



Walsall Society for the Blind



2024 - 2025

A Year in Review - Issue 120

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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.

The Society employs 16 members of staff, is assisted by over 12 dedicated volunteers and provides support to 1,534 visually impaired people 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 of Walsall.

Social Activities



Talking News



Registration



Community



Mental Health and Wellbeing



Family Engagement



Assistive Tech



Information and Advice



Transcription



Training and Awareness



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

Public Benefit in Numbers

From meeting us at reception to attending awareness events, talking to our Community Officers or visiting our Social Activities Centre, this year we have supported:

over
25,000
contacts



2,878

People reach out to us through reception, by calling our helpline or visiting us in person, where we can refer you to the right team member for your needs.



9,008

Our Community Officers support people within their homes and in the community, with advice and practical support to enable them to live independently.



3,191

Our Wellbeing Officer works with people to build their confidence at their own pace as they learn to live with their sight loss and trust their capabilities.



434

Our Assistive Technology Officer works with people to assess what aids could be most beneficial, from electronic magnifiers to readers.



250

We welcome visitors into our Social Activity groups every week day through the year, as well as hosting The Walsall Blind Carpet Bowls Team!



2,235

Through our Youth and Family Engagement we run monthly social activities for young people 0-25 years, as well as peer support for their guardians.



1,086

Our Information Officer can offer guidance, lived experience talks, information stands and awareness events in conjunction with the community team.



60

We offer short term loans of electronic assistive aids, so people can find out over a period of time, if an aid is helpful before buying it themselves.



2,452

As well as supporting our current clients at the centre, we offered further placements to potential new visitors.



6,791

We record and distribute a weekly talking magazine and monthly talking magazine, covering local and national news.



2,120

We offer transcription into braille, large print and audio. As well as sending seasonal brailled cards to all of our members.

Directors and Trustees / Legal and Administrative Information

Chairman

John Cooke

Vice Chairman

David Smith

Directors / Trustees

Richard Meere

Laurence Shore (Resigned 30/09)

Julie Harris

Elizabeth Smith

Kevin Merchant

Timothy Clift

Amara Leyya Ismail-El-Banna

Stephanie Neal (Co-opted)

Chief Executive Officer

Amanda Reed

Legal and Administrative

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. 03674948.

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

Chief Executive Officer's Report

Walsall Society for the Blind (WSB) has offered services to visually impaired people throughout the Borough for 140 years. We are the leading provider of specialist advice and support, with services for adults and children, providing face to face assessments, telephone advice, home visiting and mental health and wellbeing. We also have dedicated technical support, specialist aids and equipment, social groups, a talking newspaper/magazine service and dedicated youth group.

So, as we enter our 140th year, we celebrate our history and look forward to our future.

From our humble beginnings in 1885 to today, the changes have been immense and yet in some cases, remain the same. The needs of the visually impaired community in Walsall continue to shape what we do today.



Our History

9th November **1885**

The Walsall Branch Society for the Home Teaching of the Blind was established. With 58 people on the register and a yearly cost of £88/15 shillings/10 pence.

1st October **1935**

The Blind Institute on Hatherton Road was opened. Its mission: “to concern itself with the care of the unemployable blind and social amenities available to them”. With 140 people on the register and a yearly cost of £4,199/17 shillings/11 pence.

13th October **1987**

Hawley House was officially opened by Princess Anne. The aim of the centre was “to help a blind or partially sighted person find his or her individual way in life, and to provide a facility where instruction and training will be available in methods of overcoming the effects of blindness in the form of social rehabilitation, mobility and orientation, means of communication and recreational activities, together with information, advice and access to specialist resources and equipment”. With 733 people on the register and a yearly cost of £32,477.

We aim to deliver our services with empathy, experience and expertise in order to meet the needs of the visually impaired community in Walsall. We believe in face to face support when people need it the most, offering care, understanding and guidance. With over 1500 people now registered, this year's delivery comes at a cost of £454,273.

I would like to thank all the staff at Walsall Society for the Blind, who work so hard every day, working for and with people affected by sight loss and their families. Also, our volunteers for their commitment and ongoing support.

I wish to pay tribute as well, to the former Chief Executive, Dennis Mace, who passed away this year. Who through his energy, passion and clear commitment, helped make Hawley House become a reality and what it is today.

