

EAST SUFFOLK ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 50

WINTER 2018



EAST SUFFOLK ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND
Registered Charity No. 1173918

Mallard House Business Centre, The Old Station,
Little Bealings, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP13 6LT.
Telephone: (01473) 611011 Email: info@esab.org.uk
Website: www.esab.org.uk

The photo on the front cover shows an impressive poppy fall on the face of the tower of Trimley St Martin Church near Felixstowe which was created to mark the centenary of the First World War Armistice. We felt it timely to reprint below the famous "In Flanders Fields" poem. During the second Battle of Ypres in 1915, Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae was devastated by witnessing the death of a close friend. Reflecting on the poppies growing on hundreds of graves in front of him, he was moved to write his famous poem

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies grow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die

We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.



The back cover of this newsletter tells the story of another poem which was written in December 1918 in response to the poem above, as well as telling the story of how the poppy came to be adopted as the symbol of remembrance.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the first newsletter of the new era for ESAB. Since our last edition the organisation has become a charitable incorporated organisation. Please do not worry about this, it in no way changes what we do or how we do it, it simply means we are now better placed to comply with regulation, protect the services we offer and

those who work and volunteer with us. In short, please be assured you will not see any difference in your day to day dealings with ESAB or the help we provide, although we do now have a new charity number, which is shown on the front cover.

As I've said in previous newsletters, volunteers are the life blood of our District Committees, social meetings and many other activities ESAB organises. Previous appeals for new volunteers have resulted in a few people stepping forward to help, but we still need more. So, if anyone reading or listening to this newsletter has family or friends that may be able to help out for a few hours each month, then could I ask that you or they contact the ESAB office or your local Community Worker to offer their help; we are happy to put the right people in touch in order to explain what's involved and make any introductions needed. Hopefully we can attract a few more fantastic folk to join those who already volunteer; we can never have too many.

Financial security; ESAB has to raise considerable amounts each year to continue its operations. Many of you reading this newsletter may already be supporting us by making one off or regular contributions for which we are immensely grateful. May I take this opportunity to remind you all that one of the most effective ways of contributing to the future of our organisation is by leaving a gift or legacy to ESAB in your will. If you have already dealt with your will, please be aware there is often no need to have a completely new will written to put this in place, as a simple codicil to your existing document may suffice; your solicitor or will writer will be able to advise. If after making provision for your loved ones you are in a position to make such a direction to ESAB, you will be making a tremendously valuable contribution to the continuance of our good work.

With the festive season just around the corner, on behalf of all those who benefit from ESAB's help, I'd like to extend thanks to all those who pull together to make this the caring and supportive organisation it is. I cannot mention here everyone by name, but I do offer sincere thanks to all those who help the association in so many ways such as giving their time as Trustees and District committee members and those who tirelessly help out at socials each month including our volunteer drivers. Without the combined

efforts of all these amazing people, a great number of people living with sight loss would undoubtedly live less satisfying lives.

I'd also like to express thanks on behalf of the trustees to the officers and employees of the Association; their individual and collective effort, commitment and dedication is vitally important in making ESAB the great organisation it is.

Finally as 2018 draws to a close, may I take this opportunity to wish you, your families and friends the warmest of seasonal greetings along with health and happiness for 2019.

LARGE PRINT 2019 CALENDARS

We again this year have a limited number of large print wall calendars available for our members. There is a small space for each day in which to write a reminder. The calendars are free of charge, although we would appreciate a donation of £3 or more if possible. To order your calendar please ring the ESAB office on **01473 611011**.

HOME VISITING MAGNIFIER SERVICE

All three East Suffolk Blind home visiting Community Workers are now trained in assessing members individual magnification needs, from the simple hand held through to the more sophisticated electronic hand held types. They are each equipped with an extensive range of demonstration equipment which can be used to find the appropriate one to meet any individuals' needs and circumstances. Once an appropriate choice has been made, the Community Workers can arrange for the purchase of the magnifier and once delivered they are able to help with training to ensure they are used correctly.

It should be noted that the NHS Hospital eye clinics have a low vision aids clinic which all members can request to be referred to for a similar service.

It is important to note that before you seek to obtain any magnifier, you should first be certain that you have had a recent eye test and that you are using glasses that were prescribed from that eye test.

To arrange for a home visit by one of our Community Workers, please call the ESAB office on **01473 611011** to make an appointment.

ALDEBURGH FISHING MATCH

On Sunday the 21st October the Aldeburgh and district angling club held the 72th annual beach fishing match in aid of ESAB. Over one hundred anglers took part, including both ladies and juniors, all of whom had a good day with bright and warm conditions – not so good for catching fish though! Prizes were presented by the deputy Mayor of Aldeburgh Cllr Joselyn Bond.

ESAB have been incredibly fortunate to have benefited from the support of the Angling Club for the last 72 years and our thanks for this great support go to organisers Gail and Paul Harrison, who have organised the event for over 20 years, along with all those involved both past and present, not forgetting the many businesses in and around Aldeburgh that have supported the event over the years by providing many prizes for the grand raffle draw that accompanies it.

BLIND VETERANS UK

Blind Veterans UK is the national organisation for ex-Service men and women with severe sight loss.

The charity enables veterans to rebuild their lives after sight loss through rehabilitation, practical training and emotional support. It supports all blind veterans of every generation regardless of how they lost their sight.

Blind Veterans UK was founded in 1915 and the charity's initial purpose was to help and support soldiers blinded in the First World War. But the organisation has gone on to support more than 35,000 blind veterans and their families, spanning the Second World War to recent conflicts including Iraq and Afghanistan.

