



Oxfordshire
Association for the Blind



Newsletter

May 2021

**22 MILES FOR
22,000 VISUALLY
IMPAIRED PEOPLE**

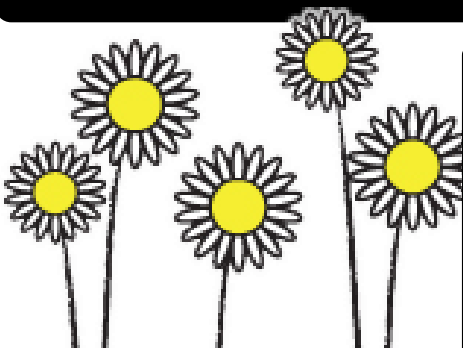


It Takes Two to Tandem!!

Find out more about our tandem teams on [page 11](#)

Also in this issue:

- Meet our new CEO: Mark Upton
- Introducing James Hart
- Talking Tech
- And much more...



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Bradbury Lodge will be open for appointment only.



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CEO's Message



Hello everyone, my name is Mark and I started as OAB's new Chief Executive at the beginning of April. I want to start by thanking Helen

Roseblade, who sadly retired because of ill health at the end of

March. Helen, although with us for a short time, has achieved a tremendous amount and led the team through one of the most challenging situations we've faced. I want to wish her well and a full recovery; I know she will be supporting us from the side lines.

About you

I've been working for OAB since 2014 as Client Services Manager after working for a similar charity

in West Sussex. My role has mainly been focused on our clients, supporting them and leading the team, so I'm really hoping to use this as a foundation as I step up to this new challenge!

Being visually impaired (VI) since birth, I know first-hand some of the struggles and barriers that we all face, day to day. It is also a real testament to OAB that a VI person has been appointed as CEO and that we as an organisation know and believe that visually impaired people not only can work, but can work in senior roles; sadly, disability history shows that this has not always been the case.

I live in Witney with my wife and our little baby – who keeps us on our toes! When I get a chance, I really enjoy music, making food (and eating it!) plus listening to podcasts and audio books – like I said, when I get a chance! I'm passionate about inclusion, and ensuring that disabled people have opportunities to learn, grow, work and play an active part in their community.

Who is OAB?

We're here for anyone who has a visual impairment, whether it's right at the beginning of diagnosis or after years of living with sight loss. We've been a part of the Oxfordshire community since

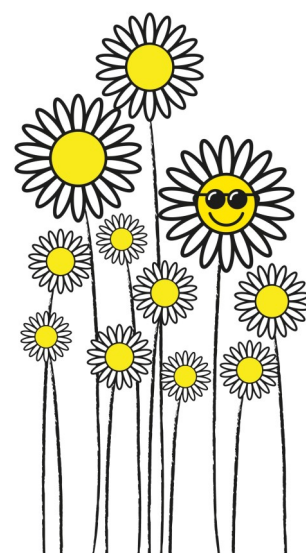
1877, so we are well established. We're a dedicated team of staff, trustees, volunteers, clients and supporters who really are passionate about ensuring blind and partially sighted people can live independently. That could be by teaching someone how to use a smartphone, providing connections at a group or chatting over the telephone.

What's next?

We have a huge challenge ahead of us: not only are our services seeing greater demand because of Covid, but we will inevitably face further financial challenges ahead, as purse strings become tighter. We also have a large and rural county to serve – with an estimated 22,900 people in the county living with sight loss – so this will be no easy task. But we are determined to build back better, build back stronger and face these challenges head on, to serve and support our community.

I'm really looking forward to connecting with as many people as possible, why not come along with us on this journey? -

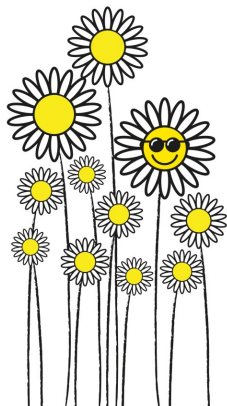
Mark



Thank You Michael

By Mark Upton

For over 14 years Michael Ling has been our Finance Manager. Michael joined the team in 2006 to provide financial administration and bookkeeping, but he soon took on many of the accounting roles at OAB because of his experience and knowledge. Michael has had a long career in financial management, both in the public and charitable sectors. Michael has assisted us through many major changes as an organisation, including the building of the Campoli Centre and the incorporation of OAB as a limited company. He has played an integral part in OAB, not just in the background but also assisting many clients and volunteers and being a friendly voice at the end of the phone. Michael will be taking a very well deserved retirement at the end of June. He'll no doubt be spending quality time with his family, and hopefully putting his feet up! I'd like to take this moment to say a very big thank you from all the staff, trustees, volunteers and clients.



