

Sensory Centres Caithness

Two sensory centres are now open in Caithness. We are in partnership with Caithness Deaf Care and have come together to provide a one-stop-shop facility to meet your needs. Manned by volunteers, the resource centres contain a range of information and equipment available for you to try out. It is also hoped to offer computer training – from the very, very simple to the more complicated, depending on your needs and experience. Unfortunately we have been unable to recruit volunteers to support the centres – either by simply offering a few hours per week to man the centres or to support the computer training but we will keep trying and are currently relying on the goodwill of volunteers with Caithness Deaf Care. Perhaps in Caithness if you feel you or someone you know could offer some time we would be delighted to hear from. The centres can also be used for small group meetings so if anyone would like to see a groups develop in Caithness please let us know. The address of the centres is:

The Sensory Centre, 23 Telford Street, Wick Tel: 01955 606170

The Sensory Centre, 9 Riverside Place, Thurso Tel: 01847 895636

Stop Press

Caithness Access Panel are currently seeking to recruit new members. If anyone is interested contact us here for more details.

Contact Us

General Enquiries: 01463 233663

e-mail: highlandvision@hotmail.com

38 Ardconnel Street

Inverness

IV2 3 EX

Resource Centre: 01463 233663

e-mail: resource.centre@hsbp-karten.co.uk

Karten IT Centre: 01463 229789

e-mail: Mary.MacDonald@hsbp-karten.co.uk

SIGHT LINES

MARCH 2005

Welcome to the second edition of the SIGHT LINES newsletter. We would remind you that you can contribute to this newsletter. If there are any issues you would like us to include or information you would like us to feature let us know.

New Service At Raigmore Hospital

A new patient support service will be available shortly at Raigmore Hospital. Following discussions with the Consultant Ophthalmologists and clinic staff we have agreed to offer immediate support to visually impaired people at the time of diagnosis. A room near the eye clinic has been identified and is currently being prepared for our use.

The patient support programme will be very much patient led. Anyone attending the eye clinic can ask to see our staff and referrals will also be made directly by the doctors and clinic staff.

Initially a patient support worker will be available two days per week but we hope, if successful in our funding bid, to offer support at the eye clinic five days per week. We would also wish to extend this service to the other hospitals around the region where eye clinics are held.

So, if you are attending Raigmore, look out for our posters and leaflets.

Are You Between 16 and 60?

At a recent meeting with a group of visually impaired people within the above age range a suggestion was put forward that they would like to meet up with others throughout the region, get to know one another and share ideas, etc. It was suggested that a meeting be arranged in Inverness where all interested could meet up. We would certainly be willing to facilitate such a meeting. Firstly we need to know how many would be interested in attending. To help with this we have enclosed a form which you should return to us. If sufficient people are interested we will go ahead with arrangements in consultation with a small working group of visually impaired people. The format of the day will be decided by this steering group.

Employment Needs Survey

Throughout Highland, as elsewhere, there is a very high unemployment rate amongst disabled people. We know from our own records the high number of visually impaired people who are without a job. To help in service planning we are currently looking at the needs of people in this age group and you can help us. Enclosed is an employment questionnaire and we would ask you to please complete this and return it to us in the envelope provided. It is completely anonymous but will provide us with a considerable insight into unemployment in the Highlands for our service users. Thank you for your assistance with this.

Do you live on the Black Isle?

Would you be interested in attending a Monthly Support Group Meeting for people who have a visual impairment?

There have been some requests from clients living on the Black Isle for such a group to be formed. The format for the meetings would be informal, providing information, but more importantly the opportunity to meet with others who may be experiencing similar difficulties and challenges as a result of sight loss, with the chance to exchange ideas in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. It is anticipated that the meetings would take place on one afternoon a month, lasting approximately a couple of hours with a venue in Fortrose having been suggested as an accessible location. However this is all open to suggestions and does depend on where the majority can easily travel to.

If you would be interested in attending such a group and/or helping to organise and run it please contact Tina to register your interest on 01463 233663.

If you wish to check if there is a Support Group Meeting currently running in your area (there are several throughout the Highlands) please phone on 01463 233663.

Warm Deal & Central Heating Programme

During the recent cold weather have you become more aware that your home is cold or difficult to heat? If so, you may be eligible for a grant to improve it!! An organisation called 'EAGA Partnership', who are based in Edinburgh, work on behalf of the Scottish Executive to provide grants for insulation and central heating.

