



Middlesex Association for the Blind

Supporting people with sight loss since 1922

OUTLOOK

**AUTUMN-WINTER
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**Barnet/Brent/Ealing/Enfield/Haringey
Harrow/Hillingdon/Hounslow/Richmond**

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Mission Statement

The Middlesex Association for the Blind aims to support people who are blind or partially sighted to lead independent lives. The Association achieves this through the local provision and delivery of a range of high-quality services, advice and information to people across nine London boroughs

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Message from our CEO Sahib Singh



I'd like to start this edition of Outlook in memory of our Trustee Mr Jeremy Brown who sadly passed away on Wednesday the 26th of October 2022 from a cardiac arrest aged 70.

Jeremy had been on MAB's Board of Trustees for 19 months and contributed greatly despite the short period of time he was with us.

He was a wonderful person; my heartfelt condolences go to Mrs Brown. Jeremy will be missed by so many of us here at MAB.

By the time you receive this copy of Outlook, with a heavy heart I will have left MAB. In the New Year I move to a charity called NanakNaam which is a charity that aims to create a world where everyone can improve their mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing through Guru Nanak's wisdom of Oneness.

My time here has been one of constant growth and I'm indebted to our previous Chair of Trustees, Doreen Luff, and MAB's previous CEO, Andrew Cox, for entrusting and having confidence in me to take on this role as CEO. Middlesex Association for the Blind is a charity I am proud to have been a part of.

Our team of dedicated volunteers and staff are the bedrock of this organisation. Without their hard work, passion and dedication, this organisation would not be what it is today. It has been an honour to work alongside

so many passionate and hardworking people who genuinely care about making a positive difference in people's lives.

My successor will be Valerie Hill who was appointed in 2020 as our Operations Manager. Valerie has over 20 years' experience in retail management and I have every confidence that MAB will grow from strength to strength under her leadership.

I won't get a chance to say a personal goodbye to all of the clients who I have worked closely with at MAB in the past decade, but I want you all to know that supporting you over the years has been a great privilege for me, and I will never forget the hours that I spent visiting and spending time with you.

Thank you for the support you gave me, as I supported you!



Sahib has poured his heart and soul into MAB. On behalf of the entire team, I thank him for his dedication and care over the years. MAB has flourished under his leadership and we enter 2023 full of purpose and determination to fulfil our mission of supporting people who suffer sight loss.

I know that our wonderful staff and volunteers will spare no effort in their endeavours. I feel honoured and proud to be given the opportunity to support and guide them as their new CEO.

Donations, wills and legacies

Maureen Ann Cox 1933-2022 Aged 89

“She did it because she loved it”.

These are the words that Jane Dorrington used when she told us about her Mother’s lifelong dedication to working in the visually impaired sector.

Maureen Cox was born in 1933. As an adult, she worked for a company called Technicolour, where she met her husband. Then, like most women of her era, she stopped work to raise her children.



When Jane and her brother Martin were old enough to start school, Maureen signed up to join the Adult Education pottery classes at the old wooden building in Pinkwell Lane, which was just around the corner from where she lived.

Maureen found the opportunity to be creative deeply fulfilling and when a job came up to teach pottery to people with visual impairment, she jumped at the opportunity to unlock creative potential in other people too.

Through the pottery classes, she met Marie Pepeman who volunteered at The Hayes and Harlington Blind Clubs. They became good friends, and soon Maureen was

helping Marie to run two clubs for people with visual impairment – the one at Hayes and then also one at Uxbridge.

“She had found her vocation,” Jane explained to me on the phone. Being able to be creative, to teach creativity and to work with people who had visual impairment gave Maureen the fulfilment she needed in life.

Sadly, Maureen’s husband passed away in 1983. “The clubs and the work she was doing in the visual impaired sector gave my Mum direction and passion to keep herself going despite having lost her husband.” Jane said. “She obviously missed him terribly, but she wasn’t one to mope. She was a highly capable person, and she just got on with things. Having the clubs and her work definitely helped her in that time.”

But Maureen’s work didn’t stop there - she had more to give the world, and in 1984 she began working for Hillingdon Social Services teaching Handicraft to people with visual impairment, and doing home visits to check that people were getting all the help available to them, both financially and socially.

Once she retired, Maureen carried on with her voluntary work. She continued with her Pottery until 2009, and with organising both clubs for people with sight loss, until 2020 when they closed due to COVID.

At this point Maureen was 87 years old. Shortly afterwards, unfortunately, she herself became too ill to carry on. Two years later, in March 2022, Maureen passed away. Before she died, she told her daughter Jane, “I have had a good innings!” Maureen is greatly missed by her family and friends who loved her positive spirit and cheerful nature.

