

Suffolk Sight News



**Spring
Summer
2024**



Suffolk Sight

Suffolk Sight is your local, community-based sight loss charity supporting children and adults of all ages.

We work hard to provide services that are friendly and practical, and to raise awareness of the different aspects of living with sight loss. These can include daily living aids, emotional support, benefits advice and the latest tech solutions. You're welcome to book a visit to one of our resource hubs or we can arrange to visit you at home. Find out about our social opportunities; connect to our befriending scheme, and be put in touch with other services based on your personal interests.

Our dedicated team are here to offer support, advice and guidance based on your individual sight loss needs. We work closely with you for as long as you need, offering ideas and solutions to help with confidence and independence.

Suffolk Sight is an independent charity and as such receives no funding from the government. We rely on our amazing supporters to continue our work through donations, legacies and non-statutory grants.

Supporting You – Services

As a beneficiary of **Suffolk Sight** you will be able to access a wealth of support and information. It's free and you can choose your level of engagement and involvement.

Our dedicated and highly skilled team of community workers and technical advisers understand the issues that people face as they live their life with a visual impairment.

They have extensive experience and knowledge of the opportunities and choices available to you. The list below highlights some of the areas we can support you with:

- Daily living and independence – aids and adaptations
- Low vision – magnification and assistive reading (with referrals to our low vision specialist where appropriate)
- Financial matters – benefits, grants and concessions
- Safety and security – in and around the home
- Tech solutions – gadget advice and demonstrations
- Social opportunities and befriending service
- Advice about services that can help you get out and about safely
- Children and Families Support Group

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Image shows members of the Suffolk Sight Juniors Club making soft toys, one of the many activities that they thoroughly enjoy.

SAVE THE DATE – Charity Gala Night

Raising funds for the Suffolk Sight Emotional Support Service

14 September 2024

7.00pm-11.30pm

The Greyhound & Twenty One, Wickhambrook, CB8 8XS

£45 each, includes a two-course meal and disco.

Tickets will be on sale later this year, please contact us for details.

Being proud of making a real difference

I often find myself asking the question “why do we attract such good people to help run and support Suffolk Sight?” Staff members, volunteers and funders alike, I believe, clearly recognise the difference we make to the lives of our members. But it is not just the ‘what’ we do, but ‘how’ we do it. By taking the time to understand the needs of our beneficiaries, paying respect to their unique situation, we collectively provide an environment where they feel safe and get care and support when they need it most.

It can be seen in the way our Community Workers engage with new referrals, offering practical advice in a caring and understanding way, often at the point when someone first has to adjust to living with their visual impairment. The Community Worker will often suggest joining one of our local social clubs. This is where the care and support baton is handed over to our fantastic volunteers. They provide a welcoming and relaxing environment for new people to meet and share a cuppa with those that appreciate the challenges of living with sight loss. I feel that Suffolk Sight volunteers are, in the words of Tina Turner – simply the best – whatever role they play for the charity.

Our Access Technology Advisors are also key members of the team, offering advice with accessibility and assistive technology. Everything in our daily lives is becoming more reliant on our ability to connect online. The challenges faced by our members are naturally greater and can be very frustrating, and the solutions required can demand extreme patience, a quality our advisors show in abundance.

I’ve highlighted just a few examples of how our people truly care for our members and this, I feel, ensures that we will continue to attract and retain the very best. And on that point, we would like to welcome Carolyn Allum, Raj Hanspal, Sandra Walker and Gwen Watts to the Trustee Board and thank Anthony Sheppard, who stepped down recently.

Geoff Staff

Chair of Trustees

Charity of Choice

St Edmunds Hospital

We would like to say a very big thank you to Carol Rose and the team at St Edmunds Hospital who kindly chose Suffolk Sight as their charity partner for 2023.

The team held a series of events throughout the year, including a Hog Roast, Craft Fair and Christmas Buffet.

At the end of the year, the team had raised a staggering £1188.05! This was then match funded by Circle Health corporate head office, bringing the grand total to £2,376.10.



Image shows Amanda Eaves at the Bury Hospital fundraiser.

Ipswich Unitarians

Our special thanks to the Ipswich Unitarians who have raised an amazing total of £700 for Suffolk Sight!

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, they wanted to support Suffolk Sight after hearing that one of their members had received help from our Community Workers.