One of the veterans the charity supports is 80-year-old Geoffrey Moss from Woodbridge. Geoffrey completed National Service between 1959 and 1961 with the Royal Air Force Military Police. He was stationed at RAF Bawdsey in Suffolk where he was overseeing the security of personnel passing through the guard room. Geoffrey says: "Despite never uncovering a Soviet spy it was a very enjoyable period that changed the direction of my life and brought me to this wonderful part of the world." It was 35 years after being demobbed that glaucoma would rob Geoffrey of his sight. He says:

“I was diagnosed 22 years ago and it was a gradual decline but in the last 3 years there has been a rapid deterioration.” Luckily, Geoffrey found out about Blind Veterans UK and started receiving help from the charity in 2015. Geoffrey says: “The help that I’ve received from Blind Veterans UK has changed my life for sure. The introduction week at Brighton set me up to adapt to life with sight loss and remain independent. From there I’ve been on a computer course and even been given software which allows me to browse the internet, communicate with family and pursue my hobby of photo editing.”

Blind Veterans UK has a dedicated community team in Suffolk who provide support including training, equipment and social events for vision-impaired ex-Service men and women in the local area.

If you, or someone you know, served in the Armed Forces or did National Service and are now battling severe sight loss, find out how Blind Veterans UK could help by calling 0800 389 7979.

Visit blindveterans.org.uk/support to learn more about the charity and how you can support its vital work today.

IPSWICH TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB 'SOCCER SIGHT' audio description service again available to supporters

Ipswich Town are again this season offering the audio description service ‘Soccer Sight’ for partially sighted and blind supporters to use at home fixtures at Portman Road. The service allows visually impaired supporters to listen to full match commentary for all league and cup fixtures from within the stadium, to help improve the match day experience. It differs from traditional radio commentary by focusing on a real-time description of where the ball and action is on the pitch. Audio description is about describing each moment so the listener can be part of the match day experience.

It was originally developed by the RNIB access project designed to improve access to football at all levels for blind and partially sighted people. Ipswich Town was one of the original 12 clubs involved in the project. Commentary is provided by Sidney Wigg and Phil Pethybridge. Sidney was one of the original commentators in 2008 and Phil joined in 2009. This is a free service provided by the club. Headsets are readily available for supporters to collect from their

DLO office prior to kick off. Please book in advance, as there is limited availability. If interested, please contact the ticket office on **01473 400556**.

INTERESTING THINGS YOU MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT TALKING BOOKS

Ever wondered how and when Talking Books got started? Talking Books was the brainchild of an officer who lost his sight during the Great War. Captain Ian Fraser was blinded during the Battle of the Somme in 1916. He tried to learn braille but found it too difficult. In frustration, he thought, "If books could only talk!" While listening to a gramophone, he came up with idea of recording a "talking book", and in 1918 he started working with RNIB to find a solution.

It took more than 10 years to develop a suitable reading machine. Fraser's team at RNIB experimented with various machines, but they were too slow, difficult or expensive. They looked at the gramophone, but none of the gramophone companies made records that played longer than five minutes. In 1932, Fraser's team found a way to extend recordings on shellac records to 25 minutes per side by narrowing the grooves and reducing the playing speed.

RNIB set up its own recording studio in 1934. Agatha Christie's "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" was one of the first to be recorded in the studio, along with Joseph Conrad's "Typhoon" and "The Gospel According to John".

The average early Talking Book fitted onto 10 heavy shellac discs. The first Talking Books were posted to customers in November 1935. People listened to the records on customised turntables which were available to blind civilians at cost price and to veterans for a lower cost.

A set of original discs featuring Joseph Conrad's Typhoon recently surfaced in Canada. Discovered in 2016 by a vintage record collector, the fragile shellac discs are believed to be the oldest surviving Talking Book.

Decca and EMI used technology developed by RNIB when they started producing long-playing music records. After RNIB developed the next-generation player in 1947 that could run off

mains electricity for ease of use, major music record labels used the same technology to develop their record production.

The average modern Talking Book lasts 12 hours and takes up to 18 to 20 hours to record. Recording a Talking Book is very much a skill; professional actors must prepare before coming to the studio and will often be recording for three consecutive hours.

To date, just under 20 million Talking Books have been lent out to blind and partially sighted people by the RNIB.

Talking Books can now be read on tablets, mobiles, USB and CD players. In 2015, to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Talking Books, the RNIB made the service completely free to blind and partially sighted people.

Famous authors have recorded their own books at their Talking Book studios. They include Roald Dahl and J.K. Rowling, and many politicians and broadcasters have also recorded their own books. Last year alone, 2,500 new titles were added to the RNIB Talking Books library. There are over 30,000 Talking Books in RNIB's library, and the number is growing all the time, with about a 150 new books being added every month.

If you are interested in receiving talking books free from the RNIB, please contact your Community Worker for help or failing that, please call the ESAB office on 01473 611011.

FREE INFOSOUND INFORMATION SERVICE FOR BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED PEOPLE

Infosound is an independent registered charity which, for more than ten years has been producing information in audio on any subject that could be relevant to daily living with sight loss. They hope this will increase awareness of the kind of help and support that is currently available and, at the same time, break down any feelings of isolation that some may experience because of their vision impairment.

For example, they talk about daily-living aids and products, benefits, holidays, mobility, travel, housing, training, employment, leisure, sport, money, consumer matters, hobbies and the important issues of the moment, as well as events and one-off services run for the

benefit of blind and partially-sighted people — they could easily feature what you are doing as listeners can also phone in with their own hints, tips, comments and items of information.

Because information changes so rapidly these days, they keep their service frequently updated with fresh audio features on an almost daily basis. Because a monthly audio magazine, for example, would not be able to cope with that, they constantly "broadcast" their information around the clock in several different easy-to-hear ways:

- over any home or mobile phone
- on Amazon voice-controlled devices (Echo)
- as a podcast, and
- on specialist audio players like British Wireless for the Blind Fund's Sonata Plus radio/player and their Bumblebee tablet app.

