

Sandwell



Visually Impaired

SVI (Sandwell Visually Impaired) Annual Report

1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018

Charity name: SVI (Sandwell Visually Impaired)

Registered Charity No: 1131021

Charity address: SVI Office, West Bromwich Town Hall, Lodge Road, West Bromwich, West Midlands B70 8DY

Management Committee Trustees:

A Averis – Chair	L Bradshaw
S Nasser – Vice-Chair	Terry Burling
H Rourke – Secretary	R Flatley
K Averis – Treasurer	R Gormley
K Betteridge	S Hammer
A Bostan	S Keenan
W Bowen	G Orlebar

Governing document: Constitution

Trustees selected by: Election by membership

Membership: 487 (as of 31 March 2018)

Registered Visually Impaired in Sandwell (information circulation list): approximately 1378

1 Charity objectives

The relief of blind and visually impaired people, their families and carers in Sandwell. In particular, but not exclusively by assistance in the provision of advice, education, information and support to enable increased independence and life opportunities.

2 Introduction

It has been an exciting year for SVI, with a raft of new developments, which will enable us to grow and better meet the needs of our membership going forward. Our new accommodation at West Bromwich Town Hall means we can welcome members, volunteers and visitors with confidence and engage more people in our activities. We have directly employed our first two members of staff, who join our two officers seconded from Sandwell MBC. In addition, becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, fulfilling a long-term ambition at the end of this financial year, means that we enter an eagerly awaited transitional phase at the conclusion of this reporting period.

2.1 About the people we support

From an initial 12 members in 2004, SVI now has a membership of 485, with an additional provision of information and peer support to approximately 1378 registered Severely Visually Impaired in Sandwell. We also offer guidance and support to family members, carers and other people with an interest in sight loss matters. The SVI office serves approximately 476 people weekly, responding to telephone enquiries, visits and organised activities. This is in addition to our work with the STN with 160 registered listeners.

In addition to the direct support outlined above, SVI has strong partnerships in the community, statutory and more recently the business sector. We help and advise on how best to engage with and support blind and visually impaired service users and customers.

2.2 About SVI's new premises

In May 2017, SVI moved to larger premises at West Bromwich Town Hall. We now have office space that comfortably accommodates more than six staff and/or volunteers at any one time. We also have:

- a 'chill room' for small meetings and one-to-one discussions;
- a small but growing resource bank of aids and equipment to demonstrate to visually impaired people and their families;
- shared common room space;
- use of rooms in the Town Hall via booking

This extra space has vastly improved our ability to offer more activities to the blind and visually impaired community and we plan to develop this offer during 2018/2019. SVI now has a base that we are proud to welcome members, volunteers and guests to attend.

SVI acknowledge the help and support provided by Sandwell MBC that has enabled us to move forward in such a positive way. Not only through seconded staff and funding in kind that helps us to operate on a day-to-day basis but also grant assistance helping us to offer prevention support to people living with sight loss. Sandwell MBC's continued support is helping us to establish a stronger infrastructure as we move forward.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of Sandwell MBC in making our accommodation available at a peppercorn rent.

2.3 About our staff and volunteers

This year SVI has recruited our first directly employed workers. A part time Awards for All funded Enablement Worker joined us in October 2017. She helps members to access our external provision at places like the Portway Lifestyle Centre and West Bromwich Leisure Centre; supports members to enjoy trips out and about as well as activities at our base; and offers one-to-one assistance to visually impaired people who need help to access services like Blue Badge applications and utility company support.

Our Information and Support Worker commenced her role with us this financial year and is based mainly in our office helping people who drop in, make appointments for assistance and call us by phone. This role also includes helping SVI to build links with local firms and taking the lead in our application to become a member of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce. She also works with the Development Worker and Trustees to work towards PQASSO Quality Standards.



The new posts complement our existing Sandwell MBC seconded officers to provide the very best services for the visually impaired community of Sandwell. They are valuable assets to our team.

