



Devon in Sight
Your local sight loss charity



In Vision

The magazine of Devon in Sight

Winter 2023 Issue 37



Sight Loss Conference 2023 Review
“Making Devon a Sight Loss Friendly County”

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Editors

Grahame Flynn
Tessa Barrett
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Chief Executive Officer's

Welcome



They say, 'Choose your battles wisely!'

This means being selective of the problems, arguments, and confrontations you get involved in, and instead saving your energy for the things that matter. Rather than fight every single problem, you fight the most important battles and let go of the rest.

Despite being such a small team we decided that campaigning to keep our Railway Station Ticket Offices open was one such battle. Was the battle worth fighting? **See pages 6 - 11 for the full story.**

We were delighted to welcome so many of you to our first **Devon Sight Loss Conference** held at the Mercure Exeter Rougemont Hotel on Friday 20th October. **You can get a flavour of the event with our review on pages 14-21.**

At this time of the year we remind everyone of the importance of getting your eyes checked at an optician with our annual **'Seeing in the New Year Campaign'**. This is now entering its 11th year. Our friends at M&S Opticians have provided a free eye & hearing test voucher for you to share with family and friends.

Finally, our cover picture celebrates Devon in Sight being awarded the internationally recognised **Matrix Standard** for Information, Advice and Guidance. A fitting tribute to the hard work we have been undertaking behind the scenes to help all our clients **live life to the full.**

Remember, choose your battles wisely!

Grahame

Grahame Flynn

Chief Executive Officer

Devon in Sight is registered with the Helplines Partnership

Helpline 01392 876 666

The Helpline is open between 10am and 2pm Monday to Friday

Matrix Standard Accreditation



▲ Photo Credit: Devon in Sight

We are delighted to announce that Devon in Sight has been accredited to the Matrix Standard, demonstrating the high quality of our Information, Advice and Guidance Services that we provide for people affected by sight loss in Devon.

The Matrix Standard is the international quality standard for organisations that deliver information, advice and guidance (IAG), either as their sole purpose or as part of their service offering. The matrix Standard is owned by the Department for Education and is managed by The Growth Company on their behalf.

Organisations that have benefited from working with the Standard include Training Providers, Further & Higher Education Colleges, Universities, Voluntary and Community Organisations, Private Businesses, the NHS and Government Departments.

“It is a real tribute to the hard work of the team and demonstrates that the services that we provide are of the very highest quality.”

Roger Chapman, Head of the Matrix Service for The Growth Company said,

“This is a fantastic achievement for Devon in Sight and I would like to congratulate the team on their success. We believe that at the heart of high-quality advice and support services are strong leadership, excellent service and a focus on continuous improvement, all underpinned by effective use of the resources available. The Matrix Standard is designed to benchmark organisations against best practice in these areas. With their accreditation success, Devon in Sight is working to provide the best possible support to their clients.”

Grahame Flynn, Devon in Sight’s CEO added, “This has been the culmination of many years of work to develop our Helpline Service, Information Resources, website, database and client needs assessments. This has been a team effort with Tessa Barrett our Head of Services leading the project. I would particularly like to thank Jennie Benham for her work building our library of Information Resources and managing our website.”

Commenting on the award, **Dr Adrian Jacobs, Chair of Devon in Sight** said, “We are so pleased to have achieved this standard. It is a real tribute to the hard work of the team and demonstrates that the services that we provide are of the very highest quality.”

For more information about the matrix Standard please visit www.matrixStandard.com.



Station Ticket Office Closures Scrapped!



▲ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn/BBC Television

▲ BBC News at Six Presenter Sophie Raworth

When the Government announced that they were looking to close 974 Railway Station Ticket Offices nationally in July, it sent shock waves around the country, particularly amongst passengers living with sight loss.

The three-week public consultation, provoking outcry and a hasty extension to the consultation period. Devon in Sight took an active part in the consultation encouraging all of our stakeholders to voice their concerns to local Councillors, Members of Parliament, London Travel Watch, Watchdog Transport Focus and Thomas Pocklington Trust.

The ensuing campaign snowballed with Honiton MP Richard Foord raising the issue in Parliament during Transport Minister's Questions and on BBC Radio 4's 'Any Questions'.

“The Government has asked train operators to withdraw their proposals for a widespread closure of station ticket offices in England.”

Devon in Sight's CEO Grahame Flynn said, “It was such a thrill to have Devon in Sight cited during a debate in the House Of Commons!

It was somewhat ironic that for the best part of a year the team at Devon in Sight have been working on the Department of Transport funded 'Tackling Loneliness with Transport Scheme' aimed at getting more people using public transport.”



Grahame wrote personally to the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Secretary of State for Transport Mark Harper MP and Rail Minister, Huw Merriman MP on behalf of all the people living with little or no sight in Devon, to express our concerns.

