



Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Trustees of Sight Advice South Lakes **2020 / 2021**



Sight Advice South Lakes at a Glance

The Bradbury Centre	Information, aids and equipment	Drop in visits: 0 Telephone enquiries: 1712 Sight Support Information Enquiries: 295
Eye Clinic Liaison Officer	Information and Support when attending eye clinic appointments at WGH	Light enquiries: 212 Full cases: 118 Patient support longer than 20 minutes: 90% Referrals for Low Vision Assessments: 21
Support and Information Groups	Peer support networks and information groups	Groups/events hosted: 212 Total attendance: 2360 VI attendance: 1566
Community Development	Specialist Support: Advice, information, independent living solutions and home-based holistic assessments	Individuals supported: 382 Cases of support: 1546 Home visits: 33 Holistic Assessments: 75 New clients added: 133
Assistive Technology Service	Independent living solutions	Individuals supported: 88 Cases of support: 130 Tech support events held: 29 Tech support group attendance: 215

Positive Steps	Understanding sight loss and independent living	Individuals supported: 22
Volunteering	Underpinning all our services	<p>Active volunteers: 133</p> <p>New volunteers added: 7</p> <p>Telephone Befrienders: 23</p> <p>Clients supported with regular calls: 80</p>
Children & Young Peoples' Project	Activities and support for under 18s	<p>Cases of support: 204</p> <p>Individuals supported: 43</p> <p>Events/activities hosted: 27</p> <p>Activity total attendance: 47</p> <p>New members: 5</p>
Community Fundraising	Income for the Charity	£3,388 raised through online events, site boxes and home boxes.
Partnership Working	Working together	Charity CEO chairs the Gateway Group Collaborative and attends the Visionary Regional Network working with sight loss charities across Cumbria and North Lancashire.
Communications	Keeping people informed	<p>SASL Magazine Editions: 4</p> <p>Facebook followers: 548</p> <p>Twitter followers: 858</p> <p>Website visits: 2000 per month</p>

ORGANISATION

**“That dark moment when I was told that no more could be done
– Sight Advice picked me up and put the pieces back together”**

Sight Advice South Lakeland is an independent registered Charity, No 1145818. Formerly known as South Lakeland Society for the Blind and South Lakeland Voluntary Society for the Blind, the Charity was established in 1956, and was registered as a company limited by guarantee No 7879355, from 1 April 2012. All assets and liabilities were transferred to the new Charity starting on 1 April 2012.

Sight Advice South Lakes is a member of Visionary, a membership organisation for local independent charities that support blind and partially sighted people across the UK. Visionary acts as the collective voice for local societies.

Registered Office The Bradbury Centre, 116 Highgate, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 4HE

Enquiries 01539 769055 or info@sightadvice.org.uk

Chief Executive Mrs Claire Park

Chair of Trustees Dr Sarah Riding

Purpose

Sight Advice South Lakes aims to support people with visual impairment to improve the quality of their lives, together with promoting greater awareness of sight issue.

We aim to do this by:

- enabling visually impaired people to live independently
- providing practical and emotional support to visually impaired people and their families and carers
- enabling visually impaired people to access social support and activities
- promoting awareness of sight issues and to campaign with, and on behalf on, visually impaired people.

Values

The Sight Advice team identified and agreed the following values and how we practice and operate by the values:

Making a Difference - Proactive: if we can help, we will.

Team-Work - Accessible to each other, democratic feel.

Honesty - Saying things clearly, saying the unpopular thing.

Listening - Building a relationship, conveying listening through eye contact, voice etc.

Professional - Doing the job well, customer focused, treating colleagues with respect.

Personal Touch - Reputation of support, not putting up barriers, caring, friendly.

People

During the year the Charity was supported by 68 individual members, 12 staff members, 6 trustees and a team of 133 volunteers.

“Clients have often commented on how their contacting Sight Advice and meeting the team and volunteers has introduced them to a whole new experience and network of friends who now also support one another”

(Caroline, Sight Support Volunteer)

BRADBURY CENTRE

The Bradbury Centre is the hub from which Sight Advice South Lakes services are delivered. The centre is managed by our Sight Support team, comprised of Sight Support Advisors and volunteers. The team provide a warm, friendly and reassuring welcome to everyone visiting or contacting the centre. We welcome, on average, 90 visitors each month, around a quarter of whom are new to the organisation. Our team respond to 160 telephone enquiries each month.

The Sight Support team provide practical and emotional support to our visitors and to those who contact us by telephone. This is the first port of call for all visitors and telephone enquiries to the organisation. The team deal with many of the incoming enquiries immediately and those requiring specific support are referred to the relevant member of the Sight Support team. This team offers a friendly and warm initial introduction to our service and this allows other team members more capacity to support more detailed or complex cases.



The centre provides an opportunity for visitors to view and test a wide range of aids, equipment and technology to help them live an independent life. We have a variety of items, such as talking clocks, lights, kitchen aids, games, toys, watches, telephones, tablets and specialist technology products. Our Sight Support Advisors spend time with visitors to understand their needs and provide guidance on which items may suit individuals. They also provide the opportunity to try the equipment before making a purchase to ensure it meets each person's needs.

