



**Middlesex Association for the Blind**



# *Celebrating*

**100  
YEARS**

1922-2022



**Outlook** Newsletter

## **Our Mission Statement**

The Middlesex Association for the Blind aims to support people who are blind and partially sighted to lead independent lives.

The Association achieves this through the local provision and delivery of a range of high-quality services, advice and information to people across nine London boroughs.

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# From our CEO:

**Sahib Singh**



**100 years!** When Middlesex Association for the Blind started in 1922, who would have thought we'd still be here in 2022 supporting people with a visual impairment?

Reading through our 100 years of history has been fascinating and incredibly insightful. As you'll read later on in this special centenary edition, MAB has delivered a variety of projects and services throughout our years of service. We've served thousands of people, through the support of our staff, volunteers and donors. Every single individual who helped contribute to MAB, I thank from the bottom of my heart. For myself, I'm honoured and feel privileged to be a part of our rich history.

Many things have happened and changed in the world through MAB's 100 years of service. We've been through World Wars, recessions and more recently a global pandemic. Yet, despite all of these trials

and tribulations, we are still here ensuring we support people whatever comes our way.

Middlesex Association for the Blind is not affiliated with any national organisations. We are a local charity with a small budget, yet we manage to do so much, providing support to people with sight loss in nine Boroughs in London.

Personally, I entered the charity sector because I wanted to help people at a grass roots level. I wanted to work for a charity that is conscious of where its funds are spent and a charity which actually helps people in a real and tangible way. I can honestly say, without an ounce of equivocation, MAB does exactly that.

I'm indebted to our members of staff who work tirelessly to support our service users. Every single MAB staff member is here because they care, genuinely, and want to help make a difference. It truly is a privilege to work alongside so many passionate, dedicated and honest people.

Thank you also to our volunteers!

I wish I could write each and every one of your names to recognise and acknowledge the enormous support you provide to MAB and our members. Without you, our organisation simply would not exist; you are our unsung heroes.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have contributed financially to MAB in the past century. We are running today, only because of the donations, legacies, wills and donors who have funded us throughout our 100 years. We are after all, a charitable organisation and we do not charge for our services. We are only able to do the work that we do because we have the necessary financial backing.

Please, therefore consider leaving MAB a gift in your Will, and help MAB continue to thrive for the next 100 years.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Singh', written in a cursive style.

# 100 years of MAB 1922-2022

## Introduction

The Middlesex Association for the Blind (MAB) started after the end of World War 1 in response to the number of soldiers coming back from the frontline who had been gassed and lost their sight. From the outset MAB has always sought to provide specialised services, care and facilities for the visually impaired. The dedication of volunteers and staff keen to support people with sight loss has ensured that the organisation has endured through structural, technological and societal changes.

## Strong Foundations

In the first years after its inception, MAB was a very active organisation quickly establishing a network of volunteers known as Honorary Representatives. These volunteers visited people with sight loss, providing companionship, ensuring they got treatment for their eyes, helping them to get admitted to the school for the blind and helping them with training to earn a living.

Interestingly enough, MAB was the organisation that originally kept the register of the people who were visually impaired in the county. Later, in 1963, this task was taken over by the local boroughs after the Middlesex County Council was abolished. The London boroughs as we know them today, Harrow,

Hillingdon, Hounslow, Ealing, Richmond, Brent, Haringey, Enfield and Barnet, were all established and it became their responsibility to keep those registers that were originally held by MAB.

One of the earlier projects established was the Home Workers Scheme, which obviously differs from the Home Visiting Scheme that we have today. In this project people with visual impairment were trained and given tools and materials to be able to work from home. People made baskets, tuned pianos, knitted on machines, repaired boots and made mats.

The next formal project of MAB, was setting up social clubs to bring people who had sight loss together. The first social clubs



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were set up in Ealing, Chiswick, Enfield and Tottenham and would go on to become a defining feature of the organisation.

### Roots take hold

The first decade of MAB was a time of continued evolution with much success. MAB networked widely with other organisations, and ideas for new services emerged such as the arts and crafts handicraft sale which started in 1928. This became an opportunity for people with sight

loss to demonstrate their skills to a wider group of people.

Technological developments, such as the wireless also had an impact. In 1927 the Chairperson remarked that the difference it made to the lives of people with visual impairment was “almost inconceivable”. Distributing wireless sets and maintaining them became a regular undertaking for MAB and still is today. Up to 1930, MAB was accountable to both the Ministry of Health and the County

*Braille training is offered from our Head Office.*



*Above left: MAB has a Rapid Response Counselling programme that helps people who find themselves in a crisis about losing their sight. Right: our Employment Service helps people build the confidence they need to enter the job market.*

Council. Then, the Local Government Act came into force which recognised MAB as an agent of the County Council. As part of this formal role MAB was entrusted with assigning help from the Council's domiciliary assistance scheme, where by a single person or couple were entitled to an income if they were blind. This level of responsibility demonstrated the high regard that MAB was held in by authorities and the deep grassroots connections it had.

