

# Sensory Inclusion Service Visual Impairment Newsletter

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Sensory Inclusion Service, Floor 7, Darby House, Lawn Central, Telford, TF3 4JA

## Specsavers tour



During a routine trip to Specsavers opticians, Archie's favourite employee, Jack, offered to give him a look behind the scenes tour.

Archie got to see where orders came in, where lenses are fitted & then tested, followed by how machines can examine the back of our eyes.

He even got to meet the managing director!



## Letter from Santa

RNIB is helping to deliver the magic of Christmas by making sure all children with a vision impairment can receive a very special festive letter.

The jolly elves at RNIB work closely with Santa to help him produce letters in accessible reading formats.

Requests for accessible letters from Santa have now closed. However, there is still time to receive a large print letter via email (with a 16pt attachment). Please send requests to [santa@rnib.org.uk](mailto:santa@rnib.org.uk). The closing date for email requests is **Tuesday 20 December 2022**.

## Watch this space!



Activities and events will be returning in 2023 starting with a family Bowling night in February.

Look out for details to follow in due course!

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## Alfie's story

Alfie is registered severely visually impaired (blind) and has no functional vision, which makes learning more challenging. He uses his other senses to learn because he cannot gain information through his sight.

Alfie attends a mainstream school and has settled well in his Year 1 class. Here is a picture of him exploring shaving foam to find toy men. This is a big achievement for Alfie because when he first started nursery, he had a dislike of touching wet substances. It can be scary for someone without sight to reach out and touch something wet, cold or slimy. Alfie's teaching assistant initially supported Alfie by encouraging him to touch soap and water by adding different smells and now he is more confident when exploring materials with his hands.



He has had the opportunity to touch a range of different stimuli and has become more confident at using both hands to explore. In this picture he is exploring autumn leaves. Look at this cute picture of him holding a hedgehog.



Children learn to socialise and play by watching and copying others. Alfie is unable to copy other children because he can't see them. He has had difficulty understanding that play is something fun. Alfie has received support from SIS access support assistants to learn some skills needed in order to play.

He is beginning to use his hands and fingers to learn various skills including push, press, pull, turn and twist and the language and concept development that goes along with these skills, which will support his play with a range of toys and also support his independence.



Children can find it daunting to socialise with a blind child especially when they don't recognise and respond to their facial expressions and gestures. Alfie's class

have taken part in peer awareness activities wearing blindfolds. They experienced normal classroom tasks with their eyes covered to help them understand how Alfie learns differently. They were also taught how to support Alfie without taking away his independence completely. They are now more confident to approach Alfie and ask him to play.

Alfie is very happy in school. He loves listening to and retelling stories as well as sharing some of his own.

## School librarian

Elektra is a librarian at her school and she really enjoys it. She is pictured here holding a book and to her left is her sister Amelia.



## Iris tells it like it is!

Iris Ion, a year 7 student spoke to teachers and support staff from schools across Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire to close our day long training event held in October, called "The VI Child in Your Class".

Iris explained how her vision affects the way she accesses her work at school. She shared a range of experiences across her education journey to date, including the sort of adaptations that worked for her and made learning accessible. She was also very clear about what hadn't worked so well!

She said the things that worked best were those that meant she could work independently. These included:

- teachers sharing presentations to her laptop so that she could see what was being shown on the interactive whiteboard,
- making sure work was presented on A4 size paper in her preferred font size of 24
- telling her when to move to the next slide in a presentation so she kept up with everyone else.

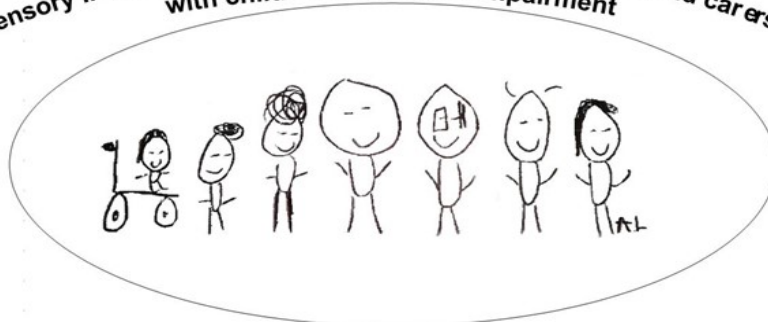
What she found frustrating included:

- being given work on A3 size paper: this takes up too much space on her desk and she must scan further up and down a page which is very tiring and slows her down.
- Work not being provided in the correct font size at the start of the lesson. Someone must then go out of lesson to get this enlarged as quickly as possible. The time this takes leaves Iris racing to catch up with her classmates or missing key points in the lesson.

