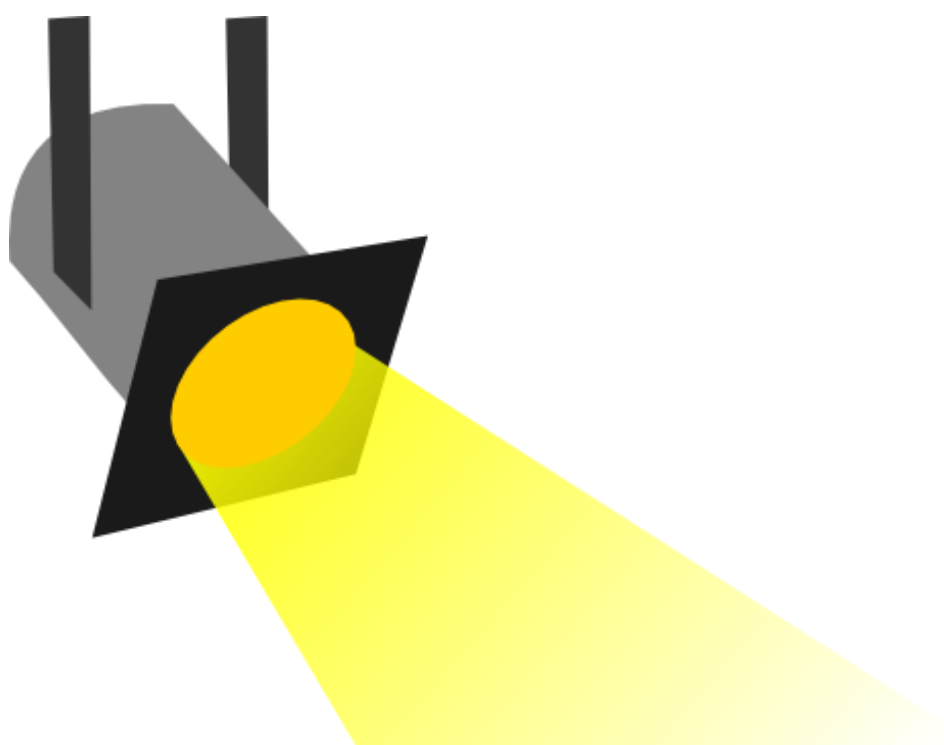


Essex Blind Charity



Spotlight

June/July 2021

ISSUE 102

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Please send your articles for inclusion in Spotlight to:

The Editor

Essex Sight

40 Osborne Street

Colchester

CO2 7DB

01206 548196

Email: services@essexsight.org.uk

Items for the next issue should reach the Editor by 5th July



The Editor writes:

I would like to say that Summer is here at last, but as I write this in a cool and damp May, I certainly don't want to tempt fate. As we start to come out of lockdown (fingers crossed), activities and events are starting to take place. This edition features everything from our pop-up sight centres to a day at the races!

Along with our regular features, we have a great review by long time contributor, Michelle Wiggins and the strange but interesting news of robotic guide dogs from California (where else!).

A recent poll asked what newsletters we produced, in what format and how often. It was interesting to hear how some other sight loss charities were switching from paper to e versions. So, my question, to you, the readership is do you still like a hard copy? Should it stay bi-monthly or become quarterly? Have we got the balance of content right? Please let us know your thoughts either by phone or email.

We hope you will find the articles informative and of interest. Please feel free to share Spotlight with other visually impaired people and their carers. Everyone who is newly registered in Essex will receive a copy of Spotlight and they can request their own copy in large print format, memory stick or by email. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide copies in Braille or on cassette.

I hope you will all continue to send your contributions, as your stories and experiences make Spotlight of interest to everyone. You can email articles to services@essexsight.org.uk

Editor

Community Support Team by Jonathan Dixon

At last we have fully reopened the Colchester Sight Centre, but still on an appointment only basis. This may seem inconvenient, but it allows us to make best use of a small team's time in supporting people in the community. We will gradually be reopening pop up sight centres across the County as we are allowed. Home visiting will hopefully be given the ok this month pending official guidance. Things may not be 'normal' for some time, but we will try and do our best to help you.

We have been fortunate to receive donated equipment so if you think you may need a video magnifier, document reader, talking calculator, daisy player or audio book please get in touch.

Have your say on safer, greener, healthier travel in Essex.

Ambitious plans to help turn Essex into a walking and cycling county are going on show to the public – and the council wants to know what you think.

Working in partnership with city, borough and district councils as well as local community and accessibility groups, the county council has published the plans which will see the reallocation of road space to make more room for everybody to walk and cycle safely.

