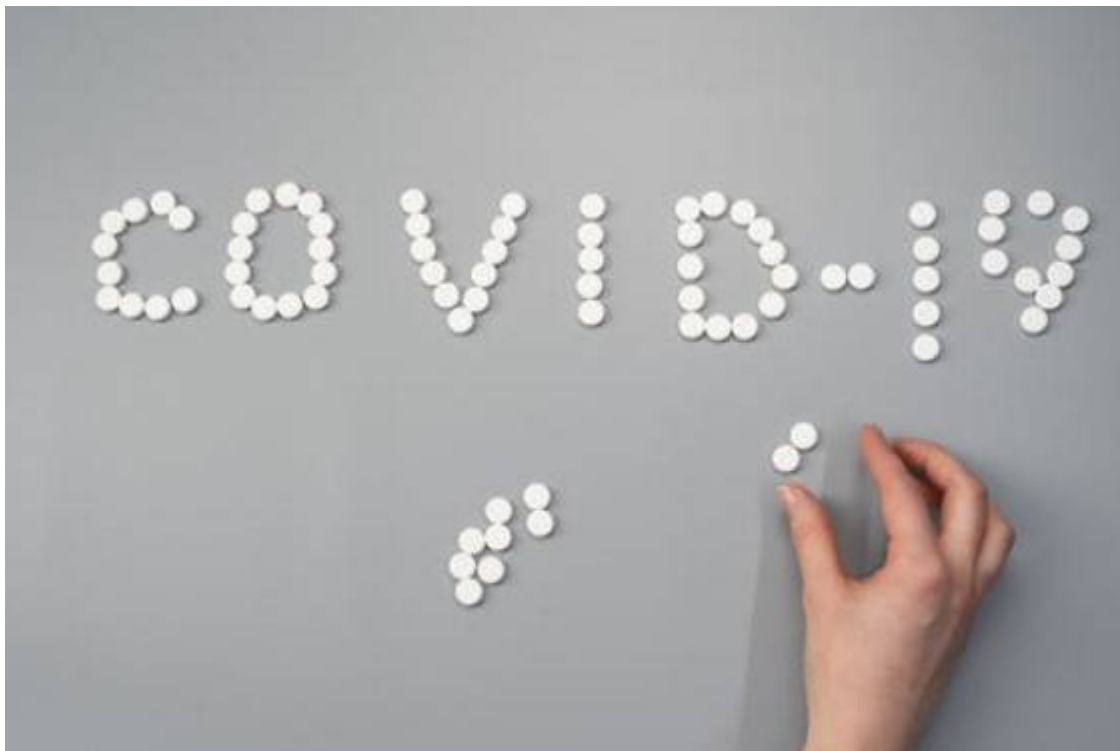




Norfolk County Council



### **COVID impact on VSSS**

There is no question that the COVID pandemic, and its impact on the education of all children and young people, has dominated this academic year. The disruption and uncertainty which everyone has had to face, combined with the significant restrictions experienced in all aspects of our lives, has been difficult to deal with at times. I am extremely grateful to all the parents/carers, educational settings and staff who have worked with VSSS colleagues to help us deliver as much support as we could throughout the year. We are currently able to make a greater number of face to face visits and are very pleased to see so many of the children and young people we support: Thank you to everyone who has supported VSSS staff as we resume direct working.

Usually at this time of year we have held a number of parent/carer events and provided opportunities for informal contact with staff; inevitably, this has not been possible this year so if you would like to contact me at all, please drop me an email at [kate.stocks@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:kate.stocks@norfolk.gov.uk)

As I write this article for our newsletter, I genuinely cannot predict what the coming weeks will hold, or if continued restrictions may still be required; however, I hope everyone has the opportunity to relax and enjoy the English summer!

