



# the **Bold View**

Low Vision Services Implementation Group Newsletter

## Normal service resumes as the newsletter returns

**'We're back – with a new member of staff and a little extra time'.**

As many of you know this time last year a decision was taken to suspend the publication of 'Bold View' until we were more confident about the future of the project. Also Chris Smith, our administration assistant, knowing the future was uncertain, left to take up a permanent appointment within RNIB in June 2003. In addition funds were limited and as it was difficult to justify the costs of producing the newsletter, the national Low Vision Services Implementation Group felt that our energies should be diverted elsewhere.

Most of this energy was used in trying to ensure the future of the project while continuing to support the work of local Low Vision Services Committees (LVSCs). The network of committees was not left to flounder and during this time Mary Bairstow, the Implementation Officer, continued to establish new groups and visit existing LVSCs.

These were busy, but exciting times with the Department of Health finally issuing guidance about a new system to replace the BD8 and announcing some funding for new low vision projects. We hope to report on both these matters in later issues.

As 2003 progressed the short-term future of the project looked more secure. There has been additional funding from a variety of sources, which will enable the project to continue past March 2004.

The year finished in a very positive way when Christine Dale was appointed to replace Chris Smith. Christine has a wealth of experience providing administrative support in the voluntary sector and academia. This has already proved to be useful in dealing with the wide variety of people and agencies involved with LVSCs.

**Inside: West Country • Dispensing Opticians • Certification**

## What's the new view?

This time last year there were 40 LVSCs. There are now 52 – the most recent being Bolton. We are currently in the process of trying to get publicity to mark the establishment of the 50th LVSC. Despite considerable competition Richmond & Hambleton (North Yorkshire) sneaked in at the last minute to claim the honour of becoming number 50.

### User consultation forms a basis for a new Committee in Weston Super Mare

One of the fundamental roles of LVSCs is to ensure that people with low vision are involved in local decision making regarding low vision services. Different LVSCs have different approaches to this – some have several service users attending each meeting, others encourage peer support groups to report and in some cases questionnaires have been sent out to people with low vision.

Woodspring Association for Blind People offers a wide range of

#### Woodspring



#### Association

services for people who are visually impaired throughout North Somerset. In April 2003 it published a report of local service users' views on hospital service provision. In its conclusion the

report suggested 'the right type of intervention at the right time may lead to less dependency'.

The report listed various action points – one in particular identified the need

to clarify the referral system and discover exactly how people moved from stage to stage in low vision services.

This prompted Celia Henshall, of Woodspring, to convene a meeting in October 2003 to enable local people and agencies to discuss the establishment of a LVSC. This was agreed and an important decision was made to make regular reports to the North Somerset Physical and Sensory Impairment Partnership. Although independent the LVSC now has a clear means of communicating with local statutory services.

The LVSC, after only one formal meeting, has already written a business plan to employ a project worker to research service user views on local services. They also plan to document local services and begin plotting the 'pathways' of journeys through services.

### LVSC activity

- ✓ Suffolk LVSC is working with NHS direct to publicise low vision services.
- ✓ In Coventry members have offered advice about hospital accessibility.
- ✓ Surrey LVSC is exploring services for people with learning disabilities.

## Low vision professionals

In 1999 RNIB and Heriot-Watt University published a report "Our Better Vision". This outlined the findings of several focus groups held across the UK – the aim being to determine what low vision services people wanted.

One interesting point that emerged was that in some of the focus groups there was confusion between the terms ophthalmologist, optometrist and optician. It seems that it was important for service users in the groups to explore this as is illustrated by the following quote taken directly from the report:

"...in many of the focus groups there was some confusion about the label 'optometrist'...or 'an optician'. Quite often, part of the focus group discussion was devoted to discussing the meaning of these terms".

The word 'optician' is often used as a general term describing both optometrists and dispensing opticians. We will be covering the role of the optometrist in a later article, but the main difference in the professions is that optometrists have a significant role in screening for eye disease, as

## Almost there

As well as those mentioned earlier, there was agreement for Committees in Darlington, Barnet and Dorset. Blackpool is planning an introductory meeting in April.

well as testing sight and prescribing spectacles.

The following article might help clarify the role of the dispensing optician.

## The dispensing optician

Dispensing opticians are registered with the General Optical Council and are qualified to advise and fit spectacles and all types of low vision aids. They also have knowledge of eye disease and their treatments.

They train for three years and many have specialist qualifications such as in contact lenses. The Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO) offers a unique qualification – "The Theory and Practice of Assessment and Management of Low Visual Acuity".

They are very skilled in the choice of lenses and spectacle frames. This is particularly important for children who wear glasses. Dispensing opticians work with optometrists or doctors in high street practices or in hospital clinics.

**Beverly Ricketts is a dispensing optician who chairs the Staffordshire LVSC. Beverley says:** "Our Committee has created a forum for people to meet in order to smooth the path towards a complete service".

## Staffordshire



## Spectacle

## Certifying it is true – the BD8 system is no more

In November 2003 the Department of Health announced a new process to identify and notify people as being visually impaired.

Dictionary definitions of these two words are:

**To identify** – to recognise a problem, requirement, truth, etc., and to show that it exists.

**To notify** – to tell someone officially about something (notifiable describes where there is a requirement to report a disease or offence to the authorities).

Until now, the system has been focused around the form called the BD8, which had assumed a particular role in notifying people as visually impaired. A review agreed that this role should remain, but that the certifying process should be more accessible and easily understood by service users. Most importantly, there should be an opportunity, not just to notify, but to identify.

## The practicalities

There are now three new documents, by which people can be identified, referred, certified (and registered). These are:

**Letter of Vision Impairment (LVI 2003)** This is simply a leaflet that optometrists will, at the time of eye examination, hand over to their patients.

**Referral of Vision Impaired Patient (RVI 2003)** This is a referral form completed by staff in the Hospital Eye Service to refer a patient (with their consent) for a social care assessment. It does not depend on the nature of their eye condition or the establishment of an ophthalmologist's diagnosis.

**Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI 2003)** This is the certificate (replacing the BD8) confirming a person's eligibility to be registered. It contains more information and enables more data to be collected. It will also act as a referral for social care assessment.

LVSCs can take a lead role in implementing these changes by bringing together agencies from several aspects of health, social care and education.

'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 Summer issue is May 28th 2004.



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