

SVI (CIO) all set for a brighter future



Welcome to New Trustees Terry and Stephen, with SVI Chair Tony and guide dog Bailey

We're always looking for the best ways to develop our services to meet the needs of the visually impaired community. We are therefore proud to have gained Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) status from the Charity Commission.

It's taken time and effort to achieve, in full consultation with our members. Thank you to all who have supported us in taking this step forward.

Being a CIO means that SVI has a firmer structure in law. It puts us in better standing with funders and reflects our ambition for the organisation. We intend to apply for bigger grants that will help SVI to grow.

We can now employ our own staff and already directly employ Kelley and Cassie. There's more about our staff team on page 3. With new Trustees on board too, we're all set for a brighter future.

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Our two new Trustees were elected at our Annual General Meeting in November. Terry Burling and Stephen Keenan will bring their skills and expertise to our board which works hard to provide the services and activities that members want.

Terry and Stephen, along with ten of the other Trustees, are visually impaired themselves.

Terry is one of our volunteer swim buddies and is former Chair and secretary of Oldbury Swimming Club. He's been a volunteer with us for several years.

Stephen has been Volunteer of the Year at the Beacon Centre and has considerable fundraising and information-giving experience, along with other talents.

They are already making a great contribution to SVI.



Stephen made our new tombola – a fun fusion of fundraising and creative skills!

Data Protection GDPR – what it means for us

Most of you will have heard of GDPR, a change to data protection regulations. At SVI we are committed to keeping your personal data safe in line with these rules.

GDPR, along with our change of status to a CIO, means that you will have received communications from us asking you to rejoin Sandwell Visually Impaired. If you didn't do this, then you are no longer an SVI member and cannot benefit from our services.

You may be unsure about whether you have rejoined. Don't worry, we can easily check this for you. Just call the office on 0121 525 4810.

If you know you are not a member and would like to join us, you can complete a membership form (there's one enclosed, if you have had this newsletter in the post) or call the office to register.

Read on to find out more about what SVI members have been up to. Join us for support, information, fun, fitness, food and friends galore. Our services are free to members though you may have to contribute towards some activities.

Meet the staff team



The team with SVI Chair Tony and Treasurer Karen.
L-R: Kelley, Susan, Sandra, Tony, Karen and Cassie, with guide dogs Jangle and Bailey.

Our volunteer Trustees are supported by SVI's paid staff who work hard in and out of the office to meet SVI members' needs.

Most of you will know Sandra, SVI Development Worker. She works with the Trustees, staff and members to develop services, apply for grants and to make sure that SVI has the correct systems and policies in place to move forward. Sandra says: "I love my work with SVI and am wholly

committed to user led services – that's what makes SVI different."

Kelley, SVI Enablement Worker, is employed through a grant from Awards for All. Kelley offers help and support at most of SVI's activities and events. She encourages members to get the most from SVI activities. Kelley says: "I thoroughly enjoy my role as an enablement worker, I'm very passionate about it and do every job within my role with all I have."

Cassie, Information and Support Worker, is part funded via Comic Relief. She offers information and support to visually impaired people who phone the office or drop in for sighted help. Cassie says: "I adore being part of the team and highly value everything SVI stands for; supporting the VI community through my work is hugely rewarding."

Susan, Business Support Officer, is usually the first point of contact when you call SVI. She keeps the cogs turning and gets letters and information out to members and friends. Susan says: "Working for SVI for nearly six months now has opened my mind. Every day is different and I learn something new every week. I love meeting all our members at our events and enjoy getting involved when I can."

Tech tips are tops



Apps under scrutiny at Appy Hour

Our members have been getting to grips with technology as part of our Appy Hour sessions.

Mr Lal said: "The people who lead the group are very clued up on how to navigate a smartphone."

Graham said: "I'd be struggling to use my I-phone if I hadn't attended 'Appy hour' training."



Nathan from New Union at the Digital Festival

We've also recently run a Digital Festival together with I-Sandwell, which aims to influence policy on accessible information for people with sight loss.

Tea, toast and a natter



Guide dogs like toast too

Join SVI on the first Wednesday of each month for our tea and toast drop in mornings. From 10.30am to 12pm you can get a cuppa and a slice of toast while chatting to other SVI members and invited guests who want to tell you about the help they can offer.

Sensory Services join us almost every month to advise on questions you have about coping in the home and getting out and about safely. Trading Standards, the Police and South Staffs Water have visited to tell us about the help they can give to visually impaired people. It's a great way of keeping on top of what's happening in Sandwell and meeting old and new friends.

Ready to SocialEyes?

SVI is setting up an exciting new group for members who want to get involved in more action-packed activities. To wet your appetite, a few suggestions are:

- ten pin bowling
- dinghy sailing day
- trip to a theme park
- activity day – including dry slope skiing, wall climbing, free-fall diving, kayaking
- quiz afternoons\evenings.