Kate Stocks, Head of Virtual School Sensory Support



### **VSSS transition event**

Just before the first lockdown in March 2020, 21 students from Year 6, 7, 8 and 9 came together at Whitlingham Country Park to take part in a transition event. During the morning we focused on activities that gave the Year 6 children the opportunity to talk about their feelings around the move to High School, whilst the older students discussed their experiences and what advice they might give their younger selves. The two groups then came together for a question and answer session. After lunch, we headed off to the Norfolk Snowsports Centre for tubing! There were many smiles and screams as they ALL had a go, even the nervous ones!

The young people's contributions were so valuable that we asked the group if they would be happy for us to create a booklet to share with other young people who had not been able to take part in the event. In retrospect, this was so fortuitous, as our original thoughts were to organise a similar event this year but of course, Covid 19 has meant that a gathering of this kind has been out of the question. As with many areas of our work we have had to think of creative ways to meet the need of our pupils. Our plan this year is to send the booklet we created called 'High School on the Horizon' to all Year 6 pupils known to the VSSS Team for deaf children and young people, encouraging families to contact their Teacher of the Deaf if they have concerns or would like support over the transition period. Teachers of the Deaf have also used the booklet in their work sessions as a basis for discussion. The booklet doesn't have the same scream factor as the Snowsports Centre but here's hoping that we can soon safely support our pupils to come together for some real face to face social encounters 😊

Here are a few examples of the young people's feelings/contributions:

- *I am worried that people will look at my hearing technology (hearing aid, cochlear implant processor, BAHA) and talk about me behind my back (Year 6)*
- *Possible solution: You could show them your hearing technology and show them how to change the battery and how it works, they might like that.*
- *One person told me "You've got really cool earphones!" I think they are just interested in your technology and want to know more!*
- *Possible solution: Talk to your Teacher of the Deaf as they can do lots of training with your class or a group of friends if you want. They then will understand better.*



## **Transition Workshops**

The Deaf Children and Young People's Team have this year piloted a series of online Transition Workshops for a cohort of pupils in Years 10 and 11, along with their parents / carers. It was found that the workshops would be more beneficial if they coincided with GCSE option choices, and will be offered to pupils in Year 9 in Autumn 2021. The twilight workshops use information provided by the National Deaf Children's Society, and cover the following areas:

- Own Your Deafness / Your Rights / Career Hopes
- Your Skills and Strengths / Post-16 Options
- Support: Funding and Technology / Career Planning

Information packs will be available for those that cannot attend the workshops, but would still be interested in knowing more about Post-16 choices and support.

For further information, please contact Tori Zielinski at [victoria.zielinski@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:victoria.zielinski@norfolk.gov.uk)



### **VSSS at Gressenhall**

Since 2015, VSSS have worked with Jan Pitman, the Learning Manager at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, to put on special events for VSSS children and their families at Gressenhall near Dereham. These have been fantastic opportunities for VSSS families to have a great free day out as well as to meet other families from Norfolk. The farm animals are always very popular, as are activities at the farmhouse and cart rides. More recently, there have also been whole day events for Key Stage 2 pupils and their families. Gressenhall staff have been amazing supporting us to offer mammoth hunting, den building, owl pellet dissection and river dipping. Even the year that rain fell from the sky like stair rods, families enjoyed visiting the animals, exploring Victorian games and catching up with old (and new) friends. This year, as long as Covid restrictions allow, we are planning for two more events. We are unable to say exactly which activities will be available due to the uncertainty around Covid regulations however, we can guarantee an interesting and fun day for everyone. So, keep the dates in your diary:

**Wednesday September 1st for VSSS children and families in KS2 (School years 3-6)**

**Friday September 3rd for VSSS children and families in the pre-school years and KS1 (Reception, Year 1 and 2)**





## June Hab Hacks

This is a useful tip to support quantity control and make sure you're putting the right thing on your hair. Most shampoo and conditioner bottles are identical and really difficult to identify from the shape of them alone.

