111.

Sensory Loss Awareness Month.

November is Sensory Loss Awareness month in Wales, when NHS staff are reminded of the needs of people with sight and/or hearing loss, and patients are reminded of their rights to accessible information and communications from health providers.

People with sensory loss are reminded that a guide to their healthcare rights is available. We have put a link on our website http://www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/single_post.php?var=1886.

CONSULTATIONS.

Help to shape the future of Deafblind UK.

Deafblind UK, the organisation for people with dual sensory loss, is giving its members the opportunity to influence its future direction, and is organising member forums across the UK. Two of these free events will be in Wales:

- 11 Nov 2016, 1pm – 4pm at Best Western Claton Hotel, Cardiff, South Wales
- 28 Nov 2016, 1pm – 4pm at Ramada Hotel, Wrexham, North Wales

For more information and to book a place, contact Deafblind UK at feedback@deafblind.org.uk or call the Information & Advice Line on 0800 132 320.

Work, health and disability.

The UK Government has announced a consultation to look at how disabled people and those with long-term health conditions can be given more support to find and retain work. Fewer than 5 in 10 disabled people are in employment and the consultation will look for ways to close this 'employment gap'.

Comments are invited from disabled people, organisations that support them, employers and other interested parties.

You can find out more and give your views on the UK Government website, <https://consultations.dh.gov.uk/workandhealth/consult/> . The closing date is 17th February 2017.

Welsh Government Consultations.

Details of all WG consultations can be found on their website, <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations>. The following may be of particular interest:

- Proposals to update Approved Building Regulations Documents (A, B & C) (closes 22nd December)
- National Infrastructure Commission for Wales (closes 9th January 2017)

If you would like a consultation document in a different format, email the document title and the preferred format to CustomerHelp@wales.gsi.gov.uk or call 029 2082 3683.

What does your cane enable?

Using a white cane to get around can make a huge difference to the day-to-day lives of people with sight loss. A new campaign from the Thomas Pocklington Trust and RP Fighting Blindness called 'Cane Enable' is encouraging people to use Twitter and Facebook to say how using a cane helps them in their daily life. The Pocklington website has a range of information, films and other resources about choosing and using a cane, and improving your skills:

<http://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/caneenable/>.

Stories about GP services wanted.

Action on Hearing Loss Cymru and RNIB Cymru are looking to speak to people who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, partially sighted or deafblind to tell us about their experiences when using their local GP surgery.

They are forming local focus groups in Cardiff, Llandrindod Wells and Bangor, where you will have an opportunity to share your experiences with local health board professionals. This is a chance to highlight the great service you have experienced or to help to address problems you have faced in accessing GP services. It is also a unique opportunity to make positive change for people with sensory loss living in Wales.

To become a member of a focus group in your area or to find out more information, contact Ruth Northey, Sensory Engagement Officer by telephone 02920 33 30 34; Textphone 02920 33 30 36, or Email ruth.northey@hearingloss.org.uk.

OPPORTUNITIES.

Goalball.

Goalball is an exciting, indoor, 3-aside team sport, of attack and defend - with a unique twist!

The sport was originally devised in 1946 to help rehabilitate soldiers who had lost their sight during the war. It has been played throughout the world ever since, at the highest level, by people who are blind or partially sighted.

However, goalball is a truly inclusive sport in that fully sighted players can also play domestically. This is because everybody is required to wear eye shades so that nobody can see. Players therefore have to rely entirely on their other senses.

The ball contains internal bells so players are able to track its movement by its sound, whilst the court is marked out with tactile lines so players can feel where they are. The idea of the game is quite simply to score goals by bowling the ball along the floor, past the opposing team.

There's an opportunity to try it out in Cardiff on Saturday 12th November from 2.30pm to 4.30pm at Fitzalan High School, Lawrenny Avenue, Cardiff, CF11 8XB. (Nearest train station is Ninian Park).

Further information: Everyone is welcome including sighted family and friends. No prior experience is required just some energy and enthusiasm! For further information please contact Kathryn Fielding (Tel. 07795 263642 or email kathryn@goalballuk.com)

For more information visit: www.goalballuk.com

Placement scheme for disabled students.

Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD) offers Change 100, a scheme which provides paid internships for disabled students and recent graduates. Successful applicants will receive a three-month placement with one of a number of major employers during summer 2017, together with mentoring and guidance aimed at helping them to build confidence and thrive in the workplace. This is the fourth year that the scheme has run, and the charity has described responses to the campaign by students and employers in the previous three years as 'fantastic'.

To find out more and apply for a place, visit the Leonard Cheshire Disability website, <https://www.leonardcheshire.org/support-and-information/work-and-skills-development/change100> or telephone 020 3620 5252. Applications must be received by Wednesday 25th January 2017.

