

Dear Members,

We hope you are all well.

As some of you will be aware, during the period of lockdown, we have tried to contact all of our members living in the Swansea and Neath Port Talbot areas. I am pleased to say that we have managed to reach most of you to find out how you are doing and what support you have needed.

However, there are around 30 people we have not been able to reach by phone, email or post. If you have not had a call from us, could you please contact the office on 01792 776360 (or call my mobile number 07824 541982) so we can update your details, find out how you have been doing and establish whether there is any support we can offer you.

One of the things we have identified in talking to our members over the past few months is the need for more information, support and training around the use of technology to help people with all areas of communication.

This is a big piece of work, but we want our members to have better access to information and to be able to connect with family and friends more easily. Age isn’t a factor in this! We have one member who is 100 years old but is able to use a mobile phone to send emails and search the internet.

The pathway to independence is an individual journey for each person with sight loss. We would like to help you to reach your own next level in your ability to communicate with others. Please get in touch if you are interested.

## Farewell, Kieran

We sadly said goodbye to Kieran Harris, Director of Operations, in May after eight years with Sight Life. Kieran was passionate about ensuring people with sight loss lived independent and fulfilled lives and I am sure he has taken that passion to his new role as Chief Executive Officer with Carers Trust South East Wales. We all wish Kieran the very best in his new role and for the future. Michelle Jones, Sight Life Centre Manager in Cardiff, has taken over as Interim Director of Operations.

## Telephone Conference calls

Over the lockdown period, we have been running telephone conference groups for our members. These have been a great success. There are a variety of groups available - chair exercise, yoga chair exercise, laughter yoga, social groups, and there are also men’s specific groups and women’s specific groups. We intend to continue with these ‘virtual’ groups alongside any face to face groups we run in the future.

Each group chooses how it will run, so some have a coffee and natter as well a quiz and others have speakers. The groups are also a great way to keep up to date with changes in the local area, new equipment and services. They are great places to ask questions and get help and support from staff, volunteers and other members.

The telephone groups have enabled many members who can’t ordinarily get out and about to have more social interaction with other members. The feedback we have received has been really positive. If you would like to join any of these telephone calls, please contact us for times and days.

In addition to our group calls, RNIB Connect also has a variety of themed telephone groups from nutrition to quiz groups. Please contact us for more information.

## Make the Change

We have been running our Make the Change workshops to inform our members about Preparation, Assistance, Services and Support (PASS) around the seven themes of life.

The seven themes (listed below) are everyday things sighted people interact with in their day to day lives without even having to think about it. However, people with sight loss of any degree need to be able to PASS. PASS stands for Prepare, Ask (this is to ask for assistance or information) Support and Services.

The Make the Change workshops cover all of these areas in each of the themes. They are highly recommended for anyone with sight loss wishing to increase and maintain a level of independence and confidence and improve quality of life.

The workshops help people to reduce stress, develop strategies, be able to problem solve and to succeed. They also provide the opportunity to talk to others with sight loss, exchange hints and tips, ask questions and make friends.

The themes are:

* Health and Wellbeing
* Leisure and entertainment
* Digital inclusion
* Transport
* Falls
* Money
* Shopping

We are currently running these workshops by telephone through our group call system, though we will be looking at starting face to face workshops when circumstances permit. If you are interested in joining the workshops, please let us know by ringing the office.

## TV Licencing changes

We have received many calls over the last few months regarding the TV licence. The following information should clarify the position for you.

### Can I get a free TV licence?

Having sight loss does not automatically entitle you to a free TV licence. However, if you are registered blind (severely sight impaired), you can get a 50 per cent reduction (called a blind concession) on the cost of your TV Licence. Your licence will also cover anyone who lives with you, but the licence must be in your name. Unfortunately, you **cannot** claim this 50 per cent reduction if you are registered partially sighted (sight impaired).