Throughout the year they held a number of talks and fundraising events, and we were delighted to attend the cheque presentation at a recent Sunday morning service.



Image shows the giant cheque made out to Suffolk Sight, being presented by Tessa Forsdike, Secretary to the Trustees of the Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House, to Wendy Johns, Communications and Engagement Officer at Suffolk Sight. The photo is taken outside the historic Meeting House.

The Hargrave Cross Country Run and Walk

We were delighted to be chosen by St Edmund's Church, Hargrave, to receive half of the funds from their annual cross-country event. The event raised an amazing £1,126.

Over 100 participants took part in either the 10k or 5k run or 5k walk on Saturday 23rd March. The weather proved very challenging, with a mixture of sunshine, rain and hailstones! Everyone enjoyed the delicious refreshments as a reward for their efforts after the event.



Image shows a gathering of all those taking part in the Hargrave Cross Country Run and Walk.



Congratulations to Nick Smith and Ryan Middleton for coming first in the 10k and 5k race, and runners up Lawrence Porter (10k PB) and Frederic Sibbing (5k).

Nick and Lawrence can be seen in the photo, receiving their hampers of Powters Sausages, wine from Nethergate Wines, Hargrave Honey, Henry's Farm Eggs and, of course, some chocolate eggs to celebrate Easter.

As a very small, independent charity, Suffolk Sight is always seeking new ideas for raising funds. If anyone has any ideas, or would like to organise a fundraising event to support us, please do get in touch.

Call the office on 01284 748800 Email: info@suffolksight.org.uk

East Anglian Beer & Cider Festival 2024

This year's festival runs from 21 to 26 August and again takes place in St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

Suffolk Sight are one of the festival's chosen charities to benefit. The more hours volunteers put in, the more Suffolk Sight financially benefits. If you would like to volunteer, then please go to: <https://burystedmundsbeerfestival.com/volunteer/> where you can select how and when you can help with this event in such a unique setting.

The image shows Meg Staff receiving a £700 cheque from Martin Bate of CAMRA for all the work put in (and fun had) in 2023.



Social club round up

Firstly, we wanted to share a few words from Agnieszka, our Social Club and Volunteer Co-ordinator.

“Imagine you come to the place where you feel safe, understood and heard. The place where you can be yourself, where people see you for who you are.

Like-minded people, who will be there to have fun, to make friends and memories, to enjoy a cuppa and cake, some entertainment but also to get support if needed.

That’s our Suffolk Sight Clubs, with the most lovely, kind and amazing volunteers you will ever come across.

Everyone involved with the clubs knows how much work goes on behind the scenes to put it all together every month. The love, hard work, time and dedication our volunteers give to make it happen is priceless.

It all starts with the vision, heart and willingness to help. I would like to invite our beneficiaries to join your local club – give it a try!”

A list of our social club locations can be found on our website:
<https://www.suffolksight.org.uk/clubs>

Mildenhall

With funding from West Suffolk Council, we’re delighted that our new social club in Mildenhall launched on Tuesday 5 March 2024.

Our special thanks to Louise and Anne-Marie, the local PCSOs from Forest Heath Police, who popped in to say hello.

Lucy from Abbeycroft Leisure also came along to talk about accessible sport and doubled up as our quizmaster!

This will be a monthly support group for people living with sight loss, offering friendly advice and professional support. A great opportunity to meet new people and to make new friends.

The meetings will take place on the first Tuesday of the month from 10.30am–12.30pm.

Location: St John’s Community Centre, Mildenhall, Suffolk, IP28 7NX

Guide dogs welcome.



Image shows Paul Airey giving his talk to the Bury VIPs.

Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket

The Stowmarket and Bury VIP groups recently enjoyed a talk by Suffolk Sight volunteer Paul Airey, about his time working and travelling in China.

Everyone found the talk very interesting, and Paul has offered to go along to talk to other groups who would like to find out more about his travels.

Please note a change to the second Tuesday in the month from the fourth Tuesday in the month for the Bury VIP group.

Boccia at Haverhill

Following on from Introduction to the Boccia article in the last edition of this newsletter, in March, members of the Haverhill club enjoyed experiencing the thrills of this game first hand. They would highly recommend it to all clubs. When the members were asked would you like to play Boccia again, the reply was a resounding "yes".



Image shows Don from the Haverhill BAPS club going for the jack.

