

Milton Keynes Reader Service

Trustees Annual Report

July 2016

Registered Charity No. 1013965

This Annual Report is also available in
Braille or in audio formats on request

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Introduction and Background

The Milton Keynes Reader Service has been running for 27 years.

It was originally set up by a group of visually impaired people in 1988. In 1992 it became an independent charity offering free services to any adult living in Milton Keynes who finds reading or writing difficult due to physical or visual disabilities.

These services are:

Reading and Writing

This is a face-to-face service for people in their own homes. It can include reading for pleasure, helping with correspondence and form filling, doing crosswords, or even playing scrabble.

We carefully match our trained volunteer readers to their service user to enable them to develop a successful and long lasting relationship.

The people who use our services arrange their own visits from their volunteer to suit their needs on a temporary, occasional or permanent basis.

Facilitation

We have a growing range of facilitation services:

- Our “Shop and See” service introduces a volunteer to a service user so they can arrange to go shopping

together. This could be fortnightly grocery shopping or pleasure shopping for clothes or presents.

- Volunteers provide support for one-off local trips to the theatre, cinema, seminars, art galleries educational and cultural activities. There is a growing demand for this popular service.
- Our volunteers help with BucksVision's 'Eye for Art' Group, where sight impaired people meet on the first Thursday of the month for art and craft activities.

Many people use both the Reading and Writing and the Facilitation services.

Transcription

We offer a transcription service to enable any of our service users to have their paperwork transcribed into large print, or onto CD or audio cassette. One of our volunteers is an IT expert and can deal with any technical problems encountered.

For a small charge, we also transcribe onto CD or audio tape work for other charities. This has included regular transcription of minutes onto audio tape for Milton Keynes Moles (bowling for the visually impaired), transcription on to CD for MK Disability Advisory Group (DAG) and for Sensory Services.

Our volunteers also regularly transcribe onto CD the theatre brochures for Aylesbury, Milton Keynes and Northampton and Derngate theatres.

Service Users

We continue to have a steady growth in the number of people using our services, with additional visually impaired people joining us every year, either directly or via local agencies.

Many of the people using our services are over 70, often with Age Related Macular Degeneration, living alone and isolated within their community. However, we also provide support for people who have become visually impaired at a younger age and want to access a more active lifestyle.

We also provide volunteers for people with severe dyslexia, Cerebral Palsy, Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis and those that have had strokes. We also signpost people using our services to other relevant agencies such as Sound News (local talking newspaper), Bucks Vision clubs and the local Macular Degeneration Group.

“My name is Carla Jones, I am sixty eight years old and live independently in an Extra Care village.

I have been using the Reader Service for eight years since my stroke in 2008 after which I was left with limited sight and it has changed my life.



I have a reader, once a week, who helps me with my post and any writing I may need. I also have someone to take me shopping every other week. I am even able

to go on visits to the theatre organised by the Reader Service.

From time to time they also organise social events with other people in a similar situation which has increased my friendship circle.

Thanks to this support I can enjoy a normal life and feel more independent. The Reader Service is an invaluable lifeline and I am immensely grateful for the support it offers.”

Volunteers

We could not provide our services without the high quality commitment of our volunteers. We have just over 100 people helping us in various ways, quite often in several capacities.

In addition to supporting our three core services, volunteers also help in the office, record and edit our transcription work, serve on committees, help at coffee mornings and other social events, attend networking stands and run the Talks Project (a group set up to promote our services to clubs, charities and other agencies within Milton Keynes).

It is vital to the quality of our service that our volunteers are reliable, trustworthy and knowledgeable. Current volunteers are DBS checked (this is a disclosure and barring service) every five years.

New volunteers are all DBS and referee checked and also attend a full day's training course covering different eye conditions, our core services, confidentiality and adults at risk. We held two training days this year.

We also hold a two-hour practical course where new volunteers learn how to guide, including using stairs and escalators. They are then paired with a service user for a practice session around Milton Keynes shopping centre.

