



**Spring 2016 Issue 54**

# CONTACT

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# Editorial

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Welcome to the first edition of CONTACT magazine for 2016. This edition is also the first for Contact's new Editor – Michael Parsons - and his Sub-Editor, The Mighty Quinn. Michael will be known to many readers as a board member, local champion on access issues and close companion of his guide dog, Quinn.

**Please note that the deadline for the Summer edition of Contact is Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2016.**

This edition has been edited by Michael. As always, comments and contributions from Sutton Vision members and local partners are always welcome and may be sent to Michael at [editor@suttonvision.org.uk](mailto:editor@suttonvision.org.uk) . Michael will gradually include one or two new items. This issue includes the first of two new series: 'Quote for the Quarter' and Meet the....

We are always interested to hear what you think of the newsletter and to receive ideas about articles for inclusion. We hope you find the articles and information of interest, but there is also a good deal of information on our website [www.suttonvision.org.uk](http://www.suttonvision.org.uk).

## Chief Officer Retires

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Stephen Hawkins, Sutton Vision's Chief Officer for almost four years, retired at the end of March this year. He joined SV in May 2012 with the stated intention that he would like to retire when he reached the age of 65.

Amazingly, four years have nearly come and gone, and I know that he will be sorry to say goodbye to his work colleagues, some of whom have become friends, on the 31st of March. As for many people coming to the end of their working lives, Stephen will have mixed feelings. Apart from missing work colleagues, he says he will also miss the challenge of doing his best for as many people as he could. Stephen is a staunch supporter of Sutton Vision and the work it does

for blind and visually impaired people, and he was very successful at networking and getting alongside key people in the Local Authority, the NHS and other allied agencies, to raise the profile of Sutton Vision in his quest to attract support and funding for its work.

On the other hand, I think Stephen finds the thought of being able to do what he likes when he wants, very attractive. I suspect that Nicky, his wife, might have something to say about that!

The Board of Trustees is deeply indebted to Stephen for successfully negotiating the uncertain, and, at times, stormy waters of the Voluntary Sector. I believe he will be leaving us with a much more stable base from which to continue and develop our services. I and my fellow Trustees are confident that we can now move forward optimistically.

Actually, we may not have seen the last of Stephen, because he has kindly offered to work on a sectional basis, to facilitate the transition of SV to the next stage of its development.

Very many thanks Stephen, and very best wishes for the future.

Eric Kennedy, Chair of Trustees.

## New Chief Officer

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Sutton Vision has appointed a new Chief Officer.

Over the last few months the Board of Trustees at Sutton Vision have been considering succession plans for Stephen Hawkins' replacement.

On 1st April 2016 Nicola Huggins, an experienced manager will start in her new Post of Chief Officer of Sutton Vision. Nicola has been working as Head of Strategic Programmes at the Thomas Pocklington Trust. She has a wealth of experience in the field of visual impairment and good links with major sight loss organisations behind the development of the UK Eye Health Strategy.

Welcome Nicola. We, at Sutton Vision, look forward to working with you in the next phase of the charity's development.

## Volunteer Retires

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### **Sutton Vision Volunteer Bob Churchman has retired.**

For the last nine years our Music Group has been a great success due to our volunteer Bob. Unfortunately Bob has decided to retire as a volunteer for Sutton Vision. It goes without saying that all of us here, clients, staff and fellow volunteers will miss him very much.

Each month Bob has presented an extremely varied and enjoyable programme for everyone to enjoy. He has supported us on many occasions providing the music for our 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Event and more recently our Tea Dance at the Salvation Army during National Eye Health Awareness Week. Bob even led guests in singing "Happy Birthday" to Paul Burstow when Paul attended our 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party which coincided with his own birthday.

Apart from facilitating our Music Group Bob has also been a driver and a home visitor he has made a big difference to many of our clients, we are so grateful to him for his time, kindness and support over the years and wish him every happiness for the future.

## Current Role Opportunities

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Do you only have a little bit of time?  
Join us to make a big impact!

Make new friends, learn new skills, hours to suit and training given

Do you like to organise? Then why not join us as a **Volunteer Activity Organiser** planning favourite activities and introducing new ones?