Active Travel Essex is one of a number of council initiatives to transform local cycling and walking routes and the consultation, covering schemes in Brentwood, Braintree, Chelmsford, Colchester and Wickford, will run until 2nd July. The plans also feature schemes to improve local neighbourhoods and make it easier and safer to walk and cycle to and from school.

To find out more and give your feedback, please visit:
www.essexhighways.org/active-travel-essex

News and Products

“Pop-up” Sight Centre

Friday 11th June, Chelmsford 10.00am until 1.00pm

We will be back in Chelmsford offering information and support for anyone living with sight loss. Find out about eye conditions, benefits, local services, low vision aids and more. Our staff and volunteers will be on hand to help.

Central Baptist Church, Victoria Road South, Chelmsford CM1 1LN

Low Vision Information Day

Wednesday 16th June South Woodham Ferrers 10.30am until 3.00pm

This is a chance to find out about the services and support that is available to anyone living with sight loss. With the support of SWF Health and Social Care Group, we will be here with information about eye conditions, registration, benefits, local services and much more. We will also be able to demonstrate how low vision aids and lighting can help you maintain your independence.

Holy Trinity Church, Trinity Square, South Woodham Ferrers CM3 5JX

Appointment Only Low Vision Day with Optelec

Monday 21st June Colchester 11.00am until 3.00pm.

We are delighted to welcome Optelec to our Colchester Resource Centre to offer the chance of seeing the latest low vision products and technology.

Each 45-minute session will be personal, and you will get plenty of time to be hands on with the equipment. Optelec’s trained staff will be available to help or answer any questions you may have, and our friendly Community Support Team will be on hand to offer information and support for anyone living with sight loss.

Colchester Resource Centre, 40 Osborne Street, Colchester CO2 7DB

**Community Coffee Morning
Friday 23rd July Doddinghurst 10.00am until 12noon.**

We are looking forward to being at this event, organised by Brentwood CVS. Enjoy coffee and a cake and get information about the services and help that is available in the area. Come and talk to us about sight loss and how we can help.

Doddinghurst Village Hall, Church Ln, Doddinghurst, Brentwood CM15 0NJ

To find out more, or to book an appointment, please contact us on 01206 548196 or email services@essexsight.org.uk. You can also find details on our website, Twitter and Facebook.

New drug for wet AMD announced.

A new drug for age-related macular degeneration could see patients receiving as few as four injections a year.

Beovu – a new anti-VEGF treatment for wet AMD - was approved for use in the UK last year by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

The new drug, which has been brought to market by Novartis, is expected to reduce the treatment burden, for patients and clinics, as more than 50% of patients in clinical trials were able to maintain vision on 12-weekly dosing intervals.

You can find out more from the Macular Society website where Professor Faruque Ghanchi discusses the treatment on video.

What do you think about compulsory voter photo ID?

The Government has said it plans to introduce a requirement for voters in Great Britain to show a personal photographic identification document before being issued a ballot paper in polling stations for UK, Parliamentary elections, local council elections in England and police and crime commissioner elections in England and Wales.

The Government argues that requiring photo ID will protect the integrity of the ballot and ensure that there is a diminished opportunity for voter fraud. However, there is evidence that if you are young, if you're a person from an ethnic minority, if you're disabled or you come from a poorer background, you're much less likely to have valid photo ID and could therefore find it more difficult to cast your vote.

Sight Loss Councils, supported by the Thomas Pocklington Trust, want to hear how you feel about the introduction of voter ID and kindly ask you to complete a short online survey, which should take less than 5 minutes to complete: <https://tinyurl.com/29xrehz6>

Our most recommended product?

We are often asked, 'what is your most recommended product'? well, its not one but two. The first being bumpons, the small self-adhesive silicone dots that you can place on or next to buttons to help you find them more easily. For as little as £1 for a strip they really are an essential item.

The second is the Breville Hot Cup water dispenser. This will replace your kettle as it safely delivers you one cup of boiling water in less than 60 seconds! Its innovative design with a large, illuminated button only boils enough water for the number of cups you need, so is economical and energy efficient. It can be purchased for just over £30 from most high street retailers. If you want a demo, we have one in the Colchester Sight Centre.

Quiz

Who said what? Extra marks if you can name the character *and* the TV programme it came from. Some of the answers may have more than one name/character.

