

# mymagazine

Edition 15

Autumn 2021



Visit our new Smart Room

Introducing The Tactile Universe

Meet our media stars!

**mysight**  
**notts**  
Seeing beyond sight loss

## Welcome!

Welcome to this edition My Magazine. We hope all our readers continue to remain safe and well.

It's been absolutely wonderful welcoming visually impaired people and volunteers back to Heathcoat Street for our Nottingham Thursday Social Group, the IT Group, Talking Newspaper recordings and of course for our pre-booked Equipment and Advice appointments.

It's also heart warming to see people returning with enthusiasm to our other face-to-face services like the Rambling Group, IT home visits, Walkie Talkie Wednesday walks, Swim and Gym and most recently the return of our choir.

Of course the pandemic has changed the way we work and we'd like to thank everyone for continuing to wear facemasks, wash and gel their hands and maintain a safe distance from others when they access services. These measures are designed to keep everyone safe.

Although the pandemic has been challenging, it has enabled our charity to develop some new and really exciting services for visually impaired people. Our new Smart Room at Heathcoat Street is packed with the latest equipment and technology, from Alexa to the latest Apps and from video magnifiers to virtual reality.

Our new team of Sight Loss Advisors and Tech Befriending Volunteers support visually impaired people to develop the skills and confidence needed to get online and stay connected. They've helped many people to benefit from our online services during lockdown, like our virtual arts and social groups and our Shared Vision peer support.

We'll continue to adapt and change what we do to ensure our services remain relevant in the changing world in which we find ourselves. We'll work more closely with partners to create better local services for people with sight loss and that includes consulting with the sight loss community on what matters to them.

Fundraising and marketing continue to find new ways to support services to thrive despite enforced charity shop closures and cancelled events. You may have seen us featured on TV and radio in recent months or enjoyed one of our many online videos. There's much to celebrate in fundraising as we enjoy support from individual and corporate donors. We'd like to thank everyone who took part in our summer raffle and we look forward to some exciting new fundraising opportunities on the horizon.

Thanks to our amazing staff and supporters, we are emerging from the pandemic with confidence and renewed purpose, finding new ways to support people with sight loss.

**Michael Conroy**  
CEO



**Jacky Fisher**  
Chair of Trustees



# Take a tour of our new Smart Room

Our exciting new Smart Room at Heathcoat Street is now up and running and open for business!

Visually impaired people are welcome to make an appointment to explore the latest technology in a comfortable home environment. During your visit you'll be supported by one of our Sight Loss Advisors who will provide a hands-on exploration of the benefits technology offers.

During the pandemic, we were unable to operate our cafe and so we decided not to reopen it when

restrictions eased, but use the space in a more productive way and so the idea of a Smart Room was born.

Our Smart Room includes a living room and kitchen where aids and technology are demonstrated in real-life situations. This includes smart technology like smart speakers and TV where things are activated just by using your voice.

We chose equipment based on what local visually impaired people said they wanted to see, what was simple to use and what was on the market.



Talking TV in our Smart Room

The Smart Room will allow us to explore new activities that we were not able to deliver before. This includes nutrition and daily living skills support incorporating both our sports and healthy lifestyles and equipment services.

We also use the Smart Room to provide appointments where our Sight Loss Advisors can talk to people about hi-tech equipment or the simplest bump on!

Our vision for the Smart Room is to see many people using it either for individual appointments where we can to showcase specific items

of equipment and for group activities such as Healthy Lifestyles and nutrition events. We also plan to showcase the latest tech to other organisations so they're aware of what's available to assist the people they work with.

We plan to develop a service for visually impaired students leaving home for the first time to view the latest tech before they go off to university so they can choose equipment to support their independence. We'd also like to support visually impaired people redesign or decorate their kitchen and living areas.

**To book an appointment to visit our Smart Room, please call: 0115 9706806**

## Teaching tech



# An experience that's out of this world!

If you're looking for an experience that's simply out of this world and truly awe-inspiring, look no further than our Tactile Universe project.

