

Vision Support Newsletter



Pictured above are some members of the staff team at Vision Support (from left to right) Kate Hurst, Jess Tyrrell, Matt Greer, Stef Harding, Roisin Dunbar, Helen Simon and Josh Garland.

HELLO!

A little intro...

For those of you who already receive our newsletter, thank you! This is a special edition and we will be doing this twice per year from now on, once in the Spring/Summer with a roundup of our impact over the year from Lowri, our CEO; and once in December/January with a roundup of all of the fun and exciting things we have gotten up to that year.

For those of you who do not currently receive our free newsletter, we are sending this to you so you can see the type of information that we send out and to try and encourage you to sign up.

In our newsletters we will include updates and exciting news for what is up and coming.

If you would like to sign up for the free newsletter, please use the contact details for your area on the last page and let us know the best format i.e. printed large print, email, audio CD or Braille.

Thank you for reading!



Hello from all of us at Vision Support!

It's been another fantastic year of supporting individuals in our communities living with vision impairments. Whether it's been assisting people through our phone lines or face-to-face support, we've been dedicated to fulfilling our mission to increase independence and reduce isolation.

This year has been especially busy, with a significant increase in calls and referrals and a new focus on what more we can do to be better.

We've also worked hard to raise awareness of vision impairment and preventable sight loss through Vision Impairment Awareness Training, Access Surveys, pop-up information desks and networking events, spreading the word far and wide to spearhead societal change.

(pictured below are Tracy and Ash from the Sight Loss Information Line sat at an information stand)



Thank you!

We would like to say a huge thank you to all our Vision Support volunteers who have helped and supported people at the groups and events this year. We really do appreciate your time and efforts to make our groups run smoothly and be an enjoyable experience for all!

An extra thank you to our brilliant fundraisers who raised money for the Walled City Bowls VI Activity Group in Chester. Martin Bell (photo to the right of Martin riding a bike) did a sponsored bike ride from Chester to Gretna Green - he cycled 251 miles over 4 days and raised £350!

A sponsored swim was also organised by Marie, Mark and Edris (photo below holding their certificates and medals) who raised additional money for the group, between them they completed 114 lengths of the pool in 1 hour! Amazing work!

If you fancy doing a bit of fundraising or volunteering, or if you'd just like to know more about our groups, get in touch!



We love hearing from our volunteers, so we thought you might too! Here's a few words from Paige, who is one of our Swimming Buddy Volunteer's in Chester.

“ I started volunteering with Vision Support in September 2023, supporting swim sessions. I thoroughly enjoy my time volunteering with the charity and its lovely to witness and be a part of a close community that is supportive and kind to one another. It's a pleasure to be a part of. - **Paige** ”

Susan Lees Award

Many of you in Wrexham will have known Susan Lees, a dedicated and longstanding volunteer who made an incredible impact in our community.

Susan ran the Wrexham Visionaires group and served as a Telephone Befriender, bringing compassion, kindness, and unwavering support to those with vision impairments. To honour Susan's legacy, the Susan Lees Award recognizes volunteers who, like Susan, go above and beyond to make a difference, showing passion, compassion, and an extraordinary commitment to supporting people with vision impairments.

This year's award went to Laura, one of our exceptional Cheshire Volunteers.

Laura's dedication and hard work has truly made a difference, and she embodies the values that this award celebrates.

(To the left is a photo of Laura smiling and holding up her certificate)



Help Vision Support Make a Difference!

There are many ways you can contribute and help make a difference. With exciting new initiatives launching in the new year, Stef, our new Fundraiser, will be working hard to raise our profile, as well as funds. Throughout 2025, we will be organising some exciting fundraising events, so please get involved to make a direct impact, and have fun! To find out more, scan the QR code to the right.



Prefer a simpler route to supporting us? A one-time or regular donation is always appreciated and helps us to continue to deliver our valued services. Considering the future? Leaving a legacy in your Will ensures your generosity continues to support others for years to come. For more information, scan the QR code to the right.



If time is your gift, we'd love to hear from you! Megan and Rachel are eager to connect with potential volunteers, whether you can commit regularly or just occasionally. For volunteering opportunities, scan the QR code to the right.



One of the simplest ways you can support us if you are on social media is to share our posts. We regularly hear people tell us that they wish they had known about us sooner. So please share our posts and encourage your friends to do the same so that we can be there for people as soon as they need us.



