

December 2011

Issue 1

# Branches newsletter

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## Welcome!

The seed of an idea for a newsletter to connect branches was sewn a short while ago at the National Branches Meeting and the response was yes please! I am therefore happy to present the very first edition of the branches newsletter!

This newsletter will drop on your doorstep or into your inbox (it's your choice) twice a year. It is intended as a way to share successes, learning points, and swap ideas on issues such as fundraising, recruiting branch members, volunteers, campaigning and

ideas for social events, amongst much else.

It is your newsletter and relies on your input, so please do continue to tell me about what's going on and also what you like and what you are not too keen on in this newsletter.

Turn to page 3 to find out why the North and Mid Wales branch was left high but not dry, and to page 6 see why the Sense Devon was shortlisted for the 'exceptional contribution' award at the 2011 Sense Awards. And on page 8 you can find

a feature special on fundraising.

Collating branch successes highlights the staggering achievements by branches over this past year alone. The articles featured are, of course, just some of what has been going on around the country. I hope you enjoy the reading!

Finally, I wish you all a very merry Christmas!

Till next time,



## Kent and Essex branches hit it off (but no holes in one!)

By Sue Turner, Kent branch



*“The best Kent and Essex family weekend yet – roll on 2012!”*



On Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May the Kent and Essex Branches met at a new venue in Hertfordshire for their annual joint branches weekend.

Friday evening saw all the families coming together and inevitably ending up in the bar! In the morning the leisure club headed off for an exciting day with swimming, bowling, ice skating, and the cinema on offer, plus time spent at the shops, but that was just the leisure club. Mums and Dads caught up with the latest news from Sense with presentations from Steve Rose bringing us all up to date with Specialist Children’s Services and Sue Brown

informing us how we can all be involved in campaigning against the potential changes in the benefits system.

With all the brain work behind us, the afternoon was more relaxing. Some chose a stroll in the beautiful 200 acre grounds, but the braver of us opted for a golfing competition, and we were useless!!! Golf balls headed in all directions except towards the green and a lot of fun was had. Eventually two champions were found whose valiant efforts actually made it onto the green! To make up for our exertions there was a scrumptious cream tea and then back to an interesting information sharing

time with Shaun Gibbons and Graham Nolan telling us about what was happening in Kent and Essex.

The day was not over yet and the evening saw us gathered for a quiz devised by Peggy and with Graham Nolan reading the questions and attempting to keep order. The result was a tie, after some atrocious cheating!! The winning team decided on after a rendition of ‘Walking on Sunshine’. As the weekend drew to a close the unanimous decision was that it had been the best Kent and Essex family weekend yet – roll on 2012!

*“Golf balls headed in all directions except towards the green”*



# Climbing high in Cymru

By Jane Plant, North & Mid Wales

The North and Mid Wales Branch recently had a superb day out at the Coed Y Brenin Visitor Centre, near Dolgellau. We decided this was to be 'a day with a difference' - enough of that coffee drinking and chatting us parents usually do, while their children go off on adventures, it was time we had a bit of a challenge too! The centre has fantastic mountain bike trails and 'Go

Ape!' - where they literally leave you swinging and screaming in the trees! We were lucky to have some great volunteers to come alongside our kids for the day, which was a packed day with art, a nature walk and sensory activities.

We started by meeting up for lunch on a morning that promised to be the wettest of the year. Then we headed off up the mountain. It

was amazing, and we all survived torrential rain whilst stuck high up in the trees with knocking knees - everyone had such a fantastic time. The children were relaxed and happy after their fun day and the parents were exhausted, so we had a great excuse for mouth-watering cake and hot drinks for everyone.

Thank you to everyone who made the day such a success.



*"Enough of that coffee drinking and chatting for us parents, while the children go off on adventures, we felt it was time we had a bit of a challenge too"*

# HSI loose their heads at the tower

By Colin Bennett, H.S.I. UK

It was a lovely late Spring day when members and supporters of the Hearing and Sight Impaired Branch met at Tower Hill for an eagerly-awaited social trip, to the Tower of London.

We crossed the drawbridge (fortunately down) over the moat to reach the Tower. History does not tell us if the Tower was

ever attacked by wheelchair users but the outcome may have been very bloody. We were met by two guides dressed in all their finery of top hat and tails. We went first into the Jewel House, which was difficult for Usher people without personal assistants, as it is very dark and rather noisy. We had decided not to bite off more than

we could chew and had a leisurely lunch in the courtyard which is amply provided with sturdy benches and places to eat.

