

Sight
SUPPORT



Working in partnership:
Sight Support West of England,
Wiltshire Sight and
Insight Gloucestershire



Summer / Autumn
2025

Keeping you informed of local sight loss news

Welcome

We're pleased to bring you another edition of Visible, the shared magazine from our partnership of three local sight loss charities. By combining our efforts, we can save time and resources and focus more on delivering the support that matters to you.

Inside this issue, you'll find:

- How the McGonagle Reader is helping people with sight loss vote independently
- Why self-advocacy is such a useful skill and how to develop it
- Tips for managing fatigue when you're living with sight loss
- News from each charity and details of our service user survey



We hope you enjoy reading this edition. As always, we'd love to hear your feedback or ideas for future articles. If you'd prefer to receive Visible by email or on a USB stick, just let us know – our contact details are on the back page.

Best wishes, Mike Silvey

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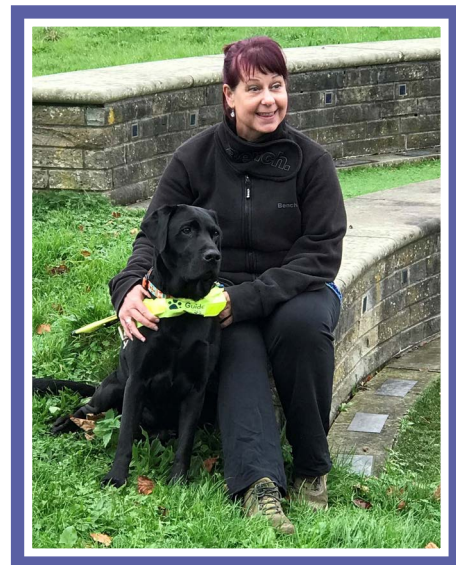
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Meet the Volunteer

Name: Tanvir Bush

Volunteer Role: Working Age Virtual Hub Host

Date Started: January 2025



I'm lucky enough to co-facilitate the Virtual Working Age Hub alongside Karen, another volunteer. I work as a Research Fellow at Bath Spa University on several diverse projects and, until recently, also volunteered as a co-opted Corsham Town Councillor. I'm one of those people who overcommit and then burn out, so co-facilitating the virtual hub sessions has been a good balance. I was aware that I needed a bit more support in my own sight loss journey, and the idea of helping others at the same time felt really important.

What I enjoy most is hearing how other people are navigating the world. I'm constantly amazed by how innovative and adaptable people can be, even while they're still processing the impact of living with sight loss. Often we share life hacks and tips, but sometimes it's enough to simply sit with each other and reflect. In those moments, there's often a real sense of camaraderie and connection – even if it's just fleeting, it can be sustaining.

Outside of volunteering, I love walking and being in nature, though I find it hard to motivate myself when it's just me and my guide dog exploring new places. I enjoy going to the gym and swimming when I can. I also listen obsessively to audiobooks, radio, and podcasts. I used to sing in a band and recently bought an online course to get my voice back in shape, maybe for future backing vocals!

If you're thinking about volunteering, just give it a go. The team is incredibly supportive, and even if you feel anxious at first, it does get easier.

We currently run four virtual support hubs for: working age adults, young adults, university students, and parents of children with a vision impairment. To find out more or sign up, please contact us.

Our impact this year

We're proud to share the difference we've made by working together as three charities over the past year across the West of England. This snapshot highlights the positive impact of our work and the growing number of people we're reaching and supporting.

In the 2024–25 financial year, more people than ever before heard about us and accessed our services for the first time. We now have 4,619 registered service users and continue to grow.



of service users felt better able to manage day to day after working with us

91%



feel less isolated

“ All the little things that the Sight Loss Advisor recommended have added up to make a huge difference. ”

Over the year, we held 5,510 one-to-one sessions with 2,286 service users. More than 1,000 people attended our social groups and community hubs, and 411 attended our Eye Can exhibitions.

We're proud to be making a bigger difference than ever, while maintaining excellent feedback from those we support.



863 new service users
+25% from last year



676 people joined peer support
+47% from last year



of service users rated our service as good or better

Thank you to our volunteers

- 243 volunteers gave almost 8,000 hours of their time.
- Nearly a third of our regular volunteers have a visual impairment themselves.
- 100% of volunteers who responded to our survey feel proud to support us, and 91% said they would recommend volunteering with us to others.

