

NYSTAGMUS NETWORK (UK) NETLETTER
February 2004

RNIB Nystagmus Day

Wednesday 4th February 2004 is RNIB Nystagmus Day at Judd Street, London. This is an RNIB education event which will be attended by teachers and VI teams from London and surrounding areas. Members of the Nystagmus Network are welcome to attend at a cost of £20.00 payable to the RNIB, please contact Alice.Mussen@rnib.org.uk

Nystagmus Network Open Day and AGM 2004

We have a very full programme for our open day this year including key speakers for the morning and the afternoon, with a range of alternative activities for all ages during the day. Lunch will be available to order or you may bring your own. Full details will appear in the next Netletter and in the March edition of Focus

For your diary now:

The date: **Saturday April 24th. 2004 from 10.30 to 4.30**

The place: **The Prince's Foundation Building,
19, Charlotte Road
Shoreditch
London EC2A 3SG**

This is a thoroughly modernised building approximately 5-10 minutes walk from Old Street Underground station. There will be a map in Focus, meanwhile directions from the station to the Prince's Foundation building are as follows,

Leave Old Street Underground station by exit 3. At the end of the tunnel turn left up the ramp onto Old Street then bear right onto Great Eastern Street. Cross the road at the first traffic lights, then take the narrow street in front of you and slightly to your right. This is Rivington Street.

When you get to a cross road, turn right. The Prince's Foundation building (number 19 Charlotte Road) is a few yards down on the right hand side.

RNIB Vision 2004

The 12th RNIB Vision 2004 Exhibition is being held on Tuesday 6 April 2004 at Kensington Town Hall, London. Vision 2004 is an exhibition on education and employment issues for people with sight problems, their families, carers and those working with them. Vision 2004 is free to enter and open to visitors of all ages! Exhibitors include technology companies, special schools and colleges, social services, voluntary societies, disability charities and well-known high street names! There will be live musical performances by blind and partially sighted people and two free workshops (details below) for blind and partially sighted children on music and art, a seminar programme on key topics as well as the opportunity to take part in a live fundraising event! Contact the Vision 2004 hotline on 020 7391 2315 or go to www.rnib.org.uk/vision2004exhibition for more information.

Kids do you fancy taking part in Art and Music workshops in London during the Easter break?

The Ultimate Art Experience: For 11-16 year olds

Spend an afternoon with Rebecca Harris. Find out how Rebecca has become a successful artist, work alongside her and recreate one of her artworks or even make your own. Rebecca, who is partially sighted herself, creates her art through painting, sculpting and photography.

Or

The Handel House Experience: For 8-12 year olds

An introduction to the great composer Handel's house through a descriptive and sensory virtual tour, with activities. This will be followed by a singing workshop leading to a short performance, inspired by Handel's music and age.

The workshops take place at the Vision 2004 Education and Employment Exhibition on Tuesday 6 April 2004 at Kensington

Town Hall, London. For further details and an application form to be returned by 24 February, call us now at the Vision hotline on 020 7391 2315, email vision@rnib.org.uk or go to <http://www.rnib.org.uk/vision2004exhibition>

Nystagmus Talks on Tape

We have a number of recordings of talks on nystagmus, and I can copy these onto tape for members. The recordings available are listed below. If you would like to purchase any of the tapes, please write to me indicating which tape you require, and enclosing a cheque made payable to Nystagmus Network for £5.00 per tape. My address is 28 North Croft, Willition, nr Taunton, Somerset TA4 4RS. Please note that some of the recordings date back to 1988 and some of the information may have changed since that recording was made.

May I remind anyone receiving Focus in the yellow plastic wallets each time to return your wallet as soon as you can. This will help us by not having to hold such a large stock of spare wallets. Thank you.

TAPE 1: 8 October 1988. David Calver, Guy's Hospital, on some of the difficulties presented by nystagmus. Eve Pascal, Manchester University, on the work being carried out at UMIST and how surgery may be used to correct head posture. Richard Broughton on the work of the Institute of Optometry.