Volunteers help our Trustees and staff to run most of our activities. Without volunteer help, we could not offer our broad range of activities and services. Our volunteers are a true asset to SVI and we plan to further develop our volunteer base in 2018/2019.

Grateful thanks to Big Lottery Awards for All for funding our Enablement Worker; Comic Relief Core Strengths grant support to part fund our Information and Support Worker; Continued funding in kind from Sandwell MBC who have seconded our Development Officer and Business Support Officer posts.

2.4 About SVI gaining Charitable Incorporated Organisation status

Throughout this Financial Year, our Trustees and staff have been working hard with the help of Sandwell Council for Voluntary Services [SCVO] to prepare and apply for Charitable Incorporated Organisation [CIO] status. We were successfully awarded this in October and are now in the process of changing from our present unincorporated charitable status to becoming a CIO. This is a big task and it will take time to make the full transition.

Members of SVI will need to reapply for membership and we anticipate a temporary dip in numbers following the switch from SVI to SVI CIO. In the longer term, this development will enable SVI to grow as an organisation, offer more services and support, and place us on a firmer foundation for the future.

The recent developments and changes in SVI will enable us to grow our offer of services to people living with sight loss, their families, carers and associates in Sandwell. As well as the developments already outlined, the programmes below highlight the range of key activities undertaken this year.

3 Summary of our main activities and achievements

3.1 Programmes for our members

3.1.1 Learn to swim, water confidence and swimming

In April 2016, SVI started a water confidence and learn to swim programme in the hydrotherapy pool at the Portway Lifestyle Centre. These sessions were extremely popular and enabled blind and visually impaired people to undertake pool-based activities with the guidance and support of swimming instructors and volunteer swim buddies. This year SVI was able to offer a further ten-week programme of relaxed evening swimming in the therapy pool. These sessions were informal and gave working people, or those who have other commitments during the day an opportunity to join in.

These sessions also had the flexibility to support SVI members with more complex support needs.

This programme was funded through an Oldbury Community Activity Network (CAN) grant.

3.1.2 West Bromwich swimming improver programme

Building on the success of the Portway Lifestyle Centre water confidence and learn to swim programme, we obtained funding from West Bromwich CAN to deliver sessions to learners, improvers and VI swimmers. These

sessions took place at West Bromwich Leisure Centre in partnership with Places for People.

Our sincere thanks go to our swim buddies, who have assisted SVI members to use the pool safely, develop their skills and confidence as well as offering encouragement and praise for achievements.

This programme was funded through a West Bromwich Community Activity Network grant.

The Community Activity Network funding programmes have enabled SVI to get 103 people into a pool to either enjoy swimming or simply relax in the water. Throughout the entire period of this funding April 2016 to March 2018, we have run a total of 94 sessions with 977 individual instances in the pool overall and have exceeded our proposed grant outcomes.

Our swimming programmes are a successful model for others to follow and have been replicated by Birmingham Vision and Sense.

3.1.3 SVI Gym Buddy scheme

SVI gym sessions at the Portway Lifestyle Centre have further developed this year. Sessions take place twice weekly on Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons. We have introduced exercise programmes like 'Couch to 5k'.

Gym buddies encourage and support visually impaired people to set personal goals and group challenges. It is true teamwork to encourage everyone to achieve their personal best.



Sincere thanks go to our committed volunteer buddies who offer invaluable assistance for visually impaired people to access the gym equipment on an equal basis to non-disabled people. The scheme has fostered new friendships and support networks.

This is a cost neutral provision, as Sandwell Leisure Trust gym facilities are provided free of charge to people who are eligible through the

Sandwell MBC Adult Services Fair Access to Care criteria and those on certain disability benefits.

3.1.4 VI Archery

Visually impaired archery sessions started at Portway Lifestyle Centre in March. The session is run by SVI. Instructors from Complete Kidz, guidance and support from British Blind Sports and Robin Hall (archery world championship level coach) have helped us to get this exciting and challenging project started in the West Midlands.

