

Sight loss charity's vision for the future



The past year has been full of challenges for all of us, regardless of age, location or situation. For Sight Support Worthing this has meant ensuring its members continue to receive the support, advice and social engagement they've been used to. Sight Support Worthing - as the name suggests! - offers a range of activities, events, resources and information designed to inspire and support those who are blind or partially sighted, and their families. Membership is free of

charge and open to anyone with a visual impairment.

The charity is headed up by Sonia Baker, who started in her role as General Manager in March 2020. Sonia's first year has seen Sight Support Worthing (SSW) needing to introduce new ways to support members and a number of new initiatives have been introduced: "Along with dealing with the restrictions of lockdown and the challenges that brought, our aim

has been to develop the Charity for the future so it meets the changing interests of a wider visually impaired community, while keeping our familiar and welcoming culture."

Like many other organisations, online communication has been key, especially when it comes to sustaining social interactions. SSW now runs popular weekly sessions including an art group and chair yoga. These are set to continue, with face-to-face classes being held in addition to online options. With lockdown restrictions now reducing, plans are being made to reopen the SSW Centre in Rowlands Road, Worthing for in-person support.

One of the areas that is key to the Charity's vision is technology. Plans include providing demos, tech support and how-to classes for using tech at all levels. "Accessible tech plays an important part in helping enrich people's lives and open up opportunities for them. However some devices can seem daunting to learn or are priced out of people's reach. So we're really trying to help people see what's out there, as well as giving opportunities to try out equipment to see if it's right for them. Then once people invest in technology, we're here to offer them assistance," says Sonia, who is leading the project.

The year ahead is an exciting one for Sight Support Worthing and its

members. As well as the expansion of the charity's technology for visual impairment service, they are launching a volunteer/member buddy scheme, which will match people by shared interests. Naturally, as a charity, volunteers are crucial and much-valued members of the Sight Support team; new volunteers are always welcome and there are varied roles available.

Another important aim for the charity is to introduce activities for its younger members. As Sonia says: "One of the things we've been looking at is the gap between activities and services aimed at the very young, and those that appeal to more senior people. There is definitely a shortage of options for those aged between 30-50. These people may be busy with families or jobs and aren't necessarily looking to engage with a charity on a daily or weekly basis. Equally they might be missing out on some great services simply because they aren't being offered anything relevant. So we'll be looking at new ways to reach that missing demographic."

In their quest to attract new members and provide appealing events, activities and services, the team is looking to collaborate with other organisations, groups or businesses. Sonia and her team are keen to pool resources and share

ideas with others who have similar aspirations: "Now more than ever, organisations need to stop working in silos and work together. So many services remain a postcode lottery which doesn't meet the needs of the community. Logistically we cannot provide everything to everyone, but if we collaborate we can make sure the things we can't provide, someone else can and vice versa."

The Charity would love to hear from anybody who would like to find out more (either for themselves or a family member), those who are interested in volunteering, as well as anyone working within an organisation, group or business who is keen to partner or collaborate on projects and initiatives. "We're always open to working with anyone who has ideas for inspiring, supporting or promoting accessibility to visually impaired people, particularly those who are themselves visually impaired, so do get in touch."



For more information take a look at the website www.sightsupportworthing.org.uk, call the Centre on 01903 235782 or email info@sightsupportworthing.org.uk