

Walsall Society for the Blind

2020-2021



A YEAR IN REVIEW
EDITION 116

Annual Report

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Our Mission

To provide information, support and friendship to all visually impaired people living within the Borough of Walsall.

Our Services

Walsall Society for the Blind is the leading charity providing advice, information and support to the visually impaired living in Walsall.

The Society employs 10 members of staff, is assisted by over 15 dedicated volunteers and provides support to over 1,300 visually impaired people within the Borough of Walsall.

The range of services we offer includes:

- A Social Activity Centre
- Talking Newspaper and Magazine Service
- Registration Services
- A Community Officer
- Transcription Service
- Awareness and Training Sessions
- Resources and Information
- Equipment and Loan Services

The Society is contracted to provide Registration Services and maintain the Sight Loss Register on behalf of Walsall Council.

Public Benefit (Covid 19 pandemic)

Through the year we have:

Had 1,431 enquiries at Reception

Dealt with over 10,165 Community enquiries

Offered 324 Social Activity placements

Sent out over 7,540 issues of the Talking Newspaper and Magazine

Conducted 1 training and awareness sessions.

Legal and Administrative Information

Registered Name

Walsall Society for the Blind Limited

Charity Registration number

1075854

Company Registration number

3674948

Governing instruments

The Society is a Company Limited by Guarantee.

Registered in England & Wales No. 3674948.

The Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Society comply with the Companies Act 2006. The Company was formed on 27th November 1998.



Directors/Trustees

Chairman

John Cooke

Vice Chairman

David Smith

Directors / Trustees

Richard Meere, Julie Harris,
Elizabeth Smith, Kevin Merchant,
Laurie Shore

Cheif Executive Officer

Amanda Reed

Investment Advisors

EFG Harris Allday
33 Great Charles
Street
Queensway
Birmingham
B3 3JN

Auditors

Bakers Chartered Accountants
Arbor House
Broadway North
Walsall
WS1 2AN

Solicitors

Enoch Evans LLP
St Pauls Chambers
6-9 Hatherton Road
Walsall
WS1 1XS

Registered Office

Hawley House
11 Hatherton Road
Walsall
WS1 1XS

Bankers

HSBC
The Bridge
Walsall
WS1 1LN

Report of the Trustees

The Trustees, who are also the Directors of the Charity for the purpose of the Companies Act 2006, present their annual report and the audited financial statement for the year ending 31st March 2021.

The Trustees have adopted the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP 2015) “Accounting and Reporting by Charities” (FRS102) in preparing the annual report and financial statement of the Charity.

The Charity was established in 1885. It is an incorporated Charity, being a Company Limited by Guarantee and is governed by its Memorandum of Association and the Articles of Association.



At the heart of the charity is our mission statement

“To provide information, support and friendship to all visually impaired people within the Borough of Walsall”

As I sat writing my annual report last year nothing could have prepared me for the year that followed. An emerging pandemic, being told to go home, the country in lockdown.

How could we continue to deliver our mission statement from an unstaffed, empty building? We needed to keep the Society open. It has meant working differently, working creatively and ensuring the safety and well-being of all. To do this we had to comply with ever changing guidance. An unpredictable, unprecedented way of working. But we were ready and prepared to accept the emerging challenges.

On government guidance all the staff were asked to work from home. A couple of core staff agreed that we would continue to keep the Society open, even on reduced hours, if only to receive calls, be here for deliveries and receive talking newspaper wallets, the post and to keep up the maintenance of the building.

As the days passed it was obvious that there was not going to be any quick ending to the pandemic, so we needed to decide what we could do, what was important and how we could deliver whilst in a pandemic. Decisions had to be made.

Those staff who could work from home did so, the community team began working remotely from home making those critical calls especially in the early days, supporting with food, medication and doorstep parcel drops, to those most in need.

With the social activity centre closed, we welcomed the support of the government job retention scheme which allowed us to continue to retain our staff through the pandemic.

We had lost our talking newspaper staff, due to their need to follow government guidance for shielding. We decided that the talking newspaper was an essential service. However it had its challenges as you will read further on in the annual review.

