



Spotlight

Spring/Summer 2023

ISSUE 109

Contents:

Editorial	page 3
Community Support Team	page 4
Spotlight On	page 7
News and Products	page 8
Quiz	page 11
Technology	page 12
Entertainment	page 16
Answers to Quiz	page 17

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 1st August.



The Editor writes:

I feel like the host of ***The Late Late Show***, the famous Irish chat show which is the world's second longest-running evening talk show. Not because I aspire to present on television, but due to the length of time it has taken to get this edition of Spotlight published! There is good reason, of course, but it doesn't make it any easier for an editor trying to pull together a newsletter, watching deadlines come and go, but I'll leave that to Jonathan to explain!

In the meantime, welcome to the Spring/Summer edition, better weather, longer days and big news from the community team!

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

I must firstly apologise for the time it has taken to get around to publishing Spotlight, the delay unfortunately, is entirely my fault. The reason has been due to workload and there have simply not been enough hours in the day as I have managed the not insubstantial task of selling our care home, Read House, as an ongoing business. When the Charity started in 1920, it provided care for vision impaired people by providing places for people to live and over the past 103 years, has owned care, nursing and holiday properties all over the County. It hasn't always been plain sailing and the charity gradually sold off its assets, until it owned just one. Read House was intended as a retirement home for vision impaired people when it was built in 1999, but that had changed over the years to the point where it was a care home with just a couple of VI residents. The growing demand for support in the community, meant that the focus needed to shift away from the small number of people in Read House so the charity could grow to meet the needs of the thousands of VI people in Essex. In March, Read House was sold to Memory Lane Care Homes Ltd, who operate nursing homes with good and outstanding ratings in the North East of England. Their ethos around the care of residents and staff very much aligned with ours and we are more than happy that it is now being operated in their capable hands.

Essex Sight Strategy

As part of our development for the future, we have been working on a strategy, the first stages of which were to get views from VI people via a questionnaire and workshops. We had a good response and are now in the second phase of planning as to how we meet the needs of VI people in Essex in the future, based on the feedback we received. It is an exciting time for the Charity as we work out how we can be the best service possible for VI people for the next 100 years!

Clacton Sight Centre – New Location for 2023

After many years, we were sad to learn that we would no longer be able to use CADOWS in Old Road for our regular Sight Centre in Clacton.

Knowing accessible and available venues are thin on the ground in Clacton, we were very lucky to find a new venue which is only a few minutes away. The Brotherhood Community Hall in St Osyth Rd is fully accessible, close to bus stops and with parking on-site.

Back in Brentwood!

If you hadn't realized, we have restarted our sight centre in Brentwood Community Hospital. It is a great venue and easily accessible, with free parking and the 808 community bus that has a circular route via the community Hospital to Hutton Village and Brentwood Rail Station. If you hold a concession card, travel is free after 9am.

New Sight Centre – Walton-on-the-Naze

Starting in April, we are opening a new monthly service in Walton-on-the-Naze. This is part of our Provide funded project to reach out to communities where there has been poor access to services for VI people. The sight centre will be held at Walton Community Centre, Standley Road and will take place on the last Tuesday of each month.

Full details of dates/locations for these venues can be found at the end of this newsletter.

Colchester Eye Clinic contact numbers

Please note that there have been some changes in personnel and telephone contacts at the clinic, full details are listed on page 21.

Annual Exhibitions

This year we are holding two exhibitions. The leading low vision companies will be in attendance at both events, together with local and national charities and services offering support to anyone affected by sight loss. This is a good opportunity to try out the latest low vision technology and equipment and to find out what help and support is available in the area.

Essex Sight staff and volunteers will be on hand at both events to answer any questions you have.

See below for dates/locations etc. We look forward to seeing you there.

