

Sight
SUPPORT



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



Summer / Autumn
2026

Keeping you informed of local news for blind
and partially sighted people.

Welcome

We're delighted to share the Summer and Autumn 2026 edition of Visible, created by Insight Gloucestershire, Sight Support West of England and Wiltshire Sight. This issue brings together real experiences and practical advice from across our regions. You'll find information about technology people actually use, tips on travel and banking support, as well as reflections on what people wish others understood about sight loss. We also have updates on our work and volunteers to share with you.



We offer Visible in different accessible formats; large print, USB audio recording, or PDF and Word versions by email.

Best wishes

Mike Silvey

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Meet the Volunteer

Name: George Barker

Role: Telephone Befriender

Date started: June 2021

My name is George, and I volunteer as a telephone befriender, making regular phone calls as a companion to offer conversation and support. Alongside volunteering, I work as a director at AAB, an accounting firm based in London. I live in Swindon with my wife and eight-year-old son. We moved to the UK from Sydney after five years in Australia and have made Swindon home.

I was motivated to start volunteering during the pandemic. Like many people, I found the period of isolation challenging, and it felt like the perfect time to do something more meaningful and connect with others.

Becoming a telephone befriender allowed me to support someone else while also feeling more connected myself.



What I enjoy most about my role is conversation. Just chatting, listening and sharing everyday moments with my companion is incredibly rewarding.

Outside of volunteering, I'm an avid runner. Running helps me switch off and stay balanced, and next year I'll be taking this a step further by acting as a sighted guide runner for someone in a half marathon, which I'm really looking forward to.

For new volunteers, my advice would be: don't underestimate the impact you have. Even if what you're doing feels small, it can mean a great deal to someone else. Also, be open to expanding your role and trying different volunteering opportunities, you may be surprised where it leads.

Volunteering has been an enriching experience, and I'd encourage anyone considering it to get involved.

Things I wish people knew about sight loss

We asked people at our social groups and members of our team to share what they wish others understood about sight loss. Their responses highlight everyday experiences and common misconceptions.



Despite being registered blind, I'm still a keen photographer... I wish I could put you inside my head for five minutes so you could see how little I see.



I've only recently realised how much my sight loss has affected my anxiety.



It's demeaning when I pay and the shop assistant gives my change to my sighted companion rather than to me.



I can see, and then also I can't... it's like I see less than half the world.



Supermarkets changing their layout causes problems when you're used to where things are.



People often associate blindness with guide dogs and ask why you don't have one.



Hardly anyone who is visually impaired is completely blind.



Don't shout, I can hear perfectly well.

Everyday things that make a difference

Small changes in how people communicate, offer support or think about accessibility can make a big difference.

“ It’s ok to use words like ‘see’ or ‘watch’. I still watch a film or TV show, just in a different way.

“ Just being mindful that someone may not be aware of things like local events if they cannot access printed information.

“ It can take time to adapt when moving from one level of light to another, for example from bright light to shade.

“ I prefer if people ask if I need help rather than assuming that I do.

“ In a group setting, it helps if you say someone’s name when speaking to them as they may not know that you are looking at them.

“ I wish people realised that you often have to focus on the ground when out and about in order to see where you’re going.

I wish people understood that it is possible for me to live independently – I don’t need help with everything.





From “The VIP Life”

A poem by Becky

I’m not ignoring you; I promise it’s true.
I can’t tell if you’re Bob or Dave or perhaps it’s even Sue?
If I didn’t say “Hello,” I wasn’t being mean,
You’re just a blurry smudge in my peripheral scene.
The “Can You See This?” game really isn’t much fun;
If you hold up your fingers, consider me done!
I’ve mastered the art of the invisible trip,
Clutching every surface to avoid the dreaded slip.
Don’t get me started on glass doors, sparkling clean;
I’ve kissed so many windows, it’s frankly obscene!
And the great “pointing mystery” always leaves me in despair,
As you confidently gesture and say, “It’s just over there!”
But “Over there” is a kingdom, vast and enormously wide;
Could you be more specific and act as my guide?

You can read the full poem on our website.

Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences. We received more contributions than we could include here, and you can read them all on our website.

These reflections show both the frustrations and realities of living with sight loss, but also the value of spaces like our social groups, where people can share experiences with others who understand.

