



South Eastern Health  
and Social Care Trust

# Sensory Support Newsletter

Winter 2025

**Welcome** back to another newsletter from the Sensory Support Team in the South Eastern HSC Trust. Our focus is on people who live in the Lisburn, Downpatrick and Ards and North Down area. The aim is to keep you up-to-date with what is happening in your local area and in touch with the team. It will be sent out to adults on our database who experience sight and/or hearing loss.

The newsletter will also be available on the South Eastern HSC Trust website and can be emailed to people, if requested.



## Best wishes to Mary Kyle *from Deborah Brunty, Team Leader*

Mary Kyle, Peer Support Worker based in Lisburn, has retired after 21 years working with the Trust.

Mary has tirelessly worked to support the local Deaf community both in Lisburn and Downpatrick through one to one support; facilitating groups and working with other organisations.

We will miss her enthusiasm, sense of humour and dedication. We all wish her a happy retirement!

## Carers Rights Day at Blair Mayne Leisure Centre

In November, staff members from the Ards team were delighted to take part in the South Eastern Trust Carers Information morning during Carers Rights Day. They were able to meet members of the public, inform them of the work of the sensory support team, discuss equipment and offer information and advice.



## British Sign Language Stage 6 Achievement

*from Deborah Brunty, Team Leader*

We would like to congratulate social worker Andrea Cunningham, based in Lisburn. Andrea has successfully completed her B.S.L. Level 6, an amazing achievement!



## Deaf Friends Group

The Deaf Friends Group continues to meet once a month in the Regency Café in Ards for a cuppa and a chat. This is open to members of the profoundly deaf community who use British Sign Language. At Christmas and in June we go out for a meal together.

If you would be interested in coming to this group please contact staff members:

Petra: **07971 334 610**

or

Karen: **07525 899 178**

## Tinnitus Support

Barbara Gracey, social worker, continues to support service users who experience tinnitus in the South Eastern HSC Trust area. Barbara will firstly complete an assessment with the person, discuss if it is felt they would benefit from one to one support, group support and/or equipment.

If you feel this may benefit yourself please contact Barbara at the Newtownards office.

Tel: **(028) 9151 0136**

# **A Day in the Life of a Vision Rehabilitation Specialist (VRS) or Rehabilitation Worker (RW) as we are known in Northern Ireland**

*by staff member Ray Maxwell*

The great thing about being a rehabilitation worker is that no two days are the same, as it all depends on who we are working with and what tasks we are teaching to our service users. So what exactly is a rehabilitation worker?

A rehabilitation worker plays a crucial role in empowering individuals with visual impairments or deaf/blindness to lead independent and fulfilling lives. We achieve this by assessing individual needs and providing personalised training and support.

For example we carry out functional home low vision assessments to identify what level of magnification is required and then demonstrate how to correctly use these magnifiers. We provide advice on how to make the best use of lighting, how to position task lights and other types of lights to avoid glare.

We also provide support with IT and assistive technology demonstrations, for example setting up PC's; laptops; smart phones/smart tablets with large icon; large font and checking if free speech is software already installed. Software options include Talkback, which is a free speech app that is used on Android devices, whilst Voice-Over is a free speech app that is used on IOS devices. Service users can benefit from knowing how to use Smart Assistants such as 'Hey Google', 'Seri', or 'Alexa' to read emails; send SMS; phone your contacts; send emails and using WhatsApp for sending and receiving audio messages.

We inform service users of Seeing AI, an app which will read letters; documents; hand writing; identify bank notes; read barcodes and can be programmed to recognise people's faces. We ask service users if they are familiar with Libby, the Northern Ireland Libraries audio books service app as service users can download audio books for a fixed period of time. We discuss a range of navigational type apps including the Translink Journey App, which lets individuals know the timetables for both bus and trains within Northern Ireland.

Rehabilitation Workers provide independent living skills assessment and training programmes, from making a sandwich to preparing and cooking more complicated meals. We also teach systematic techniques for cleaning up afterwards.

We offer orientation and mobility assessments and training programmes. This type of training ranges from scanning skills and sighted guide training to

learning how to correctly use a long cane. Learning to use a long cane varies from one person to the next, and it also can depend on how much residual vision (if any) an individual has remaining. Orientation involves learning how to find your way within known areas, identifying the difference between landmarks, clues and unique points of reference. Depending on the individual this training can involve learning how to go up and down steps, stairs, escalators and using public transport.

We can offer training on communication techniques e.g. Braille. There is also a vast range of audio information available, from RNIB Talking Books and audio book services such as Audible. We keep service users up to date with other technology which now includes audio labels ie. talking tin lids which hold around thirty seconds of audio information. The Pen Friend labeller enables individuals to record their own description/information on different labels such as laundry labels for a longer time.