Woodbridge Club

Please note a change of venue, the club will now meet at:
The Burness Parish Rooms,
38 The Street Melton, IP12 1PW.

If you want to find out more about our clubs...

...please contact us on 01473 611011 or 01473 928307
email info@suffolksight.org.uk

Haverhill BAPs member receives a lovely surprise!

Suffolk Sight beneficiary, Joan Bettney-Brown (pictured), received a lovely surprise at the January meeting of the Haverhill BAPS (Blind and Partially Sighted social group) when she was presented with a cat!



Joan had previously fallen in love with one of the new little robotic Companion Cats, which are very realistic. They meow, blink and roll over for tummy tickles!

Joan has always had pets in the past so the little cat, which she has named Petra, has been made very welcome in her new home. She even has a purple velvet cushion to sit on!

Our fond memories of Elaine Overnell

Born in Chelsfield in Kent, Elaine moved to Suffolk in 1977 when she joined Greene King as an interior designer dealing with their estate of public houses.

After retirement Elaine had more time to devote to her other occupations including developing her own fine garden, and membership and committee work for many local groups and organisations. She wholeheartedly supported fundraising for her local community and Church Fabric fund and involved herself in social outings for West Suffolk Sight.

Elaine volunteered at the Pakenham Club for about fifteen years. She was willing to do anything – driving members to meetings, making delicious homemade cake for tea, and talking to everyone.

She had quite strong views and always had a pertinent question to ask any speaker that came along.

She will be remembered as an adventuress with an enquiring mind that wanted to know the how and why of every practical matter, and someone who was a delightful friend and a joyful companion.

We really miss her contribution.

Suffolk Sight Juniors

The Suffolk Sight Juniors have had a very busy start to 2024! Activities so far this year have included Christmas Cracker jokes, Show and Tell Christmas gifts, decorating Valentine's biscuits, Easter Crafts and a music workshop facilitated by music teacher Emma Bishton.

The Suffolk Sight Juniors group meets on the first Saturday of every month at Red Gables, Ipswich Road, Stowmarket IP14 1BE, from 10.30–12.30pm.

The group provides a meeting place for visually-impaired children, young people and their families to come along and chat, share information, access advice and have fun together.

For more information on the Suffolk Sight Juniors, please contact Amanda Eaves:

Office: 01284 748800 Email: a.eaves@suffolksight.org.uk



Image shows one of our Suffolk Sight Juniors making Easter treats.



Image shows music being made by a group of our juniors at the music workshop with Emma Bishton.

Through Our Eyes - Art Exhibition

We're extremely grateful to Albany Tripp from Sakura Studio Gallery, for holding an art exhibition which will raise funds for Suffolk Sight.

The exhibition will take place between 24 May and 2 June and will showcase works alongside local artists who live with varying degrees of visual impairment.

Visitors will have the opportunity to bid on their favourite works by way of a silent auction.

Albany wanted to support Suffolk Sight because of her close friendship with Agnieszka and Amanda in our team, and also with Ray, one of our fantastic volunteers, who sadly passed away two years ago.

Albany's mum has recently experienced difficulties with her eyesight and is now thankfully recovering well after surgery.

Albany said "I think, as artists, there is a lot of weight on our vision and how we see and interact with the world and show our creativity. There are many artists who struggle with their changing sight and who work with it to show how they see the world."



Image shows Albany and her son outside her studio.

Albany opened Sakura Studio Gallery in Stonham last February as a small place to create from and support other local artists. A second pod was then opened to act as a studio to run classes and workshops which support artists and visitors who would like to try some different crafts and activities. This year they will be running two big exhibitions: *Through Our Eyes* raising money for Suffolk Sight, and a *Young Artists Showcase* to support aspiring young artists and give them the chance to exhibit their work.

The *Through Our Eyes* open evening will take place from 5pm on Friday 24 May. The exhibition will then be open to the public from 10am on Saturday 25 May to 4pm on Sunday 2 June.

If you wish to donate artwork for the exhibition, please make sure it is delivered to the gallery by 4pm on Friday 17 May.

Location: Pod 7-8, Stonham Barns Park, Pettaugh Road, Stonham Aspal, IP14 6AT.

For more information email sakurastudiogallery@gmail.com



Image shows artwork donated by Albany.