Help us spread the word about the services we offer locally to GP centres, Optometrists across the Borough as a **Volunteer Ambassador**

Is driving a favourite past time? Join us as a **Volunteer Driver** to take our members out and about locally and occasionally further afield

Are you an effective communicator? Do you like to listen to people? Become a **Volunteer Eye Clinic Supporter** to provide non-medical information and support to patients, their families and carers

Do you like meeting people on a one to one basis, sharing views, chatting, doing puzzles and crosswords then come and join us as a **Volunteer Home Visitor**

Make a new friend as a **Volunteer Shopping Supporter** when you go shopping locally with one of our members

If you like to talk on the phone why not come and chat to our members as a **Volunteer Telephone Befriender**

Come and make new friends when taking part in a favourite leisure activity such as walking, running, bowling, swimming and going to the theatre as a **Volunteer Buddy** for our members who take part in recreation and leisure activities

**For more details please contact:**

Amanda Larter

Volunteer Coordinator

**Phone:** 020 8409 7166

**Email:** [amandalarter@suttonvision.org.uk](mailto:amandalarter@suttonvision.org.uk)

## Special Interest Groups

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We have places available if you would like to attend either of our monthly special interest groups. The sessions are held here at Sutton Vision and start at 12.15 and end at 2.30 p.m. The cost per session

is £2.00 per head. You are more than welcome to bring your lunch, we will provide tea and coffee. Unfortunately we are unable to provide transport.

On the second Monday of the month our **Music Appreciation Group** meets to enjoy a very varied programme. The third Monday of the month is when our **Reminiscence and Poetry Group** get together to share past events and memories, verse and prose. Our volunteers work very hard to ensure that each meeting is enjoyable, varied and stimulating. Why not give one or both of them a try? You are more than welcome to come along for a “taster” session. Please telephone the Sutton Vision office on 020 8409 7166 if you are interested.

## GLFB Geranium Day – Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May

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If you are able to collect for one or two hours in the morning or afternoon in Sutton High Street for Geranium Day it would really be appreciated. Please contact Amanda at the office on 020 8409 7166 or email [amandalarter@suttonvision.org.uk](mailto:amandalarter@suttonvision.org.uk)

The Greater London Fund for the Blind (GLFB) was formed in 1921 by Sir Arthur Pearson who was also founder of both the Daily Express and the national charity St Dunstan’s in 1915 (which is now known as Blind Veterans UK) for soldiers blinded by war. Sir Arthur had glaucoma and was blind. Just before he died he organised a “Geranium Day” appeal in London to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by blind and partially sighted people living with sight loss.

Today the GLFB is a fundraising organisation and funds the work of its member charities of which includes Sutton Vision. For further information visit the GLFB website [www.glfb.org.uk](http://www.glfb.org.uk)

So if you can please help us to collect for GLFB on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May we would be happy to hear from you.



## Fashion Show

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We would greatly appreciate your support for our forthcoming fundraising event. In conjunction with “Amanda Ladies Fashion”, Ashted we will be hosting a fashion show, Sutton Vision will benefit from the proceeds of the evening. The event will be held on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September at The Ashted Peace Memorial Hall, Woodfield Lane, Ashted, KT21 2BA. The doors will open at 7.30 p.m. and the show will commence at 8.00 p.m., and finish approximately 10.00 p.m.

Amanda will present clothes from her shop, they will be modelled by friends, staff and customers in true catwalk fashion.

Included in the ticket price of £15.00 per head, you will be offered a glass of wine or a soft drink on arrival and a platter of refreshments will be served during the interval. Raffle tickets will be on sale during the evening and the raffle will be drawn at the end of the event before you leave.

Over the years many charities have benefitted from this event and, with your support, we are looking forward to the evening being a success for Sutton Vision.

Please telephone Amanda or Andrea here in the office, 020 8409 7166 to purchase your tickets. If you are unable to join us for the evening but would like to contribute in another way maybe by way of sponsorship or a raffle prize then please contact us. For further information please don't hesitate to speak to Amanda or Andrea

P.S. – The owner of “Amanda Ladies Fashion” is not our very own Amanda Larter, Volunteer Co-ordinator!

## Low Vision Focus Day

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Professional Vision Services and Dolphin Assisted Technology will be holding a Low Vision Focus Day here at Sutton Vision on Thursday 21st April 2016. It will run between 10am – 2.30pm. If you are

interested in attending please phone Vanessa on 020 8409 7166 to make an appointment.

Professional Vision Services manufacture and sell low vision aids to enhance reading while Dolphin are experts in software solutions including magnification and screen readers. You will have already received flyers in the post offering further information.