There are two schemes being promoted throughout Scotland:

1) 'Warm Deal' - offers grants for a range of energy-saving measures. You may be eligible for up to £500 towards:

Handy Kitchen Measure

KEY: YP =Yoghurt pot

Tbs = level plastic tablespoon

MACARONI	1 YP = 3oz	3 tbs = 1 oz
OATS	1 YP = 2oz	4 tbs = 1 oz
SUGAR	1 YP = 4oz	2 tbs = 1 oz
ICING SUGAR	1 YP = 3oz	3 tbs = 1 oz
RICE	1 YP = 5oz	2 tbs = 1 oz
CORNFLOUR		2 tbs = 1 oz
BREAD CRUMBS	1 YP = 1oz	
CHEESE	1 YP = 2oz	
COCOA		3 tbs = 1 oz
DRIED FRUIT	1 YP = 4oz	2 tbs = 1 oz
SEMOLINA	1 YP = 4oz	2 tbs = 1 oz
FLOUR	1 YP = 3oz	2 tbs = 1 oz
SUET		3 tbs = 1 oz
SYRUP		1 tbs = 1 oz
LIQUID	1 YP or 8 tbs = quarter pint	
SOFT MARG	1 tbs scoop = 1 oz	
HARD MARG	1 finger width = 1 oz	

Government Strategy To Transform The Life Chances Of Disabled people

The Government has published what is describes as a radical strategy for transforming the life chances of disabled people. The final report on a year-long project states that by 2025 disabled people should have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life and be respected and included as equal members of society.

The report makes recommendations across four key areas:

Independent Living – increasing disabled people’s ability to live independently at home, at work and in the community with support based on personal need, choice and empowerment through a major expansion of direct payments in the form of individual budgets.

Early years and family support – family-focused support, childcare and early education that enables families with young disabled children to achieve ‘ordinary lives’ and remain economically and socially included.

Transition to adulthood – planning focused on the individual needs of disabled young people, based on smooth provision of support and services during transition and leading to appropriate opportunities and choices in adulthood.

Employment – early intervention supporting disabled people to stay in touch with the labour market; improving the employment prospects of disabled people through ongoing personalised support, with employers supported in a key role, while providing security for those unable to work.

Bierley MonoMouse

The MonoMouse – A Revolutionary Device that Restores the Ability to Read.

Simple to use- Just plug the MonoMouse into your existing TV.

Requires a SCART connection. No complicated wires or tuning involved.

Extremely comfortable to use – Ideal for reading your favourite Newspaper, Magazine or Book.

- Just scroll over the text and begin READING.
- Magnifies printed text, making it easier to read.
- Portable – Why stop reading when you aren’t at home?

The MonoMouse is great to take on holiday or anytime you visit a friend, providing you have accessto a television set. Affordable : £99.00

For more information call the Resource Centre on 01463 233663.

Cavity Wall Insulation

Loft, Tank & Pipe Insulation

Draughtproofing

Energy Efficient Light Bulbs

Energy Advice

You would qualify for a grant of up to £500 if you or your spouse own or rent your home and also receive Benefits such as Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Council Tax or Housing Benefit, Income Support, and Pension Credit. Even if you are not claiming any benefits, if you are age 60 or over you could still be entitled to a 25% grant of up to £125.

2) 'Free Central Heating Programme' - A grant that provides free central heating for older people living in private housing. It offers a grant for:

- Free central heating providing heat to the main living areas such as the living room, hall, bathroom and main bedroom or bedrooms.
- Free insulation, cavity wall insulation, loft, tank and pipe insulation and draughtproofing.
- Free carbon-monoxide detector, smoke detector and cold alarm, which tells you when your home is too cold for your health.
- Free check to make sure that you are receiving all the state benefits you are entitled to.

To qualify:

- You or your partner must be age 60 or over.
- Your home must not currently have a central heating system.
- You must either own your own home or rent it from a private landlord.
- You may still be eligible even if your home has a central heating system if it is completely broken down and unable to be repaired.
- If you are age 80 or over and your home is partially heated or your heating system is not efficient you may be entitled to a new or upgraded system.

Eaga Partnership tell us that applying for one of the Grants is easy and that they have done everything they can to make applying simple and easy to understand. Information Booklets on the Schemes are available in Large Print, Audio Cassette and in Braille on request.