The response he received from The Minister of State for Transport, Huw Merriman MP is printed in full on pages 10-11.

However, on 31 October 2023 BBC News at Six Presenter Sophie Raworth reported that Transport Secretary Mark Harper had confirmed that the Government had asked train operators to withdraw their proposals for a widespread closure of station ticket offices in England.

In a statement, Mr Harper said the proposals to close ticket offices, “did not meet the high thresholds” of serving rail passengers.

He said, “The consultation on ticket offices has now ended, with the Government making clear to the rail industry throughout the process that any resulting proposals must meet a high threshold of serving passengers. We have engaged with accessibility groups throughout this process and listened carefully to passengers as well as my colleagues in Parliament.

Station Ticket Office Closures Scrapped!

The proposals that have resulted from this process do not meet the high thresholds set by ministers, and so the Government has asked train operators to withdraw their proposals.

“We will continue our work to reform our railways with the expansion of contactless Pay As You Go ticketing, making stations more accessible through our Access for All programme and £350 million funding through our Network North plan to improve accessibility at up to 100 stations.”

Watchdog Transport Focus said it had objected to all of the proposals to close railway station ticket offices in England. Chief Executive Anthony Smith said, “Following analysis of the 750,000 responses to the consultation and in-depth discussions with train companies Transport Focus is objecting to the proposals to close ticket offices.

“Significant amendments and changes have been secured by the watchdog – for example, reverting to existing times when staff will be on hand at many stations. Some train companies were closer than others in meeting our criteria. However, serious overall concerns remain about how potentially useful innovations, such as ‘welcome points’ would work in practice. We also have questions about how the impact of these changes would be measured and how future consultation on staffing levels will work.

“Some train companies were unable to convince us about their ability to sell a full range of tickets, handle cash payments and avoid excessive queues at ticket machines. Passengers must be confident they can get help when needed and buy the right ticket in time for the right train.”

“The Government has asked train operators to withdraw their proposals for a widespread closure of station ticket offices in England.”

More than 680,000 responses were submitted to public consultations on the closures. Plans to close the vast majority of station ticket offices in England were brought forward by train operators and their representative body the Rail Delivery Group (RDG).

Train companies are under pressure from the UK Government to cut costs amid the drop in revenue caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Ticket offices at 974 stations could have been affected, according to the RDG.

It says the proposals were, “designed to move staff out of ticket offices and onto station platforms and concourses to support better, face-to-face interactions”. But the plan sparked fierce criticism from opposition politicians, trade unions, disability groups and public transport campaigners.

Concerns had been raised about the impact on accessibility, safety and security, difficulties using ticket machines and how stations will be staffed in future.

Last week, the Commons’ Transport Select Committee wrote to rail minister Huw Merriman, warning that the proposals “go too far, too fast, towards a situation that risks excluding some passengers from the railway”.

Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) Union General Secretary Mick Lynch said a “stitch-up which still paves the way for ticket office closures” following the watchdogs’ responses would be a “great betrayal of passengers”.

Devon in Sight would like to thank everyone who took the time to engage with the consultation. We will be monitoring future proposals closely to ensure that the voices of people living with little or no sight are heard.

Minister of State for Transport Response!

"I hope this response provides some assurance of our continued commitment to improving the experience of disabled people on the railways."



Grahame Flynn
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From the Minister of State
Huw Merriman MP

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Our Ref: MC/436077

6 September 2023

Dear Grahame,

Thank you for your letters of 21 August to the Prime Minister and Mark Harper, about changes to railway station ticket offices. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this issue.

On 5 July train operators launched consultations on their proposed ticket office changes under the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement (TSA). Following continued engagement with stakeholders and accessibility groups, operators extended the consultation period by five weeks, to the 1 September. This extended consultation period provided all users of the railway, including older and disabled passengers, more time to respond.

We are now in a period where the independent passenger bodies (Transport Focus and London TravelWatch) are engaging with train operators on the basis of the consultation responses they have received and the criteria they have set out.

We expect train operators to work collaboratively with the passenger bodies in the coming weeks, to listen to the concerns raised and to refine their proposals accordingly. Where agreement cannot be reached between operators and the passenger bodies, individual cases may be referred to the Secretary of State for a decision.

Together with the rail industry, we want to improve and modernise the experience for passengers by moving staff out from behind the ticket office screens to provide more help and advice in customer focused roles. The proposals should allow staff to move around the station to provide more personalised assistance in various ways, rather than being restricted to just selling tickets from a ticket office window.

I understand that blind and partially sighted people are especially reliant on public transport and the railway network in particular. I have been clear that no currently staffed station should be unstaffed as a result of industry changes, and operators should ensure that staff are well located to meet passenger needs in future. This includes ensuring that staff remain available to help passengers to use ticket vending machines, or their own devices to purchase tickets and they can assist those who need additional support or do not wish to use digital tickets.