### MAB keeps evolving

In the next decades MAB developed many other services. We distributed Christmas gifts and created a voluntary fund

that was used if a blind person needed financial assistance. In 1933 a holiday bungalow was hired by MAB on the south coast in Selsey. This initial holiday bloomed into a long running theme for MAB in the coming years with holidays also being held at Littlehampton. Much later caravan holidays became popular, and at one stage a hotel in Folkestone was also set up for people with visual impairment.

In the 1930s MAB also started purchasing or leasing properties to accommodate people with visual impairment. We had properties in Teddington, Ealing, Finchley and Cheshunt.



*Some of the assistive devices we exhibit from our Mobile Resource Unit.*

### **The outbreak of war**

WWII proved to be a challenging and interesting time for MAB. Work was disrupted as Home Teachers took on roles to support the war effort. The blitz meant that all the innovative work of creating social clubs, handicraft exhibitions and the holiday opportunities all had to stop.

Despite these difficulties, MAB found opportunities for people with sight loss to work in munitions, as telephonists and testing bootstraps that were to be used on the frontline. There were ambitions for many of the workers to continue working in these roles once the war came to an end.

### **The end of the war**

As the war came to an end MAB had to evaluate its property

portfolio. Many of the properties had been damaged or were lying empty because of the evacuations and it was brought into question whether they were fit for purpose. Once the end of the war was declared the property portfolio was settled to three properties: Cecilia House in Ealing – run by the Cecilia home Company and leased by the association; McDonogh House, Ealing – rented by the association and Kelland, House, Littlehampton – a holiday home.

The end of the war signified a new era for MAB as well as Middlesex County Council decided to take over a lot of the work that was previously done by the association. Maintenance of the register of people with sight loss, the home teaching service and the domiciliary

assistance scheme were all handed over to the Council.

### **MAB's changing role**

Despite the shift in responsibilities towards the Council, MAB continued running our residential homes, providing wirelesses, running clubs, offering holidays and setting up horticultural competitions.

The economic climate and the rising cost of living meant that our work supporting people accommodated in our homes also increased. There was a need to provide people with bedding, clothing, furniture and transport.

It was at this time that caravan holidays became very popular and MAB provided such opportunities through generous legacies that were left to the organisation. Another legacy of £3,000 enabled MAB to open Valley Field House for residents in Ealing and Harrow.

### **Upheaval and concern**

The 1960's were a time of great upheaval and concern for MAB when the Middlesex County Council was abolished. There was worry about whether or not the local authorities had the staff and skills to provide for people with visual impairment in the way that MAB had been able to

*MAB volunteers working to build a sensory garden in South Harrow in 1995.*



do up until that point. It was felt that “Social workers looking after the needs of blind people must have specialised training to equip them to meet those needs. A general social work training is not enough. Blindness is a handicap which differs in kind rather than in degree from other handicaps.” (MAB Chairperson 1967). This is obviously a worry that we still carry with us today as MAB, particularly in relation to statutory provision for people with visual impairment.

Changes took place thick and fast in the next 20 years. The Home Teaching programme was stopped in MAB's 50th year of operation, and shortly after that the accommodation offerings and the holiday camps were also reduced considerably. MAB could not afford to keep the houses going as the government no longer paid for the residents to stay there.

### **Government cuts**

Government cuts to social services and local authorities meant that people with visual impairment were going to have to rely more on the voluntary

sector going forward. MAB was becoming more of an advice and support organisation, and to meet the needs of the sector, it returned to its roots and started doing home visits again with the aim of providing support to help people to remain independent.

### **Moving closer to service users**

At this point the offices were moved from Victoria, London to Harrow with the aim of being closer to the people it served. The Home Visiting Service was officially relaunched in Harrow in 1993 and soon extended to the other boroughs.

### **Developing more services**

In the 21st century MAB continued to evolve and develop new services depending on the need in the sector. In 2015, the Mobile Resource Unit was launched in place of borough based resource centres. It has been a cheaper and more effective way of creating awareness around MAB, exhibiting assistive devices and giving advice and support across the boroughs. Research around this time estimated that 1 in 3 people with sight loss would

welcome counselling, but less than one in a hundred received it. This led to the development of the Rapid Response Counselling service that we have today.