The exciting development came about when Jeanne our Arts Development Officer was watching the Sky at Night and they were doing a feature on bringing astronomy to people with sight loss.

Working with Matt, one of our Sight Loss Advisors, they made contact with Dr Nic Bonne, an astronomer featured on the show, who is himself visually impaired.

Nic wants to bring astronomy to people with sight loss, but realised it's a field that most visually impaired people wouldn't think about getting into.

Subsequent talks between Nic, Matt and Jeanne, led to Nic giving a talk and demonstration to some of our visually impaired service users using some amazing 3D printed galaxies, which are tactile!

The model galaxies have a hi-contrast black and white picture of a spiral galaxy called M51 on one side and a raised tactile version on the other side. Nic explained how galaxies were formed and that this particular galaxy was 'eating' a smaller one! The bigger galaxy's gravitational pull was drawing the smaller one towards it. This is happening with our own galaxy – the Milky Way and the galaxy nearest to us – Andromeda. Don't worry though; it will take millions of years!

After the successful tactile universe talk, Nic put us in touch with his colleague Dr Chris Harrison from Newcastle University, who is developing an 'Audio Universe' experience. Chris is using sound instead of visuals to represent the universe.

Examples include a sound-based planetarium show, so you can listen to the stars appear and software that turns real telescope data into sound.

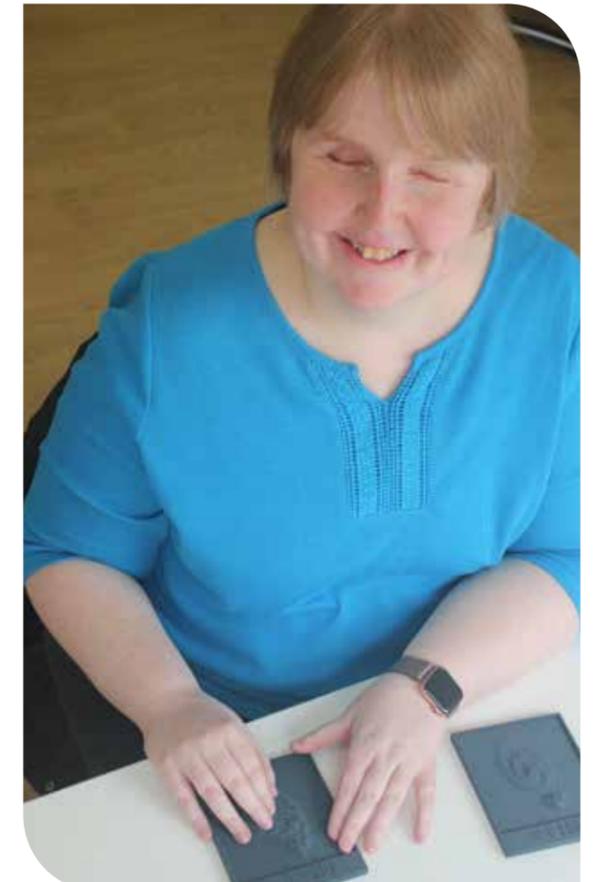
These uses of sound create a more immersive experience and aim to make astronomy more accessible.

We invited Chris to share his musical universe with local visually impaired people and the results were stunning!

Chris has worked with a musician to determine the best sounds to portray aspects of the universe. One of the most impressive we listened to was the depiction of the planets in our solar system. Using high tones for smaller planets and low tones for larger planets, as well as different beats and speeds to portray how they travelled around the sun, was fantastic!

It's not quite ready to be rolled out yet and My Sight Notts will continue to be a guinea pig until Chris and his team's audio experience is distributed to planetariums around the UK. We hope to take our members along to experience when it's released.

Neana Lawson who took part, said: "thank you for organising the tactile universe Zoom session. Nic presented it really interestingly and both the tactile and printed images represented space in a way I have never seen before. It will be interesting to see what ideas come from this and particularly from music."



