Hello All!

This is our second newsletter from the Sensory Support Team in the South Eastern HSC Trust. The aim is to keep 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 remain 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 your thoughts on any activities etc, we would welcome your involvement. Alternatively, you may have an opinion on the service which is offered to you by the team that you would like to share. We also aim to regularly update the Sensory Support section on the South Eastern HSC Trust website. Again, we would welcome any comments on how to improve it further. Please email Petra Fulton at the email address at the end of the newsletter with any contributions.

Gail McClintock, our team social worker, was a finalist in the Chairman’s Recognition Awards in November 2014. In the category ‘Access’, she was shortlisted for her partnership work with service users at the Rathgill Social Group and the (as was) North Down Borough Council. The group meets monthly, is led by the service users and does fun activities for children, whilst parents discuss issues relevant to them. Petra Fulton, another team social worker was nominated, by a parent, for the support she had provided to the family for the NDCS Commercial Cup Award and was joint winner in March 2015.

In relation to staff, Clare McStay, team leader of the sensory support team is currently acting up on a temporary basis as Community Services Manager. Gail McClintock, social worker, has agreed to be acting team leader until Clare returns to this post.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter!

Best wishes

Gail McClintock
Acting Team Leader, Sensory Support Team
What we have been up to

New Parent Groups for Deaf Children
Liz Megarrity, social worker, would like to share with you news on the on-going establishment of parent groups in the Downpatrick area, with whom she is involved. Initially a group met in May last year in the Grove Centre in Ballynahinch and had a family fun day in Springvale Open Farm last August. Recently Liz and the parents, worked in partnership with Caroline McGrath from the Health and Development department to look at developing support sessions for mums under the banner ‘Time Out for Me’. This gives the mums a chance to have mutual support while the children are cared for in a creche in the Atlas Women’s Centre, where they meet. Caroline has provided ideas on a broad range of topics within health and fitness that could be covered, with alternative therapies also proving popular. At the parents’ request, Mary Kyle, Support worker for the deaf, based in the sensory support team in Lisburn, has agreed to facilitate BSL sign language sessions, a positive step to assist in total communication. A big thank you to Caroline and the staff at Atlas Women’s Centre for their support and commitment!

In addition to the above group, a small but significant group of parents in South Down have started a parents’ group called LISTENHEAR. The group has been assisted to set up by NDCS and, while in its infancy, welcomes new members. Joe Doody, one of the members can be contacted on 07726 419 724.

P.A.N.D.A. (Parent at North Down and Ards)
This support group is for parents of deaf children in the North Down and Ards area. The group continues to hold regular coffee mornings for parents and/or carers to attend to catch up and provide informal support to one another. A large group attended the Grand Opera House pantomime in January. Another group is soon going to make pizza together in Bangor. The group is now on facebook and has a website. It is www.panda-ndards.co.uk The group welcomes any comments you have to make to improve it! The photo shows Alison Priddle providing a taster session of Sign2Music for some toddler group members.

Deaf Walking Group
For the last walk of 2014 the walking group went to the Bangor Walled Garden and enjoyed the flowers and vegetables on display and a chat over a coffee in the café. The group were prepared for rain, but on the day raincoats and umbrellas were not needed! The photo is of some of the group standing beside the fountain within the Walled Garden.
The Lisburn Deaf Men’s Group

Some men attended 12 sessions of a Positive Steps ‘Mental Health and Emotional Well Being’ programme. This was based at the Rowan Centre and was enjoyed by all who attended. They learned how to make tray bakes as well and went to Wallace Park for a nice walk.

Some of the Lisburn Deaf Men’s group also went to ‘5 Life! Men and Well Being Event’ organised by the South Eastern Trust at the La Mon Hotel. They enjoyed the day and whilst reluctant to take part in learning how to play percussion because they were deaf, they decided to ‘give it a go’ and were surprised at how much they enjoyed this new experience!

