



RAB

(Reading Association for the Blind)
Charity number 1062433

***Support and Social Activities for People Living With
Sight Loss***

OUTLOOK NEWSLETTER

Summer 2020



Editor: Henry Cooke

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Telephone Befriending: RAB's new way to support members

Since the coronavirus lockdown forced a suspension of face-to-face meetings and the temporary closure of Walford Hall, RAB has taken steps to continue offering support to members. It has launched a Telephone Befriending Service, using volunteers to mitigate social isolation and loneliness. Many members live alone, so a friendly chat is a real benefit.



RAB has recruited new volunteers to staff this service. We spoke to one of them, 'G', to find out how the work is going. She has been calling 'P' since early April.

G speaks to P once a week for roughly 45-50 minutes. Her first obligation is to check the befriender is OK for food and medicine, and that she doesn't have any health problems.

G says the key to befriending is to be a "good listener." RAB issues the befriender with a list of topics that could be used to break the ice: where they live in Reading; their background, history, vocation and family connections; the weather and the changing seasons; what they are watching on TV, listening to on the radio, or what books they are reading.

Beyond that, the talk has moved on to general topics — including, inevitably, Covid-19 and the conditions of lockdown. But G has found that she and P have a lot in common. They both love gardening, and G says “I have learned a couple of valuable tips from her.” P adds that her befriender has also given her ideas for another of her interests — handicrafts.

G says she believes P looks forward to the weekly call. “I think I am keeping her spirits up, and I hope I am able to make her laugh.” The befriender confirms this: “G is very nice. I really look forward to her call,” she says; “it gives me a little lift.”

P says she finds the Covid-19 lockdown “not depressing, just frustrating — I can’t get the plants I want for my garden.” She learned about the befriending scheme from Abby, RAB’s operations manager: when it was offered, P says she “didn’t hesitate” to take it up, and finds it “very helpful.”

After each call the befriender makes a report back to RAB, detailing any concerns about the wellbeing of the befriender so RAB can take action if needed.

For P, the befriending scheme is clearly proving a valuable service. G says she is happy to continue making the weekly calls as long as P would like. But both are looking forward to the return of normality. P’s hope is: “When this is over we’ll go to a garden centre and have a cream tea!”

Virtual Activity Programme

We know that you're missing coming into the Hall to meet up with all your friends and missing the host of other clubs and activities you usually do so we are looking at ways to get you all talking to each other and entertained. We are also working hard behind the scenes to look at how to begin safely reopening the hall.

One of the upsides of modern times is that we're now able to do some clever things using modern "business-like" technology. We're looking to put together some virtual activities, like online "coffee mornings" for those of you we would usually see at the hall and a range of other activities for everyone! Some of you may have even have spoken to Abby about taking part in some of these.

For those of you who are interested in the background, we're using Microsoft Teams. You may have noticed this software being advertised over the pandemic. All you need to join in is a phone so don't let not having a computer put you off.

We have a list of activities we are looking to deliver over the coming few months and it will grow as we have asked our wonderful volunteer team for their ideas too. We look forward to speaking to you all soon on an activity!

Anybody interested in participating, please email abbyk@rabsightloss.org, or speak to your Outreach Officer to get more details.

Focus on our Volunteers

Walford Hall is closed at the moment but many of our volunteers are still supporting RAB from home. Our new Telephone Befriending service has 25 volunteers calling Befriendees at least once a week.

Some befriendees are hearing from familiar voices from our Rambling and Walford Hall clubs, but we are also extremely grateful to our many brand new volunteers from the Maiden Erlegh Rotary and Inner Wheel clubs.

As well as our formal befriending service we know that some of our other volunteers are also keeping in touch with members: it's lovely to hear that friendships made in person are being maintained even when we cannot meet.

We also have some volunteers hard at work preparing virtual activities for you all. These telephone based sessions will be set up and supported by staff, but much of the ingenuity and creativity behind them is being provided by our fantastic volunteers.

Those of you who have social media may have seen that RVA featured some quotes about our volunteers during Volunteers Week in June. We are so grateful for their continued support.

Reading Association for the Blind

going above and beyond with our new befriending programme

already looking to the future and how we will deliver a post-Covid-19 programme to service users

forming a respectful, interesting, relaxed and fun connection with a telephone befriender ... heart warming that something so good can come from such a bad time

calling bowling team mates once or twice a week, many of whom are elderly and live alone, to check that they have what they need, and that they are ok

Volunteers' Week 2020



Mick Paige:

Warm Memories of an Outstanding Friend of RAB



Many at RAB have been recalling warm memories of Mick Paige who made an enormous contribution to the association over more than 20 years as a volunteer and a trustee. Mick died in March at age 84.