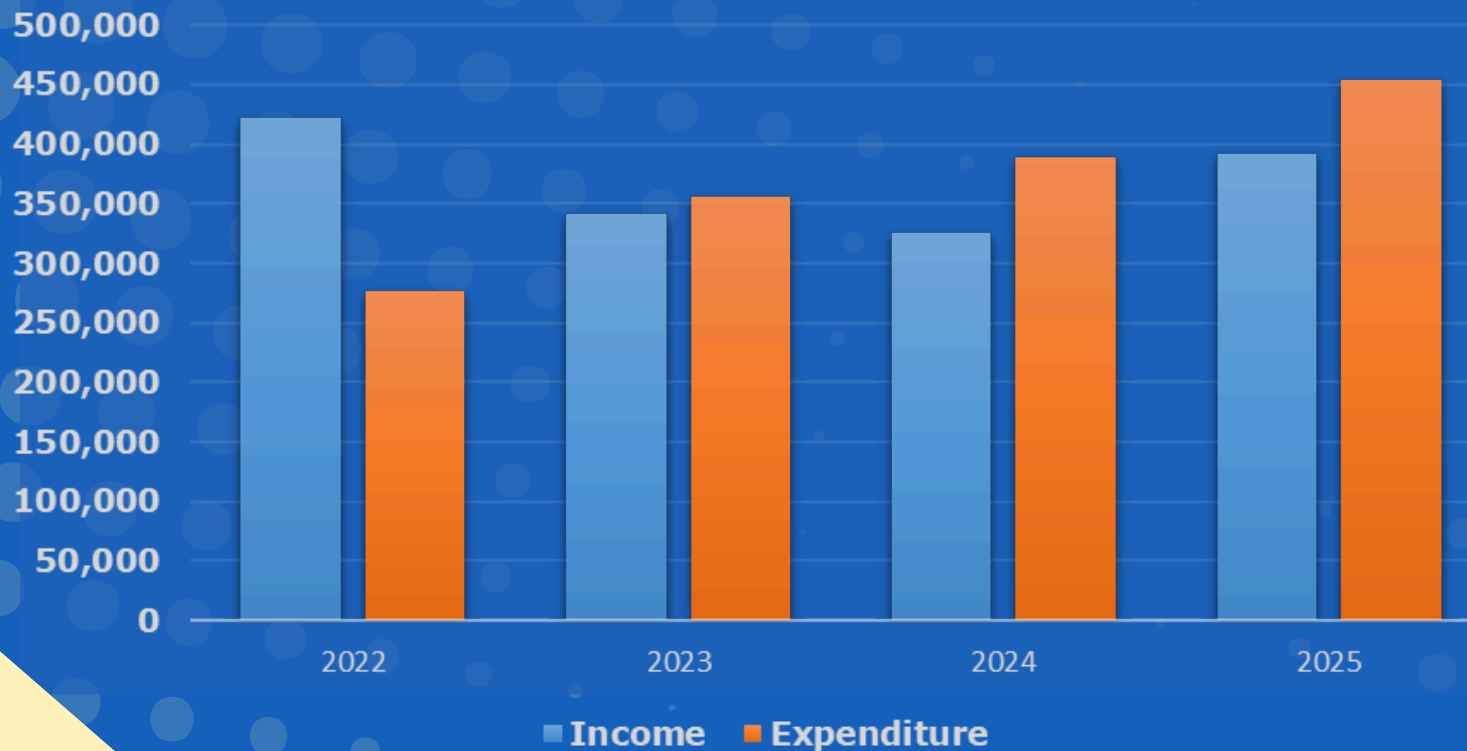
So, as this year comes to an end, we celebrate our 140th Birthday. We continue to strive to deliver excellent services for all those affected by sight loss in Walsall, changing and adapting to ensure we meet the needs of the visually impaired within the Borough of Walsall today and for the years ahead.

Financial Report

A complete set of the Society's financial accounts for the year ended 31 March 2025 is available from the Society in various formats, on request. This is a summary of the principal elements of those accounts.