E-Mentoring Project.

Look UK, a charity that supports families with vision-impaired children, is launching an exciting new mentoring project to support young VI people. It is looking for VI mentors to offer their

own knowledge and experience to help young VI mentees achieve their own potential and aspirations.

LOOK UK wants to work with young VIPs, who could benefit from having someone neutral to talk to. They may be facing some challenges, for example about to leave school or college or they may be unsure of what to do next. This is where LOOK's digital platform could help.

All mentees (aged between 14-25) will be matched with a 21-30-year-old mentor and communicate with them on a regular basis using a safe and secure online platform. Here, they will be able to exchange messages, share resources and information. There will be opportunities to meet up and do some workshops with other mentees and your mentor.

The mentoring will happen through a messaging type service using a secure digital platform over a twelve-month period. This will enable participants of the project to communicate from the comfort of their own homes and mean they can be matched across the U.K. Mentees and mentors will all receive support and training from Look UK.

If you know of anybody who could benefit from the project, either as a mentee or mentor, then Look UK would like to hear from you. Please contact the Project Coordinator on 01432 376314 or email at mentor@look-uk.org.

Audio described tours of National Museum Cardiff.

From October 2016, visitors who are blind or vision impaired can attend a guided audio description tour of the National Museum Cardiff's collections. The free tours will be on a different theme

each time and most will include touch elements. A sighted companion is welcome to accompany you on the tour. Museum staff can also offer a limited amount of guided assistance. Please let them know when you book if you require this.

Tours will run every other month, on a Thursday and last approximately 90 minutes. The next tour will be on Thursday 8th December, and the theme will be 'Natural History'. Spaces are limited, so advance booking is essential. To book, please contact 029 2057 3240.

Group bookings of audio description tours to pre-booked groups of up to 10 people (including sighted guides) are also available. These require at least 4 weeks' notice, and depend on availability. Pre-booked groups benefit from discounts in the museum café, restaurant and shop, and complimentary refreshments for the coach driver. For more information about booking your group please contact 029 2057 3315.

Letter from Santa.

This Christmas, vision impaired children will be able to receive a letter from Santa in their preferred accessible format and in English or Welsh, thanks to the help of RNIB.

To receive a letter, contact Santa Claus, RNIB, Midgate House, Midgate, Peterborough PE1 1TN, providing the following information:

- The child's name, age and delivery address;
- A contact telephone number;
- Whether you would like a reply in English or Welsh;

- What format you require: uncontracted braille (grade 1); contracted braille (grade 2); large print (please specify the font size); or audio CD.

The closing date for requests for a letter is 1st December.

To request an email letter from Santa, contact santa@rnib.org.uk by 16th December.

Creative writing competition.

Seeing Ear, the online library for blind and print disabled people, has launched its third creative writing competition, 'Seen through other eyes'. This year it is open to adults as well as children and young people, and poetry and prose entries can be submitted.

The competition is for people who are vision impaired, have dyslexia or a disability that makes it difficult to read printed books, and there are separate categories for people aged under 18 years and for those older than 18. Prizes on offer include cash, assistive technology from Dolphin and the opportunity to have your work published.

For full details and information on how to apply, visit the Seeing Ear website, <http://www.seeingear.org/home/the-seeing-ear-creative-writing-competition-2016/>. Entries must be received by 5th December.

PUBLICATIONS AND RESOURCES.

How accessible is Access to Work in Wales?

A report has been published by RNIB Cymru and Wales Council of the Blind highlighting disabled peoples' experiences of the Access to Work service.

This report, gathered from service users' views, reveals considerable shortcomings with the service since it underwent changes. Many recipients reported that they had experienced difficulties with the system, citing issues with the assessors and people they spoke to within the contact centres who were not only uninterested, but also ignorant of the need to provide information in an accessible format or the right to privacy as they request someone to help the client fill out forms.

The report gives recommendations for actions to be taken to make improvements. You can download a copy from the WCB website http://www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/single_post.php?var=1844.

The Wobbly Eyes Booklet.

Nystagmus Network has produced a new digital book which can be used to explain the condition to a child. You can read through the book with your child – or older children can read it themselves. You can download the book free from the Nystagmus Network online shop, where you can also see the charity's full range of booklets for families and professionals: <https://nystagmusnetwork.myshopify.com/>.

‘Small Changes, Big Difference’.

A new report from British Blind Sport and Women in Sport calls for change to improve activity opportunities for women with a vision impairment. 'Small Changes, Big Difference' explores how sport and physical activity affects the lives of vision impaired women, and looks at their motivations, the barriers to becoming more active, and the specific challenges vision impaired women can face when accessing sporting opportunities.

