

Milton Keynes Reader Service

Trustees Annual Report July 2018

Registered Charity No. 1169548

This Annual Report is also available in
Braille or in audio formats on request

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Introduction and Background

The Milton Keynes Reader Service (MKRS) has been running for 30 years.

It was originally set up in 1988 as a pilot project under the umbrella of the Milton Keynes Council of Disabled People, headed up by Liz Roe, who ran the service from her spare bedroom! The first service users were a pair of twin sisters who wanted help with their Christmas cards. The second was our very own Paula Suchy!

The Transcription Service was introduced as a remote reader for people requiring access to meeting minutes, etc, and steadily braille and audio cassettes were produced as needed. After approximately four years the cultural access service was introduced to facilitate theatre trips and gallery visits.

The whole ethos of the service has always been to assist visually impaired people to achieve a level of independence. In 1992 it became an independent charity offering free services to any adult living in Milton Keynes who finds reading or writing difficult due to visual or physical disabilities. Although Liz moved on to work with other charities, she has always remained involved with MKRS in many ways, from serving on the Management Committee in various roles to being a current member of the Talks Project.

In celebration of this anniversary, and starting in October 2018, we are planning a year-long programme of special events.

Services

We carefully match each trained volunteer to their service user by discussing interests and background at interview: for example a love of opera, crosswords or shopping. This regularly leads to successful and lasting relationships, our current record being twenty years.

The people who use our services arrange their own visits from their volunteer to suit their needs on a temporary, occasional or permanent basis.

Reading and Writing

This is a face-to-face service delivered to people in their own homes. It can include reading for pleasure, helping with correspondence and form filling, doing puzzles, or even playing scrabble.

Facilitation

We have a growing range of facilitation services:

- Our “Shop and See” service introduces a volunteer to a service user so they can arrange to go shopping together. This could be fortnightly grocery shopping, or pleasure shopping for clothes or presents.
- Volunteers provide support for one-off local trips to the theatre, cinema, seminars, art galleries and educational and cultural activities. There is a growing demand for this popular service.

- Our volunteers help with Bucks Vision's 'Eye for Art' Group, where sight impaired people meet on the first Thursday of the month for art and craft activities.

Many people use both the Reading and Writing and the Facilitation services.

Transcription

We offer a free transcription service to enable any of our service users to have their paperwork transcribed into large print or Braille, or onto CD or audio cassette.

For a small charge, we also transcribe work for other charities onto CD or audio tape. This has included regular transcription of minutes of meetings onto audio tape for the Milton Keynes Moles (bowling for the visually impaired), transcription on to CD for MK Disability Advisory Group (DAG) and for the Milton Keynes Sensory Services.

Information on our commercial transcription work is given later in this Report.

Service Users

We continue to have a steady growth in the number of people using our services, with visually impaired people joining us every year, either directly or via local agencies.

Many of the people using our services are over 70, often with Age Related Macular Degeneration, living alone and isolated within their community. However, we also provide support for people who have become visually impaired at a younger age and want to access a more active lifestyle.

We also provide volunteers for people with severe dyslexia, Cerebral Palsy, Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis and those who have had strokes. We signpost people using our services to other relevant agencies, such as Sound News (local talking newspaper), Bucks Vision clubs and the local Macular Society Support Group.

Here is one service user's story:

Gina Webb

I first heard about the Reader Service a couple of years ago, when Paula Suchy gave a talk at a Macular Society meeting. When I contacted MKRS, I asked if I



could have a reader and a shopper. I have been lucky enough to have had the same two volunteers since then. I have fun with both of them and look forward to seeing them. They are friends now. On a shopping trip it is very helpful to have someone checking labels for ingredients and

remembering what I do and don't like. We have a lovely

outing every fortnight doing a general shop. My reader helps with reading and writing of general paperwork, my diary, financial matters, looking up information and making difficult phone calls for me (which she is particularly good at). For a long time before this I had managed paperwork with a magnifier. I spread the word to others about MKRS when I can.

Volunteers

We could not provide our services without the high quality commitment of our volunteers. We have just over 100 people helping us in various ways, quite often in several capacities.