The gift of a lifetime

Wiltshire Sight has received a generous legacy from Colleen and Neville Scannell who knew our charity well through our hubs in Wroughton and Devizes. We are incredibly grateful that they decided to support others living with sight loss through leaving a gift in their wills.

Their generosity means our Trustees have been able to dedicate funding to ensure a Sight Loss Advisor will be available in North Wiltshire for at least the next decade.

Colleen met the love of her life, Neville, at RAF Hospital Wroughton. It was a romance that grew into a lifetime of devotion, and they married in 1960.

They shared an inseparable bond, finding joy in simple pleasures and everyday moments together. They were each other's world, and their warmth and humour were felt by everyone around them. Friends remember their quick humour and the joy they found in spending time together.

Neville began to lose his sight as a child, with his vision gradually reducing over time. In later years, Colleen also experienced significant sight loss. Together, they found ways to continue enjoying the things they loved.

They were active in their local community and known for their welcoming nature. Neville was particularly proud of his winemaking, often sharing his latest batch with visitors, while Colleen took great care in her garden.

We are proud to have supported Colleen and Neville and are deeply grateful for their legacy.



If you would like to find out more about leaving a gift in your will, please contact our fundraising team.

News and Events

Our Lived Experience Advisory Panel

LEAP are looking for new members and are especially keen to hear from people living in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. This volunteer role is to support our charities to continue to be led by the needs and aspirations of blind and partially sighted people. LEAP regularly report to the Trustee Boards and help inform decisions. Recently, they've helped develop the theme for our Spring Appeal and reviewed the outcomes of our survey.



Eye Can

Thank you to everyone who attended Eye Can Swindon. We had over 200 visitors on the day, keeping exhibitors busy and talks well attended throughout the event. We were also delighted that Eye Can featured on BBC Points West, showcasing technology at the event including Meta smart glasses and the McGonagle Reader tactile voting device, which can support visually impaired people to vote independently and privately. Our next Eye Can event will be in Gloucestershire on 7 October.



Sight Support West of England news

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Sadly, we closed our Thornbury shop in April.

Even with our fantastic volunteers, running a shop comes with significant costs, and we were not able to attract enough customers to make it viable. We've really valued the support from volunteers, shoppers and the wider community. Our Thornbury hub has moved to Thornbury Methodist Church Hall, Castle Court, BS35 2AQ, and runs on the second Monday of each month.

New Advisor for the Cotswolds

Our new Sight Loss Advisor Rob Thornton has now started in the Cotswolds. Rob has lots of experience working one-to-one with people and enjoys building straightforward, supportive relationships to help people develop skills at their own pace. He is also a martial arts instructor!



Changes to our registration status

On 1 April 2026, Insight Gloucestershire changed its legal structure to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This structure supports our work as a charity employing staff and entering into contracts. Our new charity number is 1216111. This change does not affect the services we provide or how we work.

Wiltshire Sight news



Marlborough charity shop

We're very excited to share that we are opening our next charity shop in Marlborough this summer. Our shops raise much-needed funds for our services, and being on a busy high street is a great way for even more people to hear about Wiltshire Sight.

Devizes Quiz

We held our first quiz in Devizes on 19 May. Fundraiser Paula was a brilliant Quizzer and host, and the event raised a fantastic £535. If you'd like to help host a quiz in your local town, please get in touch with the fundraising team.



Tech people **actually** use

We often hear people share simple bits of technology that make everyday tasks easier. Some will be familiar; others may be easy to overlook. Here are a few favourites that people often recommend to one another.

Using Alexa is hugely popular for listening to audiobooks, music and radio. You can ask for your favourite station or catch up on a programme you missed.

People also love how simple it makes practical tasks, like setting a timer while cooking. If buttons and dials are fiddly to use, just asking Alexa can make life easier.

“Alexa how’s the weather?”



Digital magnifiers are useful in lots of ways, but a top tip we hear often is taking a handheld digital magnifier to the supermarket. They can help with reading food labels and shelf prices, making shopping much easier.

Voice Assistants on smartphones, such as Siri and Google Assistant, can do much more than many people realise. You can ask your phone about the weather and hear the answer spoken aloud, set reminders, or send a text message just by speaking. They can also open apps for you, helping avoid scrolling through lots of icons.