Iris delivered this very articulately and with good grace and humour. The impact on the gathered teachers and support staff was profound. I am certain they went away with a greater understanding of the needs of the child in their class who has a visual impairment and how important it is to provide work they can easily access. Thank you Iris!



Sensory Inclusion Service resources library for parents and carers  
with children with visual impairment



### Our Sensory Inclusion library is back up and running!

The Sensory Inclusion Service (VI) resources library has been set up for the use of parents/carers of children and young people with visual impairment.

Toys and equipment are available to loan for a period of 3 weeks and will need to be collected from and returned to the Sensory Inclusion Service at Darby House, Lawn Central, Telford TF3 4JA. If you would like a copy of the catalogue to see what is available or for more information, please contact the Sensory Inclusion Service on 01952 385269.

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## What is Little Stars?

Little Stars is a family group for preschool children with visual impairments where preschool siblings are also welcome to attend. Parents can chat with other parents and seek advice from qualified staff. A qualified teacher of children with visual impairments (QTVI) is available to support the children achieve developmental targets around social and emotional development, communication and language, play and learning, movement and mobility, independence and self-care.

A sensory/light room is available for the children to work with a qualified teacher on visual targets.

Activities including craft, cookery/sensory activities, music/singing and the session always ends with a calm parachute session.

Parents who have attended Little Stars sessions with their children, have made the following comments;

“Little Stars have been there to support us through times of worry and the unknown.”

“The people who run Little Stars have given advice and an ear to bend and a shoulder to cry on.”

“The families I have met have become friends outside of the group and I think they will be friends for life.”

“When my daughter was born with a cataract, I did not know what to think or what to do. However, I was put in touch with the Sensory Inclusion Service in Telford and Wrekin. They were so welcoming and invited me to many events. Myself, my daughter and her sibling attended Little Stars sessions which is a friendly support group for pre-school children with a visual impairment and their parents/carers. I was very nervous about attending the first time; however, I was reassured from the team that it was a small, kind and friendly group. As soon as I arrived all my worries and anxiety soon disappeared. Each session was fun. My daughter and her young sibling took part in arts, crafts and playing with other children, just like my daughter. Weekly we were invited to go into the well-equipped sensory room with the Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (QTVI), using torches, lights and relaxing sensory equipment such as bubble tubes and fibre optics. My daughter loved this room, and it would help her to relax. I found the sessions a great opportunity for Ella to mix with other children with visual impairments and for her to realise that she is not the only child who had to wear a patch. This helped us so much, as applying her patch before these sessions used to be a fight from her; however once she realised that her friends at the group also wore them, she was happier wearing it. This session did not only help her, but it also helped my other daughter who was a year older than Ella. It helped her to realise that other children as well as her sister had 'magic eyes' and at this point she would want to have a patch applied to her face to join in. As a parent, I found this session a life saver, it helped me to talk to other parents in the same or worse situations. We could have a cup of tea together and a good catch up about things, such as hospital appointments, terminology doctors used and strategies that we would use at home. This session helped me become more confident and at ease with my own situation with my daughter and I came away with friends as well as a happy child.”

Little Stars is based at The Stepping Stones Centre, Brunel Road, Malinslee, Telford, TF3 2BF on Tuesdays in term-time from 9.30 to 11.30am

If you are interested and feel that these sessions may benefit you and your child please speak to your child's QTVI or contact the Sensory inclusion Service on 01952 385259 . We look forward to seeing some of you in the near future.

Louise



## Christmas Gift Ideas for Blind and Partially Sighted Children Under 5



It's that time of year again and buying presents for little ones who have a visual impairment can be an additional challenge. The Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC) posted an article recently which I thought would be worth sharing if you are scratching your head about what to get a little one.