“ I usually leave my volunteering sessions with a glow of satisfaction, knowing that I have achieved something and that my simple efforts have been well received by our service users.”



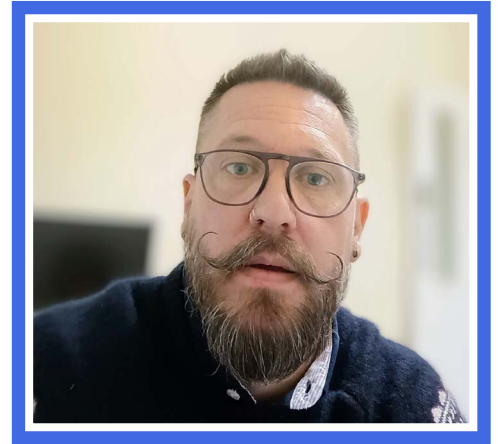
“ I can honestly say there isn't anything the Sight Loss Advisor told me or showed me that I haven't used. I was so impressed. ”

A note on our financials

As we go to press, our full annual report is still being finalised. You can download the latest version from our website or contact us for alternative formats. If you would like a full impact report, either covering all our work or tailored to your chosen charity, please get in touch with the fundraising team.

New technology project

We are thrilled to welcome Mark Durnford as our new Digital Inclusion Officer. He'll be leading the team of CSLAs in Wiltshire and developing new technology discovery and training courses across the county. As part of the project, he will be visiting all of our Wiltshire hubs to offer one-to-one help with phones, tablets and computers. Whether it's adjusting accessibility settings, learning to use apps, or just building confidence, Mark will be there to help. Turn to page 12 to find out more about why technology matters.



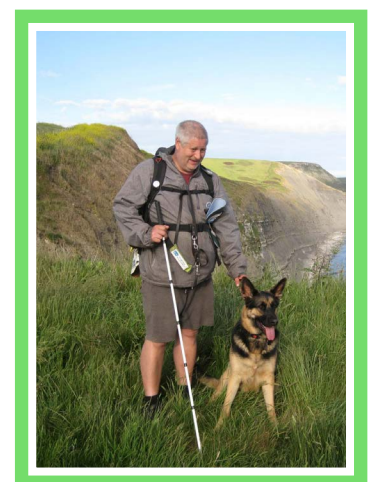
Thank you to Wiltshire Sight Darts League

With more than 400 players in 55 teams, the Wiltshire Sight Darts League, based in Salisbury, are one of our biggest supporters! Raising money for local blind and partially sighted people since 1960, they have donated almost £200,000 over the years, including a very generous £5,000 this year. We love giving out the prizes at the end of the season, and are hugely grateful to all the players and organisers.



Richard walks the South Downs Way

At the end of May, Richard and his guide dog Dilly set out to walk 130 miles along the South Downs Way and Clarendon Way to raise funds for Wiltshire Sight. Wild camping along the route and accompanied by his friend Mark and Mark's dog Mimi, they started in Brighton and finished at the Salisbury Museum. The walk raised over £2,000 for the charity and Richard also took the opportunity to talk to people along the route about sight loss and the support Wiltshire Sight can offer.



Welcome Vicky!

Following Jo Hoy's retirement in January, we are delighted to welcome Vicky Green to the Cotswold region. You can find out more about Vicky on our website.



New Shop

We are very excited to open our first Charity Shop! In the centre of the High Street in Stroud, our new shop will be opening in July. The shop will be fitted out following accessibility best practices, so that it's easy for all our service users to enjoy shopping there. The premises will also have a consultation space, for people to have appointments with one of our team. If you would be interested in volunteering in the shop, we'd love to hear from you. Sight loss is no obstacle! We'd also be very grateful for any good quality donations you might have – please do drop them off at the shop or our Cheltenham office.



New Cirencester Hub location

Our Cirencester Hub has now moved to the Baptist Church, Chesterton Lane, Cirencester, GL7 1YE. Meet with a Community Sight Loss Advisor, or join our social to meet others living with sight loss.