USB players can make audio information easy to access. You may already be listening to this magazine on USB, a small memory stick containing recorded audio. Many people like the Accord USB player, which is designed to make listening easy, with large buttons, simple controls and an easy-to-find slot for plugging in the USB. If you would like to receive Visible on USB or find out about getting a player, do ask us.



Finding lost things – technology can help with misplaced everyday items too. Some people use Apple’s “Find My” feature to locate phones or AirPods or ask Alexa to call their phone when it has disappeared into the sofa cushions. Small tracking devices, such as AirTags, can also be attached to keys, handbags or other essentials and help you locate them using your phone if they go missing.

Talking clocks and watches – some classic technology has been around for years but still makes a huge difference. With a quick push, you can hear the time and stay oriented through the day, whether it’s time to get up or leave for an appointment.



Tinted filters and task lighting can make a real difference, particularly for people with macular degeneration. Specialist glasses with different coloured lenses, often called filters, may help with glare or make faces easier to recognise in busy spaces. Good, even lighting can help light a room and reduce trip hazards, while a portable task light can make close-up tasks much easier by bringing light nearer to what you are trying to see. This can help improve contrast and brightness for reading, cooking or seeing what is on your plate when eating out.



Navigating your world

Getting from A to B should not feel like an obstacle course. For blind and partially sighted people, the transport landscape is evolving, offering more tools and services to make travel easier and more accessible. Whether you are heading to a local café or travelling further afield, a little preparation and knowing what support is available can make all the difference.

Travelling with sight loss

Passenger Assistance at train stations and airports can make a big difference. By booking in advance, you can request a member of staff to meet you, guide you through the station or airport, help you find your platform or gate, and board your train or flight.

Hidden signals

Many transport hubs recognise the Sunflower Lanyard. Wearing one tells staff you have a non-visible disability and may need extra time or support, without having to explain your situation each time.

Travelling with a guide dog

Guide dogs are allowed on all forms of public transport in the UK. On buses, priority seating often provides more space. On trains, you can request an Assistance Dog Under Seat card which alerts passengers that the floor space is occupied. For flights, guide dogs can travel in the cabin with you on approved routes, however, it is important to notify the airline in advance so appropriate arrangements can be made.

Community Transport

Community Transport schemes can help if regular services are not suitable. Often run by charities, these services provide flexible, door-to-door travel using accessible vehicles or volunteer drivers and can be a helpful option if you find standard public transport difficult to use.

Bus passes and railcards

If you are registered with sight loss, you may be eligible for free bus travel, depending on your area. In some places, you may also be able to apply for a Companion Pass, allowing someone to travel with you. The Disabled Persons Railcard offers discounted rail travel for you and a companion.

Top tips for bus travel

Signalling a bus can be stressful when you cannot read the number on an approaching bus or the information display board. The following tips can help:

- Do not be afraid to hold your hand out for every bus that approaches. When it stops, simply ask the driver which number it is. Most drivers are happy to help once they realise the situation.
- Keeping your cane visible lets the driver know you have a visual impairment and may prompt them to slow down or stop.

Apps can also help you plan your journey and find your stop. Tools such as Lazarillo or Microsoft Soundscape provide spoken directions and describe your surroundings, helping you navigate more precisely, for example, guiding you directly to a bus stop rather than a general location.



Building confidence

Support is available locally to help you feel more confident travelling. Our charities can offer advice on what is available in your area, help you apply for passes, and connect you with Rehabilitation Officers for mobility training. Having the right support and tools can make journeys easier and more enjoyable.

Our impact this year

We're proud to share a snapshot of the impact of our services over the 2025-26 financial year for blind and partially sighted people across our communities.



5,156

people are now
registered with us

(**831** were new this year)

“ I used to hate coffee mornings, but at these hubs nobody judges because everyone is in the same boat ”



7,025

one-to-one advice sessions were delivered
(2,322 individuals supported)



1,247

people attended our social groups
(18% increase on last year)



311

people received digital skills support
(three times more than last year)

“ Having people to talk to, who could offer practical advice, made a real difference to me ”



391 people attended our
Eye Can exhibitions and **98%** rated
them good or excellent

The difference our support made

96%

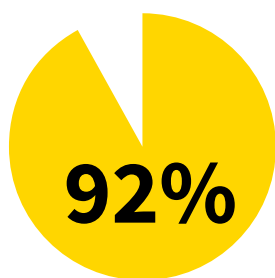
felt better able to
manage day to day



“ Your support has
increased my confidence.
I am now reading emails
and video calling people,
and I feel connected.
Thank you ”

92%

made progress in
areas where they
wanted support



98%

felt less isolated

Confidence after support

People told us they were more confident in these areas after receiving support from us.

Understanding their sight condition and registration	97%
Communicating with others	89%
Using digital technology	78%
Managing at home	93%
Getting around safely	90%
Health and wellbeing	96%
Managing money and employment	96%

What would you do with £500?

Support blind and partially sighted people
across our region and be in with a chance to win:

1st prize £500!

2nd prize £100

Two prizes of £25

Five prizes of £10



Tickets are just £1 each

This raffle is shared across our three charities,
supporting our work across the region.

Return tickets by 2 October. Online sales close 3 October.

sightsupportwest.org.uk/get-involved/raffle

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

Our summer raffle tickets were sent with this issue of Visible. If you were able to buy them (or sell them to your friends) we would be so grateful.



Last year's raffle **raised over £6,000** to be shared between our three charities.



You can buy more tickets online, or by calling the office.



Scan the QR code to buy tickets today.

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You told us: we listened



123 people responded to our survey last year, sharing what life is like for blind and partially sighted people across our communities, including what support people want more of. Respondents included people who use our services and some who do not, with 20% of respondents of working age, 77% over 65, and a small number of parents of visually impaired children.

What you told us

Many of the challenges people described were those we often hear about: getting around safely at home and out and about, losing items, recognising people and difficulties with transport.

Many people said they miss taking part in hobbies and leisure activities they value. Barriers included confidence, having no one to go with, transport and a lack of accessible opportunities. People mentioned a huge range of interests, from walking, bowls, arts and crafts and gardening to singing, knitting, golf, theatre, swimming and cycling. People spoke about missing being able to do these things for themselves or to get out and take part in them.

There were also many requests for help that we already provide, including digital skills support, social groups, telephone befriending, volunteering opportunities and information and advice.

What we're doing next

Anyone who asked for help with something we already offer has been contacted and offered support.

We are developing a new “moving on” pack to help people stay connected to support after working with a Sight Loss Advisor. This will remind everyone of the ongoing support available, including when to get back in touch, how to find guidance on our website and how to take part in social activities or training.

Later this year, we hope to recruit a new role focused on reducing some of the barriers stopping people from taking part in leisure activities.

This person will help us develop tools, guidance and information to:

- Connect blind and partially sighted people with shared interests
- Support people to launch new social activities and clubs tailored to their interests
- Help local organisations become more accessible
- Develop a face-to-face befriending service, recruiting volunteers to meet the needs of the loneliest people
- Link people with others in their community – putting people in touch online or through neighbourhood groups

Finally, we're looking closely at how we can develop opportunities for people who work during the day (and so can't get to our current hubs) to get in touch with other blind and partially sighted people locally.

We are committed to ongoing improvement and hopeful that the coming year will bring further opportunities in the support we offer thanks to all of you who responded to our survey.

Have your say

If you have more feedback you'd like to share, a great way to do so is to join our Lived Experience Advisory Panel. Find out more on our website or by calling the office.

Volunteering: at the heart of everything we do



Our volunteers are the threads that hold the fabric of our charities together. Last year, over 200 volunteers supported us in all areas of our work, and we'd like to take this opportunity to highlight their considerable contribution.

From 15-year-old students completing their Duke of Edinburgh Award to volunteers in their 90s, our volunteers come from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, from across our region and beyond. Around 26% have lived experience of sight loss themselves.

We have over 40 volunteers supporting our hubs and social groups (in person and online), helping to provide a welcoming space and offering one-to-one support on making the most of your digital devices. There are volunteers in our offices running our popular audio library, making evaluation calls, helping out with vital admin to keep our offices running, and keeping our Devizes garden tidy. There are volunteers supporting us with our marketing and fundraising, creating posters or videos for us, recording our newsletters, and attending fundraising events. There are volunteers at home making friendly calls to our service users, helping to improve our IT, or keeping the charities on track as Trustees. And there are over 50 volunteers in our shops. So, you name it, they do it, and we literally couldn't do what we do without them!

In our latest volunteer survey, completed in March this year, 96% of volunteers told us they felt proud to work with us and felt safe and supported in their role. 80% said volunteering had increased their skills and experience, and 95% agreed that volunteering increased their sense of wellbeing and made them feel good.