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

The Trust work in partnership with Guide Dogs and last year, the 3 day long ‘Steps to Independence’ programme was completed, along with input from Lisburn in Focus. Eight service users with sight loss and their partners/carers from across the Trust attended the course in the Burrendale in Newcastle. Staff from Lisburn in Focus discussed barriers to travel and provided visual awareness training. Trust rehab staff provided sessions on different types of canes and guiding skills when indoors and outdoors for safety and independence. Guide Dogs provided an opportunity to experience walking with a guide dog and the group discussed access rights and mobile technology. Alex Campbell from Visibility in Scotland was there to demonstrate Echo Location, which was a great experience for everyone to try. Barbara Gracey, social worker discussed carer support. All attendees were also able to enjoy the spa facilities on offer and mix in a relaxed setting.

SERC and Rehabilitation Support

Last year, Brigid Rodgers, a rehab worker based in Downpatrick, carried out visual awareness training with young male trainees in the South Eastern Regional College on their ‘Steps for All’ Project. This was a new venture for the Trust and received great feedback from the course tutor. He stated, ’The guys really enjoyed their Visual Awareness training. They now feel they can use what they have learnt that day in their working lives. It was really useful for them to get a glimpse of what it is like to have a visual impairment through the variety of glasses tried on and (learning about) the range of eye conditions that people have. This will be really beneficial for those who wish to take up job roles in customer service and dealing with the general public in our group’. Brigid has been asked to come back again as the training is now being incorporated into the course each year.
Macular Group, Bangor
This group continues to grow and as a result it was decided to meet on four additional months this year. The group is open to anyone who has macular problems and would like to meet others in similar circumstances. This year for example, we have had a presentation from the Trust Falls Prevention service, the Community Police and the Electoral office. If you would like more information on this group please contact Elaine Orwin on (028) 9145 4099.

North Down Walking Group
This group meets once a month and is for those who have sight loss, are known to the sensory support team in Newtownards and have been assessed for the group. There is a varied programme and it requires members to be fit and active. For example since the last newsletter we have been to the Grey Point Fort in Helen’s Bay; the Nomadic Belfast and Aunt Sandra’s Sweet Factory. If you would like more information on this group please contact Laura Cromie, rehab worker 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. For example, we have gone to the cinema, Pickie Fun Park and enjoyed a BBQ. Please contact Gail McClintock for dates and future events.

Deaf Users Group
The User Group in Newtownards is facilitated by Gail McClintock. This is more of an information sharing group, led by the service users and has covered health and communication issues, with different speakers invited to attend.
The Lisburn Deaf Women’s Group, facilitated by Mary Kyle, continues to meet every month on the 2nd Wednesday. The group has enjoyed speakers from Health Development covering topics like nutrition, walking, mindfulness and relaxation sessions.

The Down Lisburn Deaf group meet every 3rd week of the month. Speakers come to share information. One session everyone enjoyed was about bowel screening, as many were not aware of the kits available for testing.

In Touch Group
This social group allows ladies to meet to prevent isolation and socialise. Through support from Kathy McCann of Action on Hearing Loss, we have been able to continue to use a room at St Mark’s Church in Newtownards once a month to have a get-together. We have arranged various activities for them such as flower arranging, icing cupcakes and playing games that they remember from their youth. In December we joined with the Deaf Women’s Group to go for Christmas Dinner to Primacy Food village, which everyone enjoyed. It was later agreed by all the ladies to merge the two groups, which now continues to meet in St Mark’s Church under the title of the In Touch Group. We finish this year’s programme with a bus outing in June, kindly subsidised by Action on Hearing Loss. The photos show some wonderful Hallowe’en style cupcake decorating and everyone enjoying Christmas Dinner!

The Lisburn Ladies Hard of Hearing Group is now in its 15th year and is independent, having its own constitution, Committee etc, although Christine Houston, social worker from the sensory support team also sits on its Committee. The group continues to meet on the first Wednesday of every month and enjoys a wide range of activities, from crafts to walking, to health promotion issues. For example, we have had a Falls Prevention nurse visit to give valuable advice about how to avoid accidents which can often lead to physical injury. This was combined with some exercise which ‘stretched’ all the members!