In the afternoon we visited the dreaded White or Bloody Tower and went up floor by floor around the spiral staircase within the ancient walls.



Near the top one of our members slipped and we heard the body bump step by step helter-skelter into the far depths of the building where we heard a splash. Now, we in HSI have a very good record of not losing attendees at our events, so we were not unduly worried about losing just one!



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*“The branch is looking at ways of involving the families who have young children who find it difficult to get to meetings”*



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*“The evening raised £155 which will help to keep the day club going.”*



## **Kent Branch host successful family day at Farm World**

**By Sue Turner, Kent branch**

On Saturday 2 July, the Sense Kent branch and a group of teachers from the Kent MSI Steering Group joined forces to organise a family fun day at Farm World in Faversham to coincide with Deafblind Awareness Week.

The event was very well attended with over 40 people enjoying the opportunity to get up close and touch the owls, horses and small animals, take the tractor trail, join in the craft session and make their own souvenirs - and for those brave enough, the zip wire! The

event gave families with young children who have multi-sensory impairment (MSI) the opportunity to socialise with each other, meet professionals from Sense, MSI teachers and Kent branch members and their children.

Sue Turner, who was instrumental in organising the event said; “The day was a great way to have fun and introduce families with young children to Sense and the Kent Branch members. As usual at a Sense event, ideas and information were exchanged – I found some useful

information about a piece of equipment from a Mum of a very young child. All the families expressed a wish to hear more about the branch and have involvement in the future. The branch is looking at ways of involving the families who have young children who find it difficult to get to meetings”.

A thank you note from one family said; “We all had a lovely day. The boys loved stroking the animals and birds and have a great love of owls”.

## **Essex branch members quizzed**

**By Peggy Keeble, Essex branch**

On the evening of the 6 May, Linda Coote, of the Essex Branch, organized a quiz night at the Baddow Centre to raise money for our Day Club. It was a great night with some really good

fun questions, some of which were pretty hard but nobody cheated!

Most of the people who came were family, friends and branch members. Linda’s two granddaughters

worked tirelessly. The evening raised £155 which is really brilliant and will help to keep the day club going. Many thanks to Linda and her granddaughters for all their hard work.

# Terry, from the East Anglia branch, and Chris Bennett go the extra mile at Members' Day

By Anya Rakoczi, Events & Groups Coordinator, Sense

“Next year's Members' Day will have to be something extraordinary if it is to beat last Saturday”; “good venue, good friends and good support” – the Friday evening social and Members' Day 2011 received wonderful feedback from Sense members.

However, here we take a look behind the scenes and specifically at two volunteers and how they went that extra mile (often literally).

Terry Gilbert and Christ Bennett are both deafblind but rather than attend the conference, they gave up their time to help the Holidays and Events team on the day.

Terry is a young deafblind man and member of the East Anglia branch. Terry is extremely active and enjoys disabled football, swimming and basketball.

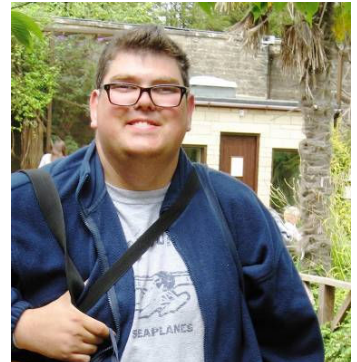
Terry went on his first Sense holiday as a young teen, an experience which eventually led to him becoming a highly successful and valued holiday volunteer in his 20s.

Terry had many responsibilities on Members' Day from showing people the way to workshop rooms to collecting feedback form and name badges at the end of the day. Sue Gilbert, Terry's mum, said: “He loves working with the team because he feels welcomed and valued. Having a role and something to be responsible for makes him feel very important - he felt as though he was the bee's knees that day” she added.

Chris lives near Doncaster, and is a real computer whizz. Chris receives Sense support and goes to his college youth club.

On Members' Day those who attended may remember being greeted and directed where to go by Chris on the reception desk. Telling us about the day Chris said, “[I] enjoyed helping and doing important work. [I] felt independent doing something on my own. [I] didn't want to go home.”