1. Just like that.
2. Let's be careful out there.
3. One more thing ...
4. Book him Danno.
5. I have a cunning plan.
6. I don't believe it.
7. As if by magic, the shopkeeper appeared.
8. Once he was asleep, was just an old saggy cloth cat.
9. D'oh.
10. Suits you sir.
11. I've started so I'll finish.
12. Lovely jubbly.
13. It's goodnight from me and it's goodnight from him.
14. That's another fine mess you've gotten me into.
15. Say what you see.
16. Tonight Matthew, I'm going to be ...
17. You dirty old man.
18. No no no no no no yes.
19. Didn't he do well.
20. Computer says no.
21. Your starter for ten.
22. Giggity.
23. Let's see what you would have won.
24. Oh twadi!
25. I'm out.
26. Is that your final answer?

Technology

Could guide dogs could soon be replaced by robots?

It may be a strange concept but a four-legged, robotic guide dog system that can safely lead blind people around obstacles and through narrow passages has been developed by US researchers.

To save on the time and effort required to train a guide dog, scientists have come up with a novel idea and created a robotic alternative. The robot was designed and programmed by lead researcher and roboticist Zhongyu Li and his colleagues at the University of California, Berkeley.

The robot is called a Mini Cheetah. It is powered by a laser-ranging system to map out its surroundings and a camera to track the human it is guiding. Equipped with a leash, it provides better lead around tight turns similar to any canine.

It weighs 25 kg (55 lb), or 30 kg (66 lb) when you include the robotic arm, so not that dissimilar to a labrador, especially a hungry one.

It is all-electric and can go for about 90 minutes on a charge, depending on what it is doing. It has a variety of sensors, including depth cameras, a solid-state gyro (IMU) and proprioception sensors in the limbs. These sensors help with navigation and mobile manipulation.

So how does the Mini Cheetah work?

It works on first feeding the destination on its system to let the machine map out a simple route. Then, it adapts its course as per the obstacles and the user's movements.

Just like a real assistance canine, the Mini Cheetah guides its user by means of a leash — which it can pull taut but also allow to go slack in order to better lead around tight turns. Li and his colleagues have successfully tested the mechanism of the bots with three blindfolded people around the obstacle path and enclosed narrow section less than a meter wide.

The tight turn aimed at testing the machine's ability to divert without keeping the belt tight at all times as the track was too narrow to fit the turning circle of both the robot dog and the handler together.

How feasible is the Mini Cheetah?

According to Li, these types of robots are scalable and have immense scope in near future. He says that these will definitely be feasible and lucrative alternatives to help and serve people when hardware will become affordable.

The team envisaged that in the future it could also be updated to sync with computer or smartphone calendars so that it could perform various other functions like automatically taking people to their appointments by means of GPS navigation.

You may question whether a robot could ever replace the unique bond between a visually impaired person and their guide dog, not to mention the social and emotional benefits, however for people with allergies or those living where animals are not allowed, the concept could be really useful. Of course, it will all come down to money and whether it is going to be commercially viable, but it is great that scientists are looking into concepts that can benefit visually impaired people.

SKY'S THE LIMMIT By J M Wiggins

It certainly is with Sky TV's wide range of accessibility features.

As long-term Sky TV users, we recently upgraded our ageing Sky plus HD box to a shiny new Sky Q box. The TV adverts show the box's wide range of impressive features, but it was a YouTube video demonstrating the audio screen reader that sold it to us.

Sky have led the way with accessibility features being the first service in the UK to use Audio Description on TV Programmes nearly 20 years ago. Existing Sky customers with sight loss can call a dedicated accessibility help line where the team have time to stay on the line for as long as you need. The wait time is minimal, but you do need to register with them.

The Sky Q box has the greatest number of accessibility features of any TV viewing system I've seen. Firstly, in the accessibility settings you can set the home screen and menus to high contrast meaning clear white text on a black background throughout instead of White text on a Blue Background. Turn on subtitles and Audio Description so that they are automatically activated in any programme that supports these features. You can have these programmes highlighted in the TV guide. These are not new features but combined with the latest features make for a very accessible system.

Voice control allows you to press a button on the remote and speak commands such as "Go to BBC1" or "Find Coronation Street". Apparently, you can say a famous line of dialogue from a film and it will find that film! Sky's latest accessible feature is called Voice Guidance. Not to be confused with Voice Control or Audio Description, Voice Guidance is a screen reader for your Sky Q box. It will speak whatever you highlight with your remote control as well as the channel number and name your box is set too and the programme currently being broadcast.

This is a new feature so as yet not all menus and apps are supported, but this will improve in time. Coupled with Voice Control it allows a person with sight loss to access their TV independently. Sky can provide an accessible remote control which has been designed with textured high contrasting buttons to help customers with sight loss or poor dexterity.