Seeun Kim: The Braille Object Project

“Today, we use diverse languages to communicate with each other in a modern society. There are various ways of communicating for modern people in the world. Firstly, the use of native language, international language or foreign language can be a tool for modern people to communicate with others.”

“However, speaking and listening are not the only the ways of communicating with others. The use of braille as a form of semiotics can be another way of communicating as well. We do not recognise the importance of intangible factors in a modern society. It might be the most important agenda for us to find really worthwhile things in our lives.”

An exhibition is being held at the North Wall Arts Centre in Oxford from 28th May– 12th June showcasing Seeun Kim’s braille art and communication project. The exhibition is free and open Mon-Fri 10am-4pm and Saturdays 12noon-4pm. To find out more call 01865 319450 or visit www.thenorthwall.com. *We have recently provided visual impairment awareness training for their staff and volunteers.*

Introducing: James Hart



Name: James Hart

Location: Lockinge near Wantage

Age: 42

Visual Impairment: Macular Degeneration

First link with OAB:

I first heard about OAB through my doctor at Oxford Eye Hospital, as I am under Prof Downs. OAB have been great to me, with counselling which was amazing and really helped me. They have also helped with aids such as using my smartphone and

computer, plus a talking watch; I can't thank their service enough.

Hobbies: I enjoy all outdoor sports such as cycling, horse riding, running, power rising, ice skating.

Career: I started my own business catering in 2004 called Delicious of Wantage and Didcot, also named Delicious Events Oxfordshire. I love this work doing weddings, birthdays, celebrations and other events. I have done 'Wedding TV; Three Grand Weddings', which was a lot of fun and I also won the competition! I do all aspects of catering like hog roasts, sit down meals, buffets, crêpes and chocolate fountains. We also offer dressing of events.

Working with sight problems has not been easy but I just pushed myself and delegated others to do things for me. I will still keep my hand in catering sometimes but due to sight issues and things changing in the world I sold the company in 2020; now is a new chapter to see what happens.

James has such a great attitude and is always keen to get involved in things we are doing. We can't wait to get him involved with us in future.

If you would like your story to be shared in our newsletter or on our website, please contact us.

Talking Tech

by Nathan Tree

The past twelve months have really highlighted the capability of technology with increased usage of video calls, online delivery and content streaming, which a lot of the population have taken into their stride. However, there are a lot of people who do not have the hardware or the know-how to be able to access the information and services that connectivity can bring.

According to the NHS, 4.8 million people never go online at all and people with a disability are 35% less likely to have essential digital skills for life.

At OAB we are aware that this is the case with some of our clients and we want to make a difference. There are plenty of ways that you can begin accessing technology that don't involve a lot of investment or knowledge, just some time and a positive attitude.

We can help with:

- Equipment (Tablets, smartphones, smart speakers, computers)
- Accessibility (Contrast, magnification, voice assistants, screen readers)
- Apps and functions (Email, Office, Video calling)
- VI specific software (VoiceOver, TalkBack, Dolphin

Guide Connect and Supernova, Zoomtext, Narrator)

- Recommending other services like RNIB and AbilityNet.

We can offer phone and online sessions and hope to resume in-person training as soon as we can.

For more information call our helpline on 01865 725595 and ask to speak to Nathan or email info@oxeyes.org.uk.

Captain Tom 100

Many of us were inspired by Captain Sir Tom Moore's efforts last year during the pandemic. He showed us that no matter what your age or ability you can make a difference!

The 30th April marked what would have been his 101st birthday. Charities across the country joined together to ask people to take on a challenge in his memory. This challenge had to be based around the number 100. So some people did 100 star jumps, or walked 100 laps of their garden. It didn't matter what it was.

We want to say a huge thank you to those who took part and raised money for OAB. A special thank you goes to The Falcon Rowing Club who collectively kayaked and canoed 201 laps of 'Cricket Island' near Christchurch Meadow - doubling their target! Thank You!

