

**ISSUE 119**



# **Walsall Society for the Blind**

**A Year in Review  
2023 - 2024**



# **Annual Report**

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# **Our Mission & Services**

## **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 16 members of staff, is assisted by over 15 dedicated volunteers and provides support to over 1,400 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  
Mental Health and Wellbeing Services  
Assistive Technology Services  
Information Officer  
Transcription Service  
Awareness and Training Sessions  
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 / Legal Information**

## **Public Benefit**

During the year we have:

Had 3,059 enquiries at Reception

Dealt with over 7,568 Community enquiries

Offered 2,161 Social Activity placements

Engaged with 2,308 Mental Health and Wellbeing contacts

Supported 1,126 Assistive Technology contacts

Sent out over 7,800 issues of the Talking Newspaper and Magazine

Conducted 5 training and awareness sessions.

## **Legal and Administrative Information**

### **Registered Name**

Walsall Society for the Blind Limited

### **Charity Registration number**

1075854

### **Company Registration number**

03674948

## **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,  
Baljeet Siyan, Amara Ismail El Banna,  
Laurie Shore - Resigned 30.09.2024**

## **Chief Executive Officer**

**Amanda Reed**



# Chief Executive's Report

For almost 140 years, Walsall Society for the Blind has been supporting people affected by sight loss in the Borough of Walsall.

Our mission is to provide information, support and friendship to all those affected by sight loss. An estimated 8,980 people live with this condition within Walsall, including over 1,400 on the sight loss register. Last year we had a further 151 new registrations.

There has been a reduction in local authority services, a loss of other support services and charities within the Borough due to lack of funding. However, we have been fortunate through our fundraising, donations and legacies received to still be able to deliver all our services free of charge.

Being told you are losing your sight can be difficult to come to terms with, common effects being depression and reduced wellbeing. Many people do not receive essential support in relation to their sight loss.

We have had the privilege of holding the register on behalf of Walsall Council since 2009, which allows us to support from point of certification.

With our relationship with ECLOs, we are now meeting with individuals who are just starting their eye care journey.

Our Information Officer goes out into the community giving information about sight loss and our services.

We accept all referrals from a wide network of GPs, opticians and clinicians as well as the individual themselves.

For Walsall Society for the Blind, it's a case of what we don't do!

- Hold the register, complete full initial assessment and make all referrals, offer of kit bags
- 3 months after registration, community follow up appointments
- Direct access to community support - short term support
- Mental Health and Wellbeing officer for those who struggle - long term intensive support
- Transport for hospital appointments and chaperon service
- Tech support and full IT suite providing 1:1 support
- Full equipment loan service, including low vision aids
- Tea and Tech peer support group
- Social activity and peer support groups, 5 days a week
- Home to Walsall's visually impaired carpet bowls team
- Talking news and magazine service
- Information officer - preventative service
- WSB youth group for 0-25 years - monthly
- Community team trained to complete low level rehabilitation

We have a large network of local and national professionals we can call on to support us such as GPs, opticians, ECLOs and other charities.

Our team works closely with Teachers for the Visually Impaired (QTVIs), Rehabilitation Officers (ROVIs) - Rachel and Simon, who provide habilitation for children and rehabilitation and mobility training to adults to enable people to regain their independence after sight loss.

We achieve this alongside our wonderful army of volunteers who achieved over 1400 hours this year and the guidance from the Board of Trustees.

We also do rather a good cup of tea and cake!

