



Oxfordshire
Association for the Blind

Newsletter

June 2019

Judith Wood

SRN, RMN, MRPC, BCAh

By Professor Adrian Hill

Judith Wood, OAB's dearly-loved Senior Sight Advisor and Counsellor, died on April 17th, just 2 months after her 70th birthday. For over twenty-five years, Judith worked tirelessly for OAB – establishing a full-time Sight Advisory Service at the Oxford Eye Hospital as well as the county's only specialist counselling service for those living with sight loss. Her contribution to mental health provision for blind and partially sighted people has been truly remarkable.

Although Judith faced illness in her later years, she was very athletic in her youth. In the 1960s she was a semi-finalist in the junior Wimbledon tennis championships, and she was also an accomplished horse rider. Judith's father was in the



RAF and she spent a lot of her childhood overseas. She started her career as a nurse in the RAF where she met her future husband, who was a pilot. At the age of 24, Judith lost the sight in one eye in a road traffic accident. Despite this, she continued nursing for many years, eventually reaching the rank of flight lieutenant in the RAF nursing service.

After the sight in her other eye started to fail, Judith qualified as a psychotherapist whilst working at the Princess Mary Unit at RAF Holton near Aylesbury.

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Oxfordshire Association for the Blind
Bradbury Lodge, Gordon Woodward Way,
Oxford, OX1 4XL.

Telephone: 01865 725 595

Email: admin@oxeyes.org.uk

Website: www.oxeyes.org.uk

Opening Hours: 10am to 3pm Mon-Fri



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In her role at OAB, Judith helped thousands of people with sight loss. Judith had around 600 client appointments per year (in person and by phone) and the sight desk that she established now has around 600 visitors annually. Judith strove to ensure that no one with sight loss would have to face the

lack of support that she had herself faced as a young woman.

Judith abounded with empathy and compassion, and her own experience of visual impairment gave her exceptional insight into the challenges that her clients faced.

Even her total sight loss in 2016 did not diminish her unremitting enthusiasm for helping others. Judith accepted her own sight loss with equanimity and showed great devotion to the needs of others by going well beyond her call of duty at OAB; in so doing, she became emblematic of a true charity worker. She was a highly inspirational counsellor, mentor, colleague and friend.



Judith receiving her British Citizen Award with Michael Underwood

Last year, Judith's achievements culminated in her receiving a prestigious 'British Citizen Award.' She was also one of just three winners out of over 1,000 nominees in Radio 4's 'All in the Mind' mental health awards. Marion Janner OBE, presenting the award, described Judith as "Somebody who exemplifies what is wonderful about the best

professionals which is that in themselves they are inspiring role models; they are able to see what we can do – our skills, our talents, our dreams."

Hundreds of people with sight loss are exceedingly grateful for all that Judith did for them, and many have said that her support has "transformed" or even "saved" their lives. Judith's legacy will no doubt live on in this way and in our continued work at OAB.

Judith was wise and compassionate beyond words. Her presence, wit and laughter will be greatly missed. We extend our deepest sympathies to her husband Trevor and her son James and his fiancée Nadia.

Judith's family have kindly set up a donation page for OAB in memory of Judith. The page can be accessed here: <https://www.justgiving.com/judithw> or you can contact OAB directly on 01865 725595 or by email at admin@oxeyes.org.uk

We would like to thank Judith's family for supporting OAB.



Memories of Judith

Below are a few memories of Judith; sadly we can't fit them all in, but if you have any fond memories and of how she may have helped you please do contact us to let us know:

"In January 2016 I was in the depths of despair. My father had been diagnosed with vascular dementia. The slow degeneration of my central vision had picked up speed. My career as a published author of historical fantasy novels for teenagers was in the doldrums. And my partner of 15 years had just ended our relationship by email. I might, now, be looking back at that dark time wondering how on earth I survived it. But I know precisely how – it was thanks to Judith.

