YorView - The newsletter of MySight York

Summer 2021

Cover photo: dancers Javier Torres and Hannah Bateman. Photo by Guy Farrow. Reproduced by kind permission of Northern Ballet

 These stunning swans will be among the characters getting the Audio Description treatment as theatres start to open up. Find out more on p6.

From the Editor…

At last we are able to look forward with a bit more positivity. We may not be able to run services exactly as they were before (indeed, we know that it would be foolish to try). But the easing of restrictions means that we can at least look more optimistically to the future, and make some tentative plans.

Our Equipment & Information centre is already up and running on a face-to-face basis, albeit rather differently from before the pandemic. We’re also working hard on our other operations. You can read all about the changes we’ve made and our current plans inside.

With the world gradually opening up, we’re focusing in this edition on getting out and about, travel and transport, and ideas for activities outside of the home. You will find articles on buses, e- scooters, mobility training, family trips and cultural opportunities. I do hope there is something here that piques your interest.

If we can support you in any way to do whatever it is you’ve been dreaming of since March last year, please don’t hesitate - get in touch.

Deborah

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# From the Chief Executive

Navigating the Covid 19 pandemic and (optimistically) its aftermath, has been one of the biggest challenges we have ever faced. To keep adapted operations going, amidst the ever changing advice, has tested our resilience, and then tested it twice more.

Throughout it all, the desire to ‘find a way’ has remained paramount, along with ensuring everyone’s safety and well-being. We now operate in a COVID secure office, following all guidelines including regular lateral flow testing.

We now turn to the challenge of transitioning to a different way of working that blends the best of the

old and the new. Ultimately our ambition is boundless and we aim to safely reopen whilst incorporating our recent service innovations (such as Keeping in Touch and Home Connections) with our award winning home visiting service and activity groups.

We only know how and when to do this by listening to you, our members. Through our Reaching out Project (indeed every conversation we have), we take note of what you tell us and we react without delay, in a collaborative and open way.

This is not to say that we are emerging from the pandemic unscathed. Our staff team has reduced by 35%, and we are predicting a drop in income of 12% in this financial year. But our positivity remains absolute. By working with partners, forging new relationships and reshaping our operations, we know we can reach more people living with sight loss across our region. If you know of anyone who would benefit from being a member of MySight York, now more than ever: make a difference, connect us together.

Scott

# E-Scooters in York: Are you Worried?

MySight York member Eleanor Tew reports on a recent meeting with scooter company TIER

E-scooters and electric bikes are now available for hire in the centre of York and you may have been wondering what that means for people with sight loss. A group of MySight York members and staff recently had a meeting with TIER, the firm that rents out e-scooters, which we found very reassuring.

Here are some of the things we

learned:

\* E-scooter riders must have a driving licence and undergo initial training.

\* E-scooters are not allowed on the pavement or in footstreets.

\* E-scooters have a maximum speed of 12.5 mph, falling to under 8 mph in busy areas and 3 mph (less than walking pace) in streets where they are not supposed to go.

\* TIER e-scooters may only be parked in designated docking stations, which will not be near bus stops or post boxes.

\* TIER rangers patrol the streets from 8am-8pm to warn inconsiderate riders. They have the power to block the accounts of riders who do not heed their warnings and call the police if they are breaking the law.

\* E-scooters have a bell and work is being done to make them audible.

We were impressed with the trouble TIER is taking to make its escooters and bikes safe. But we have to be aware that some escooters and electric bikes are privately owned and less regulated, and there will always be a few riders who break the rules.

TIER scooters have bright yellow number plates and also display the phone number for reporting bad behaviour to TIER, which is 0151 317 4276. This number is also displayed at some docking stations. Alternatively you can report your concerns by emailing TIER: support@tier.app

# Audio Described Dance

The enterprising folks at Northern Ballet are always looking for ways to make dance more accessible to blind and partially sighted audience members.

During lockdown, while live performance was impossible, they created some audio described films for the first time. There are two short films available to view online at the link below: https://northernballet.com/digital- dance/audio-described-films

We are pleased to hear that they are now returning to Leeds Grand Theatre with an emotive retelling of the all-time popular ballet Swan

Lake. The show runs from Thursday 17th to Saturday 26th June 2021, with an audio described performance on Saturday 26 June at 2.30pm. The audio description will immerse audiences in the world of the swans, and with detailed descriptions of the ballet’s movements you won’t miss a beat. Book your tickets via the Leeds Grand Theatre access line:

0113 205 3899.

If you are intrigued by the concept of audio described dance, you may find this recent article by AD experts VocalEyes of interest.

Northern Ballet get a mention, too! https://vocaleyes.co.uk/audio- description-and-dance/

# Glaucoma UK Digital Support Groups

Glaucoma UK are offering a series of monthly digital support groups. These are primarily aimed at patients, with each session attended by one or more medical professionals who can offer their expertise and share advice about living with glaucoma. You will have the opportunity to speak with them in a relaxed setting and ask any burning questions.

All the sessions are free to attend, but you need to register your interest in advance.

Recent sessions have focused on living with glaucoma and glaucoma research. The next upcoming session (on 29th June) is entitled ‘Childhood glaucoma: a parent’s guide’ and features Ophthalmic Consultant Surgeon Joe Abbott.

For more information, see the Glaucoma UK website:

https://glaucoma.uk/

# York Sight Loss Council Launches

What is it all about?

York Sight Loss Council acts as a voice for blind and partially sighted people living in York. Developed and funded by Thomas Pocklington Trust, it is comprised of blind or partially sighted volunteers who act as advocates and campaigners to influence change and improve goods and services for visually impaired people in the area.

York Sight Loss Council works closely with MySight York to reflect on the key issues that visually impaired people encounter. By working in partnership, we are able to have representation in more public arenas and amplify our collective voices to achieve positive outcomes.

Key Objectives:

\* For local people with sight loss to have their say in a full range of public and commercial services.

\* To contribute to discussions about local services.

\* To support and empower people with a visual impairment.

\* To raise awareness of visual

impairment and how it affects those living in a sighted world.

\* To inspire those with a visual impairment so that they can achieve their goals.

\* To work with stakeholders to ensure that the needs of blind and partially sighted people are recognised and met.

Any blind or partially sighted person aged 18 or over can apply to join the Council. There is a recruitment process with induction and on-going training to enable members to build their knowledge and confidence in representing the issues and challenges that face the community.

Sight Loss Councils focus on 3 priorities:

Employment & Skills Health & Wellbeing Inclusive Communities

York Sight Loss Council has a full- time Engagement Manager, who works closely with the volunteers supporting them along the way.

If you are interested in joining YSLC, email volunteering@pocklington- trust.org.uk or call 0208 996 1937.

# On the Buses

First York told about some changes they have made in the wake of the pandemic

‘To help blind and partially sighted customers feel more confident using the bus network, First Bus York is providing instant information at your fingertips. Our mobile app lets you track the location of the next bus as you wait and tells you how many seats are available, including wheelchair spaces. The bus’s progress is indicated by an icon moving across a virtual map and its status is constantly updated as passengers board and leave.

Other technology includes a tool called Space Checker. This helps you plan journeys up to 7 days ahead by providing hour-by-hour details of bus capacities for the previous week, so you can judge when are the best times to travel.

Here are a few tips for safe travel:

1. Buses are currently carrying about 80% of their total passenger capacity to enable everyone to keep a safe distance.

2. Only forward and sideways- facing seats are available for use.

Seats nearest the driver will be taped off.

3. When a bus has reached its capacity it will show a ‘Bus full’ sign on the destination display, so you might have to wait.

4. Our drivers will help visually impaired customers at stops, as before, to assist with access.

5. The seat capacity feature on the app can be used with a text-to- speech functionality.

6. When boarding, ask the driver where it is safe to sit. The driver will be happy to help you.

7. Passengers must wear a face covering for the whole journey, unless exempt. This should cover the nose and mouth.

8. Use a bus pass or contactless payment, if possible.

9. The First York website has full details of how to use its customer technology as well as a series of Extra Help to Travel cards that you can show to the driver.’

Visit https://www.firstbus.co.uk/york for more information.

# Top Tech Tip, by Harry Bell

The Viskey keyboard: https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/ viskey/id998451252

If you still have some vision, I would highly recommend this app. It is an alternative onscreen keyboard with large easy-to-see letters on the keyboard which comes up on your screen.

The Viskey keyboard is currently available on iOS only. Download the app, open it, tap on Settings and adjust how it looks to suit you.

As with any alternative keyboard, you tap on Settings on your iPad home screen, then tap General, Keyboard, Keyboards and then Add New Keyboard and tap on Viskey. Once that’s added, tap the name Keyboard - Viskey and tap to turn on Full Access then OK.

From now on, whenever you have a keyboard onscreen, you can tap and hold the globe to the left of the spacebar and slide your finger up to Viskey in the list. To go back to the standard Apple keyboard, just tap on the globe (not tap & hold).

I think you will find this keyboard far less of a struggle to see and work with!

Top tips: To insert a space, just swipe right with one finger anywhere on the keyboard. To insert a full stop, swipe right twice with one finger.

Viskey costs an annual subscription of £2.99 - which I think is worth it, as the developer works hard to improve and develop it. He is easy to contact and very responsive.

# Bank Holiday closure

MySight York will be closed for the late Summer Bank Holiday on Monday 30th and Tuesday 31st August.

If you require support during this time, please contact City of York Council’s Adult Social Care team on 01904 555111. If you have an urgent out-of-hours enquiry, the Emergency Duty Team can be reached on 01609 780780.

# Meaningful Moves at Merchantgate

Deb Wheller outlines some changes we’ve made

We recently we said a fond farewell to Jade, whom some of you will know from the Equipment and Information Centre. Jade has moved on to pursue new opportunities. We wish her every success in her future career and thank her for all she did for us.

We have made a few changes to the space and how we meet together at MySight York. We want to ensure that we can see you safely as we reopen face to face services in line with government guidelines. We appreciate that you may be keen to get back in person, but we would ask that you avoid dropping in— instead please ring first and make an appointment to meet with a sight loss advisor.

The front entrance space is now the reception area (below), where we welcome you and check that it is safe for us to spend time together. This space now displays information and has a small waiting area for two people. The Equipment Centre has relocated into our smaller meeting room, where you will find the display of equipment, magnifiers and lighting (seen on the right).

We have four hour-long appointments available on each week day. You may wish to book more than one appointment and we can accommodate this when we talk at the time of booking.

Unfortunately, we cannot offer any refreshments but you are welcome

to bring a drink with you.

To help manage social distancing and keep all our visitors and staff safe, please do not arrive for your appointment more than 5 minutes early or bring more than one other person with you.

We hope that this system will allow us all to stay safe as well as reducing any waiting times. Most importantly, we hope that it will offer you the privacy and the dedicated time to explore equipment and discuss options that you have been waiting for.

# Peer Support Project Update

Our Social Work student Lucy France is coming to the end of her placement at MySight York. She wrote to tell us about her experience:

‘This placement has created some extremely valuable learning opportunities for which I am very thankful. The project focusing on peer support is proving particularly interesting and all of my research has enabled me to further recognise and value the views and expertise of service users.

I would like to thank those members and volunteers I have been in touch with for giving their time to chat with me. Speaking to you has supported my learning and awareness of living with sight loss, and allowed me to understand the role of a social worker and the positive benefits they can bring to each individual’s life.

The project has additionally allowed me to engage with external organisations that already offer peer support services. This has developed my understanding of aspects such as facilitation, as well as my appreciation of peer support as a resource.

I hope to share the project outcomes with everyone very soon. In the meantime, however, I can confirm that adequate peer support services, in which the use of lived experience is maximised, are imperative in supporting people to live well with sight loss.’

# Families Corner: Days out in the Sun (?)

Karen Newell shares her top tips for parents and carers

So what’s top of your day out list now we can have fun outside of our homes? Scarborough beach? Beningborough Hall or escaping the rain in the Cinema? I’ve listed some tried and tested places as well as a few tips to help make your visit as smooth as possible.

Askham Bryan Wildlife and Conservation Park

There are all kinds of animals inside and out, and you can get up close and personal at the special sessions. Also great for a picnic.

The Bird of Prey Centre at Huby is another really welcoming family run place where you can get close to the birds.

Cinema

Both Vue and Cineworld now have Audio Described options for most films. Call in to check. I must admit I now really enjoy films whilst listening to the AD! The CEA card allows a carer to go for free.

Oh I do like to be beside the seaside

The beach offers a wonderful sensory experience. Our choice is Scarborough as it’s Grandma’s home town but many people love Filey and the quieter beaches of Hunmanby Gap, Flamborough or Robin Hood’s Bay. Top tip: you can never take enough clothes or snacks, and talc removes sand from feet very easily. We also take a pop up tent which helps when it all gets a bit much. The fun part is trying to get it back in the bag!

The Jorvik Centre

The first time we visited we nicknamed this place ‘Back in Time’ and the name has stuck. VICTA are running a family day on 2nd August if you’d like to meet other families with VI children (£5). We have already booked. Why not combine Jorvik with a visit to The Dig, which offers a wonderful hands-on exploration of archaeological artefacts?

Historic Houses – We are so lucky to have some great houses nearby. We love wandering around the gardens of Beningborough; the landscape transforms each season. We tend to meet friends and have a picnic on the lawn.

Ditto Castle Howard!

York Minster – Grab one of the explorer backpacks and wander around our wonderful Minster using the magnifiers, mirrors and torch to help you explore.

For a special day out, how about being a Zoo keeper for the day at Flamingoland (below), or a trip on the train to children’s museum Eureka at Halifax?

For the adventurous...

Snowzone Castleford sledging – we have visited in an organised group, a family session and even had one of Fred’s birthdays here. It’s a fun day out for all the family. They are currently offering sledging sessions in family bubbles.

Selby Summit – lots of activities to choose from including Arial trek, climbing, bowling and soft play.

Top tips

It is especially important at the moment to research in advance. Call ahead to check whether attractions are open, what’s available and what accommodations can be made to make the best of your day. Maybe there is an animal petting session or a touch tour that could be arranged?

Ask about carer discounts. Some places offer a carer to go free or both of you can go half price. Make sure you have a Maxcard and see what places offer reduced/free entrance. It’s also a great source of ideas and inspiration: https://mymaxcard.co.uk/

Little Vikings also have lots of ideas for trips out:

https://little-vikings.co.uk/

Finally, take a pack up, water bottles and spare clothes. Happy

holidays!

# Getting out with Confidence

As the world unlocks, we asked Martin Heppell and Cathy Woodward from Yorsensory for advice on getting back out

A trip out, shopping and how we access services changed for everyone in 2020 as a result of Covid-19, with social distancing, PPE, shop layouts and queuing systems being just a few of the changes we had to navigate. However, these changes have posed extra challenges to people with a visual impairment.

Some people have told us that they feel anxious about going out because they haven’t been able to identify how far they are away from other people, or read signage in a shop explaining directions or new layouts. Some have even experienced abuse as a result.This has impacted on people’s confidence, physical strength and feelings of isolation.

The Rehabilitation Officers in the Yorsensory team have continued to work with and provide remote support to adults with a visual impairment throughout Covid-19. However lockdowns, shielding and changes in restrictions have meant that home visits and mobility training have not always been possible or available.

With the easing of restrictions and a return to visits and mobility training, some clients have been ready to get out and about. Others have reported a loss of confidence, changes in their overall physical health, and concerns about being able to socially distance and navigate the new obstacles that have appeared in public areas as a result of the pandemic.