In order that people don't have to listen to their rolling broadcast for a long time (although many do!), they also make everything they produce available to hear on-demand as individual audio items whenever it suits the listener.

The best explanation of the free Infosound service is given on a very informative 27-minute long CD that they have produced which you can request to be sent to you by phoning Infosound on 03000 111 555 and selecting option 1. You can also have a taster of their service by simply phoning 03000 111 555 and selecting option 9, which will offer you the chance to listen in to their 24/7 rolling broadcast or select specific items to listen to.

TACTILE PAVEMENTS – WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

Tactile paving is a system of textured ground surface found on stairs, footpaths and station platforms to inform visually impaired pedestrians about the hazards in front of them.

Blister paving is used for pedestrian crossings. This surface provides a warning to someone with a visual impairment that they are at a road crossing. The surface is an essential safety feature and consists of rows of flat topped domes (blisters) in a square pattern.

Offset blister paving is found at train, tram and tube platforms, to warn visually impaired people of the edge of the platform. The off-

set blister tactile surface consists of flat-topped domes (blisters), spaced 66mm apart from the centre of one dome to the next one.

Corduroy tactile paving comprises rounded bars running length ways across the direction a pedestrian is walking. The bars are 6mm high and 20mm wide. This type of surface warns visually impaired people of the presence of a specific hazard. This could be the top or bottom of stairs, a level crossing or a ramp. It is also used where a footway joins a shared route. The idea is that it highlights a potential hazard.

The BBC recently broadcast an informative video on this topic and follows Amy Kavanagh who is registered blind and a newcomer to using a long cane, as she navigates her daily commute.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-44861568>

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS GOOD AS TOP EXPERTS AT DETECTING EYE DISEASES

An artificial intelligence system can recommend the correct referral decision for over 50 eye diseases with 94% accuracy – matching world leading eye experts.

The system developed by researchers at Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, DeepMind Health and UCL could help doctors and other eye health professionals spot serious conditions such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD) earlier and prioritise patients who urgently need treatment.

The breakthrough research, published in Nature Medicine, describes how machine learning technology has been successfully trained on thousands of historic de-personalised eye scans to identify features of eye disease and recommend how patients should be referred for care. It is hoped that the technology could revolutionise the way professionals carry out eye tests, allowing them to spot conditions earlier and prioritise patients with the most serious eye diseases before irreversible damage sets in.

More than 285 million people worldwide live with some form of sight loss, including more than two million people in the UK. Eye diseases remain one of the biggest causes of sight loss, and many can be prevented with early detection and treatment.

Dr Pearse Keane, consultant ophthalmologist at Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation said “The number of eye scans we’re performing is growing at a pace much faster than human experts are able to interpret them. There is a risk that this may cause delays in the diagnosis and treatment of sight-threatening diseases, which can be devastating for patients.

The Artificial Intelligence technology we’re developing is designed to prioritise patients who need to be seen and treated urgently by a doctor or eye care professional. If we can diagnose and treat eye conditions early, it gives us the best chance of saving people’s sight. With further research it could lead to greater consistency and quality of care for patients with eye problems in the future.”

The next step is for the research to go through clinical trials to explore how this technology might improve patient care in practice, and regulatory approval before it can be used in hospitals and other clinical settings.

If clinical trials are successful in demonstrating that the technology can be used safely and effectively, Moorfields will receive free use of any resulting technology across all of their UK hospitals and community services.

Macular disease is the biggest cause of sight loss in the UK, affecting 600,000 people. It is an extremely debilitating disease and timely treatment for patients with wet Age related Macular Degeneration is vital. Pressure on eye clinics has resulted in delays for many patients, which has tragically led to unnecessary sight loss. This technology will alleviate the pressure on clinics and mean patients will get the urgent treatment they need.

NICE CLINICAL GUIDELINES FAQs FOR AMD PATIENTS – JANUARY 2018

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has spent three years reviewing how Age related Macular Degeneration (AMD) is diagnosed, treated and monitored, and what information and support should be provided to people with AMD. The result is best-practice guidance which should apply to everyone. As part of that process they’ve looked at the evidence behind each recommendation – things like whether one drug is better value for

money than another, or whether people are more likely to lose their sight if treatment is delayed for longer than two weeks. The Guideline should end some differences in treatment between eye units and other healthcare professionals about when and how people should be treated for AMD, meaning that treatment is more consistent.

Where in the UK does it apply?

NICE Clinical Guidelines only apply across England and Wales but are usually adopted in Northern Ireland as well, but not in Scotland which is under a different body, the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidance Network (SIGN).

If my vision is better than 6/12, will I be treated?

The new Guideline states that anti-VEGF treatment for eyes with wet AMD is clinically effective even before your visual acuity drops below 6/12, the level at which you must stop driving. Depending on which drug is used, it may also be cost-effective. The guideline does not say you should receive anti-VEGF treatment if your vision is better than 6/12 but it opens the way to treating these patients but does not guarantee treatment.

If my vision is worse than 6/96, will I be treated?

In the past we have heard of people being refused treatment because their visual acuity is worse than 6/96. The new Guideline says that doctors should consider stopping treatment if it isn't working and you continue to develop "severe, progressive loss of visual acuity" or there is no prospect of your sight improving. But it also states that doctors should consider treating eyes worse than 6/96 if it could help your overall visual function – for example, if it's the better-seeing of your two eyes.

Can my doctor change or stop my treatment without consulting me?

The Guidance is clear: Doctors should "ensure that patients are actively involved in all decisions about the stopping or switching of treatment" – so if you don't understand why a decision has been made, do ask.

Can I ask to be changed from Lucentis to Eylea (for example)?

In developing the Guideline, the authors looked at the clinical effectiveness and safety of the anti-VEGF drugs available at the

moment and found that there was no significant difference between them. However, doctors are told to consider switching anti-VEGF drugs if there are practical reasons for doing so – for example, if it can be given less often and that makes it easier for you to attend appointments.