*Mandy*



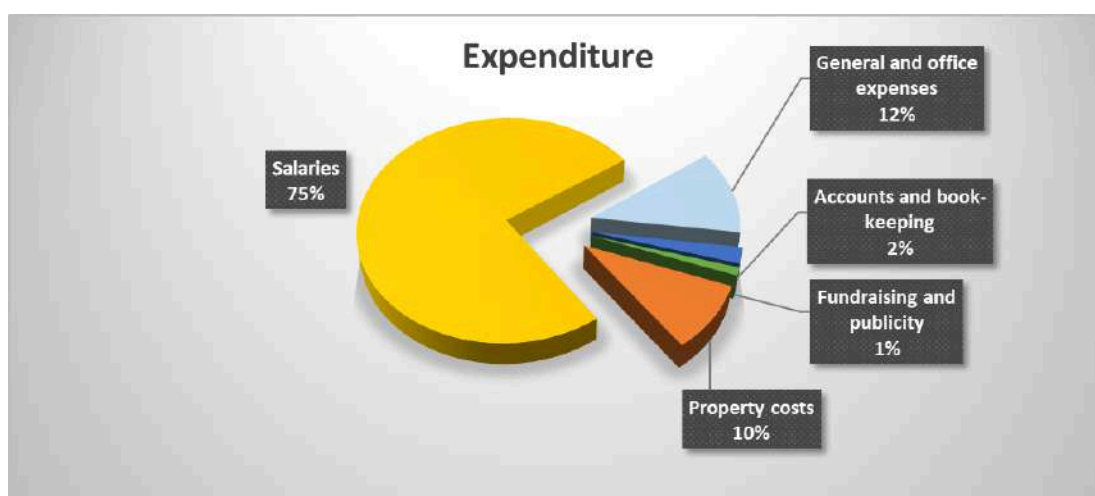


# Financial Report

## Income and expenditure

Our total income for the year was £325,233, which is approximately £16,000 lower than in 2023. This was due to a decrease in legacies received that always remain an unpredictable source of income. Our sincere thanks and gratitude go to all of those who chose to support the Society with such generosity.

Our total expenditure this year was £389,082, an increase due largely to a rise in the number of people employed by the Society. This expansion of our workforce and of the services we provide was made possible by generous funding received for specific projects.



Our staff are supported by the Trustees, all of whom are unpaid, and none of whom has claimed any expenses despite being entitled to do so. The work of the Society is also supported by a team of volunteers who give their time and energy so generously.

We are thus reporting a modest net operating deficit for 2024 of £8,000. We remain very much aware of the need to plan our finances with caution, 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, EFG Harris Allday.

At 31 March 2024, the value of this portfolio was just over £2 million, and the investment income received from it this year was £91,737. The Trustees are grateful to EFG Harris Allday for maintaining the value of the Society's investments in challenging economic conditions and volatile markets.

The Trustees believe that the Society's finances are currently sufficient to enable it to continue providing its existing services to the visually impaired people of Walsall. The Development Fund remains at £1.6million this year.

The Trustees express their grateful thanks to the Chief Executive and her dedicated team of staff and volunteers for their work during another challenging year.

A complete set of the Society's financial accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024 is available from the Society in various formats, on request. This report is a summary of the principal elements of those accounts.



*Amanda*

# Fundraising update

We are delighted to report that over the last 12 months, thanks to generous donations from Charitable Trusts and Foundations we have secured funding to deliver several of our core sight loss support services. This includes donations that have enabled us to:

- Continue our Mental Health and Wellbeing project for another year
- Fund our Community Outreach activities
- Create a new Information Officer role so that we can raise awareness and reach out to more people with visual impairment
- Increase our outreach activity with young people affected by sight loss.
- Establish a Youth Club for visually impaired children and young people



Amongst these donations, was the first year of funding from the The National Lottery Community Fund who have committed to funding our vital community outreach and new information service for 3 years, at a cost of over £200,000!

