

# Milton Keynes Reader Service

## Trustees Annual Report

July 2017

Registered Charity No. 1013965/1169548

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

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Reading and Writing

“Shop and See”



Transcription

## **Introduction and Background**

The Milton Keynes Reader Service has been running for 29 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.

This past year has seen a lot of changes. On 10 October 2016, the Milton Keynes Reader Service, registered charity number 1013965 ('the old charity'), notified the Charity Commission that it was closing with effect from that date and that all of its assets, liabilities and undertakings were transferring to a new Charity, also called Milton Keynes Reader Service with a registered charity number 1169548 ('the new Charity') as provided for by section 268 of the Charities Act 2011.

There was complete continuity of operation in this transition with the new Charity providing the same services to the same service users using the same employed Service Co-ordinator and volunteers and overseen by the same Trustees as the old Charity.

The new Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) limits Trustees' liability and will allow the Charity formally to own a share in the Walnut Tree Charity Shop which is a major funder of the Charity.

To meet Charity Commission rules, separate financial reports have been produced for the two periods during which the Charity was operating under different

registered numbers. However, this combined report covers an overall picture of the Charity's activities over the full financial year.

One of our other major changes this year is that we have moved premises; our previous Landlords doubled our rent and unfavourably changed the terms of our lease. Also, the building was no longer occupied in the day time meaning that our employee was a lone worker in an empty building. In January we moved into new premises within Margaret Powell House in Central Milton Keynes. We are paying a substantially reduced rent compared with what commercial tenants in the same property are charged due to the generosity of Milton Keynes Community Foundation. We are now working in pleasant, safer conditions with lots of opportunity for networking with other agencies. Our new address:

First Floor  
Margaret Powell House  
403 Midsummer Boulevard  
Central Milton Keynes  
MK9 3BN

## **Services**

### **Reading and Writing**

This is a face-to-face service delivered to 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 and 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 free transcription service to enable any of our service users to have their paperwork transcribed into large print, or onto CD, audio cassette or Braille. 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 of meetings onto audio tape for the Milton Keynes Moles (bowling for the visually impaired), transcription on to CD for MK Disability Advisory Group (DAG) and for the Milton Keynes Sensory Services.

## **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 Society Support Group.

Here is one service user's story:

"My name is Elaine Maries and I am in my 40s. It is still somewhat of a mystery as to why I lost some of my

sight virtually overnight in 2012. In 2014 I received documentation to say I was officially Sight Impaired/Partially Sighted.



My world around me started to fall apart, as I live alone, and I was feeling vulnerable and isolated.

I soon found that my involvement in the daily activity of reading correspondence and accessing every day written information was beginning to isolate me from the world around me. I started losing my independence, confidence and

self worth, which was having a serious effect on my mental health.

It was through my involvement with a support group that I was told about the MK Reader Service, and through their support my confidence started to shine again, I did have a life.

I started receiving services from the MK Reader Service in the summer of 2015 including:

Meeting with a reader on a weekly basis, has allowed me and given me the confidence to continue my studies. I am now a qualified counsellor and continuing to study to become a psychotherapist.

The transcript service provided by MK Reader Service has opened up my world again. I am now able to receive a variety of information from my local council and local theatre about forthcoming touch tours.

Voluntary agencies I work for can have minutes of meetings put on to CD or USB stick for me if needed. I have access to a volunteer shopper as and when I require one, which gives me a sense of control and independence.

The world has opened up again for me and I feel I can live back in a sighted world, as I can receive the same quality of information as other people. With the MK Reader Service I have found an organisation that value and treat individuals as equals. I value this important service and in 2016 I was nominated onto the MK Reader Service Management Committee as a service user, which allows me to have a voice for others with sight loss.”

## **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.

All new volunteers are DBS checked and personal references taken. They attend a full day's training course covering different eye conditions, our core services, confidentiality and adults at risk. We held two training days during 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 Service Co-ordinator will place them with a service user, carefully matching similar interests or outlook. The Service Co-ordinator will then monitor them to check that both volunteer and service user are happy with the arrangement. This year our volunteers spent around 10,800 hours providing face-to-face support for service users, plus a substantial number of hours volunteered for the running of the charity.