Lived Experience Advisory Panel

We are continuing to look for people with sight loss in Gloucestershire who would like to join our friendly panel. You'll discuss issues affecting local people with a visual impairment, helping to make sure your views are at the heart of our charities and inform what we do. Please call or email the office if you're interested in finding out more.



Sight Support West of England News

Eye Can Bath

This exhibition, featuring all things sight-loss related, will be held on Thursday 16th October 2025 at The Pavilion, North Parade, Bath, BA2 4EU

Bristol Blind Bowling Club

The Bristol Blind Bowling Club is affiliated to Bristol Arrow Bowling Club and meets on a Friday afternoon. The club has kindly chosen Sight Support West of England as their charity of the year 2025 and we are truly grateful for their support.

New members are always welcome. If you are new to bowls, new to the area or simply just want to expand your social network check out their website www.bristolarrowbowlsclub.org.uk



New hubs launching across Bristol

We are expanding the areas we cover in Bristol and are excited to announce new monthly hubs launching this spring and summer. Our aim is to have hubs near as many communities as we can, making it easier for people to access support and meet others locally. We look forward to welcoming you.

Easton Hub

Launch Date: Monday 19th May

3rd Monday monthly – Drop-in: 11am – 12pm, Social: 11am – 1pm

Easton Community Centre (Kilburn St, Easton, Bristol BS5 6AW)

Avonmouth Hub

Launch Date: Monday 7th July

1st Monday monthly – Drop-in: 11am – 12pm, Social: 11am – 1pm

Avonmouth Community Centre (257 Avonmouth Rd, Bristol BS11 9EN)

Hartcliffe Hub

Launch Date: Tuesday 24th June

4th Tuesday monthly – Drop-in: 11am – 12pm, Social: 11am – 1pm

Symes Community Building (Peterson Ave, Bristol BS13 0BE)

Cotham Hub

Launch Date: Monday 14th July

2nd Monday monthly – Drop-in: 11am – 12pm, Social: 11am – 1pm

The Elmgrove Centre (Elmgrove Rd, Redland, Bristol BS6 6AH)



Your chance to win with our Summer Raffle

What would you do with £500?

Whether it's a weekend getaway, a brilliant addition to your Christmas fund, or a generous gift to someone you care about, our raffle is a great way to support our work – while having a chance to win a great prize



Like our Visible magazine, we share our raffle. Although Sight Support is the official promoter of the raffle, all proceeds will be split equally among the three charities. Tickets are just £1 each. If you would like more tickets to buy yourself or to sell on our behalf, please do get in touch.

You can buy tickets online, or view the full Rules, Terms and Conditions at <https://www.sightsupportwest.org.uk/get-involved/raffle>

1. The Summer Raffle is promoted by and on behalf of Sight Support West of England, a charity registered in England number 1178384
2. The charity is registered with Wiltshire Council to operate the raffle
3. The registered Responsible Person for the raffle is Karen Monk, Sight Support West of England, St Lucy's Sight Centre, Bath Road, Devizes, SN10 2AT

Learning to speak up

An article about self-advocacy by Karen, our Marketing and Communications Officer.

For a long time, I found it incredibly difficult to talk about my sight loss. It was not until my forties that I began to feel comfortable speaking up – and that change has made a huge difference in my life. Learning to advocate for myself has helped me feel more confident, more in control, and better able to live the life I want.



For me, it started with accepting my sight loss and feeling okay about being someone with a degenerative eye condition. I realised that speaking up is not a weakness, but a strength. Asking for help has made me feel empowered, not dependent. I also realised it is not all one way – I often offer help to people too, it might not be in the same way, but it is still valuable.

In the past, I worried that I would be putting on people or annoying them if I asked for help. Now I know it is usually the opposite, people are often glad to know what would make things easier for me. Speaking up can make life better for everyone involved.

Having a guide dog also helped me get used to speaking up. It meant many day-to-day interactions with the public, and it gave me more confidence over time. I also began to understand it is the way society is set up that can create barriers, not my sight loss itself. That made me want to be part of changing things, even in small everyday ways.

Speaking up does not have to mean making a big stand. Sometimes it is simply asking for a letter in a different format, or explaining in a coffee shop that I cannot read the menu and would like some help. The embarrassment I used to feel has gone and life is much easier as a result.

