



SVI News — Summer 2011

Issue 15

Welcome to SVI's summer newsletter

Joining forces to improve services

Sandwell Police have been working with SVI and the Sandwell Deaf Community Association (SDCA) to train staff from frontline services: the Police and the Council.

We want to encourage visually impaired or deaf people to have confidence to report issues that matter such as crimes, anti-social behaviour, street furniture, litter, noise nuisance and so on.

A joint Sensory Impairment Awareness training programme is being offered to staff who work in the community or come into contact with visually impaired or deaf people.

This exciting programme has been funded through West Midlands Police, who will be joining SDCA and SVI for the training, and updating delegates on important information on hate crime and



anti-social behaviour.

SVI have also recruited twelve VI volunteers who are linked in with the Police, attend town-based meetings and make sure that issues important to visually impaired people are raised and acted on at a senior level. More about the volunteers in the next edition. In the meantime, if you have concerns you would like to raise with the Police, please tell us by email to info@sandwellvisuallyimpaired.org.

Inside...

Have your say on Health Service shake-ups, August 18 and 23. See page 6.

Graham gets to work on the Sensory Garden.

Dates for your diary, page 7.



SVI aims to make living and/or working in Sandwell better for people coping with sight loss.



Help to remain independent

Sandwell Council's Vision Services are changing their name to the Sensory Team.

The team offer professional help, guidance and support to adults with sensory impairment and care management for deaf and/or dual sensory loss.

Information, advice and practical training are available to enable sensory impaired people to have choice, control and dignity to live independently.

Services offered include:

- Confidence building (counselling)
- Mobility training
- Daily living skills
- Communication training
- Advice and guidance on lighting and equipment
- Specialist assessments to maximise the use of remaining abilities
- Referring/signposting to other relevant services for information/resources/activities

Following specialist assessment many aids, adaptations and equipment are provided on free permanent loan.

Self directed assessments/personal budget assessments are undertaken depending on the

individual's needs.

Tel: **Sandwell Council ASSIST**
0845 352 2266

Hardest hit protest

On 11 May, 8000 disabled people marched on parliament to protest against cuts to benefits. SVI were one of many local and national groups taking part. The day started with a rally then a mass march, followed by a lobby of parliament where people could meet their MP. The atmosphere was amazing, with so many disabled people from across the UK! We marched with a group from the National Federation of the Blind and met people from many other organisations. The speakers were excellent especially Gerry, a 16 year old who spoke with such clarity and passion. Also inspiring was Karl who is new to SVI and to sight loss, but was still determined to be there and add his voice to the protest. It's easy to forget that the services some of us take for granted are vital to those who are new to sight loss, and what a difference they make to people's lives.

The fight to save services and benefits continues, with plans for local events in the autumn. So get involved and add your voice to the campaign.



Active in Dartmouth Park Active at 60...you bet!

20 SVI members aged 50+ have joined us to be Active at 60. Research shows that if you are active as you approach 60 you are more likely to stay active and healthier for longer.

We also have a team of five Community Agents who have volunteered to organise activities that exercise the body and mind. We have had a go on the outdoor gym, toured the Sandwell Valley Farm to learn the history of the area and visited the Oak House museum already, with lots more to come...for example, who's for bowling!

The Sandwell Vision Strategy

This comprehensive plan of action to tackle: sight loss prevention; high quality service development and delivery; and removing the

barriers to inclusion, was launched on our website in mid July. It can be found on www.sandwellvisuallyimpaired.org.uk Or you can request a copy in the format of your choice by speaking to **Scott or Sandra on 0121 525 4810**.

In the approval process, Councillors remarked that SVI's led public consultation was the best they had seen; the evidence used to develop the plan was truly user led.

It is the result of good partnership working between SVI, Action for the Blind, and many council and statutory bodies. Together they have assessed the fragmentary provision being made for people living with sight loss and devised a plan of action to tackle barriers and inequalities faced by our community.



SVI team up planting the raised bed

On a sunny Saturday morning at the end of May the Friends of Dartmouth Park and SVI were in Dartmouth Park working together on the new Sensory Garden. The plants were funded by a joint sponsored walk last year and the raised bed was built, free of charge, by Mansell the contractors.



Scented and brightly coloured plants were chosen with the help of Graham Price who was formerly a Landscape Architect. Dartmouth Park Ranger, Richard Williams helped to place the plants in a suitable design before planting started. Everyone enjoyed themselves.

A big thank you to Richard the Park Ranger, the Friends and all of you who helped by raising funds or getting your hands dirty!

The Sensory Garden will be a wonderful addition to the park which

will be enjoyed by everyone and will be extended as restoration progresses and funds permit.

National Eye Health Week

13 June saw SVI embark on a week long campaign to raise awareness of eye health and preventable sight loss. Our message 'don't turn a blind eye to sight loss' was loud and clear, and with 50% being avoidable an important one!

We visited the six towns of Sandwell going right to the heart of the community, with SVI market stalls at Wednesbury and West Brom, supermarket info in Smethwick and Tipton and library displays at Blackheath and Oldbury. 17 SVI volunteers gave out lots of information about eye health, free goodies like personal alarms and purse bells, with balloons for the kiddies.

Specsavers offered free sight testing vouchers and helped us with important information on the eye health of people who visit them for the first time.

Even if you are visually impaired eye tests can indicate other health problems, so are still important.

