**Welcome All!**

This is our first newsletter from the Sensory Support Team in the South Eastern Trust.

We hope to send two each year, with the aim of keeping you up-to-date with what is going on in your local area and with the team. It will be sent out to adults on our database, who experience sight or hearing loss.

Our focus is on people who live in the Lisburn, Downpatrick and North Down and Ards area. We are very keen to have your involvement in developing this newsletter in the future. If anyone would like to contribute articles of interest, recent achievements, poems, or share their thoughts on any activities etc, we would welcome your involvement. Alternatively, you may have an opinion on the service that is offered to you by the team that you would like to share. Please email Petra Fulton or Clare McStay at the email address at the end of the newsletter with any contributions.

The Sensory Support section on the South Eastern HSC Trust website is currently being updated. We aim to regularly update this with anything that the team have been involved in. We would welcome any comments on how to improve it further. For example, currently you can change the font size by clicking on ‘aaa’ in the top right hand corner.

The team was runner up in the Regional Social Work Awards in September 2013. The photo shows some of the team at the award day.

Gail McClintock, social worker, was nominated for the Chairman’s Recognition Awards Ceremony in November 2013 for organising yoga classes. Stephen Thompson was also nominated for the same Award, for ‘going the extra mile’.

The team members were finalists in the “Making a Difference Patient and Client Council Awards” in November 2013. Pictured is Clare at the award day, chatting to Jason Smyth, the Paralympic Gold Medal winner from Northern Ireland.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter!

Best Wishes

*Clare McStay, Team Leader, Sensory Support Team*
What we have been up to

**Family Signing Classes.** Evelyn McFarland runs twice yearly B.S.L. family signing classes in the North Down and Ards area. These are relaxed, fun classes aimed to teach basic signs over a 6 week period. They are held in the Sensory Support team office in Newtownards and are always very popular. They are open to family and friends of people with hearing loss, anyone who works with profoundly deaf people and Trust staff. A session recently finished in April this year. One of the children who took part in the group said in the evaluation ‘I enjoyed learning sign language because I can use it in the future’. Another participant said ‘An enjoyable experience, very useful, ran by a very good tutor’.

**Rehab Group.** Karen Uprichard, rehab assistant and Alina Burke, student social worker, ran a rehab group for hard of hearing people on a weekly basis during April 2014, in Bayview Resource Centre, in Bangor. The programme included communication techniques, stress and relaxation and equipment demonstration. Speakers included Citizen’s Advice Bureau, Audiology and Action on Hearing Loss. This group is run annually. A selection of clients who have had contact with the team over the past 12 -18 months were invited to come along. One of the participants said ‘A very enjoyable course, well presented with very helpful topics’.

**Men’s Cookery Group.** For three weeks in April some visually impaired men who live in the Lisburn and Downpatrick areas attended the Men’s Cookery Group, facilitated by staff from the Sensory Support Team. Wheaten bread was made, as were tray bakes, pizza, sausage and mash and various other delights! It was enjoyed by all, including staff and the Lisburn team hope to run another group in the future.

**Eccentric Viewing.** Regional training took place in March 2014 for all the visual rehabilitation staff in Northern Ireland on this exciting concept. Eccentric viewing or eccentric fixation is a method that can be used by visually impaired people to improve their reading speed and ability using their residual vision. It uses a person’s best point of vision and involves moving text in front of the eye as opposed to scanning across a page as normal. We used very strong reading glasses or hyper oculars to help with this, but an individual can use a magnifier. A large staff group assembled for the training, which was provided by Visibility, a Scottish charity for people with sight loss.

On-going or planned events

**Deaf Women’s Group.** This meets once a month in Lisburn and North Down and Ards. In Lisburn, the ladies completed a ‘Positive Steps’ mental health programme some time ago and now appreciate the importance of health awareness/relaxation and taking time out. The programme reflects this with a few sessions on ‘Cancer Awareness’ planned. To include exercise in their daily routine some of the ladies requested to play badminton again and recently one lady taught the group how to make a brooch! In North Down and Ards, the group is a social group, meeting in a local cafe for a chat and catch up. Please contact the local office if you are interested in joining.
**In Touch Group.** This is a social group where ladies meet together on a regular basis to chat with each other, find out what has been going on and prevent isolation. It is aimed for ladies who may have additional needs or a mental or physical illness. Action on Hearing Loss have been supporting the group through Kathy McCann, who has also provided a volunteer to work with Evelyn McFarland in running the group.