The Passenger Assist service will also continue to help disabled passengers, and those with additional needs, to use the rail network with confidence and in safety.

When proposing major changes to ticket office opening hours – including closures – train operators are required to take into account the adequacy of the proposed alternatives in relation to the needs of passengers who are disabled, and to include this in the notice of the proposal sent to other operators and passenger groups. When consulting, operators should have also clearly considered other equality-related needs. Operators prepared Equality Impact Assessments, and these were available on their websites during the consultation.

I hope this response provides some assurance of our continued commitment to improving the experience of disabled people on the railways and I would also like to thank you for the work you have been doing on the 'Tackling Loneliness with Transport Project'.

Thank you again for your letter. I hope this response has been helpful.

Yours sincerely,

HUW MERRIMAN MP

MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT

Royal Eye Infirmary Plymouth Relocates



▲ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn, Devon in Sight

▲ Mr Robert Johns at the Grand Opening

On Wednesday, 18 October 2023 Devon in Sight’s Grahame Flynn and Tessa Barrett were delighted to attend the grand opening of the new Royal Eye Infirmary in Plymouth.

Located on William Prance Road, the new three-floor facility brings together the outpatient and surgical eye treatments that were provided at Derriford Hospital.

With an ageing population, the need for high quality eye care and eye issues are going to continue to increase, with more people experiencing conditions such as cataracts, glaucoma, and macular degeneration. However, the new REI means more space and more equipment which is good news for waiting times for patients accessing their services. With more space, staff and equipment, they will be able to treat more patients.

“The Infirmary gave me enough sight to do everything I wanted to do!”

In addition, moving the Royal Eye Infirmary off the busy Derriford Hospital site, University Hospitals Plymouth will be able to put more wards in that space and take some of the pressure off the Emergency Department.

The new REI includes the addition of a third operating theatre dedicated to sub-specialisms, such as oculoplastic, orbital and corneal surgeries, to start to reduce the waiting times of patients from across Devon and Cornwall.

The new REI has improved access for patients with a drop-off zone and parking.

Robert Johns, a 96-year-old man who started using Plymouth’s eye services at the age of five opened the new “state-of-the-art facility”.

Mr Johns praised staff as “miracle workers” for the service they provide. He said the infirmary, “gave me enough sight to do everything I wanted to do”.

The team at Devon in Sight would like to extend our sincere thanks to the REI for making us so welcome.



▲ The new REI building

Devon Sight Loss Conference Review

The theme for the conference was 'Making Devon a Sight Loss Friendly County.'



▲ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn (Devon in Sight)

▲ Audience members in the main auditorium

Devon in Sight was proud to host the Devon Sight Loss Conference on Friday 20th October 2023 at the Mercure Exeter Rougemont Hotel in central Exeter.

The theme for the conference was 'Making Devon a Sight Loss Friendly County'. The event included Speakers from across the sight loss sector, a Living Well with Sight Loss Exhibition and incorporated Devon in Sight's 98th Annual General Meeting.

Particularly well received was our keynote speaker Professor Paulo Eduardo Stanga (Pictured opposite) from the Retina Clinic London. He talked about the latest research into Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) and the benefits of being involved in research. Professor Stanga and his team were available to talk directly with delegates and answer any questions they had.



The audience very much enjoyed a talk from **Glenn Tookey** of Sight and Sound Technology Limited.

Glenn spoke of the advances being made in assistive technology. He reminded us that so much assistive technology is already available on our Smart Phones!

It was interesting to hear that we could soon have a day where people could benefit from a robot Guide Dog!

Alyson Badnell from Devon County Council Sensory Team spoke about the services of the Rehabilitation Officers for Vision Impairment.

The Rehabilitation Officer Visual Impairment (ROVIs) provide assessment, advice and support to both children and adults with sight and hearing problems. They can help you to remain or become more independent.

Our evaluation showed that Alyson was very clear and concise, which was very helpful.

Karen Rose from the Devon County Council Transport Co-ordination Service outlined the breadth of the work of the transport team and Devon in Sight's involvement in the Connecting You Project.

She shared our work to educate Bus Drivers around disability awareness.

Karen said, "It was a really positive experience working with Devon in Sight!"



▲ Glenn Tookey



▲ Alyson Badnell



▲ Karen Rose

Dr Adrian Jacobs the Chair of the Board of Trustees welcomed everyone to **Devon in Sight's 98th Annual General Meeting**.

He said, "The Board of Trustees is committed to creating and maintaining a fit-for purpose organisation, ensuring that our services are developed and managed to provide good quality support for clients, outcomes for key funders and are sustainable for the future.

I would like to thank the Devon in Sight Team who continually strive to deliver excellence to people affected by sight loss across Devon."