The club members were all elderly themselves, and none of them were able to take Maureen's place in coordinating the meetings.

Jane knew that her mother would have wanted the funding that was left in the club bank accounts to be used to the benefit of people with visual impairment. So Jane made sure that our organisation, the Middlesex Association for the Blind, received a very generous gift of £500.

Sahib Singh, the CEO of MAB, gives his thanks to Maureen's family who made sure that the funding was passed on to us, and to one other charity that helps people with visual impairment:

"It is humbling for us at MAB to receive this donation. Maureen clearly worked very hard in her life to bring in funding to keep the clubs running. This financial gift comes as a result of Maureen's passionate and lifelong commitment to the sector.

No matter what most of us do in our lives, very few of us are going to be able to work for other people until the age of 87, just 2 years before we pass away, as Maureen did.

Maureen was clearly an incredible person, and it is an honour for us to add her name to those whose legacies live on at the Middlesex Association for the Blind, through financial gifts that they give us after their passing".

Please remember that we gratefully accept Gifts that people leave us in their wills. We are also thankful for

people leaving us Gifts in Memory of the people they love who have passed away.

We offer a free will writing service for anyone who has not yet drawn up a will.

If you would like to make use of this service, feel free to phone us on 020 8423 5141.

If you have already drawn up a Will and would like to still leave us a gift, you don't have to draw up a new one. You can simply add a document called a Codicil to your will.

Contact us on 020 8423 5141 and we will send you a copy of a Codicil that you can use.

Thank you to you all!

Every year we write to you, and every year we are overwhelmed at the generous response we receive from our Christmas appeal letter. With the cost-of-living crisis affecting so many people so badly, we were slightly afraid last year that we wouldn't be able to collect as much money in December as we usually do.

Thanks to all of you who gave so generously, that fear has been abated. So many of you dug deep into your pockets and chose to give to us as a Charity of Choice in December. The response we have received gives us confidence as we move into January and continue the work that we are doing supporting people with visual impairment.

Because of your gifts, people will be visited regularly by Support Workers and Volunteers. With your assistance, we will continue to give Rapid Response Counselling to people who are in a crisis about losing their sight. With your help, we can provide Braille Training, IT Support and Employment Training to people who need it.

If you didn't manage to give in response to our Christmas appeal, and would like to give now, we would love to hear from you. Or perhaps you did give to us in December, and you would like to give again? You can donate to MAB in 3 different ways:

- Phone us on 020 8423 5141 to make a telephone donation.
- Visit www.aftb.org.uk/donate/
- Or send us a cheque in the post, addressed to The Middlesex Association for the Blind, Suite 18, Freetrade House, Lowther Road, Stanmore, HA7 1EP

We manage to do the work that we do as MAB, thanks to the family of givers who support us. Thank you to each and every one of you!

MAB Services and News

***We are pleased to introduce new members of the MAB team:**



Andrew Olgado, project manager for the Mobile Resource Unit.



Christine Bassett, Enfield support worker (maternity cover)



Ruth Gaskin, Barnet admin support officer



Adam Nazar-Bhandari, employment service manager



Davide Vezzani, Haringey support worker



Delighted also to welcome back **Tania Ortiz Zamorano** as our Hounslow support worker.

***Leavers**

We said farewell to **Kevin Nugent, Helen Skillen and Parule Basu-Barua**. From all of us at MAB, thank you for your valuable contribution and all the very best for the future.

We are very grateful for the hard work and dedication of all our team members, past and present, and thank them for always striving to make a positive difference to the lives of people with a visual impairment.

* Other news

"In the beginning", from long-standing volunteer Audrey Jarvis



"Where have the last 31 years gone? It's quite incredible to realise that I have been a MAB volunteer visitor for that long. I attended the very first meeting at the formation of the volunteer service in 1991 and there were just four of us.

After some initial training, I was fortunate to be able to help at the Harrow Blind Social Club, which was a weekly event held in South Harrow, at that time with about 30 members and several guide dogs. It provided a valuable service to the mostly elderly participants who attended and they enjoyed tea and biscuits and, most important of all, often the only social contact they had all week, sometimes with the added pleasure of visiting entertainers. We also accompanied them on several coach trips to Bexhill on Sea, sharing fish and chips and walks along the promenade – quite an adventure for us all as you might imagine. Trips to local theatres also provided rare treats for everyone. Those were the days!

At the same time, I was allocated my first client, an elderly lady who had virtually no sight at all, and I was lucky enough to share over twelve years of friendship with her, helping however I could; including reading her post, taking her shopping and to doctors' appointments. It was quite a challenge in the beginning, but the initial training at MAB proved invaluable and with experience and ongoing guidance from the staff at MAB, it was a really rewarding relationship which I remember fondly.

