YorView The newsletter of MySight York

Spring 2021

Our main picture shows a man reading Braille from a book

Tired of long evenings at home? Why not put your fingers to work with our growing number of members learning Braille?

From the Editor…

There’s no denying it – it’s been a hard winter. Many of us have found it more difficult to ‘walk cheerfully over the world’, as the Quakers would say, whether we’ve been directly touched by COVID or just worrying about our children’s escalating screen time.

All of us at MySight York have remained busy from our virtual offices, with several new projects taking shape. Our Reaching Out team are gathering information on how sight loss affects you, our members, and how we can best respond. A new research project sees us partnering with York University. And our Access group continues to work towards an improved local environment for everyone with sight loss. There’s more on all these projects inside.

Some of our members have used the enforced isolation to develop their brailling skills. You can find out how they got on (and perhaps be inspired to join them?) in our features starting on page 16.

We are so looking forward to being able to meet in person again, whether to explore equipment, run a group or share a home visit. Spring is coming.

Deborah

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# [From the Chief Executive](#from_the_Chief_Executive)

None of us wanted to start 2021 this way and our new norm, it seems, is to continually act in response to government guidelines. Since the pandemic began last year, MySight York has been working tirelessly to change and reshape services in response to the Covid-19 virus; and in January we moved MySight York operations (predominantly) to run from our own homes, for the third time.

Working from home brings about some real logistical challenges, however there are some definite benefits:

\* The daily commute has changed from a train, car or bike; to a stride up a flight of stairs, or across a landing.

\* Clothes are comfier (not pyjamas – video conferencing has prevented this).

\* Lunch time can be…whenever you’re hungry, sometimes 11am, sometimes 2pm.

Having increased flexibility means our times answering calls have become extended. Indeed, we’re making more calls than ever before with nine different extensions all linked to our main telephone number.

This means that during the pandemic we have never closed, never ceased to function, and never stopped supporting people with a visual impairment across our region.

But working from home isn’t where we’d like to be. We miss our members dropping in and saying hello. We miss being close to each other, to share information quickly and to find innovative solutions by joining minds together.

We hope that as soon as we are able, we will invite all of our members into Merchantgate for an open day to remember. I’m thinking balloons, drinks, music and a scandalous amount of cakes!

Therefore as soon as guidelines begin to ease, we will again adopt a phased approach to our ‘premises re-open’. This balanced and blended method considers demand with capacity, logistics with equipment and impact with wellbeing.

All of the evidence shows without question that people with sight loss are particularly affected by the pandemic and resulting lockdown; from social distancing rules to online shopping, to travelling on public transport and mental wellbeing.

We also know that that the Coronavirus vaccine is our best route back to making normality a reality. It offers safe and effective protection against the virus and is being successfully rolled out across York – with some of the highest rates of immunisation in

the country.

But before we can welcome you back (or indeed for the first time) to Merchantgate, if you or someone you know needs advice, support, information, equipment or a listening ear, we are here to help you stay safe, stay well and keep connected. This includes our extremely popular telephone support services such as Keeping- In-Touch and our Support with MySight groups. Our Home Connections Service continues to develop and grow – offering specialist advice over the telephone, and undertaking an ever increasing number of doorstep deliveries of essential equipment.

I know I’ve said it before but I never tire of repeating how impressed I have been by the hard work, dedication and commitment of all staff and volunteers here at MySight York. We are extremely lucky to have so many knowledgeable, qualified experts in our team.

So I’m really looking forward to the challenges and opportunities of 2021. To take forward our strategy, vision and values, with a co- produced and shared ambition. To use our new insights to develop and grow. We are entering a new era for MySight York. One of ambition and resolution. Affected by the pandemic…absolutely. Discouraged…absolutely not.

Scott

# [News in Brief](#_News_in_Brief)

Coronavirus vaccination

The government’s vaccination programme is gaining ever greater momentum, and many of our members have already taken up

the offer of a jab. Anne Smith called to tell us about her experience:

“I had my jab at Askham Bar. It is well organised and very friendly, although it is quite busy so you may have to wait. The jab takes seconds and then you have to sit down for approximately fifteen minutes. There are a few symptoms you may or may not get afterwards—fortunately, I did not have any of them. I felt so happy afterwards.”

