

The Bugle

Winter 2020



**Sight Scotland
Veterans**

Tackling vision loss together

sightscotlandveterans.org.uk

Welcome to the winter 2020/21 edition of The Bugle, the quarterly member newsletter for Sight Scotland Veterans, the new name for Scottish War Blinded.

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues, our services are still operating differently at the moment. However, despite this, we're pleased to still be able to share with you a range of member stories, top tips from our expert rehabilitation team, activities to do at home and more.

In this edition, we focus on wellbeing in winter. As the days grow shorter and darker nights set in, we provide some winter mobility tips, news on our sighted guide walks in areas where this is allowed, as well as activities for you to do at home.

In recent months, we have been sending regular newsletters to all members who have provided us with an email address. If you would like to receive our e-newsletter, or if you have any questions or comments, please contact Eilidh:

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A year like no other:

A message from Clair Bryan, Interim Director of Services

As 2020 comes to a close lots of people keep saying to me 'you couldn't have made it up,' and I agree. A year like no other. There does however seem to be glimmers of hope for 2021 with talk of a vaccination being on the horizon and the potential of a sort of normality returning.

I joined the charity at the end of August, and was absolutely delighted to find that the challenges brought about by COVID hadn't meant that we stopped doing what we are good at. I heard brilliant stories of how staff had adapted quickly when we were all affected by COVID in March, ensuring that members were receiving the support they needed and if necessary were linked into local authority support.

Over the last six months we have had to change the way we work and how we support people, which has meant lots of adaptation. And still we are constantly trying to keep on top of the changing government guidance, and what it means. The most important part however is ensuring that both members and staff remain safe at all times, and when the time is right get things back to some sort of normality.

The staff teams have throughout the pandemic continued to work harder than ever to continue to support members.

Our Outreach and Centre teams have continued to do garden and outdoor visits, whilst working with COVID restrictions. As a number of Local Authorities have entered Level 3 we've had to limit these to essential visits, and where a Local Authority has entered Level 4 we have suspended visits temporarily and reverted to phone and online support.

Our Rehabilitation team has been carrying out assessments through phone calls and online, discussing member's difficulties and working out what training, advice or equipment would best suit their needs.

We have also been able to provide outdoor mobility training, including long cane training. This enables members to walk outdoors, with perhaps a white cane, independently and safely and really build on confidence and motivation, which at this time can be very difficult. One member is now making his way to the local shop to buy a newspaper and then once

home is managing to read his paper with an electronic magnifier. He states this has really lifted his mood and he is enjoying being able to walk and read independently again.

Our staff teams normally based at the Linburn and Hawkhead Centre's have been most affected by these changes; and it's been difficult for everyone. Midway through the year it felt as though things were returning to normal and we started to resume garden visits. We had hoped to start bringing people back to the Centres in November and started to prepare for the reopening ensuring social distancing can be maintained and the safety of both staff and members.

Unfortunately a second wave of COVID in both West Lothian and Renfrewshire mean that these plans had to be put on hold, and after careful consideration we decided that we needed to keep the centres closed until April. We have committed however that if the situation changes, such as a vaccine being rolled out quickly, we will happily bring this date forward.

Whatever we have been faced with, the staff team have adapted and changed. We've embraced technology and seen a rise in our members' Facebook page, and we even held our first virtual

Remembrance Service. Our partnership with Age Scotland has allowed us to test Sight Scotland Veterans' Comradeship Circles. And we plan to continue these over the next few months. These are typically six people who chat together by phone at the same time, on the same day each week. Groups can talk about whatever they like or there may be themed circles. A member of our team will be on hand to connect everyone and ensure the call runs smoothly.

We are also taking this opportunity also look at how we can help more people next year. Should we expand our membership criteria so we can help people earlier in their sight loss journey? What additional services can we be providing? How can we make more of our veterans membership community? Do we need to provide more activities in northern Scotland? There are so many great opportunities to work in partnership. What is really exciting is the changes we are seeing in technology and how this could help. However we need to support more people to get online.

As we start to plan for 2021 our initial priority is to help the team to carry on supporting as many members as possible during the COVID pandemic until we return to business as usual.

Members' Stories

Still Game's James Martin shares memories of his Navy days and acting career

Actor and Sight Scotland Veterans member James Martin, of Musselburgh, has kindly shared with us some memories from his Royal Navy days and his acting career.

Many members may have seen James starring as Jack and Victor's pal Eric in the much-loved Scottish TV sitcom, *Still Game*. James, 89, has macular degeneration, and became a member of Sight Scotland Veterans last year.

Having enjoyed an acting career spanning over 40 years, James also has very fond memories of his time serving in the Royal Navy. He joined the Navy in 1949 aged 17, serving seven years and then five years with the Reserves.

"I loved every second of my time in the Navy," said James. "It was the best thing I ever did in my life. I was born right in Glasgow dock land, and had to leave school at 14. The Navy educated me and got me my Higher English qualification.

"I have fond memories of the camaraderie. I spent two-and-a-half years in the Mediterranean,

based at Malta. After exercises we were dispersed to various ports in the Mediterranean, and we touched practically every country in the Med during that time.

"In 1953 there was an earthquake at Zante. We helped the refugees there. I remember the Captain got the engine room guys to make an oven with firebricks ashore and we made soup for everybody. Then an American marine ship called the USS Rockbridge came along. The Captain came ashore and said, 'Maybe I can help you guys...' An hour later a landing craft came with a diesel dynamo and a cook. They set up the generator for an electric kitchen and were making hot dogs and everything! We were just standing watching. We'd been so happy we'd used firebricks to make an oven!"

James was serving on the H.M.S Bermuda in the Suez Crisis before the invasion. The ship's duty was to escort ships down the Suez Canal.

James said: "When President Nasser nationalised the canal the people were against the Navy. We were docked at the port-side offices of the canal, and they used to come and throw things at us – stones, you name it. There was

nothing much we could do. I remember a company of Gurkhas were sent, and then nobody would come near the ship.

