

Keeping you informed of local sight loss news



Visible

Sight
SUPPORT



Summer/Autumn 2021
Bristol, Bath,
South Gloucestershire

in association with
WILTSHIRE
Sight

IMPACT REPORT 2020/2021


Despite being in lockdown for much of the year, Sight Support and Wiltshire Sight stayed open to provide support to people across the West of England. Although it's been a challenging year, we have much to be proud of. Here is a flavour of what we achieved over the 12 months to March 2021:


As a result of our services...


90%
of clients say they feel more able to cope with day-to-day life

91%
say that they feel more confident about living with sight loss as a result of our support

98%
of clients rated our services good, with **79%** rating it as excellent

 **4279** one-to-one sessions held with clients
(75% increase on previous year)

 **40%** increase in number of individuals receiving support compared to previous year

 **1200** hours of volunteering time given to support clients

“The biggest difference has been to my confidence. I will now do things around the house like washing up and making breakfast which I wouldn't have tried before. I am able to go out to the shop, and feel confident crossing the road.”

Our work is focussed on the following areas: Understanding eye condition, Making best use of remaining sight, Communication and technology, Managing at home, Getting out and about, Health and wellbeing, Finances and employment. As a result of our support:

88% of clients showed improvement in at least one of the areas above

67% of clients showed improvement in three or more of the areas above

Welcome to our latest edition of *Visible*, Sight Support's bi-annual magazine.



It feels like so much has happened since our last edition in the run-up to Christmas, but it is time to look forward and focus on the slow return to normality that we have been craving for so long.

As I sit here writing this, Spring is in full flow outside the window and restrictions are slowly being eased across the country. So many of us have lost our confidence and feelings of independence during the long lockdown months and much of our focus now is on helping people to regain the confidence to go out again, and providing opportunities for social engagement out in the community.

This edition of *Visible* is focussed on getting out and about. You can read about the work we have been doing with the Ramblers to provide accessible walking groups across the region, find some useful VI gardening advice in our Tips and Tricks feature, or learn about some of the travel Apps that can help you navigate bus or train journeys.

We have also included some stories about how our supporters are helping us – from inspiring volunteers helping to run courses for people newly diagnosed with sight loss, to people doing challenge events to raise money to keep our community sight loss service running. We are indebted to everyone who is giving their time to help us and the people we work with.

Finally, some exciting news – through our partner charity, Wiltshire Sight, we will be opening our first combined community hub and charity shop in Salisbury in the Autumn – read about our plans for developing a network of shops across the region over the next few years. We believe this is going to be a real step forward for our ability to reach more people locally, whilst also bringing in income through retail to help ensure we can keep services running. It has been a tough year, but there are exciting challenges ahead!

I hope you enjoy reading this. As ever, your feedback is always welcomed. With best wishes,

Mike Silvey, Chief Executive





Fraud awareness

Have you received texts or phone calls from scammers, pretending to be the Royal Mail or HMRC saying you need to pay money or provide your details for some urgent issue? Phone, text and email scams are on the rise and it is important to recognise the signs of potential fraud. Working with the South West Regional Organised Crime Unit we have produced an audio presentation to help you recognise the signs of potential fraud and know what to do about them. We also have a short guide on avoiding fraud we can send out – do give us a call or have a look on our website – it could prove invaluable!

Children's Services

Our family services provide opportunities for children and young people living with a visual impairment and their families to come together and have some fun. Past activities have included farm trips, a visit to a climbing wall, theatre trips, cookery schools, trampolining and water walkers. We are currently reviewing these services and would like to hear from you about the types of activities you would like us to organise. This will help us provide a variety of suitable activities to cater for all abilities, ages, and interests, with a mix of sport and cultural events. Please get in touch if you would be happy to complete a short survey.



Volunteering really does make you feel good!

As life slowly returns to normal, we are excited at the increased opportunities this will bring for volunteers, but we'd also like to reflect on all of the valuable work our volunteers have done over the past year. We now have 55 active volunteers, who between them contributed a fabulous 1,200 hours of support over the last year.