## Research on increasing the take up of services for people with sight loss in London

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Blind Aid is a long-established provider of services to people with sight loss living in London. One of these services is a home visiting service. This service has a steady referral rate and a consistent waiting list to join it. However, the evidence suggests that there is a significant number of people who could benefit from the service but who don't use it – and don't use other services. Blind Aid have therefore commissioned research to improve the delivery of the service and its impact. More broadly, Blind Aid want the research to help it understand more generally what are the barriers and drivers of service use for people with sight loss; how can service providers improve their relationships with professionals who can enable people to use their services, and how can service providers better meet the needs of people living with sight loss in London.

### How the research will be carried out

The research covers four stages and sets of activities:

Stage 1: Scoping. This will identify key data sources and key contacts; carry out a literature review to identify the key factors that influence service take-up; produce an initial theory of the 'causes' of the problem and possible solutions; produce the tools necessary to do the data collection.

Stage 2: Data collection. This will collect the evidence on what factors influence service uptake, particularly the drivers and barriers to uptake. It involves: a service user/non user survey; service user/non user focus group; stakeholder interviews; staff interviews; a field visit; a benchmarking exercise (focusing on a relevant comparison service).

Stage 3: Data analysis. This will analyse the research data collected from the activities carried out in Stage 2 and compare the results.

Stage 4: Learning. This will draw together the results of the previous activities and a sector stakeholder consultation to present conclusions and recommendations, and to support Blind Aid in designing appropriate actions to implement them.

Arcola Research LLP and BlindAid are actively seeking the involvement and participation of stakeholders across the visual impairment services sector in this research.

Who is doing the research

The research is being carried out by Arcola Research LLP - an independent research organisation based in East London. Arcola Research provides research, evaluation and organizational consultancy services. It works across a number of sectors – including health, criminal justice, education and training, technology development, social inclusion and social innovation - and for different kinds of clients, including government, the private sector, NGOs and community groups.

For further information contact Dr Joe Cullen - [jcullen@arcola-research.co.uk](mailto:jcullen@arcola-research.co.uk) or Greg Holloway [gholloway@arcola-research.co.uk](mailto:gholloway@arcola-research.co.uk)

## Brooklands Museum Visitor

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On the afternoon of Monday 22nd February Sutton Vision had a visit from Virginia Smith who works at Brooklands Museum. This museum has a wonderful collection of cars, motor vehicles and aircraft, including Concorde and occupies part of the famous Brooklands Motor-racing Circuit near Weybridge in Surrey.

The reason for Virginia's visit was to seek advice and guidance from visually impaired people for signage to be used in a new exhibition at the museum. Motor racing ceased at Brooklands with the outbreak of war in 1939 and during the Second World War an aircraft factory was established on the site. One of the hangers built for aircraft construction today houses a large part of the museum's collection on historic aircraft. The hanger is a listed building but at over seventy years old is in serious need of repair. The museum has obtained funding from the National Lottery for a major project. The aircraft and other exhibits are to be moved to a temporary home in a nearby building. The hanger will then be carefully dismantled and then

refurbished and rebuilt yards away from where it currently stands. This will enable the museum to re-open the finishing strait from the racetrack, which the hanger currently sits on. When the hanger re-opens with its exhibits replaced it will feature many new featured exhibits to depict and re-create what it was like in a wartime aircraft factory. It is intended that many of these will be "hands on" so that children [and the young at heart] can really get a feel of what some of the jobs and materials were like.

Six of us from Sutton Vision met with Virginia in the Resource Room at the offices. We were a mixed group of clients, staff and volunteers. All of us are partially sighted and all with different eye conditions. Virginia explained that the museum was determined to make the new exhibition as easily accessible as possible and that she was meeting with a number of different groups including wheelchair users and other disabilities as well as the visually impaired. Virginia showed us a couple of metal signs designed to be affixed to the wall alongside exhibits. One was dark blue with yellow writing and one black with white writing. They were both metal but had a matt surface so there was no glare. We all felt that they both had good contrast but felt that yellow writing on a black background would provide the best contrast. We felt that the main writing at the top of the signs was a reasonable size but some felt that the other writing on the signs was too small. At this point the group explained to Virginia that she would find it impossible to please everybody as "partially sighted" means so many different things. To emphasise this Virginia was given a selection of simi-specs or experience glasses to give her a brief practical experience of different types of sight loss. A real eye opener for her.