“When we went down the canal, what our Captain did was to have a couple of sailors at the fo’c’sle and port side throwing hand grenades over, and two at the back, so we never, ever got touched by the frogmen.”

After James was demobbed he went on to work as a fireman with the Glasgow Fire Service for 16 years.

“When I got demobbed the invasion of Suez happened,” James said. “As I was still in the Reserves, I was liable for call up. By then I was in the Glasgow Fire Service, and apparently in the fire brigade there were around 80 reservists. The Fire Master said we couldn’t have 80 firemen going away, so he got us all dispensation and I carried on being a fireman.”

As a Navy man, he worked on the fireboat St Mungo as a coxswain and engine man. He recalls the tragedy of the Cheapside Street whisky bond fire disaster in 1968.

“On the boat we were only about a quarter of a mile from it,” he said. “The building imploded. It was really terrifying. When I worked as

a fireman in the late 1950s and early 60s it was a very busy time; there were buildings being demolished and there were many fires. In Glasgow we were one of the busiest fire brigades in the world at that time.”

It was while serving as a fireman that James met Freddie Young of Young Casting Agency in Glasgow, and with her encouragement began to take up little walk-on jobs in his time off. James says he had enjoyed performing in so-called Sods Operas in his Navy days, but never thought a career treading the boards would be on the cards.

“In the Navy each ship would put on shows, sketches and daft things,” said James. “I used to enjoy doing that. But I never thought I would end up being a full-time actor.

“In the fire service I did four days with a day shift, four days off, then four night shifts. Freddie said to me, ‘Jimmy, you’ve got an awful lot of time off, would you like to do some work in television?’ I started off doing walk-on jobs and did that for about 18 months. Then I started getting lines to say, and Freddie got me a job as assistant stage manager in the theatre. She said to me, “Why don’t you go full time?” I had two young children at the time and thought I couldn’t. But she

recommended me for a dramatic art and related studies course at Telford College that I would get a bursary for. So I thought it over, resigned, and moved into the acting business. I've been very, very lucky."

lifelong member of the creative practitioners' union Equity, has toured performing Shakespeare, including starring in *As You Like It* as Adam, and appeared in a number of television and film roles, as well as delighting as fan-favourite Eric in *Still Game*.

With an acting career spanning over 40 years, James, who is a



Image shows James smiling and waving

James says that some of the camaraderie and sense of humour of life in the forces carried over to life on set as an actor, too. He recalls one such moment while working on another iconic Scottish TV series: *Taggart*.

"I've played a killer in *Taggart*, and I've been murdered in an episode as well," said James. "There was a

scene after I was 'murdered' where I was placed in the hospital morgue. It was like a big filing cabinet. I was made up with white make up, shirt off, and put into the third tier, and the guy was to be brought in to identify me. It turned out the extra was too small to see into the third tier. So I had to come out and get into a lower one for another take, and I was freezing

it was refrigerated in there.

"I was lying there ready for the take. All of a sudden it was very quiet and I thought, 'what's wrong?' I leaned back and banged the door and there was this scream. What happened was while I was in there there was a lighting fault, so they were away for a coffee and left me in there! There was a trainee there writing the call signs for the next day, and she'd heard this 'boom, boom' coming from the morgue and screamed. Apparently she said, 'I nearly **** a brick!'

The opportunity to play Eric in Still Game arose when James met the show's director, Michael Hines, while working on kids TV show Barmy Aunt Boomerang with Toyah Wilcox.

Landing the role, James embarked on a "wonderful time" working with the cast and crew of the popular show, which ran for nine series. He says he has many favourite moments and storylines, including one from the episode "Gairden".

"The characters go to this local park, but a bully with his big dog comes along and chases them, so they set up a little garden at the top of the high rise flat." he said. "This bully gets wind of it and comes up there with his dog. One

of the characters starts pointing his stick at him, and the bully grabs the stick and throws it over the side of the high rise flat – then the dog jumps after the stick!"

James also highlighted the much-loved Eric moment when a jet of water from a fire hydrant shoots him up into the air.

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He said: "They got this dummy dressed exactly like me and put a rope on it. At 'action' the water was supposed to come up quick and put it up in the air, but it wasn't going up. I was standing watching and the crew were getting frustrated. I said to one of the crew that there wasn't enough slack for the rope, so they gave it an awful lot of slack and then it went straight up.

"They gave me nice little things to do in the show. The funny thing was, all the other guys were all young people made up to look old. I was in my sixties when it started, and I was the only one who didn't go to make up!"

As James wrapped up on his final scene as Eric in season eight, which aired in March 2018, he says the applause he received from the whole cast and crew 'brought a tear to his eye'.

With the actor still regularly recognised by friendly fans as "Eric"

now – even while wearing a face mask – people tell him they’ve loved watching recent reruns of the show, and he agrees laughter plays a big role in helping to get through tough times.

“Laughter and humour is so important,” said James. “I used to write for comedians as well. I’ve always been a cheerful character. When my final papers came through when I was demobbed, they said, ‘hard-working, cheerful personality. Unfortunately lacked ambition.’ That was good as far as I was concerned!”

As a veteran, James still plays an active role in the Naval Service community as President of the Royal Naval Association in Edinburgh. He has enjoyed becoming a member of the Sight Scotland Veterans community, too.

“Sight Scotland Veterans have been wonderful,” James said. They’ve given me a talking watch and extra lighting for reading, and a Synaptic tablet. The things I’ve been given to aid me are incredible.”

Dundee member keeps the music flowing with virtual ukulele sessions

The virtual world has worked wonders to help a Sight Scotland

Veterans member in Dundee keep in touch with his much-loved ukulele group through the Covid restrictions.

Royal Army Service Corps veteran John McCann, 94, has been playing the ukulele since 2014, and plays with a number of others in a group run through the u3a – a UK-wide movement of locally-run interest groups.

The Dee Ukes regularly play in the community, raising money for charity with their performances. However, this year the Covid-19 restrictions have sadly put a stop to their concerts and practice sessions together in person.

