

ABERDEEN TOWN AND COUNTY ASSOCIATION  
FOR TEACHING THE BLIND AT THEIR HOMES



north east  
**sensory services**

achieving independence for blind & deaf people

**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2020**  
To end March 2020

## The Board of Directors

### **Chairman**

John Legg

### **Appointed in Meeting**

John Imrie  
Laura A Sharp, Vice Chair  
Paul J Duncan  
Lynn Hawcroft  
Frank K Wahedally  
Colin Boag  
Christina Cooper  
Leonard Ironside  
Stephen C McPherson  
Ian R W Herd  
Hannah Watt  
Rev Mary Whittaker (resigned 16 January 2020)  
Charlotte Little  
Gordon McHardy (appointed 18 March 2020)

### **Observer**

Cllr Theresa Coull, Moray Council  
Cllr Douglas Lumsden, Aberdeen City Council

*November 2020*

## Chairman's Report by John Legg



This year brought challenges and changes like no other in our 140-year history. The Covid-19 pandemic swept into every nook and cranny, fundamentally shaking up the way we operate, plan and communicate. Despite these unprecedented demands, NESS has continued to provide high quality essential services and to support well over 6,000 people living with significant sensory loss to achieve independence.

As our understanding of the virus grew and its threat moved ever closer, NESS took action to protect our vulnerable service users and staff and drew up proposals to maintain core services through rapid adaptation and investment. By the middle of March, we had reshaped our provision and embarked on new ways of working. With our Resource Centres and offices closed, we switched to home working, new ways of communicating and mobile service delivery. It is to the huge credit of our staff, supporters and management team that 2020 will be remembered not just as being a year of crisis, but also as a year of growth and development.

Living with significant sensory loss can be difficult and frustrating at the best of times. Isolation through lockdown brought additional barriers to accessing vital information, communication and support. Our 'magic moments' highlighted the value of everything from the home delivery of hearing aid batteries to regular phone calls, from new technology equipment to emotional support, from shopping assistance to financial help. NESS has worked tirelessly with statutory health and social care providers along with voluntary organisations to fill gaps and meet new needs often at truly short notice. The commitment, energy and enthusiasm shown by our frontline, administration and fundraising staff has been remarkable. No challenge too far, no task too daunting.

We are especially grateful for the supplementary government support we received to meet increased costs and for the tremendous donations, grants and in-kind support from service users, their families and friends, members of the public, local businesses, trusts and foundations. Each gift or grant is carefully managed and used to secure the maximum impact for our service users. If you think you can help NESS to make a difference please contact us, we would be delighted to speak with you.

Finally, a word of thanks to my fellow Directors who, on a voluntary basis, provide the challenge and support to improve our governance, financing and performance.

## Chief Executive's Report by Graham Findlay

### Review of Activities in meeting our Objectives

In the financial year 19/20, NESS continued to deliver our services to a high standard and within budget, although income proved to be a challenge.



Our Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with Aberdeen, Moray, Dundee and Angus Health and Social Care Partnerships continued to be delivered successfully.

Angus, Dundee and Moray offered NESS extensions to our existing contracts which is testament to the impact and quality of our work.

NESS continues to make some of our non-statutory services available to people living in Aberdeenshire where we do not currently have a statutory contract. We continue to have input into the Aberdeenshire See Hear group.

### Quality Systems

Quality is at the heart of everything we do and this year has been particularly successful. All of our funders have been appreciative of our work and the difference that we make.

NESS is a holder of the Investors in People (IIP) standard and the advanced Gold Standard. We chose to be assessed continually by IIP and we are now in year two of a three year assessment programme. This ensures that we remain focused on quality and in looking after our service users, volunteers and staff. NESS is also a holder of the IIP Health and Wellbeing standard which recognises how well we look after our staff.

NESS held another successful Annual Celebration in the Aberdeen Town House in November 2019.

### Service User Statistics

The total number of service users on our database for the whole of Grampian and Tayside in the year to 31 March 2020 was 6,488.

## Awareness Raising

Over the year, we ran or took part in **51** awareness raising events attended by a total of **835** people. This included our one-day Awareness Training sessions as well as bespoke training sessions delivered to other organisations, information events with larger groups, talks to professional bodies and smaller community groups and combined fundraising/ awareness raising events.

We are continually grateful to the Aberdeen See Hear group for supporting many of our training initiatives.

## Added Value Services

NESS provides a BSL to English Language interpreter booking service, utilising freelance interpreters and our own in-house interpreter. We only use fully qualified and registered interpreters and this is a chargeable service. We undertook **286** assignments during this period. Our in-house interpreter fulfilled **152** jobs, including **18** which were undertaken with a co-worker, the remainder being carried out by contractors. Jobs were spread through each of the local authority areas we operate in. Types of assignments varied greatly from personal medical and dental appointments to the guided NuArt walks around Aberdeen and theatre performances.