I was lucky enough to visit several clients over the years, of different ages and with varying needs, but they were all very grateful for the help and companionship provided and I was only too pleased to be able to offer my help, with MAB always there supporting all the volunteers and their clients.

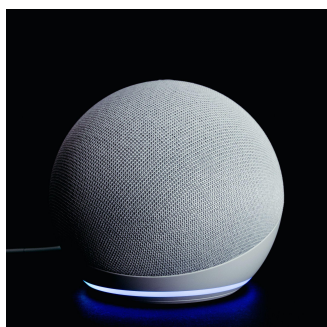
Now, many years on, the volunteer project has blossomed way beyond that first group of four in Harrow in 1991, and now serves the visually impaired in eight more outer London boroughs. `

The `Outlook' Newsletter has an important role to play in keeping us all connected and informed, and I was pleased to make a small contribution to its birth in Spring 1995 by naming it `Outlook'.

Although my volunteering is now limited to phone `visits' rather than face to face contact, it's still an important part of my life and I do send my praises and best wishes to all those who give their time and friendship to so many in need".

MAB would like to thank Audrey and her fellow volunteers for their selflessness and dedication to supporting people who suffer sight loss. Without you, we would not reach nearly as many people as we are able to.

"Smart Speakers", by Andy



My name is Andy and you might have come across me and the Mobile Resource Unit I am responsible for. I travel around in a campervan and try to pitch up in areas of high footfall throughout Middlesex. I make people aware of our services, try to recruit volunteers for our Home Visiting service, help increase awareness of eye conditions that can cause sight loss, and prompt people to get their eyes checked. Finally, I demonstrate equipment to help people with sight loss become more independent.

A simple range of equipment that is very accessible are smart speakers. Smart speakers can either be Amazon Alexa (also sometimes referred to as Echo), Google Nest or the Apple Homepod. Amazon Alexa is the most popular option and what I will be referring to in the rest of this article, but they all have similar features.

Smart speakers are quite powerful tools that can be operated purely by voice commands, so they are very useful for someone with sight loss. They can do a lot more than most people assume and they are operated by giving out a command prefixed by a trigger word "Alexa". So you would speak to it just like you would address a person. For example, you could ask "Alexa, what is the weather like?" For the rest of this article the trigger word (e.g. Alexa) will be implied before each command.

Most people start off using their smart speaker to tune into a radio station, to get a particular style of music or listen to the news. So, for example, you could ask it to "play Radio 4," "play music by Vivaldi" or "play the news

in London". However, a smart speaker is much much more than a radio.

Most of the services/features on a smart speaker are free. The main services that require some form of subscription or payment are Audiobooks, Shopping service and Amazon music. For Amazon music, you can still play a type or similar genre of music to a request you make, but if you want it to play specific artists or tracks that are subject to copyright, it requires a subscription. For example, if you ask it to play Justin Bieber, it may ask you to sign up to Amazon music, but if you ignore this, it may still try to play music by Justin Bieber (or music of similar genre).

You can use a smart speaker as a telephone. If you set-up a list of contacts, you can use it to make a telephone call. For example, if you set up a telephone number for someone called "John", you can simply ask your smart speaker to "call John". It will call the telephone number stored for John and you can speak to him through the speaker. No need to press anything, and the phone can be a landline or a mobile phone. You can also set up emergency contact, so by asking it to "call help", it will call and notify them immediately with a phone call. You can also call emergency services directly.

A smart speaker can be used to control other smart devices in your home with simple commands. Smart devices can be smart light bulbs, smart plug adaptors (that you plug ordinary devices to), smart thermostats, other smart speakers and many more types of devices. Each device is given a name like "bedroom light", so a command could be something like "switch on the bedroom light" or "switch the heating on".

Another useful feature of smart speakers is that you can use them as an intercom with other smart speakers. This

feature is called “announce” or “drop in”. For instance, if you are in the kitchen and making dinner, you can announce that dinner is ready through all the other smart speakers in the house. This feature can also work across different households. It is a useful feature for trusted people like carers to be able to drop in on you if you are not answering the phone and they are worried about you. Permission has to be granted to allow others to drop in on your smart speakers.

Audiobooks are another useful feature for people with sight loss. This works on a monthly paid subscription service. There are numerous free books and the subscription gives you monthly credit to add new books to your online library.

At your disposal are millions of free podcasts that cover all sorts of subjects and interests. Podcasts are a series of spoken words, audio episodes, all focused on a particular topic or theme. These could be educational, comedy and light entertainment, business, hobbies, sport, science, history, finance, drama, self-help, news, languages and many many more categories down to quite niche topics.