Covid-19 Impact

Between March 2020 and April 2021 the Bradbury Centre was closed to the public in order to protect clients, volunteers and staff from the risks presented by Covid-19. During this time, the Sight Advice Helpline remained open, with telephone and email enquiries managed across the Sight Support team.

Despite the closing of the centre, Sight Advice continued to provide critical support for people living with sight-loss. This support, often delivered over the phone continued to provide a lifeline for many people isolated by the wider impact of Covid-19 within the community.

“Very early in the first lock down I had a call from sight advice at a time when I was feeling rather bewildered at the prospect of everything being closed for 12 weeks at least. It was very reassuring, and greatly appreciated”

SIGHT SUPPORT & PEER SUPPORT

The Sight Support Advisor (SSA) acts on the front line of Sight Advice South Lakes services, helping individuals who come to the organisation often at a time of crisis or acute difficulty.

The role of SSA is crucial in listening to the experiences of new clients, helping to break down often very difficult and challenging situations, and identifying avenues to pursue for solutions.

Sight Advice South Lakes aims to reduce the fear, anxiety and isolation that people living with sight loss face during and post diagnosis. On a daily basis SSAs offer support to build social and community networks, providing opportunities to join peer support groups with the aim of reducing isolation and empowering people to continue activities that they enjoy.

The peer support groups offer a unique opportunity to meet other people living with sight loss, to improve social connections and gain support for enhancing their lived experience. As a result, people feel less isolated and have increased independence.

In March 2020, Sight Advice South Lakes temporarily suspended all face to face activity to reduce the risk of the spread of Covid-19 and to adhere to government guidance. Initially we continued to provide support to people living with sight loss through telephone support, signposting and an extensive online community. The SSAs were furloughed in April 2020, and during this period responsibility for managing frontline enquiries was shared across the remaining members of the Project Team.

The twelve months between April 2020 and March 2021 posed significant challenges for our social, information and peer support groups. Caused, in the main, by the impact of Covid-19 and its restrictions – i.e. the closing of the office to the general public and the suspension of all face-to-face activities.

The fear, anxiety and isolation that people living with sight loss can often face during and post diagnosis, was thus further exacerbated by people being stuck in their homes, often with little or no social interaction.

We initially continued to provide support to people living with sight loss through telephone wellbeing calls and signposting, provided by the remaining members of the Project Team (most of whom were working from home) and a group of committed and dedicated volunteers (also based at home).

This support was soon followed by the setting up of a very successful online community, led by Assistive Technology Coordinator Tim Ward. This saw the

“During the pandemic I have missed mixing with family and friends. The Friday morning quizzes have been a lifeline and helped me get through each week.”

SH, a regular Friday morning quiz attendee

setting up of a variety of regular weekly Zoom meetings, ranging from live readings of the Westmorland Gazette and the Friday morning Quiz to the Tech Know How information group and Tuesday afternoon poetry group; as well as inspirational talks by individuals such as Paralympic cyclist Steve Bate.

Initially the most popular event, the Zoom Quiz was eventually surpassed in popularity by Thursday evening's Book at Bedtime BABL, which began in February 2021. Unlike with Zoom, where people would, in the main, take part using a computer or tablet, the BABL calls enabled people to join events by simply answering their telephones.

Taking advantage of this easy-to-use system, the peer support groups started meeting again - the Sedbergh group in October 2020, followed by the Windermere and Arnside groups in November 2020.

A total of 212 events were offered online or on the telephone between 1st April 2020 and 30th March 2021.

These events were attended by 2360 individuals, 1566 of whom were visually impaired.

In January 2021 the SSAs returned to work and supported the wider team in beginning to rebuild services of support in line with UK government restrictions

The closure of face to face services, impacted on the role of the Sight Support Adviser, as the prime focus of this role is delivering and supporting frontline services. Following the return to work, the SSAs played a crucial role in rebuilding services, reconnecting with services and peers in the community, and understanding how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted those living with sight loss.

VOLUNTEERING

"Volunteering at Sight Advice is a chance for me to give back to the community. Through the help of Sight Advice I learned to touch type and become more independent... People who receive our support know that they are not alone and have someone they can contact if they are stuck. Sight Advice is a lifeline."
(John, Sight Advice Volunteer)

By April 2020 we were starting to get some understanding of the devastating impact the virus was going to have on all our lives. In a strange way one of the consequences that became apparent and was demonstrated by our volunteers, was the kindness, enthusiasm to support their community and human connection between us all. Sight Advice is and has always been about the people, clients, volunteers and staff and even though we were not together in the physical sense, everyone came together over the airways, internet and telephone to continue to provide support and comfort to our community.

During this year we had 23 volunteers regularly supporting around 80 VIPs over the phone, providing much needed reassurance, empathy and a listening ear. Many of our volunteers are themselves vulnerable or extremely vulnerable and were quite rightly anxious about their own situation, however, this also meant they had an insight into the VIP's concerns. The support also included some shopping, prescription drop-offs and support to access doctor

appointments as well as morale boosting fresh vegetable deliveries and over the wall chats later on in the Lockdown.

“Telephone support calls to isolated people with sight loss during lockdown not only provided a vital lifeline for the visually impaired, but resulted in strong camaraderie on both sides.” (Daisy, Circles of Support Volunteer)

Volunteer week in 2020 looked very different, we were not able to get together in person so had a Volunteer Social Zoom in June. We also promoted our “Lockdown Stories” which let people know what support our volunteers were providing and some of the faces behind that support.