Providing emotional and practical support as well as information and advice, our Hospital Information Officer supported **400** Eye Clinic patient cases from across NHS Grampian and Shetland, which is up from last year's total of **392**. This included **286** patients who were entirely new cases, but **does not include the numbers for March**, as clinics were interrupted by the Covid-19 lockdown. Our Hospital Information Officer has continued to ensure that information is available to patients attending Audiology and other clinical departments.

Our Connect Inform Support (CIS) service is for the specific group of advanced elderly people with significant sight and/ or hearing loss who are experiencing social isolation and living in their own homes. We secured a two-year contribution to this service totalling £232,232 from the Big Lottery, also £33,000 over three years from the R S MacDonald Trust and £4,000 from the Hugh Fraser Foundation. The team of two full-time and four part-time workers have been supported by a total of 55 volunteers during the year. They have helped **109** of our most senior service users to re-establish a social life, take part in activities and connect with a community of friends they would otherwise miss out on. We organise a variety of social events and deliver accessible transport options so people can attend. Regular contact with CIS staff means our people can get immediate professional support as well as information on practical aids, the opportunity to be connected with wider NESS specialised support and signposting to other services as needed.

Our Employment Support Services provide personalised support to people living with serious sensory loss who are of working age in Aberdeen City and Dundee. We have supported a caseload of **93** people. Each person has received individualised tailored support, planned around their preferences and needs. There have been positive outcomes for most. **Eight** unemployed people have moved into work, **41** people have been supported to retain their work or look at alternative work options, **16** people have moved onto education or training and **12** people have secured work placements or volunteering opportunities.

Our “ICT for All” service has enabled **143** people with sensory loss to become aware of devices and equipment that can help them participate like their sighted and hearing peers. We deliver this service in each of our three resource centres in Elgin, Aberdeen and Dundee and help people from the whole of the North East, including Angus and Aberdeenshire. We have helped them learn how to use the technology to develop new skills and all have reported being able to do more things for themselves and made significant improvements to their lifestyle.

Our Young Peoples’ Sensory Service (YPSS) is the only project in Scotland that provides integrated sensory support to young people aged 0-19. All our young people suffer from a significant sight and/or hearing loss which can cause them social isolation and disadvantage in access to education, training, sport and leisure and, eventually gaining employment. We have supported **161** youngsters this year, **65** have showed a significant increase in their independence, **68** have made significantly more friendships and **70** have taken part in a wide range of new and challenging activities.

Volunteer supported services and activities have delivered an increased range of support services and peer-led activities, social, leisure and peer support groups in all our areas. All our social and peer support groups in Arbroath, Brechin, Forfar, Kirriemuir and Montrose have continued to grow, with the support of the Angus Society for the Blind. Additionally, social groups have been meeting at our base in Dundee and in Broughty Ferry.

We have a range of clubs and groups who meet regularly at our resource centres in Aberdeen and Elgin, supported by volunteers. We also operate both an extensive postal audio library and a walk-in service, a fitness room and many other activities, all thanks to our marvellous volunteers.

## Fundraising and Promotional Initiatives

Over the year we delivered a number of fundraising events with varying success. A new and updated Fundraising Strategy has been developed and is being implemented.

NESS continues to have a public profile and we remain most grateful to Ian Herd and Amplus Energy for their on-going PR sponsorship. This year we were featured in a number of That's TV articles as well as receiving significant coverage from national press and TV following the award of a Scottish Government Grant for the development of a Welfare Benefits Service that is due to go live in the 20/21 financial year.

NESS continues to be a member of the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce, the Moray Chamber of Commerce, the Dundee and Angus Chamber of Commerce and the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI).

### Facilities

We recognise the importance of maintaining our facilities to a high standard and continue to spend a proportional amount to ensure they are fit for purpose. We had some significant expenditure in our Aberdeen Resource Centre, including the installation of a brand-new industrial kitchen to support our café and other services and activities. We are particularly grateful to Apache for their donation of £40K towards these costs and also to ASPC for £4K and to the John Gordon Trust for £2K. We are also grateful to Howdens for giving us Charity prices and a donation of £250 and to Camwater who also donated £250.

We are grateful to the Angus Blind Society who are fully funding the costs of renting premises in Arbroath for our Angus staff. They are an excellent supporter of our work.

### Governance

Our Board of Directors ensure the implementation of our business plan and related action plan.

During the year Rev. Mary Whittaker retired from the Board and Gordon McHardy and Charlotte Little joined.

Our Service User Forums in Aberdeen, Moray and Dundee and Angus continue to meet and offer input.