You can ask your smart speaker to set alarms, reminders and routines. These can be one-off alarms or reminders if you have to do something at a particular time. You can also set a routine of playing morning birdsong as part of your wake-up routine, and the sound of ocean waves just before bedtime.

If a smart speaker sounds like something you might be interested in, you can order them online and they will need to be set-up. Setting up a smart speaker does not require any technical experience, but they will need to be set up initially using a computer or mobile phone with access to the internet. They also require WiFi access, which can be installed by most broadband suppliers. If

you have difficulty navigating websites or using apps, I recommend asking for help from friends or family to set up a smart speaker for you.

Following is a list of skills you could try out with your smart speaker:

“Open Radio Mystery Theater” This skill takes you back in time by playing old episodes of CBS Radio Mystery Theater, a series that took the airwaves by storm in the 1970s.

“Launch This Day In History” Powered by The History Channel, this skill provides a rundown of noteworthy events that took place on today's date. Specify a different date by saying, “Ask This Day In History what happened on [date].”

“Open Ingredient Sub” This skill comes in handy when you're missing a particular ingredient for a recipe, letting you know what options can be used as a substitute.

“Open Daily Buzzword” A great way to build your vocabulary. This skill defines a new word each day from the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

“Open Myth Buster” This skill recites various myths and then asks you to guess whether each myth is true or false, making for an educational and enjoyable game.

“Play Jeopardy” Alexa assumes the role of Alex Trebek by asking a new set of questions every weekday, phrased in the parlance of the long-running quiz show.

“Play Twenty Questions” This skill helps get those brain cells firing by pitting you against Alexa in a classic guessing game.

“Open Meditation Timer” Assists in your meditation routine by playing relaxing sounds for the desired duration, and ringing a bell when your time is up.

“Open Healthy Habit” Provides a health-conscious suggestion each time you access the skill.

“Inspire Me” Plays inspirational tidbits from one of several famous speakers from all walks of life.

“Open Daily Affirmation” Offers an encouraging and uplifting message once per day.

“Open Deep Breath” Steps you through deep-breathing exercises and mental images intended to reduce stress.

“Play restful ambient noise” by asking it to "Open Thunderstorm sounds", "Open Rain sounds", "Open Ocean sounds", "Start White Noise", "Open Bird sounds"

“Interview Me” Asks a different question that you may hear on a job interview each time you access this skill to help you better prepare for those important meetings.

For more information on assistive technology, how to prevent and manage sight loss and more, please visit our Mobile Resource Unit. For full details, including venues and dates for the MRU, please visit our website www.aftb.org.uk, or call 020 8423 5141.

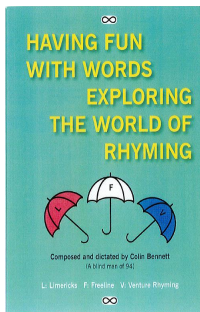
Blind Able and Blind Ability Punjabi



One of our Hounslow service users, **Amrit Dhaliwal**, has created two Youtube channels (one in English, the other in Punjabi) that aim to give tips and advice on equipment and services for greater independence, tackle the emotional impact of sight loss, educate the non-disabled community on how to confidently interact with visually impaired people, showcasing how she has dealt with challenges in her own life.

The English-speaking channel is called **Blind Able** and the Punjabi-speaking one **Blind Ability Punjabi**. Amrit is passionate about sharing her lived experience of sight loss to enhance the lives of visually impaired people, do check out her great work.

Having Fun with Words-Exploring the World of Rhyming



Colin Bennett from Harrow, a former MAB client who kept in touch with our support worker Alison, has been blind since 2016 and was in his 95th year at the start of this project. He got the notion of exploring the ideas of limericks and their potential, and wanted to regenerate their appeal in the best way. To start with, he did not feel confident in following the difficult limerick format AABBA. He was thinking of places and Goring just came to mind.

At present, Colin is trying to adapt this book as an educational project in schools.

His book is dedicated to the London Borough of Harrow in appreciation and gratitude for all the assistance received in respect of accommodation for over 40 years.

MAB Board of Trustees

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Treasurer - Mr Kambiz Daneshyar

Secretary - Mr Pushpinder Wadha

Trustee - Ms Ola Macauley

Trustee - Mr Jagdish Shingadia

Trustee- Mr Terry Mills

Trustee- Ms Rachelle Goldberg

MAB VIP clubs

The meetings are a chance for people to get together and make new friends. Through socialising at the clubs, people who are new to visual impairment are inspired by the people they meet. It is an opportunity to share challenges and victories, and to make social connections that go beyond the life of the monthly meeting.