Helpline Numbers:

For 'Warm Deal' - 0800 072 0150 (Freephone Number)

For 'Central Heating Programme' - 0800 316 1653 (Freephone Number)

(Lines are open Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.30pm)

If you have access to the Internet you may wish to visit the web site of EAGA Partnership. The address is: www.eaga.co.uk

Eye On Macular Degeneration

In the centre of the retina at the back of the eye there's a small area called the macula. This is responsible for clear, central vision, letting you enjoy everyday activities like writing, reading, watching TV and driving.

In some people the macula gradually deteriorates leading to loss of central, detailed vision. Because this painless process becomes increasingly common with age, it's known as Age Related Macular Degeneration, or AMD. The risk of the condition is increased in smokers and those with high blood pressure.

AMD is the most common cause of registered blindness. This doesn't mean there's a total loss of sight, but remaining sight is poor enough to make daily living difficult.

In AMD, things directly in front of you look blurred, and vision is also distorted, so straight things like lamp-posts and window frames can look wavy. AMD usually starts in one eye but, unfortunately, the other eye is also likely to be affected in time. Eventually dark or empty spots known as scotoma may block the central vision. But outer vision is unaffected so you can still see 'out of the corner of your eye'.

AMD is either 'dry' or 'wet'. Dry AMD is by far the most common form, developing slowly over some years. Unfortunately there is no treatment as yet for this. Wet AMD may come on more suddenly causing sight loss within weeks. In some cases laser therapy or a treatment called photodynamic therapy may limit further vision loss but can't restore what's already lost.

If there is no treatment is there anything else to be suggested? There's some evidence of benefit from the nutrients in certain foods which may help maintain healthy cells and tissues in the eyes. These foods include brightly coloured fruit and vegetables like oranges, dried apricots, carrots, tomatoes, sweet peppers, sweet potatoes, broccoli and sprouts, and especially green leafy vegetables like kale and spinach. The 'active ingredient' in green leafy vegetables is lutein. Some studies suggest that lutein supplements may help but you should talk to your doctor before taking these.

Easter Ross Open Day**Wednesday 30th March****Averon Centre****Alness****10a.m. to 4p.m.**

Come and have a chat and find out more about the latest in aids and equipment.

Catriona will be there with a range of equipment and aids which are all available from our Resource Centre.

Tina and Jenny two of our Rehabilitation Officers will be available on the day to talk to you about any issues that are of concern. Bring a friend or member of the family and with the use of "Sim Specs" they can experience first hand how it feels to have a Visual Impairment. Want to find out more about local support groups? Tina and Jenny can give you information on who to contact and when they meet

Pat will be there to listen to your concerns about access issues or any other issues regarding The Disability Discrimination Act

Terry and Mary will be along from the Karten Centre. Come and find out about the type of IT equipment and software that is available to use through Karten.

Fundraising: take along some friends and family and have a chat about what help is needed.

**Come and have a chat.
We look forward to meeting you on the day**

Karten Centre

IT training for all ages and abilities from the terrified to the fearless

We provide computer-aided training assessment and education for disabled people.

We provide training in using computers and associated specialist hardware and software

We provide courses customised to our students needs

We provide opportunity

We support disabled people to:

- Access the Internet
- Access e-mail
- Write a letter
- Print Labels
- Make a Birthday Card
- Scan Photographs
- Not be afraid to switch on a Computer

We use Dell Computers Operating on Windows XP.

Software is Office XP Professional

Additional Software:

- ZOOM TEXT
- JAWS
- OCR
- DRAGON NATURALLY SPEAKING
- ADOBE PHOTOSHOP

Why not drop in or phone us for a chat and we can book you in for a taster session.

Telephone Mary on 01463 229789

Email: Mary.MacDonald@hsbp-karten.co.uk

Karten Suite, 38 Ardconnel Street, Inverness, IV2 3EX

So how do you cope with AMD? We would advise that you keep things Big, Bright and Bold, with the use of magnifiers and other low vision aids and a high level of home lighting. You can contact the Macular Disease Society on 0845 241 2041 or visit their website: www.maculardisease.org

Disability Discrimination Act

My name is Pat Hislop and it is my job to deal with disability discrimination awareness with businesses and service providers on behalf of Visual Impairment Services Highland. I need your help so that I may undertake my job more effectively on your behalf. So I am asking for your help!

- Were you having problems before the Act came into force with shopping, banking, travel or any other services provided?
- Have any of your problems been addressed?
- Do you still have problems?