Doctors should also ensure that patients are actively involved in all decisions about the stopping or switching of treatment – so if you don't understand why a decision has been made, ask.

Is there any point registering as Sight Impaired (SI) or Severely Sight Impaired (SSI) if I am still having treatment?

The Guideline recommends that doctors offer certification of visual impairment as soon as you become eligible, even if you are still having active treatment.

Can I get other treatments apart from anti-VEGF injections?

Thermal laser therapy for dry AMD is no longer recommended as it can cause sight loss.

Photodynamic therapy is no longer recommended for treating wet AMD on its own, or alongside anti-VEGF treatment except as part of a clinical trial.

Pegaptanib (Macugen) is no longer recommended as a new treatment for AMD – but if you are currently receiving it, you should be able to continue until you and your doctor agree to change or stop.

Injections into your eye of corticosteroids also shouldn't be used alongside anti-VEGF injections.

What should I ask my doctor when I see them?

The Guideline states that you should be given information in accessible format at your first appointment, and whenever you ask for it after that. It should cover:

- Information about AMD and likely timescales
- Who to contact if you need to change your appointment
- What to do if your vision gets worse
- Other support you are entitled to, like support groups, parking permits or helplines

They should also discuss with you:

- What AMD is, what type you have and what causes it
- Things you can do to slow its progression
- Possible complications like Charles Bonnet syndrome
- What you need to know about driving
- Treatment options, including possible benefits and risks
- Who to contact for practical and emotional support
- Where your appointments will be and how long you're likely to wait
- How to register as sight impaired (and why you might want to)
- Take this list with you to your next appointment to help you remember anything you want to ask.

When do hospitals have to adopt the recommendations?

NICE provides advice and support to help local organisations put the recommendations into practice. There is no specific deadline for implementation and it can take many months.

What if I find the recommendations are not being followed?

NICE clinical guidelines inform what health professionals do but they don't dictate it. If you feel that the guidelines are not being followed, we would suggest first taking this up with the optician or ophthalmologist to enable them to explain their reasons for not following the guideline recommendations.

You can always call the Helpline to access our advocacy service who can help you get access to treatments to which you are entitled.

Background

Once NICE guidance is published, health professionals are expected to take it fully into account when exercising their clinical judgment. However, NICE guidance does not override the individual responsibility of health professionals to make appropriate decisions according to the circumstances of the individual patient, in consultation with the patient and/or their guardian/carer.

A court ruled in 2014 that Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are under an obligation in public law to have regard for the NICE guidance and to provide clear reasons for any general policy that does not follow NICE guidance. Where treatment is given outside of

the guidelines, healthcare professionals must fully document the reasons for non-compliance in the patient's medical records.

MYTHBUSTING IN THE LOW VISION CLINIC

Should I stop reading or watching TV to save my remaining eyesight?

Definitely not. It is important that you continue doing the things you enjoy. If you are struggling to read, to watch TV, or to see anything else, speak to your low vision clinic. If your eyes are uncomfortable or tired, then you should stop and take a break, but you won't make your macular disease any worse by using your eyes.

Is there any point wearing my glasses when I have sight loss?

It depends. Some people with macular disease still benefit from wearing glasses, but for others it doesn't really make any difference. Some people like to wear them for protection from the wind, or because their friends don't recognise them without glasses. Wearing glasses (or not wearing glasses) won't make your macular disease worse.

There's no point getting my eyes tested as I have macular disease and have been discharged from the hospital.

Wrong! It is important to have your eyes tested regularly at your local optometrist if you have been discharged from the clinic. Even if your sight hasn't changed, it is important to check that you don't have any signs of other eye disease, such as glaucoma. Eye examinations sometimes reveal problems with your general health such as diabetes, high blood pressure or thyroid problems.

The strongest magnifier must be the best.

Not necessarily. Stronger magnifiers are smaller, show fewer letters at once, need to be held closer to your eyes, and are often more difficult to use. In fact the weakest magnifier that allows you to see something comfortably is usually the best.

Can't I just buy a magnifier online, without a low vision appointment?

Yes you can, but there are so many different magnifiers available that it's very difficult to know which is best for you. You could seek a referral to your Low Vision Clinic at your local hospital eye clinic or you could ask your ESAB Community Worker to visit you as they are trained to help you choose the right magnifier for your need.

There's no point getting a smartphone or iPad as I won't be able to see the screen.

Actually, these are great devices for people with reduced vision. They can make text big, bright and bold, read text to you, or take down dictated messages, and there are hundreds of apps to make things clearer.

I don't need to tell the DVLA about my macular disease because I only drive locally.

Sorry, this is not true. If you have macular disease in both eyes you must inform the DVLA. They can arrange further tests to determine whether you can drive legally. It makes no difference if you drive five miles a week or 500 miles a day – you must meet the legal standard to be allowed to drive. Not informing the DVLA is a criminal offence, will mean you are uninsured and could have horrible consequences. Ask your GP or at the eye clinic for more guidance on this.

SYNAPPTIC LAUNCHES ITS NEW AND INNOVATIVE TV BOX

Synapptic have announced the release of their new Synapptic TV Box, which is designed to be a very accessible home entertainment product for people with sight loss especially when used in conjunction with a smart TV. Like all of their products, navigation is easy via a simple screen menu system, which is both intuitive and can be used by anyone even if you're new to technology.

It is designed to enable anyone with sight loss to retain their independence at home, while still remaining connected to friends and family, whether through emails, texts, calls or even social media. For many people with sight loss, operating smart TVs for Internet access and catch-up services can be a challenge which this product helps to overcome.