Almost 400 people helped us by completing a eye health week

questionnaire and four lucky winners got a £25 gift voucher as a thank you.



Success story: we are all winners!

When Paul, a student social worker, started his first year placement with SVI it was a new venture for us all. SVI had not had a student before, we were all learning! Paul said: "I had no idea what to expect or who I would be working with. As it turned out I was in for one of the most enriching experiences of my career. I feel that I am more attuned to the service user and better able to see the person behind the disability. As a first year placement SVI has been perfect, introducing me to the people who matter most, the service user and not forgetting, their carers.

"I would like to thank you all for making me feel welcome and for helping me to understand how a user led organisation works and how it benefits the community it represents.

"I hope to see you all again over the years to come."

Sandwell Revenues and Benefits Service

Sandwell Council's Revenues and Benefits service has a relationship with every household in the borough, through collecting Council Tax and paying out Housing and Council Tax Benefit to people on low incomes. Helping people get the financial support they are entitled to is a key priority, as many still fail to claim benefits or exemptions and discounts that they might qualify for. Quick checks over the phone can often determine whether someone might get help.

For more information, contact Revenues and Benefits on 0845 351 0020, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.

They are also keen to hear what you think of their service, whether good or bad and where you think they could do better, especially in terms of those with visual impairment. **If you have any comments, suggestions or experiences, that you want to share**, please contact Oliver Wright, the service's Stakeholder Relations Officer on 0121 569 6317 or email oliver_wright@sandwell.gov.uk

SAIBA off road...

For those with a spirit of adventure!



On Saturday 16 July Sandwell Active Independent Blind Association travelled to an off road course in Shropshire.

The Land Rover owners club kindly offered to take us for a wonderfully exciting trip around the course. We went up almost vertical gradients, hurtling down steep banks, traversing banks sideways, through water and zig-zagging through wooded areas.



Some people got to drive the vehicles. One person who was afraid at the beginning can't wait to go back, particularly in winter with all the mud!

We all had a wonderful day and all praise to the owners club.

We hope to repeat the experience. **Anyone interested**, please contact Stuart, SAIBA's Group events Coordinator.

Email: Stuart@saiba.org

Mobile: 07766 704070.

Is the new health service working for you?

Two of the three Sandwell GP service groups are holding their first patient summits since the health service shake up. It's your chance to hear what they're doing and let them know what you want them to do.

The **Black Country Clinical Commissioning Group** meets on Thursday 18 August 2011, 6pm to 8pm, at the Village Hotel, Castlegate Park, Birmingham road, Dudley, DY1 4TB

The **Sandwell Health Alliance Clinical Commissioning Group** is meeting on Tuesday 23 August 2011, 6pm to 8pm, at the National Metalforming Centre, 47 Birmingham Road, West Bromwich, B70 6PY.

If you would like to attend or confirm which Clinical Commissioning Group your GP Practice belongs to, please contact Kat Meredith on 0121 289 3107 or kathryn.meredith@sandwell-pct.nhs.uk

Please advise Kat of any requirements you may have including help with travel arrangements and cost.

Falls and bone health

As we get older we are more likely to fall. There can be many reasons for this: less strength and balance; poor and deteriorating eyesight; poor mobility; a need to take different types of medication; what we eat; and how much exercise and daylight we get.



The risk of falling can also be increased by our environment. A cluttered, badly maintained or cold house can increase the risk. Outside, uneven pavements and kerbs and poor street lighting are also risk factors.

Fear of falling affects our wellbeing. We can become reluctant to leave home and this can create isolation and decreased independence.

Things to help prevent falls include: ensuring our bones are protected; keeping active; keeping our homes clutter free; and making sure we have the correct amount of help, aids and adaptations

For help on managing your risk of falls contact your local community health team.

Dates for your diary

15 September is the next induction for the latest AZABAT keyboard training and computer skills course for blind and VI people. These sessions will be at Central Library, West Bromwich.

27 October is the date for SVI's Annual Forum, 2011. Venue is again Popes Lane Training Centre, Oldbury. Our Speakers are Adam and Lynn Holdsworth, a blind couple who travelled around the world unaccompanied.

Easy recipe from Mary Howe.

Easy fruit mousse



Ingredients

One jelly (any flavour you like)

Enough boiling water to make up to a pint/500 ml

1 small tin evaporated milk (such as Carnation)

Summer fruits to accompany (optional)

Method

Cube jelly and put into a jug, top up to a pint with boiling water. Stir until melted, put into decorative dish. Place in fridge until jelly is partially set – shouldn't be too firm; you will need to put an electric hand whisk into it.

Remove from fridge and add evaporated milk, whisk with an electric hand whisk or rotary whisk till fluffy. Return to fridge to set.

Accompany this with mixed summer fruits if you wish, or goes really well with halved strawberries.

Make sure your dish has plenty of room at the top, as the mousse will expand when it fluffs up.

Lower fat version: use no added sugar jelly crystals, and half fat evaporated milk.

Stop press

SVI membership stands at 471, with new members joining us all the time.

SVI starts exciting work with East European new arrivals to Sandwell in the autumn – more news next time.

This issue – thanks to:

The editorial team, Sandwell Council and Reach Project Printing, Tipton.

Editor: Sandra

Tel: 0121 525 4810

Email:

sandra_troth@sandwell.gov.uk