Devon in Sight's CEO **Grahame Flynn** gave an overview of the charity's progress against its Strategic Priorities. He shared some of the feedback from the Customer Satisfaction Survey which had been conducted during the year and some output data for all of Devon in Sight's services.

He said, "I am thrilled to announce that the team at Devon in Sight have achieved Matrix Standard Accreditation for our Information, Advice and Guidance Service.

Devon in Sight's Treasurer **Steve Muncer** gave an overview of the charity's finances.

Whilst investment performance had been poor during the current economic crisis the charity had benefited from a sizeable legacy towards the end of the financial year.



▲ Dr Adrian Jacobs



▲ Grahame Flynn



▲ Steve Muncer

Devon Sight Loss Conference Review



▲ Photo Credit: Jennie Benham (Devon in Sight)

▲ Prize draw winner Hazel Coombe

M & S Opticians kindly donated a luxury hamper for our prize draw. Professor Stanga drew the winning ticket belonging to Hazel Coombe who was thrilled with her prize.

In his closing address Grahame Flynn said, 'On behalf of Devon in Sight, I would like to thank our Sponsors, Speakers, Delegates and Exhibitors for making this such a great event and to the Staff and Volunteers who worked very hard to ensure its success.'

The Living Well with Sight Loss Exhibition took place in the rather splendid Cavendish Suite with its columns and high ornate ceilings. Exhibitors came from across the county to support the conference.

The Devon Sight Loss Conference would not have been possible without the sponsorship of Devon County Council, M&S Opticians, The Retina Clinic London and Sight and Sound Technology.



▲ Some of the many exhibitors



▲ Graham & Shaun from Torbay Social Club

Feedback on the day included...

“It was a well presented, absolutely amazing conference and the staff at Devon in Sight should be called, ‘The Absolutely Amazing Four!’”

June Brandon, Devon in Sight Client

“The Devon Sight Loss Conference was amazing. Interacting with all the other organisations and meeting with key people across the sight loss sector was brilliant, especially hearing about the trials being carried out by the Retina Clinic London. I also found the venue was really accessible.”

**Tessa Williams (Eye Clinic Liaison Officer)
West of England Eye Unit Sight Support Team**

“What a great opportunity to network. It’s great working together for the benefit of our clients and Visually Impaired listeners!”

Gill Laws, Exmouth Talking Newspapers

“What a really great networking event! We were introduced to some very interesting organisations, that we will now be working with in the future! We also met with many new clients that we were able to help with their energy needs!”

**Tara Bowers, Healthy Homes Project Manager
from Exeter Community Energy**

“Congratulations to the Devon in Sight team who by their magnificent effort & cohesion made the conference such a success, in all ways. Many thanks!”

Ray Doughty, Devon in Sight Client & new Trustee

We are please to announce that we will be holding another conference at the Mercure Exeter Rougemont Hotel in October 2024.



Should you still be driving?



▲ Photo Credit: anyaberkut (iStock)

Devon in Sight receives many calls to its Helpline from those who have either been newly diagnosed with sight loss or clients who have lost vision over a number of years. One of the many questions we ask is are you a driver? Are you still driving? Has the consultant at the Eye Clinic said if you are safe to continue to drive?

Our helpline advisers find this the most difficult of subjects to raise as we know that one of the greatest fears for those diagnosed with sight loss is that they may need to relinquish their Driving Licence.

When you are newly diagnosed with sight loss it is such a shock that you may not have thought about this very important question. We also know that many are driving because it is safe for you to do so but when seeing the eye clinic or your optician it is always best to check if you can continue.

“Help to keep Devon a safe county to drive in.”

It is because the law has changed that we believe now is the right time to raise awareness of the importance of understanding the current law.



The Driving Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)

is a Government body that issues driving licences. They set the legal standards for efficient eye sight while driving a vehicle. The law changed on 1 September 2023. According to the current driving eyesight rules in place by the DVLA, you must meet the following requirements:

You must be able to read (with glasses or contact lenses, if necessary) a car number plate made after 1 September 2001 from 20 metres.

You must also meet the minimum eyesight standard for driving by having a visual acuity of at least decimal 0.5 (6/12) measured on the Snellen scale (with glasses or contact lenses, if necessary) using both eyes together or, if you have sight in one eye only, in that eye.

You must also have an adequate field of vision - your optician can tell you about this and do a test.

Lorry and Bus Drivers

You must have a visual acuity at least 0.8 (6/7.5) measured on the Snellen scale in your best eye and at least 0.1 (6/60) on the Snellen scale in the other eye.

You can reach this standard using glasses with a corrective power not more than (+) 8 dioptries, or with contact lenses. There's no specific limit for the corrective power of contact lenses.

Should you still be driving?

You must have an uninterrupted horizontal visual field of at least 160 degrees with an extension of at least 70 degrees left and right and 30 degrees up and down. No defects should be present within a radius of the central 30 degrees.