Once the new volunteer has completed the courses, the co-ordinator will place them with a service user, carefully matching similar interests or outlook. She will then monitor them to check that both sides are happy with the arrangement.

Our volunteers spent around 9500 hours providing face-to-face support for service users, plus a further 2150 hours volunteered for the running of the charity.

Marilyn has been a volunteer since July 2014:

“Since I joined the Reader Service I have supported a number of people with a wide range of sight and disability problems. This varies from reading to them in their own home to taking them out shopping or for a coffee.



The Eye For Art Group which I support enables people with visual impairment to be creative and is really

enjoyable. I also sell raffle tickets at support meetings and help to promote the organisation at exhibitions and volunteer fairs.

I have taken on quite a lot but that was my choice. There is no pressure to do more than you want to or have time to do. I really enjoy my involvement, meeting lots of new people who become friends rather than service users.”

Management

The Reader Service is a user-led organisation run by a Management Committee of Trustees, whose members serve on an annual basis. Five user representatives (including the Chairperson) and four volunteers are elected annually at the AGM. Further committee members can be co-opted as required.

Management Committee Members 2015/2016

User Representatives

Paula Suchy MBE (Chairperson)

Jeff Bashton (Vice Chairperson)

Michael Baldry (Bucks Vision Representative)

Paula Varey (Walnut Tree Community Shop representative)

Caroline Pearson (Talks Project)

Volunteer Representatives

Philip Ward

Lynn Bovis (Secretary)

Rose Haigh

James Clifton

Treasurer Stephen Harrison

Chairperson – Paula Suchy

“This year was the last of my three years as Chairperson, although I will be remaining on the Committee as one of the service user representatives.



Apart from the many varied areas of work I undertook this year, I have with the help of a volunteer, been reviewing our Health and Safety policies which included running a First Aid Course which I attended along with Karen and some of our volunteers. I have also been involved in fundraising and have begun to review our data protection policies”

Staff

The work of the Reader Service is carried out by its only employee, part-time co-ordinator, Karen Preece. Karen is responsible for the day to day administration of the charity. This includes recruiting, training and supporting the volunteers and matching them with service users.



She also manages the office, as well as attending relevant workshops, courses and events to keep up to date and to publicise the work of the Service.

Talks Project

We regularly give talks to inform all kinds of local groups and organisations about what we do. This is coordinated by a committee member and volunteer who organise a group of service users and volunteers trained to give presentations. The main aim is to publicise our work, reaching more people who may want to use our services or to become a volunteer. A typical talk covers general information about the services we offer, plus personal experiences from the perspective of a service user and a volunteer.

Finances

The financial position of the Reader Service remains challenging in a time when public finances are constrained and where in the past around 50% of our funding came from Milton Keynes Council. The Council reversed its proposal to eliminate our grant in 2015-16 but we have received no assurance that it will continue in future years. We have also been served notice of a 111% rent increase from Woughton Community Council for our offices.

We have diversified our sources of income in 2015-16 such that only one-third of our income came from the Council but much of this extra income came from 'one-off' sources. Our running costs remained static despite providing support to more people than in the previous year. We have maintained our policy of holding at least one year's running costs in our reserves.

(For more information please see accounts)

Funding

Approximately one third of our income this year came from Milton Keynes Council as a result of our campaign to have our two grants reinstated. We are extremely grateful for this decision.

We also receive funding from other sources including:

Walnut Tree Community Shop

We are one of the beneficiaries of the profits from this shop. We received a total of £7500 in this financial year. This continues to be a vital source of income for us, second only to the level of support from Milton Keynes Council. We are very grateful to everyone who donates their unwanted items to the shop and to the staff and volunteers who work in the shop.



The shop address is 4 Fyfield Barrow, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK7 7AN Phone:01908 607666

Flag Days

We had a flag day at Asda which raised a total of £284.

Community Foundation

The Reader Service once again took part in the MK Community Foundation's Annual 50/50 raffle, which is run with Volkswagen and Centre MK. We were given three slots to sell tickets and also sold them at our own events. We raised just over £400.