The Synapptic TV Box simply plugs into your normal TV enabling you to access a world of entertainment, information and handy tools through your TV screen. You can use it to:

- search TV and radio listings with ease;
- watch live Freeview TV or catch up with BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub and All 4, etc;
- listen to music streaming services,

- MP3s, audio books, podcasts, Talking Newspapers and news feeds;
- do your online shopping or banking or get simple access to the internet;
- keep in touch with family and friends through emails, Skype video calls and social media;
- get organized with the in-built Calendar, Address Book, Alarm Clock and Weather options.

It comes with in-built speech, magnification and voice control, so you can customise it to suit yourself.

The Synapptic TV Box is available for the retail price of £649. For more information, or to place an order, please contact them on **0191 909 7 909** or visit their online shop at www.synapptic.com. Alternatively, you can contact them via email at sales@synapptic.com.

MORE ABOUT VOICE ASSISTANTS - BY MATT HARRISON, TECHNOLOGY SERVICES MANAGER AT THE BEACON CENTRE

Not long ago, an environment that responded to your voice was firmly in the realm of science fiction. However, not only is this technology now here, but it has rapidly become an everyday piece of household equipment. And with assistants such as the Amazon Echo Dot and Google Home retailing at under £50, they are extremely affordable.

Getting started

So how do these assistants work, and what exactly do they do?

One thing to remember is that you will need a smartphone or tablet computer and Wi-Fi in order to set up your assistant. Once installed, your assistant can perform many functions without using the accompanying app.

Once set up on your Wi-Fi, the assistants sit quietly in the corner and wait for a particular command such as “OK Google” or “Alexa”. What happens next is down to you. You can start with something simple such as asking your device the time, or for a weather forecast. Questions like these are a great way to start, and they get

you over any embarrassment you feel at talking to a piece of plastic. Once the ice has been broken, however, you will soon find yourself asking all kinds of weird and wonderful things, from checking general knowledge queries to getting advice on your anticipated commute time for the morning. Easy to learn Smart Assistants are designed solely to respond to voice commands. The beauty here is that as visually impaired users, there is nothing additional to learn: we interact with the devices in exactly the same way as a sighted person. We don't have to put up with work-arounds or struggle with menus, we just need to talk and listen.

While a smart assistant's abilities may not be limitless, the fact that both the Amazon Echo and Google Home work alongside third-party apps means that there are countless clever ways to use your assistant, and these are growing in number and complexity every day. I use mine to make to-do and shopping lists (no more fiddly typing), listen to digital radio (no more struggling to read menus on the TV), and to add calendar appointments and set timers and alarms. Then I just ask "What's on my shopping list?" or "What's in my calendar tomorrow?" and get an appropriate response. More advanced functions Smart Assistants can also be linked with compatible telecare and home automation applications. That means you can control lighting, heating, music and other household appliances purely with your voice, and set up your device to alert chosen people if you need assistance.

These affordable gadgets also have a fun side: you can play interactive games, listen to audiobooks, ask them to tell you jokes, and much more.

AMAZON PLANS TO RELEASE NEW ALEXA-POWERED DEVICES

It reflects Amazon's ambition to make its Alexa voice assistant ubiquitous, especially in areas where people spend most of their time like the home and car. Amazon is expanding its Alexa-powered devices, with plans to release at least eight new voice-controlled hardware devices before the end of the year. The devices include, among others, a microwave oven, an amplifier, a receiver, a subwoofer, and an in-car gadget. All of the devices will be Alexa-enabled, meaning they can easily connect to the Amazon voice assistant. Some of the devices will also have Alexa built in.

The Microwave that Amazon is releasing uses artificial intelligence to heat and defrost food simply by speaking aloud to it. The Amazon Basics Microwave is controlled by the company's Alexa digital assistant when paired with an Echo device. It recognises a number of pre-programmed settings, such as "Alexa, reheat a cup of coffee" or "Alexa, microwave frozen vegetables" to adjust the temperature and length of cooking time. This will take the guess work out of selecting times and temperatures, and avoid messy accidents Amazon claims. New pre-sets will be added in the future. It features 10 power levels to choose from and the option to defrost food based on weight or time. An Ask Alexa button triggers the assistant when pressed and held, and removes the need to say the terms "Alexa" or "microwave." Internally, it contains a glass plate and turntable ring like a standard microwave. It will cost 60 dollars when it recently went on sale in the USA, though UK availability and pricing has yet to be confirmed. The microwave is one of many products announced by Amazon which include new versions of Amazon's existing Echo Dot, Echo Plus and Echo Show devices, a smart plug and an Alexa-powered wall clock.

GOOGLE TO LAUNCH NEW ANDROID APP

Google has announced it is developing an app it hopes will help blind and visually impaired people become more independent.

The web giant said it is working on an Android app called "Lookout" which gives users auditory cues as they encounter objects, text and people around them.

It is designed to be used on a lanyard around your neck, or in your shirt pocket, with the camera pointing away from your body. After opening the app, and selecting a mode, Lookout processes items of importance in your environment and shares information it believes to be relevant, such as text from a recipe book, or the location of a toilet, an exit sign, a chair or a person nearby. Lookout delivers spoken notifications and is designed to be used with minimal interaction, allowing people to stay engaged with their activity.

Lookout is the latest in a string of smartphone apps that have in recent years replaced expensive technologies. It follows in the

footsteps of Microsoft's successful "Seeing AI" app, which is currently only available on Apple devices.

Lookout operates in four modes based on the user's current activity: Home, Work & Play, Scan and Experimental. After selecting a mode, the user will be told about objects the app senses around them, such as the location of a sofa at home.

The app's Scan feature can also read text such as a recipe from a cookbook, while its Experimental mode allows users to try out features which are in development. The app doesn't require an internet connection to operate and uses artificial intelligence to learn what people are interested in hearing about.

It is expected to be available in the Google Play Store by the year end.

TWO NEW APPS - BY MATT HARRISON, TECHNOLOGY SERVICES MANAGER AT THE BEACON CENTRE

Here is an introduction to two new free apps that have the potential to be invaluable when you're out and about. Both run on Apple and Android devices, and are very discreet.