## Falls Prevention Event *by Mary Laird*



Linzee and I were delighted to attend the Falls Prevention event held at Ballynahinch Baptist Church in October 2025, alongside a range of professional partners and charities including; NIFRS, District Nursing, Dietetics, Specsavers, Deafblind UK, Carers Support, and Safe and Well.

This event opportunity offered older people (over 65's) the chance to access community expert advice, practical tips, information and guidance on learning the tools and strategies to reduce the risk of falls in the home.

Our team showcased an array of low-vision aids, hearing equipment, and lighting solutions, giving attendees the

opportunity to try out devices and learn more about the support available from our service. We were also able to take referrals on the day, signpost individuals to other relevant services, and enjoyed meaningful conversations with potential service users and their families, about how our service could assist them.

The Physical Activity Team delivered engaging demonstrations of armchair exercises, highlighting their benefits for strength and mobility, while physiotherapists provided valuable advice on fall-prevention techniques. It was an informative and enjoyable event, and a great opportunity to promote accessible support within the community.

## Northern Ireland Blind Golf Association Event

My name is Bryan and I am a member of Northern Ireland Blind Golf Association (NIBGA).

In September I organised a golf event at Aberdelghy. The event was a great success with 23 blind golfers and their guides taking part. We also had two ladies from Lambeg Golf Club joining us.



The event was a 4 person Texas Scramble, which involves 2 blind golfers and their guides each hitting a shot and then taking the best shot and playing from there.

I decided to spice things up this year by getting the guides to wear blindfolds or simspecs for the longest drive. I asked the guides their thoughts on playing when their sight was taken away.

One of the guides said although they thought they understood some of the difficulties that visually impaired people experience playing golf, wearing the blackout glasses completely changed their perspective. They felt that wearing the glasses gave them the opportunity to experience sight loss and gave them a much stronger appreciation and admiration for blind golfers.

For more information or to get involved in blind golf, search **Northern Ireland Blind Golf Association** on **Facebook** or visit **NIBGA website**:

<https://www.nibga.org>



# Shared Lives Service and the Sensory Support Team

Alison Milford, Head of Shared Lives, shares experiences of the Shared Lives Service. She stated that ***“this is a regional, regulated service where Shared Lives carers share their home, family and community life with an older person. Aged over 65, the older person will be at the early stage of need and require support to stay as independent as they can, for as long as possible.”***

Day support takes place in the community and the family homes of carefully recruited Shared Lives carers. This reduces loneliness and isolation and assists families by offering them a break from caring.

We are delighted to support three gentlemen referred by social worker Laura McGarrity. These gentlemen have a visual impairment and some also have a hearing impairment. The nature of these difficulties has meant that it is very challenging for them to leave their home without support.

The Shared Lives Service offers a lifeline to these gentlemen. They can access their community and health appointments, as well as enjoying friendship and social interaction.

Laura commented, ***“For my clients, the service has offered meaningful social connections, emotional support and a greater sense of belonging, reducing isolation and boosting their confidence. Overall,***

***Shared Lives has made a profound difference to my clients, promoting inclusion, fostering independence and enhancing wellbeing.”***

One gentleman who uses the service said, ***“I think it is an excellent service, it provides me with relief and reassurance that I have people on board for me. Great support and a game changer. I feel safe and content with my Shared Lives carer. He puts my mind at ease. I feel that I can confide in him and see him as a good friend. He is my rescue ranger.”***

You can watch Leonard & Derek’s story here: <https://youtu.be/E1L03wZEYAk> as well as Mark & Michael here: <https://youtu.be/pTqAKAwjLQ>

More information is available on our website: <https://www.ageni.org/services/carewellbeing-services/shared-lives/>

We are not currently open to referrals but when we have a Shared Lives carer available in a specific area we contact local teams to find a match.



**‘Please spread the word as we would love to recruit more carers!’**

# Social Enterprise NI Young Person of the Year

A huge congratulations to 21 year old Andrew Hamilton who is registered as severely sight impaired and is an ex service user of the Sensory Support Team.

Andrew is studying politics and international relations at Durham University. He received this award after founding 'Just Include' in September 2024.

The aim is to educate, empower and stand up for people in decision making across the political arena and diverse areas of society.

Andrew explained:

*"I founded 'Just Include' because I believe that politics shouldn't be exclusive. Initially I focused on disability activism, but soon realised that my work can benefit wider grassroots activists, particularly marginalised groups. I have already launched a digital handbook and developed workshops on the political system in Northern Ireland, but this is just the start."*

If anyone would like to find out more, please contact Andrew via the 'Just Include' website at:

[justinclude.com](http://justinclude.com)

or he can be emailed at:

[andrew@justinclude.org](mailto:andrew@justinclude.org)



**For further information please contact:**

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**Lisburn**

**Downpatrick**

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