



Training with a difference

Over the last few months Sandwell Sensory Services and SVI have worked with Serco, the council's waste partner, to deliver training sessions to bin collection employees.

The first of its kind, the training brings two unlikely groups of people together to raise awareness about visual impairments and eye health along with tackling the issues of returning wheeled bins correctly. (More on page 2...)

Dedication

Members, staff and management committee of SVI would like to send our sincere condolences to the family and friends of Ivy Hingley, an SVI member who sadly passed away last year. Our thanks for the generous donation to SVI in memory of Ivy. This kind contribution has helped us to fund this edition of the newsletter, which enables us to inform and support other visually impaired people.

Donate: If you wish to donate to SVI's Justgiving by Text Account please text SVIG33 and the amount you wish to donate (example: SVIG33 £2) to 70070. All donations will be gratefully received.

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

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Over 150 members of the bin collection staff have undergone the training, which includes a personal testimonial from a visually impaired resident and a practical simulated activity.

This unique training has resulted in a visible improvement in service standards.

Feedback from employees who have taken part has been exceptionally positive with over 99% finding the training interesting and enjoyable but most of all influential in how they conduct their duties and their awareness of eye conditions.

The training has won an internal award through the Serco Pulse Award Scheme in the Innovation category.

Following this success, Serco will be monitoring service standards to ensure the positive messages from the training sessions are not



diluted and remain in the forefront of employee's minds.

Healthwatch Sandwell in the starting blocks

Healthwatch Sandwell (HW), born on 1 April this year, replaces the former Local Involvement Network (LINK). For the first time, the council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 has a legal duty to bring together public health and social care services to meet your needs.

Graham Price (pictured), SVI management committee member, is on the board and responsible for



communication and engagement. He promises to do his utmost to make a difference we shall all benefit from.

Besides joining all groups that feed into the decision process and advising on the design and delivery of services on Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG), the board, which is made up of local lay people, will carry out

checks on the places delivering the service such as hospitals and residential care homes. It's a big but important job for service users to influence providers to work together to give us the services we badly need.

Call Healthwatch Sandwell on 0121 737 2426.

Sandwell Talking News re-launch

In 1978 Sandwell Talking News (TN) first started dropping through letterboxes of blind people in the area. Circulation climbed to around 150 over the years.

A small group of readers gathered at locations around Sandwell to read local news and information. Agreement with Beacon Centre for the Blind meant circulation was handled at Sedgley.

Cutbacks at Beacon led to distribution ceasing last May resulting in Sandwell (and Wolverhampton) Talking News readers being left without their newspaper.

Things are changing!

SVI, working with SCIPS at



Ray and Pete recording with readers Janet and Sue

Oldbury has now obtained the first ward-based funding from Community First to re-launch the newspaper in Oldbury. We hope distribution will be borough-wide soon when other funding is available.

Help needed! We need volunteers to make it happen, doing duplication and mail-outs, recording, reading, and to serve on the TN committee. If you can help we'd love to hear from you.

Just contact Ray at ray_brum@yahoo.co.uk

To get the Sandwell Talking Newspaper in the post every fortnight ring SVI on 0121 525 4810 to register your interest – or listen online at www.sandwellvisuallyimpaired.org.uk

March Open Meeting – information and support for our members

Almost 50 SVI members braved the snow for our March Open Meeting.

Benefits and housing changes

The meeting focused on changes to welfare benefits like the recently introduced PIP (Personal Independence Payment) and housing regulations including the new under-occupancy rules.

If you have any benefits issues or want to know more about the changes contact Sandwell Council's Welfare Rights Unit on 0121 569 3158. Or call SVI and we can send you an information pack or refer you to DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) who may be able to visit you in your home.

Housing matters

SVI's new Housing Support Group was launched at the meeting. The group will be raising your housing issues with the council's housing department (formerly Sandwell Homes), social landlords, tenants' groups

and agencies that provide services to people in their homes.

Contact us at the SVI office if you would like to become a member of this new group or if you have any problems you would like to bring to our attention.

Easter raffle prizes presented

SVI's Active at 60 group organised an Easter raffle to help raise funds for their activities. Prizes were presented at the meeting.



First prize was a wonderful and yummy chocolate hamper won by Miss Lamey (pictured above).

Second prize was an equally scrummy mini hamper won by Mr McGeoghan (pictured right).



Active at 60 members thank everyone who supported them by buying tickets. Special thanks also go to Fay Allen, her mum, Bill Bowen and Georgina Orlebar who contributed to the preparation of the hampers.

The Active at 60 group meet monthly and enjoy a range of health and wellbeing activities. They have just received a grant from the Red Nose Community Cash fund to organise more interesting and enjoyable events.