But through the online platform Zoom, John and his fellow musician pals have continued to practise and sing and play together virtually from the safety of their homes.

“This is the first time we’ve used Zoom,” said John, who has neurological sight loss. “We get an email with the session link from the group leader and a list of the songs we’ll be doing. Normally you’ll get volunteers who are willing to lead a song. It doesn’t really work for us all playing together, so we just play along with the song and whoever is leading.

“It’s not the same – it’s not like us all being together and playing along with each other – but it’s a chance to keep in contact and have a wee blether and an opportunity to practise.”

Music-lover John, who is a big fan of Gaelic songs and sang with the Dundee Gaelic Choir, was a complete beginner when he picked up the ukulele at age 88.

“I’ve always been fond of all kinds of music,” he said. “My father and mother were always singing and we grew up learning their songs and the latest songs that came out. I’d always felt I would have liked to play a musical instrument.

“In 2014 a friend invited us along to a concert and it was a ukulele group playing. That was me hooked, and I went and bought a ukulele.

“It’s not difficult to get to a reasonable standard with the ukulele. My sight loss hasn’t been a great problem for learning to play. We download the songs and print them off, and I get them at a good size font. You play the songs so often that you get to know the words.

“We’ve probably got around 200 songs on the list that the group can do. I have so many favourites – I

enjoy leading on “Caledonia”, that’s a great song.”

And he says if anyone is keen to give the ukulele a try, there are plenty of online resources that can help get you started.

John said: “There’s plenty of stuff to help you learn on the internet. If you start with four simple main chords, then the amount of songs you can play with just four chords is amazing.”

The website address for “Uncle Rod’s Ukulele Boot Camp”, that John recommends for some beginners’ information, is ukulelebootcamp.weebly.com

Supporting a loved one with sight loss: A perspective from a wife and carer

At Sight Scotland Veterans we understand how much sight loss can impact your life, both for those who are going through it personally and for their families and carers too.

Kathryn Biddlecombe has been married to Sight Scotland Veterans member Michael Biddlecombe for 43 years. The devoted couple, who live near Inverurie, were both “stunned” when Michael was diagnosed with macular degeneration nine years ago.

With Michael, 88, also suffering with a heart condition, 70-year-old Kathryn, a former hairdresser, has also been her husband's full-time carer.

Kathryn has bravely shared her experiences of the couple's journey of coping with Michael's sight loss together to reassure others that they are not alone, and that it's okay to ask for help if you need it.

The diagnosis

Kathryn says that problems with Michael's vision first materialised when he noticed he was having problems driving at night.

"The optician indicated that he'd maybe got cataracts and he was referred to the hospital," Kathryn said. "When I came to pick him up from his hospital appointment he told me, 'I've got macular degeneration'. We were both stunned. I remember I stood beside the car thinking, 'Really? What are we talking about here?'"

Michael's mother had also had the condition. As the couple began to process Michael's diagnosis, the realisation of what her mother-in-law must have been experiencing hit Kathryn.

Kathryn said: "I often feel guilty now about how we behaved with

my mother-in-law, as it had always seemed as though it 'suited' her – sometimes she could see things and sometimes she couldn't. But having lived with Michael for all this time going through it himself, I understand it now. I understand that different lights, different colours, all sorts of things make a difference. But we weren't aware, and we just didn't realise then because macular degeneration just wasn't talked about."

Coping with the impact of sight loss

Many people find a sight loss diagnosis a difficult and emotional time, and Kathryn says it was hard to accept that this was something that was really happening.

"I do think that in those weeks and months after the diagnosis there's an awful lot of denial," she said. "You do think 'it's not going to happen to us'. It's something that we'll cope with and the sight loss will never happen. The truth is that it has gotten worse: Michael's just been registered as Severely Sight Impaired. He's lost his sight in his left eye and lost around 75 per cent vision in his right eye. Unfortunately, there's a lot of sadness attached to it."

As Michael's sight deteriorated and his independence was impacted,

Kathryn says she needed to pick up more and more tasks at home to support him and keep things going.

Kathryn said: "I think the main thing for Michael was that driving had to go quite quickly. He was sensible about that and he gave it up straight away. As the person standing beside their loved one who is going through this, you are picking up almost everything.

"You go through the experience together. Certainly, living together as we are, as husband and wife. There've been the ups and downs where I've perhaps a bit foolishly said 'here it is' to give him something without realising that he can't see it. It's times like that that cause you to be choking back the tears. Michael's always been a man who can turn his hand to anything. Now it's circumstances where, for example, a light isn't working, so these days we have to ring the electrician. It's a real awakening to the situation when it affects everything."

Knowing it's time for some extra support

For years the couple worked through it together, with Kathryn caring for her husband. But when Kathryn recently had a bad fall, she acknowledged that it was time for

some extra support at home.

Kathryn said: "I was very lucky, no broken bones or stitches, but my fall happened so quickly. My daughters really had to kick in and help with everything and look after both of us. That brought it home to all of us that possibly we'd waited too long and that now we really needed to get some help. I believe the time for us to reach out for some more support has probably been coming up on us over the last year."

Michael's Sight Scotland Veterans outreach worker, Ingrid Penny, has been in touch with the couple throughout the lockdown and the pandemic restrictions via phone. Ingrid has been able to put Kathryn and Michael in touch with people who can help, and some support for them at home is now being arranged.

"Ingrid did it in a lovely way, like a friend talking to you," said Kathryn. "She's gotten to know us and is watching out for us, for things that could be of benefit to us, and she's put me in touch with people who can help. She rings up just to see how we are, and that means so much. She's an absolute diamond. She really does care."

Accepting that it's okay to accept help

Kathryn says that they had never asked for help before, and though she knows it is now time to accept support it's still "not easy".

"Friends have said to me in the past that if I wanted to go out to do something, like shopping, they would come and stay with Michael so I could do that," said Kathryn.