York Wheels are offering a car service to transport people to and from Askham Bar. The driver will wait while you have your

vaccination. You must be able to sit in the back of a car and wear a mask. You also have to book and pay in advance (roughly half the cost of a standard taxi fare). There is some availability for evening and weekend trips. Contact York Wheels on 01904 630080.

An NHS Responder Volunteer driver may be an alternative option. You can call 0808 196 3382 for more information.

Guide dog owners are able to take their dogs to the vaccination site.

Vaccination scams

Please be aware that there are currently various scams promising coronavirus vaccination for a fee, or requiring you to share your bank details before you make an appointment. Sadly, some of our members have already been targeted.

These fraudulent messages are circulating by phone, email and text

message, and some of them look disturbingly similar to the real thing. They may ask you to press a number on your keypad, open an email link or send a confirmation text message. All of these may cause you to be illegally charged.

The NHS will never charge you for vaccination, or ask for your bank details. If you are in any doubt about a letter, phone call, text or email, please check before acting.

Census 2021

The Census is a survey run once every ten years by the Office for National Statistics. It involves a series of questions about yourself and your household, which you are requested to answer on Sunday 21 March 2021, or as soon as possible thereafter. The results feed into planning of services such as transport, education and healthcare as well as being used by organisations like charities to inform our work and support funding applications.

The ONS will send every household a pack through the post. This will contain an access code which will log you in to the online questionnaire. All the key information, including the code, will be in large print. You can request a large print version of the questionnaire or a braille guidance booklet. There will also be accessible videos of the census questions to guide you through the process. Help will also be available through a telephone contact centre.

Supermarket shopping by telephone

We’re delighted to hear that Morrison’s has introduced a new telephone shopping service for customers who are finding it difficult to get to the supermarket in person or manage their shopping online. You can choose from an ‘essentials’ list of 47 items including milk, butter, eggs, potatoes, pasta, bananas, cornflakes and flour. Your order will be delivered the following day—you pay electronically at your doorstep. To place an order, call 0345 611 6111 and select option 5.

World Book Day

UNESCO World Book Day (March 4th) is fast approaching. Once again, the day celebrates children’s literature and encourages children across the globe to get involved in reading and the world of books.

As in previous years, RNIB and Guide Dogs have joined forces to offer every child living with sight loss a free copy of one of the 13 chosen titles. There’s everything from dinosaur fun for younger readers with Gigantosaurus: Dino- spot by Jonny Duddle to a treasure hunt across the Paris rooftops in Katherine Rundell’s thrilling Skysteppers. Older readers are not left out either, with the inclusion of Kill Joy, Holly Jackson’s hotly anticipated prequel to recent hit The Good Girl’s Guide to Murder.

Books can be ordered until 31st March 2021. To order audio (DAISY CD) or braille copies, contact RNIB on 0303 123 9999. For large print versions, contact Guide Dogs on 0118 983 8275.

UK Disability Survey

The Cabinet Office Disability Unit is currently developing a National

Strategy for Disabled People. They have launched an online UK Disability Survey in order to find out about the lived experience of disabled people across the UK and canvass their opinions. They also want to hear from family members, friends, carers and the wider public.

Although the consultation for the strategy itself closed on 13th February, further responses are still useful as they will be used to shape the strategy’s implementation.

The survey is available in audio, Easy Read and British Sign

Language formats and a braille version can be provided on request. Written responses can also be emailed directly to the Disability Unit.

RNIB Campaigns are able to support anyone with sight loss who needs assistance in completing the survey. To request their support, email campaigns@rnib.org.uk.

# [Update on Projects](#_Update_on_Projects)

Project Reaching Out

You may remember from our last update that we have recently launched a ‘Reaching Out’ project. Funded through The National Lottery, the aim is to contact all of our members individually for three main purposes. We want to:

\* Connect – and discuss our ongoing offer of support, as well as support available externally in the community

\* Correct – to ensure we have everyone’s most up-to-date details

\* Collect – using the nationally recognised ‘Seeing it My Way’ outcomes to help us shape future services.

There has never been a more important time in our charity’s history for this type of project. We are relishing the opportunity to speak with our members, to listen and to act on what we hear.