“ Love my weekly chats, and we have got to know each other well ”



“ A day working in one of the hubs is so rewarding; it is impossible not to feel good as I leave the sessions. The support we provide makes such a difference that it’s impossible not to have a big smile on your face ”

“ There is a real feel-good factor in volunteering. I get a lot of satisfaction out of my hours volunteering, and I hope that my efforts also have a positive effect on our service users that I come into contact with ”

We are incredibly grateful for the time and care our volunteers give, and we are so proud to have such a dedicated community at the heart of our work. If you’ve ever thought about volunteering or have a friend or family member who might like to help out, we’d love to hear from you.

Can we bank on it?

Accessible banking: what support is available

Banks have made a number of improvements in recent years to make banking more accessible. We looked at accessibility information from a range of major UK banks, including HSBC, Barclays, Lloyds, NatWest, Santander, Nationwide and First Direct. While services vary, there are some common features that can make a real difference.

Most banks can provide information in formats that work for you, including Braille, large print and audio. Once you tell your bank your preference, they will usually aim to send everything in that format.

Cash machines have also become more accessible. Many now offer audio guidance, often referred to as 'Talking ATMs'. By plugging in a standard pair of headphones, you can hear step-by-step instructions to help you withdraw money or check your balance. Keypads often include raised markings to help you navigate more easily. Nationwide says all of its cash machines now offer voice assistance.

Some bank cards include tactile markings, such as a small notch, to help you identify which way to insert or tap the card at a machine. Barclays also offers high visibility cards with bold colours, tactile notches and larger numbers to make cards easier to identify and use.

Many everyday payments can now be made using contactless or a smartphone, which means you may not need to enter your PIN as often. However, there are still situations where a PIN is required, which can be challenging, especially where screens are flat and have no tactile buttons. Some machines have overlays to help guide your fingers, but these are not always available and staff may not always be aware of them. It can still be worth asking if one is available. You can also ask your bank about alternatives such as a chip and signature card, which allows you to authorise a transaction by signing a receipt instead of entering a PIN. Some banks, including Nationwide and Lloyds, offer this option.

Digital banking is another area where accessibility has improved. Many banking apps work with screen readers and built-in accessibility features.



You can check your balance, make payments, manage your account and even pay in cheques without needing to visit a branch. Some apps also allow you to log in using your fingerprint or face recognition, which can reduce the need to enter your password.

There is also practical support available. Some banks can provide tools such as signature guides or stamps, and in some cases simple devices to help identify banknotes. HSBC currently offers a free plastic note gauge to help identify different banknotes by size. Electronic note identifiers, which use vibration or audio to identify banknotes, are available to purchase separately. UK banknotes include tactile raised dots to help with identification. The £5 note has no dots, the £10 has two, the £20 has three and the £50 has four.

NatWest also offers a personalised support service called Banking My Way, allowing customers to record accessibility needs and preferences.

Accessible card readers are also available for online banking. These handheld security devices help confirm your identity when logging in or making payments online, and larger versions with audio support are available from some banks.

It is worth knowing that many accessibility features are not automatic, so it can help to ask your bank what support they can provide. Banks often develop and improve their services based on customer feedback, so speaking up can make a difference.

If you would also like information about staying safe from scams and fraud, our charities can provide guidance or direct you to online resources. Services and accessibility features can change over time, so it is always worth checking directly with your bank about the support currently available.

Contact Information

Insight Gloucestershire



Call us:
01242 221170



Email us:
info@insight-glos.org.uk



Insight Gloucestershire,
81 Albion Street,
Cheltenham, GL52 2RZ



insight-glos.org.uk

Registered Charity - 1216111

Sight S U P P O R T



Call us:
0117 322 4885



Email us:
info@sightsupportwest.org.uk



Sight Support
The Vassall Centre,
Gill Avenue, Fishponds,
Bristol, BS16 2QQ



sightsupportwest.org.uk

Registered Charity - 1178384

WILTSHIRE **Sight**



Call us:
01380 723 682



Email us:
info@wiltshiresight.org



Wiltshire Sight,
St Lucy's Sight Centre,
The Beeches, Bath Road,
Devizes, SN10 2AT.



wiltshiresight.org

Registered Charity - 1119462