These standards can be met with or without the aid of glasses or contact lenses, and using both eyes, or one eye only.

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/driving-eyesight-rules>

The dangers involved in continuing to drive with poor sight are:

Lack of hazard perception

Visual observation is key when driving. Without good eyesight, there's an increased risk of failing to spot hazards and therefore reacting quickly enough to them. This is especially true for those with bad peripheral vision - you might miss pedestrians crossing the street or cars and cyclists turning onto the road.

Further impaired visibility at night

Poor eyesight becomes even worse at night. Even drivers with good eyesight have impaired vision once the sun goes down. In the darkness, drivers with poor eyesight might strain harder and must concentrate more to see road signs and may also experience blurred vision and glare from headlights.

Dangers in road surfaces

It's not just pedestrians and other road users that pose a danger - other hazards on the road include obstructing objects and damage to road quality such as debris, black ice, uneven surfaces, and potholes.

"Help to keep Devon a safe county to drive in."

In fact, a total of 1.5 million potholes were reported to local UK councils between April 2018 and June 2021.

Please don't break the law!

Data collected from The College of Optometrists shows that nearly all of UK drivers purposefully choose to not wear their glasses or contact lenses because they either feel like they don't need them, can't find them, or simply forget. That's nearly half of drivers with poor eyesight putting themselves and others in serious danger. Please be aware that by doing so it is illegal.

Anyone caught driving without their prescription glasses or contact lenses faces a hefty fine of £1,000, three penalty points on their licence, and potential disqualification from driving.

You can also be fined up to £1,000 if you do not inform the DVLA about a certain medical condition that affects your ability to drive safely. You could even face criminal charges if you are!

If you are in any doubt as to whether you should be driving please make an appointment with your local optician. They will be delighted that you are checking.

Help to keep Devon a safe county to drive in.

Source: Much of this information has been supplied by www.comparethemarket.com

Healthy Homes for Wellbeing Service



▲ Photo Credit: Imageegami (iStock)

Exeter Community Energy's 'Healthy Homes for Wellbeing Project' provides free energy and money saving advice for people living in Exeter, Mid Devon, East Devon, Teignbridge and Torbay.

Their team of Home Energy Advisers provide practical energy advice and support with the aim of helping residents save money and stay warm in their homes.

They can help you with:

- tariff checks and supplier switching
- registering for the Priority Services Register
- energy and water saving tips and advice
- grants for insulation and heating

“Making Community Energy Work for Everyone!”

- heating control advice
- Smart Meters
- support with benefits checks and debt help
- Fuel vouchers and much more!

Devon in Sight client Ray from Torbay visited the Exeter Community Energy stand at The Devon Sight Loss Conference.

Ray said, “I made an appointment for a home visit by a representative from Exeter Community Energy. I was hoping to learn something to my advantage, and possibly save some money.

A Home Energy Adviser visited me at home and provided me with free energy and money saving advice, including advice on an accessible in-home display (see page 28).

He also gave me impartial advice on my energy tariff, and he checked to ensure my white goods were efficient and, in the event, they needed upgrading, if eligible, they could also provide grants to replace them. Whilst there he changed my light bulbs to energy saving LED bulbs. I have no hesitation in recommending the Exeter Community Energy Healthy Homes for Wellbeing Free Energy Check to others.”

For more information please visit: www.ecoe.org.uk

To be referred to Exeter Community Energy please ring:

Helpline 01392 876 666

The Helpline is open between 10am and 2pm Monday to Friday

Mythbusting Smart Meters



▲ Photo Credit: Google

With the ongoing Cost of Living Crisis, Smart Meters allow you to see how much energy is being used and where you can take steps to reduce your consumption.

Smart Meters tell your energy company how much gas and electricity you're using so you don't need to provide meter readings and your bills are based on actual rather than estimated meter readings.

FACT: Smart meters are just as accurate as traditional meters.

FACT: Smart meters only transmit information about how much energy you've used to your energy supplier. There is no smart meter conspiracy: smart meters are not spying on you!

FACT: Smart meters are installed at no extra cost to you. You don't have to pay any extra for your smart meter to be installed.

“Smart meters are a smart choice for you, and our nation!”

FACT: People with smart meters have the same consumer protections as people with traditional meters.

FICTION: You might have heard people talk about not being able to change supplier as a disadvantage or downside of smart meters. But this is not true - you can change supplier with a smart meter. In fact, with a second-generation smart meter, you should be able to switch energy supplier without any interruption to your energy readings or bill payments.

FICTION: You may also have heard about radiation in the context of smart meter dangers. Know the truth about smart meter health and safety: the level of radiation that smart meters produce is typically one million times less than guideline levels. This is lower than the levels of radiation produced by microwaves, TVs and mobile phones.