5 Ways to support OAB, without spending a penny!

As a small local organisation we are often talking about making a donation and supporting our work. But were you aware, you can support us without spending money! Here we've listed a few examples of how you can help us:

1. **Recycle.** We accept old mobile phones, tablets, games consoles, jewellery, foreign coins and stamps. You can either bring the items in or we can send you an envelope to send them directly to Recycle for Good Causes.
2. **Volunteer your time.** Volunteering is a great way to give back. We have volunteer roles in the following areas: telephone befriending, administration, fundraising and sight desk volunteers.
3. **Write to your local Councillor.** With the recent local elections this is a great time to shout about our work and the impact we have made within the community. You can let them know how we have helped you personally and what a difference it has made to your life. If you're not sure who your local councillors are you can find out online or contact us and we can help you out.
4. **Tell your friends, family and neighbours.** Although you may not feel like running a marathon or jumping out of a plane, a family member might! Give them a nudge and see if they'll take on a challenge to raise funds for OAB.
5. **Take up a challenge yourself.** We've just heard about the Captain Tom 100 but why not take on a small challenge yourself. Walk 100 laps of your garden, give up chocolate for 100 days - you name it, it's up to you. You can raise funds for OAB by doing any challenge you like!

If you'd like to know more about how you can support us then get in touch.

Reopening our Resource Centre

It has been a long and challenging year for everyone. With our small team, we made the decision that it was best to focus our efforts on remote support until we felt able to open our Resource Centre again.

We're now really pleased to say we will be reopening for face-to-face visitors from June. It will be slightly different, and we will be putting a few measures in place to keep us all safe. We've listed some of them below.

- I cannot stress this enough but we will only be seeing visitors on an **appointment only basis**. We don't want to disappoint you so please call us to arrange your visit.
- We will be open three days a week to start with
- We will be regularly cleaning the centre.
- Hand sanitiser will be readily available.
- Staff will be wearing PPE when seeing people face to face.
- We will ask you to wear a face mask unless exempt.
- We will also ask you to sign in and ensure that every visitor

has given us their contact details.

- Sadly at this time, we are unable to offer a drink when you come in, BUT this will be regularly reviewed

I hope you can understand our position; these measures are to keep us all safe and will enable us to support those who most need it.

If you'd like to talk to us about this or to arrange a time to come in, please contact us via the details on page 2.

Our Impact: Working through Covid-19

By Mark Upton

I wanted to update you on our work across Oxfordshire over the past year. It has been a challenging time for everyone. We believe that blind and partially sighted people have faced additional barriers and challenges and we're so proud to say we have been there to support, enable and encourage our clients.

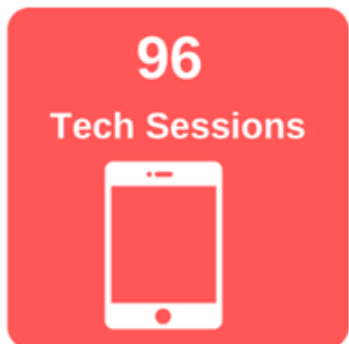
Our initial reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic

Initially we turned our efforts to contacting all our clients and

members: about 25 of our volunteers worked their way through a list of names to make contact. We wanted to ask how they were, check they had support locally for provisions and offer a regular phone call.

Telephone Befriending

Once our initial contact had been made, we set up our telephone befriending service. This is a regular phone call from an OAB volunteer. We now have **75 partnerships across Oxfordshire.**



Tech Training

Technology has played an important part in society over the past year. The digital divide is very present amongst our clients. We have provided **96 tech training sessions.** This has

included helping people to connect and shop online.



Mary Gregory making telephone calls

Children, young people, and families

Having to home school has been such a challenge for many people, and we have been there for our families during this time, offering support, encouragement, and connections.

And much more...

We have been providing equipment loans, telephone counselling, access campaigns, awareness webinars, and of course our Mon-Fri Helpline for visually impaired residents of Oxfordshire.



Thank You!

Without your generous support none of this would have been possible. Whether you have donated, become a member, volunteered your time, or just cheered us on we would not have been able to carry on our support for blind and partially sighted people in Oxfordshire – thank you!

Here are a few words from some of the people we have supported:

“I would be a lot more depressed if I didn’t have my regular call from OAB: just to hear the voice of someone else is a huge help. I don’t feel alone.”

“You are doing a wonderful job and given me hope for a life I never thought I could have.”

