



Oxfordshire
Association for the Blind

Newsletter

February 2021

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'OAB' to
70460 to
donate £5

In Conversation with Elena Piras:
traditional Scottish folk singer

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Bradbury Lodge is temporarily closed.



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Director's message



Hello everyone and welcome to the February edition of the OAB newsletter. I'm looking back at

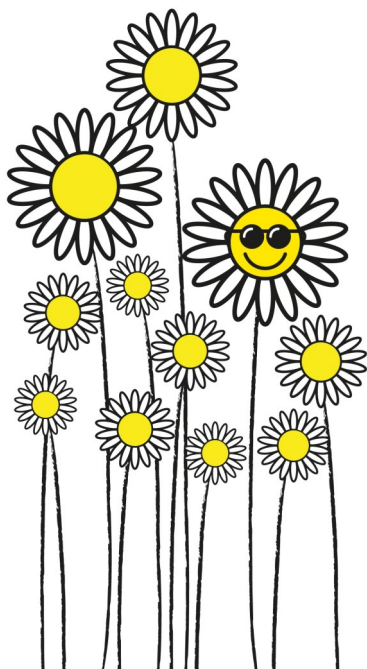
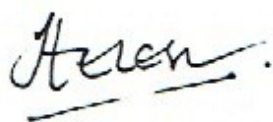
some of my previous messages and noting that I said that,

whatever difficulties we face, we must give our best and not be beaten. And now, suddenly, it's time to follow my own advice!

I'm really sad to tell you that this will be my last message as Director. I know, I have only been here for just over a year (and what a year!) and had intended to continue for several more years to come.

However, in the past couple of months some health issues have overtaken me and, to cut a long story short, I have to have some surgery shortly. Although the prognosis is good, it will take some time to recover, and OAB really needs a Director in full health and with a lot of energy as we emerge from this long period of lockdown. So, with great regret I have to tell you that I am standing down from my post, to allow the Trustees to find my successor. I believe very strongly in the importance and value of the work of OAB and shall be following its progress with great interest.

I cannot leave without saying a huge thank you to all my colleagues on our small staff team, who have been amazing in their support and commitment, to the Board of Trustees for their stalwart support, and to the super team of volunteers of every kind for their loyalty and hard work. I wish you all the very best for the future. Helen.



Message from the Chair of Trustees - Guy Lawfull

On behalf of all the Trustees and Staff at OAB I wish you well, Helen, for a strong recovery. I also want to thank you for all the hard work that you have put in since joining OAB; I know that Covid has frustrated many of the plans you had. We will greatly miss you and your ideas and hope that we can take many of them forward to fruition once the county is on the other side of the pandemic. Once again, thank you for your invaluable contribution to OAB.

Looking to the future of our organisation, the Trustees are hoping that the process of appointing a new Director won't take too long. We believe that we will be able to make an announcement on this well ahead of publication of the next newsletter. So, you may hear the news through one of our other channels, for example our website (oxeyes.org.uk) or on our social media pages (Facebook and Twitter). If you don't have access to these, you will definitely hear about progress in the June newsletter.

In the meantime, please be assured that all of the staff and volunteers are working tirelessly

from their homes to provide you with the best service possible during the pandemic. It is tricky for all of us, but I know that we have a very caring group of people here at OAB and I applaud all of their hard work during this difficult time.

I wish every one of our readers the best for the upcoming months and hope that you can stay safe and well. Please enjoy the rest of this newsletter.

Children & Young People's Update

By Laura Finnis

How difficult this Coronavirus pandemic period is for us all – it is like a perseverance test!

However, I do think - and I know many of you agree with me as I have spoken to you - that it is especially hard on young people. Some of the youngest ones do not yet have the ability to understand all the changes to their lives and the older ones are far too aware of the significant impact it is going to have on theirs. For some it has already had a devastating effect.