Out and about with Vision Support

The social and activity groups this year have been a tremendous success! Throughout the year, working closely with our partners at local organisations and with the community itself, we have been able to facilitate a whole host of trips and activities! We've had stone carving workshops, cycling and climbing, bowls competitions, walking trips, narrowboat and music train trips, audio described cinema groups, gym and swim sessions, coffee mornings, warm centres, creative art groups and so much more! We have offered more exciting and unique activities, events and trips that give a wider variety of experiences, all whilst aiming to empower our service users and increase independence! We've had a lot of fantastic feedback and some great ideas for us to look into for 2025! We also would not be able to offer such brilliant events without our fantastic volunteers, so a massive thank you to them! - We can't wait to get more exciting activities planned for 2025!

(pictured below is Rachel, Community Engagement Coordinator for Cheshire and a group of service users, all smiling)



“Back in July, I went on my second day trip out on the Narrowboat with members of Vision Support, cruising from Christleton to Beeston, and we had lunch at The Shady pub. The crew from the Wirral Community Narrowboat Trust were great. I enjoyed the scenic views, the delicious pub food, and chatting with everyone. The relaxing and happy atmosphere was great for me mentally. I hope to be going back for a third time. - **Laura**”

Stone Carving Workshop

It was an amazing two days, a small group of people came together and the group gelled straight away, the workshop was set in the beautiful Mount Pleasant Gardens and Sculpture Trails in the Cheshire Countryside.

The workshop was facilitated by Andrew from Radiate Arts, who guided the group to work in a relaxed atmosphere. He spent time with each person, providing tuition and guidance on how to carve the stone. The group worked with a soft Maltese limestone that was perfect for those who are new to stone carving.

We were able to witness new friendships being made and others said how it had inspired them to want to try other creative art projects. Another said how nice it was to meet a lovely group of people and to walk around the beautiful gardens was a real treat. Check out the beautiful piece below!

(Here are two photos of stone carvings of a gecko and a dragonfly)



“ Earlier this year, I was incredibly fortunate to secure a spot in the stone carving course at Mount Pleasant Gardens—an opportunity that exceeded any hope I had.

As someone registered as severely sight impaired, I had some hesitations about what I could achieve. But with guidance that was not only clear but also sensitive and thoughtful, I created a piece that I could only have imagined. I am beyond proud of what I made.

Sharing this experience with others who faced similar challenges to artistic expression was a moving and humbling experience. The camaraderie and mutual respect were palpable, leaving me with a sense of belonging and validation that I will carry with me. - **Dee**

Creative Art

We have had a variety of themed creative arts workshops including watercolour painting, clay modelling, decoupage box making, scented and felted pebble making, and there are still more to come!

The sessions are led by talented tutors who make the sessions relaxed, fun and interactive. Our service users have reported enjoying the creative and therapeutic aspect of making art, and have given their work as gifts to family and friends, as well as buying materials so they can enjoy creating art at home!

“ It’s nice being with people in the community, being at the crafts sessions. I don’t feel as isolated now and everyone, including myself has made more friends.

All of the smiles you see when you walk through the door and everyone is genuinely happy to be there together. The Creative Art session is marvellous, I don’t know how you all think of so many crafts to do! I always find each session so different and I’m always excited to see what is on. I’ve been very proud of what I’ve achieved, I never thought these art sessions were for me but I’ve enjoyed it so much! After each session, I can’t wait to get home to show my wife what I’ve made.



A photo to the left of a hand holding a felted art piece from a workshop



A photo below of a service user creating her painted tote bag



A photo below of a project with 'love' and pebbles from the mosaic art workshop



A photo to the right of the tutor helping a service user to create resin art

Cranes of Peace

We took part in the Cranes of Peace project, where we folded origami cranes as a symbol of peace (photograph to the right of the cranes hanging from the ceiling of the Cathedral).

While it was a fun and creative activity, the organisers realised that using white paper to make the cranes made it tricky for some of us to see the folds clearly.

So, we switched to coloured paper and what a difference it made! This small change really highlighted how even simple tweaks can improve accessibility and inclusion for everyone.