The project is still ongoing and has been an enormous undertaking, giving every member of MySight York the opportunity to share experiences in areas such as travel, work and hobbies; suggest ideas, such as the great work going on in other (non-local) organisations; and speak about the effects of the pandemic.

When completed, the report will be the most comprehensive tool we have, to help improve our services for people living with sight loss in York. Using a person-centred approach, it puts the needs of every individual at the heart of everything we do.

If you’re still to be contacted by us, please remember that no answers are too silly, no suggestions too trivial. Every person experiences a visual world in a personal and unique way and we’d like to know what this means for you.

Please don’t be too disheartened if you haven’t received a call from us just yet. The team are making a list (and checking it twice) to ensure

that everyone is contacted.

To those who have already taken part and shared their experience with us, a huge THANK YOU.

Children and Families Survey

In the last newsletter we asked parents of children with sight loss to take part in the Children and Young People’s project, supported by LNER, Assura Community Fund and Will Charitable Trust. This survey investigates parents’ awareness of the resources and support available to them in the community (including from MySight York), and asks what additional services or activities they would like to see.

The initial fact-finding phase of the project is now complete. Parents suggested a number of practical ideas, from a family trip - once the current crisis has ended - through to activity and play resources.

Karen Newell, of Toy Like Me, has written a report on the findings and is now busy planning a sequence of sessions for children and young people – most likely to be delivered virtually – to meet these needs.

If you have ideas for sessions for children and young people, or you would like to be part of the project working group, please get in touch: newellk@hotmail.com.

York Street Charter

Our Access group is working to develop a street charter for York, aiming for a commitment from City of York Council for clear pavements in the city. This is essential so that people with sight loss can get around the built environment safely and confidently. Street charters can typically include issues such as A-boards, crossings, wheelie bins, pavement parking, street/café furniture, shared spaces and overhanging shrubbery, and can be adapted to suit a particular geographical area.

We were pleased to welcome Maqsood Sheik, RNIB Regional Campaigns Officer, and Anne Parkinson of The Wilberforce Trust to a recent meeting co–hosted with York Disability Rights Forum. We are now looking forward to working with other local organisations to build on earlier work including a draft charter developed by MySight York members.

We will be holding regular Access meetings to keep members informed about current engagement activities and to put their views across. If you would like to be involved please contact Sally on 01904 731127, or email

sally.chignell@mysightyork.org

Welcome to Lucy France

We are delighted to welcome Lucy, a social work student at the University of York, to join us on placement from March. Lucy will have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of people’s unique experience of sight loss— including the challenges and also the support available. We hope that this will enrich her own professional practice. Lucy will be getting in touch with lots of you in due course and we will

report on her progress in May. Lucy says:

‘Hello, I’m Lucy, a third-year Social Work student. My family home is Hyde in Manchester; however, I much prefer York and have thoroughly enjoyed living here for the last three years. I’m extremely lucky to have this beautiful city on my doorstep, especially during the pandemic. Outside of my studies, I love to dance, keep active and cook lots of yummy vegan food!

I am looking forward to making an active contribution to MySight York in order to help people with sight loss to live well. In particular, I believe that maintaining independence and reducing social isolation are key to wellbeing. I am also looking forward to developing the skills I will need in my own professional practice, such as demonstrating my professional commitment, promoting rights, developing productive working relationships and communicating effectively. I am certainly eager to begin my placement with this fantastic organisation!’

Home Visiting Service update

Due to the pandemic our highly valued Home Visiting Service was suspended and clients were offered regular telephone calls from their volunteer as part of the Keeping In Touch project. We are regularly reviewing the restrictions and as soon as it is safe to do so we will reinstate garden and home visits. We are still taking referrals for the Home Visiting Service so if you would like to have a home visitor once restrictions are lifted please contact Catherine.

# [From the Equipment & Information Centre](#_From_the_Equipment)

How can you make the most of your sight at home without splashing out on expensive equipment? Jade Burniston shares some tips.

We are all spending more time at home right now. Here are some simple solutions that can help you make the most of your sight around the home, with little or no cost.