First we have "Welcome by Neatebox". This app alerts a venue – anything from a café to an airport – that you intend to visit, and tells them what support you might need. When registering with Welcome, you upload a photo of yourself and choose your disability from a list. You also state the type of help you require. In the case of visual impairment, this ranges from no support through to full sighted assistance. Once registered, you can use Welcome to tell a venue when you plan to visit. The app then notifies the venue of your plans and gives them top tips on supporting someone with a specific disability. When you arrive at the venue, Bluetooth beacons alert the venue so they can provide the support you requested. For me, Welcome would reduce the anxiety of not finding products in a shop, not being able to read price tags, or incorrectly recognising the colour of new clothing. Also, as I will be recognised by my photograph, there should be no need to start the conversation with the usual: "I'm sorry, I can't see very well..." That said, the app is new and more venues need to be made aware that, by installing it, they are more likely to attract disabled visitors.

Here's where you come in: within the app, you can recommend a venue installs Welcome. Neatebox will then speak to the venue anonymously on your behalf. The beauty here is in the discreet nature of the whole process, and the visitor should have little need to explain. I sincerely hope that venues throughout the UK adopt Welcome. Put it this way, if you had the choice of two similar venues, one that uses Welcome and the other that doesn't, which one would you visit? To download, search the App Store or Google Play Store for "Welcome by Neatebox".

The second app is "Good Food Talks" from Geared App. This app provides restaurant menus on your smartphone or tablet in a format that suits you. The app is compatible with the built-in accessibility features on your device, and means you can change the fonts or contrast to make it even easier to read. As with Welcome, you can suggest new venues – and the more people do, the more restaurants will upload their menu to the app. Again for me, there is no question of whether I would visit the restaurant with the accessible menu or the one without. To download the app to an Apple device, search the App Store for "Good Food Talks". On Android, open your browser and navigate to www.goodfoodtalks.com to use it through the website.

DISABLED TRAIN USERS TO GET NEW 'LIFE-CHANGING' APP

Paralympian Wafula-Strike has campaigned for better accessibility for disabled people on trains. This "life-changing" app can track disabled rail users in real-time and will update station staff on where a passenger is at any point, useful in the event of a delay, change of platform or missed train.

West Midlands Railway, London Northwestern Railway, Greater Anglia, and South Western Railway are currently trialling different parts of the app before the full roll-out across England, Wales and Scotland next autumn.

Anne Wafula-Strike said the app would "empower disabled people to travel without any fear". Currently when passengers with mobility problems book assistance, a print-out is given to station staff in the morning but when a change occurs there is no way to update the

paper list, which can lead to staff being in the wrong place and causing some passengers requiring help to go without assistance at all.

The app, developed by Transreport for the railway industry, will allow users to create a profile, book assistance, change arrangements and cancel bookings and give staff live information to accommodate short-notice changes.

This app is part of a wider overall passenger assist to improve the journey experience of disabled and older passengers.

NEW MACULAR SUPPORT GROUP IN FELIXSTOWE

A new Macular Support Group is being launched in Felixstowe to help increase the confidence and independence of people affected by macular disease. The group, which is being organised by the Macular Society, in partnership with local people, met for the first time on the afternoon of Tuesday 20th November at the Hadwen Room, Felixstowe Library, Crescent Road, Felixstowe IP11 7BY. It will continue to meet at the same location between 1.30pm and 3.30pm on the third Tuesday of every month. The ongoing aim of the group will be to offer information, encouragement and friendship to people who are affected by macular disease.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the most common form of macular disease, affecting more than 600,000 people, usually over the age of 50.

Colin Daniels, Macular Society regional manager, said: "This new group is here for anybody affected by macular disease and we want to encourage people to come along. Friends and family are also very welcome. It's good to be able to learn from each other's experiences and get tips. The peer support can be so helpful. Our groups can really help people increase in confidence and become more independent. The group will invite guest speakers on a variety of subjects, including macular conditions and their impact on our daily lives. The meetings are also social occasions where we can chat over a cup of tea."

For more information on the group, please contact Colin Daniels on **01603 937 449** or **07494 467 995**, or via email at colin.daniels@macularsociety.org

For more information on macular disease, call the Macular Society's Helpline on 0300 3030 111 or email help@macularsociety.org

BOWLS FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN LOWESTOFT

Are you bored sitting at home when you could be enjoying yourself with other visually impaired people? If so, why not have a try at bowls. The Lowestoft Blind Bowls club is waiting for you.

We are a small friendly club who meet most Wednesday mornings. We would provide you with bowls to start with and teach you to play. If you live in Lowestoft, Pakefield or Carlton Colville, a minibus can pick you up from your door and drop you off for a small charge.

For more information please phone any of the following for more information: **Michael on 01502 567181, Bob on 01502 450307 or Gail on 01502 514700.** We look forward to hearing from you.

ACOUSTIC AIR RIFLE SHOOTING - FELIXSTOWE RIFLE CLUB

The Felixstowe Rifle Club has four firing points for visually impaired shooters. In 1994, the National Small-bore Rifle Association obtained a sighting system made by an Austrian Company which enables visually impaired shooters to achieve a level of accuracy very close to that of sighted shooters.

To the casual observer the sight, which is designed for use on an air rifle at a range of 10m, looks like a conventional telescope sight and is mounted on the rifle in the same way. However, that is where the similarity ends. The sight is designed to collect and measure the level of light reflected from the target using a photo-electric cell which is then converted into sound. The centre of the target is brilliant white and then moving outwards from the centre increasingly darker levels of grey are encountered until off the target is matt black. The closer to the centre of the target you are aiming the greater the level of light reflected and hence the higher the frequency of sound which is heard by the shooter via a pair of

headphones. The sights are adjustable in the normal way to alter the mean point of impact.