This detailed report includes case studies and examples of good practice. It makes five clear recommendations to providers on how they can make their services more accessible. You can find out more, and download the full report, on the ‘education’ section of the British Blind Sport website, <http://www.britishblindsport.org.uk/>.

The costs of disability.

An independent inquiry exploring the extra costs faced by disabled people and families with disabled children in England and Wales has produced its final report. 'Driving down the extra costs disabled people face' makes a series of recommendations for disabled people and their families; disability organisations; businesses; and regulators and government. Almost one in five people in the UK has a disability, and the report calls on disabled people to be ‘bold and loud’ and to build consumer power behind this ‘purple pound’. There is a link to the full report on the WCB website: http://www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/single_post.php?var=1893.

Power for Life.

Western Power Distribution (WPD) operates the electricity distribution network in the Midlands, South Wales and the South West. Put simply, our role is to ensure the power network of poles and pylons, cables, wires and substations – the infrastructure that we all rely upon to live our lives to the full – delivers electricity to our homes and businesses around the clock.

Power cut? Call our emergency number 0800 6783 105

Sometimes power cuts can happen for reasons beyond our control. During a power cut we are able to help.

We know it can be particularly worrying if you rely on electricity for medical equipment or if you are elderly, very ill or disabled. If you depend on electricity for a reason such as using a nebuliser, a kidney dialysis machine, an oxygen machine, a ventilator – or any other reason – you should register with us.

WPD provides a FREE Priority Service Register, which helps us to identify customers who may need a little extra help during a power cut.

If you join our FREE Priority Service Register we can:

- Give you a direct number to call in the event of a power cut so you can get straight through to us.
- Agree a password with you before we visit you, so you feel safe
- Provide special help, if needed, through the RVS (Royal Voluntary Service) or British Red Cross.
- Ring and tell you about planned interruptions to your electricity supply.
- Keep you as informed as possible in the event of an unplanned power cut.

To join, call **0800 9177 953**, or visit our website
www.westernpower.co.uk

EVENTS.

Glaucoma Support Group meetings.

The International Glaucoma Association (IGA) has organised support group meetings in the Board Room, Abergele Hospital, Llanfair Road, Abergele LL22 8PD from 2 pm to 3.30 pm on 21st November, and at the Eye Unit of the Princess of Wales Hospital Bridgend at 1.45 pm Friday 25th November.

Details of all IGA's support group meetings are on their website, www.glaucoma-association.com – click the 'support groups' option on the right hand side of the screen.

North Wales Mobile Information Unit.

The remaining schedule for November 2016 is:

- Monday 14th, Blaenau Ffestiniog Diffwys Sq
- Friday 18th, Menai Bridge Car Park & Beaumaris Car Park
- Monday 21st, Rhyl rear Town Hall
- Friday 25th, Rhos on Sea
- Monday 28th, Marian Car Park

Please check Vision Support's website <http://www.visionsupport.org.uk/> for further details and for the December schedule. It is recommended that you ring 01745 338914 to confirm details before travelling.

RNIB's Online Today events.

Online Today, RNIB's lottery funded technology project, is coming to libraries and community hubs across Wales in the next few months. The team can give help with Smartphones, Tablets, Laptop and E-readers of all descriptions. Dates and venues are as follows:

November

- Monday 14th, Usk Library & Community Hub
- Tuesday 15th, Carmarthen Library
- Thursday 17th, Pembroke Dock Library
- Thursday 24th, Ammanford Library
- Tuesday 29th, Fishguard Library
- Wednesday 30th, Rogerstone Library & Newport Central Library

December

- Thursday 1st, Llanelli Library
- Monday 5th, Tenby Library
- Monday 12th, Usk Library & Community Hub
- Tuesday 13th, Fishguard Library
- Thursday 15th, Pembroke Dock Library
- Tuesday 20th, Carmarthen Library
- Wednesday 21st, Rogerstone Library & Newport Central Library
- Thursday 22nd, Ammanford Library

Booking is not essential. For more information, please call RNIB Cymru on 029 2082 8518, or check the website, <http://www.rnib.org.uk/online-today-event-search>.

Smell gas?

Staying safe in six easy steps

If you smell gas in your home or business, we're here to help. Here's what to do.

- 1 Call us immediately on Freephone 0800 111 999. We're available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and will send out an engineer to make your property safe.
- 2 Turn off all your gas appliances and, if possible, switch off the gas at the meter (unless the meter is in the cellar or basement, in which case don't go in).
- 3 Open windows and doors.
- 4 Don't use any electrical appliances or switch lights on or off.
- 5 Don't smoke or use naked flames.
- 6 If there's a smell of gas in the cellar or basement, please wait outside or with a neighbour.



YOUR GAS EMERGENCY
AND PIPELINE SERVICE



WALES & WEST
UTILITIES