It is wonderfully encouraging to see how the families we are in contact with are keeping calm and carrying on in such challenging times. Some are juggling full-time

jobs, childcare and home-learning. Some parents are working on the NHS frontline. Feedback confirms it is a struggle. It is so much more difficult than the first lockdown as it's cold and dark and winter is hard enough without lockdown restrictions. But it is a great credit to parents and carers that the children and young people I have seen online at various activities have been happy, fun and funny – exactly as they always are.

I am really missing seeing the children, their siblings and parents in person at various events, just as I am sure you miss the information about and photos of them doing another crazy activity. My support is completely on the telephone and online at the moment. There will be a couple of activities online during half-term so it will be good to catch up with some of the children.

Thank you for your continued support of our Children and Young People's work. Please keep these children and their families in your hearts and minds during this lockdown. We will be back with news of crazy – and educational – activities before too long I am certain. I might go crazy myself if we aren't!

One good piece of news (well, we need one!) is that we now have a dedicated CYP webpage on the

website which will hopefully encourage more families to get in touch and join us. Go over to www.oxeyes.org.uk to have a look.

Horticultural Outings

By Mark Upton

We're really excited to be making plans with Cutteslowe Horticultural Therapy Centre for a regular group meeting, exploring, plants, potting, working an allotment and everything green, plus obviously a chance to meet others! We are planning a taster session to look to forming a regular group; there will be a small charge but also transport is available from OAB's Bradbury Lodge. If you are interested get in touch with us to find out more.

5 Ways to Wellbeing

By Laura Finnis

Let's face it, this last year or so has really tested our perseverance – we all need to focus on how to maintain our physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. The NHS and the charity Mind have come up with a model which can really help us – it's composed of five simple ideas:

- Connect

- Be Active
- Learn
- Take Notice
- Give

We are offering a chance to simply talk through these ideas and discuss how they can help us. Hopefully, this will make us all think of what we can do to keep ourselves as well as we can.

Join me for informal group phone sessions to look at these ideas together. One hour a week over 5 weeks starting **Friday 9th April at 11am**. [Get in touch to find out more.](#)

Covid-19 Vaccinations

By Mark Upton

Have you had your vaccination yet? If so, let us know your experiences. Many of our clients who we have spoken to have found it to be a very accessible and friendly experience. Please do take the following into consideration:

- You will never be asked to pay for a vaccination.
- You will be contacted when it is your turn.
- You can ask for support with transport. Talk to your GP surgery to find out more.

Chicken and Vegetable Soup



By James Hart (VI Client)

A simple homemade chicken and vegetable soup, - what you can do after your roast chicken on a Sunday and not waste any of it.

Why not make a nice hot warming winter soup.

Ingredients needed

One chicken with bones
Two onions
6 cloves
3 carrots
1 parsnip
1 head of celery
3 pints water
Salt and pepper

Equipment

1 large pan
Blender

How to make

1. Put chicken with bones in pan
2. Cover with water
3. Chop all veg up into small bits and add to chicken and water
4. Leave one onion whole and insert the cloves into this.
5. Add good pinch of salt and cracked pepper.
6. Put on stove bring to boil, then turn down to simmer slowly for about an hour, so all the chicken breaks up and veg is nicely cooked.
7. Once cooked, remove all bones of chicken with spoon making sure all are removed.
8. Add all chicken stock and veg into a blender and blend to a nice smooth soup.
9. Serve with nice warm rustic bread and English butter.

Let us know if you enjoyed making this soup. James is an accomplished chef specialising in events and functions and continues to keep making delicious food despite dealing with vision loss. Look out for more of his recipes in further newsletters and on our website.



