

SIS Visual Impairment Winter Newsletter

Welcome to the SIS Winter Newsletter. Please take a few minutes to have a look at all the things we have been doing and all the things we hope to put on for you next year. There is a PDF copy attached if you prefer.

SIS Winter Walk



On Saturday 2nd December SIS took a group of children and young people on a winter walk around Attingham to see the beautiful Christmas lights. It was lovely to see so many of you and the National Trust put on a great show with Christmas trees dressed as fairytales. We will be having a Spring walk at Attingham on 16th March with an Easter egg hunt and a summer party with games on the lawn on 6th July. Put the dates in your diary and we will follow up with more information nearer the time.

Meet Carla McGowan



“I have been working as an Access Support Assistant with SIS since September 2023. My journey first began with the service nearly 19 years ago after giving birth to my daughter who has a profound visual impairment. As the parent of a blind child, I have faced many challenges over the years, learning braille, sighted guide and teaching independent living skills just to name a few. I embraced every opportunity to enhance my skillset, not only to support my daughter but to assist others in similar situations. I have a very caring nature and strive to help others reach their fullest potential. In 2021 I completed my PGCE, from which I taught in both secondary and further educational settings. I found these experiences truly rewarding and felt overjoyed as I witnessed the students succeed.”

Collectively my life experiences have provided an essential insight into the needs and support required from both a parental and professional role.

I am delighted to be part of the Sensory Inclusion Service and feel overjoyed to be given the opportunity to help and support others, not only through my role but through my knowledge and experiences.”

Toy Library

Did you know that SIS have a toy library? If you are interested in borrowing some toys, it is a really simple process, chat to your QTVI who will happily bring some toys on your next visit.

Update from Rob Tipton who left SIS in the Summer

“Apparently, there have been people asking about me since I left in the summer (I thought I had repaid that £5 I borrowed last Christmas, honestly) so I thought I would share a little of my life after working with SIS. Although I took early retirement as a teacher, I don’t really have any extra leisure time. I have two very distinct roles: the first is as a grandad / childminder to my one year old grandson, Rory. This takes up two days a week and although unpaid, is the most rewarding (and exhausting) thing I do!

The second is working as a part time Family Practitioner across the West Midlands for a charity that supports children and young people who have a visual impairment and their families called Royal Society for Blind Children (RSBC).

We offer a range of support which includes:

- *One-to-one sessions either face to face or online to help with social and emotional issues,*
- *Information and advice about benefits, grants and finance including help with DLA and PIP applications,*
- *Assistive technology training online,*
- *Employment and post 16 education and training advice,*

We also have a range of online activities and groups for children and young people including: Craft, audio book club and specialist groups such as our Sisterhood group, Moving on Up group to support year 6 transitions, Bright Beginnings group for parents of pre-school children and connecting Families group for parents.

If you would like to find out more, please see our website: <https://www.rsbc.org.uk/>

So I am definitely keeping busy, doing all of the things I loved about my previous job: working with children and young people who have a visual impairment and their families but just in a different way.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all.”

[Follow this link to see Rob in disguise!](#) (you have to have access to Facebook to see the photo)

The Hive Workshops

On Sunday 28th January we are leading a group of young musicians in a Taiko drumming session. 18 children were selected on a first come first served basis to attend the free workshop at The Hive in Shrewsbury. We hope this will be the first of many collaborations with The Hive.

Driving Day for 15 – 17 year olds

We are delighted to announce a free driving day for 15 – 17-year-olds taking place in 2024. In collaboration with [Sight Loss Shropshire](#) we will take 27 young people and a family member or supporter on a driving experience day in Loughborough driving adapted cars with an instructor. The cars include available to choose from include Lamborghini LP560, a Ferrari F430 Spider/California, Aston Martin DB9, Audi R8, Mustang, Corvette, 69 Dodge Charger, Nissan GTR or Porsche 911/997. Places for the event will be allocated in the New Year so look out for the email.

Family Fund

With the cost of living crisis affecting most people we thought we would let you know about the [Family Fund](#) which is a means tested grant-making charity for families raising a disabled or seriously ill child, on a low income. Follow the link to read more.

Vernon Retires



Vernon Webb who has worked with many of our families as an Access Support Assistant, has retired. Before he left, we asked for an update on CEVIC Uganda which is the amazing project Vernon and his wife Linda supports. “We have purchased a set of Lego Braille Bricks with money donated and posted them to Uganda. We are currently collecting musical instruments to send, and funds to cover shipping, as these will not qualify for Articles for the Blind Freepost.” To read more about Vernon’s projects [follow this link](#). Good luck to Vernon in all of your endeavours, we will miss your kindness and humour!

Message from Team Leader of Sensory Inclusion Service

It has been yet another amazing year with so much happening across the Sensory Inclusion Service. The service is well known for putting families first and the staff who have joined (and left) the team, are testimony to this. Thus, whilst it was sad for us all here that Rob Tipton didn't return after the summer break, we were really delighted to see him pop up again supporting families in his new role as a family liaison officer with a charity.

We also said goodbye to Vernon Webb whose immense knowledge of all things ‘VI related’ was a great asset to the team, he strived hard to pass his skills and knowledge to the staff still working with SIS and he has left a bank of knowledge as his legacy. Thank you Rob and Vernon!

We have also welcomed Carla who has brought a wealth of experience of her own journey with her lovely daughter Deja. I know that many of you at Little Stars have already had an opportunity to chat to her. Her immense positivity is an asset to the team, and we look forward to her working alongside us to bring a different and much valued perspective as a parent as well as a professional.

Some of you will be aware that Jo Whitmore (previously Adcock) has been on secondment from SIS for some time and is now leaving the team as part of a voluntary redundancy. This means that Kim, who has been covering for Jo whilst on secondment will also leave the team towards the end of February. I want to wish Jo and Kim all the very best in their new 'adventures'. Kim is an incredible fundraiser and gets things done! So, you have all benefitted from her securing passes from Attingham Park, the upcoming driving day, the 'reincarnation' of little Stars alongside our lovely colleagues in Guide Dogs. Thank you, Kim, for your tireless efforts on behalf of SIS! Nicky Clark, who now works mainly with children and young people with hearing loss, looks forward to picking up some of these activities and we'll all work hard to ensure your children's social needs continue to be met.

Finally, it is also goodbye to Rachel Atkin who will also leave Telford and Wrekin in February. Many of you will have spoken to Rachel on the phone, by email or received letters from her. She has been one of the Business Support Officers behind the scenes of SIS for thirty years. We simply cannot imagine life without her – the seamless work of SIS is very largely due to her immense skill both organisationally and in creating new ways to do things more efficiently. We all thank her for her many years of tolerating us and keeping us on the straight and narrow.

So, a year of exciting new adventures for children and young people but many sad goodbyes for SIS too. All of these colleagues will be sadly missed by us and by you, but the future always brings new challenges and new highlights so have a wonderful Christmas and a safe and happy journey into 2024. It's a sign of my age that I feel the millennium was yesterday. May Santa be good to you all!!

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