

open hand

The magazine of Deafblind UK - putting **you** in the picture

Winter 2011



Inside:

- Government's comprehensive spending review.
- Deafblind Cymru volunteer wins award.
- News from the North East.



DEAFBLIND
·UK·

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A word from our editor

Happy New Year to you all. I do hope that you had a good Christmas, or any other major celebration that you may have enjoyed. I think that we are all wondering what 2011 will bring, apart from the forthcoming royal wedding. That, I hope, will add a bright touch to the year.

In this edition the CEO, Jeff Skipp, will be focussing on the Government's spending review, and we also have an update on key changes affecting the benefits of deafblind people.

There is a call for new rights for bus and coach travellers for blind people. As coach

travel is usually much cheaper than train travel, this may well interest many readers.

We have a look at the launch by deafblind traveller, Tony Giles, of his book, *Seeing the World my Way*. This is an account of his solo travels on a shoe string budget. It might inspire others to set out on intrepid adventures and to record them.

The dangers of people posing as charity collectors to gain access to homes, has been highlighted by one of our Members in a contact with the Info Line. I think most of us are pretty cautious about admitting strangers into our houses, but sometimes people can be very deceitful and charm their way in. I think particular care should be taken during the dark afternoons and evenings when many people, not just the disabled, can be vulnerable to crime.

There is another Keep Warm, Keep Well leaflet out this winter. It has always struck me that we in Britain do not take sufficient precautions against the cold. I find thermal underwear, which is

very light and pretty these days, to be useful, plus using layers of clothing to keep the warmth trapped in. Taking regular hot drinks can help, and also using a warm cover when sitting for any length of time. I do hope I do not sound quite as patronising as some of the leaflets can!

When I was in California, where it can get cold in the evening during the winter months, I noticed that people kept a wrap or throw handy, and used it, even though it was far less cold than over here.

The third part of Robert Smithdas' story is in this edition. You may have wondered why I spent so much time discussing his education in the previous part, but I thought it important to emphasize what can be achieved if deafblind children had access to good, creative and demanding education.

Every best wish to you all for the New Year,

Rosemary Sandford

Rosemary Sandford.



Chief Executive, Jeff Skipp
updates Members

Government's comprehensive spending review

It is not often that I sit down to write for Open Hand and do not know where to begin. The full extent of the Government's comprehensive spending review is only just beginning to become clear; and the extent to which this will affect local authorities and particularly social care provision is significant, alongside a significant threat to benefit payments for disabled people. The coalition Government has been at pains to stress that the austerity measures necessary to repay the country's £179 billion debt must be shared evenly 'tough

but fair' as the Prime Minister puts it, yet closure analysis by commentators indicates that families with children and disabled people will be amongst those hardest hit.

With only half of disabled people of working age in work and the other half of disabled people in employment earning statistically less than their able-bodied counterparts it is not surprising that people with a disability have a greater reliance on public sector provision and welfare than other groups in society. In fact, the proportion

of families with disabled members living in poverty is estimated at 47.4% (Demos 2010). Therefore, considering the financial and social exclusion faced by many disabled people it is difficult to equate 'fairness' with some of the Government's plans to reduce spending on welfare. Perhaps the most disagreeable proposal of all is the plan to withdraw eligibility for the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) mobility component for all persons living within residential care. The argument being that Local Authorities have

a responsibility to fund transport for people in residential care and thus DLA represents a double funding exercise. This is of course ill-informed bunkum and presents residents of residential care homes with no savings or secondary income and with no choice but to survive on the £22.30 personal allowance each week. It should be noted that when DLA was introduced in 1992 by the then Conservative Government it was as a non means tested and tax free benefit targeted at meeting some of the additional day to day costs of



living with a disability, rather than a mainstream welfare or work based benefit.

This is an area that Deafblind UK is determined to campaign against, often working alongside other voluntary organisations, because it is an area of utmost concern across the disability movement.

The vulnerability of social care funding within Local Authorities is also a concern. Whilst the government claim to have allocated an additional £2 billion to the funding of social care, there is some ambiguity as to whether this in itself is also double counting. Commentators are suggesting that £1 billion of these monies was already included in the funding to Local Authorities within the comprehensive spending review and furthermore these monies were not ringfenced. Alongside this confusion the £1 billion to be transferred from the NHS to social care, is also not ringfenced and at the time of writing there is little detail on how this transfer of monies will occur. The combined impact of such ambiguity is high levels of

anxiety for disabled people in receipt of benefits. People are unsure of their future, their income security and those receiving social care now or in the future do not know where and how eligibility criteria may change or how this will affect them in relation to future access.

Deafblind UK is determined to do all it can to minimise the impact of these cuts on our Members and to argue for a fair settlement which does not leave disabled people unduly disadvantaged as a result of the Government's austerity measures. We would like to hear from any Member who has had their care packages reduced or has issues with benefit eligibility to contact the Information and Advice line on Tel: **0800 132320**. We will be able to support you with the issue in hand as well as use anonymous case studies to demonstrate the unfair impact of these changes.

Best Wishes



Jeff Skipp

Members embark on an annual bowling challenge

On Tuesday 7 September, the Colchester East and West groups had their annual bowling challenge. The day started off with an indoor picnic at Colchester West's group venue and then everyone travelled to Tenpin for some bowling. The trophies have gone from one group to another since the annual bowling challenge began but this year was different. Colchester West Member, Pam House won the Members trophy with a score of 95 and Colchester

East volunteer Many Perrin, won the volunteers trophy with a score of 92. Everyone had a lovely day. Our Colchester East Member, John Walkinshaw said that he hadn't been bowling since just after the war. He had a great time!

Many thanks from all of us at Deafblind UK to the volunteers who helped on the day. Without them, this event would not be possible. Roll on next year!



Bowling challenge ©iStockphoto.com/Alexey Avdeev

Deafblind Cymru volunteer wins achievement award

On 8 October Deafblind Cymru attended the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations volunteer achievement awards ceremony. The awards recognise those who give up their time, energy and skills to help others in the community.

The event took place at the Newport Leisure Centre

and the room was filled with volunteers and the numerous organisations they represented.

A number of volunteers were nominated for the various categories including the 'Youth Volunteer of the Year' and the 'Contribution to the Community' award.

A great deal of hard work

had gone into preparing the event and organising the evenings programme. There was a feeling of pride, excitement and anticipation to the event as everyone waited to see if their name was called to receive an award.