In July we had a first glimpse of getting the centre open again. We followed government guidance and after many hours of risk assessments, completing paperwork, moving furniture, arranging socially distanced seating, signage, explaining one way systems and imposing restrictions on the number of people in certain spaces, we were ready. We succeeded with achieving Covid 19 Secure Status and we reopened on the 18th August. Unfortunately Ring and Ride guidance did not allow them to reinstate our transport service, however our clients continued to support us and one by one they started to make their own way back to the Society.

At times it was disappointing, annoying and frustrating. Even with all of our hard work to keep going and deliver our services. We were hampered by the pandemic and imposed lockdowns. We kept rising to the challenges according to the guidance given and doing our absolute best.

I am so incredibly proud of what we have achieved throughout the last year, we could have so easily shut up shop and walked away. I want to thank the staff team for being so amazing and carrying on regardless, and our wonderful volunteers who continued to support us, to enable us to reopen the centre to clients. We really could not have done it without you. And finally, thank you to our members who came back, especially in the earlier days when getting to and from the centre using public transport and taxis, itself was a scary prospect.

Walsall Society for the Blind had its beginning way back in 1885, so at just 136 years young, even a pandemic did not stop us. It clearly has proven that we are still needed as much today as ever. We continue to achieve our mission statement through the charitable services we deliver.

To ensure that we are able,

“To provide information, support and friendship to all visually impaired people within the borough of Walsall”

Walsall Society for the Blind

Financial Report 2021

A complete set of the Society's financial accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021 is available from the Society in various formats, on request. This report is a summary of the principal elements of those accounts.

Income and expenditure

Our total income for the year was £378,582, which is approximately £230,000 higher than in 2020. This increase is due principally to legacies of more than £87,000, and to almost £142,000 in donations generated from new fundraising initiatives.

Our sincere thanks and gratitude go to all of those who choose to support the Society with such generosity and for the continued support of Walsall Council that is so important to the society's activities.

Our total expenditure this year was £270,209, an increase of about 6.6% from 2020. As normal, the costs of employing our hardworking and dedicated staff - £179,607 this year - form by far the largest share of that expenditure. Our staff are supported by the Trustees, all of whom are unpaid, none of whom have claimed any expenses despite being entitled to do so. The work of the Society is also supported by a team of volunteers that give their time and energy so generously.

Our net income for 2021 is thus £108,373, a significant improvement on the deficit of £105,256 incurred in 2020, and a clear illustration of our dependence on the generosity of our donors. We know from long experience to expect extreme fluctuations in our income, and we do everything we can to smooth out those fluctuations, always with the objective of maintaining the services we provide and ensuring the long-term survival of the Society.

Investments and reserves

The Society has a portfolio of financial investments managed by an independent broker. At 31st March 2021, the value of this portfolio was just over £2 million, but the investment income received from it this year was only £60,988, about 21% lower than in 2020, a reflection of the lower dividends paid by many companies in the early months of the Covid 19 pandemic.

The first Covid-19 lockdown began in the UK on 23rd March 2020 and by 31st March 2020- our annual accounting date- stock markets had fallen dramatically. Our accounts for 2020 therefore showed a large fall in the value of our investments of about £257,000. By 31st March 2021, the markets had recovered, and the 2021 accounts reflect that recovery showing an increase in the value of our portfolio of about £411,000. The trustees are grateful to our broker for protecting the value of the Society's investments during such difficult and unpredictable times.

The Covid-19 pandemic has made us more aware than ever of the Society's dependence on its donors. Even in normal times, the Society's investment income falls a long way short of its operating costs, and if that shortfall is not met by donations, we must inevitably sell some investments, something we are always extremely reluctant to do. Furthermore, the economic fallout from the pandemic is causing inflation to rise, increasing our costs, and making it even more difficult to generate sufficient income from our investments.

The Trustees believe that the Society's finance are currently sufficient to enable it to continue providing its existing services to the visually impaired people of Walsall. However, the trustees also recognise the need for extreme caution and prudent management of the Society's resources if its long-term future is to be secured, which is why the Society's reserves include a Development Fund of £1.2 million.

The Trustees express their grateful thanks to the Chief Executive and her dedicated team of staff and volunteers for their work during what has been the most difficult and challenging of years.