Both Terry and Chris were immensely valuable to the organising team – both worked extremely hard doing many tasks, the main one being tirelessly walking directing members from one end of the venue to another. They were so full of energy and enthusiasm for the role and their presence helped to ensure the day was a success. A big thank you to Terry and Chris for volunteering and going that extra mile!



“He felt as though he was the bee's knees that day.”



# Devon branch shortlisted for 'exceptional contribution' at Sense Awards

By Lucy Evans, Media Officer, Sense



The Devon branch was shortlisted in October this year for a Sense award in the category of 'Exceptional contribution'. The branch narrowly missed, but their achievements were on show and celebrated fittingly.

The ceremony took place in London and was hosted by TV personality Arlene Phillips, in October.

The Branch has organised holidays for young deafblind people, purchased two holiday caravans on the Devon coast and made a major contribution towards setting up the first residential service in Devon. It also supported the unique Cafe 55 staffed by

deafblind people on in Exeter.

Peter Holman, Chairman, and his wife Mary, who attended the awards ceremony, are founder members of the Branch, established in 1984, and are also former Trustees of Sense. Their son, Richard was born deafblind:

*"We're delighted that the Devon Branch has been shortlisted for*

*the award. It is a fantastic support network for families and has achieved so much in the area."*

Gillian Morbey, Chief Executive of Sense said: *"I am delighted that the Devon Branch has been nominated for their support for deafblind people and their families - this deserves to be recognised and celebrated. Congratulations!"*

## A fond farewell for Avon

By Anya Rakoczi, Events & Groups Coordinator, Sense

The Avon branch waves a fond farewell to Mandie Lewis as she resigns from her post as Chair after 20 successful years as a branch officer.

From the early days of the toy library Mandie has successfully fought for and seen the Woodside Centre established and branch grow and flourish.

"I have enjoyed my years as a branch officer, but feel it is time others took on the mantle and I wish them well. I am not leaving, but will be a member

not an officer" says Mandy.

Many families have found strength from the support and information Mandie has provided. Further, Mandie worked tirelessly to ensure practitioners, service providers, and authorities knew how to get it right for our children.

A huge thank you Mandie for your fantastic approach, and the huge amount of time, commitment, and passion you have given over the years.

## Christmas at the Club

By Peggy Keeble, Sense Essex

The Essex Day Club, which has been running for 12 years, kicked off the Christmas season successfully with a celebration lunch on 3<sup>rd</sup> December.

Day Club members, guests and friends of the club all came together for some festive fancifuls.

One such guest was Councillor Teresa Higgins who brought along some of her beautifully handmade tapestries – they

extremely colourful and tactile.

We were also very pleased that Laura Bennett from the Sense public policy team was able to join us for the day.

The day went far too quickly for us all as we now have to wait until February for our next club as we don't meet in January. Bring on the New Year!





## Young, deafblind and involved

By Jim Lewis, Public Policy team, Sense

Are you the parent of a deafblind young person who is eager to take part in more activities? Or, are you deafblind and aged between 15 and 30? Would you like to do more with your spare time, meet new friends and get involved in activities?

When we ask young deafblind people and their families what would help improve things, you consistently tell us deafblind young people want:

To be involved in more activities

To have better access to social opportunities  
To be able to mix with more people of their own age

To join youth groups like the Scouts and Girl Guides

To take on long term projects like the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme, and,

To be more involved in sports or other physical activities

We understand how difficult it can be for young people to go to

a youth group that might never have met a deafblind person before.

If you or a family member would like to be more involved with local activities Sense Public Policy Team want to hear from you!

Call Jim Lewis to discuss how they can help you or a young deafblind family member access a range of youth activities on 0207 014 9373 (voice only) or email at

[jim.lewis@sense.org.uk](mailto:jim.lewis@sense.org.uk)

## Walk with Me, Talk with Me campaign

By Laura Bennett, Public Policy team, Sense

The Public Policy Team's "Walk with Me, Talk with Me" campaign is to influence the government's decisions about the future funding and legal structure of adult social care. You can read more about the campaign here: [www.sense.org.uk/walkwithme](http://www.sense.org.uk/walkwithme).

We want the government to understand that good

social care for deafblind people means making sure that deafblind people get the support they need to carry out all the journeys - small and large - that they want to. Journeys that hearing and sighted people might take for granted.