Respected members of the community were present to hand out the awards including the Lady Mayor and local councillors to honour those who deserve a big thank you on behalf of the people of Newport.

We were eagerly awaiting the 'Health and Wellbeing' award for which we had nominated

our volunteer Claire Jones. Claire assists with the Newport Peer Support group; she is extremely dedicated and committed to supporting our Members at the group. She is always willing to go above and beyond what is required and it would be a lot more difficult to run the groups without the help of all our valued volunteers.

Claire's name was announced as the winner of the category and she proudly accepted her certificate. We thoroughly enjoyed the evening and we hope to have the opportunity to show our appreciation to more volunteers in the future.



Volunteer, Claire collecting her award

Thanks to the Yorkshire Building Society Charitable Foundation



Deafblind UK would like to thank the Yorkshire Building Society Charitable Foundation for its generous donation. This will enable us to purchase a loop system for our Members group in Oldham.

Portable loop systems are a vital aid and enable Members to hear clear communication whilst at a group meeting. This enables Members to fully participate in group activities and enhances their experience.

RADAR National Key Scheme

The National Key Scheme (NKS) offers independent access to disabled people to around 7,000 locked public toilets around the country. RADAR would like all providers of accessible toilets to keep their toilets unlocked if at all possible. The NKS is suggested for use only if the provider concerned has to keep the toilets locked to stop vandalism and misuse.

RADAR makes no profit in supplying keys but needs to make a small charge of £3.50 excluding vat per key to cover costs. In order to receive a key free of vat an



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individual must provide their name and address or that of the person who will use the key and make a declaration.

Please note that the toilets are the property of the providers concerned and any queries relating to a specific venue should be directed to that provider, rather than RADAR.

Buy your key from the RADAR website at: www.radar-shop.org.uk or Tel: **020 7250 3222** or email: radar@radar.org.uk

Public feel unable to challenge discrimination says leading advice coalition

Discrimination is the problem people are least likely to seek help with says the Working Together for Advice

Coalition (Advice Services Alliance, AdviceUK, Age UK, Citizens Advice, Law Centres Federation and Youth Access).

Research has revealed that one in three people experiencing discrimination does nothing about it. Of these, two thirds say they wanted to act, but felt unable to. In a bid to address this, the charities have launched a new short film to highlight people's new rights in relation to discrimination and where they can seek free support and advice.

The launch was part of Advice Week 2010 – which ran from October 11 to 15. The week was dedicated to championing the difference made by advice agencies in England and focussed on discrimination, as the Equality Act 2010 came into force on 1 October 2010. The new legislation will strengthen and simplify previous discrimination legislation.

The film shows people who have suffered discrimination and how advice has helped them take action and turn a bad situation round. The film is available on YouTube and all of the networks advice websites.

Advice Services Alliance Director, Richard Jenner,

said: "The advice sector has an important role to play in building a fairer society. Working together, we provide people facing discrimination with information, advice and representation. We want people to know about our work and how we can help them."

The project's main aim is to build the capacity, strength and independence of the advice sector by: increasing access to advice, enhancing the quality of advice, demonstrating the value of advice and improving the efficiency of advice services. The project has been funded by the Big Lottery Fund.



Where to turn to for support
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Travelling by coach

©iStockphoto.com/Huchen Lu



Blind Passengers Call for New Rights for Bus and Coach Travel

The National Federation of the Blind of the UK has called on the UK Government to support and sign up to legislation which would ensure a right to accessible travel information and make awareness training mandatory for all bus drivers and terminal staff, here in the UK and abroad.

The European Parliament is proposing new rights for disabled passengers using buses and coaches which could significantly improve the journey experienced by bus passengers here in the UK. If the proposals are accepted they would ensure:

- Accessible information (e.g. accessible timetables or information about delays).

- Mandatory disability awareness training for all bus drivers and terminal staff.

Mr Douglas Gilroy, Vice-President of the National Federation of the Blind of the UK, said: "Ministers need to understand that the proposed regulations are urgently needed to deliver equal access to transport for blind passengers."

Mr Gilroy added: "Bus travel is essential to many of us being able to lead an independent life. Currently, too many disabled people have a bad experience when travelling by bus and this urgently needs to improve. We have a once in a generation opportunity to

secure important new rights for disabled bus and coach passengers."

Ms Emily Brothers, the Federation's President, will be writing to Philip Hammond

MP, Secretary of State for Transport, asking the UK Government to clarify its position and urge positive steps towards realising equal access to bus and coach travel.

Call to Deafblind UK's Information Line about the dangers of criminal activity

Deafblind UK has taken a call from a Member of Deafblind UK who has recently been the victim of a theft. A person posing as a charity collector entered the house to pick up a bag of items being donated to charity and distracted the Member then took other items.

Police are urging people never to allow an unexpected or unknown caller inside their home, whatever they might claim. Distraction burglars and other bogus callers are very credible and will tell you any number of stories to be allowed into your home. Speak to them through a window or, if you have no

other option, always use a door chain. Any genuine caller will be happy for you to verify their identity before you allow them inside. If you are not expecting someone, have any suspicions or do not know the caller, do not let them in. Genuine callers will also be happy to return at another time when you can arrange to have a friend or family member with you.



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Tom McNemar

If you have genuine concerns about a caller or they are persistent, please contact the local police or call Deafblind UK's Information Line on **0800 132 320**.



Love it, Join it, Fix it!

Fix the Web

At last, an easy way to complain about inaccessible websites – start reporting problems now!

An exciting new initiative to address web accessibility is being launched by Citizens Online called Fix the Web. Fix the Web makes the reporting of web accessibility issues super quick and simple for disabled people – it takes under 60 seconds. Volunteers are being recruited who will pick up the issues and take them forward with website owners.

Fix the web is aiming to get 250,000 websites addressed within two years and bring about a digital culture change in the process. Given that volunteers will largely be “techies” their involvement in the campaign will help to raise awareness of digital access issues.

Fix the Web is calling on disabled people now to start reporting websites they have issues with - large or small.

There are over 50 volunteers waiting to take them forwards. Find out more by visiting: <http://www.fixtheweb.net>

When reporting a problem, it isn't necessary to sign up to the website - there is an option to do so, which gives the volunteer further information. The choice is yours!

Start reporting web accessibility issues in any of these ways:

- 1.** Send a brief email to post@fixtheweb.net with the url and problem
- 2.** Send a tweet that includes #fixtheweb #fail url problem
- 3.** Fill out a three line form by logging onto : <http://fixtheweb.net/node/add/report>

ICT support from Aidis

Aidis is a small charity serving the UK, with offices in London and Manchester. Since it's inception in 1975, Aidis has worked with home users of ICT equipment, providing support where statutory provision cannot.