Chelmsford Exhibition

Date: Wednesday 24th May 2023
Time: 10am – 2pm
Location: Central Baptist Church
Victoria Road South
Chelmsford CM1 1LN

Colchester Exhibition

Date: Thursday 5th October 2023
Time: 10am – 2pm
Location: Firstsite
Lewis Gardens
High Street
Colchester CO1 1JH

Spotlight On

CEA (Cinema) Card

The CEA Card is a national scheme developed for UK cinemas by the UK Cinema Association (UKCA).

The Card enables a person with a disability to receive a complimentary ticket for someone to accompany them when they visit a participating cinema, as they would be able to provide any assistance you may need during your visit, such as helping you move around the cinema including finding and taking a seat or making use of the cinemas facilities.

To get the free ticket, you will need to purchase a full price ticket for yourself for the same performance of the same film in the same auditorium.

Approximately 90 per cent of cinemas accept the card but you should check with your chosen cinema to make sure they participate in the scheme.

The cardholder should be registered either Sight Impaired (SI) or Severely Sight Impaired (SSI) or in receipt of one of the following:

- Disability Living Allowance (DLA)
- Attendance Allowance (AA)
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- Adult / Child Disability Payment (ADP / CDP in Scotland)
- Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP)

The card is valid for one year from date of issue and there is a £6 fee to cover the costs in running the scheme.

For more information please contact:

Telephone: 01244 526 016

Textphone: 18001 01244 526 016

Email: info@ceacard.co.uk

News and Products

All change at the polls!

The UK Government has introduced a requirement for voters to show photo ID when voting at a polling station at some elections. This new requirement will apply for the first time in England in May this year.

If you have a form of accepted photo ID which is out of date, you can still use it to vote at a polling station if it still looks like you. There will also be the introduction by some local authorities of an electronic register. This will not affect the way you vote, but it will improve accuracy and efficiency by allowing elections staff to scan the QR code on your polling card, which will automatically update the register, rather than searching the register and marking it by hand.

What will happen at the polling station?

When you arrive at the polling station, a member of staff will ask to see your photo ID and check if it is acceptable. If your ID is acceptable, they will give you your ballot paper and direct you to complete it at a polling booth as usual.

A private area will be available at the polling station, so you can choose to have your photo ID viewed in private if you wish. This might be a separate room, or an area separated by a privacy screen, depending on the polling station.

Assistive equipment

The UK Government recently introduced changes which mean that different assistive equipment may be available at the polling station. Voters can contact their local council to find out what assistive equipment will be available at their polling station and request the equipment they feel they need.

For example, you may be allowed to use a smart phone text to voice app (such as Seeing AI) to read out the text on the ballot paper. Whilst this may differ by local authority, all election stations will have a tactile voting device, a large print copy of the ballot paper for reference, basic magnifiers (these are not optical grade, so it is always best to bring your own), additional lighting. Remember, the polling staff are there to help you, so don't be afraid to ask for assistance.

Of course, if you have a postal vote, then ID is not required.

Accepted forms of ID

- Passport issued by the UK, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or a European Economic Area (EEA) state
- Blue badge
- Driving license (including provisional license) issued by the UK, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, or an EEA state
- Identity card with PASS mark
- Biometric immigration document
- Defence Identity Card
- Certain national identity cards
- An Older Person's Bus Pass
- A Disabled Person's Bus Pass
- An Oyster 60+ card
- A Freedom Pass

For any other information or clarification about the above, you can call the Electoral Commission helpline for free on 0800 328 0280 or visit their website www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Liverpool Street Station Upgrade

Liverpool Street station is London's busiest, with up to 135 million people using the station annually in recent years. Passengers already experience overcrowding, poor accessibility, and limited connectivity. As passenger numbers continue to increase these conditions are expected to worsen, so the station is being redeveloped to create a world-class, accessible transport hub with the station becoming a landmark seven-day-a week destination for passengers, visitors and the local community, that is able to cope with increased demand in the future. £450 million is earmarked for the upgrade that includes step free access, increased number of lifts and escalators, 60% more gatelines, new upper concourse and public space. More detail can be found on the website <https://www.upgradelss.com/>

Articles for the Blind

Articles for the Blind is a scheme for blind and visually impaired customers who are registered as Severely Sight Impaired (SSI) or Sight Impaired (SI). This free service effectively waives the postage (first class only) for sending items that have been specially produced or adapted for blind and VI people such as large printed media, audio or electronic media and equipment with a 7kg maximum weight limit for any package.

