

# Milton Keynes Reader Service

## Trustees Annual Report July 2019

Registered Charity No. 1169548

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

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## Introduction - Paula Suchy MBE Chairperson



Welcome to the Milton Keynes Reader Service Annual Report for 2018/19, I am the current Chairperson, my name is Paula Suchy and I have been a user of MKRS since it began in 1988. I have been a member of the management committee for

around 28 years and have had various roles including fundraising during that time.

Firstly, I would like to thank my predecessor, Judy Smith, who resigned as a Trustee last August due to ill health. Thank you Judy for all of the time and support you gave to the service and to the Coordinator during your time on the Committee.

This year has brought considerable change to the Service, in particular because we have a new Coordinator. Karen Preece, who had been in post for seven years, retired last September. Karen was very popular with volunteers and users alike, and it was a difficult task to find a replacement. Karen said goodbye to our members at our last AGM in July 2018, where she was presented with several gifts and shopping vouchers which we hope she enjoyed spending.

Our current Coordinator, Tracy Harrold started work for us last September after only one full day of handover with Karen but luckily this didn't faze her and she has settled in extremely well.

One of Tracy's first tasks was to run our 30th Birthday Party in October 2018, this was a large, well-attended event and was very much enjoyed by everyone who came to help us celebrate.

I am pleased to report that we have also retained the services of our Office Assistant, Karen Armstrong who has been a great help to Tracy particularly, while she was settling into the role of coordinator.

I hope you enjoy reading this Annual Report and finding out about all of the activities which we have been involved with this year.

## **Background**

The Milton Keynes Reader Service (MKRS) has been running for over 30 years.

It was originally set up in 1988 as a pilot project under the umbrella of the Milton Keynes Council of Disabled People, headed up by Liz Roe, who ran the service from her spare bedroom! The first service users were a pair of twin sisters who wanted help with their Christmas cards. The second was our very own Paula Suchy!

The Transcription Service was introduced as a remote reader for people requiring access to meeting minutes, etc, and steadily braille, audio cassettes and memory sticks were produced as needed. After approximately four years the cultural access service was introduced to facilitate theatre trips and gallery visits.

The whole ethos of the service has always been to assist visually impaired people to achieve a level of independence. 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 visual or physical disabilities. Although Liz moved on to work with other charities, she has always remained involved with MKRS in many ways, from serving on the Management Committee in various roles to being a current member of the Talks Project.

In 2018 we celebrated our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and celebrated with a year-long programme of special events, including trips to the theatre and a 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party.

## **Services**

We carefully match each trained volunteer to their service user by discussing interests and background at interview: for example an interest in music, the theatre, the garden, or completing crosswords or shopping. This regularly leads to successful and lasting relationships, our current record being over twenty years.

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

## **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 puzzles, crosswords, or even playing scrabble.

## **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. There is a growing demand for this popular service.
- Volunteers can also provide support for one-off local trips to the theatre, cinema, seminars, art galleries and educational and cultural activities.
- Our volunteers also help with Bucks Vision’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 more than one of our services, in different combinations for example, Reading & Writing and Shop & See, Reading & Writing and Facilitation.

## **Transcription**

We offer a free transcription service to enable any of our service users to have their paperwork transcribed into large print or Braille, or onto CD or memory stick.

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

## **Service Users**

We continue to have a steady growth in the number of people using our services, with 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 at risk of being 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 who have had strokes. We can also sign post people that use our services to other relevant agencies, such as Sound News (local talking newspaper), Bucks Vision and the local Macular Society Support Group.

This is what some of our Service Users have said this year –

“ You have been my lifeline for the last two years”

“ I'm very grateful of the service of the volunteers. What would people do without them. They're such help and friendly. My thanks to you all.”

“I don’t know what I’d do without your service. To see such a cheery face.”

“Really appreciate the service, very professionally organised”

## **Volunteers**

We could not provide our services without the continued commitment of our volunteers. We have around 100 people helping us in various ways, quite often with some volunteers supporting more than one service user in different types of roles.

In addition to supporting our three core services, volunteers also serve on committees, help at events, coffee mornings and in the office, assist at network events, help record and edit our transcription work and run the Talks (a group set up to promote our services to clubs, charities and other agencies within Milton Keynes). We also have had generous IT support in the office and at events from Martyn Lycett from MCL Studios.

It is vital to the quality of our service that our volunteers are reliable, trustworthy and knowledgeable. Volunteers are reference checked, complete a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check and attend training. The training covers different eye conditions, our services, confidentiality, data protection including the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) and safeguarding adults. Our volunteers also attend a practical course where the volunteers learn how to guide, including using stairs and escalators.

Once a new volunteer has completed their training, the Service Co-ordinator will place them with a service user, carefully matching similar interests or outlook. The Service Co-ordinator will remain in touch with both the volunteer and service user to make sure that they both remain happy with the arrangement.