Images show Bob, one of our beneficiaries, signing his beautiful paintings for us, and Georgina, one of our Trustees, with her pyrography. All of these pieces will be on display at the exhibition.

...look at gorgeous me!

Virtual Makeup Assistant



Saffy says

...

For many people with low or no vision, applying makeup can be a frustrating, time-consuming, and sometimes impossible task. For some, the use of magnifying mirrors and the self-viewing camera modes of video magnifiers and smart phones help, but for others, applying makeup independently is a real challenge, and one that results in leaving the house with little confidence in one's appearance, or not bothering with makeup at all.

Estée Lauder have designed something that may just help. Launched just over a year ago, their smart phone app uses a device's camera, along with artificial intelligence and augmented reality, to analyse the makeup on the user's face entirely through voice prompts. Voice-enabled Makeup Assistant (VMA) talks you through checking your foundation, eye shadow and lipstick, all hands-free via text-to-speech and your voice.

The app is currently only available for Apple iOS. A video review can be found by searching for Fashioneyesta on YouTube.





Emily Davison - Fashioneyesta

Emily is a blogger, vlogger and disability advocate. Emily started creating YouTube content in 2012 with the aim of challenging people's perceptions of sight loss through her love of fashion, beauty, and style. Proving that you can be both legally blind and a lover of handbags and lipsticks, her online content shares her insights on clothes and makeup, as well as advice and hacks on living with a disability.

Visit Emily's website for fashion and makeup top tips!

<https://fashioneyesta.com/>

Image above shows Emily as she appears on her website revealing her love of fashion, beauty and style.

Images below show firstly the icon for Virtual Makeup Artist followed by images of the first five screens of the app, each appearing on the app with voice over.

At the time of going to press we received the very sad news that Saffy had passed away.

We felt that it was appropriate to continue with 'Saffy Says' and further dedicate this Spring/Summer issue of Suffolk Sight News to Saffy.



Suffolk Sight Looking Ahead Emotional Support

Firstly, a huge thank you to the Co-op customers, who have chosen to raise money for our telephone counselling through the local Co-op community fund. This service has helped many of our beneficiaries who need emotional and mental health support due to the impact of sight loss.

The Co-op community fund is still running within the local Co-op stores and without this and other kind donations, we would not be able to keep this ever-growing service running.

All the feedback we get from our beneficiaries gives us great examples of how the service has benefitted them and lets them show their appreciation of the support they have received.

A few examples of the feedback are:

“All about the knowledge - it’s been an eye opener. I have learnt some highly valuable techniques like breathing techniques.”

“With the counsellor’s knowledge and understanding, she made me feel comfortable and was a pleasure to speak to.”

“The sessions were very helpful, and I was able to talk about and express my feelings. Because of this, it enabled me to feel more positive and to cope with my anxiety.”

We even receive feedback from our Community Workers, who work alongside the beneficiaries referred to the service.

“The counselling has done wonders for my beneficiary. They are so pleased with the coping mechanisms they were given.”

The emotional support service was set up three years ago as a pilot scheme, just before the Covid-19 pandemic, and enabled us to support our beneficiaries through this difficult time by setting up the telephone counselling service. It has been a huge success and we have supported over 70 beneficiaries since the launch.

Once the beneficiary has completed their telephone counselling sessions, our Community Workers continue to support them by offering other Suffolk Sight services aimed at helping them live an independent life.

We would like to thank you all for your kind donations, grants and support for the service - not forgetting the fabulous Community Workers, counsellors and volunteers, who all help to support our beneficiaries.

To find out how you can become a Co-op member and raise money while you shop, scan the QR code or visit:

<https://membership.coop.co.uk/causes/77572>



A few top tips for everyday tasks

We asked our Community Workers to give us an idea of their most frequently asked questions, and they provided some simple solutions that can make all the difference.

- If you are having difficulty reading your newspaper, you can sign up to your local talking newspaper for free.
- If your novels are in small print, you can try large print or talking books for free. You can also ask for a magnifier assessment at home from us or at your local hospital or low vision clinic.
- If your watch is difficult to see, we can tell you about talking clocks and watches, and also help you to use an Alexa device.
- If the glare of the sun is challenging, we can advise on anti-glare glasses.
- If your utility bills and bank statements are difficult to see, you can ask your supplier to send them in large print.
- If you are finding it difficult to keep track of appointments, you can use one of our large print diaries and our thicker black marker pen rather than a biro.
- If you would like to make your computer or phone easier to see, our tech team can help you.
- If you need help to find the correct button to press on household items such as the tv remote or the phone, we can apply some raised plastic bumps that are easier to see or feel.