If you are starting to build your confidence with self-advocacy, here are a few things that might help you:

Learn about your rights

Knowing what you are entitled to makes it easier to advocate for yourself. Organisations like Disability Rights UK offer good resources to help you get started.



Communicate clearly and calmly

It can help to prepare a few key points beforehand. If you have several things to raise, try prioritising them. Being polite, clear, and prepared often helps, as does offering solutions, especially if the person you are speaking to is not familiar with sight loss.

Know your strengths

Self-advocacy is not just about highlighting difficulties, it is about recognising your abilities too. Whether you are good at explaining things or staying calm under pressure, knowing your strengths can boost your confidence.

Don't be afraid to try again

Sometimes the first conversation might not go the way you hoped. If the outcome is disappointing, do not give up. Persistence often makes a real difference.

I have found that speaking up has not only made my life easier but also helped me trust others more. Most people genuinely want to help when they know what is needed.

Self-advocacy is important across so many areas of life. In healthcare, it could mean asking a doctor to explain things differently or requesting information in a format you can access. In education, it might involve asking for adjustments during exams. In work, it could mean requesting equipment through Access to Work. Even socially, telling friends and family what helps makes a real difference.

Speaking up does not mean doing everything alone. Trusted friends, family members, or advocacy organisations can support you and, if needed, speak alongside you until you feel ready.

Learning to advocate for myself has helped me feel stronger, more independent, and more positive about the future. It is never too late to start.

It's easier than you think to get started with tech

For many with sight loss, modern technology can feel more like a barrier than a bridge. Smartphones, tablets and smart speakers may seem overwhelming, especially if you've never used them before. But these everyday devices can open up a world of possibilities, helping you stay connected and supporting your independence.

Many people feel unsure. You might worry about pressing the wrong button, what to do if it goes wrong, or just feeling out of your depth.

Simple tools, big benefits

Many smartphones and devices already have accessibility features and they're easier to use than you might expect.

Stay in touch. If reading or typing is tricky, you can ask your phone to make a call or send a message. Siri or Google Assistant can contact anyone in your list – just say the person's name. With internet access, you can also use apps like WhatsApp or FaceTime to make free video calls.



“ I wish I'd learnt to use voice control years ago. I can now text my friends without asking my family's help! ”

Read with ease. Your phone can act like a magnifier, zooming in on text and adjusting contrast so you can read labels or packaging. You can also download free apps that will read printed text aloud.

Enjoy books on the go. Audiobooks offer freedom to listen wherever you are – at home, while travelling, or relaxing on holiday. Find free and paid-for suggestions on our website or ask your Sight Loss Advisor.

Margaret contacted us after hearing about changes to traditional phone lines. Her landline was a lifeline, especially as she relied on it for ordering food, speaking to carers and booking taxis. She'd never used the internet and was unsure whether a smartphone was right for her.

But after accessing regular one-to-one support at our Bristol Resource Centre, Margaret discovered how easy it was to ask a smart speaker to play the radio or call someone. She started exploring apps like BBC Sounds for podcasts and even bought a phone cover online. She now uses her smartphone to call taxis when she's out and about – something she hadn't imagined doing before.

"I feel pleased that I'm finally connected and in the 21st century," she said.



Help is available

If you're curious but not sure where to start, our team can advise you. At Sight Support West of England and Wiltshire Sight, we offer a dedicated tech support service to guide you at your own pace – and Insight Gloucestershire will soon be launching the same service too. In the meantime, their advisors are already on hand to offer help and training.

You can access one-to-one tech support at our community hubs or join one of our courses that run twice a year. These include short taster sessions, a beginner's course for those just starting out, and an improver's course for those wanting to build their confidence further.

So if you've ever thought "tech isn't for me," now might be the time to take another look. With the right support it really is easier than you think to get started – and the benefits can be life-changing.

Tech that talks – the Seeing AI app

Seeing AI is a free app from Microsoft designed for people with sight loss. It uses your smartphone's camera to recognise and describe what's around you – reading printed text aloud, identifying products via barcodes, and even recognising people's faces. For many users, it's become a valuable tool for everyday independence.