Below are some of the comments that we have received this year from our volunteers -

“So pleased to be able to volunteer with the Reader Service”

“It’s an absolute pleasure to be part of the Reader Service”

“Long may it continue”

“Good to be involved”

## **Management**

The Milton Keynes Reader Service is a user-led organisation run by a Management Committee of Trustees. Five user representatives (including the Chairperson) and four volunteers are elected at AGMs. One-third of the trustees must offer themselves for re-election at each AGM. Further committee members can be co-opted as required.

## **Management Committee Members 2018/2019**

### **User Representatives**

Paula Suchy MBE	Chairperson, Training and Fundraising
Nana Frempong	Vice Chairperson and Health & Safety Representative
Caroline Pearson	Talks Project Co-ordinator
Jeff Bashton	Data Protection Representative)

### **Volunteer Representatives**

Stephen Harrison	Treasurer
Lynn Bovis	Minutes Secretary
Terry Calvert	Grants Co-ordinator
Mark Lawrence	Data Protection Officer & Walnut Tree Community Shop Representative (Resigned February 2019)
James Clifton	Co-opted Trustee (January 2019) & Walnut Tree Community Shop Representative

## **Staff**

The work of the Milton Keynes Reader Service is carried out by its part-time Service Co-ordinator, Tracy Harrold and office assistant, Karen Armstrong.

## **Tracy Harrold**

Tracy joined us in September 2018, taking over from Karen Preece who retired in August 2018. Tracy 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, writes reports, organises events and committee meetings, writes and sends updates to members and attends events to be able to support new service users and attract new volunteers as well as generally publicising the work of the service.

Tracy is assisted for a minimum of three hours a week by Karen Armstrong on tasks including transcriptions, maintaining the website, DBS checks and general paperwork.

## **Finances**

The Reader Service failed to cover its running costs in the 2018-19 financial year with a deficit of just over £3,800. The deficit represents 10% of the Service's running costs. There were more than sufficient reserves to absorb this deficit. However the deficit highlights that the Service has not fully adapted to the higher running costs caused by the move to Margaret Powell House and additional staff costs.

The level of overall income was maintained with reductions in funds from the Walnut Tree Charity Shop and general fundraising offset by increases in work done (mainly recordings for theatres) and other income (mainly an increase in Gift Aided donations in 2017-18). Had the Charity Shop and fundraising

income and volunteer expenses been maintained at 2017-18 levels, the deficit would have been negligible.

(For more information please see accounts)

## **Funding**

It costs the Charity an average of £402 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 continuing grant of £12,444. Around 17% of our income was provided by the Walnut Tree Charity Shop and 8% by work done for other organisations, mainly theatres. Much of the remaining 41% of our income comes in some way from the donations and fundraising activities of our volunteers and service users.

## **Walnut Tree Community Shop**



We hold one-third of the shares in the company which runs the shop, which donates all of its profits to charity. We received a total of £6050 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, and also exercises the voting rights linked to our shareholding. We are extremely grateful to the shop, which is based in Fyfield Barrow, Walnut Tree, Milton Keynes and all the staff and volunteers who work there.

We also would like to thank everyone who has donated their unwanted items to the shop.

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

MKCF has been very generous and supportive this year, continuing to heavily subsidise the rent for our office in Margaret Powell House.

The Reader Service once again took part in the MKCF Annual 50/50 raffle, which is run with Volkswagen and Centre MK.

## **Transcription Work**

Commercially we have raised £2899, regularly transcribing theatre brochures for Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG) Aylesbury, ATG Milton Keynes, Royal and Derngate Northampton Theatres, The Core at Corby and The Sunderland Empire on to CD, and in some cases producing additional copies of the CD.

## **Donations**

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

The Maltsters Arms in Fenny Stratford again this year continue to raise money for us via a collection box, for which we are very thankful.

Sadly, from time to time we lose someone who used our services. Often, the family requests 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**

On an annual basis we ask our service users to make a voluntary donation if they are able to. This year we raised £2477, many people also gift aid their donation, boosting its value by 25% which we claim the following year. If service users are unable to donate, it does not affect the service they receive from us.

## **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 via this website, up to defined limits.

This year we raised an additional £2,000 by participating in these two opportunities.

## **Fundraising**

Over the year a number of fundraising activities have taken place. Our popular Cabaret Afternoon was held on Friday 30 November attended by around 90 people. Nine performers entertained us with singing, music, comedy, poetry and acting. We received some excellent feedback on the event and it was enjoyed by all.

In November and December we took part in the Community Foundation Car Raffle again in Central Milton Keynes shopping centre, selling 523 tickets of which we received 50% of the revenue.

During the last year we also secured four flag days at Dobbies Garden Centre during 2018/19 raising £519, on which we can claim Gift Aid of 25%.

We also supported an event organised for us by Pat Hodges, A Charity Quiz Night in March 2019 which raised £495.79.