Being part of this fantastic community project not only brought us together but also reinforced the importance of making activities more accessible. It's a reminder that small adjustments can have a big impact on creating an inclusive world. There were thousands of origami cranes exhibited at St Marys Church in Conwy and our cranes gave a wonderful pop of colour to the exhibition.

The photo below is of three service users smiling holding up their cranes.





Call out to all artists!

We will be exhibiting the artwork from our creative art sessions in the World Art Day on Tuesday 15th April 2025 in Chester (venue TBC). We are also inviting everyone to send your artwork in to be included in the exhibition! If you would like to take part and have your pieces exhibited, please send them to Vision Support's head office at Units 1 & 2 The Ropeworks, Whippcord Lane, Chester, CH1 4DZ by 31st March.

Your piece can be about anything you wish and in any medium, however, if you would like a theme, we would love to see your perceptions of yourself or how you see the world.

An invite to the exhibition will follow in the new year.

We look forward to seeing all of the amazing talent that is out there!



Vision Impairment Access Surveys

We are passionate about making our society more inclusive and one way we hope to achieve this is by conducting our 'vision impairment access surveys'. Our surveys focus on the barriers facing people living with a vision impairment from where the nearest bus stop is to how easy it is to reach the destination, signage, furnishings, obstacles, lighting and lots more. We have conducted our access surveys in places like Mold Market where, with the help of Jonathan, we identified some obstacles that may affect accessibility. It is great meeting the teams, staff and volunteers and raising awareness about some of the barriers that people with a vision impairment face when accessing a venue.

Here are some top tips for your venue/service

Training: one of the most common themes we have identified is lack of awareness and understanding. We believe that the staff at venues receiving Vision Impairment Awareness Training can have a significant positive impact upon the accessibility of a service/venue.

Lighting: even without out an eye condition many people rely on good lighting so really thinking about what the lighting is like both inside and outside a venue can make people with a vision impairment feel a lot more safe and confident when out and about.

Signage: is the signage easy to see and in a place that is clearly visible? – remember **Bigger** and **Bolder** writing is always going to increase accessibility and inclusivity for people with a VI.

There are so many top tips that we'd love to share if you would like to talk about accessibility or VI Awareness Training please call 01244 381515, and visit our website to see our Accessibility Strategy and Top Tips!

Breaking Down Barriers

One service that people might not know about is our Vision Impairment Awareness Training and this year we have been galivanting everywhere; from the team at Griffiths Engineering in Wrexham, a community bowls group in Dwygyfylchi, to the various teams within the County Councils that we provide services for.

There are so many positive outcomes from our awareness training - creating a more inclusive society by providing top tips for communication (both in person and written), and speaking about some of the barriers that people with a vision impairment face daily will hopefully inform the decisions/services being delivered so that these are accessible and inclusive for everyone, dispelling myths (vision impairment has so many misconceptions and stereotypes) and of course raising awareness of the impact of vision impairment.

We love meeting the amazing teams in our communities within the public, private, health and third sector. If you would like to find out more about our training, please get in touch!

(Below is a photo of Nia, Operations Manager for North Wales, with the team at Griffiths Engineering with VI glasses on)



Exciting Developments in Vision Rehabilitation Services

In Spring 2024, we were thrilled to announce the start of a new Vision Rehabilitation contract in Flintshire, marking a significant step in our mission to support people with vision impairments across the region. In addition, we were delighted that our contracts in Wrexham and Halton were renewed, enabling us to continue delivering essential services and making a lasting impact in these communities.

These milestones are a testament to the strong and collaborative relationships we enjoy with Commissioners and colleagues in local authorities. Working together, we ensure that individuals with vision impairments receive the tailored support they need to live independently, build confidence, and thrive in their communities. We are grateful for the trust placed in us and we are enjoying developing these partnerships to provide high-quality, person-centred services that make a difference in people's lives.

(Below is a photo of Moz, Vision Rehabilitation Specialist, with Ian, a service user, with their white canes ready to cross the road)



New Vision Support Pathway



At the start of 2024 we launched our new Vision Support Pathway, designed to provide early intervention and support for people with vision impairments, to ensure no one feels unsupported while waiting for a full specialist rehabilitation assessment. Individuals are now referred into our services at the point of the initial conversation between the person and the Rehabilitation Specialist.

As part of our new Pathway in North Wales, we recently held two special days in Wrexham where individuals could review their initial conversations with our Rehabilitation Specialists and connect with members of our wider team and services.