When I answered Judith's first call I could barely speak. "I'm here, darling," she kept saying. "I'm here ..."

Judith was there for me, that day, while I gasped, and cried, and raged. She was there for me two weeks later when I finally felt able to leave the house in order to meet her for a consultation at the Oxfordshire

Association for the Blind. She counselled me with compassion, intelligence and humour. Of those three tremendous qualities it is her humour I will miss the most. As the weeks passed, and I began to mend, we would roar with laughter over cups of coffee and I would leave her presence feeling not only supported, but blessed.

Judith was a brilliant counsellor and a wonderful woman; I am a stronger and happier person for having known her." - Julie

"My memories of Judith are never-ending. Her ability to make me see that I can conquer fear, sadness and regret - stays with me. While I live I will regard Judith as my watch keeper. She has helped me not see my future as an end point. Her positivity and non-judgemental words (combined with humour and light heartedness) were and are a warm comfort to me and no doubt to all her family, friends, clients etc" - Katie

"Judith listened, I really feel that. She sees with insight and compassion that few sighted people have the facility to do.

Her sense of humour helps lighten the burden of worries and uncertainties those of us with visual impairment face daily. This support has given me confidence not to pretend when I can't see or to apologise if I am slow.

Talking to Judith has made me a lot more proud of what I achieve with my patchy sight." - Karren

Judy Baron

By Professor Adrian Hill

Shortly before Christmas 2018, the death occurred of Miss Judy Baron, a long-time supporter and former custodial Trustee of OAB. Judy was born in February 1935 and her life's work had been in Social Services. For most of her career, she was a Senior Social Worker for the Blind in Oxfordshire. She helped hundreds of VI people in the county and was very skilled in teaching Braille. After retirement, she left Oxford to live in Chorleywood in Hertfordshire but faithfully continued to attend our AGMs until last year.

Since the early 1980s, Judy was a Trustee of OAB, she was

chair of the Trustees on several occasions, and was one of only three custodial Trustees who acted as financial guarantors of the charity until it became incorporated. She was also the first woman to chair the RNIB Council and, from 1989 to 2006, she was a Trustee of the Royal National College for the Blind in Hereford. In the late 1980s, she was co-founder with Dr Adrian Hill of the Oxfordshire branch of the Partially Sighted Society, created to provide a forum for sharing information between families of children with VI. After about 20 years, this society amalgamated with OAB. Judy was a very kind and caring soul who was very generous with her time and always willing to help those with sight loss. For relaxation, she loved country walks with her Bassett Hounds. She was devoted to the work of OAB and has left a legacy to the charity in her will. We are all the better for having known Judy, and OAB has a lot to be grateful for her generous benefaction.



Children & Young People's News

By Laura Finnis

SKATING TO HEIGHTS – AND LOWS!

The highlight of the last few months was the ice-skating back in February half-term. Yes, it was a challenge to ensure the supports were all there to enable visually-impaired children to skate safely but thanks to volunteers from the university's ice-hockey clubs (Nathan's team mates) there was virtually one-to-one help for those that needed it. Also, we had penguins and snowmen to hold on to and of course support from family members – when they could stop laughing at each other's misfortunes!

Seriously, we were all so delighted to see the progress made by the children and we all soon realised it wasn't such a disaster to land flat on the ice! I think credit goes to Miles for the most impressive slide on his back! Due to popular demand, we're all set to try it again.

Two days after ice-skating, when some of us were still aching a bit, we met at the Pitt

Rivers Museum to look at 'This is Me!' It was fascinating to pass round some objects and try to work out what they were used for and how they represented different groups of people. Some of us were better at guessing than others of course! Then we made some tactile badges representing ourselves or aspects of our character: for example Christopher made a heart to show his caring personality. Lastly, clay was used to make a creature of any sort that had some kind of special power. Anya made a beautiful rat called Vicki and Rona made a dog called Hugs which would give you a hug at night to protect you but only if you asked it first.

