

# Volunteer Voice

Summer 2023

**Macular Society**  
Beating Macular Disease



**You're bringing people together**

Community is at the heart of the Macular Society and volunteers like you really are the heartbeat of our community.

No one should face the fear and isolation of macular disease alone and, thanks to your hard work, people with sight loss around the UK can feel more confident and supported.

Whether it's through your face-to-face or virtual groups, befriending services, mentoring, Skills for Seeing, Connect by Tech or events volunteering, you are bringing people together and making a huge difference.

Inside this issue, I'm very pleased to be able to shine a spotlight

on our fantastic groups and the incredible people behind them.

After an unpredictable couple of years, I am also excited to hear of groups like our Grimsby branch getting back to in-person meet-ups too.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and have a wonderful summer,



**Cathy Yelf,**  
**Chief Executive**



**Pass me on!**

**Please read and share  
with other volunteers.**

# Over to you...

Across the UK, dedicated volunteers like you are going the extra mile. Here are some great examples you've shared with us.

## Supporting Newport

We'd like to thank Mary Kennett for her 11 years' service as leader of the Newport support group.



The inspiring 95-year-old has stepped down from her role, with Caroline Noall now continuing to oversee the group.

Mary, who recently received a Platinum Award for her volunteering services, said:

"I'm sorry that it's come to an end but it's nice to step away after all that time. It certainly introduced me to a lot of lovely people and being a part of it, they were one of the nicest groups of people I have ever known. I did really enjoy it."

## Thank you, Effie

We were saddened to hear that one of our longest standing volunteers and members, Effie Vesser (pictured at bottom of page) sadly passed away at the beginning of this year shortly after her 101st birthday.

Effie regularly joined our Winter Warmers calls and led the East Grinstead group in West Sussex for many years. A very caring person, Effie was always helping other Macular Society members and called some of her group members daily "to make sure they were OK". She also kindly collected donations from friends and family to celebrate her 100th birthday.

Thank you very much on behalf of the Macular Society and all of the people you have helped, Effie. You will be sorely missed.







## Grimsby group reunion

Our Grimsby group hasn't met since before covid and so we were thrilled to see the group members back together in February. The first meeting was a resounding success, with everyone catching up on news and one member sharing advice on using smartphones.

Vicky Thompson, regional manager for Yorkshire North East Lincolnshire, said: "The group were so happy exchanging conversations and it was so lovely to see the group back together in a shiny new venue."

## Share your story

Do you have an inspiring tale to share with your fellow volunteers? Let your volunteer manager know or email **[editor@macularsociety.org](mailto:editor@macularsociety.org)**



**“Volunteering is so rewarding”**

It's in Betty's DNA to help others, with an incredible 80 years of volunteering experience under her belt.

Betty has worked with St John Ambulance since she was a teenager, the RNIB and the Macular Society, but now at the age of 93 she has decided to step down from overseeing the local support group in Shirley.

“My granddaughter actually told me years ago I had reached my sell-by date,” said Betty, “but I became a group leader for a few years and my husband, who was then 97, had memory loss so it was a lot.

“I carried on as group leader through the pandemic until at last we found a new leader, so I have been able to step back.”

She looks back on her volunteering role with the Macular Society with great fondness because of the opportunities it brought.

Betty, who first started volunteering with St John Ambulance as a 13-year-old girl in 1944, said: “At the Macular Society group I found we all supported each other. We shared tips, asked each other questions, and I found people enjoyed the meetings and each other's company too.



**“Volunteering is so rewarding. You meet many amazing people and there is a feeling of satisfaction when you have been able to help someone. There are also many ways you can become a volunteer: a befriender, counsellor, a gadget guide, a group leader, treasurer or secretary for example, and they are all so important when someone just wants someone to talk to.”**

Betty was diagnosed with wet age-related macular degeneration (AMD) in 2015 after describing a “fuzzy” change to her vision. “My life changed completely,” she said. “A week later I could barely see. I was referred to my local hospital and a week after that I was told I had wet AMD. The next day I had my first injection.