To read printed text, point your phone at the page and the app will speak the words aloud. For letters or longer documents, you can take a photo and listen back, with options to pause or skip. You can also use Seeing AI in cafés or shops to read menus or check prices.

A newer feature lets you ask questions about scanned text. For example, after photographing a menu, you could ask, “What are the vegetarian options?” You can also ask the app to summarise a document or find use-by dates and nutrition details on food packaging.

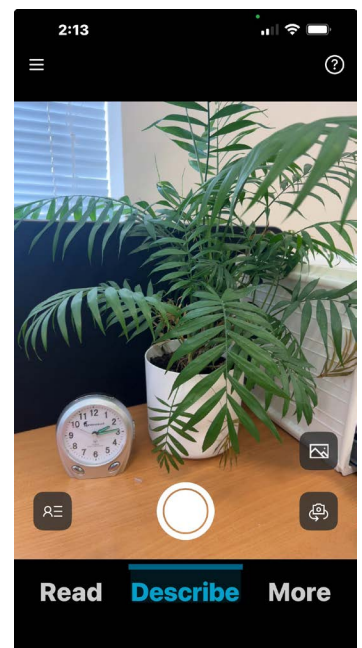
The ‘Describe’ function takes a photo and gives an AI-generated description – helpful for identifying objects or understanding your surroundings. It can also describe your photos and videos. While not always perfect, the descriptions often provide useful context.

The ‘More’ menu includes barcode and currency recognition, colour ID, facial recognition, and “find my things”, a feature that lets you teach the app to recognise personal items like your bag. You can then scan your surroundings, and the app will beep when it detects the item – with the beeps getting faster as you get closer.

Getting started

To use Seeing AI, download and open the app. Choose a mode (Read, Describe, or More) hold your phone steady and follow the spoken prompts.

Our advisors can show you how to get started with this brilliant app. We offer one-to-one support, just contact us to find out more.



Help shape the support we offer



Tell us what matters to you

As local charities supporting people living with sight loss, we're always working to ensure our services meet your needs but we also know that our resources are limited. That's why it's so important for us to hear directly from you.

This autumn, we'll be running a consultation to understand more about what matters most to you, what support you value, and where there may be gaps in what's currently available. Your input will help us make better decisions about where to focus our efforts and how we can improve the support we offer.

We'd love you to take part by completing our short survey. It covers topics like daily challenges, getting out and about, hobbies and interests, and the kinds of social or physical activities you'd like to access.

Our online survey will be available on our website and circulated by email. If you would prefer to take part in another way, you can:

- Call us to complete the survey over the phone with a member of our team
- Request a large print version to be sent to you by post

Your views really matter. Thank you for helping us shape the future of our support.

Accessible voting and the McGonagle Reader

Ahead of the May 2025 West of England Combined Authority election, we were pleased to work with Bristol City Council, RNIB and Pakflatt (designer and maker of the McGonagle Reader) to promote independent, private voting for blind and partially sighted people.

We were loaned five McGonagle Readers and we received training in how to use them. These audio-tactile devices were available for demonstrations at our Bristol office throughout April, as well as at several local hubs. A representative from Bristol Electoral Services also attended the hubs to answer questions about accessible voting support.

How the McGonagle Reader works

Traditional ballot papers are visual, making it difficult or impossible for someone with no sight to vote without help. The McGonagle Reader is an audio-tactile device that enables people to vote independently and in private.

The voter wears headphones and presses a button at the top of the device to hear instructions. They then press a button next to each candidate space on the ballot paper and the name of the candidate in that position is read aloud. This allows the voter to identify where to mark their cross. The ballot paper is held in place under the device with re-positionable sticky tabs. Once completed, it is removed, refolded using a pre-set crease, and posted in the ballot box, like any other.

Looking ahead

We support RNIB's #BlindVotersCount campaign and want to see more councils offering accessible voting options, because everyone should be able to cast their vote independently and with complete privacy.