## Staffing

During the financial year we welcomed the following new staff to our team:

- Lynn Batham
- Audrey McGhee
- Cilmi Eldho
- Caroline Rutherford
- Tina Murphy
- Heather Roy
- Jennifer Kennedy

NESS recognises that our staff are our greatest asset and three staff received long service awards:

Diane Lunan, 10 years

Carla Marchbank, 10 years

Linda Fachie, 20 years

We continued to offer successful Social Work training placements in the organisation and continued to support senior school pupils with short term work experience placements.

We have had collaborative opportunities with our local universities. We have worked with staff and MSc students from RGU Digital Marketing to improve our knowledge, skills and techniques, with a view to fundraising. We have also been working with a group of undergraduates from RGU Business School to improve our collection and presentation of evidence to better demonstrate our social impact.

We are very pleased to see the formation of Aberdeen University's Sensory Awareness Society, which developed as a result of the relationship we built with a medical student whom we hosted on a placement last year. The aim of the society is, "to raise awareness of the challenges faced by sensory impaired individuals..." and they have carried out several fundraising ventures on our behalf.

During the year we were visited by politicians both local and national, including Cabinet Secretary Shirley Ann Somerville. We are grateful to all of the politicians for their interest in our work.



## Strategies and Campaigns

We continue to support local and national strategies and campaigns including:

- The development of Scottish Government Welfare Benefits,
- The See Hear Sensory Impairment Strategy,
- Aberdeen, Moray, Angus, Aberdeenshire and Dundee See Hear Strategies.

## National Representation

We continue to represent the needs of our service users on the following groups:

- Scottish Government Cross Party Group on Visual Impairment,
- Scottish Government Cross Party Group on Deafness,
- Visionary, the UK Association for Local Societies for the Visually Impaired,
- Deaf Scotland Members Forum,
- SCOVl, Scottish Council on Vision Impairment,
- Institute of Fundraising,
- Thomas Pocklington Trust,
- Vision UK,
- SASLI the registration organisation in Scotland for BSL Interpreters.

## Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

As with every organisation and individual, NESS has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In February we started to plan our response and in March, lockdown happened and we have since then all been working from home.

NESS has continually adapted our services to ensure that our service users, volunteers and staff are safe and well. We have put in place a wide range of changes to allow our staff to work from home. We have been using new technology as widely as we can and we have developed new ways of working.

Our service users have particular challenges caused by sensory loss and it has been a challenge to keep in touch with them and support them.

Income streams have been disrupted as we have not been able to run large scale events. However, we have been creative in developing online events and trust fund income has increased significantly going into 20/21. For the coming financial year, we are confident that NESS will continue to be in a strong financial position.

Our statutory and trust funders have been exceptional in their support and flexibility of their funding.

## **Planned Developments for 2020/21**

- Continue to develop a blended working model,
- Make adjustments to our working practices to cope with Covid-19,
- Make changes to our buildings to cope with Covid-19,
- Look in detail at how we can continue to support our service users in the new normal,
- Develop our fundraising plan to cope with the enforced changes caused by Covid-19,
- Develop our in-house Media and PR services.

## **Awards Received**

### **Connect, Include & Support (CIS)**

- The National Lottery Community Fund (The Big Lottery): £96,802
- CNOOC International Limited: £9,000
- The RS Macdonald Charitable Trust: £11,000

### **Dundee & Angus Volunteer Groups**

- Angus Society for the Blind: £12,000
- Anonymous Trust: £5,000
- Anne Herd Memorial Trust: £1,545
- Dundee Partnership Grant: £2,679

### **Employment Service**

- Agnes Hunter Trust: £9,000
- Fairer Aberdeen Fund: £23,477
- The Mathew Trust: £3,384
- The Robertson Trust: £5,000

### **Hospital Information Officer**

- RNIB: £20,000

### **ICT for All Service**

- Mary Chalmers Charitable Trust: £2,000
- Miss Violet Murray Lessels Trust: £750
- The Murdoch Forrest Charitable Trust: £2,000
- DR Spalding's Charitable Trust: £5,000
- The Robertson Trust: £16,500

### **Welfare Rights Officer**

- Scottish Government Benefit Takeup Fund: £42,665

### **Young People's Sensory Service (YPSS)**

- Aberdeen City Council Youth Activity Grant: £1,500
- Aberdeen University Students' Association RAG: £2,500
- Adam Family Foundation: £1,995 – YPSS Moray
- The Adamson Trust: £1,500 - YPSS
- Anderson Anderson & Brown LLP: £1,500
- BBC Children in Need: £20,566
- Birkdale Trust for Hearing Impaired: £5,000
- The Hedley Foundation: £2,800
- The MacRobert Trust: £9,802 - YPSS
- The Mickel Fund: £1,000
- The Milne Family Foundation: £3,000
- Skipton Building Society Charitable Foundation: £1,855
- St James's Place: £1,000