Virginia also said that they intended to make a lot of signs identifying different aircraft types embossed with a silhouette of the aircraft so visually impaired people could feel the shape of the aircraft. Virginia also said they were intending to paint yellow guiding stripes around the exhibition floor. We explained to her that while that was great in theory it would only be really effective if it was of sufficient contrast to the floor colouring. We did agree that if it was deep enough to be followed by a white cane it would be very useful. We also talked to Virginia about the importance of signs being at eye level, the importance of good lighting and the need for stair edges to be clearly

marked and the need for user friendly hand rails. Several of the group praised aspects of other exhibitions that were particularly user friendly for the visually impaired. These included audio descriptive devices with a hand held key pad to enter numbers displayed alongside exhibits such as at the Tower of London or special events for the visually impaired at The Queens Gallery with detailed descriptive talks about paintings and the opportunity to feel materials depicted in the artwork.

Virginia thanked us for our time and input and said that she had learned a great deal; saying that she would like to come back in a few months' time to show us how they were doing. We thanked her and congratulated the museum on their efforts to increase accessibility. I personally think it is impressive that they are thinking about these issues at the planning stage rather than at the last minute, or worse as an afterthought.

I have visited the museum a couple of times and think it is a great place. Well worth a visit for anyone with any interest in motor or aviation history. I really look forward to visiting the new exhibition when it opens next year.

In the summer they have vintage cars taking people on drives along parts of the old banked racing circuit that still remain; it is great fun. It is an easy drive to Brooklands. The nearest railway station is Weybridge with a connecting bus service to the museum.

The Museum website is [www.brooklandsmuseum.com](http://www.brooklandsmuseum.com)

Written by Adrian Andrews

## You and Me – The Clientele

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Sutton Vision, formerly SAB  
Are always there for you and me  
Giving support and advice  
More than enough to suffice.

Age-related Macular or Retinitis 'Pigmentosis'  
The Low Vision Clinic will give the correct 'diagnosis'  
And if there is some treatment you may need  
Sutton Vision will arrange it at some speed.

Talking clocks or watches or large magnifier  
In time you may read to your heart's desire

Then we come to the activity groups  
And we can rely on our volunteer troops  
In the music group, Bob has become a fixture,  
Giving us music of a very pleasant mixture  
Currently Bob is a bit 'out of sorts'  
But always remains in our thoughts.

Mark is our music group volunteer  
And we wonder what we may hear  
Ella, Frank or Nat King Cole  
Country and Western or a little bit of soul  
Some of these may send some ecstatic  
Whilst others prefer a well-known classic

When it comes to poetry or prose  
There is wonder about how much Martin knows  
He may tell us something quite amusing  
Then come up with something that we find confusing  
Tennyson, Wordsworth, Sassoon or Wilfred Owen  
And Martin will know what interest we are showing

Anne will help us reminisce  
Though some living in the past find it pure bliss

Anne will remind us of events and people we have forgotten  
Gracie Fields, Donald Peers or dear old Billy Cotton.  
Anne may finish with a quiz  
The answers can make your brainbox fizz

Finally, we come to 'Social Eyes'  
The transport situation almost brought about its demise  
The numbers now are very small  
But no need to worry – you can't win them all  
You and me – 'the clientele'  
Are being looked after very well  
The staff and volunteers will always be there  
Making our lives much easier to bear

By Frank Smith

## FREE NHS Health Check

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### **FREE NHS HEALTH CHECKS & LIVEWELL SERVICE**

Are you aged between 40 and 74 year of age and live in the London Borough of Sutton?

If you have NOT been diagnosed with diabetes or cardio vascular disease and do NOT take a statin or medication for high blood pressure, then you may benefit from attending an NHS Health Check session at a venue in Sutton (currently, SCOLA and SCILL host sessions) to receive FREE height, weight, blood pressure, BMI and cholesterol checks.

It is not always possible to know who might be at risk for cardio vascular, diabetes and other health conditions but you will leave the check knowing your risk, how to manage it and how to stay healthy. If you are thought to be at high risk, then you will be referred to your GP and/or other community or LiveWell Services which may include free advice and information about achieving a healthier diet and or weight, being more active, smoking cessation, reducing alcohol intake, reducing stress or low moods. The LiveWell Service is for people of any age and not restricted to 40 to 70 years of age.

To book an appointment and to find out more about Free NHS Health Checks please ring: 020 8487 1727.