Some of our newly trained volunteers chatting together at our coffee morning

Here is one volunteer's story

“My name is Jean Thomas and I have been a volunteer since July 2015, after finding a leaflet for Milton Keynes Reader Service in the Café at Thrift Farm.



My husband and I had moved to Milton Keynes in 2012 and I was looking for volunteering opportunities, and as I like meeting and helping people MKRS was ideal.

I have helped with shopping, reading and playing scrabble and, I hope, made some good friends along the way.

I also let everyone know who I volunteer for, how rewarding it is, and how you can use idle time usefully, in the hope that others will want to offer their help too.”

## **Management**

The Milton Keynes 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 three volunteers are elected annually at the AGM. Further committee members can be co-opted as required.

## Management Committee Members 2016/2017

### User Representatives

Caroline Pearson (Chairperson)

Jeff Bashton (Vice Chairperson)

Paula Suchy MBE (Fundraising Representative)

Michael Baldry (Bucks Vision Representative)

Paula Varey (Walnut Tree Community Shop Representative)

Elaine Marie (Co-opted)

Judy Smith (Co-opted)

### Volunteer Representatives

Lynn Bovis (Secretary)

Terry Calvert

James Clifton (July 2016 January 2017)

**Treasurer** Stephen Harrison

### Chairperson Caroline Pearson



This year I was elected as the new Chairperson of the Milton Keynes Reader Service involving me in a variety of roles.

One of my key initiatives has been the relocation of the Milton Keynes Reader Service to our new offices within Margaret Powell House. The new surroundings have enabled us to establish our recording room within our office space. Our new office is more central and networking with others will be easier.

Our Talks Project has been rejuvenated and I have initiated, with the help of one of our new volunteers, increased numbers of talks to other local organisations and groups. I am always aware of the need to raise the profile of the organisation and the awareness of the work we do. I am supported by a dedicated group of volunteers and service users who deliver the talks and share their personal knowledge of the service.

I have also initiated the revival of our Business Plan and identified a Lead Trustee on the Management Committee to oversee Grant Applications, Sponsorship and Donors to support our continuing work.

## Staff



The work of the Milton Keynes Reader Service is carried out by its sole employee, part-time Service 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.

Karen also manages the office, organises events and committees, writes updates to members, writes reports and oversees the website 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 the Chairperson and a 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. We have given talks at a variety of groups this year including Carers MK, The Charter Club and The Tuesday Fellowship Group. We are always looking for more opportunities to publicise our work.

## **Finances**

The Reader Service has lived within its means in this financial year. Although there was a paper surplus of just over £8,000 in the financial year this was mainly due to the timing of a grant payment for building works at Margaret Powell House of £4,625 and by an unexpectedly large donation from the Walnut Tree Charity Shop which was £1,500 higher than in recent years. The building works will be paid in the early part of the next financial year and donations from the charity shop are likely to be closer to or even lower than previous years reflecting lower receipts in the Charity Shop in recent months.

With one exception, expenditure levels have been broadly consistent with previous years once one-off items such as the purchase of a new Braille machine are stripped out. The exception is the rent and service charges for Margaret Powell House which are considerably higher than the charges for our old offices in Tinkers Bridge. This is partially off-set by a generous grant from Milton Keynes Community Foundation but the Reader Service will still have to raise more funds than in previous years to cover these costs. The Management Committee has developed a plan to bridge the funding gap and the Reader Service has sufficient financial reserves to cushion it should it fall into an operating deficit in the next financial year while these plans come into effect.

There is one item of expenditure in the 2016-17 financial year in dispute, namely rent charges for our old office at Tinkers Bridge. The trustees have asked for documentary evidence that the higher rent charge imposed unilaterally by Woughton Community Council falls within the terms of our agreement with the Council. This evidence has not been forthcoming. We have therefore paid for the period of occupation of these premises at the previously agreed rate. The amount in dispute is £1,076.44.