### **Café Kitchen Refurbishment**

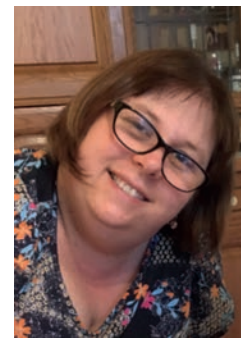
- Aberdeen Solicitors' Property Centre: £4,000
- Apache: £40,000
- Camwater Ltd: £250
- John Gordon's Charitable Fund: £2,000
- Howdens Joinery Group: £250

### **Unrestricted / Operating Costs**

- Thomas Primrose Trust: £100 - Unrestricted
- Hugh Fraser Foundation: £2,000 – Replacing PCs

## 1879-2019

### 140 Years of Improving Lives by Libby Hillhouse



When we started talking about our 140th anniversary and ways we could mark this great milestone, it was suggested we take a historical approach and create a timeline.

As the Training and Information officer, to my great pleasure, I was given the task of taking this forward. The initial idea had been to showcase how the organisation had started and how it had evolved over the years. The plan was then to create an event around the timeline to raise awareness of NESS, which unfortunately has not been possible due to the pandemic.

The information for the timeline was gathered from old annual reports, of which we only had a few dating from before 2000 and a great deal of information was found in the British Newspaper Archives. The newspaper archives hold detailed, almost verbatim, accounts of the inaugural meeting and of the Annual General Meetings (AGMs) up until the early part of the 20th Century, after which the reports were much less detailed.

A small working group was set up with myself, service user Innes Gregory, who had experience of doing research, PR and Marketing and one of our volunteers, Arlene Foreman, who is an oral historian. They, along with our admin assistant Selina Edward, helped with the design, research and content. Our printer, Stuart Cheyne, finalised the designs and put them up on the wall in our John Street building.

There is far more to our history than we were able to fit into the history wall panels, but they reflect the overall story of the organisation. It became clear after reading the report of the inaugural meeting that the values and key activities that were established in 1879 are still very relevant today, and this formed the basis of the story:

That of an organisation committed to supporting people to live as well and independently as possible, building skills and confidence, reducing social isolation, and embracing technology and developments as they emerge.

It became clear that the organisation has been supported by a great number of very committed and determined people who have contributed to NESS becoming what it is today.



1879



On 7th October 1879, the inaugural meeting of the Aberdeen Town and County Association for Teaching the Blind at their Homes (**the Association**) was held. William Ferguson of Kinmundy was elected Chairman, a position he held until his death in 1904. The Earl of Aberdeen was elected president which he remained as until his death in 1934.

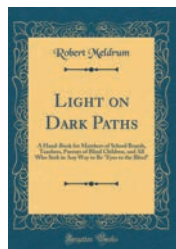
The aims of **the Association** were to:

- Seek out the blind
- Visit them in their own homes
- To teach the Moon system of reading (another form of raised text more commonly used in the late 19th Century)
- To supply scriptures and other books free of charge
- To teach work and find employment in people's homes.

**The Association** knew of around 125 people who were blind in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. By the end of the first year, they had visited nearly 250 people.

The call from the inaugural meeting was that “When the society is formed, it should not be the least but the best and that it would prove to be the expression of all that was best and most beneficent in all the societies of the land put together”.

1883



Robert Meldrum, **the Association's** first Superintendent who was instrumental in establishing **the Association**, published his book “Light on Dark Paths: A Hand-Book for Members of School Boards, Teachers, Parents of Blind Children, and All Who Seek in Any Way to Be “Eyes to the Blind”.

He was later recognised as an “authority on all work pertaining to the blind and his advice was sought over and over again”.



1900



**The Association** continued to visit people who were blind in their homes, helping people to help themselves and to “put them in a position as far as possible to make them independent of outside assistance”.

**The Association** continued to promote reading of Moon and Braille and distributed books to “mitigate the feeling of isolation and loneliness which was experienced by those whose eyes were sightless”.

By 1900, **the Association's** reach included Aberdeen city, Aberdeenshire, parts of Buchan, parts of Kincardineshire, parts of Banffshire, Orkney and Shetland, with over 600 people being visited. Small committees overviewed the work in those outlying areas.

1920



In 1920, the **Blind Person's Act** was passed. This put a responsibility on the local authorities, at the time the Town and County Councils, to meet the welfare needs of people who were blind. Blind people were now entitled to claim a pension from the age of 50 rather than 70. Local authorities were expected to keep a register of blind and partially sighted people.

The councils acknowledged **the Association** along with the

1921



**The Association** employed five Home Teachers for the Blind. Home Teachers visited people at home, taught them tactile reading using either Braille or Moon. They also taught domestic skills so people could manage daily living tasks, and craft skills so people could produce goods, such as baskets, mats and knitted items, to sell at the annual sales of work. Some were encouraged to learn to play the piano. The Annual Sale of Work raised some money for the work of **the Association**, and they continued to depend heavily on donations from the public.