Initial feedback was positive. SVI Member Trish Gracesmith said: “Since starting the archery with SVI at Portway Lifestyle Centre I have felt amazing. It has given me a massive boost, with people’s comments on how I am naturally good at this. It has even encouraged me to go out and get physiotherapy for my shoulder so I can continue attending these sessions. The qualified coach that came in also gave me a lovely boost as he said I had a great technique and was amazing at grouping, which is where I manage to get the arrows all around the same place. Coming to archery is just amazing, not sure I’m yet ready to proceed as a professional yet, but I’m so glad of this opportunity.”



This programme is funded from a Sandwell Disability Activation Fund Grant that has been carried over to this Financial Year.

3.1.5 Active at 60



This well established, peer support group encourages and supports SVI members aged 50-plus to take part in social activities to stimulate body and mind. Evidence shows that people who are active as they approach 60 are more likely to remain well and active for longer.

We offer a varied programme and this year the group have visited Soho House Museum for an audio-described and touch tour experience, a canal trip in to Dudley caves as

well as indoor events such as a film review with fish and chips afternoon and a festive celebration at the Dartmouth Central Club. Warm thanks go to the volunteer Community Agents who help to organise the events and come up with lots of good ideas for the group to enjoy.

The Active at 60 Group activities are self-funded by members' contributions, raffles and the money raised from a Winter Bazaar which is open to all.

3.1.6 Audio described tours of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts at the University of Birmingham.

The Barber Institute provides SVI members with bespoke, regular audio-described tours – bringing art to life for blind and visually impaired people. We have attended the Barber several times now to enjoy audio described tours of their art works. Guides are excellent and really bring the paintings to life, as they set the scene, telling us about the artist, the historical background and explain painting techniques and encourage discussion on the art pieces. On our winter visit, we stayed for the lunchtime recital.



Having gained feedback from the members that have visited Jean Moss said, “I thought the way they described the pictures at the Barber was excellent”. Jean’s husband Stephen added, “As a fully sighted person, I got more out of the visit than I would have done without the audio descriptions”. Peter went on to say, “The way the lady describes the artwork is very good for those of us who can’t see”.

3.1.7 Jack and the Beanstalk

Building on the great work SVI did last year with the Wolverhampton Grand Theatre and Heath House Studios SVI was invited to be one of the community groups to work on a giant arts project for this year’s pantomime. SVI members attended a workshop in October to create part of the gigantic beanstalk to be on display during the pantomime. SVI members created a huge beanstalk with



colourful and glittering foliage. This was used during the Jack and the Beanstalk Pantomime at the Grand Theatre winter 2017/2018 performance.

3.1.8 The Unremembered wreath making challenge



Heath House Studios worked with SVI again towards the end of this year to create a wreath to commemorate the forgotten heroes of the Labour Core in the First World War. The 'wreath-making challenge' is part of a national programme 'The Unremembered'. The SVI Wreath will be laid at the Cenotaph on the hundred years' anniversary of Armistice day.

Having gained feedback from members who took part, June said, "I really enjoyed the wreath making and it was nice mixing with the others there" and Sandra said "The subject matter was really poignant and I really liked being a part of this project that is so important".

The Barber Institute visits and the Grand Theatre arts projects were cost neutral. The Unremembered wreath-making challenge was funded by a small grant from Big Ideas.

3.1.9 Online Today and Appy Hour

Working in partnership with RNIB (Royal National Institute of the Blind) Online Today team, we ran several group support sessions and one-to-one support sessions for blind and visually impaired people. The aim of the programme was to enable more visually impaired people to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence in using mobile devices, tablets and Smart technology. Beginning with sessions provided by the RNIB Online Today team, we were then given support and training from RNIB to run our own sessions. We launched our 'Appy Hour' sessions in early 2018. These have been a great success and a demonstration of peer support



in practice. SVI member Mr Lal said: “The people who lead the group are very clued up on how to navigate a smartphone.” SVI member Graham said: “I’d be struggling to use my I-phone if I hadn’t attended ‘Appy hour’ training.”