If you’d like to support us for our work in 2021/22 please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

Cotteslowe Park Horticultural Trip

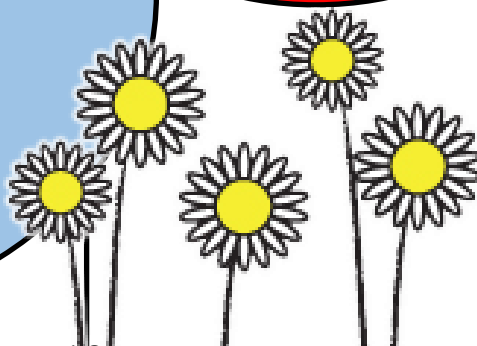
We’re excited for our first trip to Cotteslowe Horticultural Therapy Centre. This will be a fantastic chance to get outside, meet others and even have a go at potting plants. Our first session

will be on **Monday 5th July** in the morning.

Pick up via minibus available from OAB’s Bradbury Lodge. If you’d like to know more or book a spot get in touch.

“Your telephone call was like a warm hug.”

Text
'OAB' to
70460 to
donate £5



The Big Tandem Challenge!

Our challenge:

There are over 22,000 visually impaired people in Oxfordshire. We aim to ride in tandem 22 miles to raise money for the Oxfordshire Association for the Blind (OAB) – so that thousands of people with sight loss can reach their own goals every single day.

It takes two to tandem:

Several keen duos will ride to raise this much-needed funding. Each team involves a visually impaired stoker and a sighted pilot and aims to cycle 22 miles each! Read more about our cyclist's stories below.

Savita's story:

My name is Savita and I enjoy cycling. I feel very lucky to have discovered this sport at a fairly late stage in my life, when I had already lost my sight. This was only possible thanks to OAB and their partnership with the charity Wheels for All.

I have RP (Retinitis Pigmentosa, a degenerative eye condition that leads to blindness) and have been totally blind for the past ten years. I am a life member of OAB. OAB is a vital support organisation for me and so many other visually impaired people in Oxfordshire. It has benefited me

in many ways: it has introduced me to new activities, such as cycling, and to new friendships. Janet is a volunteer at OAB and is the pilot on the tandem - I am the stoker. We cycle every week and have become good friends.

Joining Savita will be Mark Upton and Nathan Tree accompanied by their pilots.

Mark's story:

"I'm taking part in the tandem challenge to raise vital funds for OAB. As a visually impaired person myself I know first-hand how necessary local support and opportunities are for blind and partially sighted people. I am, sadly, not that fit, so 22 miles around Horspath track on the back of a tandem will certainly be a challenge for myself and my poor front rider! Please give generously: charities have suffered a big hit since the pandemic, but our services have never been more needed."

Nathan's story:

"OAB means the world to me and I like to take on challenges to try and give back some of the help I have received. I have done some tandem cycling in the past when I raced triathlons but I have never cycled more than 20km, so 22

miles will be a stretch! I look forward to the challenge and hope that my legs survive.”

This challenge will be taking place on **11th June** at Wheels for All. The team are aiming to raise **£3,000**

If you'd like to sponsor the team you can:

- **Make a donation over the telephone**
- **Bank transfer or send a cheque(call for details)**
- **Donate online via:**
www.justgiving.com/campaign/OABtandem
- **Or donate via text. Text 'Tandem' to 70460 to donate £10**

Thank you!

Banbury Meet-Up

If you live in or near Banbury, come and join us for an informal meet-up. This will be a fantastic chance to meet other like-minded visually impaired people in your area. Our first meet-up will be on **Thursday 1st July 10.30am at**

The Banbury Museum Café. We will then hope to meet each month.

If you have difficulty getting to the meet-up get in touch and we can help you find the right solution. Janet one of our trustees will be there to meet you and host the session; to find out more give us a call.

Research Opportunity

Researchers at the University of Oxford are looking for stroke survivors to take part in a visual rehabilitation programme. The study will last 9-months, including 6-months of visual training (at least 40 mins a day, 5 days a week for 6-months) and 3 study visits at baseline (0-months), 6-months and 9-months. The visual training will take place in your home. At each study visit you will be asked to complete an MRI scan and some behavioural tasks (one day in total). If you are interested and would like more information, please contact Hannah Willis by phone (01865 611458) or email (visual.rehab@ndcn.ox.ac.uk).

OAB has been supported by:



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