The monthly Volunteer Update continued to be sent out to volunteers, keeping everyone up to date with any developments within Sight Advice which they were then able to pass on to any clients they were supporting. The Update also provided information on any online groups, training available and relevant local resources.

As well as supporting clients individually, our volunteers were involved in online activities such as the Poetry Group, the weekly quiz and information sessions. Volunteers were also the driving force behind many online fundraising events such as bingo and quizzes. These were equally important in keeping people connected as well as raising funds.

“You are doing a good job in difficult times.”
(Volunteer Community Group Leader)

Whilst volunteering was at the forefront of newspaper headlines highlighting their critical role in helping to alleviate the effects of the pandemic, many organisations were concerned about the effect of the extended lockdown on their volunteers, particularly in the older age group. Sight Advice conducted a survey with their volunteers prior to the first easing of Lockdown in the summer and this showed that the majority of respondents were happy to resume volunteering when able to, with reassurance that health and safety guidelines were being followed.

“A big thank you to all the volunteers at Sight Advice. Karen has been most helpful to me and I am most grateful. She has collected and delivered my prescription to... where I am staying. She has also kept in touch by phone. It has been good keeping in touch when we can't meet.”
(Client supported by phone)



CASE STUDY - VOLUNTEERING

Our volunteers really are at the heart of who we are and what we do. If you have ever been in the office or attended one of our groups, you will have met one of our volunteers. In fact, this Magazine comes courtesy of our volunteers, who help to lay it out, proof read and distribute it. This article aims to shed a bit more light on our volunteers and what they do to support the Sight Advice community.

Sight Advice South Lakes is a small charity and often when we have new visitors, they comment on how the atmosphere feels close, kind and almost like family. Whilst the small nature of our team and region certainly contribute to the closeness and familiarity, another major factor is that when volunteers and clients come to us to give or ask for support, they usually stay with us for some time.

People often dip in and out depending on their circumstances, but they know we are there when they need us and sometimes they stay and become part of the Sight Advice family. This edition's 'Volunteer in the Spotlight' is a perfect example of this.

John is both a client and volunteer. John has been a volunteer for nearly sixteen years and has pretty much turned his hand at anything we throw at him, with a few of his own ideas thrown in for good measure. John is always looking for new ways to support the charity and inevitably, the ways always involve fun!

John is never one to stand still and although he has been with the charity for a long time, he is happy to embrace change, always makes new members of staff welcome and is interested in new ideas and ways to develop the charity.

John is the founder and leader of the fortnightly Games Group who meet at the Bradbury Centre. This is a famously fun group, with laughter and cries of cheating heard throughout the building every other Thursday. John also attends the Walking Group, is part of the VITAL social group and plays a major role in community fundraising, where he is affectionately known as "Bingo John".

Throughout the Coronavirus lockdown, John maintained his commitment to fundraising and helping others. John supported a local client with his weekly shopping, made regular welfare calls to the members of his Games Group, ran online quizzes and kept in touch with people throughout.

John has a good-hearted humour and his small acts of kindness make a huge difference to those that know him. Amongst the staff team at Sight Advice South Lakes John is highly regarded as one of our most dedicated and passionate volunteers.

In his latest venture, John targeted our new Service Manager, James. In December, John and James will be doing battle in a charity pool competition to raise funds for Sight Advice. Please do support them if you can! As John himself says, "I'll always be with Sight Advice, I'll never stop doing what I do" and for that John we are extremely thankful!



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Sight Advice South Lakes offers a Community Development service via our three part-time Community Development Officers (CDOs) who provide practical and emotional support, advice and information to people with sight loss. A Holistic Assessment and Personal Plan enables us to identify an individual's needs and priorities and offer practical, user-led solutions around the home.

The Covid-19 pandemic, and subsequent closing of our resource centre and suspension of face-to-face services dramatically affected the Community Development service. Local and national services accessed by visually impaired people in our area were also severely impacted.

In order to continue to provide support to visually impaired people, whilst keeping our team and the public safe, we focussed on providing remote support. This would involve telephone calls to the client and, if appropriate, significant others, to obtain information related to the VIP's functioning, eye condition, environment, interests and values. Advice would then be given

either over the phone, via email or post often with purchasing details of equipment given or appropriate information leaflets. Urgent items of equipment were on occasion delivered to the VIP's doorstep should they be struggling to access equipment. Referrals to other services were made when appropriate although some organisations provided limited services owing to COVID related staffing issues. We were also involved in live readings of the Westmorland Gazette where we were able to liaise with VIPs as well as helping them keep up with the local news. During the period April 2020- March 2021 we made 255 wellbeing calls to 134 people.

We advised people about the range of on line social groups (always with telephone access) and activities provided by ourselves and partner agencies during lockdown. These included leisure activities such as quizzes or poetry, wellbeing sessions such as seated dance, relaxation and gentle exercise, diagnosis specific talks and general talks linked to sight impairment. Part of our role would be to explore further opportunities available on line or volunteer involvement to help support individuals to access the information required.