In our volunteer survey in March, 93% of volunteers told us they felt proud to work with us and 96% reported that they felt safe and supported in their role. 70% said volunteering had increased their skills and experience, and 89% agreed that volunteering increased their sense of wellbeing and made them feel good. Over the next few months, we will be looking for new volunteers to come and work with us on a wide range of roles, from supporting events to office fundraising, or supporting our new charity shop. If you'd like to find out more, Becs would love to hear from you – call her on 07849 833 047 or email volunteering@sightsupportwest.org.uk

Website upgrade

This summer we will be launching an exciting new Sight Support website. Following feedback from some of our clients about the accessibility of our existing site, the new site is being designed with much greater flexibility for contrast and font settings to cater for different needs. We are also developing a new 'Knowledge Hub' to provide access to information on all aspects of living with sight loss. The new website will be live in August on www.sightsupportwest.org.uk

Staying active

We had a big response to our audio-described exercise classes for older people last year – we can still send these out on USB sticks to anyone who would like help to stay active at home. Alongside the Ramblers, we are working to make their walking groups more accessible, and we hope it won't be long until we can restart our regular 'Have-a-Go' days with British Blind Sport, giving those of you who want to do a bit more the opportunity to try guide running, blind tennis or goalball. We will also be running hockey, yoga and cricket taster sessions over the next few months. Staying active has so many benefits for mental and physical health – we want to do all we can to help!



Tips for the Garden



Continuing our Tips and Tricks feature, we would like to share some of our top tips for gardening. Gardening is a great way to keep active and over the last year many of us have become gardening enthusiasts! Whether you have a small window box or space to create flower beds, you may find some of these tips helpful to stay independent in the garden.



- 1 Organising your storage areas can help with locating tools and other items. Tools with coloured handles and brightly-coloured items may help. Marking items with large labels and storing in containers helps with identification.
- 2 Gather all the tools you need before starting to avoid trips back and forth. Using a bucket for example can help keep items together while you are working.
- 3 If you need to prune a shrub, tie a piece of string after your first cut, you can then use the position of the string to check the length of branches or shoots for your next cuts.
- 4 Weeding can be difficult but with some initial sighted assistance, you may be able to learn to recognise common weeds by smell and touch.
- 5 Using bright markers can help with identifying the position of your plants.
- 6 When using canes or stakes it is a good idea to put something over the end to avoid injury when bending to the plant, for example a cork or foam ball.
- 7 If you need to space plants, you can use a piece of string with knots at the distance required. This can also help you keep straight lines if pegged down. A bamboo cane lying on the soil can also help with this. Some other options for spacing include using the width or length of a trowel or using marks in a piece of wood.

- 8 Using pots and containers can make it easier to locate and maintain your plants.
- 9 Think about colours and contrast in the garden regarding plants, edging, fencing, garden furniture and surfaces.
- 10 Choose plants that add sound, scent, or colour to you garden. Adding sounds and movement with garden ornaments can help with finding your way around and enjoying your garden.



If you are new to gardening or want to re-design the layout of your garden, 'Thrive' is an organisation that provides a range of advice and guidance on how to garden for health and wellbeing and have lots of guides on how to overcome barriers to gardening. They can help with planning pathways and flower beds, tools and equipment and seed sowing. They offer gardening advice by telephone, email or post or you can visit their website www.carryongardening.org.uk where there is a section for people who have sight loss.

If you have any tips you would like to share, be it gardening, cookery, travel or anything else, then we would love to hear from you at handyhints@sightsupportwest.org.uk

Moving Forward with Sight Loss

In January this year Sight Support ran the first of our new Moving Forward courses, a series of one-hour sessions across several weeks. Designed primarily for those who are newly diagnosed with sight loss, the aim is to help you stay independent by providing practical, emotional and social support and to answer any questions you may have.

Each week we discuss a different topic, giving you the option to join sessions useful to you. Week one starts with 'First Steps': being diagnosed with sight loss can be a daunting time and so we start by discussing where to go for help and how to access rehabilitation. In subsequent weeks we cover Staying Active and Social, Lighting and Magnification, Getting Out and About, Technology, and Volunteering.

The more interactive the sessions are, the better. Through sharing their experiences, the first group of attendees ended up forming real friendships and are now meeting regularly in a Moving Forward social group facilitated by our fabulous volunteer Lou.

We are delighted with the outcome; feedback tells us that participants felt more confident as a result. Here are just a few things the group said about the sessions.

“The course covered so much information and useful tips for sight impaired people. Each week it was a very relaxed meeting with all participants encouraged to ask questions.” Roger

“Amazingly interesting and we have learnt a wonderful amount from each session.” Megan

“The whole course was absolutely excellent, I will be recommending it to anyone. The kitchen tips were particularly helpful, they were simple ideas that anyone can use.” Susan

“It provided a great deal of information about things I had no idea were available, like how to make things larger on my computer screen.” Joy

The next course will commence in June, with further dates throughout the year. If you would like more information, or to book your place, please call the Sight Support team.