Downpatrick Deaf Men are continuing to meet every month (last Tuesday), to go for coffee around the Down area, meet their peers and relax and chat.
Who we work with

RNIB
A campaigns group called C.A.N. are now meeting on a regular basis. This stands for Campaign Action Network. The role of C.A.N. is for local people to campaign for local issues. Meetings are held monthly in the morning time. For those living in the Lisburn area C.A.N. is run through Lisburn in Focus. Please contact them for further information on dates and venues.

The Men’s Group continues to meet on a bi-monthly basis and has a varied programme. For example, this year we have met at Cloud9 at Ards Airport and gone out for lunch.

The Finding your Feet programme was held in March in the La Mon Hotel, in partnership with Lisburn in Focus, Olive Rogers of the RNIB and the South Eastern HSC Trust rehab team. Service users from Lisburn, Downpatrick, Castlereagh and the North Down and Ards area attended. This was for people who have recently been diagnosed with a visual impairment or have had a change of circumstances. Areas discussed included making the most of your sight, exploring how to maximize sight using low vision aids, colour contrast, lighting and magnification and mobility, using white canes.

Please contact Angela McCullough on (028) 9151 0136 if you are interested in the RNIB groups.

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.

The Hear to Help service is designed to help people overcome any barriers and start wearing their hearing aids with confidence everyday. People can come for help about batteries, tubing, cleaning and maintenance. Becky can be contacted on (028) 9151 0136 or 07423 457 873. The next clinics are in Daisies Corridor, Newtownards on Monday 1st June in Lisburn Health Centre, Ground Floor on Wednesday 10 June 2015 and in the Mourne Room, Newcastle Centre on Wednesday 17 June 2015.

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 and is run by Jane Hawkins.

Contact the Sensory Support Team in Newtownards for further details.
A big thank you

Last year the Sensory Support Service was presented with two Kindle paperwhites by Ruth Mulligan, in memory of her son Philip.

Philip was blind as a result of diabetes from childhood and sadly died in hospital following a stroke. Philip was well known to both the social work and rehabilitation teams in Newtownards.

The Kindles are used by rehabilitation workers to demonstrate how others with sight loss can continue to enjoy reading by using up to date technology. The Kindles use larger font size, good colour contrast and can be speech enabled.

Philip will be remembered by the team for his humour and his willingness to learn new skills since losing his sight and will be sadly missed by the team. The photo is of members of the sensory support team receiving the Kindles from Ruth Mulligan.

For your information

Articles for the Blind Royal Mail Scheme

Royal Mail operate a scheme called Articles for the Blind which allows blind and partially sighted people to send certain items of post free of charge.

If you are blind or partially sighted, or have close up vision with glasses of N12 or less and this has been certified by an opthamologist, doctor or an ophthalmic optician, you can use the scheme.

You may only send items that have been specially produced or adapted for blind and partially sighted people. The mail you post must have ‘Articles for the Blind’ on the front cover, either on a label or in writing. It must also show an external return address.

Items will then be sent 1st class or by Air Mail. Overseas mail must state Articles for the Blind - Cecogramme.

Please check the Royal Mail website for full details of the scheme on www.royalmail.com or ring 0345 607 6140.
Lipreading Course

Frances Martin, Social Worker and Karen Uprichard, Rehabilitation Assistant are currently undertaking the CityLit Lipreading Teacher Training Course.

This course commenced in November 2014 and is due to finish in September 2015 with both Frances and Karen on target to qualify.

To date 3 of the 5 block lecture sessions and 5 of the 8 assignments have been completed. Along with training as lipreading teachers the course also covers topics such as the psychological effects of hearing loss and the function of the ear.

On successful completion of the course Frances and Karen will then be able to offer lipreading classes to clients within the South Eastern HSC Trust area.

Service users enjoying a recent RNIB outing facilitated by Angela McCullough

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