FICTION: Smart Meters are not connected to your heating system. They do not interfere with the heating settings.

Contact your energy supplier to discuss the options available to you as not every home can have a smart metre installed.

Anyone with sight loss can ask their energy supplier for a free **Accessible In-Home Display (AIHD)**, the name for a new easy to see display for their smart meter.

Source: SMART Energy GB

To receive a copy of our **Smart Meters Fact Sheet** ring:

Helpline 01392 876 666

The Helpline is open between 10am and 2pm Monday to Friday

Speaker Seminars Winter 2023/4

Devon in Sight's Telephone-based Sight Loss Seminars are an opportunity for you to hear from our partners across the Health and Social Care and Voluntary sectors, in the comfort of your own home.

Sight Loss Speaker Seminars take place every second Tuesday of the month at 10.30am on Freephone 0808 169 79 30. Calls from your home telephone or mobile are FREE.

Audio recordings of previous seminars are available through the Devon in Sight Website under the Events section or by using the QR Code opposite.



Tuesday 12 December 2023

'Race Across the World and Beyond'

Tricia Sail and her friend Cathie Rowe took part in the third series of the hit BBC Television series **'Race Across the World'**.

Tricia who is Severely Visually Impaired and Cathie raced across Canada without smart phones, internet access or credit cards and on a very limited budget.

Our Guest Speakers are **Tricia Sail**, Community Connection Coordinator for RNIB (Devon) and **Cathie Rowe** a Pharmacy Manager who lives in Wales.



▲ Tricia Sail & Cathie Rowe

Tuesday 9 January 2024

'Making Community Energy Work for Everybody'

Exeter Community Energy was established by eight local people in 2014 who were brought together by Transition Exeter's energy group.

Their vision is for renewable energy projects to bring about practical change in our community by addressing energy related challenges.

Our Guest Speaker is **Tara Bowers**, Healthy Homes Project Manager from **Exeter Community Energy**.



▲ Tara Bowers

Tuesday 13 February 2024

'Introducing Devon Carers'

This is a service provided by Devon-based charity Westbank and is commissioned jointly by Devon County Council and the NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group to provide support services and assessments to unpaid carers across Devon.

Our Guest Speaker is **Hayley Buscombe**, Community Engagement Lead, **Devon Carers**.



▲ Hayley Buscombe

To access Telephone Sight Loss Speaker Seminars ring:

Tel: 0808 169 79 30

Calls from your home telephone or mobile are **FREE**

Globe trotting with George Jones



▲ Photo Credit: Jennie Benham (Devon in Sight)

▲ (Left to Right) George, Grahame and Caroline

On Tuesday 10 October, Devon in Sight's Chief Executive Officer Grahame Flynn welcomed George Jones and his mother Caroline to our monthly telephone-based Sight Loss Speaker Event.

Despite being Severely Visually Impaired George had set himself the challenge of visiting thirty countries before his 30th Birthday. It was a delight to hear George share his post diagnosis journey to becoming a keen globetrotter.

Prior to his sight loss George had a career in hospitality and catering, working as a chef at several local pubs and restaurants in South Devon. Sadly this changed when his sight condition meant that he could no longer distinguish colours correctly.

'Despite being Severely Visually Impaired George Jones set himself the challenge of visiting 30 countries before his 30th Birthday'

George explained, "I have Bilateral Optic Atrophy which means that my sight has deteriorated and now I have between 6% to 8% sight left. Since losing my sight I have been to college and achieved several level three courses at College in Hereford. These qualifications will hopefully allow me to return to work."

Caroline recalled the day that George had accepted an invitation to visit a friend in New Zealand. Her abiding memory was waving her blind son off knowing that he couldn't even read the signs at the airport!

Despite his solo holiday experience George confessed, "I enjoy travelling and take my mother with me. I particularly love cruising and would like to visit as many countries as I can. We're a pretty good team together."

Having been bitten by the travelling bug, George shared his inspirational tales of visiting countries like Alaska, Iceland and New Zealand. He talked fondly of Whale Watching and the fact that despite his poor sight he can still experience so much on his travels through his other senses.

Regular caller Les Mazurek suggested that George ought to try and find a way to write an internet blog or a book about his travels.

We would like to thank George and Caroline for sharing their story.



To access our **Speaker Event Recordings Archive** please visit:

www.devonninsight.org.uk

Audio recordings can be found on the home page under **EVENTS**

Community Fundraising

£600 raised



▲ Photo Credit: Nora Parminter (Credition Courier)

▲ CREDITON FREEMASONS HALL

In September we were delighted to receive a cheque for £600 from The Unity Lodge of Freemasons which meet in CREDITON.



Freemasons are a unique members' organisation which has thrived for over 300 years. They have ceremonial traditions which encourage their membership both to be more tolerant and respectful and actively to fulfil their civic and charitable responsibilities; they also make time to eat, drink and meet together, and form lifelong friendships.