### Building toys

Building toys make a great gift for any child but when shopping it's good to choose bricks that stick together well and are easy to build with:

- Wikki Stix are pipe-cleaner type building toys made from wax and knitting yarn. They can be bent and shaped into almost anything your child can imagine!
- Duplo bricks are ideal as they stick together well
- Magnetic blocks are also great for building
- Magnetic cogs – these stick on the fridge (or other magnetic surfaces) and connect together, moving around
- Stacking cups or plastic stacking rings
- Peg boards (or other toys they can push things into)
- Musical Shape Sorter

### Tactile toys and puzzles

Blind and partially sighted children will love a jigsaw puzzle but may need extra motivation to complete one.

- Look for simple insert puzzles with knobs on or sound puzzles which play a sound when they put the piece back in the correct place
- Play-Doh is a popular present and scented varieties provide extra sensory enjoyment. The Play-Doh Fun Factory allows children to push dough through in various lengths, thicknesses and shapes
- Multi sensory balls are fun. Look for ones made with different materials and textures or ones which make a noise
- Bean bags are easy to catch and throw if your child is still learning

### Books

- Books make the ideal Christmas present or stocking filler for of all ages. Here's what to look for when choosing a book:
- Touch and feel books with moving elements, pop-up parts, tabs or shiny parts will engage children
- Books with contrasting colours e.g. black and yellow or black and white
- Simple designs and pictures that are not too complex
- Books for young children usually have large bold words – look for ones written in a simple, clear type
- Specialist books such as large print books or Braille
- Musical books such as the Vtech Rhyme and Discover books will read children nursery rhymes aloud.

## Christmas Gift Ideas for Blind and Partially Sighted Children Under 5 continued...

### Musical toys

- Musical instruments are always popular. You can ones made of natural materials – anything from a shaker to a ukulele – which can be more motivating for vision impaired children to explore
- Vtech create a great range of toys where you push a button for sound, music and movement
- A sing-along music player with a microphone is fun – they can play music (and sing along) or listen to stories

### Creative toys

Creative toys give children the opportunity to express themselves. Ideas include:

- Lacing beads for making necklaces or pop apart beads
- Chalkboards or magnetic boards
- Pens – choose the brightest, thickest felt pens you can find as these show up best
- Scented marker pens which engage their sense of smell
- Packs of brightly coloured or neon paper
- Play kitchens which can help children with vision impairment to roleplay what their parents do in the kitchen
- Velcro fruit and vegetables (that come in two parts) which can be 'cut' with a plastic knife help fire their imagination
- Baking kits that allow children to make muffins or biscuits

### Gift experiences and tokens

If you're still unsure what to give them for Christmas, a token makes a great gift.

- If they have access to an iPad or tablet, consider an iTunes gift card so they (or their parents) can buy music, apps and stories
- You could give the gift of an experience such as a voucher for the pantomime or a soft play area day out

### Where to shop

Most of these toys can be found in high street toy shops, or in Argos or on Amazon.

For more specialist toys and books:

- The [RNIB Online Shop](http://www.shop.rnib.org.uk) (www.shop.rnib.org.uk) is a great place to shop for toys for children with vision impairment
- You'll find a range of toys on the [TFH website](http://specialneedstoys.com/uk/sensory-toys) (specialneedstoys.com/uk/sensory-toys)
- For Braille and large print books, [Clearvision Project](http://clearvisionproject.org) (clearvisionproject.org) is a postal lending library of children's books

### RSBC Tip:

If you are giving toys in packaging, it's a good idea to take the toy out of the packaging before wrapping it.

## Rob's Christmas Message

Well that must be the shortest autumn term in my memory. It seems only a few weeks since I started here in September but here we are and it's Christmas already!

It has been a hectic time for the VI team as there have been new personnel to help settle in and existing members moving on. We are quite shorthanded, and our team has been working very hard to try to make up for this.

Many thanks go to our Access Support Assistant (ASA) Helen MacDonald and ASA/Technical Officer Claire Wilson who have both been working their socks off to support the children and young people who need work adapting and the school staff who need training and help with this.