Donations

We continue to receive donations throughout the year. Service users and volunteers often give us donations, including this year one very generous amount of £1000.

The Malsters Arms in Fenny Stratford also regularly raise money for us via a collection box.

Sadly from time to time we lose someone who used our services. Often, the family request that the Reader Service receive donations instead of flowers being sent. We are very grateful that the families think of us at such sad times. We try to attend the funeral whenever possible.

Service User Donations

We ask service users to make an annual voluntary subscription of £20 for each service received. Many people also gift aid their donation. This year we raised just over £1200

Transcription work

We make a charge for the external transcription work that we do.

LocalGiving.Com

We continue to subscribe to this website which enables charities to promote their organisation to potential donors.

From time to time Milton Keynes Community Foundation offer to match donations made to local charities. This year we have been able to raise an additional £2,450.83 by taking part in these campaigns.

Fundraising Event

We held a quiz night and auction of promises which raised just over £900.

Grant Applications

We successfully applied for a grant to help us with our training costs for the next two years and received £3000 from a source wishing to remain anonymous.

We also applied to Santander for a grant towards volunteer expenses and received a cheque for £2000.

Junction 14

We are very pleased to announce that we have been selected as Charity of the Year for Junction 14, a local ladies' a capella group. They will donate money they raise throughout the year and also publicise our organisation at their events. We are hoping to hold a concert for our members later in the year.

Easy Fundraising

We are now on the Easy Fundraising website. This means that anyone buying items on line from companies such as Amazon, Tesco and Marks & Spencer may elect for a small percentage from that company to come to us. www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/mkreaderservice

Support Meetings

We hold an annual support meeting for our volunteers every May. This is an opportunity to thank them over coffee and cake and to give them the latest news. Last year Debbie Malone who is a rehabilitation officer from SARC (Sensory Services) gave us an interesting and informative talk about their work.

We also had a coffee morning for all our service users and volunteers in June, which was preceded by our AGM and Extra Ordinary General Meeting. We had a good attendance of over 80 people.

In October we had a coffee afternoon for volunteers and people using our services. We invited other visually impaired groups to bring stands along so that service users could discover more about additional help they could access or groups they could join. We had representatives from SARC, BucksVision, the Macular Society, Eye 4 Art, RNIB, Sound News, Bucks Vision Walking Group, Rifle Club and Milton Keynes Moles. We also invited Steve Naylor, CEO of BucksVision to speak about their new 'Online Today' service. We had an attendance of over 120 people.

Our final support meeting for this financial year was a coffee morning in February with an attendance of over 100 people. We also included a short EGM at this meeting to cover some changes to our constitution.

The cost of all our events is covered by raffles and donations.

Coffee and Chat

We hold a fortnightly coffee morning at Lovat Fields Extracare Village. This is run by our volunteers for any resident who is sight impaired and is used to update them about activities within their Village and other events run by sight impaired organisations.

These mornings have proved to be very popular and they are an especially good way for new sight impaired residents to find out about services and other useful agencies, as well as make new friends.

Publicity and Information

Newsletters

We produce two newsletters per year which are posted to all our service users and emailed to our volunteers. Our co-ordinator also emails a regular 'update' leaflet to our volunteers, so they can read details of the latest events and news to their service users.

Website

Our website has been running for 3 years and we continually update it with information and photographs. We have found that potential volunteers often use it to find out more about us. We also publish items on our Facebook page.

www.miltonkeynesreaderservice.org.uk

www.facebook.com/mkreaderservice

Stands and Events

We have attended many events this year in order to publicise our services, attract potential volunteers, and offer help to further service users.

Some of the events we have attended are:

- HealthWatch2 Event
- Shenley Wood Health & Well Being Day
- BucksVision Focus Day
- Community Foundation Voluntary Sector Reception
- Milton Keynes Railway Station
- Various Community Action networking events

Our Thanks

We are grateful to all our providers of income.

Our services are provided by our volunteers without whom our organisation would not survive and to whom, on behalf of our service users, we offer our wholehearted thanks.