In addition to supporting our three core services, volunteers also help record and edit our transcription work, serve on committees, help at coffee mornings and other social events, attend networking stands and run the Talks Project (a group set up to promote our services to clubs, charities and other agencies within Milton Keynes). We have three volunteers who regularly help in the office: Hilary Robertson who helps with research and various 'one off' tasks and also contacts service users and volunteers, to see if they are happy with their arrangements; Barbara Burgess who helps with office administration; and Lesley Marshall who helps with newsletters and reports. We have also had generous IT support from Martyn Lycett from MCL Studios.

It is vital to the quality of our service that our volunteers are reliable, trustworthy and knowledgeable. Current

volunteers are Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked every five years.

All new volunteers are also DBS checked and personal references taken. They attend a full day's training course covering different eye conditions, our core services, confidentiality, adults at risk and data protection. We held three training days during this year.

We also hold a two-hour practical course where new volunteers learn how to guide, including using stairs and escalators. They are then paired with a service user for a practice session around Central Milton Keynes shopping centre.

Once a new volunteer has completed the courses, the Service Co-ordinator will place them with a service user, carefully matching similar interests or outlook. The Service Co-ordinator will then monitor them to check that both volunteer and service user are happy with the arrangement.

Here is one volunteer's story:

Terry Calvert

I have been a volunteer for MK Readers for five years and a trustee for the past two years. I saw an advert in the MK Flyer. I had been very short sighted since a child and had had several eye operations in the preceding years, so I was grateful for the reasonable sight I still had. I felt empathy with those who had not



been so lucky and I wanted to spend some of the increasing time I had available as a volunteer.

I met Karen to find out more and was fortunate that a training course was due to take place within a few weeks. I have now worked with several service users, some on a short-term basis, others regularly, and it is amazing how different and interesting people's needs are, from reading correspondence, newspapers and novels, to completing forms and care records. In the last couple of years I have joined the Committee as a trustee. Now I am involved with colleagues in ensuring that the service is run responsibly for the benefit of service users, but also the "fun" stuff, like being part of the team to go on "Eggheads" (hopefully to get some useful promotion for the service) and helping to organise events to celebrate 30 years of the Reader Service in 2018.

Management

The Milton Keynes Reader Service is a user-led organisation run by a Management Committee of Trustees, whose members serve on an annual basis. Five user representatives (including the Chairperson) and four volunteers are elected annually at the AGM. Further committee members can be co-opted as required.

Management Committee Members 2017/2018

User Representatives

Judy Smith (Chairperson)

Paula Suchy MBE (Vice Chairperson, Training & Fundraising)

Elaine Maries (Walnut Tree Community Shop Representative/Grants Co-ordinator)

Caroline Pearson (Talks Project Co-ordinator)

Jeff Bashton

Nana Frempong (Co-opted)

Volunteer Representatives

Stephen Harrison (Treasurer)

Lynn Bovis (Minutes Secretary)

Terry Calvert (Grants Co-ordinator)

Mark Lawrence (Co-opted Trustee and Data Protection Officer)

Chairperson Judy Smith

I was elected by the Management Committee to become Chairperson in August, 2017, and I would like to thank my predecessor, Caroline Pearson, for all her hard work during her time as Chair.



I had been a service user for four years and a member of the Management Committee for two years. I knew that it would be a steep learning curve for me, but I have been greatly assisted by

committed and enthusiastic Trustees.

I very much value the support of the Service Coordinator, Karen Preece, who has helped me understand the day to day work of the office, the process of inducting and matching new volunteers, networking with other organisations, and organising and running the service. She has also ensured that I am familiar with the policies and procedures of the service.

This year, she has worked very hard, together with our lead Trustee, Mark Lawrence and with generous IT support from Martyn Lycett from MCL Studios, to ensure that our procedures will comply with the new Data Protection Regulations which come into force in May 2018.

Realising the huge increase in her work load, (the numbers of service users and volunteers has doubled over the past six years) the Committee decided to appoint a part-time office assistant and the post was advertised within the organisation. We were delighted to appoint Karen Armstrong, who took up the position in January 2018, initially on a nine month contract.

It is an exciting time to be Chairperson of the Reader Service as we celebrate our 30th birthday during 2018. We have special events planned throughout the year, with our main birthday party scheduled for October.

