



Helping Blind and Disabled People

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Newsletter Winter 2018

Here's hoping you all had a Merry Christmas and wishing you a Happy New Year!

There's been a lot happening at the Reader Service since our last newsletter and there are more exciting times ahead as we begin to celebrate our 30th year. The Reader Service was formed in October 1988 and there have been many major changes over the decades. We'll keep you up to date on all the activities we are planning during the year. We would like to welcome all our new volunteers and service users and hope you enjoy becoming part of our small charity.

Management Committee:

There have been some changes to our Management Committee. We would like to thank Caroline Pearson for her work as Chairperson for the past year. She has now stood down and our new Chairperson as of last August is Judy Smith with Paula Suchy as her Vice Chairperson.



Registered Charity No. 1169548

Walnut Tree
Community
Shop

Chairperson:



Judy lost her sight totally overnight when she was five and a half. She attended special boarding schools for visually impaired children before graduating in history and training as a psychiatric social worker. She worked at the Maudsley Hospital in London, West Lambeth Health Authority and RNIB before taking early retirement because of a back problem. She then became a trustee of Action for Blind People as well as being on the Board of Governors for New College, Worcester and a special needs school in Peckham. Judy and her husband moved to Olney four years ago and they have both had personal experience of the Reader Service as service users.

The current members of the Management Committee are:

Service Users

Judy Smith - Chairperson

Paula Suchy MBE - Vice Chairperson & Fundraiser

Jeff Bashton

Elaine Maries - Shop Representative & Grant Applications

Caroline Pearson - Talks Project

Nana Frempong - Co-opted

Volunteers

Stephen Harrison Treasurer

Lynn Bovis - Minutes Secretary

Terry Calvert - Grant Applications & Publicity

Mark Lawrence - Data Protection

Two of our long serving committee members, Michael Baldry and Paula Varey, have stood down. Michael has served on the committee in a number of roles since 2001. Paula Varey was Chairperson for 12 years, our Walnut Tree Community Shop Representative and one of our major fundraisers. She has played a major role and made a substantial contribution towards the development of the Reader Service. Luckily, both Michael and Paula wish to continue their involvement with the Reader Service in lots of ways, but we will miss them at our meetings.

New members are always welcome on the Management Committee, so please get in touch with Karen if you would like to join our team.

New Employee:



Due to the growth of the Reader Service, we now have a second employee (and a second Karen!). Karen Armstrong has joined us this January to work five hours a week. Karen has been working with us as a volunteer for almost 3 years and has also been recording the local theatre brochures. She is looking forward to getting to know everyone.

New Premises:

We have settled into our new premises at Margaret Powell House. We now have a safer and more pleasant environment for staff, committee members and volunteers, and can benefit from the networking opportunities by being part of a voluntary-sector hub.



Our room has been beautifully brightened up by an amazing lino cut representation of Milton Keynes which was presented to us by members of Eye 4 Art at our AGM. We also now have a fully functional transcription room enabling us to further develop our transcription and braille service.

Eddie Mann:



Eddie Mann, author of *Ordinary Unthinkable*, released on 31st July 2017, is supporting Milton Keynes Reader Service. His book is already in high demand and Eddie is attending book signing events, speaking on radio shows and has already featured in our local newspaper, *Milton Keynes Citizen*. At all these events he is publicising the Reader Service and informing everyone about the various ways we can help sight impaired people living within Milton Keynes.

Paula Suchy, Elaine Maries and Terry Calvert, all members of our Management Committee joined Eddie at his book launch at Waterstones on 7 September. It is very exciting for the Reader Service and something new to us! During the evening Eddie signed his bookmarks, raising £100, which he later donated to the Reader Service.

Thanks Eddie for all your help – we are really pleased that you are supporting us!

Information Updates:

Many of our volunteers will have already had calls from Hilary regarding their volunteering experience. She will now be contacting service users to ensure that we are meeting their needs and also to update our emergency contact numbers.

Most Recent Support Meeting:

Thank you everyone who joined us at our support meeting in October.

We had a slightly different format this year and invited a number of groups and organisations whom we thought may be of interest to our members.

The Lions Club distributed their 'message in a bottle'. This is a really simple but brilliant idea. Anyone taking part in the scheme keeps a small plastic bottle in their fridge which contains information regarding their medication and contact numbers. A special sticker on the person's front door notifies any emergency service that the bottle with these details will be in the fridge and they can start helping the person immediately. Please contact Karen if you would like to know more about this scheme.



We were also joined by representatives from Torch, SARC, Sound News, Macular Degeneration Group and Alternate Visions Coaching. BucksVision opened their resource room and Lesley Townsend distributed leaflets about their walking, yoga and dance groups. The Moles also met people and handed out leaflets about bowling.

During the afternoon there was plenty of time for tea, coffee and cake. Thank you to all the ladies in the kitchen who, as usual, did a wonderful job.