**Kay has the universe at her fingertips!**

## What's New in Sports and health?

Throughout the pandemic all sporting activity came to a halt. There were some exceptions to disabled team sports and we worked with the university to deliver some Goalball sessions. Unfortunately further lockdowns brought them to a stop. Goalball did make a welcome return in May this year and we managed a few sessions before the summer break, with a full programme resuming in September.

In May we began to reintroduce our other sports and healthy lifestyle activities including Walkie Talkie Wednesdays, Rambling Group and Gym and Swim.

During the pandemic we've been looking at how we can make this service exciting and fresh with activities for everyone to have a go at. As a result we'll be providing more one-off activities, taster sessions and short courses including some surprising ones - Axe throwing anyone?

A new partnership with Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club will enable us to reintroduce our cricket sessions. We're currently working out the details for this.

We've also entered into a new partnership with a Community Interest Company, Koi Sports, and we hope to support them set up a blind football team with West Bridgford Colts – more details to follow!

As part of the development of the service we have also looked at providing nutrition and wellbeing workshops. This is a new area for us and we hope to roll this out very soon!



**Our ramblers return!**

## Breaking News!

Although our dedicated volunteers were unable to come in to record Talking News during lockdown, Sarah, one of our Sight Loss Advisors kept it going throughout the pandemic. At first this was delivered once a month and was used to keep people informed of what was happening at My Sight Notts, but from January, we were back to delivering the news every two weeks.

We changed the format of our Talking News, which now include not only local news stories but all the latest news from My Sight Notts along with some local history and interesting facts. Future editions of Talking News may have

additional features such as interviews with our staff team – helping you to get to know us better!

Most of our fantastic Talking News volunteers made the decision to move away from volunteering during the pandemic and we'd like to thank them for their amazing contribution. Fortunately we've recruited a whole new team of news recorders and duplicators and we look forward to introducing them to listeners in the future.

We also changed the wallets that Talking News CDs and memory sticks are delivered in. The new wallets are much more accessible and easier to use. So far, we have had 100% positive feedback about them from our listeners!

# Volunteering through the pandemic

In March 2020 we made the decision to change all face to face My Guide befriending volunteers to telephone befriending. This has proved to be a great decision as it enabled visually impaired people to remain connected throughout lockdowns.

The telephone befriending service was so well received that we decided to offer it to other isolated visually impaired who were not receiving a My Guide service from us. At the peak of the pandemic we had over 90 support partnerships in place.

At the very beginning of the pandemic we made a commitment to phone every single person on our database to see if there was any support they needed. This was a huge undertaking as there are around 1,500 people on our database! Volunteers were recruited – some who were already volunteers (including some of our trustees and service user reps) and some who were brand new and just wanted to help.

As a result of these phone calls, it became clear that people were struggling with getting basic food items to see them though.

In response we started a volunteer shopping service that delivered to our visually impaired service users across the county. We also supported people to set up online shopping provision and provided advice on priority telephone numbers for priority shopping deliveries.

We also offered a befriender telephone call on or around Christmas day to people who were going to be on their own or who just wanted to talk to someone different. This was extremely well received as one person said ‘I was on my own for the very first time this Christmas – my family couldn’t visit me due to the lockdown. Having a call from My Sight really cheered me up! We talked for about an hour and it was an hour that took away my loneliness.’

As well as pandemic response, we identified the need to support local visually impaired people to access new technology to help them stay connected and remain independent. We secured funding for a new tech project that will support people to use technology with confidence.

In October 2020 we recruited Matt Harrison, a specialist in assistive technology who now oversees 16 tech befrienders who support people to access not only our services but other services too.

The pandemic has informed our volunteer strategy going forward – we will continue to offer telephone befriending and shopping support and there will be more tech savvy volunteers recruited.

In addition, we’re carrying out a consultation on volunteering, looking at good practice, areas for learning and development. We will share the feedback soon.



Keeping in contact by phone

# Focus on Fundraising

## Paul Baskcomb

Paul steps up for our charity To help him through lockdown, Paul Baskcomb, one of our visually impaired service user reps and member of the Thursday Social Group has walked a staggering 1,000 miles and raised £1,000 for My Sight Notts.