Mick was born in 1935 in London, one of four children. His father — who had been gassed in the First World War — died when Mick was only three. On the outbreak of the Second World War the family were evacuated to Wantage, his mother's home town.

He was educated in Wantage, but did not take the 11-plus examination because his family could not afford to send him to grammar school. In a memoir he wrote in retirement, Mick wondered how his life might have been different if he had had a good education. But he concluded: "It doesn't matter now 70 years later. All is well and I'm content."

As it was, on leaving school Mick joined the RAF, possibly inspired by the air crew he had met during the war at RAF Grove, just outside Wantage. After five years service, he left the air force and had a spell as projectionist at a cinema in Wantage. Then Mick joined the UK Atomic Energy Authority at Harwell: he trained as a metallurgist and worked there for about 30 years.

On retirement from Harwell and now living in Reading, Mick threw himself into voluntary work, first for the Red Cross and the Fire Brigade's victim support unit, and then for RAB.

"He was a lovely man who'd do anything for anybody," is the general recollection of RAB members when asked about Mick. "He was a genuine friend — nothing was too much trouble for him, and he's sadly missed."

Mick drove the association's minibus for a while, and also fetched members in his own car. Recalls one: "Mick was my driver for a good few years. He'd take me and others in his car to the Walford Hall every Tuesday. He was always willing to do anything for you. He'd go into town to get your favourite sandwiches. Once I broke my door key and he went down to the hardware shop and got new keys cut for me. He'd do the crossword puzzle with us and often make us laugh."

Another member says: "He'd do the shopping and the washing up as well as the crossword. He knew a baker's shop where you could get lardy cakes, and he'd bring one back for anyone who wanted one."

Adds another: "Mick didn't want praise or thanks, but would do anything to help quietly and efficiently. He was extremely modest, and always put others before himself. A real gentleman. In fact he became a personal friend to me, my husband and daughter."

One special memory for RAB members is the garden at Walford Hall. Mick and Janet Haywood (one of the visiting officers) created the garden from scratch. They took a litter-strewn rat-run and tidied it up, fenced it in and planted it up.

They planted flowers, roses and also vegetables. They encouraged members who liked gardening to help with the work. During the summer break, Mick would go back to water the plants. The garden won a Reading In Bloom award three years on the trot.

Mick was respected and liked by so many people and his quiet generosity continues to help many, many people. Mick is greatly missed.

Shielding is Ending – What Next?

If you have been part of the Government's COVID-19 shielding scheme you may have questions or concerns about how to make sure you have everything you need once the scheme comes to an end.

The RAB Outreach Team have lots of information on getting priority supermarket deliveries, arranging to have your prescriptions delivered, and for other services offering help and support. Give the team a call on 07843 358 451 or speak to your usual Outreach Team member for more information.

Centenary of the Blind March

This year marks the centenary of The Blind March, when hundreds of people marched from around Britain to Trafalgar Square in London to demand fairer working conditions and legal rights for blind people.

As the RNIB records on its website, their action led to Parliament passing the Blind Persons Act 1920 — the world’s first disability-specific legislation.

This new law required local authorities to keep a register of the blind and partially-sighted, and to promote their welfare.

It also resulted in the pension age for blind people being reduced from 70 to 50 years.

It was on 5 April 1920 that hundreds of sight-impaired people set off from Newport, Manchester and Leeds behind a banner demanding “Justice not Charity”. Led by the National League of the Blind, they headed for London to meet the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George.



(Photo credit: RNIB)

They reached Trafalgar Square on 5 April, and contemporary newspaper reports said they made quite an impression. “With drums beating, banners flying and sounds from toy trumpets and a tuneful complement of mouth organs and other instruments, the blind marchers arrived in London yesterday,” the Manchester Guardian reported.

The Daily Herald said: “The scene on the men’s arrival on Saturday, many in stages of exhaustion when emotional women rained kisses on the drawn faces, was memorable.”

After their meeting with Lloyd George on 30 April, the Blind Persons Act was passed the following September.

Contact the Editor - I need your news!

Please send me your news, and anything you think might be of interest for inclusion in a forthcoming edition of the RAB Outlook Newsletter.

I’m also happy to receive your comments about any of the articles appearing in the Newsletter, and suggestions of what you would like to see in future issues.