We have had negative feedback about things like pub and café furniture spilling out onto pavements, pedestrian areas and roads and even blocking footpaths in the city centre. Other new obstacles include barriers outside shops for queuing systems, ‘A’ Boards and low level indoor signage indicating entrances, exits and directions.

All of these can pose difficulties, leading some people to ask for new and refresher mobility training based on these changes, as well as lack of opportunity to get out and about.

Some people have found reassurance in knowing that other people with a visual impairment have had a similar experience. One client reported that the combination of health difficulties, shielding and sight loss had made them feel like they wanted to become a ‘hermit’. Another told us that whilst shielding, to keep up their mobility skills and physical stamina, they had developed a mobility route around the house which extended into the garden (weather permitting!).

What Might Help

\* Ask family or friends to accompany you on walks to help build your confidence.

\* Take your time and set small achievable goals to build up your routes and stamina.

\* Approach your local sensory team for advice, support and training.

\* Contact other organisations such as Move Mates to enquire about being paired up with a local walking buddy.

\* Metro Blind Sport and British Blind Sports run an ‘Active at Home’ programme and Age UK’s ‘Simple Ways to Keep Active at Home’ is another useful resource.

If you have lost confidence, need reassurance, refresher training or further mobility training to help you get back out and about, please contact the Yorsensory Team on 01904 202292 or email us at

enquiry@yorsensory.org.uk

# Update on Activities and Home Visiting

By Caroline Robertson and Catherine Bamford

We are aware that many of our members are wanting to know when we will be restarting our Activity group sessions in person. Although we have successfully been running groups on the telephone and over Zoom during the pandemic, we know that this isn’t for everyone.

We would love to be able to tell you right now that we have a date for this. However there is some work to be done before we can meet in person to ensure that we do it in a way that is safe and comfortable for everyone.

We have started to make calls to our volunteers and the members of our groups to find out their thoughts about returning to face to face meetings. Once we have completed this initial work we will then need to prioritise which groups we can accommodate first.

What we need to make clear is that the return to face to face meetings (if appropriate) will be on a phased approach and so not all groups will be able to meet face to face straight away. It may be that some groups will still run virtually, or they may even run both face to face and virtually at the same time.

We will also need to consider dates and times, and these may have to differ from those we had previously.

We are also busy contacting all our Keeping In Touch clients and volunteers to see if they would like these calls to continue. For clients who received home visits before lockdown, we are working hard to resume face to face visits and will be in touch as soon as possible with news on this service.

We will keep you up to date and hope you understand our thinking on all of this. We really do appreciate your patience while we work out the best way forward for everyone involved. We will see you soon with the kettle on and a large box of biscuits for everyone to enjoy in a safe and comfortable environment!

Watch this space...

# Events around York

Looking for something to do as restrictions ease? Barbara Fairs

takes a look at some upcoming cultural events in the city

Staycation is the new buzzword and here in York we are very lucky to have some fabulous places to visit on our own doorstep. For all you culture vultures out there here is a brief summary of the planned reopening dates for our local museums and theatres.

Yorkshire Museum reopens on 9th July with a new exhibition entitled Richard III Coming Home. The centrepiece will be a 16th century portrait on loan from the National Portrait Gallery. The exhibition runs until 31st October and requires an entrance ticket. Full information at www.yorkshiremuseum.org.uk/ exhibition/richard-iii-coming-home/

York Art Gallery reopens on 28th May with the launch of Grayson Perry: The Pre Therapy Years, an exhibition of the earliest works and ‘lost pots’ of one of Britain’s best known artists. Tickets are available until 5th September. There is more information at: www.yorkartgallery.org.uk/ exhibition/grayson-perry-the-pre- therapy-years/

York Castle Museum reopens on 19th May but will be operating guided tours only. There are a number of tours available including Kirkgate Victorian Street, York Castle Prison and the family friendly Confectionery Tour. Tickets must be pre-booked as numbers are limited to ensure social distancing. For more details, visit: www.yorkcastlemuseum.org.uk/ york-castle-museum-tours/

Museum Gardens are also open to the public from 10.30 to 6 (4pm for the Artists Garden). Visitors are asked to respect social distancing and some narrow pathways will be closed off, including the Riverside Walk and gates.