The club, which currently has 15 members, meets on the second Thursday of each month between 10am and 12.30pm, at the Felixstowe Rifle Club, High Street, Felixstowe IP11 9UB. If you are interested in joining or finding out more, please contact Mark Maidment on **01394 211418**.

PRE-USED DAILY LIVING AID EQUIPMENT

We have recently received donations of some pre-used daily living aids which are currently sitting in our store room awaiting a new home, which we are happy to make possible for a donation.

These items include:

- Two Talking Microwaves
- Large Floor standing Daylight lamp
- Three CCTVs where documents can be projected and magnified onto an integrated flat television screen to help with reading them

If you are interested in any of the above items please contact the ESAB office on **01473 611011** for further information.

EAST SUFFOLK BLIND SOCIAL CLUBS

East Suffolk Association for the Blind has seven Social Clubs run by volunteers at seven different locations across East Suffolk. They are at Lowestoft, Beccles, Halesworth, Stowmarket, Woodbridge, Shotley and Felixstowe. These are run by local volunteers and take place on an afternoon once a month where you will be able to enjoy the company of others over some refreshments and food, and on some occasions there will be some entertainment. There are also summer outings and of course a special outing for a Christmas meal. In most cases, it should be possible to help out with transport.

If you are interested in participating in any of these clubs, please contact the ESAB office for help on **01473 611011**.

EAST SUFFOLK BLIND DISTRICT COMMITTEE NEWS

BECCLLES BRANCH

This year seems to have flown by and we are now fast approaching its end. We have enjoyed the usual programme of activities with some old favourites and some new treats. In May we were entertained by a local beekeeper who kindly brought a large honey cake for us to enjoy with our afternoon tea and several of us were tempted by his pots of honey and other goodies. In June we were captivated by the musical entertainment from members of the Bellaires Handbells and in July the Beccles Ukulele Group delighted us with their energetic and joyful repertoire.

In September Alan Middleton-Stewart left our committee to concentrate on the amalgamation of the Halesworth and Southwold branches. He has given unfailing service to our own branch over the years, always helping set up tables and chairs, organising the raffle and presiding over the drinks table at our annual Christmas Lunch. Many thanks to Alan for all that he has done.

Happily we were pleased to welcome a new volunteer, Colin Barrett, who comes with valuable experience of volunteering and, apart from setting up tables, he is able to stand in for our bus driver when necessary. Colin not only helps us but is also involved with the Beccles May Centre so is a stalwart in the volunteering community. Another wonderful example of the community spirit is Nancy Barclay, our organiser and helper on the Community Bus. She has been with us for many years and, like Colin, is heavily involved in the Beccles May Centre. Last month Nancy was in a car accident, sustaining broken ribs, a head injury and bruising but, in typical style, is refusing to make a fuss. What would we do without wonderful volunteers like Nancy and her kind? Now out of hospital we wish her a speedy recovery.

Of course, all our other helpers are indispensable too and we are so grateful for their continued support.

Jennifer Langeskov, Chairman

FELIXSTOWE BRANCH SUMMER OUTING

A lovely day out was enjoyed by members at the Hut on Felixstowe sea front in June. On arrival, members settled in with a cup of tea or coffee and enjoyed the sunshine. Fish and chips lunches were delivered and were very tasty, all the better for being eaten out in the fresh air. Following another cup of tea,



the volunteers hot footed along the prom to fetch ice creams for all. Later on we managed still more tea with cake and biscuits - all feeling extremely well fed by now! The raffle was drawn and sadly the day trip was drawing to an end. A wonderful day with the chance to enjoy good companionship, lovely food and some brilliant Felixstowe sunshine.

Finally, a huge thanks to all the volunteers who without their help and commitment none of this would be possible.

GOD'S OWN COUNTY - Poem by Felixstowe's Len Collett

They say Cornwall's a lovely county,
Full of grace and God's own bounty.
Sandy beaches, hidden coves,
Shops that sell all sorts of clothes.

Fishermen put out to sea
Catching lobsters for your tea,
Tea or lunch, or lunch or dinner,
Every eating place a winner.

Then there's Truro, Launceston, Fowey
These I'm sure you will enjoy.
There's one thing that makes me sad
It's not a pleasure that I've had.

HALESWORTH AND SOUTHWOLD BRANCH

It is with great pleasure that I can announce that a suggestion made last year by Southwold Branch that Halesworth and Southwold branches should amalgamate has now happened and from the 1st October 2018 they officially became one branch. I will take up the position of the Chair supported by Jo Small as Vice Chair, Susan Holmes as Secretary, Sallie Ball as the Treasurer plus several other volunteers from both previous committees joining too.

The two branches worked together during the year and had a most enjoyable Fish & Chip lunch at Dunwich and in August we all met at Susan Holmes home and with wonderful weather had a most enjoyable Tea Party. (Thank you Susan).

We had our first outing as a single branch on the 18th October when we went to Highways for a very good carvery lunch followed by shopping at Edinburgh Woollen Mills who gave us a good discount to do our winter shopping.

We have a full programme set up for the rest of the year and 2019. Our Christmas lunch will be held at the Huntsman & Hounds in Spexhall on the 13th December 2018 at mid-day. If last years` event was anything to go by it will be another success.

I would like to thank all the helpers who have done a sterling job through the year vis, Lynne, Chris, Jo, Susan and our new driver Brian who was a great help going to Highways. Without their help the branch would be in a very sorry state. Thank you all.

There is just one more thank you and that is to Jenny our Community Worker and Alison, Mark, Peter and Stephen at Head Office. Without their help we would be in such a pickle. Thank you everyone.