Eating to support eye health

Healthy eating advice can sometimes feel overwhelming – especially if you're adapting to sight loss and learning new ways to prepare food safely. That's why we're sharing some useful findings from the Macular Society on how diet may support your eye health, particularly in slowing the progression of age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

Certain nutrients such as lutein and zeaxanthin help protect the macula, the part of the retina responsible for central vision. As our bodies can't produce them, it's important to get them from food or supplements. Green leafy vegetables like kale, spinach and broccoli are rich sources. Kale contains the highest levels of lutein and many clinicians recommend a portion per day, if possible, to help build antioxidants that protect against macular damage. These nutrients may be better absorbed with a little healthy fat, such as olive oil or avocado. Yellow vegetables like sweetcorn and yellow peppers also contain useful compounds – aim for a few portions per week. Omega-3 and omega-6 fats may also support eye health. These are found in oily fish like sardines and mackerel, or flax seed for vegetarians and vegans.

If you have AMD and don't eat many fresh vegetables, AREDS2 supplements (based on a major research study) may help slow sight loss, particularly in those at higher risk of progression.

In people with wet AMD in one eye, the study found that the risk of developing it in the other eye could be reduced by up to 40% with these supplements. However, always speak to your clinician before starting supplements, and avoid taking both supplements and a high-lutein diet to prevent over-dosing.

Lutein in vegetables

mg / 100g (fresh)

Kale 11.4mg

Red pepper 8.5mg

Spinach 7.9mg

Leek 3.6mg

Broccoli 3.3mg

Peas 1.7mg



Understanding fatigue and sight loss

Fatigue is a common and often overlooked experience for many people living with sight loss. It's more than just tiredness after a long day; it can feel overwhelming, persistent, and hard to recover from. Fatigue can affect every part of life, from emotional wellbeing to memory, work, and relationships, and it's often caused or intensified by the extra effort required to complete everyday tasks with reduced vision.

Why is fatigue so common for people with sight loss?

Living with sight loss often means working harder to do the same things others may take for granted. Whether it's navigating busy streets, reading text, recognising faces, or using technology, these tasks can demand a high level of mental and physical effort. This constant concentration leads to what's known as increased cognitive load and over time, it can be exhausting.

Other factors can contribute too, including:

- Light sensitivity, which can cause discomfort, eye strain, or headaches
- Emotional stress, particularly around changes to independence or feeling less confident when socialising
- Sleep disruptions, which can be more common in people with sight loss due to changes in light perception
- Underlying health conditions or the severity of vision loss itself

Together, these factors can leave you feeling physically drained, mentally foggy, or emotionally low.

What does fatigue feel like?

Fatigue isn't just being tired. It can mean waking up already exhausted, struggling to find motivation for things you usually enjoy, or feeling the need to cancel plans and avoid socialising. Everyday tasks like cooking, travelling, or working may feel overwhelming, and it can become difficult to concentrate or remember things. If this sounds familiar, you're not alone – and there are steps you can take to help manage it.

Managing fatigue: practical tips



Use tools and adaptations. Finding practical ways to reduce the effort of daily life can really help manage fatigue. This might mean using a magnifier or screen reader, setting up better lighting, switching to audio books instead of print, or labelling items with tactile markers to make them easier to find. Adapting how you do things, and using tools that work for you, can cut down on stress and strain, saving precious energy throughout the day.

Accept where you are. One of the hardest but most helpful steps is recognising that fatigue is real and not something you can simply “push through.” Allow yourself space to rest, even when it feels frustrating or inconvenient. Accepting your limits can help you manage your energy more effectively.

Plan and pace. Think about your week and try to spread out energy-draining activities. Avoid doing too many things in one day. Even simple tasks, like taking a shower or making lunch, might leave you needing a short break. Give yourself extra time and plan ahead so you can rest when needed. You might find it helpful to keep a rough diary of what tires you out and what helps you recharge.

Find what recharges you. Sleep isn't always enough. Rest looks different for everyone, some relax in silence, others with music or a favourite podcast. Activities that once helped you recharge might not have the same effect after sight loss, so explore new options. Try a walk in nature, gentle movement like chair-based exercise, audiobooks, or simply sitting somewhere peaceful



Seek support. You don't have to deal with fatigue alone. Your GP can help rule out any underlying causes and suggest treatment options. You may also find it helpful to speak to your local Sight Loss Advisor, who can offer advice on daily living, helpful equipment, and local services. Connecting with others who understand can make a big difference – our in-person and online social groups are a great place to start.

Contact Information

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