York Theatre Royal is working hard to stage Covid-safe performances and has put in place measures such as socially distanced seating and one-way systems. They are currently planning to resume Audio Described performances of two plays: A Splinter of Ice, the story of a meeting between author Graham Greene and spy Kim Philby (6th- 10th July), and Willy Russell’s hilarious comedy Educating Rita (31st August to 4th September).

# Fundraising News

By Mike Hickman and Barbara Fairs

Over the last 12 months we, in common with many other charities, have found our usual means of raising funds to be very restricted as we have been unable to carry out collections or fundraising events. However, we are extremely grateful to the many people who have supported us, both individuals and organisations.

Since the last Newsletter we have received funding from the following Trusts and Foundations:

The Noble Charitable Trust, Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust, The Paristamen CIO, Charles and Elsie Sykes Charitable Trust, The Betty Messenger Charitable Trust, Sylvia and Colin Shepherd Charitable Trust, The Brelms Trust and the Charles Hermann Duckworth Trust as well as a very kind donation from Holy Trinity Church Micklegate.

We have also received very kind donations from families and friends in memory of Sheila Goater, Mary Hudson, Robert Howarth, Marc Schatzberger, Giuseppina Pierotti and Peter Lawrence. We are so

grateful to each family for their generosity.

We have also been very grateful to receive an extremely generous legacy from Bernard Graham.

Legacies are a wonderful way of leaving a gift to a charity, which costs you nothing in your lifetime. If you would like to know more about legacy giving, please take a look at https:// www.rememberacharity.org.uk/find- a-charity/mysight-york/.

Via our Remember a Charity partnership, and using this link, you can write a will for free online or get legal advice from a local solicitor or will writer. There is also a discounted service (20% off) available from the Co-Op: https://www.co- oplegalservices.co.uk/partners/ remember-a-charity-referrals/ Alternatively you can telephone 0330 606 9578 and quote RACWILLS01.

Another option is to make use of Bequeathed, who also offer free will-writing advice for MySight York

members. For more information on their services, please visit the following address: https:// www.bequeathed.org/racfree? initiator\_type=charity&initiator=rac mysight

Later in the year, in September, we will once again be joining with charities and celebrity patrons all over the country to celebrate Remember a Charity Week. Watch out for further promotions during that time!

Another way of helping us is to make a regular donation by standing order. This can be done monthly, quarterly or annually but it does help us to plan ahead and ensure that our services can continue to run in the way we want them to.

If you are in a position to do this then please complete the form on the back of this Newsletter and return it to us. We will then make the arrangements with your bank. If you are a UK tax payer please also consider allowing us to claim Gift Aid on your donation to boost your donation by 25% at no cost to yourself.

Alternatively, you can make a one- off or regular donation online by

visiting our fundraising page at Enthuse: https://mysightyork.enthuse.com/ cp/52331/fundraiser#!/

or you can click the Donate Now button on our website.

The Enthuse fundraising website also allows you to set up your own fundraising event. So if you feel inspired to walk from Land’s End to John O’ Groats or something easier like shaving off your beard (we’re looking at you, Scott), please visit https://mysightyork.enthuse.com/ profile to set up your own event, set your target and then collect your sponsorship online.

We are grateful for the many and varied ways that our members, volunteers and the general public choose to support us. If you have any fundraising ideas you would like to discuss, please contact mike.hickman@mysightyork.org

Bank standing order form

Please return to: MySight York,

14 Merchants Place, Merchantgate, York, YO1 9TU. DO NOT send it to your bank.

To the Manager (Your Bank’s Name & Address)

Please pay MySight York

£ each Month / Quarter / Year

until further notice from the following account

Account Number Bank Sort Code

Starting on (Date)

I want to Gift Aid my donation and any subsequent donations I make in the future to MySight York.

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and / or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Your Signature Your Name Your Address