Grant funding has also enabled us to improve our facilities. Amongst this year's upgrades we have been able to:

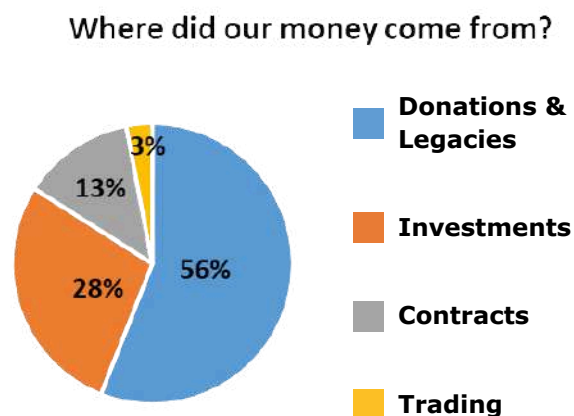


- Undertake a kitchen refurbishment
- Install new ceiling tiles
- Purchase new furniture for the day centre
- Replace the security doors at the rear of the centre
- Invest in new equipment including:
  - a driving simulation game for the Social Activity Centre
  - items of assistive technology
  - sensory toys, craft materials and console games for our Youth Group

We've also secured funding which has enabled our Community Team to put together sight loss resource 'kit bags' to support those who are newly registered with sight loss. These kit bags are tailored made for each individual and include items such as a symbol cane, liquid level indicator and large print telephone book.

We are so grateful to the many Charitable Trusts and Foundations who have supported our vital services this year. Thanks to their generous grant funding of £127,000, we have been able to achieve all of the above and a little bit more.

In total, income raised during the year 2023/24 was £325,000. This included £41,000 in legacy income, £13,000 in donations from the public, £9,000 from the sale of goods, £42,000 from contract work and £92,000 in interest from our wisely invested income.



We are extremely proud of all that we've achieved with the funds that we've generated. However, with our expanded service provision and rising costs, this figure was almost £60,000 short of the £389,000 it cost the Society to support local people with sight loss last year.

We need to ensure that we can raise as much as our services cost each year so that we can continue supporting people with sight loss for years to come. In real terms, we need to be raising nearly £1,100 every single week!

With your help we can increase our donation income, and plan for the future. There are so many ways you can support Walsall Society for the Blind. From one off and regular donations, to hosting an event or sponsored activity or getting your place of worship, club or workplace involved. There are lots of fun and simple ways to raise awareness and funds for the Society.

You could even leave a gift to Walsall Society for the Blind in your will. This is a great way to support us during your lifetime without costing you a penny right now. We have a free will writing service available until the end of 2024, ensuring that making or updating your will is easy and cost free.

If you would like more information about how you can help us to ensure future support for local people with sight loss please get in touch.



# Community



*Sarah*

I joined Walsall Society for the Blind in November 2021 as the new Community Officer. New to the world of sight loss, I was eager to build up my knowledge of how to most effectively support our clients. Within my first few weeks I shadowed our Registration officer and took over existing clients known to the society for many years, who were already receiving monthly visits.

I introduced myself and during my time in the office, made safe and well calls to clients to explain who I was and to see if they required any additional support. By completing these calls, I built up my clientele further and started arranging home visits to new clients who were registered but did not previously require support. After some weeks, I was going out on home visits on my own and started building a trusting relationship with the clients.

In the first year, I attended workshops and networked with other organisations to introduce myself.

I have faced challenges along the way and dealt with them the best way I could, using the knowledge I acquired during my time with WSB.

While working at WSB I have supported our clients in many different ways. This has ranged from:

- Having a cup of tea, chat and a listening ear
- Making referrals to
  - Adult Social Care Team
  - Occupational Therapists
  - Sensory Team
- Helping to allocate a Social Worker.

I have worked alongside Doctors' Surgeries to help support our clients in the best possible way when facing health conditions other than sight loss. I also received referrals from other organisations for clients who faced difficulties in the world of sight loss. These clients were not currently registered with a consultant but were under the eye care pathway and required support with daily living skills.

Once the referral has been received, contact will be made to arrange a face-to-face visit to complete an assessment to see how we can support further. Once the assessment has been completed, they will be registered with ourselves and their details will be uploaded to our database.