To help me act on your behalf I need you to contact me so I can assist the service provider in addressing the situation where possible. I'm looking for good news stories as well as current problems. Perhaps we can look at a small annual reward for companies / service providers who go that extra mile to get it right.

I look forward to hearing from you all

Council Tax Benefit

Many people eligible for Council Tax Benefit – including many pensioners – don't claim it. Council Tax Benefit can help people on low income pay towards some or all of the Council Tax bill, even if they own their home. If you think you might be eligible to apply you should contact the Council right away.

Council Tax Benefit is shown as a rebate on the Council Tax bill. The amount a person gets depends on their income, amount of savings and other circumstances. They don't have to be on any other benefits or entitlements and if they do qualify for Council Tax Benefit it will not affect any other benefits they may get. Pensioners could be missing out on an average rebate of £426.

Further information about Council Tax Benefit is available from Highland Council www.highland.gov.uk or from www.dwp.gov.uk

Revealweb

Revealweb is a new, easy to use web-based service that brings together a wealth of information about materials in accessible formats for people with a visual impairment. For the first time you can find out what's available from over 200 organisations – all in one place on the web.

Revealweb (www.revealweb.org.uk) contains over 100,000 titles and is a major step forward for visually impaired people. You can:

- search the database by author, title, subject or ISBN to find out what's available and how to get hold of it
- search across a wide variety of formats including audio, large print, Braille, DAISY and electronic materials – plus music scores, study books, newspapers, audio described videos and tactile maps and diagrams
- check whether a specific work exists or is being produced

Revealweb has been designed with ease of use in mind for both sighted and visually impaired users. It works well with access technology and is a simple way to find a specific title or browse for a subject.

Creative Travel Group Holidays

Creative Travel Group Holidays is exclusively for the over 55s. Together with Action For Blind People, who own and run four hotels with every facility for visually impaired people, Creative Travel have designed a number of short breaks and holidays specifically geared towards the needs of those who are blind or partially sighted.

Described as an exciting concept in group holidays they include:

- executive coach travel from pick up point
- superb holiday accommodation with excellent cuisine
- organised tours throughout the week entertainment every night
- professional friendly courier in attendance at all times
- free holiday insurance

UK resorts include Bognor Regis, West Sussex; Cliftonville, Kent; Dunoon, West Scotland; Eastbourne, East Sussex; Falmouth, Cornwall; Llandudno, North Wales; Sandown, Isle of Wight; St. Anne's On Sea And The Lakes; Tenby, South Wales; Teignmouth, Devon; Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset; Windermere, Lake District. In Europe group holidays can be arranged for France, Belgium, Switzerland, Winter Breaks in a three star hotel in Spain.

If people are interested we can make contact with this company to see what can be arranged from Highland. Please let Catriona know on 01463 233663.

Open College Of The Arts

Are offering home study courses for pleasure, career or a qualification. The Open College of the Arts is a vibrant community of artists, writers and designers dedicated to your personal development. Their aim as an educational charity is to give you the skills to discover and express your creative talents. If you would like further information contact Catriona on 01463 233663

DWP—Direct Payment

Direct Payment is the way state pensions and benefits are being paid. Now that order books have stopped, your money is paid straight into your account.

Have you received your form yet?

If not, please phone 0800 107 2000, between 8am and 9pm weekdays, 9am to 5pm for assistance. You can also ask any member of staff at Jobcentre Plus or Benefit Offices.

Information is available in formats such as Braille, Large Print, audio tape, and other languages.

For a copy call 0800 107 2000.

Fundraising

We have not forgotten to enclose raffle tickets with this edition of SIGHT LINES. Due to a delay in the issue of our new licence we will not have the tickets available until April.

We will be holding a "flag day" in Inverness town centre this year on **July 30th** If you feel you could help us for any period of the day please give Sadie a ring on 01463 233663.

As part of the same licence we are allowed to hold house to house collections during the week of **25th to 29th July** within the city of Inverness. If you live in Inverness would you a member of your family, friend or neighbour be willing to collect in your or their street or neighbourhood. If you or anybody you know can help let Sadie know 01463 233663.

The Xmas Draw held in the resource centre with the prize of a TV/Video combi unit was won by Mrs Davidson from Tain. Many thanks to all who bought a "square" and a **big thank you to Mrs Grant of Grantown on Spey who donated the TV/Video.**