Henry Cooke 07530 883 092 Email: news@raftb.org

AND — if you would like to receive the Newsletter by email, please let us have your email address. We promise we won’t use it for anything other than the RAB Newsletter.

Focus On Fundraising

The temporary closure of Walford Hall means RAB has no regular income so fundraising is more important than ever.

We thank Berkshire Masonic Charity for pledging £500 to cover the cost of Mental Health Training for the Outreach Team, and the Lord Hanson Foundation for contributing £1,000 towards general running costs.

We are grateful to Berkshire Community Foundation (BCF) and United Way UK for giving us funding towards the cost of our Telephone Befriending Service, and BCF with the Pargiter Trust who have part-funded our virtual activities. United Way also chose RAB as one of their featured charities on their social media day of action. Marion is working hard to secure more funding to keep these services going, as well as to fund our Outreach service, which has been a lifeline to so many people during Lockdown.



Or corporate supporters are helping us remotely: Workday are helping design a new website; Open Health are developing a new logo and literature; and Secure Cloud+ will soon upgrade the Charity's computer hardware.

We are so grateful for everyone's support in these difficult times.

QUIZ

Can you name the musical or film from which these songs came?

1. Just my Bill
2. Feed the birds
3. Smoke gets in your eyes
4. Poor Judd (is dead)
5. I feel pretty
6. Doh, ray, me
7. Something wonderful
8. Who wants to be a millionaire?
9. Sisters, sisters
10. Memories
11. Climb every mountain
12. You'll never walk alone
13. Happy talk
14. Old man river
15. Luck be a lady
16. Sit down, you're rocking the boat
17. Stranger in paradise
18. Wouldn't it be lovely
19. I've come to wive it weathily in Padua
20. Comedy tonight

(Answers on page 16)

Priority Services Registers - helping you to stay safe

Every utility company operates a Priority Services Register to ensure that vulnerable customers are at the head of the queue in the event of an emergency such as a power cut. Visually impaired people are eligible to join the register.

Benefits include:

- Advance notice of planned power cuts (for example, for engineering work)
- Support in an emergency, which could involve the network operator providing you with alternative heating, lighting or cooking facilities in the event of a supply cut
- Free gas safety checks
- Identification scheme - to reassure you that callers such as meter readers are genuine

This is a free service provided by gas, electricity and water supply companies. Each supplier operates its own register, so you need to contact them individually. You can find the name of your supplier and contact details on your utility bill.

Thames Water's contact number for priority services is **0800 009 3652**, or email ecs@thameswater.co.uk. Or you can sign up by completing the form on its website at <https://www.thames-psr.org/>

Visually impaired people can also get special help from other service providers too. British Telecom offers a free priority fault repair service to telephone customers who are disabled or housebound. To register, call **0800 800 150** to request an application form, which will need to be countersigned by your doctor.

Passenger Assist is a national system used by all train operating companies to help disabled people travel. You need to give 24 hours notice of your journey. The National Rail number to call is **0800 022 3720**. Eligible people can also buy a Disabled Person's Rail Card which gets you one-third off the normal fare for you and a friend.

The British Wireless for the Blind Fund provides a range of audio equipment designed for people with sight loss. This could include radios, CD or USB players, or internet radio. Equipment is free of charge to people who meet the Fund's criteria. Contact them by phone on **01622 760709** or **07540 724063**, or via the website www.blind.org.uk



Paddi Lilley, 1927-2020.
Former Chair of Trustees of Reading
Association for the Blind.

Alongside her career in local and national government (including serving as secretary to Margaret Thatcher MP), Paddi Lilley was a loving wife, mother and grandmother, keen traveller, warm host, and supporter of many of Reading's voluntary and community organisations.

Paddi was an enthusiastic and dedicated volunteer with RAB, including serving as Chair of Trustees. She is fondly remembered by all who knew her.

We are grateful for her support over so many years.

If you would like to memorialise your loved one in our newsletter please contact: news@raftb.org

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Quiz answers (from p 13)

1	Show Boat	11	Sound of Music
2	Mary Poppins	12	Carousel
3	Roberta	13	South Pacific
4	Oklahoma	14	Show Boat
5	West Side Story	15	Guys and Dolls
6	Sound of Music	16	Guys and Dolls
7	The King and I	17	Kismet
8	High Society	18	My Fair Lady
9	Paint Your Wagon	19	Kiss Me, Kate
10	Cats	20	A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum