



north east
sensory services

achieving independence for blind & deaf people



ANNUAL REPORT

To end March 2022

The Board of Directors

Chairman

John C Legg

Appointed in Meeting

John Imrie
Laura A Sharp, Vice Chair
Lynn Hawcroft
Frank K Wahedally
Christina Cooper
Leonard Ironside
Hannah Watt
Charlotte Little
Gordon McHardy
Carmen Irving
Martin Housden
Helen Nicoll (appointed 12 May 2022)
Carol Gordon (appointed 18 August 2022)

Observer

Cllr Theresa Coull, Moray Council
Cllr Gill Al-Samarai, Aberdeen Council

November 2022

Chairman's Report by John Legg



Making a Difference

It's been another hugely successful year for NESS. Our services fully reopened after the lifting of Covid restrictions, new staff joined our dedicated team, new services extended our reach and the amazing level of charitable contributions allowed even more people to access vital sensory support.

Well over 6,000 people across the North East of Scotland used our services to gain and maintain their independence by accessing high quality support, information, equipment and a raft of activities and resources. A big thank you goes out to all those in the NESS 'family' who helped to make this happen, including our inspirational volunteers, staff, managers, Directors and our extraordinary network of partners and stakeholders. Their effort and their determination to provide the best possible service, regardless of challenges and time constraints, made the difference.

In a difficult financial context, NESS secured essential monies to maintain and grow services. Much of this came from the altruism of our service users, as well as their families, friends and the wider public. Whether through individual fundraising endeavours, the organisation of prestigious events or the thoughtful bequest of gifts, NESS attracted tremendous support. Local businesses dug deep and made a difference by raising funds, contributing gifts and offering advice. Lastly, an array of trusts and foundations continued to generously support individual services, often exceeding expectations.

As Scotland's leading provider of sensory services, NESS continuously improved services, efficiency and effectiveness, as well as ensuring a flexible and responsive approach to new demands. This year, NESS secured high level external accreditation, confirming the quality of work being undertaken every day, in every community we serve.

Finally, if you think that you can help Ness to make a difference and help achieve independence for people living with sensory loss, then please contact us at www.nesensoryservices.org.

Thank you.

John Legg, Chair of NESS Board of Directors

Chief Executive's Report by Graham Findlay

Review of Activities in meeting our Objectives

In the financial year 21/22, NESS continued to deliver all our services to a very high standard, in what was again, a very challenging year for everyone.

Throughout the year, our operations continued to be disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, although we again looked at developing our service delivery model so that we could adapt how we deliver services safely and effectively to our service users. At times we furloughed some staff, with the updated scheme suiting us far better as we could take staff back on a part time basis.

Our staff team have worked tirelessly to provide the best possible support to our service users throughout these uncertain times.

During the summer of 2021, our Aberdeen service went out for tender and we successfully retained the contract for up to a further five years. This is testament to the high regard that Aberdeen Health and Social Care Partnership holds NESS in and the vital services our staff have delivered for many years.

Our Angus contract was extended a further 18 months and our Moray contract has been extended to April 2024. Our Dundee contract continues on a rolling contract basis.

Since early 2022, our services have in effect been back to normal, with the full re-opening of all our resource centres.

Our Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with Aberdeen, Moray, Dundee and Angus Health and Social Care Partnerships continued to be delivered successfully and we continue to have excellent working relationships with all our statutory funders.

NESS continues to make some of our non-statutory services available to people living in Aberdeenshire where we don't currently have a statutory contract. Many of our Added Value Services are accessed by service users from Aberdeenshire. We continue to input into the Aberdeenshire See Hear group.

We held our Annual Celebration in the iconic Aberdeen Beach Ballroom in November and we are grateful to Aberdeen City Council for granting us a civic reception.



Quality systems

Quality is at the heart of everything we do. Despite lockdowns and significant ongoing restrictions, we have done all we can to provide the services we could to a high standard.

As a holder of the Investors in People (IIP) advanced Gold Standard, NESS again retained this prestigious award for a further three years. Indeed, throughout the areas of assessment, we showed continued improvement and scored at the top level of 'High Performing' in six of the nine indicators and at the next highest level of 'Advanced' for the remaining three. I am so proud of our staff who have helped us achieve this, particularly over a difficult three year period full of uncertainty and disruption.

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 2022 was 6,162.

Awareness raising

Our awareness raising activity continues in many different ways to meet the needs of the different people and organisations we are in contact with. NESS raises awareness through a structured programme of training, tailored training, talks to organisations and community groups, as well as by participating in networks and through informal meetings and discussions with others.

The way in which NESS's training programme is delivered has changed substantially in response to the pandemic and the subsequent change to the way that people work. In April 2021, NESS launched the new online learning, developed in response to the pandemic. This training programme, available for anyone to book onto, consists of e-learning content, hosted on our training site which participants can work their way through in their own time. The second part is a Microsoft Teams session to provide opportunities for discussing the practical and emotional impact of sensory loss. Between April 2021 and March 2022, 23 Microsoft Teams sessions were held, with 117 people attending. Those attending the open training programme come from a wide range of places, including private business, occupational health, nurses, social workers, OTs, support staff, student support, and other roles involved in working directly with and supporting people.

In addition to the open Sensory Awareness Training sessions, we have delivered 15 tailored training sessions or talks, reaching approximately 418 people. Tailored training is structured training, with the content tailored to meet the needs of the customer and delivered in a way to suit their needs. This often means a shorter session, and increasingly means delivering separate Visual Awareness Training and Deaf Awareness Training, to break the information up for online delivery.

For some of these tailored training sessions, the participants completed the e-learning before attending their own tailored Microsoft Teams session, which focused on particular issues that related to their organisation e.g. further education and employment. Talks are informal and unstructured, usually focusing on raising awareness about NESS and delivered to community-based groups.

As well as delivering training, we have worked with 19 organisations to either promote and raise awareness of NESS, raise awareness of what our service users need to access services, and/or to share information about what other organisations are doing with regards to accessibility. Organisations that we have worked with include local authorities, Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) and cultural organisations including cinemas, visitor attractions, and other health and social care organisations. Sometimes this work involves a one-off meeting, phone, or video call, while at other times, it involves ongoing communication, exploring issues that impact on the day to day lives of our service users, particularly in relation to accessibility of communication and information.

Our training continues to be funded by the Aberdeen See Hear Strategy Fund in Aberdeen, and by our contracts with the Angus and Moray Health and Social Care Partnerships for people who work for the local Health and Social Care Partnerships. Training participants who do not benefit from these strands of funding pay for attending the training. We are grateful to everyone who supports the training.

Added Value services

NESS provides a **BSL to English language interpreter** booking service, utilising both freelance interpreters and our own in-house interpreter, enabling Deaf people to access vital services and participate in society as equals, as they are entitled to do. We only use fully qualified and registered interpreters, and this is a chargeable service. Over this period, face to face assignments have become possible once again, although remote interpreting assignments via digital apps have also been significant.

We undertook **383 assignments** during this period: **310** were face-to-face and the remaining **73** were remote. Our in-house interpreter fulfilled **212**, with the remainder being carried out by freelancers. Jobs were spread throughout Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Moray, Angus, Dundee, as well as Glasgow. Types of assignments included GP appointments, Hospital out-patients and in-patients' admissions, emergency admissions, clinics, vaccinations, film festival, performances, mental health, presentations, panel discussions, legal, financial, council meetings, housing matters, social work, OT assessments, education, a wedding, employment, training, social groups, on-line events etc.

Our Hospital Information Officer works on an integrated basis with the Clinical and Admin teams at the Eye Outpatients' Department at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. He began this period partly furloughed working three days a week until September, when he returned to his normal hours. His role is chiefly about assisting patients, providing emotional support and advice including at the point of diagnosis, enabling them to self-manage the impact of their sight loss more easily.

During this period, there have been significant increases in both the number of remote referrals to the Eye Clinic from community opticians, as well as in-person out-patient clinic appointments. The total number of cases he has dealt with is **462**, of which **138** have been entirely new. The process of certification as either Sight Impaired (SI) or Severely Sight Impaired (SSI), which can result in a person being registered SI or SSI, is administered by our Hospital Information Service in collaboration with clinical NHS colleagues.

In addition, we continued to ensure that information was available to patients attending Audiology, in-patient wards as necessary and other clinical departments.

Our **Connect, Include, Support (CIS)** service brings together socially isolated elderly people aged 65+ living in Aberdeen City and Moray who have a significant visual and/or hearing impairment, living in their own homes or in sheltered housing.

During the reporting period (2021/22) our in-person groups were unable to meet for eight out of the twelve months, so we maintained contact using a range of contact methods and home visits.

We started "CIS Digital", an initiative using digital technology and collaboration with "Connecting Scotland" to help our elderly service users reduce some of their social isolation by contacting each other, ourselves and family and friends. Digital training and support continue, even now that our groups can meet in person again.

The team has helped support **78** of our most senior service users. Unfortunately, several of our members passed away over the period and it has not been possible to assess new referrals as we would normally do, although this recommenced as of February: we are working through a backlog.

Our **Employment Service** aims to enable people with sensory loss to contribute to their community and the economy as members of the workforce, offering tailored support to gain and maintain work and improve skills and opportunities. Our Employment Officer began this period partly furloughed, working three out of her usual four days a week until September.

In Aberdeen, a total of **57** people received support over the course of the year, with **42** remaining actively engaged as at 31st March 2022.

In Dundee and Angus, in the same period, a total of **24** people received support with employment-related issues and **20** were still actively engaged at the end of the period.

Members of the workforce who are sensory impaired have been disproportionately affected by the impact of covid lockdowns and restrictions, with the challenges they already face, greatly increased. We experienced less demand for support with job seeking during the pandemic and have mostly provided in-work support to sensory impaired workers enabling them to maintain their work and deal with employment related challenges.

We have also helped employers access the information and funding they need to implement “reasonable adjustments” through the Access to Work scheme which can help workers with a disability to thrive in their job.

Our “**ICT for All**” Officer began this period partly furloughed, working three days a week until September, when he returned to his normal five-day week and to his regular weekly rail journeys to Elgin and Dundee.

We delivered information about the difference digital devices can make to people with sensory loss to a total of **137** people, across Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Dundee and Moray. We assessed **68** people to identify what kind of equipment they could benefit from. We taught **79** people individually or in groups how to use digital devices to enrich their lifestyle and we delivered technical support to **129** people in their use of digital devices.

We saw the retirement of Charles Clark, the longest serving member of NESS staff, at the end of 2021. Fortunately, we were able to recruit a new worker immediately and, in addition, we obtained extra funding to employ a part-time ICT Officer, to meet additional demand, from April 2022.

NESS provides a Transcription service for other organisations, assisting them to fulfil their legal and social obligation to provide accessible information. We have also recommenced our home-produced information such as Audio magazines and NESS News transcribed into peoples’ preferred formats.

Our **Young People’s 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. During the year, we organised a range of innovative activities: some face to face and some remotely, within the constantly changing parameters of the covid restrictions.

We maintained contact with **171** youngsters during this challenging year: **68** have showed a significant increase in their independence, **60** have made significantly more friendships and **68** have demonstrated increased participation and ambition to try new things and achieve. We now start to see the impact that covid has had on our children and young people.

We also secured funding which allowed us to commission The University of Dundee to conduct a feasibility study into the potential of us delivering a YPSS-type service in Dundee. This is currently ongoing.

Much of the usual Volunteer supported services and peer-led activities, social, leisure and peer support groups in all our areas had to be closed during the covid restrictions. Despite this, we maintained our postal Audio library from John Street, which is operated by volunteers. Our innovative Hear 2 Help Express door-to-door retubing service continued up until September, when our resource centres were able to open to the public again and our twice monthly drop-in clinics recommenced, along with the drop-in library service, the fitness room, the café and various clubs and group meetings.

All the clubs and groups who meet regularly at our resource centres in Aberdeen, Elgin and Dundee and in community venues across Tayside (Montrose, Brechin, Arbroath, Forfar, Kirriemuir and Broughty Ferry) and across Moray (Keith, Buckie, Forres and Elgin), were shut. Our telephone conference-call and Zoom video meetings continued for those who wished to join in. Since February, all the groups have been trying to re-start, although most have faced challenges in their membership, with volunteer support and the changing availability of some community venues. By the end of March 2022, with a lot of hard work, roughly half of them were up and running with the rest due to follow.

Fundraising and promotional initiatives

Although covid disrupted some of our in-person fundraising events, we did manage to get some of them off the ground, including the Chapleton Bike Ride and a return of our ever popular Dine with the Dons event. We continue to be grateful to our friends at Amplus Energy for their input in supporting this event in particular, as well as their ongoing support to NESS and our service users.

We successfully applied for significant trusts and foundation support to maintain and expand our valuable Added Value Services to meet our service users' needs during this challenging time.

We are continually grateful to the many people who leave a legacy to NESS in their Will, their contributions are vital to the sustainability of the charity.

NESS continues to have a strong public profile and received significant coverage from local radio, and both local and national press.

We are grateful to Quantum Communications who manage our Public Relations role and have maintained our profile with the media, the public and politicians to a high level.

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

Political Interest in NESS

During the year, we were visited by seven MSPs and MPs and by a number of local councillors. We had two motions put forward to the Scottish Parliament on our behalf, congratulating NESS on successes with Trust Fund applications.

We developed a newsletter for our politicians, which keeps them informed of the vital work that NESS undertakes.

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. Our John Street facility is second to none and we welcomed two different service providers, one from Scotland and one from London to view the centre and hopefully be inspired as they further develop their own facilities.

In Angus, we moved to new office space at the Friockheim Community Hub. We are extremely grateful to our friends at the Angus Blind Society for their continued support of NESS and supporting us to make this move a reality.

Our Dundee and Elgin facilities are excellent and kept to a high standard by the landlords.

Governance

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

During the year Paul Duncan resigned from the Board. We welcomed our new directors, Martin Housden and Gordon McHardy to the board.

Our Service User Forums in Aberdeen, Moray and Dundee and Angus were suspended due to covid restrictions and we are currently exploring new ways of service user engagement.

Staffing

During the year, we had five members of staff retire and we are grateful to Charles Clark, Margaret Scrutton, Diane Lunan, Carol Gordon and Brigitte Marshall for their many years of dedication to NESS and both our service users and us wish them well for a long, happy and healthy retirement.

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

Tracey Stewart, Administration Assistant, Angus
Julie Hughes-Cross, CIS Administrator, Moray
Alison Green, Support Services Manager
Ryan Leslie, ICT Officer

Ann Robertson, Client Services Manager, Janice Gray, Employment Officer and Julie Thornton, Fieldwork Assistant and Guide Communicator received their long services awards for 10 years at NESS.

NESS usually offers Social Work training placements in the organisation as well as supporting senior school pupils with short term work experience placements. We took on Astrid Offersen from the John Smith Institute as our first Intern and provided opportunities for Robert Gordon University students who helped develop our fundraising plans.

Strategies and campaigns

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

- The See Hear Sensory Impairment Strategy,
- Aberdeen, Moray, Angus, Aberdeenshire and Dundee See Hear Strategies,
- The Scottish Government's plans for a National Care Service,
- We continued to support local initiatives to ensure that our service users were able to access vaccines as easily as possible,
- We continued to work with partners to ensure that vital covid information was made available in accessible formats,
- We continued to engage with the Scottish Sensory Hub,
- We were involved in the Scottish Government's plans for the development of a community low visual aid (LVA) service,
- We were one of only two service providers who took part in the face-to-face consultation with the Scottish Government Finance Minister on the National Spending Review.

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. We continued to be involved at board level as well as within the many online support groups that have developed to support staff,
- Institute of Fundraising,
- Thomas Pocklington Trust,
- SRLDPC the registration organisation in Scotland for BSL Interpreters.

Planned developments for 2022/23

- Put together a compelling response to the Angus Health and Social Care tender,
- Reinstate the full range of Community Fundraising Events, including the iconic NESS Ball,
- Update or replace our service user database,
- Replace our fundraising database,
- Continue to review our organisational structures and recruit quality staff,
- Expand our statutory staffing levels if funding allows,
- Take forward recommendations from our latest Investors In People assessment,
- Continue to be involved in the Scottish Government National Care Service Plans,
- Take part in the review of the See Hear Strategy,
- Take part in a national review on employment support for our service user group,
- Complete the feasibility study on the need for a Dundee Young Peoples Service and seek funding to develop the service if appropriate,
- Continue to be involved with local developments and strategies,
- Develop our next six-year organisational strategy.

Service user feedback

We received a lot of positive comments from and on behalf of our service users demonstrating the impact NESS had had on their lives.