To find out more about or book an appointment with the LiveWell Free NHS health improvement Service, please call: 020 8251 0606.

## Your PPG (Patients Participation Group) needs you!

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The NHS Constitution states "no decision about us, without us".

Patients have the right to be involved in the planning, development and delivery of healthcare services. Consulting with patients allows healthcare providers to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of the services they provide.

Every one of you will be registered with a G.P. practice. From 2015, it is a requirement that each practice has a PPG and to make reasonable efforts for this to be representative of the practice population. Over 90% of Suttons practices have some form of Patient Participation Group.

Patient Groups offer us all the opportunity to be 'active partners', playing an important part in having our say about the way local services are delivered and advising the practice on the patient perspective. They provide patients with opportunities to challenge and influence the quality of services and ensure that what is provided best meets the needs of the patients and the local community.

Each group comprises of patient representatives who care about what goes on in their practice and quality of services it provides. The group will be open to all registered patients of the practice, carers of registered patients and staff of the practice, although registered patients should form the majority of the group.

It is essential that G.P. practice staff are aware of issues encountered by someone who has a visual impairment for example, is the practice accessible? Are staff helpful and understanding when booking in on arrival, offering sighted guiding support if required? For those with

low, functional vision, is the lighting adequate; is information clear and sufficiently large? Are G.P.s and practice staff aware of additional, relevant support both locally and nationally to refer onto e.g. Sutton Vision, welfare benefits, Sensory Impairment Rehabilitation etc.

Please do consider joining your surgery's PPG to ensure issues affecting people with a visual impairment are highlighted. Meetings are held usually bi-monthly or quarterly, some being held at lunchtime in-between morning and afternoon surgeries or early evenings after surgery. G.P.s and or Practice Managers are often in attendance.

If you would like more information about joining your practice group, contact the practice, many have information on their websites. If you do join your PPG or are already a member, then please do suggest they might benefit from having a short talk from Sutton Vision to advise on the services we provide, visual awareness and sighted guidance for staff.

By Rebekah Kelly – Senior Outreach Worker

## PIP Research

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### **Experiences of Personal Independence Payment on people with sensory impairments.**

Researchers at NatCen Social Research are currently working on a project about the experiences of people with vision impairment and people with combined hearing and sight loss who have been claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and who will apply for Personal Independence Payments.

#### **Who can take part?**

We would like to speak to people who: have a vision impairment or combined hearing and sight loss; are aged between 16-64; live in either London or the West Midlands; and have had their PIP assessment and received an outcome in the last few months.

#### **What does the research involve?**

We would like to speak with you if you have recently received the

outcome of your PIP assessment in the last couple of months. We would like to conduct an interview with you to discuss your views and experiences of the PIP application, assessment process and outcome. We would also like to discuss with you your views on the outcome and the impact this has had on your life.

The interview will last up to an hour and you will receive £20 cash as a thank you for taking part. Everything you say is kept confidential and you can stop the interview at any point if you wish to. There are no right or wrong answers, we are just interested in your experiences.

If you take part in an interview we would also like to ask if we could follow-up with you a month later to see how you are getting on. However each interview is voluntary.

### **What if someone else (like a parent, friend or relative) helped me fill in my DLA or PIP application form?**

That is ok. You might want to ask them to be at the interview with you.

### **Where will the interview take place?**

Interviews can be done face-to-face or over the phone at a time and place convenient to you. Face-to-face interviews can be done at your home or at another suitable place such as a quiet café or at your work.

### **Do I have to take part?**

No, taking part is voluntary. You do not have to take part in both interviews. Also, if you take part but later change your mind, you can get in touch with the research team within a month of your interview and we will be able to remove your information from the project.

### **Who is funding the research?**

The project is funded by three charities – Sense, RNIB, and the Thomas Pocklington Trust. The research is being carried out by NatCen Social Research, an independent social research organisation.

### **What will happen to the results of the research?**

The information collected will be used to write a report. This project will help us better understand how the move to PIP affects people with sensory impairments. We hope to share the findings widely, including conferences, academic articles and specialist magazines such as

Talking Sense and NB. You can ask to be kept informed of the final results of the research.

### **Who will know that I've taken part?**

The report and articles will be anonymous. We will not use your name or details such as where you live or work. However because the things that you tell us might be unique to you, people reading it who know you very well might be able to recognise you from reading it.