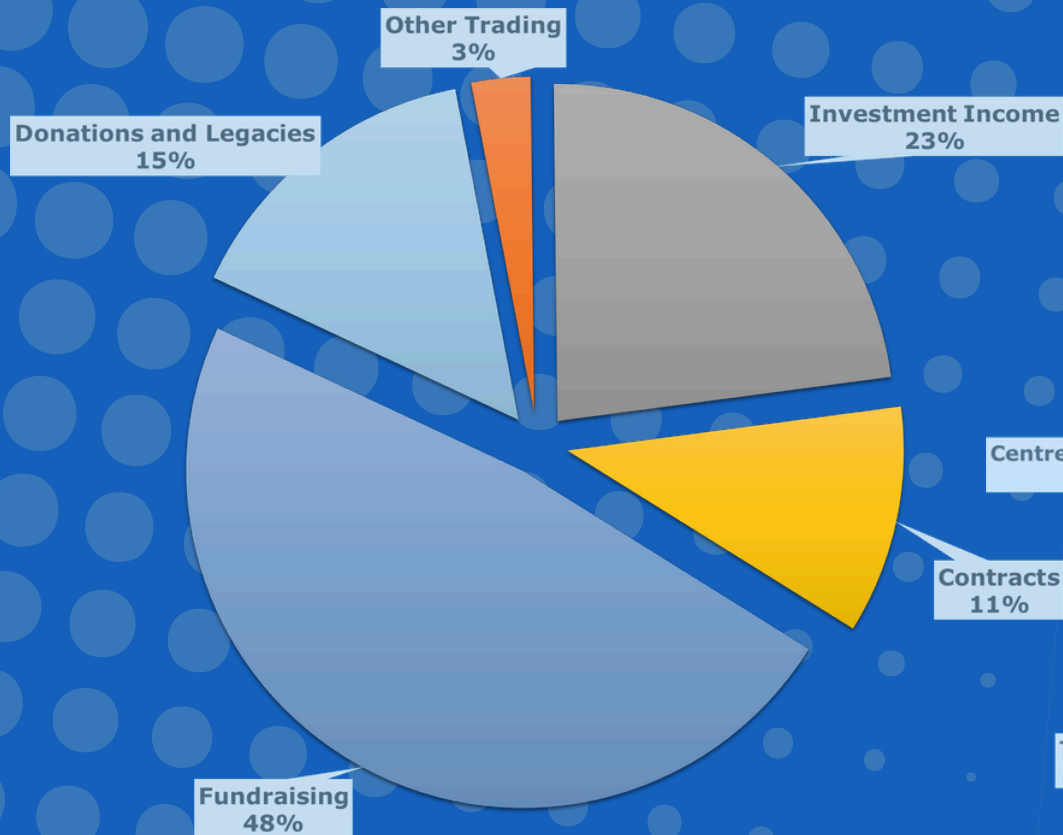
Income and Expenditure

We are reporting a deficit of £38,000 for this financial year.