The good news is that from January we will have partially "plugged the gap" for the remainder of the academic year as we welcome Vernon Webb to our team.

Vernon is semi-retired and so will be working part time alongside Helen and Claire as an ASA to help deliver modification training in schools, supporting schools to adapt and modify resources for students and teaching touch typing. He has many years of experience working with children and young people with VI as before he took retirement, he was a QTVI in Herefordshire and has been very active as a self employed VI consultant since 2012.

Our Social Inclusion Facilitator also took a secondment recently. One key area of this role was the arranging and coordinating of social events that help to bring together our children who have VI.

We have been struggling to find funding for these vital activities but there is a little light on the horizon. Thanks to one of our HI team colleagues: Mary Brotherton, we have been put in touch with Mr Duncan Bowyer who is a Consultant ENT Surgeon and Chairperson of The Shropshire and Mid Wales Head & Neck Charity. The charity he chairs has kindly agreed to fund a bowling evening which will take place in February 2023: More details about this will be available soon. We are very grateful for the support Mr Bowyer and the charity has offered to enable us to arrange this.

We would ideally like to be able to offer many different events throughout the year, but we need reliable sources of funding so if any of you parents or young people know of ways to (legally) generate some funding and if you have ideas for future events, please let me know.

On the subject of charities, I would also like to acknowledge the support Sight Loss Shropshire have given recently to two students who spoke at our VI training course for schools: "The VI Child in Your Classroom" which took place in October. They gave Amazon Vouchers as a thank you to Iris Ion and Josh Thomas who both spoke to the many teachers and support staff who attended (Josh starred in a video as he was unable to attend in person).

Iris and Josh spoke eloquently about their experiences as students who have a visual impairment, sharing what they felt had worked for them and also speaking openly about things that hadn't been quite as helpful. We all learnt a lot from them. Their messages were powerful, humorous, moving and had a big impact on the audience.

So, we are on the cusp of a different year, and I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from all of us at SIS VI.

**Rob Tipton** Lead QTVI SIS





## Goodbye for now

### Tracy Hollyhead



"It's already been almost a year since I took up a part time secondment into the SEND Team in January 2022, which saw me keeping 2 days working with SIS whilst spending 3 days each week in SEND. In August 2022 another slight change meant that I am currently on a full time, 1 year secondment from SIS to SEND, working on overdue Annual Reviews. I have worked for SIS for almost 19 years in two different roles, meeting many children and young people and their families along the way, but for now a slightly different challenge was what I needed, and as hard as it was to step away from working directly with children and young people, I am pleased to have found a role that still has an impact on their lives. For some families our paths will continue to cross and it's always nice to hear a name I know."

### Jo Adcock

'Hi everyone

As some of you may already know, I recently left the Sensory Inclusion Service to take up a new role as an Engagement Officer within the Virtual School Team on a 1 year secondment basis. I am pleased that I will continue to support children and young people and I am looking forward to learning new skills and facing new challenges.

I have been working in the Sensory Inclusion Service for just over 7 years and in this time I have enjoyed working with the children and young people as well as watching them enjoy themselves at the activities we have arranged in the past including our Little Stars pre-school group. It has also been lovely to have had the opportunity to meet some parents/carers and families too.

Thank you for all your support, may I wish you all the best for the future.'



### Local Offer for Special Educational Needs and Disability

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[www.telfordsend.org.uk](http://www.telfordsend.org.uk)



#### Key features...

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- Learn how schools support special educational needs.
- Use the interactive map showing what is available near to where you live.
- Have your say through our online feedback form.



[www.telfordsend.org.uk](http://www.telfordsend.org.uk)

## Need this in large print or Braille?

If you would like to receive this newsletter in Large Print or Braille, please email

**sendandinclusion  
@telford.gov.uk**



**Shropshire's SEND Local Offer** is a single place for information and services for children and young people with special education needs and/or disabilities, their families and the practitioners who support them.

Take a look at the [SEND Family directory](#) for local events, groups and things to do. For news and updates please like and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Email: [Local.Offer@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:Local.Offer@shropshire.gov.uk) Telephone: 0345 678 9063

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