"I've always turned those offers down. I've never said I don't want them to come, I just haven't done it. I am now at that stage where I feel that if people offer, I will say 'Yes, that's nice, thank you – that'd be good'.

"I've said no before because I felt we could manage. We've been together a long time and are very much a pair. I don't want to admit that I can't do it all anymore. But it brought it home to me when I fell, and I really couldn't have done anything for anybody for a couple of days, that we should have things in place now whereby we do accept some help.

"There's a relief now we have come to this point, but there is a sadness that comes with it. But you still have to get over that and be realistic."

'You're not alone in this'

Through Sight Scotland Veterans, Kathryn says that after meeting other members and their partners and carers, she knows she is not alone in what she and Michael are experiencing. Some vital friendships have grown for them through the charity's Inverurie lunch group that they attended regularly, which is currently halted due to pandemic restrictions.

"It's Michael that's the Sight Scotland Veterans member, but the support is there for us all," she said. "It's made a tremendous difference to me. When I'd go out with friends I'd be watching to make sure something doesn't go wrong, whereas when we'd go out for the lunches with Sight Scotland Veterans it's an absolute treat because you haven't got to worry. Everybody's in the same boat.

"Through the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, the friends we've made ring up and it's so good that you don't have to explain everything. The feeling that another wife/carer just knows, without saying, how we feel because they are going through it too. It's worth so much. I relax. I find it invaluable.

"I'd encourage anyone – member, friend, family member or carer –

who is feeling like they're struggling to get in touch with the outreach worker assigned to you or your loved one. Our outreach worker has been a godsend to us. We are getting there."

Acts of Kindness

Little acts of kindness go a long way, and even more so in recent times. With socialising and travel restrictions still in place, members of Sight Scotland Veterans have been displaying various acts of kindness to keep the community spirit alive and brighten the days of those around them.

Three members have shared with us how they have displayed little acts of kindness throughout lockdown.

Musical neighbour raises spirits during lockdown

Drew Crockett, 57, of Cardross, went above and beyond to show his appreciation for the NHS and carers during the national Clap for Carers weekly applause in summer. Every Thursday at 8pm, Drew put on his kilt and marched up and down his street whilst playing the bagpipes. "I thought I'd play the bagpipes on the street during the first Clap for Carers as my way of thanking everyone," he said.

The performance was such a hit with his neighbours, Drew continued to take to the street with his bagpipes every week on Clap for Carers night for the following 10 weeks.

"The neighbours looked forward to it every week, it was a good way to cheer everyone up. Even the young children looked forward to hearing me play," Drew said. "Every week I was thanked by my neighbours and was even given bottles of whisky."

Drew has lived on his street in Cardross for 18 years and most of his neighbours know him as their ex-postman. But few people knew of his musical talents until then.

"People I never knew before say hello to me now," Drew said.

Drew has played the bagpipes for nearly 50 years, including during his service with the Argyll and Southern Highlanders from 1987 to 1990. Prior to lockdown, Drew played at events regularly, including services and events held at the Hawkhead Centre.

Filmed by his wife, Helen, Drew also played the bagpipes for Sight Scotland Veterans' VE Day video online and performed Flowers O' the Forest for the charity's virtual Remembrance service on 11 November.

"The members who go to Hawkhead love it when the bagpipes are played, so it felt good to still be able to play for everyone," Drew said. "It was good so many people tuned into watch the Remembrance service."

On Remembrance Sunday, Drew united his neighbours once again as he marched up and down his street to play. Drew said: "People stood at

their front doors and some cars stopped as well to listen and mark the two-minute silence."

And he is thinking of the next occasion where he can play for his neighbours, saying: "I don't think anyone will be able to do anything for New Year this year, so I'll play on the street again at Hogmanay to try cheer everyone up."



Image shows Drew standing next to the Commonwealth War Graves and he is wearing a kilt and holding the bagpipes in his arm.

Member uses woodwork skills to raise money for charity

Another member to have displayed an act of kindness during the coronavirus pandemic is Eddie Piper of Wellbank in Angus.

Eddie has raised an incredible £700 so far for a local children's charity since the start of lockdown in March. The 79-year-old has been busy making squirrel boxes for a local conservation group to sell, with all profits going to Help for Kids.

Eddie attended the Linburn Centre once a month and spent a lot of time in the woodwork room making rocking horses. "My son-in-law, Derek, asked me if I could make him a box for squirrel feed," said Eddie. "I thought it didn't seem too difficult and that I'd be able to do it."

Eddie has a shed at the bottom of his garden which he uses to make the boxes. One box led to another, and another, and it wasn't long before Eddie's squirrel boxes were in high demand.

Eddie's son-in-law proudly showed his new squirrel box to a friend who works for a local conservation charity. The squirrel boxes are being sold for £10 each on

Facebook on a page called 'Darren's Ginger Ninjas'.

It takes Eddie two to three hours to make a box. "It keeps me busy and keeps me out of my wife's way!" he said. "I have always been interested in woodwork and used to do a lot of DIY around the house. I had to stop when my sight got worse though as my wife said things didn't look right anymore.

"When I started to go to the Linburn Centre, I learned a lot about the safety aspect of doing woodwork with sight loss and it helped with my confidence. I use a talking measuring tape but taking my time and having patience is the main thing."

Sharing and caring during lockdown

We have another bagpiper in our midst in James Sibbet, of Edinburgh, who also took to the streets to play during the weekly Clap for Carers.

"After the first Clap for Carers, I heard on the radio that people were also being encouraged to play their instruments during the weekly clap," James said. "I thought, oh well I could do that and thought it would be of interest, so the following week I stood on the street and played my bagpipes."

James was in the Royal Navy from 1951 to 1962, and he played the bagpipes as the ships went in and out of harbour and at parties. The keen piper has also been a member of the Pipe Major David Black's Leith Pipe Band for many years, but due to the pandemic the group currently isn't able to play together as a band.