And at Easter, it was Farmer Gow's and holding the soft, sweet chicks. We also fed the sheep, goats and kids and went egg-collecting. The kids were so soft and sweet too. The trailer ride was a bit bumpy and the ground mega-muddy but I suppose that is to be expected on a farm!



After lunch it was the Easter egg hunt and the children found plastic eggs on the giant hay bale and were awarded a chocolate prize! Hurray! A fun day out if a little cold!

I have been getting quite snappy with the camera but unfortunately forgot to take any photos of our Easter session here at OAB which is a pity as we made yummy chocolate eggs and decorated very colourful baskets.

WE HAVE TAKEN PART IN THE FOLLOWING:

Weds 1st May 7pm: Musical 'Madagascar' audio-described with touch tour

Weds 29th May 10 – 11:30: Ice-skating

LOOKING AHEAD:

Thurs 30th May 10:30 – 12:00: Natural History Museum 'Destination Dinosaur'

Sat 27th July 1pm – 4pm: Canoeing/Kayaking

Thurs 15th August 10:30 – 3:30: Climbing Wall and Zip Wire at Youlbury Scout Camp.



Fun on the Ice, at the Oxford ice rink

Crafts at the Pitt Rivers Museum



Feeding the goats at Millets Farm

Digital Magnifiers

We have a number of handheld and portable digital magnifiers available for demonstration in the resource centre. These devices have the capability to magnify and change the colour of whatever is under their camera. They come in a range of screen sizes with many additional features.

Models include:

Amigo HD by Enhanced Vision
– RRP £870.00

Pebble HD by Enhanced Vision
– RRP £582.00

Explore 5 by HumanWare –
RRP £399.99.00

Explore 8 by HumanWare –
RRP £699.00

We also have a SALE on the Compact + HD by Optilec for £250.00 (RRP £390.00).

For more information please call Nathan on 01865 725595.



Technology Update

Technology is fast moving and it can often be hard to keep up-to-date! We're holding a tech update workshop at OAB on **Thursday 1st August 10.30am -12.30pm** at Oxfordshire Association for the Blind, Bradbury Lodge, Gordon Woodward Way, Oxford, OX1 4XL. We'll be covering the following topics:

- New apps to help you read
- New Navigation apps
- New hardware, phones, tablets
- Alexa enabled devices
- New smart speaker skills

If you'd like to come along please book a place by contacting Mark Upton on 01865 725595 or email markupton@oxeyes.org.uk

Social club updates

There have been a few changes with some of the local groups in recent months, below we'd like to update you on what's going on around the county:

Didcot

The Didcot group had its last meeting on Thursday 25th April. The group enjoyed a fish and chip lunch; it had been running for around 40 years, and we'd like to thank Pam Organ, Pamela, Barbara and Anthea for all their hard work over the years.

Banbury Society for the Visually Impaired

Sadly the Banbury group has now finished meeting after 43 years of regular get-togethers. Well done to Enid Smith and her team for all the work they did with the group.

Thame

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of Jean Mander; Jean had been the leader of the Thame group for around 40 years and had recently won several awards for her tireless service to the

group. She will be greatly missed by all.

OXVIC

The Oxford Visually Impaired Club had a great time at Easter, making Easter baskets. At the bottom of the page is an image of the group with their hand-made baskets. Thanks to Ali, Isabelle and Verona for all their hard work with the group.

Coffee Club meet-ups

We are looking to start a few informal coffee meet-ups around the county. This will be a chance for visually impaired people to meet up in a local café or bar, grab a cup of coffee and get to know others in the local area. If you live in the Didcot or Banbury area please do contact Mark Upton on 01865 725595 if you'd like to know more or get involved.



Introducing Rona!

*By Laura
Finnis*



I thought you might like to 'meet' some of the children/young people we work with and as Rona is celebrating her 18th birthday around the time of publication, why not start with her and wish her happy birthday too!