(This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA)

1922



**The Association** eventually moved to their first official premises at 112 Crown Street in Aberdeen, in 1922.

(Crown Street and Electricity Works, Aberdeen)





**1930**



**The Association**, along with the Blind Asylum, were acknowledged by the authorities as the organisations providing the statutory welfare services for people who were blind. Aberdeen Council contributed towards the costs for each person visited by **the Association**, as well as contributing costs towards the training of individual Home Teachers for the Blind.

**1933**



Everyone being supported by **the Association** in mainland Scotland had a wireless by the 1930s, with the expectation that everyone in Shetland and Orkney would have one in the near future.

**1934**



**The Association** was approved to run the Home Workers Scheme. Under this scheme, people who were blind could be set up as a small business, working at home with financial support from the local authorities. Home workers produced goods such as baskets, knitted items and mats to be sold, enabling them to be as self-supporting as possible.

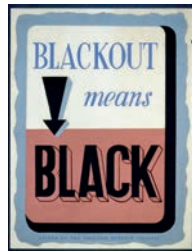
**1935**



By the 1930s, audio books had started to appear on gramophone records and **the Association** owned an audio book machine. One side of a record held about 25 minutes of recording. An early popular book was Agatha Christie's "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd".



**1941**



At the 1941 AGM, Mr George Miller talked about his experience of being blind during the war, saying "People say they wish the blackout were over, but our "black-out" is continuous. We have simply to bear it and say nothing. But we give thanks for all the assistance that is given to us, and we hope it will continue".

**1944**



With **the Association's** support, people who were blind were found employment to help with the war effort. Sources list mechanics, transcription typists, factory work and telephonists as the type of employment taken up.

(photo courtesy of Barclay's Bank)

**1945**



Many soldiers returned from World War 2 having been blinded by the war. By this time, **the Association** was supporting over 540 people. Services were brought together to ensure returning soldiers were supported at home.

There was a reduction in the numbers of children with sight loss which was attributed to improved maternal and postnatal care.

**1948**



**The Association** was now formally employed by Aberdeen Town Council and the county councils of Aberdeen, Banff and North Kincardineshire to deliver the welfare services for the blind.

Work continued visiting people, organising fundraising through sales of work, organising social events and group craft sessions across the geographical area covered by the Association.







**1960**



(By Colin Smith, CC BY-SA 2)

**The Association** moved to premises at 20 Bon Accord Square, a large four story building, with a small office and the Braille library in the attic.

Home Teachers continued to visit people in their own homes.

**The Association** organised an annual sale of work at which Home Workers could sell their goods, such as baskets and hand-knitted goods to raise money. Regular evening concerts and an annual picnic at Haddo House were also held. Annual parties were organised by the local authority in the Beach Ballroom.

**1968**



(courtesy of [www.iriss.org.uk](http://www.iriss.org.uk))

In 1968, the **Social Work (Scotland) Act** was passed. Social workers assessed people's individual needs and put together packages of support. The tasks were very similar to that of the Home Teachers, visiting people in their own homes and liaising with other services to ensure their needs were being met. By the mid-1970s, the Association was employing social workers which replaced the role of the Home Teachers.

**1972**



**The Association** provided free holidays in a caravan in Buckie. Buckie Town Council covered the cost of electricity and the local Rotary Club visited people and took them out. A second caravan was bought three years later with funding from the Student's Association.

(© Aberdeen Journals Ltd)

**1975**



**The Association** employed a fully qualified Mobility Officer, one of only five in Scotland. Eventually, the role of the Mobility Officer was replaced by the Rehabilitation for Visual Impairment Officer (Rehab Officer).

**The Association** bought its first car which meant more home visits could be made, particularly in the more rural areas.





north east  
**sensory services**

achieving independence for blind & deaf people

**Grampian Society for the Blind (GSB)  
1980 – 2000**

**1980**



The Aberdeen Town and County Association for Teaching the Blind at their Homes changed their name to **Grampian Society for the Blind (GSB)** to reflect the area that they covered and in response to the formation of Grampian Regional Council in 1975.



In 1980, the Grampian Tape Service was set up by service user Duncan Simpson in the Bon-Accord Square premises. Using a network of volunteer readers and small cassette recorders, the Grampian Tape Service was built up to produce three audio magazines of local news stories and distributed to over 1,200 people. Bon-a-talk and Hameower continue to be produced today.

(Courtesy of hifiengine.com)

**1994**



The Iain Fraser Resource Centre at John Street was officially opened by Princess Margaret in 1994. It was named after the chairman Iain Fraser who had been instrumental in co-ordinating the purchase and refit of the new premises.

The new premises were designed to be as accessible as possible, with good colour contrast, good lighting, a talking lift, and many other features to enable people who are blind or visually impaired to use the premises safely.

**1994**



**GSB** opened a small Resource Centre in Moray Street, Elgin, before moving to the current office at Elizabeth House in 2010.