Big thanks from food bank

Generous SVI members brought non-perishable donations to the meeting to pass on to West Bromwich food bank.

The food bank collects and stores food to give to people who cannot afford to buy it. On average they support 60 people each week.

Clients visit the food bank at West Bromwich Community Church, Victoria Street, B70 8JR and get the appropriate amount of food to meet their needs. This is intended as a short term measure whilst more permanent support is put in place.

Clients are referred to the food bank by agencies such as CAB, Sandwell Housing, Welfare Rights Unit or SVI, who are now a food bank referral partner.

Stocks come from donations by individuals, businesses, local agencies and churches. The food bank can arrange collection of donations.



Food bank collection

Contact Keith Turner on 0121 580 0068 or email keithturner@elimwestbrom.com.

West Bromwich food bank is open Monday 2pm to 5pm and Friday 1.30pm to 4pm.

SVI service survey

Thanks to everyone who completed SVI's service development survey. Your feedback is very important and will help us to shape SVI in the way you want it.

We are analysing your feedback and will report back in the next newsletter.

As a thank you for completing the survey, lucky member Mr Dhamu won the prize draw of a £25 ASDA voucher – happy shopping.

A walk in the dark

SVI vice-chair to walk 15 miles in the dark to raise money for eye research.



Saeed Nasser (above) a founder-member of SVI and current vice-chair, will be joining others to walk the streets of Birmingham on the night of Friday 20 September to raise money to support important sight loss prevention research.

Did you know that every day in the United Kingdom, 100 people start to lose their sight?

Saeed says: "I lost my sight completely when I was a child and I am very pleased to make a small contribution to research efforts to prevent sight loss and that's why I will be participating in the 15 mile sponsored walk in September."

If you would like to support Saeed and this worthwhile cause or want find more details about the Fight for Sight Charity, visit the online donation page at:
uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/HelpingHandTeam

Or donate through the SVI office. Clearly mark your donations "Fight for Sight".

Shopping in safety

Council Officer Alan Goodman – responsible for the Princess and Duchess Place (formerly West Bromwich High Street) market area development – met with SVI, Sensory Services and the Federation of the Blind to make sure that changes to the market space are safe and accessible for visually impaired people.

He said: “We find the feedback and advice you give us very useful in designing a balanced and considerate environment for all.”



SVI members, council staff and Paul Corry, site manager

We were introduced to Joanne Saunders from the council’s Highways Department and Paul Corry, site manager for the principal contractors, Fitzgeralds. They accompanied us as we did a walk about to look at the tactile surfaces and to check out the work in progress.

There’s still a long way to go in ensuring that planners and developers fully understand the needs of visually impaired people. We will be continuing discussions while work goes on

in West Brom, so please tell us what you think about the new shopping area.

Centro backs fight against hate crime

Safer Travel, a partnership between Centro, West Midlands Police, British Transport Police and transport operators is working with Stop Hate UK, a charity that provides independent and confidential support to people affected by hate crime.

Hate crimes consist of hostility, prejudice or hatred based on a person's perceived difference. This includes name calling and verbal abuse, bullying and harassment, spitting and physical attacks, damage to property, graffiti, written notes, emails and text messages.

More details at www.stophateuk.org. Or ring the 24 hour hotline 0800 138 1625 to report hate crimes, access support, and get information.

SVI is a registered Hate Crime Reporting Centre too, so call us on 0121 525 4810 to report it.



Are you an SVI member?

This newsletter is sent out to everyone on Sandwell Council's register of Severely Visually Impaired people but everyone who gets it is not an SVI member. To get all of our information about activities and campaigns and the latest news about services available to visually impaired people, please join SVI today. Membership is free

and you will become part of a user led group that really cares how visually impaired people's needs are met.

Simply complete the enclosed membership form and return it in the freepost envelope.

Or email

info@sandwellvisuallyimpaired.org.uk
or call 0121 525 4810.

Cauliflower and stilton soup

Ingredients

2oz / 50g butter
1 onion, finely chopped
A leek, cleaned and chopped
1 large potato, diced small
1 medium cauliflower split into small florets
1 heaped tablespoon plain flour
1 pint/ 570ml stock (chicken or vegetable)
5 fluid oz/ 85ml dry apple cider
4oz /110g stilton cheese grated
10 fluid oz/ 175ml milk
Salt and pepper

Method

Melt the butter in a thick based saucepan. Add the vegetables and cook gently with the lid on for 5 to ten mins. Add the flour and stir to absorb the juices. Gradually pour in the cider and stock. Cover and simmer for 30 minutes. Add milk and stilton, then reheat. Add salt and pepper to taste.

If you like, puree the soup in a food processor or press through a sieve. This soup is extra nice served with crunchy croutons.

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