You can help by sending us a postcard from a recent journey, and giving us your email

address so that we can ask you to take action for us, particularly at key points of the campaign e.g. as legislation goes through parliament.

Please get in touch with Laura Bennett if you would like postcards or to help with the campaign in a different way. [laura.bennett@sense.org.uk](mailto:laura.bennett@sense.org.uk); 020 7014 9367.

You can also sign up online: [http://www.sense.org.uk/campaigns/walk\\_with\\_me/join\\_the\\_campaign](http://www.sense.org.uk/campaigns/walk_with_me/join_the_campaign)

There are also two e-actions that people can take: to write to your MP or local paper. Both have letters pre-written for you on the Sense website, you can adapt these if you like. Thank you!

## The South Coast branch

By Anya Rakoczi, Events & Groups Coordinator, Sense

The South Coast branch are in the process of closing after many successful years. The decision was made at a recent branch meeting. Further information from the branch Chair will follow in the New Year.

# Hints and tips on fundraising

By Carl Williams, Community Fundraising team, Sense, and Anya Rakoczi, Events & Groups Coordinator, Sense

Fundraising for your branch can be hard work: as volunteers you have busy lives not to mention today's ghastly economic climate. However, there is still money out there! The answer is often creativity – stepping outside the box and expanding your fundraising repertoire. In this article, we present creative fundraising ideas, alongside hints and tips on how to fundraise successfully.

Coffee mornings, quiz nights and cake sales can be fun social occasions and help to bring new supporters to the branch. These events are easily organised and avoid issues of risk

assessments, council licenses, and insurance providing you have permission from the owner of the venue. Try to make them as topical and entertaining as possible to capture the imagination of your guests. Perhaps a 'headlines from 2011' quiz, or maybe 'a post Christmas present raffle'!

Raffles, street collections, sponsored walks, and music events all require correct licenses and can be a big undertaking. Do consult [www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk](http://www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk) or [www.how2fundraise.org](http://www.how2fundraise.org) for more information around the fundraising

## Codes of Practice.

It is important that any events taking place in the name of the charity are safe, well planned and are organized with the correct authority from the venue so as to uphold Sense and your branches' names at all times.

Above all try to get as much help and support from your community as possible in the early stages and give yourself plenty of time - brainstorming and careful planning are certainly the key to a successful fundraiser!

Whether you are organizing an event or encouraging others to fundraise for your branch – good luck!

## Remember - It is all in the planning!

- Setting goals will focus your fundraising plan and provide clear targets to hit.
- Select your fundraising ideas early to assure ample time for planning.
- Market as much as possible, including using national Sense to help advertise.



Organise an auction of promises – persuade colleagues to offer their unique or unknown skills.

Fed up with the same old pub opposite work? Host a Pimms/ cocktail Party or buy a keg of beer, ask people for the pub price and donate profits to Sense.

Organise a Come Dine with Me competition and ask each participant to pay £10. Use half to fund a prize for the winner and donate the rest to Sense.

# Sense Secret Window art exhibition in London

By Andrew McVicar, Sense web team

Sense is currently working with Reading Room, a specialist digital agency, on the new Sense website. The design and structure of the new site have been agreed, and we'll keep you posted in the lead up to its launch in spring 2012.

As an extension of this partnership, Reading Room offered us their prime gallery space in Soho, London to host an exhibition celebrating the work of two young deafblind

artists, Lloyd McCullough and Ian Treherne. Lloyd and Ian are both artists who have Usher syndrome. They work in different mediums, in different styles, to create different views of real and fantasy worlds.

The Secret Window exhibition will be at Reading Room Gallery, 65-66 Frith Street, Soho, London W1D 3JR. It will be open to the public from 13 December 2011 to 20

January 2012 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm) and is free entry. Works from both artists will be on sale so come along and take a look.

Unfortunately, the building is not accessible and the Gallery is not able to accommodate wheelchairs at this time.



# EXPRESS YOURSELF 2012! Sense creative writing competition

By Colin Anderson, Publications Manager, Sense

Everybody experiences the world in their own way, and has a different way of expressing how it feels to them. Some people want to write about their own lives and the journey they have taken, some like to imagine a fantasy world, others see comedy at every turn. The main thing is that each person's story, and how they tell it, is unique.