**1997**



**GSB** was awarded major lottery funding to create a mobile resource centre to travel around rural areas providing information and advice about rehabilitation and independent living skills.



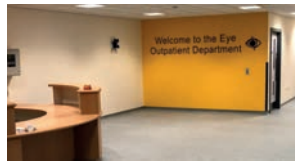


north east  
**sensory services**

achieving independence for blind & deaf people

**Grampian Society for the Blind (GSB)  
2000 – 2010**

**2000**



**Grampian Society for the Blind** set up a help desk in the Eye Clinic at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, supported by volunteers. In 2010, this became our Hospital Information Service, covering both the Eye Clinic and Audiology.

**2003**



The Hello Centre in Aberdeen was set up, housing the audio library, music and large print books. The fitness room in John Street was also added, creating a small but accessible gym. A smaller HELLO centre was opened in Elgin.

**2004**



The first "Drive of your Life" event was organised, giving people who were blind or partially sighted the opportunity to drive for either the first time, or again since they had lost their sight. Sighted drivers were able to drive with blindfolds, all under the strict guidance of qualified driving instructors.



**GSB** celebrated its 125th anniversary with a ball at the Marcliffe At Pitfodels, with HRH the Princess Royal in attendance.

**2009**



Moray Council awarded GSB the contract to deliver integrated joint sensory services, including people who are Deaf British Sign Language users and people who have a hearing loss. Services included social work support, lipreading classes and British Sign Language interpreter services.

**GSB** continued to deliver services on behalf of Aberdeen City as well as Added Value Services. Added Values Services included Employment Support, Young People's Sensory Service, training to use accessible Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), the audio library and audio magazines, a Befriending Service, as well as supporting various clubs and groups.



2010



Grampian Society for the Blind changed its constitution so it could support people who were Deaf or hard of hearing. The organisation also changed its name to **North East Sensory Services (NESS)** to reflect the fact it was now a joint sensory service, supporting people who were blind and/or deaf.

2011



By now, **NESS** was supporting nearly 3,500 people who were living with a sight and/or hearing loss, including Deaf British Sign Language users, in Moray and Aberdeen.

As well as delivering the services for hearing equipment and British Sign Language interpreting as part of the contract, **NESS** also created drop-in sessions for people to find out about hearing equipment.

Staff learned British Sign Language up to Level 2 to ensure they could communicate with Deaf British Sign Language users.

2013



**NESS** was awarded the contract to deliver the services for people who were Deaf or hard of hearing on behalf of Dundee, Angus, and Perth and Kinross councils, which covered the NHS Tayside area.

2014



**NESS** started to deliver a Rehabilitation for Visual Impairment (Rehab) contract on behalf of Angus council, which ran alongside the services commissioned for people who were Deaf or hard of hearing. **NESS** was now supporting over 4,600 people.

2016

**NESS** was successfully awarded contracts for joint sensory services in Dundee and Angus, resulting in all contracts now being joint sensory services and cementing **NESS's** position as the first fully integrated joint sensory services in Scotland.





2019



**NESS** continues to successfully deliver integrated joint sensory services for the local authorities in Aberdeen, Moray, Dundee and Angus, alongside a wide range of Added Value Services. All of **NESS's** services help to support and enable 6,500 people who are blind, partially sighted, Deaf or hard of hearing to lead a fulfilling and independent life.

Services include:



- Support for older people to remain socially active through group activities
- Support for children and young people to build confidence, self-esteem and life skills
- Employment support for people of working age looking to return to employment or to maintain their current employment
- Hospital Information based at the Eye Clinic and Audiology
- ICT training to support people to use assistive technology
- Audio library and magazines
- Basic hearing aid maintenance for people wearing NHS hearing aids, including supply of NHS hearing aid batteries
- British Sign Language interpreter and booking service
- Lipreading classes
- Transcription services
- Training and information