In summer 2021 restrictions were lifted and we were once again able to visit individuals in their homes. The impact of deconditioning in those who had been

“The Advice from Sight Advice was so valuable... It is so reassuring to know that there is an organisation like Sight Advice locally where I can go for advice any time because of the scope of support you offer”
(Sight Advice client, aged 71)

shielding became apparent and we worked towards providing opportunities and volunteers to support VIPs to get out into the community.

Circles of Support

The Circles of Support project was set up as a response to numerous members reporting that they missed participating in activities that they used to do prior to their sight loss and were also eager to try new activities. A Holistic assessment allowed the VIP's goals to be drawn up and a volunteer to be identified who matched their interests and values.

Our funders asked that 25 VIPs should be supported during this funding period. Unfortunately the entire funding period was impacted by the Covid-19 lockdown during which no face to face contact was permitted. We liaised with the Circles of Support organisation to adapt our delivery model and developed 'Light' Circles.

These 'Light' Circles provided an invaluable opportunity to support people through the pandemic through regular contact from volunteers or SASL staff and signposting to online sessions run by SASL ranging from relaxation and quizzes to demonstrations of relevant equipment, diagnosis related seminars and public talks from visually impaired celebrities such as a Paralympic cyclist. Such events could also be accessed by telephone for those without internet access. 'Light' Circles members were also encouraged to attend online or telephone events delivered by other organisations such as online sailing and seated dance sessions.

Unfortunately there were a small number of clients who experience dual-sensory loss whose participation was restricted during this period.

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, 96 Light Circles were completed for 55 unique individuals.

"I think that the work carried out by South Lakes Sight Advice over the last nine or ten months, during really hard times for a lot of people, will have been a life-line to many VI residents in the area" (Circles of Support client, aged 75)

We also found that for Circles of Support volunteers and members of these 'Light' Circles, the connection also helped them personally, through the difficulties created by the pandemic. Members have indicated that they felt supported during the lockdown and enjoyed making new friends despite the unusual circumstances.

CASE STUDY - COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Rosemary lives with her partner in a small isolated hamlet which is not served by public transport. Rosemary suffers from a number of health issues, and her sight condition means that she cannot see well in low light and is extremely light sensitive. This has resulted in Rosemary no longer being able to drive. Rosemary shared that her health issues and isolation left her feeling low, impacted her confidence and has affected the relationship she has with her partner.

Through a Home Visit and Holistic Assessment our Community Development Officer learned that Rosemary wanted to improve her ability to read, use her laptop and find solutions to regain her independence in cooking and gardening.

Our Community Development Officer provided practical advice on how to adjust magnification settings on Rosemary's laptop and demonstrated the use of a magnifier which could be installed on her smartphone. Additionally the CDO worked with Rosemary, looking at the different places within her home that she usually likes to read and suggested different lighting and magnifiers that could help. In order to help with Rosemary's light sensitivity, fit-over tinted glasses were trialled, and Rosemary was provided with information on how to purchase these independently. In the kitchen the CDO demonstrated improved lighting, a vegetable spike to help with chopping and 'Good Grips' peelers to assist Rosemary in preparing vegetables, considering her other health needs.

Following the intervention from Sight Advice, Rosemary reported that she has been "overwhelmed" by the effectiveness of her fit-overs and has purchased new lighting to assist with reading and in the kitchen. Rosemary also shared that her confidence has grown and she has begun gardening again, something which has improved her emotional health and made her feel "good about myself again". Rosemary has also been able to return to driving now that the glare from her eye condition has been addressed.

To protect Rosemary's privacy, we have changed her name.

LOW VISION CLINICS

Under normal circumstances Low Vision Clinics would be held at Sight Advice South Lakes every 6 weeks, with 10-12 assessments completed each time. This equated to at least 100 Low Vision Assessments per year.