**Send us your story**  
Sense's Express

Yourself! awards celebrate these individual voices. We welcome any type of creative writing: personal stories, poetry, comedy, thrillers, romance or politics – whatever hits the spot for you.

There are five awards for the best piece of writing by:

- a deafblind child or young person
- a deafblind adult
- a carer or family

member .  
• any individual on the subject of deafblindness.

The deadline is 12 January 2012.

To find out more, or send your entry, please contact:

Colin Anderson,  
Publishing and Information Manager,  
[colin.anderson@sense.org.uk](mailto:colin.anderson@sense.org.uk)



## Useful contacts

### Hubs in England and Head of Services for Wales and Northern Ireland

A Hub is a working term for a group of Sense services headed up by a Community Services Manager.

#### Hub 1 – North

**Karl Shore**  
Community Services Manager  
The Rodney Clark Resource Centre, Leeds  
Road, Robin Hood, Wakefield, WF3 3BG  
[karl.shore@sense.org.uk](mailto:karl.shore@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 01132 059 500

#### Hub 2 – Lincs

**Maggie Sykes**  
Community Services Manager  
The Hammond Centre, East Street,  
Nettleham, Lincoln, LN2 2SL  
[maggie.sykes@sense.org.uk](mailto:maggie.sykes@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 01507 610 925

#### Hub 3 – Cambs

**Sylvia Welford**  
Community Services Manager  
Hampton Resource Centre, 50 Forder Way,  
Hampton, Peterborough, PE7 8FB  
[sylvia.welford@sense.org.uk](mailto:sylvia.welford@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 01733 425 074

#### Hub 4 – Norfolk

**Karen Elsbury**  
Community Services Manager  
Dereham Resource Centre, 32 Bertie Ward  
Way, Rash's Green, Industrial Estate,  
Toftwood, Dereham, Norfolk, NR19 1TE  
[karen.elsbury@sense.org.uk](mailto:karen.elsbury@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 01362 854 153

#### Hub 5 – Hertfordshire

**Graham Nolan**  
Community Services Manager  
Anne Wall Centre  
12 Hyde Close  
High Barnet EN5 5TJ  
E-mail: [graham.nolan@sense.org.uk](mailto:graham.nolan@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 0208 449 0964

#### Hub 6 - Midlands

**Deb Hughes**  
Community Services Manager  
9a Birkdale Avenue, Off Heeley Road, Selly  
Oak, Birmingham, B29 6UB  
[deb.hughes@sense.org.uk](mailto:deb.hughes@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 0121 415 2720

#### Hub 7 – Devon

**Andy Charles** is covering Shelagh Appleton's  
role April 2011 – April 2012  
Community Services Manager  
Providence Court, 37 Northernhay Street,  
Exeter, EX4 3ER  
[andrew.charles@sense.org.uk](mailto:andrew.charles@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 01392 426 374

#### Hub 8 - Kent

**Deborah Dowsett**  
Community Services Manager  
61 South Street, Novellus, Epsom, KT18 7PX  
[deborah.dowsett@sense.org.uk](mailto:deborah.dowsett@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 01372 840 315

Hubs one to five are led by Sue Davies, Deputy Director of Community Services  
The Hammond Centre, East Street, Nettleham, Lincoln, LN2 2SL;  
[sue.davies@sense.org.uk](mailto:sue.davies@sense.org.uk); Tel: 01522 595 777

Hubs six to eight are led by Shaun Gibbons, Assistant Director of Community Services  
Providence Court, 37 Northernhay Street, Exeter EX4 3ER; [shaun.gibbons@sense.org.uk](mailto:shaun.gibbons@sense.org.uk);  
Tel: 01392 204 078

**Wayne Lewis**  
Head of Services Wales,  
Tŷ Penderyn, 26 High Street,  
Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 8DP  
[wayne.lewis@sense.org.uk](mailto:wayne.lewis@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 0845 127 0090

**Colette Gray**  
Head of Services Northern  
Ireland  
Sense Family Centre, The  
Manor House, 51 Mallusk  
Road, Mallusk, BT36 4RU  
[colette.gray@sense.org.uk](mailto:colette.gray@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 02890 833 430

**Rob Legge**  
Director of Community  
Services  
9a Birkdale Avenue, Off  
Heeley Road, Selly Oak,  
Birmingham B29 6UB  
[rob.legge@sense.org.uk](mailto:rob.legge@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 0121 415 6759