The programme is cost-neutral, run in partnership with RNIB.

3.1.10 Living with Sight Loss course

SVI joined up with the RNIB to offer a two-day ‘living with sight loss’ course to people recently diagnosed visually impaired or those who were struggling to cope with sight loss. We ran the first of these partnership working ‘living with sight loss’ courses in October 2017. Fourteen people attended the two-day programme. Guest speakers from Sandwell MBC’s Sensory Services, South Staffs Water and RNIB Connect gave participants information about local services and Val who ran the sessions was a wealth of knowledge on support available. We plan to run another of these courses in spring 2018.

This course was run by RNIB and hosted by SVI; it was cost neutral to SVI.

3.1.11 Here to Help

We wanted to set up an aids and equipment resource service in Sandwell, in order that visually impaired people did not have to travel to Birmingham or Wolverhampton to look at and get ‘hands on’ information about equipment to make their lives easier. We were therefore delighted when Comic Relief Community Cash awarded us a grant to



purchase a small supply of equipment to demonstrate to visually impaired people, their families and carers. We have shown items to our members at various events run by SVI and where appropriate, encouraged them to have an assessment from the Sensory Service team. This equipment has given people an idea of what is there to help them and encouraged them to explore doing things in different ways.

Hear to Help will also enable SVI to run a pilot listening and support service in the next Financial year.

Local Area Budget funding has enabled SVI to purchase portable loop systems for one-to-one meetings and small group sessions. This will help dual sensory impaired members to benefit and enjoy SVI activities.

3.1.12 SocialEyes

A grant from the Harry Payne Trust has helped SVI to set up a SocialEyes group. This will offer visually impaired adults of any age to take part in and enjoy more active leisure and social activities, more details about this new group will be coming soon.

3.2 Members' meetings and regular communications

3.2.1 SVI Formal launch event at West Bromwich Town Hall

On 11 August 2017, SVI invited members and guests to join us for a formal launch and celebration of our new base at West Bromwich Town Hall. Sixty-three members and friends joined us for a varied afternoon of talks and entertainment. Guest speaker Sion Simon MEP opened the event, Councillor Ann Shackleton welcomed everyone to our new offices and Sandwell MBC Managers Colin Marsh, Chris Guest and Sue Johnson supported us by attending the event.



3.2.2 Annual Forum

In November 2017, we held our Annual Forum with his Worshipful the Mayor of Sandwell Councillor Ahmadul Haque MBE formally opening the event. Guest speaker David Quarmby, of Kirklees Visual Impairment Network told us about his background, how their network was set up and how they strive to enable visually impaired people in their community to access technology.



The day also offered delegates the chance to enjoy a range of exhibitors and interactive workshops.

3.2.3 Members open meeting

In March 2018, SVI held an open members' meeting with 45 members present. The meeting included an EGM where we elected two new trustees. The less formal part of the meeting included a presentation from Raj Chande of Sandwell Welfare Rights service who updated us on Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments. Tajinder Singh Sohal of Sandwell MBC's Sensory team provided those present with an overview of their service and answered members' questions.

3.2.4 Communications

We continue to issue our SVI newsletters in a range of formats and maintain our accessible website. This year we also launched the SVI Facebook Group. We send out regular emails to our members and offer correspondence in a range of formats.

Sandwell MBC grant support enables SVI to offer the above as well as providing SVI with continued support to operate on a day-to-day basis.

3.3 Fundraising and awareness events

3.3.1 Asda fundraising day

Members and volunteers helped at a general information and fundraising day in May at Asda Oldbury. A total of £144.05 was raised. Information about eye health and eye conditions was handed out to the public and SVI staff and volunteers assisted visitors to the stall by telling them about SVI and signposting to other local and national organisations.