During my first year, through training I have gained knowledge to better support clients with sight loss. I will continue to liaise within the community team at Walsall Society for the Blind to signpost to the relevant person in order to obtain the best outcome.

During my first 12 months within the society there have been lots of highs and lows, I have met some amazing people along the way and I look forward to my continued journey with the society.

# Wellbeing



## **A year in the life of the Wellbeing Officer**

My name is Lisa, I am the Mental Health and Wellbeing Officer at Walsall Society for the Blind. The post is funded by The Postcode Lottery, dated April 2023-March 2024. My job role offers short term intervention for individuals who are struggling in the world of sight loss.

I support clients registered severely sight impaired, partially sighted and non-registered clients within the borough of Walsall, who require support to maintain independence and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Research has proven that vision loss can lead to poor mental health. My job is to break the cycle of isolation and build confidence which encourages positive mental health and wellbeing. Face to face support is completed through home visits, which have proved to be the key to enabling each individual to build trust. This allows them to feel confident and comfortable to open up about their wellbeing concerns.

An Initial assessment will be made between us both in order to set the goals and strategies to reduce the isolation and exclusion from the outside world.



It is important that the individual feels heard, supported and confident to implement positive actions and coping strategies in their day to day lives, even after their programme of support is concluded. Telephone contact is made to update any changes and to keep in regular contact. Through close working relationships with the council's rehabilitation team I am now able to support long cane training, allowing me to take clients out on walks within their local community. This has boosted their mental wellbeing, their physical health, increased their confidence in accessing their local community independently and reduced their isolation. I also provide low level sensory support which encourages healthy meal preparation. Circumstances have meant I have had to act as an advocate on behalf of service users who have been at crisis point. I will not relent until the issues are resolved for those I support. I am passionate about my work and no two days are the same. I look forward to my future with Walsall Society for the Blind.



# Registration



My name is Sharon and I am the Registration Officer.

If you have been struggling with deterioration of vision, it is advisable that you pop along to see your local optician. They will do an eye test and if they have any worries, they will refer you straight to the hospital for further tests. If your vision is at the point where you could be registered, the consultant will then talk you through the next steps of registration

Being registered as SSI or SI is entirely your own decision. However, becoming registered can entitle you to certain benefits, concessions, like TV licence reductions, parking permits, and travel passes. It may also make it easier for you to access local services.

Following your certification, the Consultant will then forward the CVI to us for registration. At this point, you will be given your own unique registration number, which will appear on your registration card.

A copy of your CVI will also be sent to your GP, the Department of Health and a copy is kept at the hospital. You will also receive your own copy through the post.

We will then write to you, acknowledging receipt of your CVI and telephone you within five days to arrange a home visit to see if you are struggling with anything and how we can help you.

Another reason for this is to assess whether you are interested in accessing our other services, such as:

- The Talking Newspaper and Magazine service
- Community Officer
- Social Activities Centre

You may feel at this point that you are not ready for any contact, advice or services. This again, is entirely your choice. We find that many people do not require anything at first, but we do enclose our contact number so that you are able to contact us at any time if you need to.



We work very closely with the Sensory Support Team, who are the Visual Impairment division of Social Services. They are able to offer basic living skills training such as mobility training and kitchen skills (for example preparing and cooking meals, making hot drinks etc). We also work closely with many professionals who can put things in place for you if you need more help in your home as well as out and about.



*Lisa*

# Youth Group



*Jade*

We are the Youth Club for Walsall Society for the Blind. We offer a service for young people from 0-25 and their parents/carers. I am Lisa and I have a volunteer who is also my daughter, Jade. I have another daughter who is 24, accesses this service and is registered blind.

We began by hosting Coffee Mornings in October 2023, where we invited young people and their parents/carers to come and discuss their ideas about the future of Walsall Society for the Blind. A number of them had not accessed the society since before Covid, if not earlier.

It was found that parents were looking for a support group for themselves and a safe place to share highs and lows. Young people want to meet others like themselves, and they loved the idea of getting into the community together.