Meet the Volunteer



My name is Lou Lively. I'm 57 years old and have been partially sighted since the age of 28. I was a nurse until my sight loss stopped me, quite abruptly. Rethinking my career options at that point, I attained qualifications in counselling and aromatherapy and massage. At the same time, I decided to volunteer for the Bristol Eye Hospital and for the RNIB in various roles. It was important to me to give back in a small way to the services that had helped me. I've been volunteering with Sight Support for over two years now. I started by hosting a coffee morning, to give people the opportunity to socialise, share experiences and swap tips about living with sight loss over coffee and cake. Questions would often arise to which no-one knew the answer; these would be taken back to the team who could answer any query. I have learned so much by talking with people and finding the solutions to issues. A great volunteering role if you enjoy a chat! We certainly hope, post Covid restrictions, it will be up and running again as soon as possible.

During the Covid pandemic I volunteered as a telephone befriender. I actually felt this was a privilege - I was linked up with a wonderful lady who shared her life stories with me which were all fascinating. She was 94 years old and had seen and experienced so many incredible moments in history. I think I probably gained more from this befriending experience than she did!

And now I am to host an online social group once a month for people who attended Sight Support's Moving Forward course and wish to continue to keep in touch. I do hope that this will prove popular too.

I have been asked if I could choose a superpower, what would it be? Well, the obvious answer would be to have the ability to reverse all sight loss. If I could couple that with super speed that would be ideal; I sometimes wonder how many hours of my life I have spent just waiting at bus stops! So much to do and so little time!

I have made some great friends and have met some quite inspirational people since volunteering, and it feels good to be a team member helping to support others. Organisations like this need volunteers to enable them to carry on doing the brilliant job they do!

Sight Loss Advice Services



Our Sight Loss Advisors remain available every day to provide information, advice and guidance on all issues around living with sight loss. At the time of going to print we are working hard to ensure we can provide face-to-face services in as many locations as possible from 21st June.

We will keep you up to date with progress on our website and monthly email updates. To register for these, contact us via the details below.

For more information or to book for any of the services below, please call **0117 3224885** or email **info@sightsupportwest.org.uk**

Book an appointment

Our Sight Advisors are available to offer information and advice on assistive technology, lighting, magnifiers and much more to help you manage your sight loss. We are committed to ensuring our services are accessible to everyone so please call to discuss your needs if you are not able to travel.



All our face-to-face services are provided observing COVID-safe procedures. **Booking is essential.** At the time of writing, appointments can be made in the following locations:

Fishponds, Yate, Bedminster, Midsomer Norton and Bath. And we plan to open additional hubs open in **Thornbury, Southmead and Bradley Stoke.**

Where community venues are available for us to use, we will be establishing regular community hubs for you to drop in without an appointment from 21st June.

Join a face-to-face support group

We know that meeting others is important and, all being well, we will resume our face-to-face support groups as soon as possible after 21st June. We are committed to increasing the number of opportunities to meet others living with sight loss and will keep you updated as things develop.

Join a telephone or online group



We continue to offer opportunities to connect with others remotely; all our sessions can be accessed both by telephone and online.

• **Sight Support Sports Talk – Wednesday evening (fortnightly)**

If you want to learn more about VI sport opportunities in your area, talk to others about sport, make new friends and get inspired, then this is the place for you. Each session takes a theme, but the floor is open to discussion on all topics sport related.

• **Esme's Friends – Wednesday afternoon (monthly)** Esme's Friends is a monthly support group for those who live with Charles Bonnet Syndrome. If you experience hallucinations you are invited to join us, whether you just want to learn more about the condition and coping strategies, listen to other people's experiences, or to share your own experiences.

• **Moving Forward Series – Monday afternoon (weekly)** The Moving Forward series is designed to offer help to people who are adjusting to life with sight loss. Each session will provide practical advice and a chance to learn from other's personal experiences. Sessions are open to anyone adjusting to life with sight loss, including friends and family members.

Other Services

Telephone Befriending- If you would like to receive regular telephone calls, we can match you with one of our telephone befrienders, who will call for a friendly chat at a time which is convenient for you.

Audio Library- Membership for our audio library is free. Audio books are in audio CD format, available on loan and posted to you free of charge with a self-return envelope.

Exciting New Partnership with the Ramblers

In our recent survey many of you told us you wanted to join a walking group but lacked the confidence or knowledge on how to get started. We all know just how good walking can be for your physical and mental health – and the potential to make new friends and enjoy the beautiful countryside around us feels more important than ever.

In response, we started talking to the Ramblers about partnering with their local groups to provide appropriate support for blind and partially sighted walkers. We were overwhelmed with the interest and enthusiasm from local Rambler groups wanting to invite you to join!

