

Volunteer Voice

Winter 2023

Macular Society
Beating Macular Disease



The Dalgety Bay support group at Aberdour Sensory Garden

Volunteers like you are keeping our Macular Society community going, come rain or shine.

You're the friendly voice at the end of the phone. You're the warm welcome at group meetings. Every day, you're making a real difference to the lives of people affected by macular disease.

Thank you for everything you do, your dedication and enthusiasm never fails to impress me.

Inside this issue, I'm really excited to share more stories of how you're helping your communities and spreading joy to our support group members.

I'm reminded how lucky we are to have wonderful volunteers in every corner of the UK and I'm delighted to showcase some of these inspiring individuals over the next few pages.

I hope you enjoy this issue and have a peaceful and relaxing winter,

Cathy Yelf,
Chief executive



Pass me on!

Please read and share
with other volunteers.

We're here for you...

The Macular Society is hugely grateful to each and every one of our wonderful volunteers and we are here to help you grow your skills and confidence.

Join the conversation!

Did you know, a lot of our regional managers run monthly calls which volunteers can join to share stories, hints and tips and learn from one other? Chat to your regional manager to find out if there is one running in your area.



Exchange ideas

If you'd like to develop your support group and need some inspiration, why not visit another group and swap ideas? Your regional manager can suggest a good group to visit.

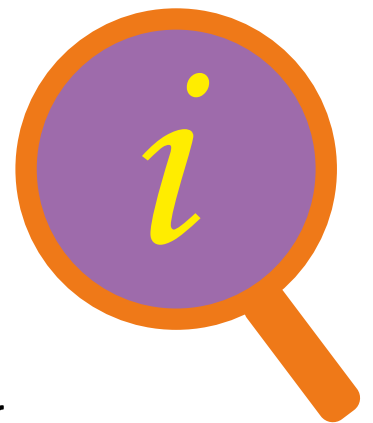


...and you're here for our macular community

The Macular Society provides lots of services that you can direct people towards. These include support groups, counselling, Winter Warmer calls, Connect by Tech, befriending, the helpline and more. For details of any of these services, please visit our website macularsociety.org

Further support and information

You may also receive questions about what external support is available, such as attendance allowance or other benefits. We have recently updated our website to reflect the most up-to-date guidance. Please go to macularsociety.org/support/benefits to learn more or call the helpline on **0300 3030 111** with any questions.



Over to you...

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

'Making up the numbers'



Group leader Lynne Dean set out to start a 'little' group in her market town of Driffield. After promoting it locally, she was pleasantly surprised to welcome 22 attendees to the first meeting in July.

Regional manager Vicky Thompson said: "I opened the meeting asking if anyone thought there was a real need for a Macular Society Group in Driffield, which led to some giggles, I then introduced the group leader Lynne whose husband quickly dashed in. She explained to the group she had asked him along to 'make up the numbers!'"

Thank you Lynne for helping to bring your community together, we wish your new Driffield group every success!

Help is at hand

Before Covid our Aberystwyth group was sadly on the verge of closing, with only three members regularly attending. After drumming up publicity and inviting in new speakers, the group now has 15 to 20 attendees each month! Do get in touch with your regional manager if you'd like help to reach more people in your community.

Fun in the sun

The Whitehaven support group enjoyed a lovely day out at Distington Walled Garden in Cumbria, taking advantage of one of the rare sunny days this summer. Group leader Fiona Robinson-Benn said they are now looking to make it an annual event as it was such a hit with members!



Meet your group leaders

Judith Barton
Dunfermline and
Dalgety Bay,
Scotland



After spending 20 years as a rehabilitation officer for the blind, Judith went on to co-ordinate our Kirkcaldy support group. She continued to volunteer after retiring and has been doing a fantastic job leading our Dunfermline group for the past five years.

Judith organises speakers and activities with the help of a wonderful committee, including treasurer and star baker Elizabeth and Ernie the ‘tea boy’. The group work hard to welcome people in the Dunfermline area and attendees have increased three-fold since Judith first joined.

With the help of regional manager Iona McLean, Judith has now set up a new group in nearby Dalgety Bay, providing support for more people with macular disease in the Fife area.