I would like to thank everyone who has supported me since I took on this role last August and to say how much I enjoy being part of such a vibrant and friendly organisation.

Staff

The work of the Milton Keynes Reader Service is carried out by its part-time Service Co-ordinator, Karen Preece and office assistant, Karen Armstrong.

Karen Preece

Karen is responsible for the day to day administration of the Charity. This includes recruiting, training and



supporting the volunteers and matching them with service users.

She also manages the office, organises events and committees, writes updates to members, writes reports and oversees the website as well as attending relevant workshops, courses and events to keep up to date and to publicise the work of the Service.

Karen is now assisted for five hours a week by Karen Armstrong on tasks including transcription and website work.

Finances

The Reader Service has lived within its means in the 2017-18 financial year. Although there was a paper deficit of just over £5,600 in the financial year this was due to the timing of the payment for building works at Margaret Powell House, the receipt of the grant for these works from the Milton Keynes Community

Foundation and a further grant from the Foundation for theatre trips to allow some service users to celebrate our 30th anniversary. When these are taken into account the Reader Service ran a cash surplus of just over £580.

Increases in donations and fundraising activities allowed the Reader Service to cover the increase in running costs caused by the occupation of the office at Margaret Powell House for the full financial year and taking on an additional member of staff towards the end of the financial year. However, there will be an increased funding challenge next year due to higher staff salaries. The Management Committee will keep its plan to bridge the funding gap under review to learn lessons from the outturn of the 2017-18 financial year. The Reader Service has sufficient financial reserves to cushion it should it fail to cover all running costs in 2018-19.

The item of expenditure from the 2016-17 financial year which was in dispute, namely rent charges for our old office at Tinkers Bridge, was settled during the 2017-18 financial year at no cost to the Reader Service. The amount in dispute was £1,076.44.

(For more information please see accounts)

Funding

It costs the Charity an average of £340 per service user per year to provide a regular service.

Approximately one third of our income this year came from Milton Keynes Council. We are very grateful for their continuing grant of £12,444.

We also receive funding from other sources including:

Walnut Tree Community Shop

We are one of the beneficiaries of the profits from this shop. We received a total of £7,250 in this financial year.



This continues to be a vital source of income for us, second only to the level of support from Milton Keynes Council. Our shop representative updates the trustees every two months regarding our developments and reports back to the Management

Committee. We are very grateful to everyone who donates their unwanted items to the shop and to the staff and volunteers who work in the shop.

The shop address is 4 Fyfield Barrow, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK7 7AN Telephone : 01908 607666

Milton Keynes Community Foundation (MKCF)

MKCF has been very generous and supportive this year, continuing to heavily subsidise the rent in our new office at Margaret Powell House.

The Reader Service once again took part in the MKCF Annual 50/50 raffle, which is run with Volkswagen and Centre MK. This year we raised £466.70 plus gift aid.

The Community Foundation also chose us as one of three local charities to present a talk to the High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire about our activities.

Transcription Work

Commercially, we have volunteers who regularly transcribe the theatre brochures for ATG Aylesbury, ATG Milton Keynes and Royal and Derngate Northampton Theatres onto CD, raising just under £2,153. This year we are also transcribing for two additional theatres: the Sunderland Empire and The Core at Corby.

Donations

We continue to receive generous donations throughout the year from a variety of sources and individuals, including service users and volunteers.

The Maltsters Arms in Fenny Stratford also regularly raise money for us via a collection box.

Sadly, from time to time we lose someone who used our services. Often, the family requests that the Reader Service receive donations instead of flowers being sent. We are very grateful that the families think of us at such sad times. We try to attend the funeral whenever possible.

Service User Donations

We ask service users to make an annual voluntary donation if they can. Many people also gift aid their

donation and this year we raised £2,375.30. If service users cannot donate, it does not affect the service they receive from us.

Flag Days etc

We secured four flag days at Dobbies Garden Centre during 2017/18. Collections from July until this March raised just over £1,100.

We also participated in the Waitrose token scheme, raising £318.

LocalGiving.Com

We continue to subscribe to this website, which enables charities to promote their organisation to potential donors.

From time to time Milton Keynes Community Foundation offers to match donations made to local charities up to defined limits.

This year we raised an additional £2,125 by participating in these two opportunities.