“The main thing was that I had to give up driving and, as my husband had never driven, this was an inconvenience. I did many crafts such as lace-making and cross-stitch pictures but I couldn’t see enough to pick up the stitches. It varies among people.”

But Betty’s sight loss has never stopped her passion for helping others, for which she was awarded the Dame of Grace last summer for her decades of service, just days after she carried the Queen’s Baton in the Queen’s Baton Relay in July.

Thank you Betty for all of your hard work making a difference to so many people’s lives.

**To learn more about different volunteering roles you can try, go to [macularsociety.org/volunteer](https://macularsociety.org/volunteer) or call 01264 601 041.**



# Volunteer updates



## The results are in!

Last year we ran a volunteer survey to find out more about your experiences. Thank you for all of your responses! Overall the results were very positive and we're glad to hear that most of you feel valued and appreciated for all of the hard work you do. We want to ensure we are providing the best experience and support for you so please do reach out to your volunteer manager if you have any more feedback.

**95% of you  
feel valued and  
appreciated as  
volunteers.**

**87% find their  
volunteering  
rewarding and  
fulfilling.**

**99% would  
recommend  
volunteering with  
the Macular Society.**

## Brilliant befrienders

"Thank you to everyone who got in touch to learn more about befriending after reading our winter 2022 Volunteer Voice. We're so lucky to have such a generous community of volunteers eager to help one another."

**Hannah  
Keegan,**  
programmes  
manager



## Could you be a mentor?

Do you have lived experience of macular disease? We're currently on the lookout for more volunteer 'mentors' who can advise and support people with aspects such as employment, social activities and looking after a child with macular disease.



**To find out more, please go to [macularsociety.org/volunteer](https://macularsociety.org/volunteer) or call 01264 601 041.**

# You're leading the way



Fighting the fear of isolation has been one of the main benefits of an online condition-specific support group.

Berni Warren, who has diabetic macular oedema (DMO), oversees the Macular Society's DMO calls, which are held every third Wednesday of the month on Zoom.

Berni, 54 from Surrey, said: "The group has been really beneficial. When I was diagnosed I knew nobody else with the condition, so having a DMO group means more people know others going through the same thing.

"That's been important for me because I've learned so much from other people – about treatments and sharing hints

and tips for everyday life with both diabetes and sight loss. I'm just so grateful to the Macular Society and now I feel really supported with my DMO, and the group is doing so well."

After launching the online support group, Berni also gave a talk at last year's Queen's University Belfast event, pictured, which was supported by the Society thanks to National Lottery funding for Northern Ireland.

Berni said: "I really enjoyed that. It was great to have the chance to talk about the complications of diabetes with our eyes, so I was pleased to share what DMO is, its impact but also the positives such as the help out there through the Macular Society."

To find out more about condition-specific group volunteering, contact [colin.daniels@macularsociety.org](mailto:colin.daniels@macularsociety.org)



# Support for you

## Making the most of your Macular Society volunteering

From role-specific development and training to updates and refreshers, we run volunteer sessions across the UK and encourage you to attend. Above all, these are a great way to get together with fellow volunteers to ask questions, share experiences and make new friends.

*"I learn something new every time and it's reassuring to know that I am doing things right. The hints and tips are a good way to learn and share with others."*

Caroline, Skills for Seeing Volunteer



**Please contact your regional manager for details of upcoming sessions.**

## Your key contacts

- For all services and support-related enquiries:  
**Advice & Information Service 0300 3030 111**
- For regional support or contact details for your regional manager:  
**Groups Admin 01264 560 259**
- For volunteering support:  
**Volunteer manager 01264 601 041**
- For information about fundraising and membership:  
**Supporter Care 01264 350 551**

## Have you received this in the correct format?

To change your preference or if you no longer wish to receive Volunteer Voice from us, please contact the volunteer manager.