London NFB logo image:

Dear London NFB Members,

Happy Friday and welcome to edition 43 of your London Life. Thanks to our contributors, if you have an article you would like added to the next edition please do email us – London@nfbuk.org – it’s always great to hear from you. This edition includes:

* Next Sunday Social
* Last chance to register for Let’s Celebrate Eastbourne 2022
* 75th anniversary celebration for NFB UK
* Campaigning with Inclusion London - Our new training program has arrived
* My first visit to Tate Modern by London member and Vice Chair Berin Gem
* Aquabats members enjoy a sizzling Barbecue
* Future activities with Aquabats from London member Arthur Payne
* Hearing the radio in a new way from London member Colin Palgrave
* Celebrating 100 years of Middlesex Association of the Blind

# Next Sunday Social

Join London NFB members and friends for the next Sunday social hosted by our fabulous vice Chair Berin on Sunday 14th August, live on zoom at 4pm. Use the usual NFB London to join the fun –

<https://zoom.us/j/9876541948?pwd=SDlKOHRLMmtWbVlCaGNIbnNHYjQ5dz09>

We look forward to seeing you there!

# Last chance to register for Let’s Celebrate Eastbourne 2022

Spaces are filling upfront our 45th celebration of Eastbourne. Activities confirmed include Romanian folk dancing, Angels Choir, a Bucks Fizz reception, Disco, live band, RNIB tech session, Eastbourne’s Got Talent, keep fit, afternoon tea and much more. All organised by the Eastbourne Revellers Team under the London branch of NFB UK.

Please email londoneastbourne@nfbuk.org for more details of availability

# 75th anniversary celebration for NFB UK

Congratulations to those delegates and Observers on their way to Loughborough later in September. This year’s AGM takes place in a four star accessible hotel where attendees can take advantage of a spa and pool. Attendees will join other branches to hear about our campaign work, enjoy a dinner and learn more about the past 75 years which has provided unique peer support to all blind and partially sighted members.

The AGM Forum Planning team who now meet weekly have been working hard to ensure this celebration put us back on the map.

Remember you can log in to many of the events including the quiz and evening entertainment on zoom, as a hybrid Observer just email admin@nfbuk.org for more details and to receive our anniversary information pack.

# Campaigning with Inclusion London

Learn all about campaigning with the new training from Inclusion London. Please see message below from John Abrams.

Our new campaign training programme – commencing at the end of September - comprises four workshops, delivered over four months, designed to equip you with the skills to develop a powerful voice, demand better rights and campaign for change. It will be an opportunity to learn together, share ideas and take action as you progress.

Find out more and apply here <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/uncategorised/campaigning-with-inclusion-london-application-form/>

# My first visit to Tate Modern by London member and Vice Chair Berin Gem



*Above is a photo of Yayou Kusama the Obliteration room.*

This was the first time I have visited Tate Modern and was very interested to go and see the exhibition bye Yayoi Kusama. Markus Dickey-Horley Organised the audio described tour. It was a small group of eight of us,

We were shown into the lounge and refreshments were provided until all eight people arrived. After everyone introduced themselves, we were given earpieces to enable us to hear when Marcus described the exhibition.

The artwork was a white house everything was white chairs bed piano TV kitchen sofas. They gave us sticky papers with coloured circles in different sizes and colours. We all proceeded by sticking these circles onto any object we wished whether it was the floor the wall the piano and the TV etc.

It was such good fun to be part of this amazing artwork.

## About Yayoi Kusama

Yayoi Kusama is a 93 year old Japanese artist, whose wealth reflects hair connection with the world and the universe through coloured polka dots.

Growing up in the 1940s she was interested in seeds, flowers and use of textiles which she learned making parachute silks.

In the 1960s she worked in Manhattan New York, Making crazy pop-up installations out of silver balls. As a very elderly artist Yayoi Kusama is very precious and important, and at present she is the world’s most valuable artist, In terms of her sculptures and paintings.

# Aquabats members enjoy a sizzling Barbecue

25 Aquabats members, including many from NFB London, basked in glorious evening sunshine to enjoy our annual flagship Barbecue in Hoxton on July 21. Enjoyment was had by all as we reunited at the fully accessible venue by the water, with gourmet chef David Payne serving a mouthwatering range of Barbecue delights with his partner Eli. Thanks to the team and volunteer support for delivering a wonderful evening amongst old and new friends. To find out more about Aquabats, email Arthur Payne at arthur.payne@beis.gov.uk.

Pardy, Aquabats Chair



The above photo is of Aquabats members Connie and Arthur at Barbecue

Message from Arthur Payne, Secretary & Events Manager:

On Thursday 21 July the Aquabats Sports and Social Club for Visually Impaired people held a barbecue at the Laburnum Boat Club in Hackney. I travelled there with my friend Jim and around 20 others took part. My brother David and his wife Eli helped prepare the barbecue.

The food was very good. We had a mixture of hamburgers, hotdogs, lamb and beef koftas. Vegetarians were also catered for. David had put together some music a mix of songs. The atmosphere was very friendly.

# Future activities with Aquabats from London member Arthur Payne

The following events will take place.

* 4 August walk at Hyde Park. Please meet at Hyde Park at 6.45pm leaving at 7.00pm. The event has been changed due to the forthcoming train strike on 18 August.
* 1 August swimming at Parliament Hill. Please meet at Gospel Oak on the London Overground at 6.25pm leaving at 6.40pm.
* A walk will take place on Saturday 13 August in Bexleyheath. Please catch the 10.04am train from Victoria Platform 7 but please check on the day. It arrives in Bexleyheath at 10.46am. Please meet at the exit on the same platform the train arrives. Alternatively, you can get a train at 10.35am from London Bridge Platform 6 or 7 which arrives at 11.00am at Bexleyheath. Walk will head to Danson Park and at Welling we can catch a bus to the Kings Arms which is situated in Bexleyheath Broadway. Please let me know if you would like to come along by Saturday 6 August including helpers.
* 25 August Jack the Ripper walk still to be confirmed. Will let you know details for this later.