**NESS** employs over 50 staff and is supported by more than 140 volunteers across all areas of the organisation.



## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2020

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total 2020	Total 2019
Income and endowments from:	£	£	£	£
Donations and legacies	11,341	-	11,341	164,590
Charitable activities	32,733	1,578,281	1,611,014	1,607,302
Other trading activities	168,889	-	168,889	172,215
Investments	46,500	-	46,500	63,251
<b>Total income</b>	<b>259,463</b>	<b>1,578,281</b>	<b>1,837,744</b>	<b>2,007,358</b>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>				
Raising funds	167,309	-	167,309	190,766
Charitable activities	633,837	1,665,372	2,299,209	2,084,415
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>801,146</b>	<b>1,665,372</b>	<b>2,466,518</b>	<b>2,275,181</b>
Net losses on investments	(212,676)	-	(212,676)	78,260
<b>Net expenditure</b>	<b>(754,359)</b>	<b>(87,091)</b>	<b>(841,450)</b>	<b>(189,563)</b>
Transfers between funds	(134,042)	(134,042)	-	-
<b>Net movement in funds before other recognised gains</b>	<b>(888,401)</b>	<b>46,951</b>	<b>(841,450)</b>	<b>(85,000)</b>
<b>Other recognised gains:</b> Actuarial gains/(losses) on defined benefit pension plans	<b>423,000</b>	-	<b>423,000</b>	(85,000)
<b>Net movement in funds</b>	<b>(465,401)</b>	<b>46,951</b>	<b>(418,450)</b>	<b>(274,563)</b>
<b>Reconciliation of Funds:</b> Total funds brought forward	<b>855,454</b>	<b>30,381</b>	<b>885,835</b>	1,160,398
Net movement in funds	(465,401)	46,951	(418,450)	(274,563)
<b>Total fund carried forward</b>	<b>390,053</b>	<b>77,332</b>	<b>467,385</b>	<b>885,835</b>

## Service User Numbers as at 31 March 2020

Area	B/SSI	PS/SI	N	N/HH	HH	D	DBSL	DB	H	TOTAL
Aberdeen City	279	433	312	236	891	39	120	126	0	2436
Aberdeenshire	103	121	112	7	41	8	5	13	7	418
Moray	140	125	151	128	398	22	19	86	0	1146
Angus	96	116	135	85	258	44	50	45	4	792
Dundee	305	277	195	80	569	51	104	106	9	1696
Perth & Kinross								1		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>948</b>	<b>1069</b>	<b>893</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>2158</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>6488</b>

### Abbreviations:

**B/SSI** = registered blind/severely sight impaired

**PS/SI** = registered partially sighted/sight impaired

**N** = severe sight loss, but not registered

**N-HH** = severe non registered sight loss and hearing loss

**HH** = hard of hearing

**D** = deafened

**DBSL** = Deaf BSL user

**DB** = registered blind/severely sight impaired/partially sighted/sight impaired with severe hearing loss

**H** = hearing, other problems such as Tinnitus, no sight problems

## NESS During Lockdown 2020

We all started the week commencing 16th March by going to work as normal. Then our Resource Centres were closed, in compliance with government instructions and members of staff, beginning with those identified as more vulnerable, were deployed home.

A letter was sent to 6,500 people living with sensory loss, in their preferred format, about these lockdown measures and how they should continue to get in touch with NESS as needed. This included a translation into British Sign Language (BSL), as a video clip, sent out on DVDs to the 200+ Deaf people known to NESS.

Additional notices were posted on the NESS website and Facebook page, encouraging service users to phone, text or email for help with supplies, practical advice, support or information and to help them reduce any isolation.

By Tuesday of the following week, all our staff were working from home with whatever technology, mobile phones and internet connections they had at their disposal.

### Lockdown had started.

### Working From Home



Our telephone numbers and alternate contact methods had been re-routed to specific team members at their homes, so we could offer a flexible and responsive help link. Regular checks for incoming messages to our Facebook messenger, email accounts and text phone were introduced, as our service users began to make contact again.

For the next three weeks, our team members did whatever they could to respond to the needs of our service users, using makeshift communication methods. Most, having had to leave their desktop computer and files behind in the office and unable to return there, were doing their best with their own personal devices which some were able to use to access the office server remotely.



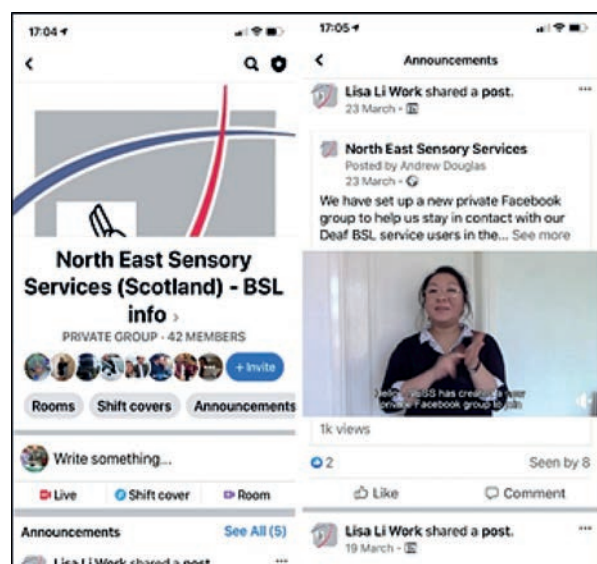
In the week of 6th April, fourteen members of staff were furloughed thanks to the national Job Retention Scheme and our volunteers were stood down, although many offered to remain engaged, the kind of duties they had previously undertaken had stopped. All partner agencies were officially informed that NESS was still working, albeit in a different way and how they should continue to get in touch.