I always place one elastic band or hair bobble on the shampoo and two hair bobbles on the conditioner. Having no bobble on the shower gel confirms you know exactly what you're feeling for!

The pump action definitely helps to ensure you get the right amount; this is also useful for dispensing toothpaste and shower foams.



### **Self-catering holiday flat in Scarborough**

LOOK-UK are a small voluntary organisation supporting vision impaired children, young people and families across the UK. They are fortunate to have a lovely self-catering flat in Scarborough which is a great place for a few days away and a base to explore North Yorkshire.

If anyone is interested in this holiday flat, please use this link for more details and contact to book.

[Self-Catering Holiday Flat in Scarborough – Look UK – Supporting Visually Impaired Young People to Thrive \(look-uk.org\)](https://www.look-uk.org/self-catering-holiday-flat-in-scarborough)



### **Research into the impact of COVID-19 on vision impaired young people aged 11 to 18**

The VI/MSI Team have been approached to participate in research with Dr. Wolfgang Mann, Reader in Special and Inclusive Education at Roehampton University. Wolfgang, and the team, is looking at the impact of COVID-19 on vision impaired young people, learning and their experiences during the last 18 months. The programme is being established and will be using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with young people aged 11 – 18 years. It will be great to get as many people involved so please encourage your young people to participate.

Further information will be available from John at VSSS [john.milligan@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:john.milligan@norfolk.gov.uk)





## **Vision Norfolk**

### **Activities and Events with Vision Norfolk**

Vision Norfolk organised a trip for nine Vision Impaired young people to the Hautbois Activity Centre during May half term. Everyone enjoyed Kayaking, the Assault Course, Climbing Wall and long Zip Wire. The sun shone brightly and it was supported by staff from the VI/MSI Team alongside colleagues from Vision Norfolk.

Over the last few months Vision Norfolk Children and Young People Service and the VSSS VI/MSI team have collaborated to host a series of young people's virtual quizzes, games and competitions. In addition Vision Norfolk continues to host regular online Parent/Carer events providing an opportunity to learn about other resources such as Short Breaks Funding, Buddy Dogs for Vision Impaired Young People and Toy Like Me. Do get in touch with [barbara.dunn@visionnorfolk.org.uk](mailto:barbara.dunn@visionnorfolk.org.uk) or call 01603 561242 if you wish to get involved and learn more about future events and activities.

During the summer months, Vision Norfolk will be hosting family beach days at Hunstanton and Winterton, a BBQ at High Lodge Thetford Forest, bowling with the monthly Teenage Youth Group and a Driving Experience at the Norfolk Showground. Vision Norfolk are always open to ideas and suggestions so please get in touch.

## **Vision Norfolk - Other Services**

In addition to events and activities, Vision Norfolk also offers services in the following areas:

- Information following diagnosis of a Vision Impairment
- Advice and support about applying for Benefits and Financial support
- Support with the EHCP process
- Signposting and advice to other services and organisations
- Opportunity to meet other families with Vision Impaired Children and Young People



## **BSL Signing Day**

**You're invited to BSL Signing Day on 4th September 2021.**

Free admission for groups and individuals.

Please join us for a free Signing Day when all our flying displays will be signed, together with special BSL Q&A sessions.

80 of the worlds most beautiful owls & other birds of prey, a variety of iconic species flying free at close quarters.

Spacious seating areas for picnics and flying displays.

Social distancing measures and sanitising stations throughout the Sanctuary.

Disabled parking at the door.

Meet the Meerkats at Meerkat Kastle.

Woodland Walk with Red Squirrels.

Come-and-go ticket allows time to enjoy all the shops and attractions at Stonham Barns Park.

To register for free admission call Catherine on 03456 807897 option 3 or e-mail [info@owl-help.org.uk](mailto:info@owl-help.org.uk)

Suffolk Owl Sanctuary, Unit 22 Stonham Barns, Pettaugh Road, Stonham Aspal, IP14 6AT