(For more information please see accounts)

## **Funding**

It costs the Charity an average of £340 per service user per year to provide a regular service.

Approximately one third of our income this year came from Milton Keynes Council. We are very grateful for their grant of £12,444

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 £9000 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. Our shop representative updates the trustees every two months regarding our developments and reports back to the Management Committee. 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 Telephone :01908 607666

### **Milton Keynes Community Foundation (MKFC)**

MKCF has been very generous and supportive this year. They have provided a grant of £4,625 towards the purchase of a new Braille Embosser and provided £4656.00 for us to build a purpose built recording room

within our new premises. They have also heavily subsidised the rent in our new office at Margaret Powell House (see separate item regarding our move.)



The Reader Service once again took part in the MKCF Annual 50/50 raffle, which is run with Volkswagen and Centre MK. This year we were lucky to be allocated seven slots to sell tickets which resulted in a bumper year, raising £558 plus gift aid.

## **Transcription Work**

Commercially, we have volunteers who regularly transcribe onto CD the theatre brochures for ATG Aylesbury, ATG Milton Keynes and Royal and Derngate Northampton Theatres raising just under £2000 this year.

## **Donations**

We continue to receive generous donations throughout the year from a variety of sources, including service users and volunteers.

Local ladies' A Capella group, Junction 14, chose us as their Charity of the Year and helped raise funds at a special concert where they performed for our members. They also sang Christmas Carols in MK Shopping Centre (Intu) in December over three different days where they

collected a further £370 We would like to thank all the ladies in the choir for their support.

We were chosen as Charity of the Year by Dawsons Rentals Vans Limited. The employees of the company took part in 'dress down Fridays' and made donations every week. We surprised and delighted to receive a total of £512.95 from them in January!

We would also like to thank:

MK Moles

Shenley Parish Church

The Charter Club

Lions Club of Bletchley for new exhibition banners

Stony Lions Club of Stony Stratford for new 6 new chairs

### **Service User Donations**

We ask service users to make an annual voluntary donation. Many people also gift aid their donation. This year we raised £2,234.

### **Flag Days at Dobbies**

We secured 4 flag days at Dobbies Garden Centre during 2017. Our first collection in March was very successful, raising £252. We have other collections are planned in June, September and December.

### **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 offers to match donations made to local Charities up to defined limits.

This year we raised an additional £555 by participating in these two opportunities.

## **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.

Derek Child, both a volunteer and service user for us gave an interesting talk about Guide Dogs, including his own personal experience. He was joined by Richard Baker who, as well as volunteering with us, trains puppies for guide dogs; so we learnt a lot about the 'other side' of a guide dog's life!

In June we had a coffee morning for all our service users and volunteers in June, which was preceded by our AGM. We had a good attendance of over 80 people.

In October we had a coffee afternoon for volunteers and people using our services. We were joined by Stuart McKay from RNIB who informed us about new equipment. Local Charity Sound News gave out Sonic players to their members and any Reader Service members who wanted to access the local newspaper.

Our final support meeting for this financial year was a coffee morning in January with an attendance of over 100 people.



The cost of all our events is covered by raffles and donations. We have a regular team of volunteers who help set up the room, greet people, set up the PA system, run the raffle and help serve tea, coffee and cakes. We would like to especially thank them for all their help!

### **Coffee and Chat**

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

### **Publicity and Information**

#### **Newsletters**

We produce newsletters and updates every year which are posted to all our service users and emailed to our volunteers. Our Service 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 gives full information about our services 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](http://www.miltonkeynesreaderservice.org.uk)

[www.facebook.com/mkreaderservice](https://www.facebook.com/mkreaderservice)

## **Exhibitions and Events**

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

Some of the events we have attended are:

- HealthWatch2 Event
- Shenley Wood Health & Well Being Day
- Community Foundation Voluntary Sector Reception
- 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.