They have three main free services:

Courses – Aidis has funding enabling them to go into schools (must include parents) and organisations at no cost, to provide information sessions to parents, carers and staff aimed at helping improve their knowledge of Disability



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Computing. This usually takes the form of a two hour session providing an overview of many of the options and concepts available.

Helpline – Aidis' helpline was set up with funding from the Big Lottery Fund and provides advice and support on all aspects of computing within the disability community. It includes a remote control facility which allows Aidis to access a client PC to provide remote on-line training or to fix the client's computing problems from their office. They also provide a free informal advice service to assess a client's computing needs and advise on the best and cheapest computing options or solutions.

This is available on **0845 120 3719** (local call rate only), five days per week during office hours, or by emailing support@aidis.org

Website – The website, which is packed with articles and technical advice, can be found at www.aidis.org



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Keep Warm, Keep Well information from the Department of Health

The Department of Health has launched a pack of information about maintaining good health during the winter. Severe cold snaps can have dramatic

effects on everyday life, especially for those people who are already vulnerable as a result of their age, disability or an illness.

Log onto the Department of Health website using this link to download the information: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_121382

Or, if you are particularly concerned about your health during winter contact your local GP or give NHS Direct a call on: **0845 4647**

BBC First Click

The BBC launched its new campaign - First Click - as part of Get Online Week in the Autumn last year with information about it on TV and national and local radio. This led to ten thousand people ringing the advice line to request courses and assistance. Current plans are to repeat the promotion of the campaign in January 2011.

The BBC's aim, over the next

two years, is to try to reach and support the millions of people not currently online.

The BBC had a very positive response to its information about First Click - more than 520 courses were registered in the first few days, 23,000 copies of the Beginner's Guide were downloaded from the web site and 15,000 users accessed the First Click website in one day



Log onto the BBC First Click website

If you would like to find out more about BBC First Click log onto: http://www.bbc.co.uk/connect/campaigns/first_click.shtml or find a beginner's computer course by calling **08000 150950**.

Thomas Pocklington Trust launches the UK's first home lighting consultancy service

A new tool for social landlords and those helping older people live independently

In a bid to improve the lives of older people and those with sight loss the charity Thomas Pocklington Trust has launched the UK's first consultancy service dedicated to improving lighting in the home.

"Improving the lighting in people's homes has a major impact on their independence and quality of life," says Anthony Slater, Lighting Development Manager, Thomas Pocklington Trust. "Our new consultancy combines lighting specialists with leading experts in sight loss issues to give advice on how to do it."

There are currently around 13 million people in the UK over the age of 60. Since a 60-year-old needs three times as much light as a twenty-year-old to carry out basic tasks, good lighting is

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Murat Giray Kaya

crucial for all older people. It is also vital for people with sight loss that the right kind of lighting can maximise even impaired levels of vision. For both older people and those with sight loss, better lighting increases people's confidence and safety, and enhances their enjoyment of life. Improving



people's lighting can also play a major role in helping to maintain their independence, enabling them to live for longer in their own homes.

The new consultancy brings together lighting engineers with experts in sight loss issues to offer Lighting for Sight consultations. It is aimed at social landlords and others supporting people to live independently in their own homes including Social Services Departments, housing and support staff, home improvement agencies, rehabilitation workers for people with visual impairment (ROVIs) and occupational therapists (OTs). Tenant interviews, appraisals of current lighting, practical recommendations, technical information, energy efficiency advice and follow-up support are all part of the consultation.

"Our engineers identify practical and often low-cost ways to upgrade lighting. They focus on the needs of tenants and tailor their

recommendations to fit landlords' budgets," says Slater.

In a major push to increase awareness of the importance of lighting the Trust is distributing a detailed Guide to Improving Lighting in the Home, including care homes and social housing. It will be mailed to all Social Services Directors as well as to housing associations, builders, architects, and organisations who work with older people and with people with visual impairment. The Guide provides detailed specifications of which lighting to choose and how to install it. It includes checklists for conducting a comprehensive review of lighting.

"Older people want to maintain their independence as long as possible," said Anthony Slater. "Upgrading lighting is so simple, yet it can dramatically improve people's lives and their capacity to continue living independently in their own homes."

For more information please visit www.pocklington-trust.org.uk or call: **020 8995 0880**.

New 'Lost for Words' campaign



Reading a Braille book

What would you do if you could no longer read your own bank statements or personal documents? Imagine the frustration you would feel if you were denied important personal information.

"The choice is either to ignore the post or rely on housemates to read my mail, but why should they have to know my personal financial situation?" Aletea, 20's, Aberystwyth.

For more information on the report and how to take action please visit RNIB: http://www.rnib.org.uk/getinvolved/campaign/accesstoinformation/lostforwords/Pages/lost_for_words.aspx or contact the RNIB's helpline on **0303 123 9999**.

Losing your sight should not mean being without the books and information you need and this is the message at the heart of RNIB's new 'Lost for Words' campaign report.

Unsurprisingly RNIB's research shows eight in ten members of the public would be "upset" if they could no longer enjoy reading books. Strikingly nearly half of respondents thought all books published today were available in a format that blind and partially sighted people could read. The reality is that fewer than one in twenty books are published in formats like large print, braille or audio.

Get involved today and use the 'Lost for Words' report to help remind public services that they must comply with the Equality Act and make information accessible.

TAG takes deaf telephone relay services campaign online

The campaign to enable deaf and hard of hearing people to access the telephone as easily and at the same price as hearing people has gone online to reach a wider audience.

Anyone can find out more about the campaign on the new TAG website by logging onto: www.deaftag.org.uk, on Facebook (via the website) and on Twitter @DeafTAG. There is information about the newer types of relay services on the website, case studies about the telecoms needs of deaf people, hints on how to contact and lobby MP's, latest campaign developments and much more.

Ruth Myers, Chairman of TAG, said: "We are taking the campaign to bring deaf telecoms into the 21st century online so that more deaf and hearing people will understand the issues and start lobbying their MPs for the changes that we so badly need. We are providing lots

of campaign information online and giving people the chance to air their views and needs.

We want to hear from deaf individuals who are frustrated through not having access to modernised relay services because of availability and/or cost. And we also want to hear from hearing people who also want to benefit from being able to contact deaf family, friends, colleagues and customers via the new types of relay that need to be made available in the UK.