To send items under the scheme, simply write 'ARTICLES FOR THE BLIND' on the front of the envelope and the sender's name and address clearly on the reverse of the envelope. Mail must be open or easy to open for inspection. If you are concerned, contact customer services on 0345 607 6140 for permission to seal it or take your item to your local Post Office where it can be checked and sealed by the counter staff.

Mail must be addressed to the blind or visually impaired person at that address. Items that are addressed to "The Occupier" or "Dear Customer" etc. and not a named recipient cannot be sent under this scheme. Nor should you send personal, sensitive, or financial information; that should be sent as normal, paid-for mail.

Quiz

Animal Adjectives

We all know that feline refers to cat, but how many of these animal adjectives do you know? A gold star if you get No. 20.

1. Aquiline
2. Bovine
3. Ovine
4. Simian
5. Leporine
6. Hystricine
7. Caprine
8. Gastropodian
9. Vulpine
10. Columbine
11. Anserine
12. Cygnine
13. Avine
14. Cancrine
15. Equine
16. Picine
17. Vespine
18. Ursine
19. Cervine
20. Ferine

Technology

Smart Canes

The long cane is over 100 years old and has been refined over time to improve it, but it does have its limitations. Steph Yin has researched the aspects of traditional versus the new smart canes, with some very interesting results.

Could there be a better cane? One that more people want to use?

For decades, inventors have tried to use whatever new tech is out there — sonar, ultrasound, GPS, artificial intelligence — to improve the function of the plain white cane.

Shlomi Hanassy knows all about that. Ten years ago, he was a student, working in a lab on a device called the ‘Eye Cane’. It used infrared rays to detect obstacles within 5 meters and communicated with users through sound and vibrations. It was a promising technology — previous devices were slow at detecting and communicating obstacles.

The EyeCane “was fast” and their research showed that it took blind people less time to learn how to use the EyeCane than other devices. It worked very well and had positive media coverage.

But good press aside, many VI people are sceptical of technologies invented by sighted people like Shlomi.

Daniel Kish, who lives in Southern California, feels he has no need for a smart cane. After losing his eyes in childhood, he found his own way of getting around. “I began clicking and developing my own form of sonar right after I lost my second eye,” Kish said. He started using echolocation, or sonar vision. He would make sounds — usually by clicking his tongue, but sometimes also snapping his fingers or clapping his hands. And he’d listen to how the sound came back to him to get the texture, size and shape of objects.

Brain scans have found that when people like Kish use echolocation in lieu of sight, they’re actually using the visual cortex, the region of the brain that

processes sensory information from our eyes. “It’ll reconnect and rewire itself to wherever it needs to, to gather the data it needs,” Kish said.

In his late teens, Kish wanted to go more places and do more things. So he learned to use a cane. And that helped even more — echolocating helped him with objects at head and shoulder level, and the cane took care of what was at his feet.

“My perceptual system became a kind of seamless dynamic,” Kish said. Today, he can sketch a room after clicking his way around it, ride a bike, and go on solo hikes. He’s even hiked the Swiss Alps alone.

His non-profit organisation World Access for the Blind, has been teaching people his method of echolocating with a cane for over a decade.

A big part of the technique is allowing the cane to become an extension of oneself. He compared the cane to a rat’s whiskers. “Rat’s whiskers have certain qualities,” Kish said. “They’re very delicate, they’re light, they’re flexible, they’re conductive. So we try to simulate that, if you will, with a cane. The lighter and more delicate the touch, the more information you’re able to receive.”