3.3.2 National Eye Health Week

SVI remains fully committed to raising the importance of regular eyesight tests amongst the public to help prevent sight loss. This year's National Eye Health Week took us to each of the six towns of Sandwell to promote the message 'Don't Turn a Blind Eye to Sight Loss' and to have an eyesight test at least every two years. Members of the public took information, made

enquiries about where to go for help with sight problems and learned about various eye conditions.

3.3.3 Samathon

Sam, one of our volunteer gym buddies, ran the Birmingham Marathon for SVI and raised £531.75. This amount was kindly matched by her employers Barclays Bank, giving us a grand total of £1051.75. Thanks, Sam your efforts will certainly help SVI to offer more services to visually impaired people.



3.3.4 Akash fund raising meal

In November 2017, seventy-four SVI members and friends joined us for a fundraising Indian meal at the Akash restaurant in West Bromwich

Funds raised were £582. Thank you to the management and staff of the Akash for their generous donation and support.

3.3.5 Crystal Payroll Services and Steel Sections Ltd

Crystal Payroll Services donated £1000.00 to assist SVI to cover running costs and associated staffing. .

Steel Sections Ltd donated £100 towards running costs and staffing.

Stores collections raised £596.68 for SVI.

3.4 Partnership Working and Consultation Groups

3.4.1 West Midlands Community Fellowship Scheme

SVI's work with Warwick University and Public Health England on this exciting project concluded this year. SVI recognised the importance of the medical profession and trainee doctors hearing patients' direct feedback and took up the challenge: Four trainee doctors and a Public Health mentor worked with SVI to map the pathway from initial diagnosis of sight loss, to registration and beyond. The aim of the project was to take a holistic look at

how sight loss affects emotional health and wellbeing and to produce a research activity and report.

Working with the doctors, a survey was designed; a focus group took place in order to hear the real life experiences of blind and visually impaired people. A report was produced on the effects of sight loss from a holistic perspective. SVI co-presented a number of formal presentations of the final report at conferences including Birmingham sight Village.

This was a cost neutral programme, with expenses covered by Health Education England and the NHS.

3.4.2 Local Optical Committee (LOC) Conference

SVI's Chair Tony Averis, founder member Graham Price and SVI Treasurer Karen - attended the LOC Continued Professional Development (CPD) Conference of the opticians of Sandwell and Dudley. Emphasis was on the newly launched Minor Eye Conditions Service. As part of this conference, SVI outlined our two research projects with Warwick University and Public Health England, the Community Fellowship Scheme in 2017 and the planned research of the support needs of those caring for blind people. We were delighted to be presented with £572.56, which we hope to use to develop our resource service.



3.4.3 Sandwell Talking News Partnership

Our partnership work with the STN continues and grows. This year we have assisted in the recruitment of new listeners to the STN, provided essential help to duplicate, dispatch and manage the weekly turn around of the postal editions. This is a partnership that we are deeply proud of and the combined services offer mutual benefits to both organisations. Our work with the STN continues and as part of our joint commitment to offer an accessible service for all, we were successful in August in gaining a Local Area Budget grant.

A presentation and press release event took place at our offices, where Councillor Syeda Khatun MBE and Steve Melia, together with West Bromwich Town Team Officers Liz Nembhard and Santokh Singh joined to promote this new inclusive initiative.

The STN Editor/Chair together with a Talking News volunteer attended the National Talking News Federation Annual Conference and AGM in October. As a result of this conference, STN and SVI are working on the development of a podcast for the STN, have developed national contacts and are working on other initiatives

The STN raises funds from donations and user contributions. Sincere thanks also go to Sandwell MBC Local Area Budget and the Tipton Christmas Tree of Lights Appeal for grant support.