General Fundraising



Over the year a number of fundraising activities have taken place. One of the largest was completed by our very own Paula Suchy, who undertook a sponsored climb of Snowdon with her family. They were on the

mountain for eight hours in total in extreme weather conditions. Paula managed to raise a brilliant £782.00 for the Reader Service from this really hard physical challenge.

We also held another of our popular fundraising Quiz Evenings and a Cabaret afternoon featuring the varied talents of our volunteers and service users. A large audience was well entertained by poetry readings, singers and musicians.



Support Meetings and AGM

In May we held an interactive evening for our volunteers.



Our aim was to try to give examples of living with various kinds of sight loss. With the aid of sim specs we set up stands with tasks to be carried out, such as navigating a room with tunnel vision, or pouring drinks with macular degeneration. We also had tasks involving Braille and a display of equipment and aids.

For our October meeting, we invited other groups and organisations whom we thought may be of interest to our members. These included the Lions club who distributed their 'message in a bottle'. Participants in the scheme keep a small plastic bottle in their fridge containing details of their medication and contact

numbers. If needed, emergency services know from a sticker on the front door where this important information is kept.

We were also joined by representatives from Torch,



SARC, Sound News, Macular Degeneration Group and Alternate Visions Coaching. Bucks Vision opened their resource room

and distributed leaflets, and The Moles visually impaired bowls club also gave out information.

Annual General Meeting

Our previous AGM was held on Saturday 29 July 2017.

This year there have been some changes to the Management Committee, James Clifton stood down earlier in the year due to work commitments and we have also lost two of our long serving committee members, Michael Baldry and Paula Varey. Michael gave valuable long term support on the committee in a number of roles since 2001. Paula Varey also stood down from the Management Committee. She was Chairperson for 12 years, had been the Walnut Tree Community Shop Representative and also one of the fundraisers, including the organising of flag days and our part in the Community Foundation Car Raffle. She has played a major role and made a substantial contribution towards the development of the Reader Service.

The cost of running all our events is covered by the proceeds of raffles and donations, not from our core fundraising.

We have a regular team of volunteers who help set up the room, greet people, run the raffle and help serve tea, coffee and cakes. We would like to give them special thanks for all their help.

There is also a major commitment in terms of providing the transport and support needed to enable our service users to attend these meetings and events.

Coffee and Chat



We hold a fortnightly coffee morning at Lovat Fields Extracare Village for any resident who is sight impaired. This is run by one of our volunteers, Marilyn Barby, and is used to update them about activities within their Village and other events they may be interested in.

A similar group, run by another volunteer, Marcia Gleeson, takes place at Shenley Wood Extracare Village, and this includes visits and information from other visual impairment groups and organisations.



Anniversary Celebrations

As part of the celebrations for our 30th Anniversary, a team of five people from the Reader Service took part in the “Eggheads” TV quiz programme. This involved a trip to the studio in Glasgow and two hours of recording. The result is a closely guarded secret until the programme is aired later in the year.



Other celebratory events are planned for the rest of the year.

Publicity and Information

Talks Project

We regularly give talks to inform all kinds of local groups and organisations about what we do and to reach potential service users and volunteers. The project is jointly coordinated by a Trustee and a

volunteer who organise a group of service users and volunteers trained to give presentations. We are always looking for more opportunities to publicise our work.

Newsletters

We produce newsletters and updates every year which are posted to all our service users and emailed to our volunteers. The Service Co-ordinator also emails a regular 'update' leaflet to our volunteers, so they can read details of the latest events and news to their service users.

Website

Our website gives full information about our services and we continually update it with information and photographs. We have found that potential volunteers often use it to find out more about us. We also publish items on our Facebook page.

www.miltonkeynesreaderservice.org.uk

www.facebook.com/mkreaderservice

Exhibitions and Events

We have attended many events this year in order to publicise our services, attract potential volunteers, and offer help to further potential service users.

We have also joined the Chamber of Commerce to make use of the networking and publicity opportunities it provides.

Our Thanks

We are grateful to all our providers of income.

Our services are provided by our volunteers without whom our organisation would not survive and to whom, on behalf of our service users, we offer our wholehearted thanks.



Walnut Tree
Community
Shop