And that’s one of Kish’s main gripes with smart canes. He believes that when you start adding batteries, sensors and buttons, you start interfering with all that.

“One of the things that happens, of course, is you make the cane heavier, you change the balance of the cane,” he said. A smart cane can weigh more than double than a traditional cane. Furthermore, all the additional sound and vibratory cues can be distracting and there is greater potential for things to go wrong, technology can malfunction or run out of charge.

Most importantly, Kish worries that fixating on electronics will shift focus away from building a good foundation in orientation and mobility. He wonders if the resources spent on tech might be better spent on cane training that really nurtures the skills for independence that blind people already have. After all, these are the skills they’ll always be able to fall back on.

Smart canes, he said, ignore the reality that “we can provide a kind of cane training that makes the cane basically a natural extension of the body, to where it is fluid and comfortable and, above all, effective.”

There are others, like Kürşat Ceylan, who developed the We Walk cane, which has previously been featured in Spotlight. He firmly believes that VI people should use available technology to their advantage. “Technology has advanced so much, but unfortunately this area is not seen so profitable for the big companies,” he said.

WeWALK isn’t just about navigation and avoiding obstacles, it also integrates with a user’s smartphone and syncs up with apps such as Google Maps or with Amazon’s Alexa. As more travel companies develop apps, for example, it can alert when your bus is coming rather than being reliant on asking other passengers. “Also, while we are walking in the street, we don’t know the name of the stores, or we don’t know the colour of the traffic lights. And these are the problems that we must solve” he said. “Visually impaired people can be independent. We believe that.”

He understood the points some blind people make against smart canes, and he is a full advocate of using a traditional cane, but added that he developed we walk to provide so much more.

Kish, the echolocator, said it’s promising that more blind people are leading tech development. That makes a world of difference, he said.

“Historically, a lot of these technologies were developed by sighted people — you cannot understand blindness from a sighted perspective,” he said.

He added that sighted people make “guesses about not seeing, based on their understanding of seeing.” And often, what fuels those guesses are stigma, dread and anxiety.

“Most people are afraid of blindness,” he said. “They feel it’s among the top four worst things that can happen to them, right alongside of terminal illness, cancer and such.”

Much of the marketing around smart canes and other technologies preys on this fear, according to Kish.

“When you look at information that is presented around various technologies and devices, it very much emphasizes what the blind person cannot do or won’t be able to do. So, there is a very much kind of ‘we need to fix this’ mentality,” he said.

“I think that the whole perspective needs to be shifted from an assumption of deficit to an expectation of capacity,” he added.

Remember Shlomi Hannasy? The inventor in Israel who was working on the EyeCane? He eventually learned this his own way. During the time he was working on the EyeCane, while out running one day, he came across a stray cat on the street. He named the cat Zeevon, took it home with him, and soon realized the cat was blind. Since he was already working on EyeCane, he started to consider a wearable device that would detect obstacles for Zeevon. But he quickly realized the cat didn’t need such a gadget.

“As much as I wanted to help this cat, with time, I saw that it could manage by itself”. Zeevon was fine staying home alone. He deftly maneuvered around the furniture. He gracefully jumped from the kitchen counter to the top of the refrigerator. The experience taught Hanassy a bigger lesson: that people who can see often miss the ways the vision impaired adapt and develop their own ways of being in this world. It also illustrates a broader problem with tech — that, too often, developers try to create solutions for others based on assumptions, without taking the time to understand people.

“They just develop the technology without considering what people really need,” he said. In the end, and despite several years of development, the EyeCane never took off.

So, where are we today? There are a whole range of smart canes available ranging in price from under £100 to over £600. The basic ones detect obstacles at short range, the most expensive link to your smart phone with full navigation. Whatever route you decide, the main thing is there is a much wider choice now and that has got to be a good thing.

Entertainment

Vocal Eyes

Vocal Eyes believe that blind and visually impaired people should have the best possible opportunities to experience and enjoy art and heritage.