"My neighbours gave me the thumbs up and they all seemed to enjoy it, so I kept playing every week," said the ninety-year old. "Some of my neighbours gave me a thank you card and I got a bottle of wine too.

"I've lived on the street for 36 years but I don't know too many of my neighbours anymore due to new families moving in, so it was a good way to bring everyone together.

In September, one of my neighbour's son's was doing a sponsored group cycle from London to Edinburgh for charity and our street was the finish point. I was asked if I would play for the group as they reached their final stop, so I got to be a one-man band."

James and his wife of 65 years, Aurora, have also kindly been providing home cooked meals to their neighbour.

"Prior to lockdown, we would invite our neighbour over for a meal," he said. "She recently became bedridden so my wife has been making extra and we deliver it to her doorstep for her carer to collect.

"Eating healthy continental food has been my secret to a long and healthy life. I'm very fortunate my wife is such a good cook.

"I think it's in our nature to show kindness to others. There's never been a time when we have not been helpful, we always do what we can."

Staff step up to volunteer

Staff at Sight Scotland Veterans have also gone above and beyond during the pandemic to ensure everyone is supported and cared for during these tough times. In particular, we would like to thank the centre and outreach staff who have very kindly worked at our sister charity, Sight Scotland's, care services during the Coronavirus pandemic. Their support has been invaluable to the staff and residents.

Tips and Tricks

Rehabilitation Team Tips for the Winter Weather

Katrina Campbell is one of Sight Scotland Veterans' rehabilitation officers. Here she shares her tips for staying mobile and safe as the weather gets colder and the days get shorter in these difficult times.

Winter can be hard for people at the best of times, with or without visual issues. Many of us have been especially struggling recently due to isolation because of the current Covid-19 pandemic, so it is good to take advantage of a dry day to get out for some fresh air and exercise.

We are all too aware of the need to social distance and this can be a challenge if you have a sight issue. It is not always apparent to other pedestrians that you have a visual impairment and may struggle to social distance at times. This is where wearing a Hidden Disabilities Sunflower lanyard may be useful. These lanyards discreetly indicate to anyone near you that you may struggle to socially distance due to having a visual impairment, and may need additional support, help or a little more time. If you think one of these lanyards would be of benefit to you, please get in contact

with one of the rehabilitation officers or your outreach worker and we will get a lanyard posted out to you.

Dealing with glare

Glare is a particular problem in winter for people with sight loss due to the sun being low in the sky during the morning and late afternoon. There is also the additional issue of the sun reflecting off snow, ice and water on the road. So, make sure you have a good pair of wrap-around, anti-glare glasses. If you wear distance glasses outside you can get fit-over anti-glare glasses to wear over the top. A cap with a skip is also very good at helping to reduce glare. Again, speak to your rehabilitation officer or outreach worker for advice and support with this.

Things to wear and carry with you

With the shorter days comes darkness. This can be a problem for many people, but especially for those with conditions like Retinitis Pigmentosa who experience night blindness. If your vision is reduced further by the dark you should, ideally, carry a symbol or guide cane when out and about. These

canes are small enough to fit into an inside pocket or handbag, thus can be pulled out when required. They are reflective and help to make vehicle drivers and other pedestrians aware of your visual difficulties. Sight Scotland Veterans can assess you for these canes and supply them, as well as offer guidance on the correct way to use them.

If using a long cane we recommend you wear leather gloves rather than woollen, as these are not so thick that they reduce your ability to pick up changes in surface texture through your cane.

Dealing with snow

The arrival of snow can bring added challenges. Someone who is severely sight impaired or has significant low vision may rely on echoes and other sounds to help orient themselves to their surroundings, so snow will make this difficult, as it muffles sounds. Crossing streets can become challenging, because it can also be harder to hear the sound of cars. If it is cold, ideally wear a winter hat such as a beanie which can be folded above the ears, so as to not impede auditory clues.

Snow also interferes with the information we get from our canes. A light cane touch is used

for fluffy snow and a heavier touch for icy conditions. Poking through the snow with the cane to gauge its depth and consistency is also useful.

It is extremely important to be visible to drivers during dark winter months. Either wear brightly coloured outwear which stands out, or consider adding a reflective item like a high visibility 'Sam Browne' belt to give drivers more warning of your road-crossing.

Sighted Guide Walks

We are pleased to let you know that Sight Scotland Veterans staff are now offering a sighted guide walks service in areas where the pandemic restrictions allow for us to do this.

Our Lead Rehabilitation Officer, Sandra Taylor, provides the details on this service:

Through this difficult time many of our members have mentioned that they have lost confidence in going outdoors. Their mobility has decreased due to lack of exercise, motivation or no support to get outdoors. This can affect general wellbeing and mental health.

For those members who are mobile and wish to go out for a sighted guide walk with a member of our staff, this is now possible depending on the restrictions in your home area. Some members have already taken up this offer and are enjoying the opportunity to stretch their legs and get some fresh air, and are enjoying a good old chat with the staff member.

Sight Scotland Veterans has invested in ramble tags which attach to your guide's arm and provide a handle for you to hold on to for further safety precautions. We also ask members to wear a facemask and to ensure hand sanitiser is used at the start of the walk.

If you feel you would benefit from this service, please contact your Outreach Worker who can discuss this further with you.

Please also let us know if you require any further advice around sighted guide techniques. We are also happy to support friends and family to learn the safest way of offering sighted guide to you. Again, please discuss this with your Outreach Worker who can then refer you on to the Rehabilitation Team.

An introduction to types of mobility canes for visual impairment

Mobility canes are a form of mobility aid that enable people living with a visual impairment to go about their daily business when out and about, especially in unfamiliar areas.

White mobility canes are used by many people who have a visual impairment. Primarily, they aid a person to scan their surroundings for obstacles or find orientation clues. They are also helpful for others such as road users in identifying the person as vision impaired so that they can take appropriate care and attention.

Mobility canes are often made from aluminium, graphite-reinforced plastic or other fibre-reinforced plastic, and can come with a wide variety of tips depending on the user's preference. They can be either collapsible or straight.