### Important changes for people 75 or over from August 2020

After August 2020 anyone over 75 and not claiming pension credit will have to pay the full licence fee. However, if you are registered blind (severely sight impaired), you can apply for the previously mentioned 50 per cent reduction.

### Do I need to do anything now?

If you had a free TV Licence up to 31 July 2020, you don’t need to do anything now to stay licensed. During August and September, they will be writing to you to explain what you need to do to set up your next licence. You’ll have plenty of time to do that. Meanwhile, don’t worry – you’re covered.

Full information about how to claim a reduced TV Licence and the changes regarding free licences can be found on the official TV Licensing website. If you would like further information, contact TV Licensing: telephone 0300 790 6130 or [www.tvlicensing.co.uk](http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk)

## Face to Face services

We at Sight Life would like to start re-introducing face to face contact and services. Our plan is to start with outdoor activities such as walks and meet ups in local parks for our members throughout the Swansea and Neath Port Talbot area.

The idea is for people to meet up and have the opportunity to chat, have a walk and sit and socialise. Those who cannot walk far would be welcome to just join us to sit and natter. In order to make the arrangements, we need to know who is interested in attending so please contact the office if you would like to join in.

Initially, we will be piloting two walks, one in Singleton Park Swansea and one in Victoria Park Neath. We will need to adhere to Welsh Government guidelines, so numbers will be limited. Please contact us if you are interested in attending.

We are also in the process of identifying which services we could potentially reopen safely. These would be within venues that are able to comply with government guidance. Please note that a risk assessment would have to be undertaken for each of these services, numbers may be limited, and we might have to change how we run a group.

If you were attending a service previously and would like to come back, please get in touch and advise us on the best way for us to update you when we have more news. Note that we do not have a timeframe for face to face indoor services as yet.

## Home visiting services

We are keen to meet with the members who we know are in most desperate need of one to one support. At this point, we are not permitted to carry out visits within an individual’s home, but we would like to look at other options. These may include meeting in an individual’s garden or outside at a local café. Please let us know if you feel this is something you would benefit from and if you have a garden or café near to you where we can meet.

Any and all visits and social interaction would need to comply with government and organisational requirements, and because of capacity, we would not be able to meet all of our members. However, having an understanding of your needs and circumstances would greatly help us in providing the best and most appropriate level of support for you.

**Social Distancing Lanyard**

When you are out and about, it is important for the general public to know that you are not necessarily able to judge the distance of another person – what’s called social distancing. Not everyone with sight loss has a cane or a guide dog, and sight loss is not always obvious.

The Partially Sighted Society has a lanyard available that has wording informing people that the wearer has sight loss and is not able to socially distance. The lanyard costs £1.80 (excluding VAT. VAT exempt if you are registered as visually impaired.) and is available by calling the Partially Sighted Society on 01302 965195 or by emailing reception@partsight.org.uk

## Hints and Tips

We have a variety of hints and tips to enable you to access the outside world. These are aimed at how you can cope and manage with the new environment and changes due to the Covid 19 pandemic. If you feel these would benefit you and you want to learn more, please get in touch.

## Swansea Office

We are all currently still working from home and we do not yet know when we will be able to access the office. However, the office telephone number (01792 776360) connects to our computer systems so you are still able to call us.

Though we are not always able to answer calls straight away, we do check the call logs and the answer machine, so please leave us a message and we will call you back. If you can’t get us on the office number, you are welcome to ring my mobile 07824 541982 or email anita.davies@sightlife.wales

Stay well, stay safe – and know that we are at the end of a telephone if you need us.

Regards,

Anita Davies

Locality Manager Swansea, Neath & Port Talbot

**Gwefan/website:** [www.sightlife.wales](http://www.sightlife.wales/)

**Twitter:** @SightLifeWales1

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/SightLife.Wales](http://www.facebook.com/SightLife.Wales)

**Instagram:** sightlifewales2020

**YouTube:** <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmsO4dmcCKlt-ouqAzEIssA/featured?disable_polymer=1>

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