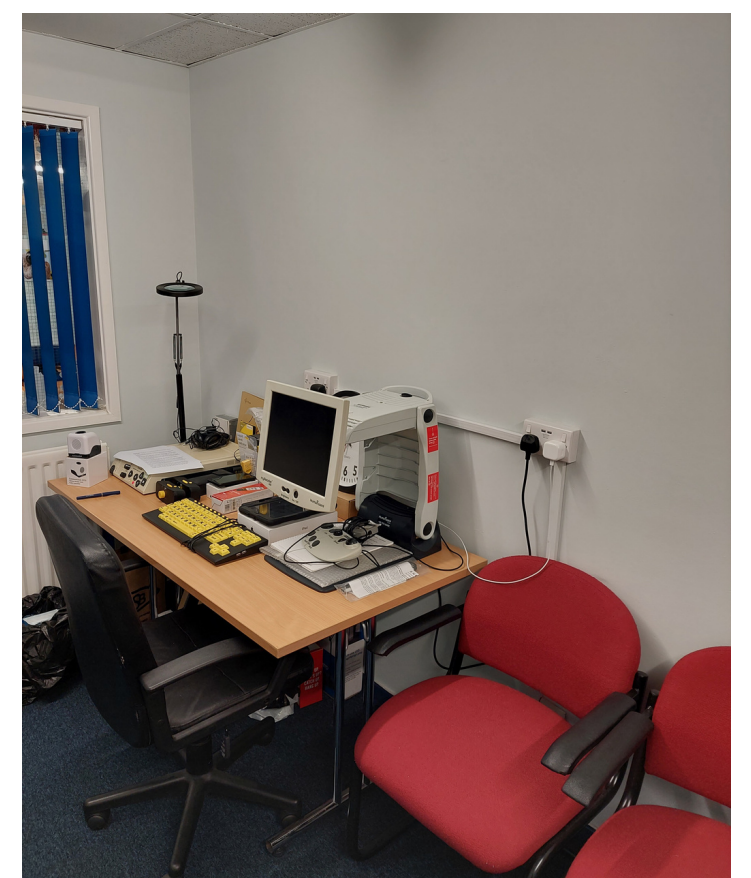
Renovations



With Covid restrictions meaning lower footfall in the centre during the last year we took the opportunity to complete some much needed renovation work.

Thanks to our prime donator the Wolfson Foundation. We have been able to fully refurbish both the male and female toilets, as well as adapting the old pool room into a office in readiness for a new exciting project which will support our sight loss community. We've also created a separate corridor leading to the Talking News studio and redesigned the studio space to create a separate self contained meeting room.

These improvements have already made a huge difference to the way we use the centre and were made possible thanks to donations from generous funders. We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks for their support.



Walsall Talking News

Walsall Talking News, well, what a journey it has been. Covid arrived and it's been a learning curve ever since. Overnight we lost the staff team and our wonderful group of dedicated volunteers due to the government lockdown. This was our entire Talking News team which left Claire and Amanda taking the reins. With the knowledge that Claire had picked up from Keith and Amanda's background with Talking News we managed to keep the service running. Our new routine involved us putting on our gloves armed with the magic of anti-bacterial spray and cleaned each wallet and memory stick as it came into the building so that our listeners and staff were protected.

We needed help so we asked Jenny, who was originally one of our Day Centre Coordinators, that was on furlough. We asked if she wanted to return to the office but in a different role to support and learn our Talking News.

What a job she has done. She came back and learned the process from recording to dispatch; the pressure was off and we were able to maintain our weekly delivery of Walsall Talking News along with restarting our Monthly Magazine edition.

On easement of restrictions, Keith returned to the office but he decided it was time to retire after 12 years of service. However, Barry chose to take a 12-month sabbatical to help meet his family needs.



The uncertainty was solved by Jenny taking on the permanent role as Talking Services Officer. All was going well until we started having technical issues with our recording system, and due to the age of the software it was apparent that we would need to start from scratch. Doing nothing by halves, we purchased a whole new recording system which meant only one thing, more learning. Thankfully our loyal and supportive listeners bared with us.

We have purchased a new label system that works with our original barcoding system and new pouches that comply with Covid regulations.