Here are the most common types of canes you may come across:

Symbol cane

These canes are smaller than other types of mobility cane. They are a signifier and are used primarily to make others aware of the user's

vision impairment. For example, it may alert drivers that a pedestrian holding one may not be able to see them, and as such to take extra care.

A symbol cane is often lighter and shorter than the long cane, and can be folded up to fit into a bag or pocket when not in use. It has no real use as a mobility tool. Some people with a visual impairment use the symbol cane to check for a stair edge or kerb edge and it can be used to detect things like door edges and frames.

Guide cane

This type of cane is longer than a symbol cane and is used for basic protection. A guide cane generally extends from the floor to the user's waist, providing information about surroundings around a step ahead. It can be used to scan for kerbs and steps. The guide cane can also be used diagonally across the body for protection, warning the user of obstacles immediately ahead. A roller tip can be used if appropriate to aid travel in different situations, especially in unfamiliar areas and where surface underfoot is uneven. The guide cane is also collapsible. It is advisable to have training from a rehabilitation officer to ensure correct use and ensure safety.

Long cane

This white cane is designed primarily as a mobility tool that is used to detect objects and provide information about the environment to the user about two steps ahead of them. The cane's length depends on the user's height, and traditionally extends from the floor to the user's sternum. It differs from the guide cane in that a long cane's end has a tip of some kind – either rolling or pointed.

Rolling tips can be best for smooth pavements and offer the largest amount of protection as they never leave the ground. They can be either cricket ball shaped, or more cylindrical. Pointed tips can be used when tapping the ground as opposed to rolling across it. Your rehabilitation officer will advise you on the correct tip for different situations. It is recommended that long cane training be undertaken with a qualified rehabilitation officer.

Support cane

The white support cane is designed primarily to offer physical support and stability to someone who is blind or partially sighted. Its white colour means the cane also works to make others aware the user has sight loss. White support canes need to be measured so that the

height is correct for the individual. Support canes come with various styles of handles and can also be collapsible. It is recommended that individuals should be assessed by a physiotherapist to ensure correct height and use of support cane.

Red-striped canes

If you see any of the above white canes, including white support sticks, that also have red stripes on them, then this signifies that the person also has a hearing impairment as well as a visual impairment.

Rehab support: Handheld electronic magnifiers

Little pieces of specialist equipment can make a big difference. As part of Sight Scotland Veterans' offering, our expert Rehabilitation Team are able to assess for various handheld electronic magnifiers that can aid in everyday tasks and hobbies.

Sight Scotland Veterans Rehabilitation Officer, Kate White, was recently able to source a solution and provide training to help member Jim Syme, 84, of Edinburgh, access his Kindle library on his Kindle with use of a simple, electronic handheld magnifier called an Explore 5.

The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders veteran, is a keen reader and loves his detective novels. Though he struggles to read text on the TV and his mail, he is still able to enjoy reading books on his Kindle due to its text magnification feature.

However, the Kindle library on his new Kindle wasn't accessible to him to find the books he wanted to read. After an assessment with Kate and support to get used to the new magnifier, Jim is now able to use the magnifier to search the Kindle library and then read away to his heart's content.

Jim, who has macular degeneration, said: "This magnifier's the best bit of equipment I've had. It's absolutely brilliant and really easy to use. I can manage to read my Kindle because I can blow the words up fully. The books are a bit small on the library, so I just use Explore 5 magnifier to find the one I want to read.

"I've also been using it to find phone numbers and to read tins and cooking instructions. It does really help at home – I won't let it leave my side.

"The Rehabilitation Team are very good, they really try to get you what you need."

Kate has also been working with member Kenneth Hall, of Clovenfords in the Scottish Borders, and has provided him with an Explore 8 electronic magnifier. This handheld magnifier also has an in-built distance camera, and it allows you to zoom into the pictures you take.

Kenneth, who served National Service with the Army's Intelligence Corps, is a talented musician and artist, and when restrictions are lifted he hopes to be able to use this camera feature to take images and use the magnifier features to assist with his landscape painting.

Kate has also set Kenneth up with a Topaz video magnifier, which is larger and has enabled him to read newspapers and magazines. Kenneth, who is 88 and has glaucoma, said: "My sight loss impacts on day-to-day tasks a great deal, because it's very difficult to read normal print. It's very frustrating. I've had some very good pieces of equipment from the charity to help, particularly electronic magnifiers.

"The Explore 8 measures 8x6 inches and is portable so I can carry that around with me. It's excellent. I've got a big one too, the Topaz – I can put a newspaper under it or the Radio Times so it's very helpful. It's static so it stays in my study. I

can put a sheet of print under it, like the newspaper, and read it off the screen.

"I think I use the Explore 8 most because I'll quite often sit in an armchair to read and I can put it over a book. I do sketching, and that can be frustrating because I can't see the detail of the scene I'm trying to reproduce sufficiently, so that's very difficult. Being able to take a photograph of it helps me when I'm making touches to sketches. When restrictions are lifted I'm looking forward to getting out to try out the Explore 8 camera feature.

"These pieces of equipment have had such a positive impact, it's been absolutely tremendous."

Sight Scotland Veterans Rehabilitation Officer, Kate White, said: "Modern technology can offer some fantastic ways to keep enjoying the things you love and maintain your independence. But from time to time, accessible technology like Kindles and tablets can still have their limitations, and sometimes other equipment is needed to get to the end goal.

"Magnification is not a one-size-fits-all, and the Rehabilitation Team is here to work with you to find the best solution for you for whatever your goal may be – from reading or

regaining a favourite hobby like arts and crafts, to maintaining your independence with daily tasks at home.

We're still here to help

Our rehabilitation officers offer a full assessment, advice, training and equipment in order to aid our members to adapt to sight loss and maintain independence safely.

The rehabilitation team is working remotely under current restrictions, offering telephone assessments and expert advice and support, and posting out specialist equipment.