From being one of the leaders in deaf telecoms, the UK is now lagging behind many other countries where services like video relay and captioned relay are available."

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Skip O'Donnell





Getting a feel for sports without sight

SWALEC Stadium hosts Sight Support's dual sensory exhibition

In October, Swalec Stadium was the venue for a groundbreaking exhibition organized by local charity Sight Support, which works with sight impaired people in south east Wales.

The event, kindly supported by SWALEC, hosted the very best in local and national support for people with sight, hearing and dual sensory loss, in Wales. A wide range of local and national organisations exhibited, offering products, services and information for people with sight, hearing or dual sensory loss. The exhibition had 45 stands ranging from technology companies providing the

latest equipment in assistive technology, charities supporting people with dual sensory loss to organisations such as the Police and the Fire Service. Experienced and helpful staff were on hand throughout the day to give advice and information.

Nearly 200 people attended this event, including Deafblind Cymru. Attendees ranged from service users, their families, friends and carers to professionals working with people with dual sensory loss.

As well as the many stands that people could visit, there were talks throughout the day on different eye

conditions, services available for people with dual sensory loss and important topics such as doorstep crime.

The event also gave visitors an opportunity to try leisure activities for people with dual sensory loss such as blind cricket, bowling and football.

The highlight of the event was a cookery demonstration by celebrity chef, Stephen Gomes, from Moksh Restaurant in Cardiff Bay

who demonstrated cooking whilst wearing simulation spectacles (spectacles which reproduce the effects of various eye diseases such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy etc). Chef Gomes said "it certainly was difficult cooking with sim specs and gave me an insight into how a visually impaired person feels, but with careful training and rehabilitation one can still continue cooking and enjoy good home cooked dishes".

Learning Disability Today 2010

SeeAbility worked with the Eye Health Alliance, a coalition of optical bodies and eye care charities to produce the Eye Zone, an innovative area at Learning Disability Today 2010 in December. This event was a place where people with learning disabilities and their supporters could learn about eye care.

Learning Disability Today 2010 was the only exhibition on learning disabilities in the UK and it brought together visitors with learning

disabilities, families and carers and those working within the private, statutory and voluntary sectors.

The Eye Zone was a fun, lively and informative zone for people with learning disabilities and their supporters. The zone was designed to:

- educate about the prevalence of sight problems amongst those who have learning disabilities.
- stress the importance

of, and encourage, regular and effective sight tests for people with learning disabilities.

- help people with learning disabilities to become familiar with the role of the optometrist/optician, eye testing methods and equipment.

- motivate and support people with learning disabilities to wear, look after and repair their glasses.

Plus, everyone attending could learn more about SeeAbility's eye2eye Campaign and the Look Up website, a source of information on eye care and vision for people who have a learning disability.



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For more information please visit www.pocklington-trust.org.uk or call: **020 8995 0880**.

Welfare Reforms – The Spending Review

On 20 October 2010, the coalition Government announced key elements of their spending review, which reduces all Government department budgets up until April 2015.

For many deafblind people the Welfare Reforms in particular, could have a significant impact, by affecting entitlement to benefits. At the time of writing the specific details of how and when these changes will be made is limited – but we will do our best to keep you up to date as further information becomes available.

The key changes to benefits are:

Pensions:

- The basic state pension will increase by a guaranteed minimum of 2.5% each year.
- The maximum Savings Credit award in Pension Credits will be frozen for the next four years.

Heating Allowances:

- Winter fuel payments will continue, if you are aged 60

or over on 5 July 2010, you could be entitled to a £250 payment. If aged over 80 on a 26 Sept 2010 a £400 payment. You must apply to receive this payment.

- The previous temporary increase to the Cold Weather Payment is to be permanent. Eligible households will receive an automatic £25 payment for each 7 day period where a cold spell is recorded or forecast in your area. These payments will occur only between 1 November and 31 March.

Disability Living Allowance:

- The mobility component of DLA will be removed for people living in residential care where these costs are already met from public funding.
- The DLA higher mobility allowance will still be extended to people registered or certified as severely sight impaired (blind) from April 2011. To qualify you must be under aged 65 on 11 April 2011. From November 2010 the Pensions, Disability and ▶

Carers service will call all people who claim DLA based on sight loss. You will need your certificate of registration to claim this increase.

- No further information has been announced for the proposed DLA medicals.

Housing benefits

- Council Tax benefits are to be reduced overall but the most vulnerable people are to be offered protection from the reduction.

- The age threshold for Shared Room Rate within housing benefit is to be increased to 35 years; this will reflect the housing expectation of people of a similar age not claiming benefits.

Working Age Benefits

- The Universal Credit announced in June will receive additional implementation funding; this credit will replace the current

means tested working age benefits and tax credits. A consultation is expected on this benefit.

- There will be a one year time limit for contributory Employment Support Allowance for people in the work related activity group to improve incentives to work. The most severely disabled will be protected.

As further information becomes available Deafblind UK will review the details of the spending cuts, and we will campaign to ensure deafblind people do not experience an unfair reduction in benefits. If you are concerned about these benefit changes or would like further information please contact the Information and Advice Line on **0800 132 320**. We will be noting all your concerns to build up a national picture and use this information to inform our campaign.

This article was written on 28 Oct 2010 and information may well have changed between this date and the date of printing.



Technology Today

Demonstrating the Deafblind Communicator

by Steve Unwin,
Deafblind UK's IT Manager



I recently had a demonstration of the Deafblind Communicator from Humanware which was released earlier this year. This machine is directly targeted at persons with dual sensory loss and consists of a MPower notetaker and a mobile phone with a qwerty keypad.

The portable Mpower is not new but its built-in Braille cells can still be used as a standard notetaker for emailing, Internet or writing letters but now includes software for sending or receiving mobile text messages via the mobile's sim card and TTY phone calls via the Mpower's built in modem.

Using the device is simple, a deafblind user wishing to talk to a person directly, such as a shop assistant with no communication skills, hands them the mobile phone and a pre-recorded message is spoken and displayed on the phone telling them what to do. When they type into the phone the message is displayed on the MPower's Braille display, the deafblind person then responds and the conversation continues. While the person is typing in on the phone the last Braille cells vibrate to show that they are typing in.

It is a simple, portable and effective way in which a deafblind person can talk with someone not

familiar with any deafblind communication. The mobile phone is attached to a retractable wire that can be fixed to a belt so the mobile cannot be lost or stolen.