We often talk about the principle of 3 B’s: Bigger, Brighter and Bolder. Any or all of these can make things easier to see, though they don’t all suit every sight condition. Things can be made bigger by increasing

the size of the text or object we are looking at, or by using a magnifier. (This may not suit people who have a limited field of vison.) You can increase brightness by adding a good quality light source such as a task lamp. Making things bolder increases contrast which can help you to distinguish items or text from their backgrounds.

If you struggle with the number dials on cookers, microwaves or washing machines, bumpons are a simple low-cost solution. They are small, raised, adhesive dots that can be used on different surfaces

to increase contrast and provide a tactile marker. For example, you

might want to stick one next to your favourite setting on the washer.

Turn the dial until your finger touches the dot and you know you are going to wash at, say, 40°. Bumpons come in a variety of shapes and colours, cost 10p each and can be easily posted out.

Even a simple elastic band can be a useful tool around the home, helping you to distinguish between objects that look and feel alike. For example, a single band around the shampoo bottle and two around the conditioner helps to distinguish them from one another and the shower gel. This cheap and easy method can be adapted to other items such as tins in your kitchen.

Handwriting can be tricky to see, especially when using everyday pens. A thicker black pen (£1) increases the contrast between the lettering and the paper, making the writing bolder. Lined paper can also help. We stock white and yellow paper with thick black lines in A5 and A4 sized pads (£6.25).

Glare (from the sun, indoor lighting or digital devices) can be very

troublesome, especially as we move into Spring. Glare from the sun or lighting can be reduced by wearing peaked hats, caps or eye shields. Eye shields come in a variety of shades and styles, and range in cost from £7 to £32.

You may also find trying different light ‘temperatures’ helpful, as well as improving the general quality of light in your home. For example, a daylight bulb (with a temperature of 6500 kelvin) will increase

brightness and contrast, making reading and other tasks easier. However for some people this level of brightness may be

uncomfortable. To reduce the glare, you may prefer a warmer light

temperature (4100 – 2700 kelvin), but this may not give as good a quality of light. A task lamp may still be needed when reading or performing more detailed tasks.

As we are all using more technology, glare from screens is a common problem. One solution is to change the brightness or contrast settings on your device. Most devices and web browsers have a ‘dark mode’, which uses darker background colours and flips the text from black to white, reducing glare while still maintaining contrast. As always the rule of 20 applies: look away from the screen every 20 minutes for 20 seconds to rest your eyes.

We are currently available by phone and email to support you with any aspect of living with sight loss. If you need a face to face appointment please contact us and we will arrange to see you as soon as it is safe to do so.

# [Apps of the Season](#_Apps_of_the)

Jade Burniston takes a look at Seeing AI and Envision AI

Seeing AI is a free app, downloadable from the App store. It can be used to recognise and read short text, documents, barcodes, people, currency, scenes, handwriting and colour. It can also detect light. Seeing AI is able to read a variety of languages and currencies and is accessible using Voiceover. Unfortunately, it is only available on Apple devices.

Envision AI is available on both Android and Apple devices, and is downloadable from the App store or Google play store. It can recognise and read text, documents, handwriting, scenes, colours, barcodes and common objects. It also has a learning feature: it can be ‘taught’ to recognise particular objects or people, which it then stores in its library.

Envision AI includes a built-in magnifier and can invert colours to reduce glare, turning the background black and the writing white instead of the other way around.

Unlike Seeing AI, Envision AI is unfortunately not free, but it comes with a 14 day free trial period. After this, there are various subscription options which unlock all of the app’s features:

Monthly - £1.79 Annual - £19.99 Lifetime - £84.99

Both Seeing AI and Envision AI have their pros and cons. Both require a smartphone or tablet, and as with all technology they are not 100% accurate, which can make for some interesting results when they are describing a person!

However, they can be useful for a variety of purposes; for instance, they may enable you to read letters, documents or phone numbers independently rather than having to ask for help. In both apps you can adjust the speaking rate, and when they are reading a whole page they will tell you if all the edges of the page are visible so that you can adjust the angle of your phone or tablet accordingly.

One other thing that can be quite useful is a smartphone or tablet camera. With one of these you can take photos and simply zoom in to enlarge the object or features you

want to focus on.