What would **you** like? To make a suggestion and/or express your interest in taking part, complete and return the SocialEyes form or give us a call at the office. We will contact you with our list of activities once we have collated your responses. We may be able to offer discounted rates for admission and transport to activities too.

Not an SVI member? Call us and we will tell you how you can join.

SVI Women's Group

The women's group meets once a month, with the choice of a daytime or evening session, at West Bromwich Town Hall where we chat and discuss any issues we may have.



We have a speaker to talk to us on health and wellbeing and have social events like afternoon tea. It's a chance to meet other likeminded women without the men being there. Lots of topics are covered like alcohol awareness, skin care and we have had a massage and a seated fitness class.



The group is funded by a Healthy Sandwell Micro Grant, so all ladies are welcome up to the age of 74. Please come along.

Gina said: "I have been to both day and the night women's groups. I have met some lovely interesting people. Had a lovely back neck and arm massage, talked about various topics. This group gets everyone involved, well done again SVI."

Focus on funding

What a year we've had, it's our best yet and it looks like hard work and our new premises are really paying off. Below are a selection of grant providers who have helped us this year.

The Big Lottery Awards For All programme,

funded our twelve month



**NATIONAL
LOTTERY FUNDED**

Enablement Worker post, with Kelley starting with us last October. We are busy seeking funding to keep her. She's helped so many members to get the most from the gym, swimming, social activities and much, much more. Awards For All were so impressed with SVI, that they invited us to give a presentation in Birmingham to their grant officers who work across the Midlands.



Comic Relief, administered by the Heart of England Community Foundation, has helped us by giving us a grant to set up a small resource supply of equipment and to start confidential listening support sessions at our base at the Town Hall. They have also part-funded our Information and Support Worker Cassie. She's

been helping us to gain PQASSO Quality Standards, which will help us to apply for more funding in the future.



The **iSandwell Accelerator Fund** supported us to hold our VI Digital Festival, which in turn has helped us to increase membership of our 'Appy Hour sessions.

SVI Women's Group was started thanks to help from a **Healthy Sandwell Micro** grant. It's our newest group and feedback from the women is very positive. We have recently applied to set up a men's group as well, so keep an ear out for news.

Harry Payne Charitable Trust

has given us some funds to help set up a SocialEyes group, so that visually impaired people of all ages can enjoy social activities that are just that little bit more challenging and adventurous!

Sandwell CAN (Community Activity Network) funding has come to an end now but this great programme enabled almost 100 of our members to take to the pool for a swim or just to splash about and gain confidence in the water. Even though funding has stopped,

swimming is still on every Wednesday from 3pm, so join us at West Bromwich Leisure Centre.



A huge thanks to CAN and all of our funders who have helped SVI to grow and offer even more to our members and friends.

SVI members raise funds in the community

We don't just rely on grants, our members, volunteers and friends get out and about, helping us to fundraise in stores. In July, over £500 was raised in just two days at Tesco Cradley Heath and Dudley Castlegate. Our West Bromwich street collection in May raised about £220 when SVI supporters gave up a sunny Saturday to collect for us. Members of the public are so kind and we thank them for their generous contributions.

Sam Love, one of SVI's volunteer gym buddies, put her best foot forward to run the Birmingham Marathon. Her employer Barclays Bank match funded her efforts and a grand £1000+ was raised for SVI. Thanks Sam, we hope your feet weren't too sore afterwards!



Sam at the finish line

Our members raise funds by running raffles, where funds go to help organise even more activities and services for SVI. The Active 60 group hold raffles to help cover some of their activities and hold an annual Winter Bazaar – so keep a look out for details of this great chance to buy festive gifts and help A60 at the same time.

These are just a few examples of the kind work done by members to support SVI and we haven't even mentioned the regular donations made by people who don't want any thanks – we thank them all anyway, we couldn't do the great work we do without you.

Donate: By text to SVI's Justgiving by Text Account, text SVIG33 and the amount you wish to donate (example: SVIG33 £2) to 70070. Or call the office for our bank details.

Getting active SVI members hit the target

On Tuesday afternoons we hold archery sessions at Portway Lifestyle Centre for our blind and visually impaired members.



Join in the fun and give it a try. Expert help is on hand to get the best from these sessions.



In the gym

Portway also hosts our gym sessions on Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons. We are welcomed by staff and our gym buddy volunteers, who help us

move safely around the equipment and set programmes up for us. Guide dogs can watch us in the gym or be looked after by Portway staff.

Some of us now enjoy the new indoor cycling sessions too – why not join us for a spin in the new studio at Portway.

In the swim



On Wednesday afternoons members visit West Bromwich Leisure Centre for our swimming sessions in the training pool. This is enjoyed by people with all swimming abilities and your guide dog will be looked after while you go for your swim. Sit in the cafe area afterwards and enjoy a coffee and a chat with others.