“It would be good to meet up with you before going on a ramble, so we can talk and walk through these and to work out how we can best help each other to enjoy Wiltshire’s wonderful walks. I am a regular walks leader with the Mid Wiltshire Ramblers group based around Devizes. Our group is small, friendly and is always keen to welcome new members. I am looking forward to rambling with you soon.”

Sally Whiston, Wiltshire Ramblers member

“I am excited about sharing my love of walking with anyone who fancies accompanying me on a joint adventure. I am confident my skills will be complemented and enhanced by those of my companion...in joint appreciation of nature.”

Alison Parry, Bristol Ramblers group member

Whether you are a seasoned walker, or new to walking in the countryside, we are pleased to announce a new partnership with the Ramblers, to make sure you have all you need to get out walking with their groups. We have several groups across Wiltshire, Bath, North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire who are enthusiastic about welcoming new walkers with a visual impairment. And we are providing the necessary support to enable them to feel confident about supporting you appropriately.



Where possible, Sight Support will match you with a sighted guide if you do not already have a companion and ensure you have all you need – including a very warm welcome from the Ramblers groups.

Our team of Sight Loss Advisors will be there every step of the way to support you – and will be available to join you at an informal meeting with your local group walk leader if desired.

Trained walk leaders will welcome you on every walk, providing a safe, sociable and fun environment for you to meet people – walks are designed to accommodate a range of ages and walking abilities.

“Walking is such a wonderful experience; I’d recommend it to anyone.” Marika, visually impaired Herefordshire Ramblers member and walk leader.

We are keen to get those of you interested connected with your local group, so you have everything in place to get walking and making new friends as soon as possible. You can read all the latest guidance for walkers on the Ramblers website, **www.ramblers.org.uk**.

If you are interested in joining a group or would just like to find out more, please contact Sight Support.

Making Tech Work for You



Travel Apps for bus journeys - Plan your journey!

There are several Apps available that you can download to your mobile phone or smart device that can help you to plan a bus journey. I generally use **Moovit** or **UK Bus Checker**. Both of these Apps are free and can be downloaded from either the Play or App stores.

You can plan your journey by entering your destination into the search box, the App will then give you a route plan, including bus numbers and departure times.

If you are standing at a bus stop where multiple buses stop and are unsure which one is coming next, you can use UK Bus Checker to inform you. The App will use GPS to locate exactly where you are and present you with a list of your nearest stops. 9.9 times out of ten, the stop you are standing at will be the top one on the list.

Once you have selected the correct stop, the App will show you a list of bus numbers and how far away they are. The nearest bus will be top of the list, you will see or hear the bus number and how many minutes it is away.

If multiple buses stop at your stop, this is a good way to find out which bus is due to arrive next. It is still best to double check with the driver that you are on the bus you want, but on the whole I have found this is very reliable.

When waiting for a bus, try and position yourself so you are visible to the driver as the bus approaches. Some people hold out a piece of paper with the bus number on if they feel this helps. It is always useful to keep all tickets and passes easily accessible, tickets are also available on your smartphone.

So, you are on the bus and on the move but how do you know where to get off?

If the bus you are on does not have spoken stop feedback through the speakers, both UK Bus Checker and Moovit will inform you when you are approaching your stop. All you need to do is enter your destination and let the App do the rest. It will use GPS to track your progress and when you are approaching your stop, it will let you know.



When I moved to a new city, I found these tools invaluable and reassuring. I always know where I am going and where I am on the bus journey.

People who are registered Sight Impaired or Severely Sight Impaired have access to discounted travel on public transport. You can discuss this with your local council.

If Apps aren't your thing or you haven't downloaded or used them before, don't forget we can help you with that. We can assist you with using technology for the first time and help you adjust the settings to change font size, colour and contrast and to add audio and voiceover functions. We can even loan you a tablet to get started on, via our free loan and learn service.

By Marc Gulwell, Senior Sight Loss Advisor

Meet the Team - Jo Hindle

Hi! My name is Jo Hindle and I have recently undertaken the role of Retail Development Manager for Sight Support. For the past nine years I have been running charity shops locally and I have developed a real passion for the industry.

Sight Support is aiming to open a few shops across the region which can also act as hubs for services and consultations. The initial task I was given was to find the right location for our first charity shop, before moving on to strategies for generating donations and recruiting and training volunteers. This is an exciting time for us- making a success of the shops will create a new income stream that will assist the charity in becoming more sustainable and help ensure we continue to provide services for years to come.

