

News & Views

Winter 2025



A collage of photos from our National Eye Health Week featured in this edition.

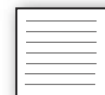


In This Edition

Front Cover: National Eye Health Week



Page 2: Contents



Page 3: Message from the Chair



Page 4: National Eye Week



Page 5: Anna – Visual Impairment Advisor, Luton



Page 6: Maureen – Visual Impairment Advisor, Central Beds



Page 7: Heidi – Visual Impairment Advisor, Bedford Borough



Page 8: Marufah – My Volunteer Journey



Page 9: Visual Awareness Training



Page 10: Volunteer News



Pages 11 and 12: Upcoming Events



Page 13: Above and Beyond Award



Page 14: Vision Zone



Page 15: Supporting Sight Concern



Page 16: Contact us



Message from the Chair

Adrian Spurrell

Happy New Year to one and all.

I have to say it feels strange saying that. Not just because I actually wrote this in November, but this year seems to have whizzed by.

My children will, in their loving way, tell me this is just because I'm getting old. I think its because of all the amazing work Carol, her team and all our volunteers have done during the year.

National Eye Week was just one of the many events and activities. I have to say though that I loved being there – despite the flooding and rain which did rather hamper travelling that day.

I had fun bowling and doing the sitting exercises, as well as having an opportunity to chat to our staff, volunteers and some of the many partners we work with.

Sight Concern is a small charity that does wonderful work, but we couldn't do it without all your support and the help we get from our partners – so a big Thank You to you all for your hard work and efforts through 2024.

2025 will no doubt be a very different year, given all the changes that happened last year, but I am confident that Carol and her team will continue to deliver the amazing support and help I know our services value and appreciate.

So here's to another great year. *Adrian*



Adrian Spurrell.

National Eye Health Week

Clare Anderson – Charity Operations Manager

Well, it's been a little while since our wet, but spectacular National Eye Health Week Event at Kings House.

We would like to say a huge thank to everyone that came, whether you were professionals, clients or visitors.

We cannot thank our venue, Kings House enough, not just for hosting us and being so helpful, but also for doing everything possible to ensure the building was safe to use after flooding the day before!



Seated Dance session.

On the day we had a mindfulness session delivered by Mind BLMK, a seated dance session delivered by Imagination Dance, and although sadly our outdoor events could not go ahead, our resident kite flyer Lionel displayed his beautiful kites and gave a talk about them; and our Blind

Bowls champion John and wife Beta were able to still support people in giving bowls a go as Kings House set up an indoor area for us!

Our Volunteer and Services manager Lisa, along with our volunteer Jess, led some mini-sessions for Visual Awareness, which went down so well with everyone interacting and asking questions. (If you or your organisation are interested in Lisa and Jess delivering a full visual awareness session, then please do not hesitate to contact us!).

Last, but certainly not least, a huge thank you to our stall holders from Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, Thomas Pocklington Trust - Bedfordshire Sight Loss council, Age UK, Mind BLMK, Healthwatch Bedford Borough, Citizens Advice Bedford, Advanced Public Health – Bedford Borough, The Macular Society and the RNIB. We appreciate you coming out in the awful weather and I think everyone agreed that the day was an enjoyable one. Next in this edition you can hear from my colleagues about some of the other fantastic things that happened in the week.

Ana – Visual Impairment Advisor, Luton

On National Eye Health Week, I met with representatives from Link Community Centre Luton to talk about who Sight Concern Bedfordshire are and to build a future partnership.

LINK Community Centre is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting Eastern European minority communities in the UK by mobilizing resources, coordinating the efforts of different agencies and building individual or group welfare programs to meet their needs.

They serve Romanian and Roma communities and access those groups which don't interact with local hospitals or authority a lot, so they tend to lose information on what they can access.

After discussing what we do and how we can support, the team recognised we play a vital role in the lives of people who suffer sight loss and are keen to make plans for a referral pathway which will be put in place.

The meeting was really positive, and they expressed that they appreciate what we do and want to know more about us.

The hub can refer people who would not be able to access our services, because they do not attend doctors, or they do not know they can access support.

We are positive about the prospect of our next meeting together in 2025 to plan our referral pathways and get to know each other better and see how we can build a wider community outreach.

Thank you so much to Link for meeting with me.



Anna at Link Community Centre.

Maureen – Visual Impairment Advisor, Central Bedfordshire

On Tuesday 24th September 2024, my colleague Kathie Hughes, a Low Vision Clinic Advisor from Sight Concern Bedfordshire, and I ran an event at Ampthill Library. The library was kind enough to host the event, and we saw lots of individuals, both existing clients and new clients. It was lovely to meet so many people and for them to also engage with one another.

Despite the dreadful weather conditions of the previous day, individuals arrived and enjoyed their time with us.

We took many referrals and discussed our services and gave sign posting details, as required.

The library is a most relaxed environment and one that many of the individuals we saw, were familiar with.

Being able to meet existing and new clients face to face was exciting and gave them an opportunity to discuss their concerns and ask questions. No appointment system was in place and individuals were given the time and space to speak with us.

I do hope this is the first of many events in Ampthill.

A big thank you to Amy Warner, Library Manager, for making this event possible.



Maureen at Ampthill Library.

Heidi – Visual Impairment Advisor – Bedford Borough

Hello, I'm Heidi and I joined the Sight Concern team in August this year as a Visual Impairment Advisor (VIA). We already have the role in Luton and a Sensory Impairment Advisor (SIA) in Central Bedfordshire, but this is a new role to Bedford Borough.

My role is to identify and assist clients in applying for vision loss related benefits, Blue Badges, Bus Passes and TV licence reductions for those eligible. It can be quite a minefield to know what you may be entitled to, and the best way to apply, so my role aims to support you with empathy and knowledge to provide a positive outcome.

I can also help with referring or signposting to other relevant services if the need arises, so you can have the best support available to suit your needs.

To access VIA support, you will first be assessed over the phone by one of our Access and Triage officers who will then refer you on to me if you have a need, I can help you with.

I hope to bring a much-needed service to Bedford Borough, tying in with the other team members and adding value to your experience with Sight Concern.

When not at work, I enjoy spending time at home with my family and walking lots of miles with my spaniels in the Bedfordshire countryside.



Heidi with her spaniels..

Marufah – My Volunteer Journey

I first started volunteering with Sight Concern when I was at college. I had chosen my A-level subjects but wasn't sure which area of healthcare I wanted to get into. I secured different work placements and thought I'd also volunteer with Sight Concern to understand the world of optics and low vision. I began with a much-needed training session on low vision and then started a 'home befriending role'. This was of course before the pandemic and involved visiting low vision clients and usually chatting or reading to them. I loved the experience and decided to study Optometry at university. Whilst studying, I took a break from volunteering but when I qualified as an optometrist, I knew I wanted to get involved again.

Currently, I participate in a few different roles and enjoy the variety as it's different to my usual work pace and environment which can get repetitive. I've attended and supported a few events and go along with Matt to the Moorfield's eye clinic in Bedford to raise awareness of the low vision clinic and our other services. We've had positive feedback and there have been many patients surprised by what we can offer and support with.

I'm also involved in the Assistive Tech room at Bedford, where we demonstrate the use of electronic magnifiers, screen readers, smartphone apps etc. The devices can seem intimidating to start with, so it's a nice opportunity for service users to try them out and assess which aid may suit them better. In addition to this, I've also begun to offer eccentric viewing sessions. This is a technique that involves using a different part of the retina to help fixate and see better. It definitely takes a bit of practice and perseverance but can really make a difference especially for tasks like reading or watching TV.

Volunteering has been a fulfilling experience, and it is rewarding to support low vision users in leading more independent lives. I've also had the opportunity to venture out of my comfort zone which has helped me increase my confidence and refine my skills aiding me when I'm examining my own patients in practice too.

I'm excited for the year ahead as I learn more, meet new people and continue my role.



Marufah.

Visual Awareness Training

The Visual Awareness session was a fantastic opportunity to learn about guiding techniques and explore low vision aids designed to help individuals with low vision.

Participants were especially excited to try on simulation spectacles (sim specs) and engage in activities like pouring a drink. These hands-on experiences provided valuable insights into the daily challenges faced by their family members, friends, and colleagues with visual impairments. Jessica, one of our wonderful Visual Awareness trainers, shared her expertise on eye conditions to explain the effects created by the sim specs.

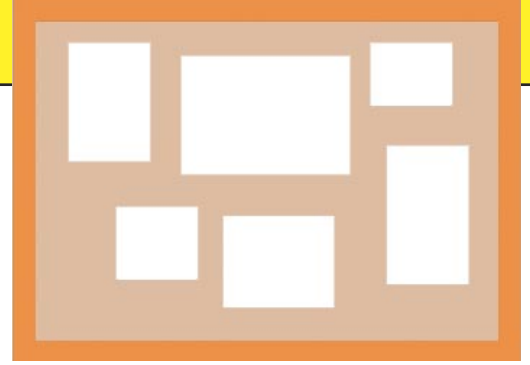
The event also included sighted guiding training, where attendees learned essential techniques for safely assisting individuals up and down stairs, navigating narrow spaces, and getting in and out of cars. These practical skills are incredibly useful for anyone supporting a person with low vision.

If you're interested in future Visual Awareness training sessions, please contact Lisa Drummond: Email: lisadrummond@sightconcern.org.uk
Telephone: **01582 256093**



Visual Awareness Training.

Volunteer News



A big thank you to all the volunteers that supported our National Eye Health Week!

We had lots of volunteers supporting at the event at Kings Church. Lionel demonstrated kites as well as being on hand to support visitors, Matt and Pat welcomed attendees, Mary, Cheryl, Jessica, Andrea and Rona supporting visitors as they explored our various stalls and refreshments...and they all took part in the wellbeing and seated dance sessions which was fantastic! The day would not have been the same without them, and we hope you can join us at next year's event!

IT with Tea

Our IT volunteers Stefan and Bob, who are both visually impaired, are on hand on a Wednesday afternoon in the Bedford office to talk tech tips, help with voiceover settings and how to use your phone to help navigate day to day life. So come along for some IT support with a cup of tea!

IT Support Calls

We were sad to say goodbye to our Luton IT Club volunteer Will, but although he has moved, he is still happy to support with over the phone tech talk. So, if you want to talk about how to make better use of screen readers, voiceover and more, get in touch.

For all IT support, please call **01234 311555** for further information.

The Volunteering Team

Welcome to the team John, Bob, Lucy and Derick, we're excited to have you on board!

Merry Christmas and thank you to all our volunteers, we look forward to celebrating those who can make it at our upcoming Christmas Coffee mornings.

If you'd like to be part of our wonderful volunteering team, contact Lisa Drummond **01582 256093** or email lisadrummond@sightconcern.org.uk

Upcoming Events

Our Visually Impaired Champion George is out and about across the county this year for more adventures meeting everyone!

We are joining many other local organisations, including Citizens Advice, Age UK Bedfordshire and Bedfordshire Fire Service to name but a few, at a free coffee morning drop-in session organised by East Bedford Primary Care Network at Christ the King Church Hall, Harrowden Road, Bedford, MK42 0SP from 10am – 12pm on Thursday 6th February. This is a regular event, normally on the first Thursday of each month. Please see our Facebook page or website for further dates later in the year. You will be able to access free support and information, or you can just pop in for a chat, or a free cup of tea.

Vision Zone Events 2025 with Optelec:

We'll be across the county with low vision equipment supplier Optelec on the following dates:

Vision Zone Wixams on Wednesday 19th February, we will be at Wixams Retirement Village, Wixams, Bedford MK42 6EA from 11am – 2.30pm.



Heidi and visitors at Wixam's Health and Wellbeing event.

Vision Zone Luton on Wednesday 12th March, we'll be at Bushmead Community Hub, Hancock Drive, Luton LU2 7SF from 11.30am – 2.30pm.

Vision Zone Biggleswade on Monday 16th June, we'll be at The Weatherley Centre, Eagle Farm Road, Biggleswade SG18 8JH from 11am – 2pm.

At these Vision Zone events, come and try out digital magnification equipment and come and talk to Sight Concern for advice on services and living aids, including assistive phone technology, to support those living with sight loss. Please see our social media for further details and updates including other organisations attending.

Professional Vision Services Flitwick Drop-in day on Tuesday 15th April at The Rufus Centre, Steppingley Road, Flitwick MK45 1AH. Come along from 10am - 2pm for demonstrations of Professional Vision Services latest magnification equipment as well as getting support and advice from the Sight Concern team.

Save the date

On Friday 3rd October, we'll be attending Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's annual Festival for Older People at the Rufus Centre in Flitwick open from 10am-2pm.

Please do come along to one or all of these free events, we would love to meet and greet you. Please keep an eye on our socials for more details and any other upcoming events.

Assistive Technology Appointments with George

Do you want to know more about Assistive Technology? Would you like to come and test out magnification and speech low vision aids, including the Orcam Read, with our Visually Impaired Champion George Hogman?