We held our first meet up on December 9th where we ordered pizzas in and had the Grinch movie playing with a number of activities out on tables. Parents enjoyed staying around the table and talking to each other. Since then, we have held monthly meetings for the youth group on the last Friday of each month and we also hold a parent/carer coffee catch up once a month. In addition we started our own Facebook group where we share information and parents, carers and young people can share their successes and photos.



Our group numbers have steadily increased since the first group, with a theme for each month:

**January** we had Games Night

**February** we had Pancake and Sensory Night



**March** we held our first trip

**April** we had a tech night!

Our first trip was very successful with a trip to the local cinema to watch Kung Fu Panda 4. A few of our young people had never accessed the cinema before.



As time has passed, it is great to see friendships forming between the members of the group and the confidence levels of individual members increasing.

The young people continue to share future ideas for activities. We look forward to the group continuing to grow.

# Information Officer



*Holly*

Hello! I am your new Information Officer. My role is to reach out to the wider VI community in Walsall and ensure everyone is aware of, and able to access the support we offer.

I joined the team in June 2023. When I found out about this position I hoped it would be my chance to give back to the sight loss sector. I was born with congenital glaucoma, so have been losing my sight since birth, and was registered as severely sight impaired as a child. Throughout my life I have been very fortunate to have received support from a whole host of organisations that have allowed me to really thrive. My goal, through WSB, is to ensure that people are aware of sight loss and the support that is available to positively impact their quality of life.

In order to spread the word, I began by shadowing all members of the team, including the community team, assistive technology officer, WTN and the social activities co-ordinators. This was to ensure I could accurately promote our services and be fully aware of how we operate. It was illuminating being on the professional side of VI support and seeing the well oiled machine in action.

After this it was time for me to produce my marketing materials so I could venture out into Walsall!



I began my outreach with 2 talks, to the local rotary club and a sight loss campaigning group. My third instance of outreach (and largest to date) was the charity takeover of Walsall FC. I took the lead on organising this, along with the Fundraiser. After my initial few successes I moved onto approaching GP and health centres to run stands where I could reach out to patients in a familiar setting to bridge the gap between the centre and public.

So far I have engaged with **1906 people within 17 instances of outreach**, with a wide variety of events planned for the near future - talks, visits, awareness events and conferences.

I can definitely say the first year of my role has been exciting and has taught me so much! I look forward to seeing how my role develops and reaching as many people as I possibly can. Sight loss support is hugely important and I'm proud to be a part of the work we do at WSB.







# Talking News

Over the past 12 months Walsall Talking Newspaper has gone from strength to strength. WTN is now reaching many more listeners, branching out to the wider audience through Soundcloud & Facebook.

Our first national feedback message came in September, from IIford, Essex, giving us the thumbs up. David explained that he had cousins living in and around the Walsall area and it was good to hear the regional accent and the local news that doesn't reach his part of the country.

Our local listeners, using the memory stick service have increased too. So far, WE have welcomed 23 more listeners in the past year. Currently we send around 150 of the weekly issues.

Just last month on Soundcloud we had a wonderful 79 listeners and have received so much positive feedback and ideas from Facebook.

Training is ongoing and we are learning so much; constantly improving ways for better sound quality. Our studio is light, airy and A welcoming place to be, thanks to donations and fundraising efforts.





Guest speakers have been invited in to record their message including Dogs Trust, The NHS Breast Screening services and the West Midlands Fire Service, who whilst still on call, arrived in a fire engine and parked outside the centre, letting us know that they could be called away at any time!

On a sad note was the passing of Barry, our much loved WTN recorder and editor. He gave so much of his time to serving WTN. He was a character who is sorely missed.

We would like to say a huge Thank You to our WTN volunteers. Without them, we couldn't do what we do. They are amazing! They each have their own segment and never cease to amaze us with the research and knowledge they bring to the table.