The weekly STN is available by post, on USB stick and CD or downloadable from the SVI website sandwellvisuallyimpaired.org.uk

3.4.4 Transcription services

This year SVI recorded and produced the audio CD version of the Network West Midlands 'Getting Around Access Guide' working in partnership with STN. We look forward to further work of this kind in the years to come.

3.4.5 Crime and safety

SVI is a member organisation of West Midlands Police Disability Advisory Group, Sandwell Hate Crime Partnership and is a registered Third Party Hate Crime Reporting Centre. We attend regular meetings with the police and work to ensure that any issues of hate crime are reported. This year SVI have also linked up with Sandwell Trading Standards and the police to ensure that safeguarding alerts are circulated to our members as soon as possible and in their required format.

We work with the West Midlands Police, West Midlands Fire Service, Sandwell Trading Standards and Sandwell Safeguarding Adults Board to ensure that visually impaired people stay safe both in and outside the home.

3.4.6 Accessibility

SVI Transport Group works in partnership with Transport for West Midlands, National Express, Midland Metro and Sandwell taxi and private hire licensing.

The Vision Access Group (VAG), works with the council's Access Officer and other key staff seeking to address environment and access issues that affect visually impaired people.

SVI has been a member of the Sandwell Networkers for many years and has become more actively involved since its re launch with Richard Flatley as organiser. This is a proactive group of community organisations that provide a wealth of knowledge and information to keep us on top of what is happening in Sandwell. The network also enables SVI to promote our services to a broader and varied group, helping us to spread the word about sight loss issues and support.

3.4.7 Other partnership work

We sit on other local and national committees and engage in partnership working with organisations including Shaping Our Lives, Guide Dogs, Healthwatch Sandwell, RNIB Audio Description Team, Scope, [SCIPS] Sandwell Community Information and Participation Service and SCVO.

4 Other activities this financial year

Our other activities this financial year have included:

- Representation on local committees, including SCVO, Sandwell Housing and the Portway Lifestyle User Group.
- The above local and national representations ensure that SVI remains fully engaged and committed to full inclusion and equality.

These are enviable achievements for a peer-led and managed voluntary organisation operating on such a low cost base.

5 Moving forward

5.1 CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation)

As part of our continuing development SVI has recently achieved CIO status. This will enable SVI to grow and extend our services in the years to come. Our new offices have already enabled us to increase the activities and services to blind and visually impaired people in Sandwell. Over the next year, we plan to increase our outreach services and to offer support closer to people's homes. To develop town based partnerships in order to encourage visually impaired people to make better use of universal mainstream services. We also plan to increase our volunteers base and hope to obtain funding for a Volunteers Co-ordinator.

At the end of this year we joined the Black Country Chamber of Commerce, we want to work more closely with businesses to increase greater awareness of sight loss issues in commerce.

We are still working towards PQASSO Quality Standards and in the months to come will be reviewing our policies, procedures and practices in order to take SVI to our next level of development.

6 Conclusion

SVI's work is based on true user participation. Our aim is to reduce the isolation felt by many visually impaired people; to encourage them to play an active role in the community; to support families, friends and associates of people living with sight loss and to work with service providers to inform and educate.

We are proud to boast that all of our activities and campaigns are organised and led by visually impaired people with the assistance of our committed staff and volunteers.

The SVI Management Committee would like to thank our funders and supporters who have helped us throughout 2017/2018. Exciting times are ahead as we apply for larger funding streams, build up our outreach offer and put the organisation on a firmer financial footing.

7 Financial review

Our financial policy is to retain 15% of our core funding to implement an exit plan. Please refer to SVI's Statement of Accounts 2017/2018 for a full summary of financial expenditures.

The Management Committee Trustees declare that they have approved the Trustees' Report above.

Signed on behalf of the Charity's Management Committee Trustees and staff

Signatures:

Anthony Averis SVI Chair E: tony.averis@btopenworld.com T: 0121 552 0089	Sandra Troth SVI Development Worker E: sandra@sandwellvisuallyimpaired.org T: 0121 525 4810