

# **Plymouth Advisory Team for Sensory Support (PATSS)**

## **Visual Impairment Team**

**SEND Service**, Education, Participation & Skills, Plymouth City Council, Ballard House, Plymouth PL1 3BJ

### **Newsletter 2023-24**

We have had another great year working with our children and young people and their families and settings. We would like to take this opportunity to welcome our new families, provide information about upcoming events and training and share some of the things we have been up to this year. We have also added some useful links to the end of this newsletter.



### **The team**

For those new to the Sensory Support Team, the VI team is made up of:

- 2 full-time Qualified Teachers of Visually Impaired Children (QTVIs)



Jude Davies



Louise Woodhead

- 2 part-time Habilitation Specialists



Sue Stevens



Karen Price.

We currently support 150 children and young people between the ages of 0 and 19 in a range of settings across the city. Most of our children and young people have a Certificate of Visual Impairment and / or an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP).

### How we work with children and young people

- Meet younger children with their families to support them to understand their vision and how they are using it to access learning through play and the environment
- Meet with older children in school or at home to talk to them about their vision and how it affects them in any part of their life
- Listen to what they say about the things they find easy or hard and any ideas, feelings or thoughts they have
- Help other people to understand their visual impairment and how it affects them
- Discuss with parents and teachers about how they think their visual impairment is affecting them
- Come into their class(es) to watch them, their teachers and anyone else around them to see if anyone can do anything to help them understand, be included and support them better
- Monitor how well they are accessing learning and interacting with others by watching them, talking to people around them and asking them
- Talk to other people who may work with them already or who may be able to give them more help
- Support with transitions including familiarisation visits, independent travel, making sure settings are as visually accessible as possible and completing transition plans.
- Teach them specialist skills such as touch typing, braille, using specialist equipment, using a cane
- Train the adults around them to make them more aware of what they can do to make sure they are included at home and in lessons and understand as much as possible
- Help them to become a happy, confident and successful person

### Training

We have continued to deliver training centrally (allowing us to bring staff and families together from different settings) as well as in nursery settings, schools and colleges.

We have delivered lots of training this year including:

- Visual Impairment Awareness Training
- Modifying resources
- An online self-study training module
- Staff training for new students
- Peer awareness sessions in schools
- Braille training for support staff and parents
- Training to use access technology

- Mobility training, including how to support students using a cane / sighted guide training

Feedback has been positive, and we have continued to notice the impact of our training when visiting settings who have accessed one of our courses. We will continue to offer a range of training in the next academic year and have made some changes to content in response to your feedback. **Please see our attached calendar for training and events for 2024-25.**

### Events for children, young people and families

#### Early Years Sensory Picnic



We enjoyed a sensory picnic with a few of our families with pre-school children who are deaf and/or visually impaired in June. The weather was kind to us and those who came along said they really enjoyed it!



The sound balls, bubbles and parachute were a hit! Events like this also provide an opportunity for families to meet other families in the city.



### Arts and Crafts with primary-aged children



Another big hit with our primary school children were our 2 arts and crafts days. There were lots of amazing bugs and creatures made with egg boxes and collage materials, as well as some beautiful prints.

Lots of the children said they loved it and liked meeting new friends!



### Bowling with secondary-aged students



A fun afternoon with some of our older (and quite competitive!) students at Tenpin Plymouth.

Most of the young people we talk to after they leave school say that the most valuable thing that helped them accept their visual impairment and develop confidence was meeting other people with visual impairments.

We have responded to feedback from our children and young people to offer two events for all school-aged children in the next academic year instead of one. Please also let us know if you have any suggestions for additional training and events.

### Events during Summer Break

Our Habilitation specialists have some exciting events planned for the summer holidays. We are having an explore a bus event on **Wednesday 31st July**. Primary School aged children are invited to join us from 10.00-12.30 and secondary school aged children from 1.30 – 4pm. This will give young people the

chance to explore a stationary bus and do a short bus ride from George Junction Park and Ride to Central Park and back, having spent some time in the park.

We are also hoping to run a train event on another day.

We have a bugs life event taking place on **Tuesday 27th August** at the Barn Family Hub in Barne Barton, with primary aged school children invited to come from 1-2pm and secondary aged children from 2 -3pm. This will be interactive and hands on but with no pressure to handle the animals.

These events are free of charge. Please contact either Karen Price [Karen.Price@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:Karen.Price@plymouth.gov.uk) or Sue Stevens [susan.stevens@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:susan.stevens@plymouth.gov.uk) to find out more or to book a place if your child would like to come along and join in. It would be great to see you there.

### **Health & Well-being**

#### **Think Right, Feel Good (adapted Guide Dogs Course)**

In response to demand, we ran the 'Think Right Feel Good' course again in June for some of our students in Y5 – Y9). The course promotes positive self-esteem and self-awareness for students who have visual impairments. Students had the opportunity to:

- learn about themselves and build self-confidence
- rehearse answers to enable them to describe confidently their eye condition and themselves to other people in a variety of situations
- explore feelings that arise in their lives, particularly anger, and to explore strategies for dealing with feelings and responses in difficult situations

The young people that took part provided feedback at the end of the course so we thought we would share some of their comments with you. It does highlight how important it is for young people to meet their VI peers.

“It was helpful meeting new people (with visual impairments) and the activities were helpful, especially the positive compliments. I will try the relaxation techniques.”

“I liked finding out we weren't the only ones with disabilities like ours”.

“It was nice making new friends.”

“It built up my confidence a little.”