If you insert a sim card into the mobile phone then the Deafblind Communicator can be used to make and receive text messages. The Braille cells will jump up and down to alert the user a text message has been received.

With the Mpower's built-in modem you can make



Testing out the Deafblind Communicator

You can get more information in print and Braille from Humanware on **01933 415800** or email **eu.info@humanware.com**

telephone calls through the Text Relay service (formerly TypeTalk). Phone numbers can be stored in the Mpower's address book and used to automatically make the call.

Having seen many demonstrations of both SMS and phone systems linked to a Braille display, I have to say I was very impressed with the no nonsense way the Deafblind Communicator got on with the job and the menu driven approach is easy and a joy to use. You can set it to work as a basic communicator for one-to-one, SMS and TTY communication or switched to advanced mode to include all the functions the Mpower offers such as word processing, Internet, calendar and more.

The downside is the price at £5,500 which includes everything, except the mobile sim which you will need to get from a mobile phone supplier on contract or pay-as-you-go if you want to use the SMS text service.

Focus on North Wales



Deafblind Cymru launch new deafblind group in Ammanford

Deafblind Cymru, part of Deafblind UK, is pleased to announce the launch of a new deafblind peer support group in Carmarthenshire, West Wales.

Our new group will meet at Nantlais, Llandybie Road, Bonllwyn, Ammanford, SA18 2EJ from 1.30pm to 3.30pm on the fourth Wednesday of each month. The first meeting of the group took place on 24 November 2010. We welcome people with combined sight and hearing loss including people who are partially sighted and hard of hearing as well as those with more severe levels of Deafblindness.

Deafblind Cymru as part of

its Big Lottery funded 'Welsh Connections' project has already established another 11 deafblind groups. Four are in North Wales in Llandudno Junction, Mochdre, Rhyl and Wrexham. The remainder are in South Wales in Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Neath, Newport, Swansea and Trealaw (Rhondda).

We welcome new Members in all our groups as well as their companions. We also have a range of volunteering opportunities for people wanting to work with deafblind people including befriending, driving, helping at groups, etc. Deafblind Cymru also provides one-to-one casework support in Wales.

Deafblind Cymru: Update



There have been some changes at Deafblind Cymru. Deafblind Cymru

recently waved goodbye to Lukasz Kuziow who was our Volunteer Co-ordinator. We were pleased to hear he has secured an exciting new job with Bron Afon Housing Association. We thank Lukasz for his hard work in securing new volunteers to support our deafblind groups and Members. We wish him well for the future.

We are pleased to announce that we have recruited a new Project Sustainability Officer, Nisha Shukla who joined us in mid November 2010. We hope to introduce her to you in the Spring issue of Open Hand. Nisha will work with our regional group co-ordinator. Nisha will work with our team in Wales to put in place plans and actions to ensure the sustainability of our peer support groups and activities in Wales.

Before re-structuring, Sian McLean performed the role

of All Wales Caseworker providing one to one support for deafblind Members in Wales. Sian is now our South West Wales Group Co-ordinator and will oversee our peer support groups in Ammanford, Bridgend, Swansea and Neath. Nerys Probert who previously was responsible for all the South Wales groups is now South East Wales Group Co-ordinator and supports our groups in Caerphilly, Cardiff, Newport and Trealaw. Our North Wales Group Co-ordinator continues to support our groups and activities in North Wales.

We continue to provide one-to-one casework support through our area Group Co-ordinators. If you have any issues relating to your Deafblindness or need any help, you can contact Martin Griffiths, our Welsh Connections Project Manager for assistance. Alternatively, you can contact our free Information and Advice line on 0800 132320 for advice. Your enquiry will then be passed to your nearest Co-ordinator to deal with unless of course we can solve your enquiry right away.

Living in Wales? Tell us what services would benefit you

We are always looking to the future here at Deafblind Cymru. If you have combined sight or hearing loss or live with someone who does why not drop our Project Manager, Martin Griffiths, a line to tell us what new services and support you would most benefit from as a deafblind person or as someone who cares for/lives with a deafblind person.

Why do we want this information? We believe it is important to keep consulting with our Members in Wales to help us determine what services we need for deafblind people in Wales. We are looking to develop Deafblind Cymru services and also to inform other organisations and groups at national, regional and local level what our Members need.

We are also interested in your personal stories related to your experiences good and bad of accessing your local community, local services and facilities - if you are happy to share them with us. These provide



Enjoying a party

further evidence of barriers faced by deafblind people and also examples of good practice where organisations and individuals have done something to support deafblind people.

Feel free to write or email Martin Griffiths, Project Manager, Deafblind Cymru. We will not publish your stories unless we ask first and you give us permission to do so.

News from the North East

Rob Ottaway talks about Daniel's new challenge!

Daniel, is 23, profoundly Deaf, and has had a Communicator Guide provided by Deafblind UK for over three years.

He regularly attends wheelchair basketball at the Percy Hedley Sports Centre and enjoys his time with his worker, going for meals, to the cinema, and to see his favourite team Newcastle United at St James Park.

But in June, he took on a brand new challenge, he drove a car around a test track! Daniel registered to support Guide Dogs for the Blind by driving around the test track at Nissan Car Plant in Sunderland. He was very excited about this as he loves cars, and has no fear (apart from spiders!), as he showed when he did a zip slide off the Tyne Bridge for Deafblind UK in 2009.

Daniel sat in a specially adapted car with the passenger seat having a brake pedal installed. The speed and steering was controlled by Daniel via a control on the steering wheel. Daniel had a British School Of Motoring Instructor in the passenger seat alongside him whilst I, as his Communicator Guide, sat directly behind him.

Daniel was very excited as he started the car and moved slowly out of the pit area. The pit area was full of other cars driving around so Daniel had to be very careful



Daniel before setting off on his drive



Daniel behind the wheel

to avoid them as he joined the main track. When on the main track, a huge loop about two miles long in total, he sped up before turning into the first bend. As he became more accustomed to driving for the very first time, he became more confident and drove faster, eventually getting up to 86mph! After doing two laps, it was time to pull in to the area and stop the car. It had gone so quickly! Daniel said: "I really enjoyed driving very fast and want to try it again next year".