OAB services during Covid-19

By Mark Upton

I wanted to update you on what we are offering at this time of lockdown and uncertainty: although our Resource Centre is closed and we are not able to see you in person, we are still working hard to provide help and support if you need it. Currently we are:

- At the end of the telephone to provide information and advice or to just chat. Call our helpline on 01865 725595: if you don't get through straight away please leave a message and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.
- Sending out equipment. We can still send equipment in the post, or arrange for our suppliers to send items direct to you.
- Providing technology assistance. We are still able to support your tech needs over the phone and online; whether you just want some advice about using the internet or are struggling with your smartphone, we are here to help.
- Providing a regular friendly phone call. If you are feeling isolated, struggling with not seeing many people, we can arrange to call you on a regular basis to chat, read the news, or do a quiz.
- Providing support and activities for children and families. This is a tough time for parents and families with home schooling. Our Laura is on the end of the phone and in regular contact with many families.
- Counselling sessions. We have Jill, our qualified counsellor, on the end of the phone able to provide sessions.
- Campaigning for accessible streets. There have been many changes to our streets over the past few months. OAB has been involved with many discussions and we are campaigning to ensure the streets of Oxfordshire are safe for visually impaired people.

For any support, information and advice contact us:

T: 01865 725595

E: info@oxeyes.org.uk

An interview with folk singer Elena Piras



By Mark Upton

I spoke on the telephone with Elena, one of our clients, who is a professional musician.

Tell us a little bit about yourself?

My name is Elena Piras, and I'm a folk musician. I live in Charlbury but I was born in Sardinia and moved to the UK when I was 18 to attend the Royal National

College for the Blind in Hereford. I was born visually impaired and I'm registered as severely sight impaired/blind.

How did you get started with music and what style do you play?

I started singing when I was 7, and learnt to play the guitar when I was 11; by 14 I was leading a group of volunteers singing

in the local hospital. I really enjoyed this although it was a lot of work. I then joined various choirs and after playing several weddings I decided to start professionally. It was this that helped me to afford the plane ticket to the UK.

Now I specialise in Scottish traditional folk music, which all started when I arrived in Britain: I overheard someone listening to some and I said “one day I’m going to sing this” and he told me “no way”, so I was determined to tackle it! After 11 years I didn’t do much about it but in 2005 I was caught up in the 7/7 London bombings and I lost about 60% of my hearing, this shook my life up, so I eventually decided to move to the highlands of Scotland where I rekindled my love of the music.

What barriers do you come across as a visually impaired person? And how have you adapted to overcome them?

The main barrier I find is people’s prejudice; people make assumptions of what I can or can’t do so they don’t give me work. I have to fight quite hard to get myself taken seriously, which is a real shame.

What advice would you give to other visually impaired musicians?

If you enjoy it, keep going, get all the support you need to carry on and stick with it.

How has OAB helped you with your visual impairment?

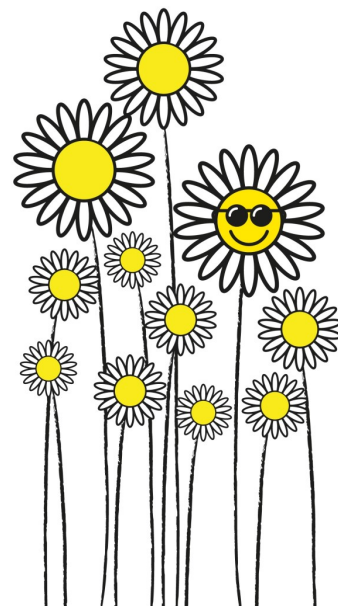
The biggest support you gave me was through your counselling service; I found this extremely helpful boosting my confidence. I’ve also found it so helpful having support with my smartphone and other equipment.

You have a new album out - can you tell us a bit about it?

This one is a collection of songs I’ve learnt over the years and I’ve picked out my favourites; most of them are traditional folk music with a mixture of folk covers that I enjoy.

And where can people find out more about you and purchase your new album?

They can go to my website: www.elenapiras.com or search for me on social media. The album is called “Where the Wind Blows” and can be downloaded from Bandcamp or purchased from Elena’s website.