Just as things were starting to fall into place, we started having reports that listeners were receiving blank memory sticks and jumbled editions. After lots of investigating we learnt that our USB's were also out of date and unable to be formatted so along with everything else, we purchased new USB's.

Problems solved, fingers crossed.

We would like to thank all of our listeners and volunteers for supporting us throughout the last 12 months, and the donors who have helped to fund this service and new pieces of equipment.

From Trustee to Trust Fundraiser

By Amanda Elliott

I was delighted to join Walsall Society for the Blind's Board of Trustees in June 2012. I was one of eight Board members who together have overarching responsibility for the safe and ethical running of the Society's charitable activities. The Board support Amanda Reed, the Chief Executive, to steer the direction of the charity, always ensuring that its services meet the Society's charitable objectives: to provide information, support and friendship to the visually impaired community of Walsall.

The Board is made up of both sighted and sight impaired individuals, all of whom are volunteers and give their time and advice free of charge. Many of the Board members have an area of specialism from their working life, such as financial investments, accounting or law, which is called upon for the benefit of the charity. My area of expertise is charitable fundraising and alongside my volunteer role on the Board I worked as a Fundraising Manager for a national charity.

My love of fundraising started when I volunteered at Walsall Society for the Blind for 18 months following my university studies. And it's WSB I have to thank for getting me into such a rewarding career path. I've worked as a Fundraiser for almost 20 years and been fortunate to work for some of the most well known UK charities.

I spent eight years proudly serving as a Board member and loved hearing about the amazing work the charity was doing to support the visually impaired people of Walsall and providing input into how we could strengthen our services further. So, you may wonder why I stepped down from my role.


In January 2020 I had a big birthday, the type that ends in a zero! It made me re-evaluate my work life balance and I decided that when the right position came up closer to home I would make the move from full time to part time employment. Sure enough, I didn't have long to wait to find my dream job. In February that year the Society's Fundraising Officer left the charity leaving the fundraising position vacant so when it was advertised just before the Covid-19 pandemic rocked the world, I decided to apply. I was interviewed by Amanda and Claire and was over the moon to be offered the role. Following references and DBS checks, I started my new position as Fundraising Officer at Walsall Society for the Blind in June, right in the middle of a global pandemic!

I'm absolutely delighted to say that despite the challenging circumstances of the last 18 months our Fundraising activity has gone from strength to strength. Since I joined the staff team I have generated £200,000 of income for the charity. The majority of this has come from Charitable Trusts and Foundations and we are beyond grateful to all of the organisations who have supported us through this difficult time. With their help we have been able to refurbish the centre, fund our Community Outreach and Talking News activity, purchase new equipment and develop a vital new Assistive Technology support officer role. Without our generous funders believing in the value of the services we provide to the sight loss community of Walsall, none of this would have been possible.

So what became of my role on the Board of Trustees and what does the future hold? Well, I stepped down from the Board just before starting my role as Fundraising Officer as our current constitution doesn't permit me to do both. It was strange and a little sad leaving the Board after so long and not seeing those I'd shared the Board meetings with, but it has allowed me to focus solely on Fundraising for the charity and proving that there are pots of money available out there for us to benefit from. Instead of reading reports at the Board meetings I now write reports for the meetings! I provide Fundraising updates for the Trustees so that they can clearly see the benefit of the charity's investment in a Fundraising role and use the fundraising income to help plan for future charitable activities. As to what the rest of the staff team think about working with a former Trustee, well you'll have to ask them about that!

Moving forward I'm excited to diversify the charities income streams further as we start to develop opportunities for people to give to the charity in other ways such as through our beautiful new Tree of Life situated in the Society's reception area, and by remembering us in their Will. If you're interested in finding out more about our fundraising activities or supporting the charity through a donation, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me on fundraiser@wsftb.co.uk



A photograph showing several hands of different skin tones reaching up from the bottom and sides to form a circle in the center. The hands are positioned with palms facing each other, creating a sense of unity and support. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of light green and yellow, suggesting a bright, airy environment.

We would like to say
thank you to all of our
Clients and Volunteers
for loyalty and
dedication throughout
the last year.

Thank You



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Helpline Number
01922 627 683



Charity No - 1075854
Company Reg - 3674948



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Website - www.walsallblind.org



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