Introducing Ron and Hugo, our local celebrities!

Ron and Hugo are regular visitors to our Lowestoft social group. Hugo is a German Shepherd cross Golden Retriever and was one of a record-breaking litter of 16 puppies!

Hugo has had quite an amazing time, from going on BBC Breakfast with his wonderful puppy raiser, all the way to meeting the actor Martin Clunes (photo on front cover).

Ron and Hugo appeared together on BBC breakfast at Christmas and for his most recent television appearance in January, Hugo was seen in the crowd at the world indoor bowls championship final!

Hugo even has a dedicated Facebook page, "Hugo's Pupdate". Puppy raiser Yvonne set up the page to document Hugo's journey to become a guide dog.

There are lots of photos and videos showing Hugo at home with Yvonne, then going off to 'big school' at Leamington Training Centre, and finally settling in with Ron.

Go to <https://www.facebook.com/hugospupdate> to follow his journey.



Image shows Ron with Hugo



Image shows puppy raiser Yvonne sitting on the BBC Breakfast sofa with hosts Naga Munchetty and Charlie Stayt. Hugo is lying down at Yvonne's feet.

Peer-to-Peer Befriending

My first year as Befriending Officer with Suffolk Sight has flown by. During this period, I've very much enjoyed meeting and getting to know the members and volunteers involved with the befriending service. I remain constantly amazed by the kindness and generosity of our volunteers, who do such wonderful work, often beyond what might be expected of a befriender.

The number of referrals for befriending is constantly growing and finding volunteers to meet this demand remains a challenge. Consequently, we are always looking for new ways to serve our members and increase the support we can offer.

Recently, we've embarked on a new initiative of peer-to-peer befriending. Quite simply, this involves enabling members to provide companionship and friendship for each other by holding regular telephone conversations. It's appreciated that contacting somebody you do not know may at first seem daunting, and therefore preliminary intermediary calls are made by Suffolk Sight in order to make the initial act of members contacting each other as comfortable as possible.

Whilst it's still early days, reports from those involved are very encouraging, with members stating they enjoy having somebody new to get to know and, hopefully, even meet up with at some point. It should be said that members engaging in peer-to-peer befriending do not give up their places on the befriending waiting list and if a suitable volunteer becomes available, they will still be introduced.

Finally thank you to our volunteers for the great work you do and best wishes to all.

Kris, *Befriending Officer, Suffolk Sight*

If you are interested in participating in peer-to-peer befriending, or if you do know somebody who may be interested in volunteering for Suffolk Sight please get in touch by calling either **01284 748800** or **01473 611011** or **email info@suffolksight.org.uk**.

We are delighted to welcome Raj Hanspal to our Board of Trustees. Raj is a Consultant Ophthalmologist and Clinical Director of Newmedica Suffolk.

Raj has kindly agreed to write an article for the newsletter and in this edition he is talking about macular degeneration.

What is macular degeneration?

Macular degeneration, also known as **age-related macular degeneration (AMD)**, is a progressive eye condition that affects the **macula**, a small area near the centre of the retina. The macula is responsible for **central vision**, which allows us to see fine details, read, recognize faces and perform other tasks that require sharp vision.

AMD is the most common cause of sight loss in the developed world, with more than 600,000 people affected by AMD in the UK. It usually affects people over the age of 60 but can occur at any age. There are two types of AMD, wet and dry.

Dry AMD: This is the more common form. It occurs when the macula's light-sensitive cells gradually break down, leading to central vision loss. Drusen (small yellow deposits) may accumulate in the retina.

Wet AMD: Less common but more severe, wet AMD involves the growth of abnormal blood vessels beneath the retina. These vessels can leak fluid or blood, causing rapid vision loss.

Risk Factors:

Age: AMD is more common in people over 60.

Genetics: Family history plays a role.

Smoking: Smoking increases the risk.

Race: Caucasians are more susceptible.

High Blood Pressure: Uncontrolled hypertension may contribute.

Obesity and Poor Diet: A diet low in antioxidants and high in saturated fats may increase risk.