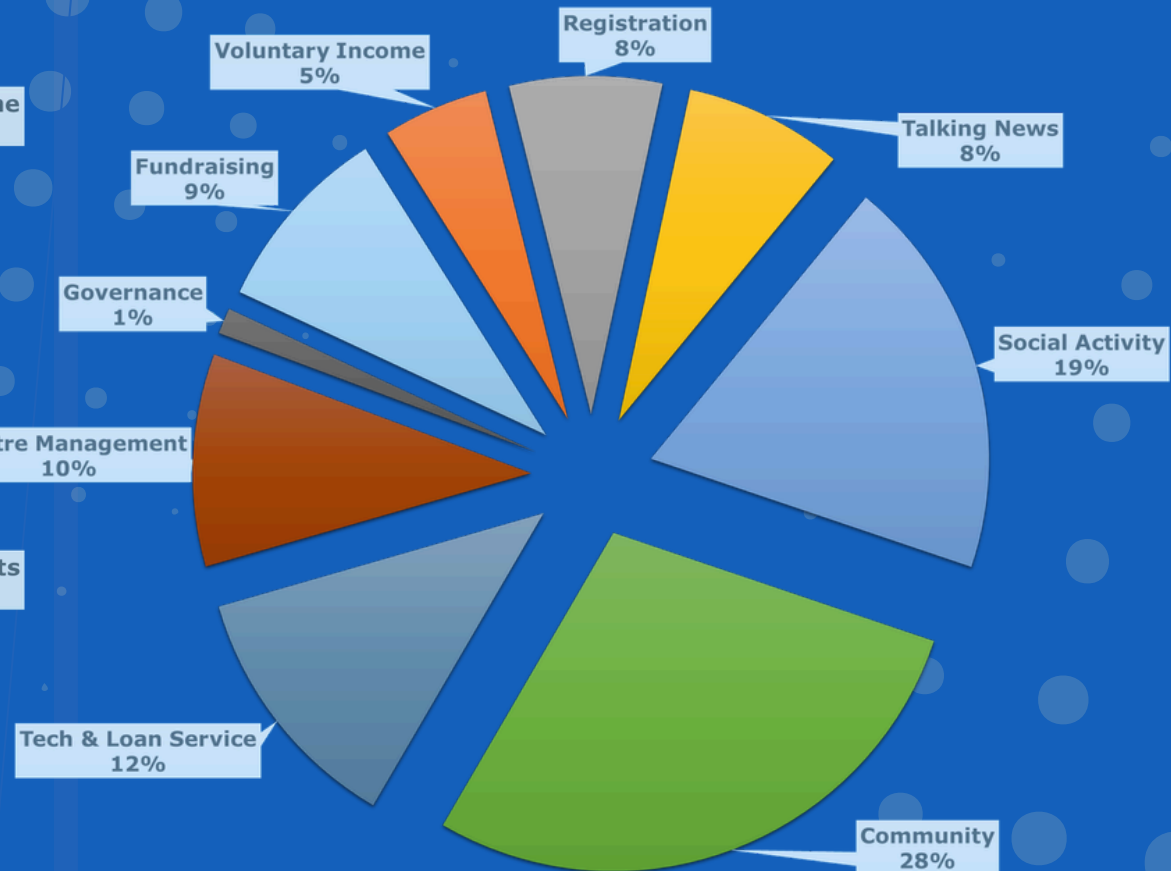
Our Trustees are satisfied that the Society's financial resources are adequate for the continued provision of its core services for the foreseeable future.

Where the money comes from?



Almost half of our income (48%) is raised by our fundraiser tirelessly applying for grants. Our sincere thanks and gratitude go to all of those who chose to support the Society with such generosity.

Where we spend our money?



When we receive grants, they are often for specific projects or campaigns. The rest of our income is divided between our services, as pictured above.

Fundraising

I am pleased to report that despite challenging financial times and increased competition for funding, this year was our best yet in terms of trust fundraising success. Through our pro-active fundraising applications, we secured £187,000 of income from Charitable Trusts and Foundations, bringing the total generated during the last 5 years to over £600k.

We are so grateful to the many Charitable Trusts and Foundations who have supported our vital services this year - thank you!

Donations have enabled us to:

- Fund our vital community outreach service for a second year
- Continue to deliver our Mental Health and Wellbeing support programme
- Fund the second year of our new information service; helping us to raise awareness and reach out to more people with visual impairment
- Continue to develop our Youth Club and parent support activity for children and young people with sight loss
- Partially fund our daily social activities and peer support

We are delighted that the National Lottery Community Fund has continued to support our outreach activity for a second year and are pleased to report that we have been awarded a new three year grant from BBC Children in Need towards our work with those under 18 who are living with sight loss in Walsall.

Grant funding has also enabled us to:

- Upgrade and expand our range of assistive technology and magnification equipment available for demonstration and loan purposes
- Purchase two magnification kit bags hosting a range of handheld devices which are now available for our team to take out on community home visits
- Create a sensory garden and sheltered outside space for our clients to enjoy
- Carry out an audio visual upgrade to enhance our service users' experience in our Social Activity Centre.

Last year it cost almost £1,244 per day to run our sight loss support services; and next year our costs are expected to be even higher. Whilst our trust fundraising and investments are performing brilliantly, they are simply unable to keep pace with the growing needs of those we support.

You can help us change that. As we celebrate 140 years of delivering sight loss support across the Walsall Borough, we want to ensure that we're around to support our visually impaired residents for many years to come. With your help we can increase our donation income, and plan for the future.

From one off and regular donations, to hosting an event or sponsored activity. There are lots of fun and simple ways to raise awareness and funds for the Society with your family, friends and colleagues.

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.

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.