Sight Concern is opening up spaces on the first Tuesday of every month at our Bedford office's Assistive Tech Clinic. Address: 116 Bromham Road, Bedford MK40 2QN.

Spaces are limited to Bedfordshire and Luton residents only and pre-booking is essential. To book an appointment with George, please email office@sightconcern.org.uk or call us on **01234 311555**.



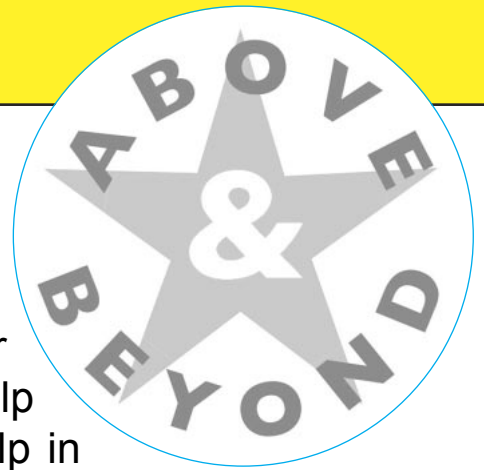
George Hogman.

Above & Beyond Award

As Christmas has come and gone and we're into a brand new shiny 2025, the Above and Beyond Award needs your input.

If you have had good service, or somebody or organisation, has gone above and beyond to help you access their service, or give you extra help in achieving what you wanted to do, we need to know and then Sight Concern can recognise them in the next edition of News & Views and present them with a certificate.

Previous winners have included Thameslink, The Card Factory, The Harpur Centre in Bedford, The Red Lion Hotel in Luton and Luton Town Football Club - all for their extra efforts in helping and assisting people with sight loss.



The Harpur Centre.



The Red Lion Hotel, Luton.



ThamesLink /



If you have a nomination, please email George at: georgehogman@sightconcern.org.uk or call us on **01234 311555**.

Our Visually Impaired Champion George would like to wish you all a very happy and prosperous new year.

VisionZone 2025

Solutions for Low Vision



Would you like to find out more about assistive technology, Support, Services, Groups and much more!

Our Vision Zone events bring together a variety of excellent services and charities covering your local area.

No matter what your sight loss condition we are here for you. Whether it's just to gain knowledge or hands on experience of new technologies, entry is free to our events, and our friendly staff will greet you with a warm welcome.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY!

Wednesday 19th February –

Wixham Retirement Village, Bedford Road, Bedford, MK42 6EA

Wednesday 12th March –

Bushmead Community Hub, Hancock Drive, Luton, LU2 7SF

Monday 16th June –

The Weatherley Centre, Sullivan Suite, Eagle Farm Road, Biggleswade, SG18 8JH

More information on timings and exhibitors will follow in another bulletin in conjunction with



0800 1456115

www.lowvisionshop.co.uk

Supporting Sight Concern Bedfordshire

If you would like to support this work by donating to us, you can:

Set up a standing order – to donate regularly. This will help us plan ahead to structure our services and activities. If you wish to donate in this way please contact Alison Taylor on **01234 311555** or email:

office@sightconcern.org.uk for a copy of the form and support with completing it.

Debit/Credit card – please contact Alison Taylor on **01234 311555** or email office@sightconcern.org.uk

Online – via the Donate Now button on our website:

<https://www.sightconcern.org.uk/>

JustGiving page – <https://www.justgiving.com/sight-concern>

Facebook – via our Sight Concern Bedfordshire page:

<https://www.facebook.com/sightconcernbeds/>

By Cheque – to Sight Concern Bedfordshire, 116 Bromham Rd, Bedford, MK40 2QN

By Leaving us a gift in your will – When arranging your affairs, please consider us in your last will and testament by leaving us a lasting legacy to support blind and partially sighted people across Bedfordshire.

Please contact us with any queries on **01234 311555**

Email office@sightconcern.org.uk

Thank you for your support.



Getting in Touch

Please contact us by telephone or email

10am to 3pm Monday to Friday

Telephone 01234 311555

Email: office@sightconcern.org.uk

Website: <https://www.sightconcern.org.uk/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sightconcernbeds/>

Feedback: We are always looking for your feedback on the magazine and all of our services. Good or bad it all helps us to get a better idea on how our services impact you. Please do get in contact with us to share your thoughts. It really does help us to shape the charity and the services we deliver.

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