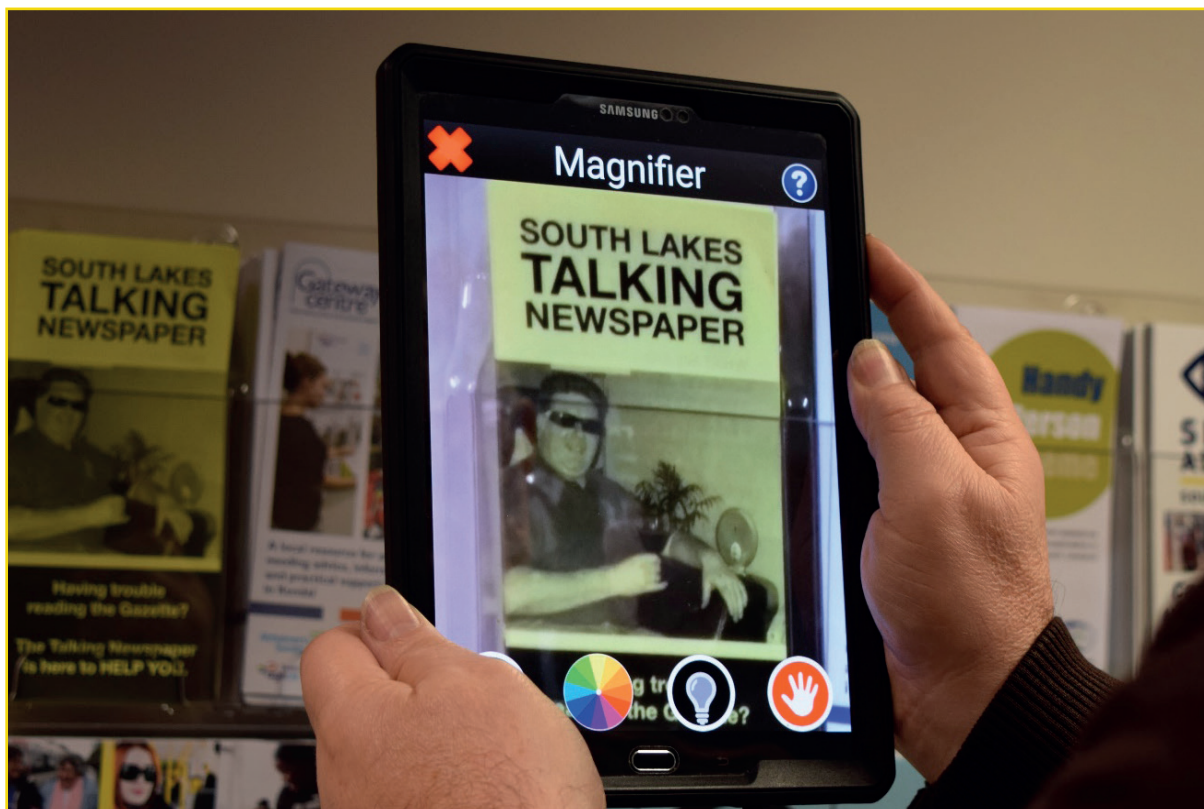
Following the Covid-19 pandemic, it has not been possible to deliver Low Vision assessments at the Bradbury Centre, and therefore far fewer people have received this support.

Despite these challenges however we have continued to refer those people in need for Low Vision assessments, and worked with partners to facilitate home-based assessments, where this could be delivered in a safe manner.

During this reporting period we referred 99 individuals for Low Vision assessments, with 89 assessments being completed.

Starting in April 2021 we will be working with our partners at Galloways to deliver this service, and once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, hope to reinstate face to face clinic services as soon as it is safe to do so.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY



The year 2020/2021 posed several challenges for Sight Advice South Lakes Assistive Technology service. The whole year was pre occupied with providing a service under the Covid pandemic.

The year started in full lockdown. Plans had been formulised just before lockdown as to how to respond, and a two pronged strategy appeared:

- A. How can we use Assistive Technology to reach out to people?
- B. How can we support people individually with Assistive Technology?

Reaching Out Using Technology

Sight Advice were already “reaching out” via regular phone calls to many of its members to ensure they were not isolated or left in a vulnerable situation. Once this had been established it became clear that people also needed information, contact with others and entertaining while locked down.

An analysis of the type of technology that was inexpensive and could “reach out” was made, this included social media, messaging, video technology, phone technology, laptops, phones and tablets.

A variety of off the shelf products were discussed that could be quickly set up to complement current Sight Advice systems. Very quickly a Zoom video account was set up, followed by a “Mailchimp” marketing account for email communication to customers, partners and volunteers, both at zero cost.

Consultation with people led to a regular programme of weekly Zoom events being set up in April. These were weekly and consisted of:

- A poetry hour hosted by Volunteer co-ordinator
- A technology event with guest speakers from top organisations.
- Talking newspaper “live” reading of the Westmorland gazette by South Lakes talking Newspaper.
- A “quality of life” event such as talks on eye conditions and mental health well being. Hosted by staff and guest speakers.
- Guest inspirational speakers, often adventurers with sight conditions who had a story to tell.
- A weekly quiz hosted by Assistive Technology coordinator.
- Ad hoc fund raising events such as Bingo online.

The free Zoom account was upgraded to one that allowed people without internet access to dial in on their landlines. This meant that no one was excluded because of technology.

Several hundred people a month attended these events.

Eventually in the year the Sight Advice model was shared with other sight loss organisations around the country, leading to sharing of skills, events and audience which still continues.

Supporting People Individually

It was still possible under lockdown restrictions to support people individually with Assistive Technology. This could be done via phone assessment, doorstep advice and liaising with other organisations.

The Chief Executive sourced a grant to aid technology for people who did not have access to technology but wished to explore it. The grant was used to purchase high quality equipment that could be loaned out for a period of time, to see if it was of use. Phone and “doorstep” tuition could also occur, and following the end of full lockdown, home visits too.

A total of 15 people accessed this scheme, via Synapptic talking phones (2), talking tablets (12), iPads (2), Alexas (2) and other supplementary equipment such as stands and mobile Wi-Fi.

One of the advantages of the scheme is that equipment was only loaned, so although for example 10 people accessed talking Synapptic tablets, it was from a pool of 6 tablets, which are still owned by Sight Advice for others to trial.

Of the 15 individuals, 12 (80%) purchased or fundraising purchased appropriate equipment themselves because of this scheme. The loan scheme is now part of mainstream Assistive Technology service role.

With the lifting of restrictions in some points of the year, it was still possible to undertake the traditional Assistive Technology service, but there were interruptions as in other sectors.

CASE STUDY - ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Mrs J had recently been diagnosed with Age Related Macular Degeneration, coupled with her hearing loss and lockdown she had lost a lot of confidence and was frequently in tears.