And while MAB had long stopped teaching basket weaving and mat making, the need for an Employment Service was never been more apparent than in the 2010's. The development of technology and assistive software removed many barriers to integrating people with sight loss into the work force. MAB responded to this opportunity by developing a

“Clear Vision to Employment Course”. The service helps people who have either never worked before to become job ready, or those who have lost employment due to sight loss, to re-enter the work force.

### **Celebrating 100 years**

MAB celebrates its centenary as an organisation that continues to serve the visually impaired sector through a wide range of services that all seek to increase independence, reduce isolation and increase mental wellbeing. We are proud to have made 100 years, and we look forward to turning 200!

*Our Mobile Resource Unit parks at strategic places in our boroughs, giving advice and support and exhibiting assistive devices for people with sight loss.*

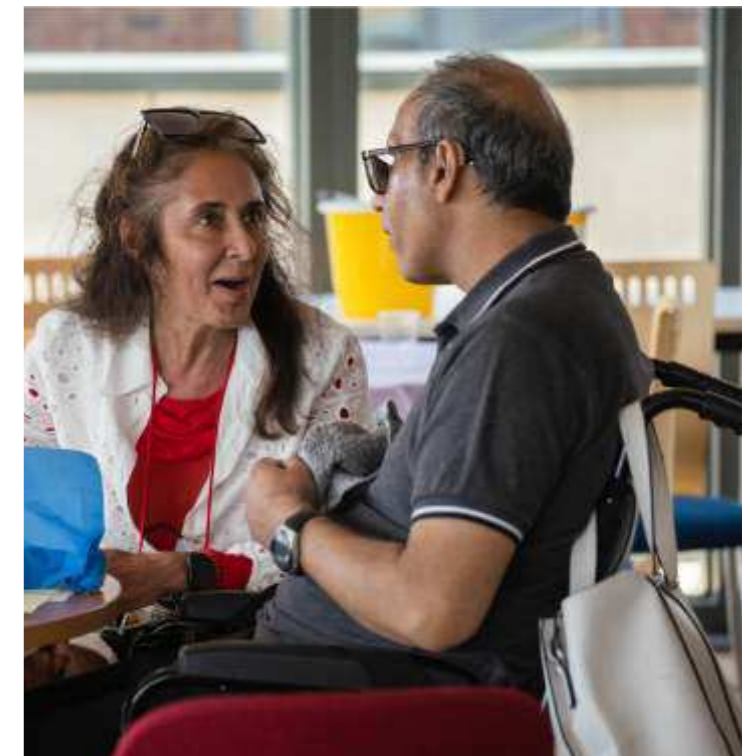


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**MAB's VIP clubs 100-year celebrations were hosted in four boroughs to the delight of our service users and volunteers.**

## **Richmond and Hounslow had a joint celebration**

The event took place at the Twickenham Exchange, Conservatory, 75 London Road, Twickenham, TW1 1BE. We were honoured to have Mayor Julia Cambridge attending our celebration.



## Ealing and Hillingdon had a joint celebration

The event took place at the William Hobbayne Centre, 1 St Dunstan's Road, London W7 2EY. We were privileged to have Mayor Mohinder Midha celebrating with us.



## Our Barnet and Enfield clubs had a joint celebration

The event took place at St Margaret's United Reform Church, Victoria Road, Finchley, N3 1BD. We were delighted to have Mayor Alison Moore join us to celebrate.



**The Brent and Harrow club had a shared celebration**

The event took place at the Sattavis Patidar Centre, J/W, Forty Ave, The Avenue, Wembley Park, HA9 9PG. We were pleased to have Mayor Abdi Aden attending our celebration.



For details about our clubs, meeting times and contact numbers, please refer to our list of contacts on page 25.

**A story from one of our members:**

# Facing the unknown

**When Parry started losing his sight, the rehabilitation officers at Harrow social services referred him to MAB. “Raheel (Rapid Response Counsellor) is the person who inspired me to get to where I am today,” Parry enthuses.**

“I needed my head sorting out. As I started losing my sight, I felt like it was degenerating on a daily basis. I could feel my reading powers were decreasing. I would wake each day fearing how little I would be able to see and what sight I would be left with. It felt very rapid, and I felt scared and depressed by it. I used to play bridge, but I obviously had to stop that. I had to get used to a whole lot of things. I used to be a go-getter. I worked in small businesses and I was always busy. When I couldn't do many things in the business anymore, I relied more and more on my wife. Then when she ended in hospital with a triple heart bypass and a stroke, and became disabled, I had to retire and look after her. My spirits at that stage were very low. After contacting MAB, Raheel

came around with a radio for me as I had stopped being able to watch TV. He sat with me for an hour and he just listened as I talked. Raheel came to see me 6 or 7 times that year. And then one day he said to me, “Parry, you don't need me anymore.” I had gone from being half empty glass, to being a half full one. To this day, I am not sure how it happened, or what happened exactly, but it was as if something just clicked inside me, and today I find myself full of joy. I am a little afraid that it is going to disappear again and that I will find myself in that place of despair again.