At the time of going to print, the exciting news is that we have located a potential site in Salisbury which will open under the banner of Wiltshire Sight, our partner charity. The premises are large enough to be able to include a consultation room for sight loss advice and services, and the unit will also stock a range of sight loss aids, including kitchen equipment, magnifiers and lighting options. If all goes to plan, this is a model we would look to replicate for our clients across Bristol, Bath and South Gloucestershire.

So why retail?

Charity shops provide a strong and stable source of core income for charities across the country. They are a staple on high streets across the UK, fiercely championed by customers and supporters. Having a presence on the high street can help us raise awareness of our charity and some of the issues faced by the VI community.



Charity shops can reuse or recycle more than 90% of donated clothing, over 90% of donated books and 85% of donated electrical goods. By boosting re-use and recycling, charity retail helps to reduce waste that ends up in landfill.



Our aim is to also use our shops as consultation hubs, providing a safe and secure environment where our Sight Loss Advisors can provide information and guidance and demonstrate resources.

In addition to traditional charity retail items, the store will supply some of the most commonly used daily living aids, simple technology and gadgets that are useful to our visually impaired clients, similar to what we hold in our existing resource centres.

Where are we now?

We have already received a fabulous number of donations to help stock the first shop –in fact, we have had such a huge response that we are pausing donations because we have run out of space to store them! Lease negotiations are underway, and we hope to have the new premises open by the end of September. Lots of work to do, but exciting times!



Who's up for a Challenge?



Meet Richard

Richard Burt knows a thing or two about staying active. He has won Olympic medals, and this year is taking on an incredible challenge to raise funds for Sight Support and Wiltshire Sight – **the Race to the Stones**, a 100k race along the Ridgeway. Richard will be running with his guide dog, and with a friend acting as a guide-runner.

Richard thinks his love of activity comes from his childhood experiences with Wiltshire Sight – back when we were known as Wiltshire Blind Association. Our records unfortunately don't go back this far, but Richard remembers week-long activity breaks in Wales, giving visually impaired children the chance to try many different activities.



Meet Alison (Iron Woman!)

Hello, I'm Alison, Community Sight Loss Advisor. In between lockdowns last year, whilst sitting in our local pub garden with friends, I found myself being talked into competing in a Half Iron Man distance triathlon this summer, alongside my husband David and my eldest daughter Jenna. It wasn't until the next day that I discovered what I had actually signed up for! A swim of 1.2 miles followed by 56 miles on a bike and finishing with a run of 13.1 miles, i.e. a half marathon. I have never done any kind of endurance event before.

As this is such a huge challenge for myself and my family, we decided that we



wanted to raise as much money as possible - in my role as a Community Sight Loss Advisor I see the many challenges our clients overcome on a daily basis.

It has been pretty difficult fitting in the training with gyms and swimming pools closed during lockdown. I have to admit I secretly thought the event would be cancelled, but now it's definitely on, with so many people donating there is no getting out of it now!

Could you take on a physical challenge?

If you've been inspired by Richard and Alison, would you consider fundraising for us by taking on a Challenge?

You don't have to do a tough endurance event - challenge events can be anything you like, and they are a great motivator to get out and about more. Once you've made a commitment to fundraise, you're much more likely to get your running shoes or walking boots on – even if the weather is horrible!

And it really helps us – both through the funds you'll raise, and because you'll be telling lots of people about our work.

There are many virtual events this year – including a Virtual London Marathon. You get a medal from an iconic event, whilst running or walking a route that you know well. Or you can pick your own challenge – run 5k, ride a tandem, or swim 50 lengths of your local pool. Our fundraising team can help you, and will send you our challenge pack including a T-shirt. Please get in touch with our fundraiser karen.monk@sightsupportwest.org.uk or call the office to find out more.



If you or someone you know is losing their sight or living with sight loss, we can help.

Our Sight Loss Advisor team are here to help you adjust to living with sight loss, and to give you the tools you need to live your life the way you want to. Our support includes:

- Information, advice and guidance on living with sight loss, remaining independent and getting the most from life
- Demonstration and training on a range of useful resources to help with daily living, including making the best use of magnification and lighting aids to support reading and writing
- Advice and training in how to use smartphones, tablets and other devices to minimise the impact of your sight loss
- Social activities, sports clubs and opportunities to meet others living with sight loss

Call us on 0117 3224885 for Bristol, Bath and South Gloucestershire

Email - info@sightsupportwest.org.uk

Call us on 01380 723682 for Wiltshire and Swindon

Email - info@wiltshiresight.org

www.sightsupportwest.org.uk

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