Unlimited Oxfordshire

By Diane Sider (Unlimited Oxfordshire)

Unlimited Oxfordshire is a local charity supporting disabled people and their carers. The charity is run by disabled volunteers and membership is free. It was founded in 2010 with the aim of giving a voice to disabled people across the county whatever their impairment. We consult regularly with Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council and other relevant groups such as Healthwatch. Our next main project is to survey disabled people living in Headington to feed into 'Headington Futures', which is an initiative being run by OCC and Headington Action to find ways that Headington can be improved.

We are keen to know how disabled people have been coping during the Covid lockdowns and get opinions on access and facilities in Headington generally. The survey will be conducted by telephone; it will be confidential and any conclusions will be presented anonymously. If you would be willing to answer some questions and share your experiences and opinions please

contact Diane Sider, Trustee, on 01865 308746 or email

diane@sider.co.uk.

Thank you!

Alternative BAME Network

By Haseeb Ahmad

A new network has been set up aimed at reaching out to Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) people who are Visually Impaired living in the UK. The group is called the Alternative BAME VI Network. Its purpose is to provide a space for BAME VI people to come together virtually and provide each other with support, advice and a voice with which to speak to others responsible for delivering services to visually impaired people across all communities. It is a highly inclusive group that welcomes friends and families affected by sight loss from BAME communities. We will be holding regular Zoom chats, learning about the lived experiences of its members and interviewing inspirational visually impaired people from BAME and other ethnic backgrounds with a view to creating a really exciting and positive vibe that will leave people feeling great about themselves and what they can achieve.

So please join us for something different, alternative as the name suggests and let's together create a social movement which maximises accessibility for all communities. Please contact Haseeb.ahmad@btinternet.com or follow the group on twitter @alternative-VI.

Video Calling

By Nathan Tree

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, video calling has become a very popular way to keep in touch with friends and family. But what does it involve? And how accessible is it?

There are many ways to connect with people via video, and even if you cannot see the person on the screen, they may want to see you. There are many tech companies that have made their own ways to do it and here are some of the most popular ones.

Facetime – Built into all Apple devices like iPhone and iPads, this App is rather intuitive to users and but only works between Apple devices. You can try asking “Siri, make a facetime video call” to contact someone who has an Apple device.

Zoom – an independent online platform that can be used on most devices. On a computer there are

lots of keyboard shortcuts that make it very accessible.

Teams – A Microsoft-made product that works on most devices. It can also facilitate group calls on many devices and is popular for online presentations.

WhatsApp – Allows you to make video calls between devices using their phone number.

Facebook – Make video calls to other facebook users.

These can all be accessed from most devices with a camera and an internet connection and are generally simple to set up and use.

There are also some devices specifically set up for making video calls such as the Amazon Echo Show. This device consists of a screen and a speaker and can call other users very simply. You can even use their ‘Alexa’ function to call someone using only your voice.

Dolphin computers have now also put video calls into their GuideConnect platform that is designed specifically for blind and visually impaired people; they offer online demonstrations if you want to know more.

To find out more or if you have any questions please get in touch with me via the details on [page 2](#).

Becoming a member of OAB

All our services and support at OAB are free of charge: this is to ensure that there are no barriers to accessing the support you need. In your newsletter you will find a membership application form. Membership is £10 a year or £250 to become a life member. We wanted to highlight below why some people choose to be a member of OAB.

"I received so much support from OAB I wanted to join and be a part of the organisation" -
Barbara

"I find everyone at OAB supportive, kind and friendly. Through it I have been introduced to many activities which I would otherwise might not have been aware of. Because of this support and help I decided to become a life member a few years ago." -
Savita

"My visual impairment is for life so it made sense to me to become a lifelong member of OAB. It may sound odd but as a life member I feel like part of a strong and supportive family."
- Julie

Join today, by filling in the enclosed form, or [contacting us](#) to find out more

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