Daughter in Law C had said about Mrs J that she has deteriorated quite a lot during lockdown (not really eating, etc.) and ended up ringing her in floods of tears last week over a build-up of post, etc.

Assistive Technology Co-ordinator (ATC) visited to get a fuller picture. Initial consultation was around making drinks and cooking, an electric one cup kettle was demonstrated, this worked well and family purchased one, plus bump ons for cooking devices.

In further discussion with ATC it transpired that Mrs J was a very talented artist, and had given up totally on art since her diagnosis of AMD. ATC explained that with smart use of stands and magnification it may be possible to undertake art. Initially very sceptical about this.

ATC constructed a set up with tablet and stand, and Mrs J quite intrigued that with correct magnification and positioning of her hand, she could see her pen strokes on paper.

ATC lent her a large desk top electronic magnifier and immediately she started sketching cartoons of animals and was very absorbed in this activity.

She decided to purchase an electronic magnifier and stand from a Tech company, also adding in text to speech facility so her post could be read.

Mrs J was painting again, and this made her happy, confident and gave her more purpose in life.

When ATC visited 2 weeks later, Mrs J showed him an excellently drawn and painted birthday card she had made for her grandson, she was delighted with this.

Another sight professional contacted Mrs J after the intervention of ATC and her daughter in law reported that, her Mother in law is "a different person" is painting again and finds electronic mag wonderful especially as it can even read to her"!

EYE CLINIC LIAISON

The Eye Clinic Liaison officers are usually based in the waiting room of the Macular Clinic at Westmorland General Hospital on Monday to Wednesday. Patients from throughout the Morecambe Bay area and even further afield attend the clinic for treatment and monitoring linked to retinal issues. The ECLO also works with patients attending the out-patients eye clinic and can be involved with in patients with sight impairments at Westmorland General. They have worked with 118 clients in total this reporting year, and managed a further 212 'light' enquiries. Support can also be given to the clinical team both in and out of the clinic.

The Covid-19 restrictions on permitted numbers allowed in eye clinics resulted in the service being offered remotely rather than within the eye clinics. One ECLO was placed on furlough throughout lockdown.

Prior to lockdown the ECLO would chat to patients whilst waiting for their appointments within the clinics and discuss any issues related to coping with sight loss. Information provision and sign posting to other services would commonly occur. The majority of referrals were received in this manner. Clinic staff also referred patients to the service as do Third Sector organisations such as sight loss charities and community services including from the NHS. Work pressures and reduced staffing within clinics and community organisations during the pandemic resulted in a drop in referral numbers and difficulty with communication with both community and NHS organisations.

The ECLO was keen to ensure patients remained aware of the service during this critical time and strove to raise the profile of the service within the hospital with publicity and articles on Hospital Radio and within the community by liaising with potential referrers such as community optometrists, newspaper articles and radio publicity. Methods of referring remotely to the ECLO were developed and promoted to allow clinic staff to refer patients to the service. Patients were then contacted by telephone and thorough assessment carried out and appropriate information sent out. Patients were supported with referrals to other organisations such as for talking books or purchasing advice was provided for appropriate equipment such as lighting.

During the first lockdown the ECLO became involved with organising transport for those patients attending hospital appointments as North West Ambulance Service patient transport was no longer available. This involved prolonged liaison with volunteer drivers, NHS volunteers, taxi firms and patients and sight loss charities to arrange transport followed by the procuring of Personal Protective Equipment at a time of great shortage.

The ECLO also organised and presented online (with telephone access) events related to eye conditions such as seminars about eye drops and presentations about research related to Age Related Macular Degeneration and Charles Bonnet Syndrome. They were also able to signpost to sight-loss related events held on line by local and national organisations.

The service remained remote throughout the funding period although a return was considered at various times during the period but deemed impractical for the safe running of the eye clinics.

CASES STUDY - EYE CLINIC LIAISON

What problems was the person experiencing when they approached/were referred to Sight Advice South Lakes for support? Why did they need our help?

I met J in the waiting room on the macular ward at Westmorland General, where the ECLOs are based and where J was sat waiting for her appointment. From talking to her, I found out that she had been coming to the hospital for treatment for about two and a half years.

During our conversation she also told me that she would really like a magnifier, as she said she struggles to read things (particularly instructions) and often ends up having to ask her neighbour to help. She said she had a plug in one, belonging to her late brother, but that this no longer works.

How did Sight Advice South Lakes help? What actions did we take to make these problems better? Was there anything that we did that no one else could have done?

I told J that, with her permission, I could make a referral to Barrow Blind Society, and that someone from there would be able to talk to her (either over the phone or during a home visit) about aids and equipment that might be of help. I also explained about the Low Vision service, and how, with an assessment, she would be able to obtain a suitable magnifier on loan.

I made this referral via MARS (on Compass) and received feedback to say that J's case was being passed on to the appropriate person.

What was the end result of Sight Advice South Lakes support or intervention? How has the person's life improved since receiving support from Sight Advice South Lakes?

I spoke to J again today, to see how she was getting on. She said that she had had a visit from a lady at Barrow last week, and that she had left J a light and a magnifier to try. She said that this magnifier is not as good as the one she had that belonged to her late brother, but she is still giving it a try. She is also due to receive a follow-up visit in a couple of weeks' time, when, she has been told, it might be possible to swap it for a stronger one.