For more information contact Arthur, Secretary

Aquabats Sports and Social Club for the Blind

# Hearing the radio in a new way from London member Colin Palgrave

This company are developing an accessible radio for visually impaired people. I emailed them back suggesting that they might be better employed adapting a smart speaker. Below is the reply.

They actually made some very interesting points and arguments for a bespoke radio for visually impaired people, that I must admit I hadn’t thought of.

1. We agree that radio may eventually move to the internet. This is why the radio we develop will have access to internet stations in addition to DAB and FM. Eventually DAB and FM may become obsolete, however, we argue that this is not a reason to ignore the current problem people have accessing radio. For years, the government have been saying that they're going to turn off FM. This hasn't happened yet and if there wasn't a demand for radio as a medium, I'm sure they would've turned it off years ago, and scrapped DAB while they were at it. Ireland for example did try to make the switch to DAB from FM, but subsequently turned DAB off again because people weren't using it! They're sticking to FM for now we believe.

2. Online broadcasts are often out of sync with live broadcasts. This means that when you're listening to sports commentaries which a lot of our customers do, you'll find you're a few minutes behind the action in some extreme cases, 15 to 30 seconds if you're lucky. Not ideal if you want to join in with your friends and you're wondering why they're cheering. Also, smart speakers do not always enable access to real-time information which the stations are broadcasting, for example song titles, radio show information, sports scores etc. Whilst it could be argued that this information is not useful or necessary, from feedback we've received, people are quite enthusiastic about having access to something they didn't even know existed. It's not always possible for you to carry your smart speaker into the garden as it may disconnect from WiFi unless you have an exceptionally good internet connection, not to mention a power pack for your smart speaker. Many of our customers also have speech impairments or very strong accents which makes it very difficult if not impossible for them to use devices which only offer voice control.

3. As I mentioned in my email, two thirds of those aged 75 and over don't have access to the internet to begin with as proven by RNIB's study and our own extensive research. When we sell our BlindShell phones to people for example, we often find people don't pay for the internet. People who lose their sight later on in life argue that they're too old to get online and it's another bill they don't want to pay. We do try to encourage them, but some people argue they don't need the internet. They will insist on doing their banking via phone or in person for example, even though the internet would make life so much easier for them.

4. Before starting development on the radio project, we did think about an accessible smart device such as the Alexa. I did some research and very quickly found that the difficulty in developing our own smart speaker is that we can't compete with the multi million pound voice recognition technology that Google and Amazon offer at such a low price. In order for us to translate and carry out voice commands at the same level and have a decent text to speech engine, we would have to pay a cloud based voice recognition provider and a text to speech provider. They often charge a monthly fee based on your usage or a fee for each word translated/spoken, so the more users you have, the higher the cost. Blind people would have to pay monthly for the device to cover these costs, which further complicates matters. You have the other issue of connecting the device to WiFi. With no keyboard or smartphone available, how could people connect to the internet? You could argue you could use a SIM card with mobile data, but then it's another cost the user has to pay for to a phone carrier, similar to the RNIB "In your pocket" devices. It no longer becomes something which is plug and play compared to the mainstream voice assistants. You'd have to set up a Taira Technology account, connect that account to your bank to set up a direct debit or to make a card payment each month, then log in to WiFi on the device, then log into your Taira Technology account with your username and password. Ironically the steps Google/Alexa use are far more efficient in many respects, as the app on your phone logs into your Google/Amazon account and they automatically connect to the WiFi network your phone is connected to.

We would also have to compete with the functionality of these devices. How could we compete with the plethora of Alexa skills available or the intelligence of Google's search engine using voice, in addition to all of the games and customisation available. We would have to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds on developers to try and replicate this functionality, increasing the cost of the device even further. There would be no unique selling point at such a high monthly fee. This is why we feel that radio is a much more accessible and easy to use medium for those who want something simple to use. There are no monthly fees, no need for the internet, you can just turn the radio on and tune to your desired station. If you do want internet radio, you can connect the radio to WiFi and access our directory of stations in addition to other internet services such as audio books, podcasts etc.

5. Regarding cost of development, much of the software development will be done in house by us, which has reduced the development costs massively. We've also tried to reduce unit costs as much as possible while providing value for money. With components going up in price just like everything else seems to be doing worldwide, it remains to be seen what the final price will be.

Omar.

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# Celebrating 100 years of Middlesex Association of the Blind

Middlesex Association of the Blind have created a special newsletter, the summer edition of Outlook, to celebrate their 100th anniversary.

Message from CEO, Sahib Singh:

If you want to read it on a PDF you can click here https://tinyurl.com/2p8mfaau If you would prefer to have the audio version, then here is that link. https://tinyurl.com/45kftvdu

I do hope that you will enjoy reading it and that you will find the history of our organisation as fascinating as we did, as we read through all the documents that made up this summarised version of our existence.

I feel it is a privilege to be part of MAB at this significant time and I am pleased to be sharing this momentous occasion with you, through this special edition of our Outlook Magazine.

Kind regards

Sahib Singh

CEO for the Middlesex Association for the Blind

That’s all for this edition. Have a wonderful fortnight and we look forward to sharing more with you next time. Have a wonderful fortnight, there’s another heat wave coming so please do keep safe and cool! Looking forward to meeting up with some members at the Gladstone Arms social next week.

Best wishes,

Jess

London NFB Chair