The fun wasn't over for Daniel yet though. As he

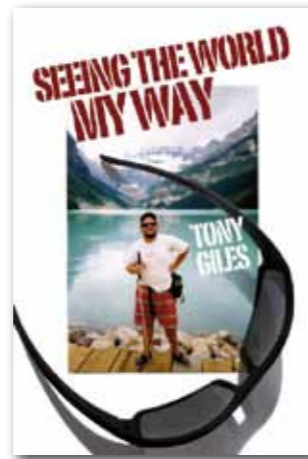
had raised so much money for Guide Dogs, he was allowed to sit in a rally car's passenger seat while a professional rally driver sped around the rally course at Nissan! The rally car zoomed around the course at high speed and gave Daniel a great thrill! Daniel was strapped in very tight into the rally car and had to raise his hand if he wanted to go faster, or lower it to slow down. He kept his hand raised all the time, so the rally car got even faster! Daniel thoroughly enjoyed his day at Nissan, and the high speeds he got up to!

Tony 'Sees' the World His Way

Tony Giles (30) from Teignmouth, Devon, has travelled the world and seen more thrills and spills than most of us will in a lifetime – despite being totally blind and 80 percent deaf.

A few years ago Tony set out to explore as much of the world as possible – staying in backpacker hostels and living on a shoestring budget.

Whilst travelling countless countries with pleasure-seeking in mind might not be unusual for most twentysomethings, Tony does it regardless of his sensory loss. Yet this does not hold him back or hinder his carpe diem attitude to fulfilling his dreams. Sky-diving in Australia, bungee jumping in New Zealand and staying out all night in New Orleans are just some of the tales Tony has to tell of his young but action-packed life. Nor does he believe that being blind has diminished the opportunities he has had: "For somebody who can't see, beauty has a lot to do with what you smell and feel. I've learned to use all the senses of my body –



Tony's new book

my nerves, my touch, my sense of smell." Tony sums up his unflinching thirst for discovery and excitement by revealing what keeps his feet itchy: "Really, I want all the freedom I can get."

Tony has travelled solo across North America, Asia and Australasia, dealing with disability whilst encountering new cultures and living life to the limit. He decided to document his inspirational tale in a new travel biography *Seeing The World My Way* (SilverWood Originals, £8.99) published on 1 November 2010. "The book contains basic history and geography of the countries visited whilst mainly concentrating on an adventurous story of drink



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and adrenalin activities," says Tony, who is fiercely independent, always travels solo, and tries to avoid too much help from others. He funds his trips by frugal living, squirrelling away Christmas and birthday money to supplement a small legacy from his late father. He often travels overnight to save on hostel fees, and seeks out cut-

price accommodation and backpacker hotels.

Seeing the World My Way is a frank, honest and self-deprecating story of – in Tony's own words – "one guy's global adventures". His no-holds-barred style of writing features plenty of drama, danger and discovery as he traverses cities, islands and wilderness.

You can get more information in print and Braille from Humanware on **01933 415800** or email eu.info@humanware.com

Finally winning in the job market

by Member, Lizzie Anderson

Hello, it's Lizzie Anderson again, after a long gap, for education, health and job interviews – endless.

I thought, having lost out on the first two roles I went for after coming back home from college, I was unemployable.

All that changed in May this year. I finally found a voluntary post that was just me and has matched my aspirations. I am now working with people with learning difficulties. It can be a lot of fun but it can also be very tiring, as at the moment

I am trying to carve out a couple of breaks during the day.

My job includes talking to people about their problems, or just getting to know them, referrals to advocacy services and liaising with members of staff. I am generally on my feet or sitting down with customers from 10am until I leave at 3pm. I wouldn't have it any other way.

Now to change the subject, before the Henley Centre I was looking at other voluntary opportunities. Having lost an interview for a governorship in Kettering, I learnt two things from that interview – never talk about religion or unless it's raised, politics!

However, with the other governor's interview which I have had for Isebrook SEN Cognition and Learning College in Kettering, I am told politics is all important, to challenge Government cut-backs. I will hopefully end up on the personnel committee which is a sub-

group, however, I will need to have a CRB check to do my orientation day to meet the students. There are now some there at GCSE level and some at key stage level, who can progress to GCSE or a work placement.

It seems like a lovely environment to get qualifications in, or for those who can't get to exam level, a lovely environment to learn in.

They are planning a fully equipped living skills area and have expertise in other areas – drawing students into the system who can't go anywhere else.

They have the occasional part time student who will then hopefully become a full time student, as all the expertise is there for the disabled or the terminally ill.

To conclude, I have two wonderful jobs and opportunities and no longer have to quote from the Boys from the Black Stuff, "Giss a job, any job"!



Robert Smithdas – Part 3



Robert Smithdas attending a conference

Robert Smithdas is an excellent example of the progress that can be made by a young deafblind person if they are skilfully taught and encouraged to achieve.

After completing his Bachelor's degree, he went on to New York University as a post-graduate student and studied for his Master's degree, specialising in vocational rehabilitation for the handicapped. He completed the degree after two years in 1952, becoming the first deafblind person to achieve that academic level. He felt this demonstrated what other deafblind people could do and so follow in his path.

About this time, a Mr Keane, who had been his counsellor at Brooklyn University, suggested that he do some public speaking on behalf of the Industrial Home for the Blind. In order to do this, Smithdas had to learn to speak more clearly by taking speech-correction lessons. This was a great challenge and demanded very hard work.

His most intensive training in speech was from a professional singer, John di Francesco, who had been at Perkins with Smithdas, and who had studied under Ezio Pinza, the great basso at the Metropolitan Opera House.

Because John was totally blind, Smithdas was doubtful about the experiment as John would not be able to see the movements of his lips and tongue, nevertheless the two worked together with remarkable results. He taught Smithdas how to control his breathing through practise exercises, holding vowel or consonant sounds for extended intervals.

The first public speaking engagement after his work with di Francesca was at a junior high school in Manhattan. The aim of the speech was to give the children an idea of what could be achieved by blind people at the Industrial Home. Smithdas was introduced by di Francesca who also followed the talk with a critique of the performance, advising Smithdas that his voice had been a little too high and that he had kept moving to the right.

The high pitch of voice was due, di Francesca suggested, to nerves, and next time a table could be used to help in maintaining direction. They then arranged a system of tactile signals that could be used to keep Smithdas informed about the acoustics and conditions within a room. Very quickly Smithdas learnt to maintain the right volume and the length of his speeches.

It is unlikely that Smithdas would have been able to learn correct speech as well as he did if he had not insisted on being corrected every time he made a mistake. One of Smithdas's strengths seems to have always been his willingness to learn, and to accept critical feedback, thus avoiding many pitfalls that can trip a profoundly deaf speaker up.