J said that it is 'starting to get [her] down now'. Although she does have a big garden that she tries to get out in when she can – walking to her greenhouse. She has a stamp with her initials for when she goes to the bank, but finds going shopping on her own difficult – her son goes for her on a Saturday, but I think she would still much prefer to be able to go herself. She also said that reading gives her a headache, so she has to just do a bit at a time.

What would have happened (or might have happened) if they weren't able to access support from Sight Advice South Lakes? How might their life look differently now?

If I hadn't spoken to J that day at the hospital, and subsequently made the referral to Barrow for her, it is likely that she would not have received the help she has with obtaining a magnifier. Or at least not as quickly.

It is good that Barrow have made contact with her, and that she should now be able to access their services as a result.

What are their thoughts about the future?

Not discussed specifically, but I would say to just carry on doing what she's doing – i.e. the best she can.

POSITIVE STEPS COURSES

The Positive Steps course, is historically “classroom” based, in that it is delivered in a venue to a group of people. The course helps people who are newly diagnosed or people who have experienced a decrease in their remaining vision, resulting in them facing new challenges and difficulties as they learn to live with their changing vision. Course content includes advice and support relating to practical solutions for living with sight loss, benefits and concessions, mobility advice and technology available to assist with daily living.

The course is delivered in partnership with Cumbria County Council (CCC) and Age UK South Lakeland and also aims to connect people in their community to others living with sight loss, for peer support. About 40 people a year would attend these courses.

The year 2020 to 2021 was dominated by Covid 19, this meant that it was not possible to deliver this course in a “classroom” setting as most of the year was pre vaccination and under some form of restrictions or lockdown.

In order to maintain Positive Steps courses throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, we quickly developed an online format that could be accessed safely via Zoom. Sight Advice delivered an excellent programme online that encompassed all of the elements of Positive Steps.

“The technical zoom talks I found very helpful to decide the things that would be useful to... the talks about eye diseases and problems I found enlightening. The zoom was well setup and easy to use.”

(Positive Steps Course attendee)

National and international speakers were booked for all manner of weekly events such as eye conditions, where we had speakers from organisations such as Macular Society, Glaucoma UK and Esme’s Umbrella (Charles Bonnet). Awareness of eye conditions, research and eye health were all covered.

Also national lead on Rehabilitation Officer for Visual Impairment, Age UK, national care agencies and local Community leaders gave talks on areas as diverse as rehabilitation, benefits, mental health support and local service under Covid.

There were regular Assistive Technology online Zoom meetings also, that included all the market leaders such as Orcam, Optelec, Sight and Sound, Pamtrad, Synaptic amongst others. Covering electronic magnification, artificial intelligence, video technology, phones, apps, iPads, Alexas and much more.

Using the online technology of Zoom and BABL, Sight Advice was able to reach even more people than before, it also reached people who did not have the internet as it was possible to use landline phones, so accessible for all.

“Personally I have benefitted from the Assistive Technology online demonstrations and discussions... It is also useful to hear other participants’ questions and experiences with their equipment.”

(Positive Steps Course attendee)

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROJECT

During 2020/2021 our Children and Young People's Project has supported 32 members with a visual impairment and we welcomed 1 new member. With the funding from Children in Need our project coordinator provides support, information advice and activities for young people across South Lakeland. During the Covid-19 pandemic, all face to face events were suspended and we responded quickly to provide a programme of online activities.

17 different activities were organised this year with the help and participation of our young people. As a project we held 3 Assistive Technology sessions for our families through Zoom, 6 Zoom cooking sessions and 2 inspirational talks from guest speakers. Our families were disappointed not to be able to attend our Annual Theatre Trip at Christmas so we took the theatre to their homes! Everyone enjoyed a live audio-described London theatre production of A Christmas Carol.



Craft packs from a local community art store were also delivered to our children and young people. We were then able to meet on Zoom to share our creations. As a project we also hosted an online family quiz.

When restrictions allowed some of our members were able to attend a Visually Impaired Skiing session with instructors from Kendal Snowsports Club.

Offering a helpline for to families has been one of our core services over the last year. Well-being calls from our project coordinator were so important to many of our families and the frequency of the calls depended on the needs of the individual members and their families. Many of the children, young people and their families live with additional disadvantages other than sight loss with many having to shield. Families and carers at times expressed enhanced feelings of exhaustion, heightened emotions and tensions with families. In response the project coordinator was able to offer emotional support and guidance in navigating the statutory and charitable services able to children and young people.

“Out of all the people who have contacted us you have been the most involved. I really appreciate it.”

(Mother of a severely disabled child with virtually no useable vision)

As a project we have also had two successful individual grant applications to purchase laptops with accessible programmes. They have been invaluable for these young people in a time when home-schooling was so challenging.

CASE STUDY - CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROJECT

Child C is new to living with sight-loss after losing their peripheral vision following an acute brain condition. This condition has also impacted other areas of their health and mobility.

Child C was referred to Sight Advice South Lakes through a local Occupational Therapist. This is a well-established professional relationship maintained by our Children and Young People's Project Co-ordinator.