Of course, all this technology comes at a price, from around £25 a month for the entry level TV package (currently including Netflix) which tend to come with an 18 month contract. There are frequent deals advertised so unless you want Sports or Movies you can pay under £45 a month for TV and fibre broadband. It's a definite thumbs up from me.

App, App and Away!

Passenger Assistance

The Rail Delivery Group launched its new travel assistance app which means you can now request assistance on the National Rail Network, London Overground and TfL Rail using the new app.

It enables you to request assistance via your smartphone without needing to phone or email.

The app is available on Apple/iOS and Android mobile devices and can be downloaded to your phone by visiting the App store or Google Play Store. The app enables you to:

- book assistance for your rail journey
- manage your customer profile
- view your travel history
- browse rail journeys using the online journey planner

The app can be used to request assistance for future journeys across the whole National Rail network. It was developed by Transreport in conjunction with the Rail Delivery Group.

Transreport believe that everyone should be able to travel spontaneously and have the independence and flexibility they desire. Jay Shen, Transreport Founder said 'If you wake up on a sunny day and decide to go to the beach, everyone should be able to do that easily and without a lot of hassle. However, we knew this was not the case for a lot of disabled people, as travelling anywhere can take a lot of pre-planning. We wanted to take the first step into improving their experience and we started with rail travel. The technology our team has developed will allow a more stress-free and consistent booking experience, which has been a real issue within the disabled community for a number of years'.

Please note, assisted journeys on London Underground and DLR can still be accessed by speaking to a member of staff and do not require pre-booking.

Entertainment

Vocal Eyes

Vocal Eyes allow you to experience art and culture through audio description. Bringing arts, theatre, museums, galleries and heritage sites to life for blind and partially sighted people.

The Interval is their weekly online listing of accessible arts and cultural events and content available online. It includes events in the next two weeks and content you can watch/listen to anytime.

Check out their website for more details and their weekly selection of accessible cultural experiences <https://vocaleyeyes.co.uk/>

Chelmsford City Museum

Chelmsford Museum has reopened!

The museum at Oaklands Park had a complete makeover in 2019 and its home to beautifully curated collections about the city's story and the Essex Regiment Museum.

You won't be too surprised to hear that things will be a little different at first. Since stage 3 only marks the next phase of the roadmap rather than a complete lifting of Covid-19 measures, some restrictions will be in place. For more details visit the website

<https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/museums/> or call them on 01245 605700.

Events

Sight Village

Unfortunately, the main sight village central exhibition event in Birmingham scheduled to take place on 17th and 18th August has been postponed. The next nearest event is scheduled to take place at Kensington Town Hall in London on the 2nd and 3rd November.

AUGUST RACEDAYS ON SALE NOW!

August race days and events at Chelmsford City Racecourse are now on sale!

Chelmsford City Racecourse are extremely excited to be welcoming people back to the races for some fantastic summer race days and events. The Club Restaurant & Lounge reopens to non-members and the Fairwood restaurant reopens as well having served as one of the largest vaccination centres in the region! The racecourse has 20 blue badge spaces, 2 for 1 tickets on race days for visually impaired people – you will need to contact the racecourse in advance and provide pip or registration details and bring ID on day.

You will experience a minimum of 6 races and full commentary. The indoor lounges also feature racing on large screens. The following race days are open for booking:

Tuesday 3rd August - An afternoon of thrilling summer racing

Tuesday 10th August - a perfect summer evening of racing

Thursday 12th August – a floodlit evening of racing.

Saturday 21st August 2021 - Ministry of Sound Classical favourite dance-music chart-toppers, reimagined through an incredible 50-piece orchestra.

Thursday 26th August 2021 - Ladies Day

A quintessentially English summer race day with world-class horseracing followed by some brilliant live entertainment from Peter Andre and of course a glass of bubbly or two!

Saturday 11th September - NOW That's What I Call The 80s Live

Relive all of your best-loved classics from everyone's favourite decade, the 80s, with an explosive concert of unforgettable music from the bestselling compilation albums in chart history!

For more information contact 01245 360300

Answers to quiz

1. Tommy Cooper
2. Sargent Esterhaus. Hill Street Blues
3. Columbo. Columbo
4. Steve McGarrett. Hawaii Five-0
5. Baldrick. Blackadder
6. Victor Meldrew. One Foot in the Grave
7. Mr Benn. Mr Benn
8. Narrator. Bagpuss
9. Homer Simpson. The Simpsons
10. The two Kens. The Fast Show
11. Magnus Magnusson. Mastermind
12. Del Boy. Only Fools and Horses
13. Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett. The Two Ronnies.
14. Oliver Hardy. Laurel and Hardy
15. Roy Walker. Catchphrase
16. The contestant. Stars in Their Eyes
17. Harold. Steptoe and son
18. Jim Trott. The Vicar of Dibley
19. Bruce Forsyth. The Generation Game
20. Carol Beer/David Walliams. Little Britain
21. Bamber Gascoigne/Jeremy Paxman. University Challenge.
22. Quagmire. Family Guy
23. Jim Bowen. Bullseye
24. Mr Khan. Citizen Khan.
25. The Dragon(s). Dragon's Den.
26. Chris Tarrant/Jeremy Clarkson. Who Wants to be a Millionaire