One result of his lectures was that Smithdas realised how very little people knew about blindness. In question and answer sessions he would be asked how he could shave and dress himself, and if blind people could hold down jobs, or if they had to be fed. Such questions may seem odd over half a century later, but I think that they are still being asked. There is also much misunderstanding of deafblindness, and this is something that Robert Smithdas devoted his working life, into his eighties, in addressing.

Source, Smithdas, Robert, *Life at my Fingertips*, Dumbleday, 1958.

Increase your knowledge of Deafblindness

Deafblind Studies is a 'not for profit' venture developed by a consortium of charities: Signature (previously CACDP), Deafblind Scotland, Deafblind UK, RNIB, Sense and Sense Scotland.

The Diploma in Deafblind Studies is the outcome of over a decade of partnership working, with the most experienced practitioners in the field of Deafblindness pooling knowledge and resources to produce the best materials and teaching the field can offer. This unique programme of study is aimed at professionals involved in designing and/or delivering services to deafblind people, within the community or

within residential care. The curriculum explores in detail both congenital and acquired Deafblindness, is thoroughly grounded in practice and is subject to continuous improvement and refinement. The outcome, workers at the forefront of practice, equipped to meet statutory requirements and duties in relation to Deafblindness.

The next Diploma in Deafblind Studies course will begin in September 2011. To make sure you are one of the first to receive updated information and to be notified of application pack availability make sure you register your interest.

You can do this by logging onto the website at:

www.deafblindstudies.org.uk

or by contacting Course Director, Gerard Swan on

Tel: **+44 (0) 845 456 1036** or Fax: **0871 528 4628**

or Email: coordinator@deafblindstudies.org.uk

Here for all bird lovers during winter time is a poem written by Jane Taylor 1783 – 1824 sent in by Member, Victor Shackleton.



The Robin

Away, pretty robin, fly home to your nest,
to make you my captive would please me the best,
And feed you with worms and with bread,
Your eyes are so sparkling, your feather so soft,
Your pretty wings flutter so pretty aloft,
And your breast is so covered with red.

But then it would be cruel to keep you, I know,
So stretch out your wings, little robin and go,
Fly home to your young ones again,
Go listen again to the notes of your mate,
And enjoy the green shade in your lonely retreat,
Secure from the wind and the rain,

But when the leaves fall, and the winter winds blow,
And the green fields are covered all over with snow,
And the clouds in white feathers descend,
When the springs are all ice, and the rivulets freeze,
And the long shining icicles drop from the trees,
Then, robin, remember your friend.

If with cold and hunger quite perished and weak,
Come tap at my window again with your beak,
And gladly I will let you come in,
You shall fly to my bosom, or perch on my thumbs,
Or hop round the table and pick up the crumbs,
And never be hungry again.

Make your booking from January

As many of you know, Deafblind UK owns a six berth caravan at Hopton, nr Great Yarmouth on an award-winning site with a number of amenities and activities available on the holiday park itself. We have had a huge response from our Members showing interest and booking holidays at the caravan throughout 2010.

As a result of generous donations from a number of charitable trusts, Deafblind UK is able to support its Members by offering the caravan as a holiday destination in 2011 for either a seven night stay or a four night stay. The cost to you is only £40 per holiday break.

Whilst Deafblind UK is able to support Members financially with the cost of the holiday, we are unable to provide staff support directly or fund transport costs. Should individual Members require such support, they

would need to arrange this themselves.

The caravan is available to hire from 1 March - 30 November 2011 and there are 20 weeks of holidays available to Members. Bookings will be taken from January 2011 onwards, and these will be on a first come, first served basis.



[Book your holiday now!](#)

For more information and to request a booking form, please contact Niki Peacock on Tel: **01733 358100** ext **257**.

Lightning Lottery



Thank you to all of you who have contacted us and started playing the new 'Lightning Lottery' which is a fun and easy way to support Deafblind UK.

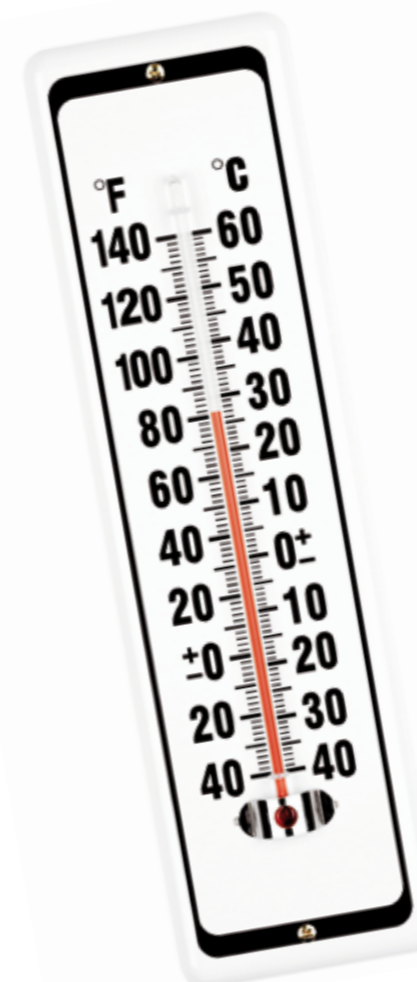
How does it work?

Choose six numbers from 0-9. If your numbers match the last digit of the daily Fahrenheit temperatures (in the right place) of Corfu, Istanbul, Tenerife, Innsbruck, Edinburgh and Stockholm, you win the top prize of... £25,000! You can check your numbers in the Daily Mail, however, all prizes are guaranteed and sent out automatically.

How much does it cost?

Each entry line (each set of six numbers) costs £1 per week. The draw is held every week on Fridays, so you have a chance of winning a prize weekly!

For one Entry Line this will cost you £13 for 13 weeks.



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To join today call Lorraine Densham in the Fundraising Team on **01733 358100**

Swish in the City



Enjoying Swish in the City!

October saw the Swish in the City event take place at Deafblind UK's HQ in partnership with www.ihaventgotathingtowear.com.

The Swish was a great reason for ladies to clear out their wardrobes of all their unwanted clothes, shoes and accessories, and swap them for some new key pieces. Ladies enjoyed pampering treatments including hand and arm massages by Sisley, John Lewis, back massages from The Good Lifestyle

Company, ate delicious fudge from The Fudge Factory and nibbles from Deafblind UK's very own conference facilities!