Downpatrick and Lisburn Deaf Group. This meets the third Tuesday of each month and plans its programme to cover topics such as health awareness issues, first aid awareness, local council issues, accessing the PSNI, and learning about Action on Hearing Loss projects. The group also enjoys its outings and this year will be concluded with an outing to a garden centre and shopping!

**Walking Group.** Evelyn McFarland and Karen Uprichard have been running a walking group in the local area over the Spring/Summer months for the past 3 years. The walks usually also take in places of interest, for example Mount Stewart and Castle Espie. Dates have been arranged for Mount Stewart in August and Bangor in September. Please contact the team mobile if you are interested in coming along. Children are welcome to attend but must be supervised at all times by a parent/carer.

**Deaf User’s Group.** The User Group meets monthly in Lisburn and quarterly in Newtownards. In Lisburn Mary Kyle runs the group. Their last meeting before the Summer was 17 June at the Garden Centre. Please contact Mary if you wish to come along. In Ards, the group is led by Gail McClintock. This is more of an information sharing group, led by the service users and has covered health and communication issues in the past, with different speakers invited to attend.

**Visually Impaired Walking Group.** The visually impaired walking group continues to meet every month for an outing. Most recently there was a tour of the Crumlin Road Jail, or ‘the Crum’ as some people know it by!! The tour was excellent and we were able to access public transport to get to it. We got a train from Bangor and collected a few people at different stops along the way and arrived in Great Victoria Street station. From here we walked to a local cafe which we often use and had our breakfast/lunch before getting a bus up to the jail. There were a few jokes along the way about some members after the tour not being allowed to get out of the jail and being kept in! However we all arrived home safely. We have an exciting programme organised for the rest of the year which includes tours of Bangor Abbey, Bangor Walled Garden and Donaghadee. These all include a lunch and possibly a few coffee breaks along the way.

A big thank you from Laura and the group to Elaine Orwin, who gave a lovely presentation about our group at the walk leaders networking event in March 2014.

For more information about this group please contact Laura on (028) 9151 0136.

**Rathgill Social Group.** This group continues to meet socially once a month at Alderman’s Green Community Centre in Rathgill, Bangor. It is an opportunity for profoundly deaf people to come with their families to catch up with friends and enjoy different activities. We are lucky to be supported by a member of staff from Aurora, who provide structured play for the children whilst the adults are taking part in other activities. We have enjoyed a trip to Pickie Fun Park, a BBQ and line dancing. Please contact Gail McClintock for dates and future events.
**Who we work with**

**RNIB.** Angela McCullough, Community Vision Co-ordinator, based in the Sensory Support Team organises on-going events for people who experience a visual impairment. Community Connections is currently being planned.

This event is for newly diagnosed people or for anyone experiencing a change of circumstances in relation to their sight. It provides information on what is available in your local area. Contact Angela McCullough at the Newtownards office if you or someone you know would like to attend. Angela has also organised 4 archery lessons in the Racquet’s Club in Lisburn. This will be taking place in August. Transport is also provided so please join us! Contact Angela if you are interested.

**Guide Dogs.** Nickie Boyes, Senior Rehab Worker, is working with Guide Dogs to devise the Steps to Independence programme. This will be run in July 2014, based at the Burrendale Hotel in Newcastle for 3 days. It will cover issues such as travelling independently, pre-cane skills, specialist technology to aid orientation, long cane skills etc. Most participants are required to be from the Lisburn area and spaces have been allocated for this time.

**Action on Hearing Loss**. The free Hear to Help drop-in clinics continue to be run throughout the Trust area, co-ordinated by Becky Triffit who can be contacted on 02891510136 or 07423457873. The next Clinic is in Newtownards on 5th August, followed by a Lisburn clinic starting in August and plans for a new drop-in clinic to start in Newcastle in the Autumn time.

**Wider Vision Club.** This social club, based in the Marie Curie room at Ards Hospital, continues to meet twice a month. It provides social support to those diagnosed with a visual impairment. It is run by Jane Hawkins. Contact the Sensory Support Team in Newtownards for further details.

Jane was recently awarded the B.E.M. in the Queen’s Birthday Honours. This was for her voluntary work with Belfast City Mission, working with young parents in the Ards area - **Congratulations** to Jane!