These events were designed to empower people with vision impairments, giving them greater control over the support they want and need, by introducing them to the full range of services available.

We were delighted to be joined by partners from Low Vision Service Wales, DSN (our colleagues supporting people with hearing loss and Deaf communities), Telecare, the library, and leisure services. The days gave attendees the opportunity to explore additional resources and opportunities to enhance their independence and wellbeing.

These collaborative events have been a fantastic step toward creating a truly integrated support network for people in Wrexham and beyond.



Pop up in the Park

We had a fantastic time at the Community Fun Day in August organised by HealthBox at Grosvenor Park. It was great to see so many amazing organisations pulling together to make a difference in our communities.

We were able to speak to so many people and spread the message about preventable sight loss, and also helping the younger generations understand the importance of looking after their eyes and getting regular eye tests. We arranged games to be played whilst wearing vision impairment simulation glasses which was a great way for children to get involved. (Pictured to the left are two children wearing vision impairment simulation glasses)



Halton

Many of you may know that Roisin has joined us as the new Halton Services Manager. Roisin brings extensive experience in social care, particularly supporting individuals with disabilities and mental health needs. While new to the sight loss sector, she's already diving in with fresh energy and ideas! Stay tuned for more updates as new groups and events take shape! (Pictured to the left is Ash from the Sight Loss Information Line giving out leaflets to two people)





Keeping people warm this winter



Throughout the colder months, we have been able to offer our service users the opportunity to come along to our Vision Support Warm Centres! Each month, we have hosted warm Centres in Ellesmere Port, Winsford and Frodsham and it's been fantastic to welcome so many people along! We've been able to provide some tasty warm soup, buttered bread rolls and plenty of tea and biscuits to keep everyone toasty and full!

Photographed above is a group of service users at one of the warm centres enjoying a catch up and a brew

It's been a great opportunity for many people to come along, socialise and get to know others! As part of the Warm Centre funding, kindly provided by Cadent, we have been able to provide carbon monoxide awareness, as well as a free carbon monoxide alarm, to those who wish to have peace of mind in their homes. In addition, we have raised awareness of and helped people sign up to the Priority Service Register, offered people free energy saving advice and provided clients with a free slow cooker, and a VI friendly recipe booklet to those who most need it. We've heard from so many of you about all the different meals you've been cooking! From soups to stews, and even lamb shanks it all sounds delicious! If you want a copy of the recipe booklet, it is available on our website! (pictured below to the left is Bob holding his new slow cooker and recipe book)



“ I found out about the Warm Centre, off the back of the swimming and creative art sessions that Vision Support have been running and since joining in, I've never looked back! I didn't realise how much Vision Support had on, I was amazed there was so much going on and all the support that is available! ”

Since getting the slow cooker, I've made cottage pie for the whole family that went down very well! Very much looking forward to making soups next! I've also been very impressed with all the information provided including about the Priority Service Register, as its very important for me to have this peace of mind. Vision Support has always given great advice too, I can't say enough good about Vision Support. - Bob ”

Climbing Taster Sessions

Vision Support



The photo above is of a service user climbing the climbing wall being supervised by a member of staff

Over the course of 3 weeks we had 9 people come and have a go at indoor climbing, with many coming for multiple sessions. We had participants in their 30s through to their 90s, proving everyone can have a go!

Climbing is an activity where you need to work out the best way to use the holds on the wall in addition to physically moving upwards – so it was a challenge for both the body and the mind!

We were supported by a fantastic instructor, who took the time to get to know everyone and explain the wall and how the safety equipment worked. All participants did very well, scaling the 11m high walls, despite the cold temperatures! Luckily the climbing centre has a good coffee machine so plenty of hot drinks kept everyone going!