### **How can I take part?**

If you would like to take part in the interview, or have further questions or comments, please contact the research team:

Email: [PIP@natcen.ac.uk](mailto:PIP@natcen.ac.uk)

Freephone: 0808 281 0298

Text: 07714 560 54

Write to:

NatCen Social Research

35 Northampton Square

London EC1V 0AX

As researchers we can't provide you with any advice or information about applying for PIP. You can get this by calling the RNIB helpline on 0303 123 9999 from Monday to Friday 8.45am to 5.30pm.

# Priority Services Register

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## Have you signed up for the **PRIORITY SERVICES REGISTER** for the **UK Power Networks**?

Your electricity supplier is the company you choose to buy your electricity from, and who you pay your bills to. If you look on your bill - part of what you pay is given to **UK Power Networks** for running and maintaining the power cables in your area.

Do you need extra support during a power cut or do you know someone else that would need extra support? If so, **sign up to our free register**

### **By joining the register, you will receive:**

- ✓ A priority phone number that you can call 24 hours a day and regular updates until your power is back on
- ✓ A welcome pack with useful advice about preparing for a power cut
- ✓ Regular text message updates if you text 'Power' followed by your postcode to 80876
- ✓ Extra support from the British Red Cross

### **Who can apply**

- Customers who are dependent on medical equipment
- Customers who are chronically ill
- Customers with a disability
- **Customers who are visually impaired or blind**
- Customers who are hearing impaired or deaf
- Elderly customers
- A nursing or residential home
- Customers with young babies in household
- Any other case that you would like us to consider

You can request to receive text updates on your mobile during a power cut. If you're power's off, you can be kept updated with text messages **Complete the quick and easy application form online via the following link: [www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk/internet/en/power-cuts/priority-services-during-a-power-cut/](http://www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk/internet/en/power-cuts/priority-services-during-a-power-cut/)**

**Or ring\_0845 601 4516.** Lines open Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm

**If you have a power cut call 24 hours a day 0800 3163 105 free to call from a landline or a mobile phone.**

- Report a power cut
- Report another issue
- Report a dangerous power problem

## Sutton Macular Week 2016

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**Macular Week 2016 – Get involved!**  
**27th June – 3rd July 2016**

The first Macular Week took place in July 2015 and was a huge success. Thank you to everyone who got involved, by organising events and spreading the message on social media. Macular Week 2016 is going to be even bigger and better and we need your support to help make this happen.

For more information on Macular Week and Sutton Macular Group, please contact Diana Coman on 07970 525 143 or e-mail [suttonmacular@gmail.com](mailto:suttonmacular@gmail.com) or website at [www.suttonmaculargroup.wordpress.com](http://www.suttonmaculargroup.wordpress.com)

## Aniridia Network Meeting 2016

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Aniridia Network UK are holding their 2016 meeting in our area, for the first time. Why not go along and join in or support them.

**When:** 09:30-17:15 Saturday 14th May 2016

**Where:** Wallington, –  
Morning: Beddington Park, Croydon Road entrance  
Afternoon: Holy Trinity Church, Maldon Road, SM6 8BL

**Book now** for an amazing day of activities and learning:

Morning: After registration, from 10am you can spend two hours doing either or both of these:

- Tandem riding with volunteers from Wheels For Well-being, and/or
- Visually impaired cricket with Change Foundation coaches led by Lois, who has Anirida and captains the England Women's VI Cricket Team.

Afternoon: We'll move venues for great variety of talks and discussions by doctors, patients and VI organisations. Plus stalls including the Online Today team from Action For Blind People.

You'll learn about Anirida and related conditions from each other, ANUK and professionals in medical and related fields. Come to discover how those affected by Anirida deal with it every day. Find out all the medical details and the latest advances. Plus contribute to ANUK by volunteering or sharing your ideas and experiences. Over 50 people from throughout the UK attended previous events.

If you would like more information, including a notification of when booking opens, contact the Conference Coordinator Heather at [conference@aniridia.org.uk](mailto:conference@aniridia.org.uk) or 020 8123 4561

## Meet the...Trustee

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Hello. My name is Sue Christie and I'm a Sutton Vision Board member, one of the six trustee's.

Born in the late 40s, my pre-school years were filled with play with friends, a weekly visit to Woolworths to buy a toy, Sunday tea at Granny's and sometimes being allowed to stay up late and listen to Take Your Pick, a popular quiz show. In short, a happy and carefree time like hundreds of other kids.