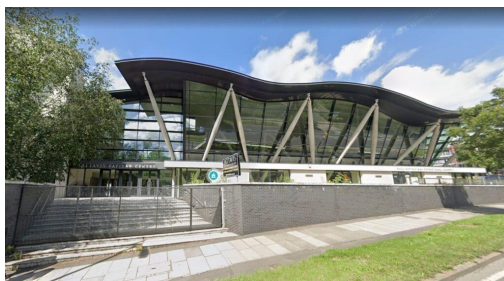
We currently run monthly clubs in the following boroughs:

- **Barnet**



Our Barnet VIP Club runs from 11am to 1pm, on the last Thursday of every month, at **St Margaret's United Reform Church, Victoria Road, Finchley, N3 1BD**

- **Brent**



Our Brent VIP Club runs from 11am to 1pm on the second Monday of each month at **the Sattavis Patidar Centre, J/W Forty Avenue, The Avenue, Wembley Park, HA9 9PG**

- **Ealing**



Our Ealing Coffee Morning runs from 10am to 1pm on the third Thursday of each month at **The William Hobbayne Centre, 1 ST Dunstan's Road, W7 2EY**



Our Ealing Trike Club usually runs from 10am to 1pm on the last Wednesday of the month (March to October) in **Walpole Park, Mattock Lane, W5 5EQ**

- **Harrow**



Our Harrow "Open Eyes" VIP Club runs from 10:45am to 12:45pm on the last Wednesday of each month at **The Wealdstone Library, 38 – 40 High Street, Wealdstone, HA8 7AE**

- **Hounslow**



Our Hounslow VIP club usually runs from 1pm to 3pm on the last Thursday of the month at **The British Legion, Legion Hall, Whitton Road, Hounslow, TW3 2DB**

We were thrilled to speak to Mr. Majeed Garehbaghi about his experience of attending the monthly coffee meeting in Barnet.

“I have met so many good friends at this coffee morning,” Majeed explains, “We exchange phone numbers and we phone each other if we have problems in between the meetings. I lost my wife to cancer 5 years ago, and the only person I have left in my life is my son. He is 20 years old though, and is attending Uni so I don’t see him very much. So I really look forward to the coffee mornings. Bina, the Barnet Co-ordinator, is a fantastic person. She always phones me and keeps in touch with me, telling me what programmes we will have at the coffee morning. Last week for example, we had dance. I would like to thank everybody at MAB who is involved in arranging these things. It is a great opportunity for people with visual impairment. I am so much happier now that I attend this group.”

For more details about our social clubs, please visit our website www.aftb.org.uk or call 020 8423 5141

Contact Numbers

Borough Coordinators' contact numbers

Borough	Name	Telephone Number
Barnet	Bina Padia Rita Shah Ruth Gaskin (form-filling only)	07594 625 215 07510 127 893 07858 311 410
Brent	Rita Shah	07510 127 893
Ealing	Kamila Reynolds	07387 101 631
Enfield	Christine Bassett	07754 127 347
Haringey	Davide Vezzani	07754 875 175
Harrow	Alison Bicknell	07387 101 632
Hillingdon	TBC	020 8423 5141
Hounslow	Tania Ortiz Zamorano	07511 826 892
Richmond	TBC	020 8423 5141

Sensory Services Team contact numbers

Borough	Telephone Number
Barnet	020 8359 5000
Brent	020 8937 4300
Ealing	020 8825 6230
Enfield	020 8379 1001
Haringey	020 8489 8900
Harrow	020 8901 2680
Hillingdon	01895 556 633
Hounslow	020 8583 3100
Richmond	020 8891 7971

Contributing to Outlook

We welcome contributions to the newsletter. Please send your articles to Valerie Hill (valerie@aftb.org.uk)

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Are you receiving this newsletter in your preferred format?

Outlook is produced in large print, Braille, on USB and email. It is also available online in print and audio formats at www.aftb.org.uk/outlook-magazine/

So that we can keep our records up to date, please telephone us if you move address or would like to receive Outlook in a different format.

Tel: 020 8423 5141

Alternatively, please email Nasreen at:
nasreen@aftb.org.uk

Thank you

Our thanks to the following for allowing us to put MAB collection boxes on their premises:

Bath Road Pharmacy, Bath Road, Hounslow

Seven Oaks Court, Copsewood Way, Northwood

Harris and Hoole, King Street, Twickenham

Special thanks also to our volunteers for their continued support .

And to all our Trust, Foundation, Borough and Corporate donors – without you we would not exist. Thank you for your support!