The event was a great success with 150 women swishing the night away and experiencing what Deafblind UK's Conference Centre can offer to clients for future conferences and parties.

A HUGE thanks to all of those who took part and volunteered throughout the day and night for the event.

The Virgin London Marathon

The Virgin London Marathon is one of life's great challenges, and there are so many reasons to take part. If you or someone you know is looking for the personal challenge of a lifetime the cheering crowds will drive you on as you pound the streets of London: round the Cutty Sark, over Tower Bridge and past the icons of the capital.

Golden Bond Places:

Deafblind UK has secured Golden Bond places for the Virgin 2011 London Marathon and the competition for Golden Bond Places is extremely high. To register your interest for one of our places, please contact us for a registration form and medical form and return with a £100 registration fee to the events team. The £100 registration fee will only be banked if you successfully secure a place with us. We ask each of our Golden Bond



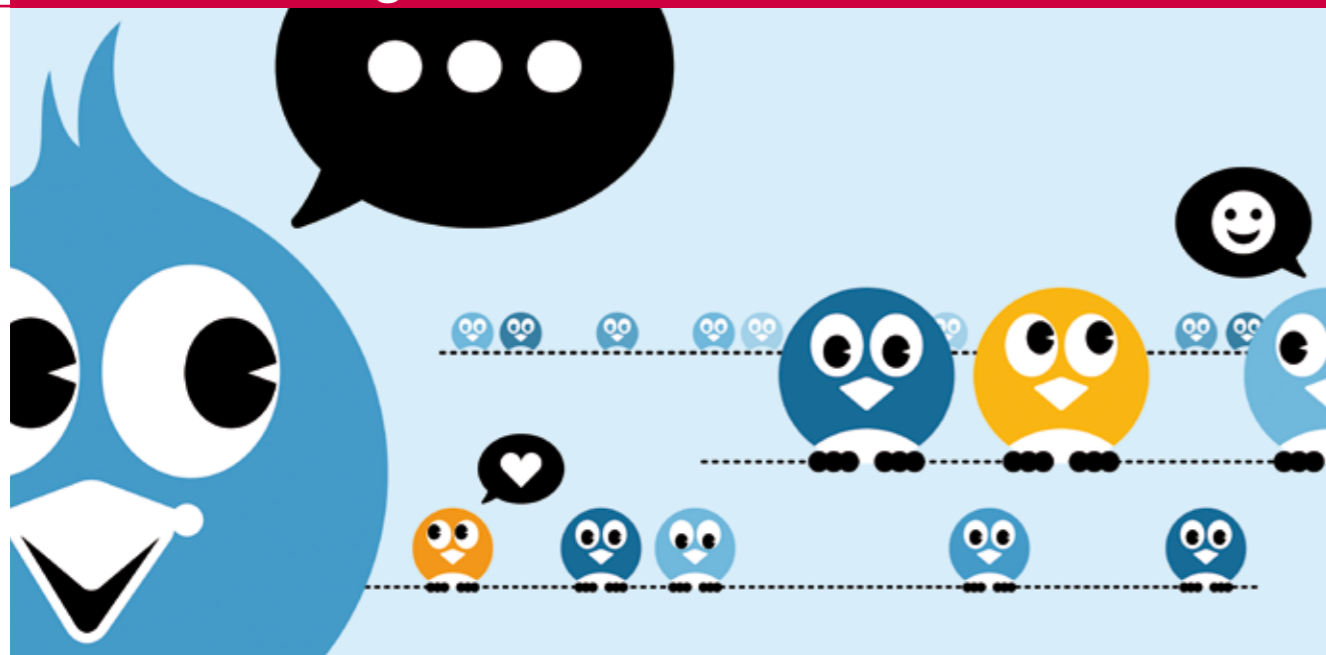
runners to raise a minimum of £1500 in sponsorship, which will help to support deafblind individuals across the UK.

We offer fantastic support to all of our Golden Bond and Ballot Place Runners:

- A Deafblind UK running vest or t-shirt
- Regular email and newsletter support
- A fundraising pack, including sponsorship forms, posters, leaflets, and collecting tins
- A fundraising handbook full of tips and advice on reaching your sponsorship levels
- Support from a dedicated fundraising team

To join today call Lorraine Densham in the Fundraising Team on **01733 358100**





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Facebook and Twitter

If you would like to find out more about events, news and views at Deafblind UK keep up to date with us by finding us on Facebook and Twitter:

Find us on Facebook by searching for Deafblind Uk Charity



Find us on Twitter by searching for Deafblind UK



You can also contact our fundraising team on: **01733 358100** or log onto: **www.deafblind.org.uk** to check out our upcoming events and activities.

Thank you for your stories, letters and articles

Thank you very much for responding to the appeal we made asking for your stories, letters and articles for Open Hand, our membership publication.

We have received some interesting articles from Members about issues you want to raise or highlighting the support you have received which works for you.

We would still like to receive even more information in 2011. If you have an opinion about recent benefit changes or you would like to comment about any of the articles in Open Hand, we would love to hear from you. We are also interested to hear if you would prefer to receive Open Hand on email.



Enjoying a chat

Please send your submissions to our Editor, Rosemary Sandford on email at: **rosemary@sandford-dbuk.fsnet.co.uk** or by writing to **Open Hand, National Centre for Deafblindness, John and Lucille van Geest Place, Cygnet Road, Hampton, Peterborough, PE7 8FD.**

About Deafblind UK

Who we are

Deafblind UK is a national charity offering specialist services and human support to deafblind people and those with a progressive sight and hearing loss acquired throughout their lives.

Our aim is to enable people living with this unique disability to maintain their independence, quality of life and reduce the isolation Deafblindness creates.

What we do

We achieve this through campaigning, education, the provision of practical and emotional support via independent living teams and a free Information and Advice Line.

Please send submissions to Open Hand using the contact details on Page 2. Postal submissions can be sent to the address below.

Submissions are required for the Spring issue by **7th February**.

The views and opinions expressed in Open Hand are not necessarily those of either Deafblind UK or the editor and we reserve the right to edit submissions. Open Hand is available to all Members of Deafblind UK free of charge and to non-Members at £20 a year. Open Hand is available in Braille, large print, tape, audio cd or via email from Deafblind UK and can be downloaded free from www.deafblind.org.uk

Contact us

Deafblind UK, National Centre for Deafblindness,
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Cover image: Gentleman enjoying a chat
on an adapted telephone



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