Age four and a half I went to school. I was looking forward to it, though I was shy with my peers and teachers. Progress was slow and I found learning to read hard and I was clumsy, I'd always been clumsy. By the age of eight when a vigilant dinner lady spotted my

inability to see the blackboard properly, I was considered one of the dunces in the class. Could this be due to a sight defect? What sight defect? I had no idea I had such a thing.

After many tests and examinations in hospital I was diagnosed with uveitis, an auto immune disease thought to be arthritis in the eyes. The consultant had a hushed conversation with my parents and he must have painted a bleak picture of my future because my poor Mum was so upset. I think there was rarely a day that she didn't ask me 'are your eyes alright?' Yes was my usual careless reply, because to me, they were.

I went to mainstream secondary modern, sitting at the front of the class, where someone must have seen a spark in me because I was entered for the Grammar school programme and sat GCEs. By now I knew what I wanted to do as a career. I was going to be a radiographer. I liked physics, I liked the hospital environment, I liked anatomy. It was perfect for me. But now I was rapidly developing cataracts on both eyes so there was no hope of achieving my ambition! To spare my Mum worry I kept my failing sight a secret, which was not hard in the home environment. I had a job operating a switchboard and another in a building society where I made so many 'cash errors' I was gently asked to move on.

I went to the labour exchange to take a test that told you what employment you were suited to. The result was audio typing, nothing else just audio typing. I hated the thought of this and was ready to apply a blunt knife to my wrists when I discovered I was expecting my first child. Now the hunt was on to find a surgeon who would operate on my cataracts. At the time this was very difficult as most were wary of the poor outcome I could expect. Luckily for me my G P found a professor at Moorfields who performed what I can only describe as a miracle. Looking back it was like one of those films where the poor, pregnant blind girl has the bandages peeled away from her eyes and.....she can see! (but only three lines of the eye test chart).

For the next eight years I was busy with my two children and when I needed a job for economic reasons, I joined a department store

selling soft furnishings. I stayed for over thirty years. I met a huge number of people, made a lot of friends and could add up quicker than someone using a calculator. In my forties I studied at night school for pleasure and gained a couple of GCSEs and an A level.

During this time I had to contend with other issues associated with Sick Eyes and a marked deterioration in my sight. Again I kept this fact to myself, fearful that my employers would transfer me to the kitchen washing pots or sack me. Goodness that sounds Dickensian doesn't it? Good friends, which I still have, helped me out and I am very grateful to them.

Would I have had a better time if I had asked for help along the way? I don't know. What I do know is that very few of my peers ever penalised me because of my poor sight, that my condition has not stopped me from raising a family and being proud of and thankful for that and since finding a group of sight impaired folk where there is nothing to hide, I am finding new fulfilment and great friends in my retirement. So I guess my message is you can do pretty much what you want to do but maybe not in the usual way, you need not be defined by your disability.

## Quote for the Quarter

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And finally, the first in our series of Quotes for the Quarter:

Failure doesn't need to be a lifetime's experience - but only a passing event if we let it!

J. Meyer, January 2016

## Regular Dates

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For information on any of these activities please call 020 8409 7166:

Event	Date	Venue
Rotary Club Gentle Exercise Class	Every Monday 10.00 am – 12.00 noon	Community Hall Church Road, Cheam (On left of Cheam Library by St Dunstan's Church)
Hello! Club	Every Thursday 10:00 am -12.00 noon	Christchurch with St Philip, Ruskin Drive/Cheam Common Road, Worcester Park
Social Eyes	Alternate Thursdays 2:00pm - 4:00pm	SCILL Centre, Robin Hood Lane, Sutton
Music Group	2 <sup>nd</sup> Monday of the month 12.15 – 2.30 p.m.	SCILL Centre, Robin Hood Lane, Sutton
Reminiscence & Poetry Group	3 <sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month 12.15 – 2.30 p.m.	SCILL Centre, Robin Hood Lane, Sutton

## Useful Telephone Numbers

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The following list of useful numbers includes an emergency number for the London Borough of Sutton and Sutton Eye Unit.

RNIB/Action for Blind People Helpline	0303 123 9999
London Borough of Sutton	020 8770 5000
First Contact	020 8770 4337
Pension & Benefits	020 8687 3621
Sutton Eye Unit	020 8296 4364
Macular Society (National)	01264 350 551
Sutton Group	020 8661 1886
Age UK (Sutton)	020 8770 4090
Sutton Carers Centre	020 8296 5611