# [Fundraising News](#_Fundraising_News)

By Mike Hickman, Income Generation Manager

The Big Give Christmas Challenge 2020

Huge thanks to everyone who pledged or donated towards 2020’s Big Give Christmas Challenge. This is the first time that MySight York has taken part and I am delighted that we hit our target of £4000 in support of our Home Connections service. Thanks go to Jim Wallace, Martin Butcher, Nestle, Eleanor Tew, LNER and the HBJ Trust for pledges. Thanks too to The Reed Foundation who provided Champion Funding which enabled donations to be doubled. We hope to take part in the Big Give again in 2021. Watch this space!

We have received almost £3,000 in individual donations since the last Newsletter. Thank you to everyone who has contributed. We are also grateful to the families of Mary Hudson, Raymond Mosey and James Wilson for donating in memory of their loved ones.

Further thanks to the Trusts and Foundations who continue to

support our work, including Assura Cheshire Community Foundation, Charles Brotherton Trust, Jack Brunton, Feeoffees of St Michael,

the Edward Gostling Foundation and the York Common Good Trust.

Thanks also to Studio 12 Hair for their support.

At this challenging time for all charities, fundraising is more important than ever. There are many ways to support MySight York’s work, including:

Amazon Smile – donate at no cost while shopping online:

https://smile.amazon.co.uk/ ch/1159188-0

Donr – Text MySight to 70085 to donate £3 a month or MySight plus a one-off amount to 70490.

Easyfundraising – donate while shopping online:

https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/ causes/mysightyork/ (£5 bonus donation when you sign up!)

Ziffit - Donate unwanted books, CDs, DVDs, games and blu-rays (they will collect from your home): https://rb.gy/wnnkzm

As ever, if you have fundraising ideas or are aware of fundraising opportunities (for example, nominating us for Charity of the Year with a company), please don’t hesitate to get in touch:

mike.hickman@mysightyork.org

# [Families Corner: Brailler in the Family](#_Families_Corner:_Brailler)

Karen Newell shares her top tips for parents and carers of children starting out with braille.

When you have a trainee brailler in the family it can take a lot of

adjustment and be quite overwhelming at first. I for one was determined to learn braille alongside my son but he soon overtook me!

Sighted children see words all around them even before they are ready to read formally. It’s a good idea to help familiarise our VIP’s by popping braille onto toys, books and food items for them to explore.

Get those fingers moving! Fun trailing activities offer a great way for the fingers to become more feely. I stumbled across a book called Fun For Fingers by Anna Bruder. It was screaming out to be made tactile, and this is the result. Fun for all.

For sighted family members who want to learn braille, Crack the Code and A Braille Reader in the Family are useful free booklets that can be downloaded from Clearvision. They also have a brilliant library service. See: http://www.clearvisionproject.org/resources/index.html.

There are lots of resources also available from RNIB, including braille books to borrow or buy, monthly magazines and reward stickers with braille messages embossed onto them. More information on any of these is available from our Equipment & Information team. Here’s an example of a Dorling Kindersley book for very young learners, with

braille and large print side by side.

It’s best to start by learning the alphabet. Help it to stick by making it fun and practical using objects from around the home! All you need is a 6 hole muffin tin or egg box and 6 tennis or ping pong balls to create all the letters. I also like to give our hands a warm up using 6 tubs of Playdoh before tackling the braille. You can make your own materials to test each other out of card or buttons and felt.

The latest brailler on the block is Lego. They have launched blocks that fit together like regular Lego but with the alphabet embossed onto the plastic. Learning braille has never been so much fun and so accessible with lots of great associated activities. Check out Morten Bonde’s unboxing on YouTube – he is a senior Art Director at Lego with sight loss.

More on the Lego project at: https://www.legobraillebricks.com/activities

I’ll leave you with a Fun Fact...The braille alphabet from A to J repeats itself from K to T but with the addition of the bottom left hand dot.

Then K to T repeats again from U to Z with the bottom right dot added! This is true for all letters except for W. Why? Because Louis Braille, being French, created it to read and write in French and at the time W didn't exist in the French alphabet. So in English, the W is the one letter that sits outside the repeating pattern. There’s a useful bit of trivia for your next Quiz night...

# [Too late to learn?](#_Too_late_to)

Glynis Garner and Harry Bell have used the latest lockdown to brush up their braille skills. Here’s how they got on.

