



# the Bold View

Low Vision Services Implementation Group Newsletter

## 'Respond to and reflect national priorities'

### The 2nd National Low Vision Conference.

An idea discussed recently in the media is the government body that advises about the weather and its relationship with health matters.

Perhaps we should have enlisted their help before planning the date of the national conference as we chose

the day after the recent storms. Despite severe problems with public transport the commitment to attend was very high as 80 per cent of the expected attendees managed to get to the day.

The conference, held in central London, began with the keynote speaker, Richard Wormald, Ophthalmologist, outlining the results of a survey of older people in GP practices. He challenged the audience to use these results to provide the evidence required in setting up comprehensive low vision services. For the rest of the day delegates attended talks/presentations of interest. Half of these were directed towards expanding the work of committees and half focused on practical issues that will allow service development. People were keen to hear how to develop skills that reflect "best practice" in the services they provide. John Collins' talk about telescope training was particularly well received.

Delegates filled in evaluation forms and an amazing 100 per cent would probably/definitely attend next year and 97 per cent said their overall impression was good/very good. Maybe the poor weather brought a spirit of resilience – this was the first conference we have run without a complaint about the food or coffee!



Rapt listeners



LV info desk

### A talk given



by Mick Ward

## What's the new view?

The number of Low Vision Services Committees now stands at 37 due to the establishment of the newly formed committee within the area of Hampshire.

### Oxford views care pathways

The Oxford Low Vision Services Committee was first set up in June 2001 with the assistance of the Oxfordshire Association for the Blind and professionals from the local hospital Eye Department. Various changes in personnel resulted in a short period of inactivity, but it has recently been significantly revitalised by the appointment of Dr Phillip Ambler as chair. Dr Ambler is Chair of the Professional Executive Committee of a local Primary Care Trust (PCT) and it is hoped that his experience will assist the Committee in looking at low vision services in Oxfordshire.

One important first task has been the creation of a sub-committee to plot out a care pathway. This small group set aside an afternoon in early December to thrash out their ideas.

### What is a care pathway?

A care pathway plots out the person's journey as they experience various aspects of low vision services. It should help develop an understanding of what happens to people when they experience sight loss. In addition it enables gaps or blockages in the process to be identified.

They began thinking about the services a person would come in contact with when they first noticed their sight was causing practical difficulties. They then worked on sorting out what other services are available and how and when a person would come into contact with them.

**Patsy Terry, from the hospital, co-ordinated this group and was pleased with the results. She said,** "Our pathway shows that low vision can be a very complicated process. We hope that in identifying some of the gaps it will help the Committee in drafting plans for better services."

### LVSC activity

- ✓ Croydon has an active local Macular Disease Society and is using a questionnaire to elicit their members views about services.
- ✓ Warwickshire have written a job description for a low vision co-ordinator to develop local services.
- ✓ The Forest of Dean has finished a business plan incorporating aspects of health, voluntary and social care to be presented to their local PCT.

### Almost there

At recent introductory meetings in Lincolnshire and Southend, there was unanimous support for a Low Vision Services Committee.

## Low vision professionals

We continue our series of looking at the role of professionals involved in low vision provision.

## The rehabilitation worker

A rehabilitation worker works with visually impaired people in order to enable them to live their lives to their maximum potential.

They work with all age ranges – from young to old people. Much of their work is based on assisting a person in relearning practical skills. For example, they may work in a person's home in finding solutions to daily chores such as making a meal, basic DIY tasks and gardening.

They help address problems with communication such as writing letters, finding out what is on television and reading books. This can involve special activities including teaching braille, advising on talking books and vision enhancement training with low vision devices. They also help by advising on lighting and suggesting pieces of equipment that will assist a person in keeping their independence.

One part of their work, that is widely recognised, is their role in mobility training. Here they may be teaching people how to get from one place to another or how to safely navigate their home or office environment. People may be taught how to use a white cane or how to travel outdoors (including using public transport).

A skilled assessment of a person's needs and aspirations forms the basis of their work. In this role they are ideally placed to offer emotional help and sign-post people to other services which offer advice and support. For example, a rehabilitation worker may know of local groups and of ways of applying for financial benefits. In addition they may be asked to offer support when someone loses their sight suddenly.

To develop these skills rehabilitation workers have to undertake specific training. Currently this may be through a diploma course which is run by the University of Central England as a distance learning course or through Guide Dogs for the Blind who run a diploma course with students being based at their school in Surrey.

Ten years ago **Daniel Scholes** was a motor mechanic in the West Midlands, but he now works for an **RNIB rehabilitation team. Daniel says:**

"I had become disillusioned with the motor trade and felt that there were no career prospects unless I wanted to compromise my personal integrity. My wife, an occupational therapist, worked for a local blind charity and through meeting and talking with a rehabilitation worker colleague of hers, I became very interested in the

prospect of making a real difference to people's lives, and the rest is history, as they say."



**Daniel at work**

## Involving service users

Sometimes there is a phone call to the Birmingham Office from a service user asking for assistance in a matter of low vision. Usually we try and answer these questions by directing people either to the RNIB Helpline or to NALSVI (the National Association of Local Societies for Visually Impaired People), the telephone numbers of the above and others are given later. Sometimes though, the call is from a service user who is keen to do something locally to set up a low vision committee. Mr Bob Morgan from Dudley was one of such callers. He runs a local group for people who are visually impaired and heard about low vision committees through the Partially Sighted Society (PSS). A request was made for Mary Bairstow to speak at a meeting of service users in the summer. As Dudley is nearby, this was an easy assignment and Mary spent a very enjoyable afternoon explaining about the role of the committee. The group were very supportive and even suggested a popular shopping mall as a good venue. We are not sure if this will be possible, but we are hoping to work

with the group, a representative from social services and a local optometrist to set up the first meeting.

Where there are other areas, that have service users keen to be involved in low vision services, Mary is always eager to attend local meetings and is happy to speak to service user groups. She can help groups ensure that all people involved in low vision remember how important it is that the services reflect the needs and opinions of service users.

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**Finally, from everyone at the LVSIG, Happy 2003.**

'Bold View' is a quarterly newsletter written and edited by Mary Bairstow for the LVSIG. It is distributed to people and organisations with an interest in low vision. The aim is to inform people of the progress of LV Implementation. Articles about specific projects are reviewed by local contacts. Comments and contributions are welcome. Copy date for inclusion in the Spring issue is February 28th 2003.



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