TAPE 2: 31 March 1990. Paul Ennals, RNIB, on the school statementing system. Michael Tobin, Research Centre for The Education of the Visually Handicapped at the University of Birmingham, on his research in the field of education and visual impairment.

TAPE 3: 13 April 1991. David Calver on diagnosing and understanding nystagmus. Michael Patton, St George's Hospital Medical School, London, on research into genetic causes of nystagmus. NN Members on how nystagmus affects them.

TAPE 4: 28 March 1992. John Collins, Partially Sighted Society, on the visual aids available.

TAPE 5: 23 April 1994. Elizabeth Clery, VI teacher, on the role of support teachers in schools. Bruce Evans, Institute of Optometry, on possible future research developments. David Brain, trade union official, on his experience as a nystagmus sufferer.

TAPE 6: 16 March 1995. Chris Harris, Great Ormond Street, on myths and misconceptions associated with nystagmus. Barbara Harrison, advisory teacher for VI children on the Code of Practice. Chris Harris and others in a question and answer session.

TAPE 7: 20 April 1996. Philip Ward on the development of technology for VI people wishing to access computers and CCTVs. Ian Pritchard, Benefits Agency, on the Disability Living Allowance. Chris Harris and others in a question and answers session.

TAPE 8: 26 April 1997. Neil Anderson RNIB, on getting help for children in school. Duleep Allirajah, Action of Blind People, on access to welfare rights. Bruce Evans, Institute of Optometry, on research into treatment for nystagmus. Chris Harris on his work at Great Ormond Street. BBC Radio 4 In Touch broadcast on nystagmus.

TAPE 9: 2 May 1998

Roger Willis, RNIB, on helping visually impaired children to get about independently. David Taylor, Great Ormond Street, on clinical work with nystagmus. BBC Radio 4 In Touch recording of James Galway talking about living with nystagmus.

Andy Machin

New radio station serves people with sight problems

The first radio station in Europe aimed at people with sight problems, has started broadcasting from Glasgow.

RNIB Scotland is one of a consortium of organisations behind the new station, VIP ON AIR.

The station broadcasts via an audio internet channel. To listen to the station visit the VIP ON AIR web site <http://www.viponair.com>.

VIP ON AIR is staffed by a mix of full-time employees and volunteers including many blind and partially sighted people as well as sighted members.

The programme schedule includes news and current affairs, discussions and phone-ins. There is a strong emphasis on eye health issues and services for people with sight problems.

Magazine programmes, presented by blind presenters, focus on life skills such as cooking and DIY. Other coverage includes business, finance and sport.

VIP ON Air provides the Scottish Executive, councils, local businesses, and others with the means of targeting information about their services to blind and partially sighted people.

Newspapers and books play an important role in the programme schedule. VIP ON AIR broadcasts extensive extracts from local and national papers on the same day they are published.

Station Manager, Kerry Krige says she wants to involve the audience: "We want to use the views of our audience to shape the development of the service."

VIP ON AIR is the first station to have fully accessible broadcasting studios. The studios are designed to be operated by blind and partially sighted people themselves.

VIP ON AIR is funded and supported by Glasgow City Council; Royal National Institute of the Blind, Scotland; Playback; Glasgow and West of Scotland Society for the Blind and Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.

The station operates from the Centre for Sensory Impairment in Partick, Glasgow.

St Dunstan's explores national radio for the blind

A director of one of the UK's leading blind charities has set in motion plans that could lead to the setting up of Britain's first dedicated national radio service for blind and partially sighted listeners.

Nick Ward, of St Dunstan's, is calling on interested parties to help him form a steering group to explore the possibility of using digital satellite broadcasting via BskyB, which already broadcasts to 6.8 million households.

Britain lags behind several other major countries such as the USA and Australia which have already set up bespoke national and even local 24-hour radio stations for blind people.

"A permanent national radio service for the blind here will enrich their lives in ways that are not currently being served by any mainstream broadcaster," said Mr Ward.

"Whereas most radio stations will briefly review the front pages of daily papers, for example, a dedicated blind service would have the time to read out the inside columns and features these newspapers contain," he added. "As well as broadcasting talking books, the service could provide full audio descriptions of TV programmes and the latest movies."