Registration, Community and Wellbeing Officer

Our Community Team delivers a wide range of support tailored to the needs of our visitors and clients, and is made up of (pictured left to right) Sarah, the Community Officer, Sharon, the Registration Officer, Lisa, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Officer, and Dan, the Assistive Technology Officer.



Visiting your local optician for an eye examination is recommended if you feel there has been a deterioration of sight or a sudden change in vision. The optician will refer you to the hospital and you will be invited for further diagnostic tests. If the consultant feels that registration is necessary they will discuss your eye condition with you and give you some leaflets to take away.

Becoming registered severally sight impaired (Blind) or Sight impaired (partially sighted) is purely your own decision. Sometimes a more detailed explanation and a little more time is needed to understand the process of being registered. If you decide it is what you want they will talk you through the next steps of registration and answer any questions you may have.

Sharon, Registration Officer will receive a copy of the certificate (CVI) at the Society and contact will be made. This is usually done by letter within five days of receiving the CVI. Becoming registered may entitle you to discounts which include a 50% concession on your TV licence, parking permits and travel passes. A copy of the CVI is sent to your GP, the Department of Health and a copy will be kept on file at the hospital. Once registration is received, you are put on the register and all personal details are uploaded to our data base with your consent and a unique number is issued. This number is transferred onto the yellow registration card and given with a copy of your CVI during the face to face visit.

A discussion then takes place for Sharon to assess the level of support needed and to inform you of our current services. This assessment allows Sharon to fully understand your needs when living in the world of sight loss and to refer to the relevant people within our organisation. Data protection forms are also completed during this visit. Kit bags are issued and symbol cane if required. Referrals are then made to either Lisa, Sarah or Dan.



Mental health and Wellbeing, Lisa funded by Fight for Sight 2024-2025

When a referral is received from a team member, contact is made to introduce Lisa and see if support is still required. If so, we arrange a suitable date and time for the visit to take place at home. This allows you to feel more at ease and relaxed. An initial assessment takes place focused on the level of support required and the desired outcomes. Support ranges from low level kitchen skills, accessing the local community, attending low vision aid appointments and working alongside the rehabilitation team, implementing long cane mobility training. Putting these skills to use will build up their confidence, implementation has proven to help with the mental health and wellbeing of the individual as they feel their life is getting back on track before sight loss took over.

Sight loss can have a big impact on a person's mental health. It can lead to a feeling of loneliness and social isolation. Individuals can feel worried and anxious about their future and how they will cope with the changes associated with sight loss. This one-to-one tailored support usually takes between 12 and 15 weeks to complete.

Once this is complete and they are using the skills sufficiently and confidently, a referral is made to Sarah for a friendly face and a listening ear, details are uploaded to our database with your consent and a unique number is issued.

Sarah will be informed of all the support that has already been implemented, which is documented on the database. Sarah will make telephone contact to introduce herself and to see if the support is still required. If it is then a home visit will be made. This support is usually done fortnightly which allows both to build positive relationships and encourages people to share and offload any worries or concerns they may have. Being a community officer can be challenging but also rewarding. Support varies depending on the needs of the individual but a lot of the time a friendly face is all they need. If you feel your sight is deteriorating, and Sarah is supporting you she can refer back to the relevant organisations for reassessment.

Dan can also support you in accessing assistive aids, such as electronic magnifiers, readers, talking phones and cocoon glasses. Dan can visit you at home, or within the centre and will work with you to find out what aids would be most helpful with your level of sight. Once any equipment has been decided upon, Dan can support you to purchase it, or you can borrow it from us on a short term loan in order to check that the equipment will be useful to you on a long term basis. Once you have your assistive tech Dan can provide training and assistance while you learn how to use your devices, until you are confident in your skills. He is always available for any advice on electronic and manual aids, and it always happy to help.

The team work well together and understand the level of support needed for each individual. This is done through a person centred approach.

Youth Group

We have been so busy with our young people and families this year! With **2** trips, **5** sensory and creative evenings, **2** very energetic evenings and a tech night! This is alongside our guardian support sessions, where parents and guardians can grab a coffee and seek peer support. We were also fortunate to get to visit Priestly Smith Visually Impaired (VI) Specialist School, to raise awareness of our support services and social activities to the students, parents and carers enrolled there.



2,235

We have engaged with, and reached out to so many young people and families through messages and phone calls.