Glynis Garner, Braille learner

‘I have had a couple of attempts to learn braille over the years but for various reasons have not got very far. However, as my sight has now deteriorated considerably I thought I would give it a more serious try.

Reading and writing is now very difficult even with a video magnifier and I find this very frustrating.

I thought if I learnt braille I would be able to label items around the home, especially in the kitchen, and keep a note of such things as passwords as we have so many of them these days, don’t we? I also decided it was time to get to grips with the bluetooth braille keyboard

that I had bought to use with my iPhone, as it was gathering dust.

I heard about a self-learning course from RNIB called Fingerprint and purchased a copy with the intention of teaching myself. At about the same time someone told me about the Braillists Foundation. This is a community group which provides support, equipment, courses and generally promotes the use of braille. They have a 12 week beginners course and I registered for it. The course uses Fingerprint

and is done via Zoom, like everything now. We have done 3

weeks and it is going well. It is very helpful to have the support of a

teacher and there is an email forum so you can ask questions during

the week as well. A lot of practice is needed but I am enjoying it and do feel as if I am progressing.

I am using my braille keyboard now and have done some labelling so I am starting to achieve what I wanted, although there is still a long way to go. The hardest part is reading but I am making slow progress and am determined to keep going!’

A Simple Keyboard, by Harry Bell

‘Losing sight meant relearning or doing many things differently, including finding my way round the screen and keyboard of a smartphone or computer! Laborious and frustrating - until I discovered the Orbit Writer bluetooth braille keyboard. This device has just 3 keys for the left hand, 3 keys for right and two keys plus spacebar for thumbs!

Having learned the braille alphabet, I now never lose my place on the keyboard. There is a navigation wheel so I don't have to swipe or tap. I can type any character, number, symbol or accent in documents or messages and move around my iPhone or computer with far less effort. The Orbit Writer weighs very little and fits in my fleece pocket, ready to help. You don’t need to learn to read braille, just type it. I bought mine from the USA for $99 but RNIB will soon be selling it over here (we have been told this will be within the next 2 months).

Learning braille letters is a small effort and takes some practice - but it can save you from a lifetime of struggle and frustration!’

The Braillists Foundation runs a programme of free online events designed for anyone getting started with braille, as well as classes for existing readers who want to improve their skills.

Sessions are delivered by experienced braille readers, are accessible online or over the phone and (better still) are free of charge. For more information, visit https://www.braillists.org/

There is also a wealth of support available from RNIB (0303 123

9999 / rnib.org.uk) – from products such as braille readers and writers to teaching materials, books and magazines. For a special gift, they even have a magnetic Braille Sudoku kit (£75) - you just put the puzzle sheet over the board and wrangle the metal number tiles into position using a magnetic ‘pen’. Genius.

# [Access to Information](#_Access_to_Information)

Are you getting the information you need, in a format that’s right for you? Barbara Fairs takes a look at transcription

RNIB Transcription Service

Changes in sight, including the ability to read print, can leave us feeling frustrated and cut off from the world. The RNIB Ivybridge personal transcription team can help you re-connect with hobbies, social opportunities, education and travel. They will convert your print, whether it be letters, journals or a favourite book, into a format you can read yourself. These include:

Braille

Large or Giant Print

Audio: Daisy, Daisy CD or MP3 Electronic text

Tactile diagrams and images Accessible sheet music

Audio recordings can normally be either human or synthetic, but social distancing has made live recording impossible at present. RNIB hope to be able to offer this option again once restrictions ease.

The service is free for personal use but they do ask that you contact

them first on 01752 690092 or ivybridgetranscription@rnib.org.uk so that they can guide you through the process.

Hospital Transcription

While we know that Covid-19 has created a huge workload for the NHS, some routine appointments are still taking place. If you are under the care of a hospital department and would prefer to have appointment letters or information leaflets in an alternative format, please let them know. Your file can be marked with your requirements, whether Braille, large print or audio, and all correspondence should then be sent to you in this format.

We know this does not always happen as requested but we would urge you to either contact the hospital or MySight York if your requirements are not met. We have a contract with the hospital to provide alternative formats so we would like to see this used as much as possible to ensure the service stays in place. It is your right under the Accessible Health Standard to have information provided in the right format so please let us know if this is not happening or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service at York hospital on 01904 726262.