Symptoms:

Gradual Central Vision Loss: Objects may appear distorted or blurry.

Difficulty Reading or Recognising Faces: Fine details become challenging to see.

Dark or Empty Areas in Vision: A blind spot may develop.

What treatments are currently available?

Dry AMD:

No cure, but lifestyle changes (such as a healthy diet and not smoking) can slow progression.

Nutritional Supplements: Some patients benefit from specific vitamins and minerals.

Wet AMD:

Anti-VEGF (Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor) Injections:

Certain medications can slow vessel growth. These injections are a standard treatment for wet AMD. Drugs like Lucentis (ranibizumab), Eylea (aflibercept), and Avastin (bevacizumab) fall under this category.

Anti-VEGF medications work by inhibiting the growth of abnormal blood vessels in the retina, controlling leakage, and slowing down macular damage.

The primary drawback is that these injections must be administered into the back of the eye every four to six weeks.

Photodynamic Therapy: Laser treatment combined with a light-sensitive drug is occasionally used for wet AMD. It helps reduce abnormal blood vessel growth. Much less frequently used now.

Prevention:

Regular eye exams are crucial.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Protect your eyes from UV light.

What treatments are currently available or on the horizon?

Here are some **recent advancements** in the treatment of macular degeneration:

Brolucizumab (Beovu): This injectable medication has been approved for use in England and Wales. It offers a more flexible dosing regimen, allowing patients to receive as few as four injections a year. Brolucizumab inhibits the growth of abnormal blood vessels in the retina and can help minimize the treatment burden for patients.

Faricimab: is a novel treatment for AMD and offers several advantages compared to existing therapies. It is a bispecific monoclonal antibody that simultaneously targets two different molecules responsible for the growth of abnormal blood vessels. By inhibiting both pathways, it provides a more comprehensive approach to managing abnormal blood vessel growth in the retina. Clinical trials have demonstrated that faricimab allows for longer dosing intervals so patients may require fewer injections, potentially reducing the burden of frequent clinic visits.

Pegcetacoplan and Avacincaptad Pegol: These new medications are injected into the eye to slow the atrophy associated with dry macular degeneration.

Stem Cell-Derived Treatment: Derived from stem cells, this treatment has shown promise for people with wet age-related macular degeneration (AMD). The first patients who received this treatment regained reading vision.

<https://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/news/successful-trials-new-treatment-moorfields-fight-against-sight-loss-caused-amd>.

Retinal Gene Therapy: Emerging treatments include retinal gene therapy, which aims to preserve eyesight without frequent injections.

Port Delivery System: This system provides longer-lasting injections, reducing the need for frequent visits.

Anti-VEGF Eye Drops: These drops target vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) and may offer an alternative to injections.

Oral Tablets: Researchers are exploring oral medications that could slow down the progression of macular degeneration.

Laser Light Treatments: clinical trials of a treatment known as photobiomodulation have demonstrated sustained improvement in vision and a reduction in rates of new atrophy in patients with intermediate dry AMD across two years. The non-invasive Valeda system is already in use in Europe and exposes tissue to specific wavelengths of light which reduces drusen development, slows the progression of geographic atrophy and possibly reduces conversion from dry to wet AMD.

Early detection and timely intervention are essential for managing macular degeneration effectively. If you experience any changes in your vision, consult an optician promptly.

Storytelling with Tony Finn

Tony began to lose his sight about 25 years ago. His interest in the telling of tales started in earnest some 15 years ago and he soon found that his visual impairment was no barrier to his own enjoyment of a good story and in the telling of a tale or two to others.

He brings his warm personality and relaxed and engaging style to traditional and not so traditional tales, local legends, monologues and personal anecdotes. He hopes that his fun and relaxed sessions will encourage listeners to consider having a go at storytelling themselves.

Tony will be in Suffolk at the start of May and he will visit our clubs in Sudbury and Ipswich, and also our Juniors.

We will hear how young Jack got the better of a giant, of Albert and the Lion, and how the nightingale got its song!

With his wide and varied repertoire of humorous stories and personal anecdotes, Tony will also be taking part in the East Anglian Storytelling Festival between 17–19 May at The Food Museum in Stowmarket

To find out more visit the website:

<https://eastanglianstorytellingfestival.co.uk/index.html>

Changes to landline telephones

The UK's telephone network is being upgraded, which means that landline services are changing. You can still have a landline in your home, but the technology that powers it will be different. For most, switching over will be straightforward, but some people may need new equipment or support to make the changes.