Their mission is to increase those opportunities, make them as good as possible, and ensure that as many blind and visually impaired people as possible are aware of them, and that the arts and heritage sector know how to create them, and welcome blind people as a core audience.

For more information about what's on near you or to subscribe to the What's On guide email: enquiries@vocaleyes.co.uk or telephone 020 7375 1043.

Seable Holidays

Seable's mission is to provide accessible tailored holidays to the visually impaired community. Amazing and inclusive trips that can improve your well-being with our local trained assistance and tailored activities to suit your needs and enjoy a stress-free holiday. Here is a list of the next available destinations, but as always, places are going quickly.

London 16-22 August

Lanzarote 25-30 August

Berlin 23-27 September

Naples 1-5 October

Florence 23-26 October

Thailand 14-26 November

You only need £100 to reserve your space and the balance is due 3 months before departure. If you want to book or if you have any questions, contact Seable on 0203 375 6947 or email lucy@seable.co.uk or visit the website at <https://seable.co.uk/>

Answers to quiz

1. Eagle
2. Cow
3. Sheep
4. Ape / Monkey
5. Hare
6. Porcupine
7. Goat
8. Snail
9. Fox
10. Dove
11. Goose
12. Swan
13. Bird
14. Crab
15. Horse
16. Woodpecker
17. Wasp
18. Bull
19. Deer
20. Any wild animal

Contact details

Helpline and office

01206 548196

(Carol Massey, Christine Pratt, Denise Sanders and Steve Massey)

Accounts/Administration

01206 548196

Tina Cox

Eye Clinic Liaison Officer

01206 548196

Christine (Colchester and Broomfield Hospital Eye Clinics)

Email: services@essexsight.org.uk

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 40, Osborne Street
Colchester, Essex CO2 7DB

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 487105 / 487106 / 487090

To enquire about or change a date for SURGERY only
01206 407109 / 407110

To book or change a FOLLOW UP appointment only
01206 487095 – Mr Mukherjee
01206 487098 – Mr Patel and Mr Bansal
01206 487092 Mr Dimitriou and Mrs Sella
01206 487091 Mr Radwan and Ms Murta

For any enquiry relating to Low Vision 01206 487103 / 487104

For any enquiry relating to Orthoptics 01206 487100 / 487101

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

Broomfield 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

Brentwood Sight Centre
Brentwood Community Hospital
Crescent Drive
Brentwood CM15 8DR
Second Tuesday of each month
10am-1pm

Clacton Sight Centre
Brotherhood Hall
36 St Osyth Road
Clacton-on-Sea CO15 3BW
Second Thursday of each month
12- 2pm

Harwich Sight Centre
Dovercourt and Harwich Hub
276 High Street, Dovercourt
Harwich CO12 3PD
Third Thursday of each month
10am – 12noon by appointment

Maldon Sight Centre
Maldon Library, Carmelite House
White Horse Lane
Maldon CM9 5FW
First Tuesday of each month
10am - 1pm by appointment only

Walton Sight Centre
Walton Community Centre
Standley Road
Walton-on-the-Naze CO14 8PT
Last Tuesday of month 11am - 1pm

Chelmsford Sight Centre
Chelmsford Central Library
Market Road
Chelmsford CM1 1QH
First Friday of each month
10am-1pm

Colchester Resource Centre
40 Osborne Street
Colchester
CO2 7DB
Open Mon-Fri 10am to 4pm

Jaywick Sight Centre
Jaywick Community & Resource
Centre, Brooklands Gardens
Jaywick CO15 2JP
Last Wednesday of each month
10am-11.30am by appointment

South Woodham Ferrers Sight Centre
S.W. Ferrers Library, Trinity Row
South Woodham Ferrers CM3 5JU
Third Wednesday of each month
10.30am – 12.30pm

**For more information or to book
an appointment tel: 01206 548196**