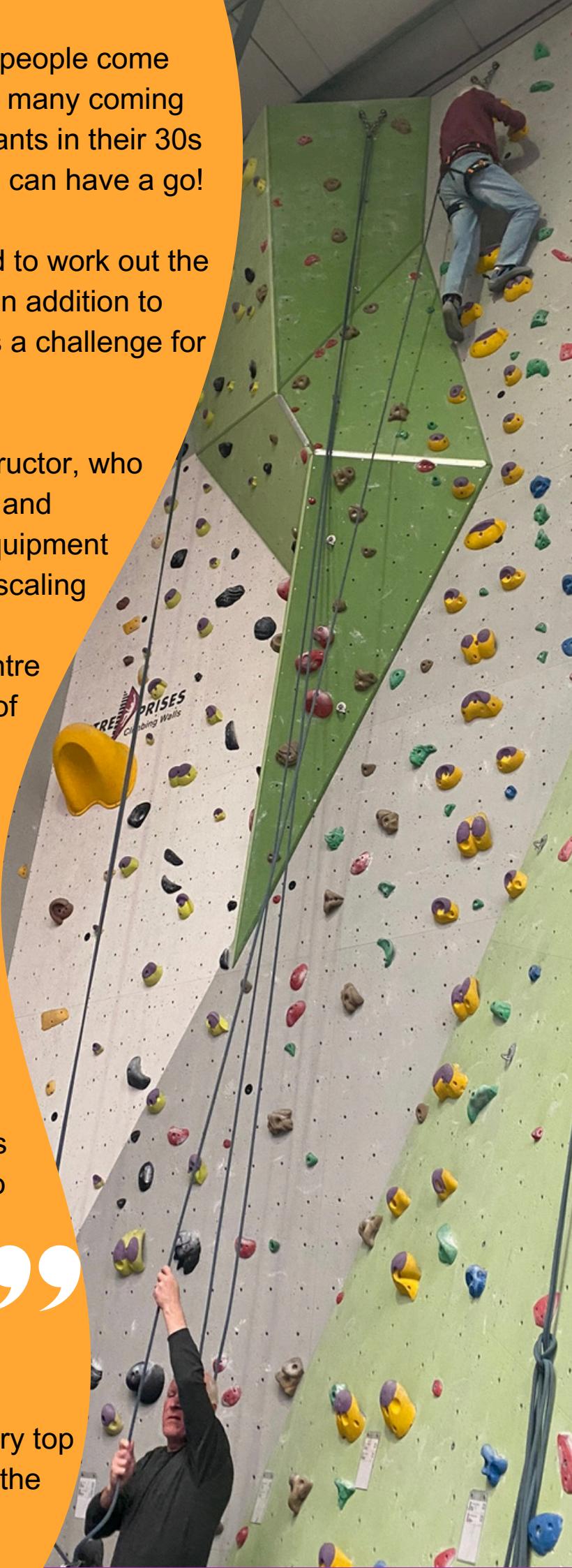
We have more climbing sessions coming up in February in Llandudno, so if you want to have a go, get in touch!

“

Thank you so much for a wonderful experience on the climbing wall. It was something that I had always wanted to do but never got round to it. – **Frank**

”

(pictured to the right is Frank at the very top of a climbing wall with Chris acting as the belay below)



Open Mic Night

Wow...what a night! Not only did we have incredible performances from our own staff, Ash and Matt (who is pictured playing guitar to the right), we also had the privilege of hearing the amazing talent of some of our service users. The night was a massive success, everyone had lots of fun, and we raised over £300! We are hoping to have lots more events like these in 2025 and beyond and if you would like to get involved in fundraising for Vision Support, please get in touch!



Our New Website

Vision Support staff and Ellison Marketing worked so hard to create a website that was attractive, informative, and accessible. We are so happy with the results and we hope you are too!

Visit www.visionsupport.org.uk or scan the QR code to the bottom right corner to go straight to our website on your phone. (Just above the QR code is the Ellison Marketing logo)

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Celebrating Our Incredible Board of Trustees

At Vision Support, we are privileged to have a dedicated Board of Trustees (graphics below of each member) whose hard work, expertise, and passion are integral to our success. Their unwavering commitment ensures that we continue to provide fantastic support to people with vision impairments across our region.

Our Board brings a wealth of experience to the table, including skills in quality assurance, accounting, commissioning, IT, ophthalmology, and personal experience of vision impairment. These diverse expertise strengthen every aspect of our charity, from ensuring financial sustainability, to maintaining the highest standards of service delivery.

Their guidance helps us navigate challenges and seize opportunities, always with the best interests of the people we serve at heart. Whether shaping strategic decisions, championing innovation, or providing thoughtful oversight, our Trustees consistently go above and beyond to help Vision Support thrive.



Get in touch!



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www.VisionSupport.org.uk



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For more contact details, head to our website!