Interested in taking part? Call the office for more details. If you aren't already an SVI member we will tell you how to join – membership is free.

SVI shares skills with South Staffs Water



SVI reps meet South Staffs Water

SVI has been working with South Staffs water to make it easier for customers to access their services using the Amazon virtual assistant, Alexa. Some of our members already use Alexa at home, asking it to play music, tell us the weather, set alarms and reminders and so on. Using South Staffs Water's 'skills', Alexa can give instant advice on various matters.

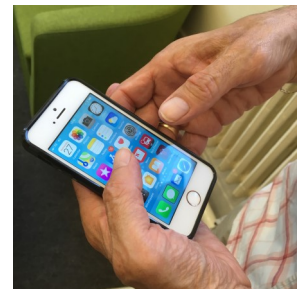
Tony, Chair of SVI said: "Working alongside South Staffs Water in the development of the Alexa Skill gave us the opportunity to bring together what the customer wanted from the skill and we are looking forward to the future developments bringing in new features to enhance the experience. The features incorporated within the skill currently surpass those of other water utility companies -

something the others should be aiming to work towards."

Sandra, SVI Development Worker said: "We welcome any advances technology can provide us with to make our lives safer or easier. We have been delighted to be involved in the development of South Staffs Water's skills for Alexa and are looking forward to taking advantage of the skills when the features go live."

New text alert scheme

From September, SVI will be able to send text information straight to your mobile phone. Members will be invited to receive texts alerting to scams, bogus traders and callers in your area. Working with Sandwell Council's Trading Standards, we will be able to send text alerts to specific areas of Sandwell prompting you to call Trading Standards if you need more information.



We will also offer the service to remind members of events, workshops and groups you are registered for. This is a great way to ensure you don't miss out.

We will contact members to ask if you would like to register for this service.

Active 60 – it's a hoot



Owl encounter at Ash End Farm

A fantastic day was had by all who went on the Active 60 trip to Ash End Farm. A hot and sunny day set the backdrop for our bumpy tractor ride and owl handling, not to mention the snake who seemed happy enough to get to know us better!



Snake wrap?

We met and fed all the animals but drew the line at holding the cockroach.

Ritchie said: "I enjoyed the whole visit. The ride on the carriages pulled by the tractor was fun as

was meeting the owl. I was brave enough to have him sit on my hand as were a few others."



Active 60 explore Lightwoods

For those who fancied a more genteel afternoon, a visit to Lightwoods House and Gardens fitted the bill. A tour of the recently restored house, a stroll around the gardens and afternoon tea at Jonathans in the Park was very nice thank you.



If you are over 50 and like to get out and about, why not join us, contact the SVI office and we can add you to the A60 list – we have other activities coming up soon including festive fun in the lead up to Christmas.



Wreath making challenge



SVI members got creative with Heath House Studios to remember the 'Unremembered' of the First World War. SVI's wreath commemorates all of the Labour Corps members who transported food, water, fuel, ammunition and weapons to the fighting soldiers.

Without the Labour Corps bringing these vital supplies, the Army would have been unable to fight, defend or advance.



This was part of the national Big Ideas 'Unremembered' project funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. We plan to make another wreath to present at the Remembrance Day ceremony in West Bromwich.

Talking art at the Barber



SVI members received a warm welcome from staff and volunteers at the Barber Institute, Birmingham when we visited them this summer. Helpful and well informed volunteer guides audio described art works, bringing them to life and making them interesting, even to those of us with little or no sight.



There will be another trip to the Barber Institute on Friday 30 November. Book your place with the office.

Want to get creative?

Then join SVI's upcoming Christmas Crash Course and design your own festive crafts with help from SVI and Sandwell Adult Community Learning. More details will be available soon.

Forthcoming events

Along with our regular programme of activities, we have some more events coming up. We would love to meet you there. Come along and join our friendly members and friends. We will send more information to you if you are an SVI member.

Monday 22 October:

SVI fundraising curry night at the Little Bangla restaurant, Langley

Starting October: SVI Christmas crafts course, running in partnership with Sandwell Adult Community Learning from SVI's base in West Bromwich.

Monday 19 November: SVI Annual Forum at the Portway Lifestyle Centre, Oldbury.

Friday 30 November: Trip to the Barber Institute

Have you done something interesting that you would like to share with our readers? We welcome articles from our members and supporters. Why not drop us a line or give us a call on 0121 525 4810.

Don't miss out on what's going on. Get Sandwell Talking News.

It's free! With lots of news and information for visually impaired people in Sandwell. Delivered weekly by post on USB stick.

Or online via the SVI website sandwellvisuallyimpaired.org.uk

Listen now!

Call the SVI Office for more information.

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You can download this newsletter from our website:

- as a colour pdf document to view/print
- in audio format

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