## Useful contacts

### Fundraising

Shad Everett  
Head of Community Fundraising  
9a Birkdale Avenue, Off Heeley Road, Selly  
Oak, Birmingham, B29 6UB  
[shad.everett@sense.org.uk](mailto:shad.everett@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 0845 127 0069 / 07825 174925  
Areas: Hertfordshire, Midlands, Devon &  
Exeter, Wales, NI

David Steele  
Community Fundraising Manager  
Melton House, 99 Gerard Road  
Moorgate, Rotherham S60 2PN  
[david.steele@sense.org.uk](mailto:david.steele@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 0845 127 0069 / 07824 319736  
Areas: North

Ruth Kilcullen  
Community Fundraising Officer  
Hampton Resource Centre, Upper Floor, 50  
Forder Way, Cygnet Park, Hampton,  
Peterborough, PE7 8JB  
[ruth.kilcullen@sense.org.uk](mailto:ruth.kilcullen@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 0845 127 0069 / 07977 249084  
Areas: Lincs, Cambs, Norfolk, Kent

### Branches

Sense Avon Branch  
Helen Potter  
Sense: Woodside Family Centre,  
Woodside Road  
Kingswood  
Bristol  
BS15 8DG  
01179 670008  
[Helen.potter@sense.org.uk](mailto:Helen.potter@sense.org.uk)

Sense North and Mid Wales  
Jane Plant  
Godre'r Graig  
Pentre  
Minera  
Wrexham  
LL11 3DP  
Tel: 01978 754308  
[family\\_plant@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:family_plant@yahoo.co.uk)

### PR

Lucy Evans  
PR Officer  
101 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9LG  
[lucy.evans@sense.org.uk](mailto:lucy.evans@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 0207 014 9379

### Finance

Louise Wootton  
Business Liaison Officer  
9a Birkdale Avenue, Off Heeley Road,  
Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6UB  
[louise.wootton@sense.org.uk](mailto:louise.wootton@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 0121 415 2742

### Holidays and Events

Anya Rakoczi  
Events & Groups Co-ordinator  
101 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9LG  
[anya.rakoczi@sense.org.uk](mailto:anya.rakoczi@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 0207 014 9310

Hannah Tompkins  
Head of Holidays & Events  
101 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9LG  
[Hannah.tompkins@sense.org.uk](mailto:Hannah.tompkins@sense.org.uk)  
Tel: 0107 014 9303

Sense South West, Devon Branch  
Peter Holman  
36 Chudleigh Road  
Kingsteignton  
Newton Abbot  
Devon  
TQ12 3JU  
Tel: 01626 438446  
[pmmholman@talktalk.net](mailto:pmmholman@talktalk.net)

Sense East Anglia Branch  
Liz Royle  
The Lanterns  
Church Lane  
Playford  
Ipswich  
Suffolk  
IP6 9DS  
Tel: 01473 622443

## Useful contacts

### Sense Essex Branch

Peggy Keeble  
17 Gladwyns  
Lee Chapel North  
Basildon  
Essex  
SS15 5HZ  
Tel: 01268 544593  
[sense\\_essex@hotmail.com](mailto:sense_essex@hotmail.com)

### Sense Kent Branch

Sue Turner  
Spring Grove  
Goudhurst Road  
Marden Tonbridge  
Kent  
TN12 9NW  
Tel: 01622 831345  
[sgturner@talktalk.net](mailto:sgturner@talktalk.net)

### Sense North West Branch

Brenda Carter  
3 The Briars  
Eccleston  
Chorley  
Lancashire  
PR7 5UB  
Tel: 01257 451920  
[jackcarter@talktalk.net](mailto:jackcarter@talktalk.net)

### Sense Northern Ireland Branch

Muriel and Tom Mathers  
11 The Coaches  
Brown Brae  
Croft Road  
Holywood  
BT18 0LE  
Tel: 028 9042 1475  
[murielmathers@btinternet.com](mailto:murielmathers@btinternet.com)

### HSI UK (Hearing Sight Impaired UK)

Mr. D. Lucy  
1 Dunkery Rise  
Ashford  
Kent  
TN24 8QX  
Tel: 01233 627742 / 07598129700  
[desanddiane.lucy@sky.com](mailto:desanddiane.lucy@sky.com)