Here is a selection received during 2021-22:

“My worker was most professional, helpful and even through the pandemic remained in touch. A great asset to NESS.”

“The ladies who called on me were an absolute delight, so helpful and hard working. An excellent service all round.”

“Yesterday, I met a woman who is the mother of a deaf lad of 13, who often comes home from school totally fed-up and frustrated at feeling excluded from things for much of the time. She was full of praise for the innovative and inclusive support you offer to the young people. She said it makes such a difference to him.”

“I wish everyone was as thorough as you. Nice to work with someone so professional for a change.”

“I would like to thank you for your time and expert advice you gave me... After a difficult year I was nervous about telling future employers about my sight loss, but I used the links you gave me and took on your advice and I'm over the moon to say that I now have been offered a fantastic job... The help I received was invaluable, thank you so much.”

“Just wanted to let you know, I saw M walking along the road with his wife using his long cane, he looked so confident. He was walking in front of her and she was walking fast to keep up with him, it was so nice to see him being so independent. Thank you so much for all your input.”

“My mum and I greatly appreciate the time you have taken to ensure things were progressed as appropriate. You clearly are passionate about the job and the patients!”

“I'm absolutely shocked, and most grateful: I'm to receive PIP (Personal Independence Payment). I've also received a lump sum back dated from 19th November 2020, the date when you first helped me with the call to DWP. I really can't thank you enough for all your help, and giving me the confidence to keep going. I honestly can't believe it!”

“Thank you so much for completing my husband's blue badge application form as I didn't know how to go about getting it renewed. I am so grateful for all your help.”

“I was quite nervous and emotional when I visited but I was very quickly put at ease and I felt safe and comfortable. I had so, so many questions and I truly appreciate the time and advice given to me. Your organisation is amazing.”

“I was informed that I've been awarded enhanced rate for daily living and also mobility. I wasn't expecting that! It is also 10 years before review. Just wanted to say thanks so much for all your hard work and support. This is a real weight off my mind financially and can now concentrate on getting on with other things.”

“You were so very helpful to me with your support and guidance. I had the benefit and pleasure of having met you before covid, and your calm, knowledgeable professionalism comes over in your emails too.”

“Thank you for getting the right person to help me. The Welfare Rights team got me an extra £149 every 2 weeks And I got a full refund for my glasses as well.”

“The advice given and suggestions made were appreciated. The worker was extremely professional, caring and empathetic and seemed to thrive on the challenges set by my mother-in-law!”

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total 2022 £	Total 2021 £
Income and endowments from:				
Donations and legacies	127,731	-	127,731	162,700
Charitable activities	37,918	1,744,328	1,782,246	1,747,274
Other trading activities	65,628	-	65,628	33,265
Investments	51,623	-	51,623	56,344
Total income	282,900	1,744,328	2,027,228	1,999,583
Expenditure on:				
Raising funds	118,561	-	118,561	100,903
Charitable activities	474,174	1,779,008	2,253,182	2,056,976
Total expenditure	592,735	1,779,008	2,371,743	2,157,879
Net gains/(losses) on investments	49,954	-	49,954	319,645
Net income/expenditure	(259,881)	(34,680)	(294,561)	161,349
Transfers between funds	(55,200)	55,200	-	-
Net movement in funds before other recognised gains	(315,081)	20,520	(294,561)	161,349
Other recognised gains: Actuarial gains on defined benefit pension plans	290,000	-	290,000	366,000
Net movement in funds	(25,081)	20,520	(4,561)	527,349
Reconciliation of Funds: Total funds brought forward	892,212	102,522	994,734	467,385
Total funds carried forward	867,131	123,042	990,173	994,734

Service User Numbers as at 31 March 2022

Area	B/SSI	PS/SI	N	N/HH	HH	D	DBSL	DB	H	TOTAL
Aberdeen City	269	411	325	203	836	45	122	121	6	2,338
Aberdeenshire	74	86	79	7	34	36	2	11	8	337
Moray	141	121	144	117	378	22	18	111	0	1,052
Angus	83	103	118	81	260	35	46	43	2	771
Dundee	315	257	202	78	548	40	97	116	9	1,662
Perth & Kinross	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Total	882	978	868	486	2057	178	285	403	25	6,162

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

North East Sensory Services

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

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