Other things have blossomed in my life now. I go to the day centre regularly to speak to people. I was also the first person to go back to the synagogue when it opened after

the pandemic. And then one day I had a phone call from the synagogue, “Parry, we want to give you an award, for coming every Saturday in rain or sun, you are in inspiration!” So now my name is up on the board at the Synagogue. I am quite thrilled by this, as I was never really a religious person. I was always too busy working to go to the synagogue. Now, I have taken up dancing at the synagogue too – people have to hold the Bible for me, but I still do it. It's nice for me that everyone says, “You are always happy and smiling, Parry”. And I have to say that so much of this is due to MAB. Raheel did this all without talking, just by listening to me.

“David (a MAB volunteer), comes to me every Friday and takes me out for a walk. Now, when I go to the Day Centre, I talk to everyone and I make suggestions to them to help them. I say two things to people about their eyes... Firstly, go to the Opticians, and secondly, if you need them, go to MAB.

***Thank you for everything your organisation has done for me. It will remain with me for the rest of my life”.***



**If you are reading this and would like to share your story of how MAB has helped you, please phone us on 020 8423 5141. We would love to interview you for our next edition of Outlook.**



# Leaving MAB a gift in your Will

**We would not be able to exist without our trust, foundation, borough, corporate and individual donors.**

# Thank you for your support!

Raising money for MAB is a bit like building a cathedral. Centuries ago many of the people who were involved in creating these majestic structures knew that the cathedral would not be finished in their lifetime. Yet they gave their money and their time for the benefit of future generations, knowing that the full glory of the completed building would only be witnessed by generations to come.

In our 100th year as we look back, we can see that in the past century there were many people who left us Gifts in their Wills, and like the stone masons and builders of cathedrals, they aren't here to witness the full extent of what their gift has created. But thanks to their gifts, MAB is still serving people in the sight loss sector a hundred years after its inception.

If you would like to join this human train of thoughtful givers we would love to hear from you.

### Did you know?

- That a Gift in your Will could be a financial sum of any size, an item of value that we could sell like an artwork or a property, or it could simply be the residue of your estate. In other words, anything left after you have taken care of your loved ones.
- That if you were to leave MAB a Gift in your Will, you could reduce the amount of inheritance tax payable on your estate.
- We have teamed up with two Will writing companies, who can help you draw up a telephonic Will free of charge.

**To find out more, please phone us on 020 8423 5141.**



# VIP clubs contact details

These are our Borough Coordinators' contact numbers:

Borough	Name	Telephone Number
Barnet	Bina Padia	07594 625 215
	Rita Shah	07510 127 893
Brent	Rita Shah	07510 127 893
Ealing	Kamila Reynolds	07387 101 631
Enfield	Ruby Miyah	07598 880 244
Harrow	Alison Bicknell	07387 101 632
Hillingdon	Helen Skillen	07387 101 630
Hounslow	Tania Ortiz Zamorano	07511 826 892
Richmond	Parule Basu-Barua	07521 927 970

Sensory Services Team contact numbers:

Borough	Telephone Number
Barnet	020 8359 5000
Brent	020 8937 4300
Ealing	020 8825 6230
Enfield	020 8379 1001
Haringey	020 8489 8900
Harrow	020 8901 2680
Hillingdon	01895 556 633
Hounslow	020 8583 3100
Richmond	020 8891 7971

# Board of Trustees

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Trustee	Mr Terry Mills
Trustee	Ms Rachelle Goldberg
Trustee	Mr Jeremy Brown

We welcome contributions to our  
*newsletter!*

Please send your articles to Valerie Hill: [valerie@afb.org.uk](mailto:valerie@afb.org.uk)

Design and layout: [info@brak.co.za](mailto:info@brak.co.za)

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**So that we can keep our records up to date, please telephone us if you move address or would like to receive MAB's Outlook newsletter in a different format.**

Tel: 020 8423 5141 or please email Nasreen at [nasreen@afb.org.uk](mailto:nasreen@afb.org.uk)

**Middlesex  
Association  
for the Blind**

Working  
locally  
with people  
who are blind  
& partially sighted

**[www.aftb.org.uk](http://www.aftb.org.uk)**

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