Over the next anxious weeks, our fundraising team worked hard to secure a number of grants that allowed us to purchase new laptops, and other equipment to help us improve our home-based offerings. Our IT support company, Simblox Technologies, pulled out all the stops, easing our frustrations and managed to get us all working effectively, more or less, with remote access to our usual office-based systems.

## Digital communication and social media for Deaf sign language users

The specific needs of profoundly Deaf BSL users, for whom English is a second language, is a priority for us. As a frequently overlooked cultural and linguistic minority, they are easily missed out of essential information, and indeed their vulnerability to misinformation, is far more likely in times of crisis.

Way back in March, we created a new private Facebook group, in place of the telephone support line, which was available to our “hearing” service users.



It aims to deliver accurate and up-to-date information, the latest guidance and advice and a means to contact NESS for assistance, via video, exclusively in BSL. The newsfeed is updated several times each day and all contacts are responded to within 24 hours. Information updates have covered local and national government advice, responses to questions, updates on our own services and information about local agencies, supermarket policies, delivery services and so on. Our videos, recorded at home and posted by our in-house BSL interpreter, enabled us to update information at short notice and focus on the areas and communities in which our service users live.

## Social isolation and mental wellbeing

Regular contact with service users on our open caseload has been maintained throughout. Our field work team has been working continually from their homes, delivering support, advice and information remotely, using all the technology at their disposal, to try ensure no one was missed.

People with serious sight and/ or hearing loss were already at great risk of social isolation in pre-Covid times. Approximately 70% of those we support are aged 65 and over and in reality, many are in their 80s and 90s and dealing with age-related, joint sensory loss. For many, their attendance at our social and activity groups (which have been cancelled since 16th March) was their only social contact. Being able to talk to a familiar voice on the telephone regularly has helped a lot during this time of additional isolation. We have been maintaining regular telephone contact with those identified as being most vulnerable (including the oldest elderly, living alone). We have been able to respond quickly and flexibly— either directly, for example with doorstep deliveries, or by liaising with or referring to other agencies such as foodbanks, care hubs, health centres, pharmacies and other providers - ensuring that people had access to food, medicines and social care.

Duty social work has been in place each day throughout lockdown. New referrals have been followed up with assessments conducted over the telephone. We have encouraged innovation, adding more flexibility and so exceeding our usual range of responsive support activities.



Unable to do our normal home visits indoors for much of this time, we have been to some service users with secure “outdoor” visits and doorstep deliveries, maintaining a safe level of distance and using additional measures. As well as delivering hearing aid batteries, we began to offer an innovative Hear to Help Express service, utilising some of our trained Hearing Aid Champion volunteers, which picks up, cleans, services and

and returns hearing aids to people within Aberdeen City on the same day, thus cutting down the isolation of people totally dependent on their hearing aids to interact with the world.

## Preparing for a return to the office

By the beginning of May, the Management Team had begun work on an “Exit from Lockdown” plan, beginning with a focus on looking after our people. Our Investors in People partners, Re:markable, surveyed everyone to identify common themes about our handling of the situation so far, to generate ideas and to discover what were the common concerns everyone was having about returning to the workplace. This was followed by an individual questionnaire which was undertaken by the line managers to identify each person’s individual specific needs and wishes.

Hand-sanitizing stations were installed at each entrance to our buildings and PPE and additional hygiene resources were acquired and made available. We reviewed our office layouts, moving desks and reassigning some room functions, to allow for distancing. Perspex screens were installed in reception and resource areas, interview rooms and meeting rooms were equipped with movable table-top screens.

A “Return to the Office Handbook”, was complemented by a series of task-specific and where appropriate, person-specific risk assessments and management plans to help people feel more secure. We were just waiting for the Scottish Government and our Local Authority partners to allow us to start the re-opening process.

This began at the end of September with appointments and essential home visits only.

At time of writing (October) we continue to move cautiously as we ease forward.



**Reception at John Street with new screen**

## North East Sensory Services

is the operational name of Grampian Society for the Blind, charity registered in Scotland, SC009537, company limited by guarantee SC155630

Main office:

**21 John Street**

**Aberdeen AB25 1BT**

**Tel: 0345 27 12345**

**Fax: 01224 622120**

**SMS: 07593 102004**

**E: [info@nesensoryservices.org](mailto:info@nesensoryservices.org)**

Also at:

**Elizabeth House**

**10 Victoria Crescent**

**Elgin IV30 1RQ**

**Tel: 0345 27 12345**

**Fax: 01343 547167**

**SMS: 07968 013951**

**E: [moray@nesensoryservices.org](mailto:moray@nesensoryservices.org)**

**Number Ten**

**10 Constitution Road**

**Dundee DD1 1LL**

**Tel: 01382 721455**

**SMS: 07713 711772**

**E: [dundee@nesensoryservices.org](mailto:dundee@nesensoryservices.org)**

**[www.nesensoryservices.org](http://www.nesensoryservices.org)**