Between our sensory activity nights and trips, we've had a lot of fun, and strengthened our connections with the young VI community of Walsall.

83



Youth Activities

April

Tech Night

May

Lego Night

July

Karaoke

August

Weston Super-Mare

September

Wellness Evening

October

Pumpkin Carving

November

Winter Crafts

January

Winter Disco

February

Cinema Trip

March

Slime Workshop



Social Activity Olympics

This year we have run an Olympics worth of tournaments!



Golf

1st John J
2nd David
3rd Shelley



Skittles

1st Robert
2nd Fiona
3rd Graham



Dominoes

1st Tony
2nd Barry
3rd Gurmail



Drop darts

1st Beryl
2nd Joe
3rd Martin

We're excited for our next round of tournaments, who knows what other sporting events we might introduce?

Trips

We've been on a lot of trips out this year!

From local outings to Walsall Arms to play skittles, Boundary Mills for a spot of shopping, to meals and bowling.

Then we have our tech adventures to Sight Village, the TNF Annual Conference and Visionary Annual Conference.

Round that all off with three coach trips, where we travelled to Trentham Gardens, Blackpool and Weston Super-Mare!

We can't wait for next year's adventures.



A Very Merry WSB

Christmas this year brought some exciting changes to the year's usual planned activities.

This year we decided to go big with a merged festive meal. This gave all the groups a chance to meet each other and integrate within circles they wouldn't normally meet.

Thanks to 'The Brewers Fayre' who supported our festive meal, we even had a visit from Santa!

Next came our Christmas Party, which was held at 'The Crossing' Walsall. This time we invited our fantastic supportive volunteers to join in with the festivities. Thanks to the well-organised efforts of all involved, the afternoon went without a hitch and it didn't go unnoticed.



With both days being a success with clients and staff, we are looking forward to planning the festive year ahead!

SENSORY GARDEN

In early spring we put out a call to the local gardening community to help us create a brand new sensory garden for our visitors to enjoy.



Thanks to the B&Q and BUPA Foundations we were granted funding to bring our botanical dreams to life!

With the help of our volunteer gardener Yoke, we have a glorious garden brimming with an array of seasonal flora to bloom throughout each season!



WSB140

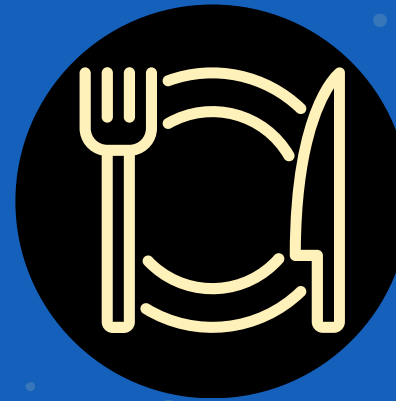
Next year is going to be a very exciting one as we mark our 140th anniversary!

From humble beginnings as an Institute for the Blind, to the community support hub that we are now. Through 3 centuries, 14 decades, World Wars and a national lockdown. We are so grateful for everyone that has supported us and utilized our services, as we have developed and grown over the years.

Between our volunteers, staff, trustees, visitors, clients and donors, everything we have achieved, and the delivery of support to thousands of visually impaired people in Walsall, wouldn't have been possible without you.



We will be launching our anniversary year in November and following this up with a full calendar of events and campaigns spanning the centre, social media and beyond!



Here is a teaser of some of the events and campaigns we have planned.

We will be announcing our anniversary events very soon, stay tuned for the details and let us know if you would like to get involved.

Thank You

**1,148 hours of
volunteering**

**150 hours of carpet
bowls support**

**25 Tea and Tech
sessions**

**430 hours of
newsreading**

**568 hours in the
social activity centre**

12 volunteers



**We would like to say a huge thank you to all of our clients,
staff, trustees, donors and volunteers for their loyalty,
hard work and dedication throughout the year.**

Contact Details



Charity Information

Charity No - 1075854

Company Reg - 03674948



Helpline Number

01922 627 683



Address

Hawley House, 11 Hatherton Road

Walsall

WS1 1XS



Contact Details

Email - hawleyhouse@wsftb.co.uk

Website - www.walsallblind.org



Social Media

Facebook [WalsallSocietyfortheBlind](https://www.facebook.com/WalsallSocietyfortheBlind)