Thank you also to Marilyn and everyone that helped with the raffle, we raised over £200 and thank you to everyone else that helped make it a really good afternoon!

Cabaret Review:



Our festive fundraising took a slightly different form with our Cabaret Afternoon. This event enabled some of our more extrovert service users and volunteers to entertain over 130 of us with their talents. We had some beautiful poem reading from Liz Roe and Judy Smith and some less classical pieces from Pauline Sheers and Alison Statham.

The musical elements included a very amusing rendition of Benny Hill's Ernie: the Fastest Milkman in the West by our esteemed treasurer, Steven Harrison; some sublime

flute playing by Sally Easton, a great acapella set, organised by Linda Round with her 'Ladies who Sing' Group and Steve Nealle kept us all spellbound with his rendition of Fleetwood Mac's Albatross on his guitar. A Christmas sing-along was accompanied by Fadin' Shoes and the whole was ably compéred by Alison Statham.

Thank you to Paula Suchy for organising the event and to all those who, as always, so ably assisted with the quiz, the raffle and the refreshments. Perhaps this could become an annual event? If you have talents to share, please let us know and next time, it could be you.....!

Lovat Fields and Shenley Wood Residential Villages:

Marilyn is continuing to run the coffee mornings and read the newsletter for people with visual impairment living at Lovat Fields, every other Monday. Marcia Gleeson has started up a similar group at Shenley Wood. It meets on the first Monday of the month and she is including visits and information from other visual impairment groups and organization like SARC and Bucks Vision.

Fundraising Activities:

A big thank you to everyone who gives up extra time to take part in our fundraising. The most recent events were a collection at Dobbies Garden Centre and the Community Foundation Car Raffle.

Paula Climbs Snowdon:



One of our largest fundraising events this year was completed by our very own Paula Suchy. She describes her challenging sponsored Snowdon climb:

“My family and I completed our sponsored climb up Snowdon on Tuesday 12th September. There were 5 of us – Andy, Richard, Stella,

Stephan and myself.

We were on the mountain for 8 hours in total, it took 4 hours to climb up, about an hour’s rest, and 3 hours to walk down again.

We took all the advice given regarding equipment, clothing etc. and set off in good weather, so we were not expecting that the weather would turn quite as nasty as it did. Unfortunately my waterproofs were not up to the extreme weather conditions and I was soaked through. I was also very nervous about the walk down as it is so much harder than going up but I just had to go for it as there was no alternative. Stephan had hard work guiding me and trying to pick the safest places to place our feet.

We were all extremely wet by the time we reached the walkers’ cafe at the bottom of the mountain but we certainly felt a great sense of achievement, although the weather did rather spoil our enjoyment.

This was the hardest physical challenge I have ever undertaken and I am not sure that I would have struggled right to the top if it hadn't been for the generous people who had sponsored me and I didn't want to let the charities down."

Congratulations to Paula and her family!

Look out for more fundraising events during our 30th Anniversary year!

Milton Keynes Theatre:

Many of you will know that we offer a facilitation service to our members so that they can enjoy trips to the theatre. Many local shows offer audio-described performances and touch tours. Milton Keynes Theatre currently has the following available:

Matthew Bourne's Cinderella, Saturday 17 February

Audio described performance at 2.30pm, touch tour at 1.00pm

Beautiful – The Carole King Story, Thursday 22 February

Audio described performance 7.30pm, touch tour 6pm

Tosca – Friday 6 April

Audio described performance 7.15pm, touch tour 6pm

Hairspray – Friday 13 April

Audio described performance 7.30pm, touch tour
6.30pm

The Little Mermaid – Saturday 21 April

Audio described performance 2.30pm

Matilda -The Musical – Thursday 21 June

Audio described performance 7.30pm

An Officer and a Gentleman – The Musical – Friday 13
July

Audio described performance 7.30pm

War Horse – Friday 28 September

Audio described performance 7.30pm, touch tour
5.30pm

Fond Farewells:

Sadly we have, once again, had to say farewell to some of our service users recently. We would particularly like to mention Barry Mook and Rob Read. Thank you to their volunteers: Trevor & Maria and Natalie & Ernie, for all the kindness and help that they gave these service users.

We also lost Philip Kent after a short illness in the summer. Philip originally came to us as a service user but for over 6 years, he also helped as a volunteer at all our get-togethers: moving furniture to get the room

ready and welcoming you all, alongside Jenny. He was amazing at woodwork and made several beautiful bird boxes for us to auction at our quiz nights. We miss him dearly.

We would also like to thank all our volunteers who have retired this year or moved away. In particular, we would like to thank Karen Murphy who has had a wonderful partnership with Liz Roe and is now returning to New Zealand. We know that they shall remain firm friends!

Finally, we would like to thank all our wonderful volunteers and fundraisers, without whom we could not exist. You are all amazing!

A Date for your Diary:

Everyone is invited to our New Year Coffee Morning on Saturday 27 January from 10am until 12 noon at The Peartree Centre. See you there!