Charity Steward Peter Coleman said, "One of our members asked that his private fund should be donated to an organisation helping people with sight difficulty."

We would like to thank Unity Lodge for their kind donation.

Our Community supporting people living with sight loss in Devon

Friends of Devon in Sight

We know that times are hard for everyone, but if you are able to support us with a small donation, it means we can continue our vital work.

Our Regular Giving Scheme 'Friends of Devon in Sight' is the best way that you can support your local sight loss charity during these very challenging times. You can give as little or as much as you would like with a monthly direct debit.

Could you spare the cost of a cup of coffee to help fund future editions of this magazine, to provide counselling sessions for people in crisis, to keep our telephone support services running?

Everyone who joins our Regular Giving Scheme 'Friends of Devon in Sight' will receive a limited edition, 'I'm a Friend of Devon in Sight' enamel badge.



Other Ways to Donate

If you would like to make a donation over the telephone, by cheque, by Bank Transfer or leave us a gift in your Will, you can speak confidentially about the options available to you with our Office Manager, Jennie Benham.

To support Devon in Sight with a donation please ring:

Helpline 01392 876 666

The Helpline is open between 10am and 2pm Monday to Friday

Community Champion Awards

Devon in Sight is keen to recognise outstanding customer service from an individual or organisation for people who are blind or partially sighted in Devon.

We would like to thank those of you who have taken the time to share your positive experiences of customer service.

All nominees will receive a Community Champion Certificate.

Bill's Opticians, Newton Abbot

Devon in Sight client Mark Harper and his wife Tracey were far from happy following a bad experience at a popular High Street Opticians. Tracey left the premises with a pair of glasses that she was struggling to see through. She decided to seek a second opinion with an independent optician. Tracey found her way to Bill's Opticians in Newton Abbot.

It was quickly established that she had been given the wrong prescription lenses. Instead of returning to the former optician Tracey decided to stay with Bill's and allow them to carry out another sight test. The couple were very impressed with the level of their professionalism from carrying out so many different tests. They even sent her home with her eye scan.

Mark said, "Tracey was very reassured that all was well with her eyes and the experience with Bill's had been so positive".

Both Mark and Tracey would like to thank the team at Bill's for all their reassurance and the service they provided.



Recognising outstanding customer service for people who are blind or partially sighted in Devon

Marvel Fitness, Kingsbridge

George Jones who is Severely Visually Impaired has nominated his Personal Trainer, Devi Majumdar at Marvel Fitness, Kingsbridge for a Community Champion Award.

George says, "Devi provides me with a personal, tailor made fitness programme. She ensures all the exercises are accessible to me and then personalises the exercise specifically for me."

Marvel Fitness ensures that any new exercise being introduced is accessible for people with sight loss and they seek input from George. This supports not just him but others with varying sight loss conditions.

George added, "Devi has given me confidence to understand my body and what it can do".

Devon in Sight is delighted to be able to make this Community Award to Devi Majumdar particularly when keeping your body and mind healthy is so important.



If you would like to nominate someone for a **Devon in Sight Community Champion Award** please ring:

Helpline 01392 876 666

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Seeing in the New Year Campaign 2024



Devon in Sight's CEO Grahame Flynn launched our first Seeing in the New Year Campaign in December 2013. The premise is simple. 'Seeing in the New Year' promotes the importance of regular eye tests for everyone.

Eye tests are vital because you may not feel any pain or discomfort when something is wrong with your eyes. A visit to your optician for an examination is an important health check that may detect initial signs of eye conditions before you're aware of any symptoms.

It is important to remember that many eye conditions can be treated if found early. Having an eye test won't just tell you if you need new glasses or a change of prescription - it's an important eye health check. An eye test can help identify other health conditions such as high cholesterol, diabetes, high blood pressure and increased risk of stroke.

"Don't take the sight you have for granted!"

Visit Your Optician Regularly

Everyone needs the regular eye tests that are part of a visit to the Optician, even young children. Tests can identify conditions like glaucoma or macular degeneration that may not have any symptoms in the early stages. It's important to spot them early, and to get treatment.

An appointment should include talking about your personal and family medical history, vision tests to see if you're near sighted, far sighted, have an astigmatism, or any age-related vision changes. Tests to see how well your eyes work together, a Field of Vision test, eye pressure to check for glaucoma and an optional OCT Scan of the retina.

Eat Well

Good eye health starts with the food on your plate. Try to include the following in your diet. Dark green leafy vegetables like kale and spinach, salmon, tuna, and other oily fish, eggs, nuts, beans, and other non meat protein sources, oranges and other citrus fruits or juices, oysters and pork.