Alan Middleton-Stewart, Chairman

LOWESTOFT BRANCH

ESAB Social

In May members enjoyed a day sailing with the East Anglian Sailing Trust, a garden party hosted by Susan Holmes in August, followed by an invitation in October from the Lowestoft Lions for a "Summer Extravaganza" evening of entertainment in Gt Yarmouth. Our members enjoy our monthly social of musical entertainment, refreshments and a raffle and recently have also been attending an evening of musical entertainment at the local Footsteps Club. We

end the year with a Christmas dinner at the Masonic Hall and return to our meetings as usual on 29th January.

Local Lowestoft independent Clubs for the blind

Lowestoft Blind Bowls Club (LBBC)

The club has two seasons; indoor (Oct to April) and outdoor (May to Sept) arranging special matches with local sighted clubs. Meeting on Wednesdays with in-club competitions running regularly and lessons offered to new members to get them started.

Lowestoft Blind Activities Club (LBAC)

Monthly activities of target shooting, darts nights, quizzes, tenpin bowling and new age kurling. Other activities include several trips to the local theatre and Greyhound Races. The summer months brought additional activities such as a ramble at Dunwich Forest, canoeing with the Bungay Canoe Club, a trip to Carlton Colville Transport Museum and lastly a tour of Bressingham Steam Museum.

Lowestoft Live Arts

The Club continues to make their crafts as well as charity items for Suffolk Knitters & Stitchers who pass the items on to a variety of other charities.

I would like thank Jenny, our Community worker, for all her hard work, and all the volunteers and drivers who help at our ESAB social, and also the independent clubs; without your support our members would not be able to take part in any of the activities on offer in Lowestoft. Finally thank you to all our members who have made donations and/or have given their time to help me with our collections. – Kathryn Outterside, Secretary

SHOTLEY PENINSULA BRANCH



2018 has been another successful year for the Shotley Peninsula Branch. The Socials are well attended and there has been a selection of entertainment consisting of both music and Talks.

In early September, Shotley Peninsula branch hired a coach

and took a number of members and their friend, plus two wheelchairs and three dogs, on a visit to Poplar Nurseries in Marks Tey, Essex. Everyone was able to walk around the nurseries, tour the large gift shop or just relax in the restaurant where coffees, lunches and teas were served by very helpful staff. The weather was perfect and an enjoyable time was had by all.

In July, our Summer Lunch was again held at Hintlesham Golf Club where an enjoyable lunch was provided. In both May and October the committee organised a Coffee Morning at the Compasses in Holbrook to say thank you to the volunteers who give up their valuable time to help. In September, to raise funds, a Coffee morning was held in Stutton and was very well attended.

My thanks to the committee for their continued help and support, and to Ian, our Community Worker, who is always on hand at the Socials to give advice and assistance if required by our members.

Jean Miller, Chairman

STOWMARKET BRANCH

An awareness day was held in Stowmarket in June this year. This was reasonably well attended including a visit by the town Mayor, Linda Baxter who took time to go and speak with the various providers of Aids and Services for visually impaired people.

Numbers at our monthly social groups have dropped for the moment partly due to older members being physically unable to cope with car travel. However, we have enjoyed a couple of outings throughout the year and the ever popular homemade cakes at our social meetings.

A few members attended the Newstalk AGM where Ken Snow gave a talk on his adventures as a visually impaired intrepid traveller!

Margaret Baxter, (pictured right) one of our members, was awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) for her thirty years of service in the local community volunteering with



Newstalk, the Stowmarket Talking Newspaper. Back in early November the medal was presented by Lord Lieutenant of Suffolk, Clare, Countess of Euston following the announcement in the Queen's Birthday honours this year.

My thanks to all the volunteers who all give up their valuable time to be involved in the Stowmarket social group and to Ian, our Community Worker; their help is very much appreciated.

WOODBIDGE BRANCH

It has been an enjoyable year at the Woodbridge District meetings. Highlights include the crisp tasting round in the January quiz (which was hilarious to watch); Ron and his unique skills when calling the raffle; the Harbour Lights trio who arrived with a wide variety of instruments and our visit to Woodbridge School to hear the amazing Cantabile Choir led by Claire Weston. Their singing is glorious. Woodbridge School generously hosted the afternoon including providing a delicious tea served by the children. In the summer we went to an afternoon tea at Ufford Park Hotel. The helpful staff provided a tasty tea and suitably refreshed, we tackled a quiz that tested our knowledge of old money.

Fundraising continues and Geoff Moss (who attends our meetings) and his wife, Maureen have raised large sums for ESAB during the year and we are very grateful for their efforts.

Many thanks also to the volunteers who give their time so generously and make our afternoons so enjoyable. We are grateful to Woodbridge Town Council for the grants that they make towards our transport costs.

And nothing happens without the support of our community worker Lesley, who is always so calm and friendly.

We look forward to another busy year and more delightful teas.

Karen Cade, Chairman



THE ADOPTION OF THE POPPY AS A SYMBOL OF REMEMBRANCE

In December 1918, an American professor called Moina Belle Michael was inspired by the poem "In Flanders Field" and vowed to always wear a red poppy in remembrance of all those who lost their lives. She wrote this poem in response:

We shall keep the faith

Oh! you who sleep in Flanders Fields,
Sleep sweet - to rise anew!
We caught the torch you threw
And holding high, we keep the Faith
With All who died.

We cherish, too, the poppy red
That grows on fields where valour led;
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies,
But lends a lustre to the red
Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders Fields.

And now the Torch and Poppy Red
We wear in honour of our dead.
Fear not that ye have died for naught;
We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought
In Flanders Fields.



At a conference in 1920 Moina Belle Michael handed out artificial poppies in return for a donation. A French socialite, Anna Guerin, who was at the conference, was inspired to spend the next two years travelling to veterans' organisations around the world, encouraging them to adopt the poppy symbol.

Britain held its first poppy day on 11 November 1921, organised by the Royal British Legion. It raised an amazing £100,000, which would be the equivalent of several million pounds today.