What is changing?

Landlines have been delivered through an analogue network for decades, but this is being replaced with newer digital technology.

The new system is called 'Voice over Internet Protocol' (VoIP). You may also hear this referred to as a digital landline or 'Digital Voice', the name of BT's new home phone service. BT is one of many network providers making this change.

Once you've moved to the new digital system, your landline will mainly work as it always has, although there will be some differences. For example, it won't work if there's a power cut, so you'll need an alternative solution such as a mobile phone or battery backup unit for emergency calls.

What is a digital landline? Will I need an internet connection to make phone calls?

Digital landlines use an internet connection to make and receive calls. Given this, you'll need an internet connection at home to use the new landline digital system.

If you already have a broadband connection, then the new digital landline system will use this.

Don't worry – if you don't have broadband, your network provider, such as BT or Virgin Media O2, will supply you with a connection to support the new digital landline system. You shouldn't pay extra for this if you don't choose to take up a broadband service.

Why are these changes happening?

The current analogue landline network needs to be replaced because it's old and is becoming difficult to maintain. The new digital landlines use the internet to make phone calls – this offers better quality calls as well as some additional features such as protection from scams.

UK phone and broadband companies are leading this change and are working with Ofcom, the Government and others. The aim of Ofcom (the communications regulator) is to make sure customers don't face unnecessary disruption or harm because of the changes.

What happens if there's a power cut?

Unlike some traditional corded analogue phones, a digital phone will only work in a power cut if it has a battery back-up, because it runs using your home electricity. In these instances, phone companies are advising people to use mobile phones as a backup.

If you're dependent on your landline phone – for example, if you don't have a mobile phone or live somewhere where there's no or poor mobile signal, then your telephone provider must offer you a 'resilience solution' to make sure you can make emergency calls during a power cut. This could be a mobile phone (if you have a mobile signal) or a battery-backup unit that connects to your landline phone and provides power in case of an outage.

This resilience solution should be provided free of charge to people who are dependent on their landline. If you're not eligible for a free resilience solution, you may be able to purchase one from your provider or another retailer – talk to your provider about the options available to you.

When are these changes happening?

The changeover has started, and some people have already been moved to the digital system.

This is an industry-wide change, but timescales may differ depending on your service provider. However, for most networks, the move to digital landlines will happen by December 2025.

Your telephone provider will contact you in advance to let you know when your system's changing and what you need to do. In some cases, an engineer will need to visit to make changes.

For more information visit the Ofcom website:

<https://shorturl.at/gNOS6>

Source: Age UK

Be Scam Safe

The BBC recently launched a campaign called “Stick it to the Scammers!” and gave out some important guidelines to follow if you think you have been the victim of a scam.

Don’t respond to any unexpected call, email or text, without checking first.

If it’s out of the blue, check it’s for you!

If it’s a call, hang up, find a number you can trust and call back on that.

If it’s your bank, you can call back using the number on the back of your card.

If you think someone is trying to trick you into handing over money or personal details – stop, hang up and call 159 to speak directly to your bank.

159 works in the same way as 101 for the police or 111 for the NHS. It’s the number you can trust to get you through to your bank safely and securely, every time.



Cambridge VI Forum

The idea of the Cambridge VI Forum is to bring together local visually-impaired people and partner organisations to find out about the latest events, activities and services available for blind and partially-sighted people from the local area.

There will be a chance to hear directly from service providers and ask them any questions.

The forum intends to meet quarterly, on the first Thursday of the month, between 10:00am and 12:00pm. Meetings are scheduled for July, October and January.

The meetings will be in person in Cambridge and will also be held online on Microsoft Teams.

For more information, please contact Warren by email:

Warren.wilson@rnib.org.uk

Have you played golf in the past or are you interested in trying it for the first time?

Golf is a great way for people to stay active, both outdoors and indoors, whilst making new friends.

We have been asked by England and Wales Blind Golf if we would like to work together and run some "have-a-go days" throughout the year at local driving ranges.

The sessions will be open to all ages and will include tuition. New technology at driving ranges now makes golf far more accessible, and it has received great feedback from people with a visual impairment.