At the point of referral, Child C's parents were still coping with the emotional impact of accepting their child had lost their sight. **"It's devastating to see that your child had been changed overnight... It's still hard to get used to now."** (Parent of Child C)

Child C received a joint home visit from the Occupational Therapist and SASL Children & Young People's Co-ordinator in order to make an introduction and begin building a connection between Child C and the project. During the home visit, Child C expressed disappointment and sadness about the possibility of making new friends and trying new things in the future.

Our Children & Young People's Co-ordinator initially supported the Occupational Therapist in recommending aids and training which would support Child C in developing independent mobility skills, including a white cane.

Alicia shared examples of activities and events from the past, stories about other young people within the Project and invited Child C to attend some upcoming events.

Child C's first activity was skiing at Kendal Snowsport Club in October 2021. After their first session with the group we asked for Child C's feedback: **"I quite enjoyed skiing, basically you got to learn the ropes, putting the ski on one foot, and then the other. It was really fun. I was focussing on my feet making sure they were level in symmetry. Overall I love skiing 100/100. I would recommend it!"** (Child C)

"Child C felt there wasn't much hope or ways of being able to make new friends but then we were introduced to Alicia at Sight Advice and everything changed and opened up and Child C's life from March has changed dramatically." (Parent of Child C).

Following Child C's successful introduction to the Project, they quickly became a regular attendee at a variety of different events including:

- Skiing
- Dance classes
- Independent daily living skills session

Child C and their family were also given the opportunity to attend Disney on Ice and a Jockey Day Club at Carlisle Race course. Significantly Child C has made new friends within the Project group, and in November 2021, worked together with these friends to put together a video sharing their experiences and providing tips for others.

Through regular participation at events and increased communication with other members we have witnessed Child C make new friends, grow confidence in her physical ability to do more things, and build the confidence to talk to others about their experience of living with sight loss.

“Since Alicia has got involved Child C has been learning to ski, she’s been to dance classes, she’s been to talks and she’s really beginning to feel like there are friends out there, to meet people that understand her. She’s been to look around the college to see if she can go there. Things are looking much brighter and Child C’s look on life is much more positive since Alicia got involved and Sight Advice” (Parent of Child C).

Without the crucial intervention of the Children & Young People's Co-ordinator, Child C may not have such a positive outlook on life and may not understand that their sight-loss is not a barrier to realising her potential or achieving new things. Child C has built friendships and confidence as a result of the support from our work, and through participation in events but has also developed important skills and awareness about how to live independently with sight loss.

Following involvement with the Project, Child C has now enrolled onto weekly dance sessions and has continued friendships made within the group. We asked Child C's parent how Child C is feeling about the future now:

“So looking forward to a possible friendship developing with another member of the project. They have swapped phone numbers and will continue to contact each other in the future.”

Financial Summary Statements 2020 / 2021

(INCLUDING INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2020

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total 31.03.21	Total 31.03.20
	£	£	£	£
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM:				
Donations and legacies	72,804	-	72,804	74,104
Charitable activities	31,134	205,729	236,863	170,058
Other trading activities	8,263	19	8,282	24,776
Investments	743	-	743	903
Other	-	-	-	-
Total	112,944	205,748	318,692	269,841
EXPENDITURE ON:				
Raising funds:	28,711	9,507	38,218	39,806
Charitable activities	60,221	148,811	209,032	224,547
Other	-	-	-	-
Total	88,932	158,318	247,250	264,353
Net Incoming Resources	24,012	47,430	71,442	5,488
Transfers Between Funds	(428)	428	-	-
Net income/(expenditure) for the year and Movement in Funds	23,584	47,858	71,442	5,488
Fund Balances Brought Forward at 1 April 2019	566,037	19,651	585,688	580,200
Fund Balances Carried Forward at 31 March 2020	589,621	67,509	657,130	585,688

Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2021

	31 March 2021		31 March 2020	
	£	£	£	£
FIXED ASSETS				
Tangible Fixed Assets		327,332		337,666
CURRENT ASSETS				
Debtors	2,097		3,420	
Cash at bank and in hand	352,760		269,887	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	25,059		25,285	
NET CURRENT ASSETS		329,798		248,022
NET ASSETS		657,130		585,688
REPRESENTED BY:-				
General Funds		217,778		206,484
Designated Funds		371,843		359,553
Unrestricted Funds		589,621		566,037
Restricted Funds		67,509		19,651
Total		657,130		585,688

Reserves policy and financial review

The Trustees have developed a reserves policy that maintains 6 months normal operating costs to cover contingencies that could arise in the coming years. This approximates to £132,000.

As at 31st March 2021, the Charity had £589,621 unrestricted reserves of which £327,332 represented fixed assets and £44,511 was designated to future projects. This left £217,778 as free reserves which equates to 10 months normal operating costs. This is higher than the reserves required by the reserves policy, but in the current difficult climate it is not excessive.

Copies of the full Annual Accounts are available on request by contacting Sight Advice South Lakes.

Our thanks to all those who have funded our work during the year. A full list is available in our Trustees' Report and Financial Statements.

Copies of this annual review are also available in Audio and E-mail formats

Sight Advice South Lakes
The Bradbury Centre
116 Highgate
Kendal
Cumbria
LA9 4HE

info@sightadvice.org.uk
01539 769055
www.sightadvice.org.uk