## **Support Meetings and AGM**



Our Volunteer's Support Meeting took place on 2 May 2018 at a new venue, The Oaktree Centre. About 40 people attended and were able to listen to one of the founders Liz Roe talk about how the service started. There was also a

quiz which tied in with our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and was based on questions about 1988.

Our previous AGM was held on Saturday 28th July 2018. This was the first since becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation which meant that one third of the current committee was required to stand down. Paula Suchy, Caroline Pearson and Lynn Bovis all stood down and were then subsequently re-elected.

Once again our regular team of volunteers kindly help set up the room, greet people, run the raffle and help serve tea, coffee and cakes. We would like to give them special thanks for all their help, along with the volunteers that support our service users by providing transport to and from meetings and events.

### **Extra Care Villages' Coffee and Chat**



Once a fortnight one of our Volunteers, Marilyn Barby runs a coffee morning at Lovat Fields Village for any resident that is sight impaired. Marilyn updates them on activities and news from within their village, events and news from MK Reader Service and any other events or news that is appropriate.

At Shenley Wood Village, our volunteer Marcia Gleeson, runs a coffee morning once a month for residents that are sight impaired. Marcia updates them on activities and news from within their village, events and news from MK Reader Service and often invites other relevant speakers to come and talk to the group on a regular basis.



## **30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations**

As part of the celebrations for our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we secured a grant from the Community Foundation which enabled us to offer some of our service users a trip to the theatre. One of our service users had never been to the theatre before this opportunity. We were able to take 10 people to the Little Mermaid in October, 12 to An Officer and A Gentleman and 8 to War Horse. The trips were a great success and we had wonderful feedback.

Over 100 people and the Mayor attended our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party at the Oak Tree Centre on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2018. The tables were decorated with tablecloths, table decorations and balloons. Each table also had a bottle of Prosecco for the birthday toast. We also circulated a memory book at the event and had some lovely comments written in it. The Birthday cakes were kindly made by Paula Suchy and decorated by our volunteer Becca Parsler. Photographs were kindly taken by our volunteer, David Easton, a poem was written and read out by Pauline Shears and music was played by Fading Shoes.



We also celebrated our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary by entering a team of five people from the Reader service into the TV Quiz “Eggheads” and this was screened on BBC2 on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019. Sadly, they did not beat the Eggheads but they did the Reader Service proud and helped to raise our profile.

## **Talks Project by Caroline Pearson, Talks Project Co-ordinator**

This year has been a very active year for the Talks Project Team and has certainly kept us busy.

Our talks to local groups enable us to raise the profile of the Milton Keynes Reader Service, and to raise awareness of the services and support we are able to offer within the community.

Talks are undertaken by two speakers at each presentation, one a Service User and one a Volunteer.

This year we have provided talks to Sheltered Housing, MK Visual Impairment Support Group, Olney Inner Wheel, Bletchley Rotary, Barclays Retirement Group, St Mary's Ecumenical Ladies Group and the AGE UK Milton Keynes Home Visiting Team.

Our talks often result in helping us to recruit volunteers and this year we have also received very generous donations as a result of our presentations. I would like to thank all the groups for their kind donations.

I have an amazing team of speakers who help me to support the project and wish to thank them all, for their time and commitment.

### **Publicity**

This year we had an article printed in the Olney Phonebox which helped us recruit volunteers for that area. Terry Calvert one of our Volunteers and Committee member took part in radio interviews for CRMK (Community Radio Milton Keynes), and Secklow Sounds. We were approached again by Secklow Sounds and involved one of our service users Diana Rattan in the broadcast, so that listeners could hear about the Reader Service directly from a service user. Jeff Bashton, one of our Service Users and Committee members also took part in a broadcast on Moneybox.

### **Newsletters**

We produced two newsletters over the year, which were sent to our service users and volunteers by their preferred method, email or post. Other events or news during the year has been posted or emailed accordingly, and advertised on our website.

## Website

Our website gives full information about our services and we continually update it with information. We have found that potential volunteers often use it to find out more about us. We also publish items on our Facebook page and Twitter.

[www.miltonkeynesreaderservice.org.uk](http://www.miltonkeynesreaderservice.org.uk)



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



[@MiltonKeynesReaderService](https://twitter.com/MiltonKeynesReaderService)

## Events

Terry Calvert, a Committee Member and Volunteer arranged three scrabble sessions in August, one in Kingston Library, one in Central Milton Keynes Library and one in Bletchley Library. Members of the public were invited to join in and a prize was given to the best adult and best child.

Terry also represented the service at an event in Stony Stratford arranged by the Lions International Club to raise awareness of World Sight Day 2018. This event was attended by the Mayor and Terry helped to guide the Mayor who was blindfolded along the busy pavement of Stony Stratford.

## Our Thanks

We are extremely grateful to all our supporters and providers of income.

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



Walnut Tree  
Community  
Shop