If you have played golf in the past and have given up through sight loss, or are interested in trying a new sport, please get in touch! Call Andy Gilford on 07885 723343

To find out more, you can also visit the England and Wales Blind Golf charity website: www.ewblindgolf.co.uk



Image shows a visually-impaired golfer about to tee off with the aid of a sighted guide.

Council Tax Support

Disabled band reduction scheme.

If your home has been adapted for a disabled person, and you can demonstrate this, you'll be able to drop a council tax band. Where your property is already in band A (the lowest council tax band) and you qualify for this discount, your council tax bill will be reduced by 17% instead.

The types of adaptations could include:

An extra bathroom or kitchen for a disabled person to use.

A room that's 'predominantly' used by a disabled person. For example, this could be a downstairs room in a two-storey house that has been turned into an accessible bedroom. Or a room that has been adapted specifically for a disabled person to use.

The creation of sufficient floor space to make the home accessible for someone who uses a wheelchair.

If you believe you're eligible for a discount or reduction, you must apply as it won't happen automatically. Contact your local council tax department for further information.

What is the 'severely mentally impaired' council tax discount?

The 'severely mentally impaired' (otherwise known as SMI) council tax discount is a reduction of a household's council tax bill, worth, at a minimum, 25%, all the way up to the entire bill being wiped in some cases.

If you know someone in receipt of Attendance Allowance who has Dementia (including Alzheimer's), Parkinson's, severe learning difficulties, Multiple Sclerosis, or is living with the effects of a stroke, they may be eligible to receive a discount on their council tax bill.

Use the link below to visit the website for further details, and how to apply.

<https://shorturl.at/crOW8>

Volunteers' Week 1-7 June 2024

Every year in June, the UK comes together to celebrate the incredible contribution of volunteers in our communities.

It's a fantastic opportunity to say thank you to the amazing people who give their time and energy to make a difference.

At Suffolk Sight we are extremely grateful to our army of over 200 volunteers who take on the roles in admin, befriending, driving, fundraising, tech support and helping out at our social groups.

We love the fact that you can volunteer at any age. At Christmas we were joined by Lena and Milly who wanted to volunteer as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award.

We'll be holding a special 'thank you' event for all of our volunteers in June - no doubt the afternoon will involve lots of cake and we'll share the photos in our next newsletter!

If you could spare two hours a month and would like to help support people living with sight loss, please get in touch.

Call 01473 611011 or email info@suffolksight.org.uk



Image shows Lena and Milly fundraising on behalf of Suffolk Sight.



Assistive Technology Support



Do you need help with your device?

If you would like to make your computer, tablet or phone easier to see, or want to connect with friends and family using your voice alone, we can help.

Come along to our free drop-in sessions offering advice on accessibility and assistive technology.

Find out about the latest apps which make life easier for people living with a visual impairment.

Our sessions are for everyone, whatever your ability.

**Lowestoft Library, Clapham Road South,
Lowestoft, NR32 1DR**

**10am–12 noon
Saturday 25th May
Saturday 15th June**

For more information about the drop-in sessions please email info@suffolksight.org.uk or call 01284 748800

We are a Charitable Incorporated Organisation Charity Number 1183608



Suffolk Sight Equipment and Information Day



**Monday 10 June 2024,
10am–2pm**

**Lowestoft Centre for Over 60's,
Clapham Road South,
Lowestoft, NR32 1QS**

Come along and try out the latest equipment and technology specifically designed for people with visual impairment.

We will be joined by some of the UK's leading suppliers:



Cobolt Systems Ltd



Advice and support will be available from local organisations and charities including:

Macular Society, Disability Advice North East Suffolk, Vision Norfolk, Communities Together East Anglia and Sensing Change

This is a FREE event and the venue is fully accessible.



Suffolk Sight

**For more information please call 01284 748800
or email info@suffolksight.org.uk**

Suffolk Sight is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation Charity Number 1183608

www.suffolksight.org.uk

Suffolk Sight is the sight loss charity for the county. Its purpose is to improve the lives of people who are affected by sight loss, throughout Suffolk.

Disability Resource Centre
4 Bunting Road,
Bury St Edmunds, IP32 7BX
Tel: 01284 748800

19 Tower Street,
Ipswich, IP1 3BE
Tel: 01473 611011

email: info@suffolksight.org.uk



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