We will be running a similar course on 13th March next year, to focus on self-advocacy and self-help skills. A letter will be sent to families nearer the time with further details but please do save the date!

## Peer awareness

We have provided some peer awareness sessions in schools and settings and have continued to encourage 'peer mentoring' by introducing students from different settings to each other.

We now have 3 groups of students in 3 of our secondary schools who meet on a regular basis to both support each other and provide feedback for the school about what things could be improved. Discussion topics have included:

- Exams access arrangements.
- Improvements to the school environment, e.g. lighting, handrails, highlighting step edges.
- Equipment and access to learning resources.
- Suggestions for events and training.

We are keen to encourage and support other schools to set up a similar groups where appropriate.

## **Ordinarily Available Provision**

Plymouth City Council have recently launched new guidance on Ordinarily Available Provision, with sections included specifically about visual impairment. The documents for schools and early years settings can be found here:

[Plymouth Council - Ordinarily Available Provision for Early Years by The Education People - Issuu](#)

[Plymouth Council - Ordinarily Available Provision for Schools by The Education People - Issuu](#)

They should be read in conjunction with the Curriculum Framework for Visual Impairment (CFVI) and Reasonable Adjustments in Schools Guidance – see links below.

## **Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (CFVI)**



If you are not already aware of this fantastic best practice document, we highly recommend taking a look. We are currently embedding this into our practice to ensure that all of the children and young people we support can achieve their best outcomes. The framework is divided into 11 areas of learning and focuses on the specialist skills and provision needed to help students

both **access learning** and **learn to access**. Find out more here:

[Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment | RNIB](#)

### **Reasonable Adjustments in Schools**

In partnership with the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP), Guide Dogs have produced Reasonable Adjustments in Schools guidance to ensure that the 41,000 children and young people with vision impairment across the UK have access to better support throughout their education. Further information and links to the relevant documents can be found here:

[Reasonable Adjustments in Schools \(guidedogs.org.uk\)](#)

### **Plymouth Children's VI Services Network**

The Plymouth Children's VI Services Network continues to meet twice a year and is well attended by professionals and voluntary organisations with an interest in visual impairment. We would love to see more families and young people coming along so if you would like to take part please contact us for more information. The next meeting is on **Thursday 28th November 12.30pm – 2pm** to be held at **Sensory Solutions @ Improving Lives Plymouth** - 156 Mannamead Road, PL3 5QL. It is a fantastic opportunity for everybody to come together to share successes and discuss the way forward for visual impairment services in the city.

### **Links with other services**

We continue to maintain our links with other organisations and teams both within and outside of the SEND team. Our strong links with the REI have meant that we continue to receive many referrals directly from them at the point of diagnosis and work with families from the start. Early intervention can mean better outcomes for a child's vision.

We continue to liaise with post-16 provision to ensure a smooth transition for our older students. For example, we have provided information about our role for post-16 professionals and we are involved in transition and training for Achievement Training, City College and other placements. We also support our students to access work experience.

### **Useful Links**

**RNIB** "We offer practical and emotional support to blind and partially sighted people, their families and carers." [RNIB | Homepage of the Royal National Institute of Blind People](#)

**Guide Dogs** “Over the years we’ve developed a wide range of services with and without dogs to support people living with a vision impairment. Children and adults. Friends and family.” [Guide Dogs | The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association](#)

**Thomas Pocklington Trust UK** – “Our work is focused on championing the needs and aspirations of blind and partially sighted people, fully recognising the depth and complexity of the challenges faced.” [Thomas Pocklington Trust](#)

**Look** - “We are a charity based in Hereford, but we work nationally. We offer mentoring, transformational events, online forums and parent support. We are the leading mentoring organisation in the UK for visually impaired young people.” [LOOK – Supporting Visually Impaired Young People to Thrive \(look-uk.org\)](#)

### **Accessible Books**

Finding large print, tactile and audio books for your child can be difficult. The following websites have books to buy, borrow or download –

[Clearvision Project](#)

[About us - Living Paintings for Blind Children and Adults](#)

[UK education collection | RNIB Bookshare, accessible books for print disabled learners.](#)

[CustomEyes Books | Guide Dogs](#)

[Calibre Audio - Calibre Audio](#)

A parent has also recommended a Facebook page called UK Bookshare where parents share and swap large print books.

### **Grants**

Hopefully you are all aware that you can apply for grants to buy equipment for use at home through Guide Dogs or VICTA if your child is registered as sight impaired (severely sight impaired for VICTA). We can support you through the application process if you need it so please ask!

[Assistive technology grants for children | Guide Dogs](#)

[Apply for a grant – VICTA](#)



### Plymouth Online Directory (POD)

Please remember to use the POD to access our Local Offer and information about services available to you locally:

<https://www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com>

and you can go directly to our page, where you will find useful links and resources for VI , using the following link:



[Visual Impairment Team - Plymouth Online Directory](#)

Follow this link to find the booklet about Services For Children And Young People With A Visual Impairment In Plymouth:

[Plymouth Children's Visual Impairment Network - Plymouth Online Directory](#)

**Finally** – we would really appreciate your feedback on the support you get from us – please use the QR code or survey link below.

Have a lovely summer from all of us at the Sensory Support Team (VI team). 😊



**We would appreciate your feedback on the support you get from our team (Plymouth Advisory Team for Sensory Support). Your comments are important to us and will help us improve the service we provide. You can do this by scanning the QR code or clicking on the link below to complete a short online survey.**

[https://linktr.ee/epssurveys?utm\\_source=qr\\_code](https://linktr.ee/epssurveys?utm_source=qr_code)