“The groups are like family,” Judith explained.

“Some people have been coming for nearly 10 years and have formed strong friendships but I also love seeing new people arrive and feel instantly at home as they meet other people going through the same thing,” she added.

The group is very active and Judith said that even lockdown couldn’t stop everyone from meeting, albeit virtually. “It was great just to keep that contact going and it meant that when we did resume face-to-face meetings no one was a stranger,” she said.



“We also had a ‘virtual outing’. We delivered homemade afternoon teas and we were ‘walked around’ Aberdour Sensory Garden. We actually did the outing for real this summer when 30 of us visited the garden and had lunch in the local hotel,” Judith shared.

Jean Stewart
Newtownabbey,
Northern Ireland



Two years ago, Jean, who has dry age-related macular degeneration, joined the Newtownabbey Macular Society Support Group with her friend Dorothy. With just six regular attendees at the time, the 90-year-old was keen to play a more pivotal role. “I’m one of these people who likes to organise things,” she said.

Today, Jean is a vital part of the group and, thanks to her and fellow volunteers Anthea and Dorothy, the membership has doubled to 14. Although she struggles to fulfil her passion for crafting, due to her eye sight, Jean enjoys leading activities such as cardmaking and gardening.

“We have a lovely time together. The hour and a half flies and we chat and tell each other about things that help us,” Jean explained. She added: “I wanted everybody to get the same support as me, to have the same opportunities that I’ve had to get things. I also have a great interest in people.”

Thank you!

Keith Lamb from the Hull Macular Support Group handed his regional manager Vicky Thompson this very generous cheque for £150, to be used to fund research into macular disease.



Thank you to Keith and the Hull group!

Tell us more

Do you have a story to share or an individual you’d like us to celebrate in Volunteer Voice?

Speak to your regional manager or email
editor@macularsociety.org

Volunteer updates

Join our training sessions

We're here to support you so you can have the best volunteering experience, and we're now updating our mandatory training to make it easier for you to attend.

There are two training sessions we're legally required to provide to both staff and volunteers; data protection and safeguarding. We will be rolling out training on these topics in the new year.

The sessions will take place predominantly on Zoom, where you can join on video call or be dialled in via conference call. You will be sent details and a selection of dates and times for you to choose from.

If you have any questions, please chat to your regional manager or Aishah, the volunteer manager, on **01264 601 041** or by emailing **aaishah.khan@macularsociety.org**



Understanding your privacy



We've recently made some changes to our privacy policy, which sets out what information we gather and keep about our members and supporters.

You can read the updated policy at **macularsociety.org/privacy** and change how you hear from us at any time by calling **01264 350 551**, or emailing **info@macularsociety.org**

Are you involved with your Integrated Care Board?

Please let us know!

We want to

understand how we

can get the best from the NHS for

anyone with a macular condition,

and having people working locally is

the best way to do this.



Please contact Emma Malcolm at **emma.malcolm@macularsociety.org**

“Volunteering is about giving back”

For more than a decade, Thelma has played a vital role in helping to manage a macular support group in north Wales.

From treasurer to group leader, Thelma describes her volunteering as “giving back” to the community of Llandudno, following the support she received from the Macular Society when she was diagnosed with a detached retina and macular hole in the late 1990s.

Thelma, now 71, had a successful operation on her retina, but was left without the use of her central vision. She found support from the Society, which then looked to form a support group in her area a few years later, in 2008.

She said: “I’ve always enjoyed the company of others and meeting new people, listening to their stories and the lives they have had. They are so interesting and very appreciative.

“It was a way of giving back, because the Society helped me all those years ago.”



Thelma has been the Llandudno support group leader since 2014 and has enjoyed the sense of community it has forged.

She explained: “They are with other people who understand what they’re going through, which means they are relaxed and they can enjoy themselves a lot more.”

**Our services
in Wales are
generously
funded by
The National
Lottery Community Fund.**



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. 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:
Helpline 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
- For befriending queries:
Befriending 01264 326 622

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 visit macularsociety.org/vvpreference.