If you are struggling with a task at home, or would like more information on sighted walks, mobility canes, or a piece of equipment, please speak to your local outreach worker to request a referral.

Activities at Home

Cooking at Home

We're pleased to bring you three more delicious recipes for you to try at home. These recipes include a lunch or starter option, a main meal and a tasty treat and have been provided by our rehabilitation team. Follow our step-by-step guide for each of the recipes below. For a recap on cooking safely at home, please refer to Jac's top tips on page 7 in the previous edition of The Bugle.

Sandra's haggis, neeps and tatt- tie soup

Ingredients:

- One large onion
- Splash of rapeseed or vegetable oil
- 500g tatties
- 300g neeps
- 1.8L beef stock (approx. 3 pints)
- 450g Haggis or, alternatively, a large tin of haggis
- Salt & pepper to taste
- Half teaspoon mustard powder
- Nip of whisky (optional!)

Method:

1. Peel and finely chop the onion and sweat it on medium heat in a large soup pan along with a

splash of oil.

2. Whilst the onions are cooking, peel the neeps and the tatties and then grate, finely chop or use a food processor to break down into smaller pieces.
3. Add the neeps and tatties to the pan alongside the onions and continue to sweat for a couple of minutes, be careful not to burn the vegetables.
4. Next add 1.8 litres of stock to the pan and bring to the boil. Add half a teaspoon of mustard powder and simmer for 30 minutes.
5. Remove the haggis from its outer cover or tin and cut into small cubes.
6. At this point you can either add all the haggis to the soup, warm it through and serve it in a rustic broth style.
7. Alternatively, for a smoother and creamier version, add half the haggis to the soup and blitz with a handheld blender. Heat the remaining haggis in the microwave and add a heap to the middle of the bowl.
8. Taste and season before serving. You may wish to add a nip of whisky.

Slainte!

Cheryl's slow cooker chicken curry

Ingredients:

- 600g diced chicken
- Fry light oil
- Two large onions, grated
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Half teaspoon Garlic paste
- Half teaspoon Ginger paste
- One teaspoon Cumin powder
- One teaspoon Turmeric powder
- Half to one teaspoon Chilli powder
- One teaspoon Garam Masala
- One teaspoon Ground Coriander
- One tablespoon Coriander leaves
- Half teaspoon Lemon juice
- 400g chopped tomatoes
- One tablespoon Tomato puree
- Two tablespoon Tikka Paste
- Three tablespoon natural yoghurt (optional)
- Half pint cold water.

Method:

1. Brown the chicken with the onion, garlic, ginger salt and pepper in a little fry light
2. Mix cumin, turmeric, chilli, garam masala and ground coriander in a cup with a little water to make a paste
3. Add the chicken mix to the slow cooker along with your spice mix paste, tomato puree, lemon juice, chopped tomatoes,

coriander leaves and tikka paste

4. Add cold water, stir the mixture together put the lid on and set to slow cook six hours
5. If you are using yoghurt, add this to the mix just before serving and stir well.

Audrey's 'best ever' banana muffin's

Ingredients:

- Three large ripe bananas
- Three quarters cup of white sugar
- One egg
- One third cup of melted butter
- Half teaspoon of salt
- One and a half cups of self-raising flour

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 190 degrees Celsius
2. Mash the bananas in a large bowl
3. Add the sugar and a slightly beaten egg to the bowl, then add the melted butter
4. Finally, add the salt and flour and mix together
5. Spoon the mixture into a greased muffin tin
6. Bake at 190 degrees for 20 minutes.

We hope you enjoy making these recipes. Let us and your fellow members know how you get on by posting a picture of homemade dishes on the 'Members and Friends of Sight Scotland Veterans' Facebook page.

Fitness at Home

As the days are now shorter and temperatures have dropped, it may not be as easy to go outdoors for your daily exercise.

It is important for us to continue to be active to keep us fit and healthy, especially in the winter months.

To help you to continue to exercise safely from the comfort of your own home, Abbie, Centre Officer at the Hawkhead Centre has created a strength and balance programme for members to try at home.

All you need is a steady chair, an empty space on your wall, an item to use as a weight, e.g. a tin of soup, and a pole or brush.

Before you get started:

- Make sure eat before you do your workout, do not exercise on an empty stomach.
- Make sure you are feeling well enough to exercise – listen to your body.

- Always allow time to warm up and cool down gradually
- Do not overexert yourself, take plenty of rest and go at your own ability.
- Drink water throughout.
- Do half the workout one day and half another day if you get breathless easily.
- Rest and recover in-between sets.

Warm up

March on the spot – keep this up for three minutes

Remember to:

1. keep your back straight
2. have loose legs and don't lock your knees
3. breathe normally.

Side steps – again, continue exercise for three minutes

Remember to:

1. step left to right
2. go at own your pace to give gradual warm up
3. breathe normally.

Main exercise

For each exercise, repeat movement 10 times to complete a set. We recommend you do three sets of each exercise.

Exercise one – Sit-to-stands with chair

1. Sitting on a chair, keep your back straight and knees soft
2. Keep your feet flat on the floor with your weight on your heels, feet shoulder-width apart for stability
3. Use your legs and bum to raise up off chair
4. Feel for chair behind your legs before sitting back down

Exercise two – Wall press

1. Stand facing a wall and squeeze your shoulder blades together
2. Keep your feet hip-width apart and open your chest
3. Stretch your arms out and place your hands on the wall
4. Lean in towards the wall by bending your elbows, whilst keeping your body straight
5. Return to standing position

Exercise three – Step ups

Continue exercise for one minute and repeat three times, resting for 30 seconds after every minute.