Stop Smoking

Smoking can increase your chances of developing cataracts, damage to your optic nerve, and macular degeneration. If you've tried to stop before, only to start again, keep trying as the more times you try the more likely you are to succeed. Ask your doctor for help.

Protect your eyes

Sunglasses can help to protect your eyes from the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. Too much UV exposure increases the chance of cataracts and macular degeneration.

- Choose a pair that blocks 99% to 100% of UVA and UVB rays.
- Wraparound lenses help protect your eyes from the side.
- If you wear contact lenses, some offer UV protection, but it's still a good idea to wear sunglasses for extra protection.

Wear safety glasses

- If you are using hazardous or airborne materials at work or at home, wear safety glasses.
- If you play sport that could cause injury to your eyes, wear appropriate eye protection, helmets with protective face masks or sports goggles with polycarbonate lenses to protect your eyes.

Keep Active

Being physically active can improve the blood supply to the eyes, your balance and general wellbeing. You don't need to run a marathon to get the benefits!

- If you are sitting for any length of time, get up, stretch gently and walk around.
- Take a daily walk outside if you can
- If you play a sport, ask us how you could continue, even with some sight loss
- Take part in armchair exercises which are often included as part of TV programmes.

Take time away from computer screens

If you spend a long time on your computer, tablet or smart phone, make sure your glasses prescription is up to date and suitable for looking at a screen.

- If you suffer from eye strain, talk to your Optician about computer glasses.

- Move the screen so your eyes are level with the top of the monitor. That lets you look slightly down at the screen.
- Try to avoid glare from windows and lights. Use an anti-glare screen if needed.
- Choose a comfortable, supportive chair. Position it so that your feet are flat on the floor.
- If your eyes are dry, blink more or try using artificial tears.
- Rest your eyes every 20 minutes. Look 20 feet away for 20 seconds. Get up at least every 2 hours and take a 15-minute break.

Finally, please share this voucher with friends and family to help them protect their sight too.

M&S
— OPTICIANS —

Visit M&S Opticians to claim
your free eye test and free
hearing health check

Show our team code **DEVINS24FET** when you arrive for your appointment. Call your local store or visit **mandsopticians.com** to book online today.

Terms and conditions apply. Available from our opticians in M&S Torbay, Plymouth and Exeter. Offer valid until 31st March 2024.

An Overview of Our Services

Devon in Sight offers a range of holistic services for people who are blind or partially sighted, their families, friends and carers who live or work in Devon.

This is a summary of our core services.

Our Information, Advice and Guidance Service

We are committed to providing accurate and impartial Information, Advice and Guidance. You can access our comprehensive information resources through our Helpline on **01392 876 666**. Our website is available at **www.devoninsight.org.uk**

In Vision Magazine is available FREE in a range of accessible formats - large print, digitally via email and in audio. It can also be accessed on your smart phone through the **British Wireless for the Blind App**.

Our Independent Living Service

We work with you to identify the equipment, support and training that will help you maintain your independence and live life to the full. We undertake this valuable work in partnership with Health and Social Care and the voluntary sector.

We have a unique **Assistive Technology Partnership** with Sight and Sound Ltd., the UK's leading provider of equipment, software and services for people who are blind and partially sighted.

We also offer **Living Well with Sight Loss Events** across the county where you can meet partners in Health & Social care, the voluntary sector and community groups.

Devon in Sight - Supporting people affected by sight loss in Devon

Our Health & Wellbeing Service

Our Health and Wellbeing Service aims to help keep you physically and mentally fit and safe in your home. We can help you make some healthy lifestyle choices such as smoking cessation or arrange a FREE home safety check with the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service. We can also provide **emotional support** and in some cases **formal counselling**.

For fun, friendship and really useful information about living life with low vision you can join our free telephone based **Chit-Chat Calls**. To access the calls simply dial **0808 169 79 30** at **10.30am** every **Wednesday morning**.

Our free **Telephone Speaker Seminars** take place monthly with speakers from across the sight loss sector and beyond. These are structured so that following a formal information sharing presentation; listeners can contribute by asking questions and share their lived experiences of sight loss. **A schedule of events and joining instructions can be found on pages 30 and 31.**

Influencing Change

We believe that it is important that people who are blind or partially sighted, their family and carers have a voice in the development of sight loss services and other community services across Devon. **We are pleased to hear your thoughts about how services across Devon can be improved.**

For more information about our services please ring:

Helpline 01392 876 666

The Helpline is open between 10am and 2pm Monday to Friday

Articles for the Blind

Return Address: Devon in Sight
Splatford Barton, Splatford, Kennford
Exeter, EX6 7XY



Devon in Sight
Your local sight loss charity

Christmas Opening

Closes
2pm Friday
22 December 2023

Opens
10am Tuesday
2 January 2024

01392 876 666

enquiries@devoninsight.org.uk
www.devoninsight.org.uk

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