Paul set himself the challenge of walking a three mile circular route around his home village of Ravenshead using just his white cane. His achievements saw him featured on BBC East Midlands Today!

Having smashed his original target, Paul's set himself a new goal of walking 1,200 miles and raising £2,000 for My Sight Notts!

If you'd like to support Paul's incredible effort, visit his Justgiving page: [www.justgiving.com/fundraising/paul-baskcomb](http://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/paul-baskcomb)



Paul Steps up for our charity

If you have an idea for a personal fundraising challenge like Paul, please get in touch with Lydia on 0115 9706806 for advice and support.



## Raffle raises £4,000!

Earlier this year we launched our summer raffle, this was organised and sponsored by our charity President, Len Jackson and his wife Di.

The draw took place at Heathcoat Street on the 8th of July and Cathy Smith was the owner of the lucky winning ticket, scooping the £500 first prize!

Other prizes included a second prize of £250 and a Fortnum & Mason Hamper. In total the raffle raised just under £4,000 and we are sincerely grateful to everyone who donated prizes or brought tickets.

## Chairman's Appeal

We'd like to thank Cllr Wallace, former Chairman of Nottinghamshire County Council who nominated My Sight Notts as his chosen charity for 2020/2021.

The Appeal raised £3,464 through a range of fundraisers, which included Cllr Wallace's blindfolded walk, sponsored activities by council staff and a recycling pledge campaign that was match funded by Veolia.

Special mention goes to County Council social care employees, Iris Peele, who is visually impaired and her guide runner Melanie, who ran the Monsal Trail in fancy dress!



Len draws the winning ticket!

## Meet Our Media Stars

During the pandemic we've had to explore new ways of getting our message across to the visually impaired community, our volunteers and supporters.

Our staff have worked hard to create over 45 YouTube videos, from seated chair exercise sessions, to advice on eye health and equipment. We've also used videos to get messages of thanks to our volunteers during National Volunteers Week in June and to campaign on the needs of visually impaired people during the pandemic.

We've benefitted from some media coverage with our media stars sharing their experiences on BBC TV, Radio Nottingham and in local newspapers.

Our Sight Loss Advisor Matt Harrison spoke to BBC Radio Nottingham about the life-changing benefits of technology for visually impaired people and our fundraisers, Paul Baskcomb and Iris Peele told their stories on BBC TV. Rob Allcock, one of our visually impaired artists spoke to BBC East Midlands Today about how he used art to get him through lockdown and some of our visually impaired staff and volunteers, Neil, Rachael and Julie spoke to BBC TV and Nottingham Post about the challenges faced by people with sight loss both during lockdown and as restrictions eased.

You might also hear us over the coming months on Capitol Radio stations across the UK as we support their Make Some Noise Appeal, which will be fundraising for My Sight Notts!

**Rob talks  
to the BBC**



## Potty about pots!

These beautiful colourful pots containing micro herbs were hand decorated by local visually impaired people as a lockdown art project to help keep everyone busy and creative. The project took place virtually, with people being supported to access zoom by our Sight Loss Advisors and the kits were delivered straight to people's homes.



Created by Adan



Created by Rob



Created by Erica

## Shared Vision

Our Shared Vision peer support group continues to go from strength to strength. Whether it's a face-to-face session at Heathcoat Street or a virtual meeting online, Shared Vision offers visually impaired people the opportunity to come together for mutual support. The facilitated discussions provide a safe space to share feelings about sight loss and develop coping strategies and learn practical life hacks that make living with vision loss easier.

We're thinking of setting up a group for people with visual hallucinations after sight loss. Aimed at people living with Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

**If you have an idea for a media story,  
please call Julie on 0115 9706806.**

**To find out more about Shared Vision support groups,  
call 0115 9706806 or email [micheleb@mysightnotts.org.uk](mailto:micheleb@mysightnotts.org.uk)**

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