

VIBE



Issue 15

June 2022

VIBE Summer 2022

Welcome to the second newsletter of the year. We hope you had a restful spring break and enjoyed the Jubilee bank Holiday celebrations.

Head of Service retires ...

You may be aware that at the end of Term 5, our Head of Service, Suzanne Wilkins will be retiring after 35 years of teaching, 25 years as a Qualified Teacher for Vision Impairment (QTVI) and 15 years managing the Sensory Service.



We thought we would take this opportunity to share the background to Suzanne illustrious career and celebrate some of her many achievements.

Suzanne's career began as a Science teacher in a local secondary school where she was head of a small department. When her first son David was born, things changed. The addition of a baby changes any family and the lives of the parents forever. In addition to this huge adjustment, David was born with Norrie Disease which is a genetic condition affecting vision and often affecting hearing later in life. When David was 4 months old, a QTVI came out to visit the family. Suzanne describes this visit as the first time anyone had ever spoken positively about David's future and his prospects.

As David developed through his Early Years, Suzanne sought some interesting resources from Canada which promoted an inclusive approach and sure enough, when David reached school age, he attended a mainstream primary school and was the first profoundly vision impaired learner to do so in Kent. It was clear that the number of QTVI's locally were limited and as Suzanne challenged this with the Head of Service at the time, she in turn, was challenged to train as a QTVI herself! She undertook her QTVI training in London as her family continued to grow. In 2016, STLS were delegated to Special Schools and the current county Sensory Service was established. Reflecting on her career, Suzanne is able to highlight building an effective and cohesive working relationship with Valence School as a positive outcome of the delegation. Moving the employment of over 40 staff to be a county team was no mean feat. More recently, the difficulties in providing a service to hundreds of learners with sensory impairment through the Coronavirus pandemic seemed monumental. However, supported by Suzanne, the service found new and innovative ways of working, we were able to provide support throughout and resumed 'in person' visits as soon as it was possible.

This achievement is one of the things which Suzanne is most proud of. During this time, lots of work went into the development the website which you might like to admire at [STLS Sensory Service Kent \(stlsvalence.com\)](http://stlsvalence.com) Suzanne lead on the setting up of specialist support from the STLS for children with MSI/deafblindness and she laid the groundwork for the start of short break opportunities for children with sensory impairment. She also developed and gained funding for the "Grow Your Own" scheme which has supported 15 teachers to train on the job within the STLS to gain their Mandatory Qualification in HI, MSI or VI.

Suzanne has always promoted an ethos of improvement and as a result the team have strived to develop MSI Family Days, Deaf Expo, On the Road to Independence, VI Extra and All My Own Work to name just a few programs and events. When asked, Suzanne said “I am most proud of the team and the work it does”.

As she begins to look to the future, Suzanne credits her husband for supporting and enabling her to carry out the work which she became passionate about through their own family experiences. The plans for retirement begin with a trip to the Chelsea Flower Show to celebrate the first day and on 25th May 2022, many colleagues, past and present, gathered together to celebrate Suzanne’s achievements and career.

The retirement tea party took place at The Friars in Aylesford and included a moving speech from Roland Gooding, Principle of Valence School.



Some of Suzanne’s family attended and everyone enjoyed her speech where she acknowledged the support she has received from family and colleagues through the years. We as a team are forever grateful for Suzanne’s commitment to the children and young people of Kent with sensory impairment and also to our professional development and well-being. We look forward to a new chapter in the Sensory Service and wish Suzanne Wilkins all the very best and happiness in her well-deserved retirement.



VI Awareness of PE and Sport

STLS Sensory Service in association with British Blind Sports, would like to invite you to an awareness training workshop on supporting children with a Vision Impairment in PE and Sport on Monday 13th June 2022.

Held at

Mercure, Great Danes Hotel,

Maidstone, ME17 1RE

10:00am- 3:00pm

Cost - £50 Lunch will be provided so please make us aware of any dietary requirements. Please come dressed appropriately to partake in sport activities. To book please visit

<https://www.stlsvalence.com/calendar/?calid=3&pid=8&viewid=1&event=120&month=06&year=2022>



Important

If you have any news or information you would like to share, please contact:

clewis@valence.kent.sch.uk or lsteere@valence.kent.sch.uk