Contact details

Helpline and office 01206 548196
(Carol Massey, Christine Pratt, Denise Sanders and Steve Massey)

Eye Clinic Liaison Officers 01206 548196
Christine & Denise (Colchester + Tendring hospitals)

Read House 01255 673654
(Tina Cox, Administrator)

Read House is the residential care home run by Essex Blind Charity in Frinton on Sea. The home specialises in the care of elderly people with sight problems. We offer permanent and respite care (short breaks) by staff who have all been trained in visual awareness. The Home is situated on the seafront at Frinton on Sea, a short distance from the town Centre with its friendly local shops.

If you would like to find out more about Read House or receive an Information Pack, please contact Tina.

How you can support us

Essex Blind Charity produces and distributes Spotlight free of charge. However, donations in time or money are always welcome. If you are a UK taxpayer please consider filling in our gift aid form so we can claim back the tax paid on your donation, thereby allowing us to make even better use of your donation.

If you are writing or redrafting your will please consider leaving us a gift. Your support will enable us to continue to provide and develop the services we provide for people with sight loss throughout Essex. Thank you.

Gift Aid Declaration

**On behalf of Essex Blind Charity
Registered Charity No. 1103732**

The Gift Aid Scheme enables charities to make more of your donation by reclaiming the tax you have already paid. In order for us to make this claim on your donation(s) please complete this form and return it as soon as possible

Thank you!

Please treat the enclosed gift of £.....as a Gift Aid donation.

I confirm that I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for the current tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for the current tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I have given.

Title.....Forename(s).....Surname.....

Address.....
.....
.....
.....

Post Code.....

I would like Essex Blind Charity to treat all donations I have made since 1 July 2012 as Gift Aid donations until I notify them otherwise.

Signature..... Date.....

Please return your completed form to:
Essex Blind Charity
Read House, 23 The Esplanade
Frinton on Sea, Essex CO13 9AU

Are you on our mailing list?

If you are not already on our mailing list for 'Spotlight' and would like to receive a regular copy, please complete the form below and return it to Carol Massey at Essex Sight, 40 Osborne Street, Colchester CO2 7DB

Name.....

Address.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Tel.....

How would you prefer to receive your copy?

Large Print..... Memory Stick.....Email.....

We would like to add your contact details to our database so that we may from time to time send you details of developments to our services, events taking place in your area and other information we feel may be of interest to you.

If you would prefer us not to do so, please tick here.....

We will not pass your details to anyone else without your permission.

You may request us to remove your details from our database at any time.

Useful Telephone Numbers

Colchester Eye Clinic contact numbers

To book or change a NEW appointment only
01206 286870 / 286871 / 286872

To enquire about or change a date for SURGERY only
01206 286874 / 286875

To book or change a FOLLOW UP appointment only
01206 286860 – Mr Sheldrick and Mr Mukherjee
01206 286863 – Mr Patel and Mr Bansal
01206 286856 – Mr Dimitriou
01206 286769 – Mrs Shenoy

For any enquiry relating to Secondary Optometry 01206 286868

For any enquiry relating to Orthoptics 01206 286866

For the EMERGENCY EYE CLINIC only 01206 286882
Please Note self-referrals are not accepted unless the patient is already under our care or has a pink card for the same condition.

Email the department on chu-ftr.opthalmologydepartment@nhs.net

Broomfields Eye Clinic (Chelmsford)

Appointments - 01245 513900

Diabetic Eye Screening - 01245 516707

Age Related Macular Clinic - 01245 514899

Ophthalmology Surgery waiting list - 01245 514767

Essex Sight Centres

Due to the current restrictions, we are only able to offer a drop-in service at our permanent sight centre in Colchester. Please ring to make an appointment.

Colchester Sight Centre

40 Osborne Street

Colchester

CO2 7DB

Open Mon - Fri 10 am to 4 pm,

Saturday 10 – 12pm

Tel 01206 548196

For more information contact Essex Sight Office on 01206 548196.

Email: services@essexsight.co.uk

For information about permanent or respite residential care, contact:

Tina on 01255 673654

Email: info@essexblind.co.uk