1. Use your staircase or a secure step
2. Using one foot at a time and keeping your back straight, step up onto the step

3. Return to your original position and repeat using the other foot
4. Start slowly, gradually building up speed

Exercise 4 – Bicep curls

1. Hold your weight in your hand (e.g. bag of sugar or tin of soup)
2. Stand with a wide stance and keep your knees relaxed
3. Raise your arm to squeeze bicep
4. Repeat on the other side
5. Do not hold your breath – breathe out when you lift

Exercise 5 – Shuttle walks

1. Walk back and forth in a space for three minutes and take rest when needed.
2. Use arms for balance and support
3. Keep a steady pace
4. Breathe naturally

Exercise 6 – Calf raises

1. Hold on to the back of a chair for support and stand with your feet apart
2. Raise up on to your toes and then relax back to a flat footed position
3. Repeat this movement

Exercise 7 – Upright row

1. For this exercise, use a brush or pole for lifting
2. Place your hands on the pole hip width apart and ensure your feet are apart
3. Straighten your back and open your chest
4. Lift the brush or pole up towards your chin ensuring your elbows are out to the side

Exercise 8 – Alternate lunges

1. Keep good posture, with your body weight in the middle
2. Keeping your back straight, bend your front knee to lunge
3. Swap legs and repeat movement
4. Use a chair to hold on to if need support for balance

Exercise 9 – Lateral rises

- Holding a weight in each hand, e.g. a tin of soup, keep your weight centered and your feet apart
- Lift your arms in wide arcs up to your sides to around ear height, then lower again
- Repeat movement

Cool down

Stretches:

When stretching, control your breathing and hold the stretch for 30 seconds.

Calf stretch

1. Lean against a wall
2. Keep feet facing forward and flat and stretch one leg out behind you
3. Hold for 30 seconds then switch legs

Quad stretch

1. Hold a wall for support
2. Holding on to your ankle, lift your leg to your back within your flexibility range
3. Hold for 30 seconds then swap legs

Back stretch

1. Join fingers together and stretch arms out in front, palms facing forwards
2. Hold for 30 seconds

Chest stretch

1. Stand tall and extend both arms straight out in front of you
2. Keep arms straight and move them back as far as you comfortably can

3. Palms should face forward and you should feel the stretch along your chest
4. Return the arms to the starting position, extended in front of you and repeat

Shoulder stretch

1. Bring one arm across the front of your body at chest height
2. Support the arm with the crease of your other arm's elbow
3. Continue to face forward and hold for 30 seconds, then swap arms

Relaxation

For two minutes, do one of the following:

- sit or lie
- close your eyes
- concentrate on your breathing
- deep breaths in and blow out.

We hope you enjoyed this workout. For more workouts to do at home, please get in touch with Eilidh by emailing eilidh.mccartney@sightscotlandveterans.org.uk or by calling 07718 486 318.

Creative Corner

Poetry by Dave Phillips

Sight Scotland Veterans' member and resident poet, Dave Phillips, has written another excellent poem especially for his fellow members.

In this edition, we're pleased to share Dave's festive poem, Find Kindness, which is all about finding and sharing kindness this Christmas after what has been a very strange year for all of us.

Find Kindness

This year as we wrap gifts
And write our cards
Finding positivity
Seems hard

An it seems that this
Most terrible of years
With its sickness
And it's loneliness and fear

Has hollowed out the joy
From in our souls
Where once was hope
Now dwells a gaping hole

And however much
The politicians try
To reassure we're sure
That they all lie

But take a look around
And you may see
That no matter how despondent
You may be

It isn't very difficult
To find
Someone for whom one act
Of being kind

Of taking just one moment
Of your day
Deciding not to look
The other way

Will make them realise
They're not alone
That every human heart
Is not cold stone

That kindness, care
And everyday compassion
Are something that
No government can ration

So this Christmas don't just sit
And grimly bear it
Find some kindness, wrap it up
And share it.

Merry Christmas

Creative Competition

Have you been letting your creative juices flow throughout lockdown?

As we have all spent more time indoors this year, perhaps you have used the time to regain a long-lost hobby, or hone your existing skills.

Whether you have a flair for poetry or are a dab-hand with a paint-brush, we would love to see your creations. So much so that we're holding a creative competition!

We challenge members of Sight Scotland Veterans throughout Scotland to submit one of the following:

- A piece of artwork using any material
- A poem
- A short story of no more than 1000 words

A prize will be given to the lucky winner, with entries judged by the Outreach Practice Leads for Sight Scotland Veterans, Alison Cairns and Jenny Liddell.

To be in with the chance of being crowned Sight Scotland Veterans' Creative Champion and winning the prize, please submit your entry by Friday 15 January.

You can send your entries via email to:

hello@sightscotlandveterans.org.uk

or via post to:

Alison Cairns,
Sight Scotland Veterans,
50 Gillespie Crescent,
Edinburgh,
EH10 4JB

The lucky winner will be revealed on the members' private Facebook group, Members and Friends of Sight Scotland Veterans, and in the next edition of The Bugle in the spring.

Good luck!

AgeScotland Calendar

We're pleased to enclose a free 2021 calendar from AgeScotland, This was kindly provided in large print especially for members of Sight Scotland Veterans and includes lots of useful information and advice.

We hope you like your new calendar, but if it isn't to your liking please feel free to pass this on to a friend or family member.

Sight Scotland Veterans' Christmas Show

Thank you for reading the latest edition of The Bugle.

We hope you have enjoyed the final edition of 2020, the next edition will be issued in the spring.

If you haven't already, please join our private members' Facebook group, Members and Friends of Sight Scotland Veterans. This is an online community of fellow members, their friends and family, and staff. Simply log into your Facebook account, search for Members and Friends of Sight Scotland Veterans in the search bar and request to join.

This year, we will be sharing a virtual Christmas show especially for members! Our Christmas show video will be available to watch

week commencing 21 December on the Facebook group. Further details will be revealed on the group shortly.

From everyone at Sight Scotland Veterans, we wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We hope to see you all again soon in 2021.

Thank you for reading the latest edition of The Bugle. We encourage and appreciate your opinions and feedback. If you would like to have a chat about the newsletter, please contact us.

Email: hello@sightscotlandveterans.org.uk

Phone: 07718 486 318

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**Sight Scotland
Veterans**

Tackling vision loss together