We have expanded the Sports section; not just local football as it started out but now we report on international sports including cricket, rugby and Formula One racing. In addition, we have a Royal family section so that we can keep track of what the monarchy is doing.

We can't wait to see where WTN will take us next.

*Jenny*



*Gina*

# Social Activities



*Grace*

During the last 12 months in the Social Activity Centre, there have been lots of highs and lows, making happy memories, and cherishing memories made with those who have sadly left us.

Groups are choosing to utilise the Tree Of Life displayed in the reception, to remember members we have lost, all with their own personal messages.

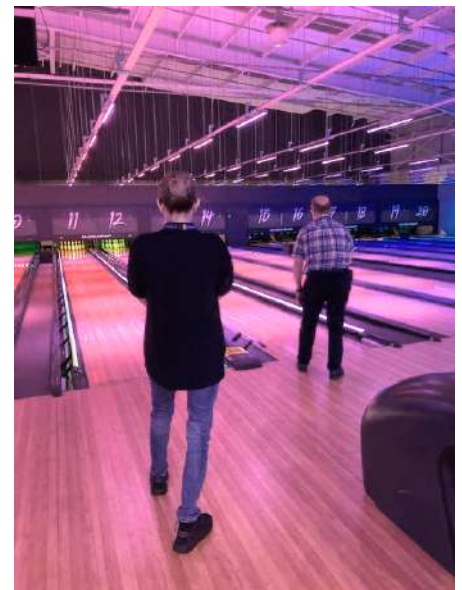
We have celebrated many special occasions with parties, meals and afternoon teas, along with lots of talented entertainers to help get us into the party mood.

Our main celebration was the accession of King Charles to the throne, where we had a Royal week.



There have been many outings, from going to local pubs for lunch, playing skittles, going for walks around the local park and going to play Ten Pin Bowling.

We have had plenty of competitions throughout the year, with tournaments taking part for all types of sports / games, including drop darts and dominoes.



Friendships have been made and connections maintained through peer support. But most importantly the mutual appreciation of cake!

Our aim is to keep the smiles and laughter going through some of the hardest times. We are here to wipe the tears away and put hope back into daily life.

We look forward to welcoming new members in the future



# Walsall FC Takeover Day



In September, we had the opportunity to collaborate with Walsall FC to host a charity takeover day of Bescot Stadium!



We hosted a blindfolded 'pin the ball in the goal' game and 'penalty shoot out' wearing simulation specs.

We hoped having fun, engaging activities would raise awareness in a light-hearted but eye-opening way for all ages in attendance.

Walsall FC also gave one of our young clients the opportunity to be a mascot for the day!



At half time, the club granted us access to speak in the three members' lounges about the services we offer and the effects of sight loss.

At the same time Holly, Dee and Mojo the guide dog also performed a pitch walk, with stadium sponsor volunteers wearing blackout blindfolds.



We planned this so the volunteers could briefly experience the disorientation of sight loss, whilst walking from the halfway line to the goal. As expected Holly and Dee - being used to their sight loss - walked straight to the goal line, with the sponsors walking in diagonal lines and eventually asking for assistance.



We are so grateful for this collaboration with Walsall FC, having the opportunity to fundraise and spread awareness in such a variety of ways in one day is invaluable.

We went away having engaged with over 6000 people and raising a massive £1,052 for the Society.



We would like to thank all of our dedicated volunteers and trustees for their support throughout the year. In total you have given us over 1,444 hours.



Thank  
you!

# Contact Details



**Walsall Society for the Blind  
Hawley House  
11 Hatherton Road  
Walsall  
WS1 1XS**



**Helpline Number  
01922 627 683**



**Charity No - 1075854  
Company Reg - 03674948**



**Email - [hawleyhouse@wsftb.co.uk](mailto:hawleyhouse@wsftb.co.uk)  
Website - [www.walsallblind.org](http://www.walsallblind.org)**



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