Currently, out of the 168 hours in the week available to each national broadcaster, the blind community receives just 20 minutes of dedicated programming from only one service, BBC Radio 4.

Discussions have already taken place with the Radio Authority and BskyB to clear the way and confirm there are no obstacles to prevent such a service being set up. Ironically, the man ultimately in charge of broadcasting policy in Britain, Home Secretary David Blunkett, is himself blind.

“With 1.8 million people in Britain registered blind, not to mention all kinds of other people who have problems with reading for one reason or another, we know there is potentially a very large audience,” said Mr Ward.

“We want to see if we can bring together organisations and people interested in backing the project and establish whether such a station could be run on a firm financial footing,” he said. “We will also be exploring channels of potential funding, whether that be from grants, sponsorships, or selling advertising.”

The following items are taken from e-access bulletin, a free monthly e-mail newsletter. For further information and to subscribe, please go to: <http://www.headstar.com/eab>.

'Global garden' - Showcases accessible animation

A ground-breaking children's web site which has been created using accessible 'Flash' web animation could set a new trend for accessible games and cartoons, according to the RNIB (<http://www.rnib.org.uk>).

'Our Global Garden' is a collaboration between Eureka! (<http://www.eureka.org.uk>), a children's museum in Halifax, and 'showme' (<http://www.show.me.uk>), the children's section of the government's online cultural resource the 24-Hour Museum (<http://www.24hourmuseum.org.uk>). The site mirrors a current exhibition at Eureka! By allowing children aged between four and seven to explore and compare six different global environments.

The game was built using a combination of HTML and accessible web animation software Flash MX 2004, developed by Macromedia (<http://www.macromedia.com>). The software allows access to descriptive text within an animation file which can be interpreted by assistive devices such as screen readers.

"This is an exciting development," says Julie Howell, digital policy development officer at the RNIB. "Over the past few years, Macromedia has modified its software tools to make them more accessible [see for example E-Access Bulletin, issue 10, October 2000]. However, best practice examples of using accessible flash to create web sites are few and far between."

Howell hopes that projects such as this will help galvanise the web design community to experiment with the technology. "It is easy for web designers to think that accessibility means creating uninspiring, text-only sites. However, this project proves that this isn't the case. We need web designers to start experimenting with accessible Flash, sharing their learning experiences and creating best practice examples of accessible, interactive web development."

Long-awaited breakthrough for talking TV

Accessible digital TV in the UK took a leap forward this month with the release of an affordable set-top box that provides audio description for Freeview, the popular free-to-air digital service used by terrestrial broadcasters ITV and the BBC.

Audio description is the verbal description of scenes that occur between periods of dialogue, which can be carried as a separate sound-track on digital television or in specially adapted cinemas. Until now, it has only been commercially available through the Sky digital satellite service. It is not supported at all by cable TV and was only previously available on Freeview to just 45 households as part of a pilot project.

The Netgem i-Player product costs 125 pounds and provides access to all audio described programmes available on six BBC channels; ITV1 and ITV2; Channel 4; and Channel 5. "At last! This is very good news and something for which we've been campaigning for a long time," said Jill Whitehead, broadcasting and talking images officer at the RNIB.

The Freeview service offers users more choice because it enables users to adjust the volume of the audio description track independently of the programme's main soundtrack, unlike the Sky system. The Netgem box also speaks the name of each channel automatically, and will soon be available with a headphone adaptor so users have the option of listening to audio description in privacy. In addition, the box provides a link to the RNIB website so that users can check programme times.

At present, the Netgem i-Player is not available in shops and must be ordered from the manufacturer by calling the freephone number 0800 015 3092.

FOCUS NEWSLETTER

Please send articles, letters and comments for the next edition of Focus to the editor, Sue Turner, at sueturner@creativecomm.co.uk

Please send contributions, ideas or links for the NetLetter to Gill Taylor at gill@taylors.uk.com

For information about joining the Nystagmus Network please ***click here.***