Rona Margaret Smith's aim in life to be an inspiration to others and I am certain she has already done that. Born blind as part of the consequences of her Septo-optic dysplasia (she spelt it out for me!), she was learning braille by the time she was 2 and had mastered it at the age of 10! She has lived in Bicester all her life and attended Southwold Primary School, then Marlborough School where she took 5 GCSEs. Very

impressive. She is rightly very proud of her achievements and hopes that she will continue to do well in her BTEC Health and Social Care and her Maths studies at Witney College as well as later at university (hopefully!). Her long-term aim is to help visually-impaired children learn braille.

Rona advocates going to a mainstream school rather than a specialist boarding school for the visually-impaired, saying "you have a better mix of social interaction in a mainstream school and that prepares you better for work and life outside school." Moreover, Rona appreciates the people who have helped her through her education such as her TAs Michelle (who she is still in contact with), Jane and Caroline, as well as Louise who is currently her PA.

In her free time, Rona enjoys listening to audio books and going out with Louise, sometimes shopping but more often being ladies at lunch! She also goes swimming and says that at the start of 2018

she couldn't swim but she now has an amazing private instructor Wendy and has managed 2 lengths on her back and a width of the pool doing front crawl!

And her plans to celebrate her 18th? With Louise, Rona is busy planning a bucket list of 18 things to do within a year! This month she is going to see the musical 'Matilda' in London and then having a meal at Prezzo with numerous friends so a great start! Thank you Rona for sharing with us and we all wish you a very, very HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Pedal Power - Bike Oxford Sunday 19th May

Massive thanks to the three tandem teams and one solo rider who got on their bikes and went into high octane training before taking part in Bike Oxford 2019 to raise funds for and awareness of OAB.

Tandem team 1 was made up of Kate Pounds with her husband as front rider – they cycled the 25 mile route.

Tandem team 2 consisted of Paul Goodwin and his cycling

partner Andy Pau – they did the 80 mile route and even managed to do an unplanned extra 10 miles on the actual day!

Tandem team 3 had Joel Young partner up with Patrick Holden, a member of Cowley Road Condors, to complete the 80 mile course.

Our Vice Chair Guy Lawfull enlisted the help of his brother Clark Lawfull to ride solo for us on the 25 mile course.

All our intrepid cyclists donned our bright yellow OAB t-shirts and worked hard at gaining fundraising support for their efforts.

A massive thanks to all our riders: monies are still coming in but we hope to have raised over £800 from this event and are keen to be more actively involved in Bike Oxford 2020.



Training day with the ActivEyes Club at Wheels 4 All, Horspath Athletics Track

Local Clubs and Groups

Abingdon & District Macular Group – 01235 531857.

ActivEyes – 01865 725595.

Banbury Macular Group – 01608 685293.

Chipping Norton Group – 01608 810899.

Dreaming Spires ten pin bowling – 01869 331778.

Goring Macular Group – 01865 725595.

Henley Visually Impaired Group – 01491 628284.

Kidlington Macular Group – 01865 376482 or 01865 373104.

LOOK Oxfordshire – support for families of visually impaired children, 01189 722322.

Oxford Macular Group – 01865 316245.

‘OXVIC’ – Oxford Visually Impaired Club – 01865 725595.

Retinitis Pigmentosa Group - 01235 511044.

Thame & District Society for the Visually Impaired – 01844 212983.

‘VIBNO’ – Visually Impaired But Not Old! - 01869 331778.

Wantage Blind Social Club - 01235 764646 or 01235 765849.

Witney Friends of the Visually Impaired – 01865 725595.

Witney Macular Group – 01993 771828.

Sensory Impairment Team

The County Council has an excellent team of specially trained staff supporting people of all ages affected by sensory impairment.

Their telephone no. is: **01865 894935.**

Carers Oxfordshire

A service for anyone who is caring for another person and would like some support. Their no. is: **0845 0507666**

OAB is assisted by:

