Devon in Sight
Your local sight loss charity

100 YEARS
1925 - 2025

In Vision

The magazine of Devon in Sight

Spring 2026 Issue 46



Industry Vision Group: Parliamentary Reception at The House of Commons

FREE MAGAZINE

Spring 2026 - Issue 46

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Editor
Grahame Flynn

Contributors
Tessa Barrett
Mandy Darling
Louise Millington
Sarah Small

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Sight Loss Helpline 01392 876 666

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

Chief Executive Officer's

Welcome



Welcome to the Spring Edition of In Vision Magazine.

After the cold, dark days of winter, the spring brings new life and fresh hope to the world.

It's incredible to think that Devon in Sight has been serving people living with little or no sight and their families for over 100 years. It was a privilege to lead our charity through its centenary year and to meet so many of you at our community events and annual conference.

However, this year will see a change of leadership at the charity as I have taken the very difficult decision to move on from Devon in Sight. I won't be leaving until the end of March and I very much look forward to introducing you to my successor in the coming pages.

Even though I'm going, it is very much business as usual at the charity. We are delighted to announce the dates for our forthcoming programme of Living Well with Sight Loss Events, our Sight Loss Speaker Seminars and Peer Support Chit-Chat Calls. This year we've introduced two Assistive Technology Clinics in partnership with Sight & Sound Technology. We've also secured the date for our 4th Devon Sight Loss Conference.

May I take this opportunity to thank you all for your support over the last 13 years.

Onwards and Upwards!

Grahame Flynn
Chief Executive Officer

A message from our CEO Grahame Flynn

‘I hope that my tenure at Devon in Sight has been characterised by honesty, integrity and kindness!’



▲ Photo Credit: Sarah Small (Devon in Sight)

▲ Devon in Sight’s CEO Grahame Flynn

Having led Devon in Sight for 13 years, including its centenary year, I have taken the very difficult decision to move on.

Please be assured that this has not been a sudden decision, but a carefully planned transition of leadership to minimise disruption to the staff team and our front line services.

My news has come as a shock to many, but it is completely my decision and mine alone. Thirteen years in one post is a long time. I’m looking forward to a break with my family, some travel and then on to the next adventure.

I took over the leadership of Devon in Sight in 2013 following a period of hiatus. Much has changed in the ensuing decade. I am delighted that Devon in Sight is now a multi award-winning charity of local, regional and national standing.

We have received national recognition for our holistic needs assessment the ‘Sight Loss MOT’ and our specialist counselling services. I am particularly proud of our work during the COVID-19 pandemic where we coordinated so much support for our residents living with sight loss and our workplace COVID protocols were adopted nationally.

It has been a privilege representing people with little or no sight in Devon. My consortium of sight loss charity leaders from across the South West of England is now part of the National Visionary Network. Our campaigns have included accessible information for NHS patients, helped keep train station ticket offices from closure and providing disability awareness training for Bus Drivers.

We also pioneered a unique Assistive Technology Partnership with Sight and Sound Technology and we work closely with The Retina Clinic London to raise awareness of cutting edge Clinical Trials and Research. Fire safety is very close to my heart. We were one of the first community partners for the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service home safety visits, that so many of you have engaged with.

Mahatma Gandhi said, *“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”* I hope that my tenure at Devon in Sight has been characterised by honesty, integrity, passion, empathy and kindness. I have been blessed with a talented, committed and passionate team of staff and volunteers. I would like to thank everyone at Devon in Sight, past and present for their support over the last thirteen years. You know who you are!

I wish my successor Richard Pike, the very best of luck and hope that he will continue the fight to *make Devon a Sight Loss friendly county!*

Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Introducing new CEO Richard Pike

"It is very exciting to be taking over the running of Devon in Sight just after its centennial year."



◀ Photo Credit: Richard Pike (Devon in Sight)

▲ Incoming CEO Richard Pike takes the hotseat!

In November 2025 we started the quest for a worthy successor to our long-standing CEO Grahame Flynn. In January interviews took place with seven potential candidates all of whom brought extensive skills to the table.

The successful candidate, Richard Pike, will be joining Devon in Sight in March 2026 and taking over the reins as CEO in April from Grahame who has led the charity very successfully for 13 years.

Richard has a long and varied history of working with and supporting charities across the sector. He has been a Trustee of multiple charities over the last 20 years and was a founding Trustee of a charity set up to support a school providing free education in a rural part of Zambia.

In his professional capacity as a fund manager at a national investment firm, Richard specialised in managing long term reserves on behalf of dozens of different charities which gave him an invaluable insight into the workings of charities and the challenges they face together with a range of strategies adopted to meet those challenges. This role also equipped him with an excellent understanding of the regulatory and governance requirements needed by charities in order to thrive.

At various times in the past, Richard has been Chair of Trustees of his village hall and set up a Community Interest Company in order to organise and run a biennial street party in his village to reduce social isolation and build community spirit whilst raising funds for local causes.

Prior to his time in the financial services industry, Richard was an officer in the Royal Navy for 5 years where he trained to be a navigator (Observer) in the airborne early warning Sea King helicopter and was awarded his wings.

In his spare time, Richard loves to walk with his wife, particularly on the South West Coast Path which they have fully completed at least once. He is also a keen runner and has completed two London Marathons as well as countless half marathons. Richard is an enthusiastic fly fisherman but by his own admission is not very good at it!

Richard said, "It is very exciting to be taking over the running of Devon in Sight just after its centennial year and leading it boldly into its second century and building on the fabulous foundations already in place. I am also looking forward to meeting many of the different stakeholders involved with the charity, over the coming months."

Parliamentary Reception



▲ Photo Credit: Devon in Sight

▲ (L-R) Tessa Barrett, Prof. Stanga, Steve Darling MP, Sebastian Stanga and Grahame Flynn

The Industry Vision Group is a cross-industry forum of pharmaceutical and medical technology companies with expertise and an interest in eye health, working towards a shared ambition of preventing avoidable sight loss in the UK.

In May 2025 The Industry Vision Group hosted a virtual roundtable event bringing together stakeholders from across the Health and the Third Sectors to provide their expert insights and perspectives into sight loss services in Devon. We were pleased to be invited to represent the Third Sector.

On Monday 15th December 2025 Devon in Sight's Sight Loss Ambassador Steve Darling MP hosted a Parliamentary Reception on behalf of The Industry Vision Group at The House of Commons, London.

Devon in Sight: Influencing change locally, regionally and nationally!

Devon in Sight's CEO Grahame Flynn and Head of Services Tessa Barrett were invited to attend this prestigious event.

The Industry Vision Group presented their report 'Best Practice in Focus: A Blueprint for Eye Health through the 10 Year Health Plan' to the audience of parliamentarians, strategists and practitioners. The report captures the transformative approaches to eye care service delivery that have been pioneered across Devon in recent years.

The solutions introduced in Devon have been formally recognised as exemplar approaches by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists.

We were pleased to hear from Dr Elizabeth Wilkinson, Consultant Medical Ophthalmologist, Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust about services in Devon post COVID-19. In his address Steve Darling MP highlighted his own sight loss journey and the valuable role that Devon in Sight has played in his life.

Our friends from the Retina Clinic London, Professor Paulo Eduardo Stanga and his son Sebastian were able to meet with delegates and promote cutting edge clinical trials and research.

Devon in Sight's CEO Grahame Flynn said, "I am pleased that Devon in Sight was invited to represent the Third Sector at this event. We would also like to thank Steve Darling MP who arranged for a private tour of Parliament including The St. Mary Undercroft beneath the Houses of Parliament, which is not open to the public. We were also able to sit in the Members Area of the House of Lords whilst it was sitting."

Devon in Sight continues to give voice to people living with sight loss in Devon locally, regionally and nationally.

‘Seeing in the New Year’ Campaign 2026



◀ Photo Credit: Sarah Small (Devon in Sight)

▲ Marketing Manager, Sarah Small, undergoing an eye test.

The 30 Minute Resolution - Why booking your eye test should be top of the list for 2026.

What if we told you that having an eye test can prevent irreversible sight loss? It is so much more than just updating your prescription or getting a lovely pair of new glasses, an eye test is crucial for checking your eye health.

Many eye conditions can be detected early using non-invasive equipment, such as Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) and Fundus Photography, technologies that capture detailed images of the back of the eye. Eye conditions that can be detected in this way include age-related macular degeneration (AMD), glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

‘What if we told you that having an eye test can prevent irreversible sight loss?’

As the onset of these conditions can be extremely subtle, they can often go unnoticed, meaning significant damage can occur. Early detection of such conditions means early treatment. Which, in turn, can lead to better overall health, and your sight being saved!

Several health concerns can also be detected through having an eye test. Among others, the list includes autoimmune diseases, neurological disorders, cholesterol and high blood pressure.

Devon in Sight’s annual ‘Seeing in the New Year Campaign’ encourages people to make a New Year’s resolution to have their eyes tested. This is the 13th year that we have run our ‘Seeing in the New Year Campaign’.

We would encourage people of all ages to see an Optician at least every two years. Even people with an existing eye condition, or those that wear glasses, should get their eyes tested regularly as these conditions can worsen or new issues may develop. We, at Devon in Sight, are proud of the work we do with people who are blind or partially sighted, but, as they say, prevention is better than cure.”

We can’t think of a better time to make a change than in the New Year! As our lifestyle choices can have a huge impact on our eye health, be sure that your resolutions also cover the most effective ways of protecting your long-term vision. Smokers, compared to non-smokers, are much more likely to develop cataracts or age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which is the most common cause of sight loss in the UK.

Heavy alcohol consumption may also increase the risk of developing early AMD. To take the very best care of your sight, it is highly recommended to stop smoking and to reduce alcohol intake.

Prioritise your health this New Year, make that 30-minute resolution today.

Hospital Radio Exeter



◀ Photo Credit: Devon in Sight

▲ The Hospital Radio Exeter Studio at R, D & E Exeter

Hospital Radio Exeter is the Radio Station for the patients of the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital (Wonford) and residents of Care Homes in the Exeter area.

On Tuesday 6th January 2026 Grahame Flynn, Mandy Darling, Dr Lisa Gould and Pepsi the Guide Dog were guests of Hospital Radio Exeter's 'Lunchtime Live' programme.

Grahame gave an overview of how County Associations for the Blind were formed after the Blind People's Marches of the 1920s and our current services. Whilst Mandy talked about the challenges of fundraising.

Mandy's music choice was 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree" by Tony Orlando & Dawn which gave her happy memories of being driven home from boarding school.

'Hospital Radio provides tailored, 24-hour audio entertainment and information directly to patients' bedsides.'

Grahame's music choice was the seldom played 'April Showers' by Al Jolson. The 1921 song uses the old proverb "April showers bring May flowers," a sentiment dating back centuries, emphasising that difficult times (rain) lead to beautiful outcomes (flowers).

Grahame took the opportunity to remind listeners that up to 50% of sight loss in the UK is avoidable by having regular eye tests which can also detect numerous health issues.

How to Access Hospital Radio Exeter

While in Hospital
On Hospedia Channel 1 (Radio is free)

App
Hospital Radio Exeter has it's own App and is available on the Google Play and the Apple App Store

Listen online
You can listen to Hospital Radio Exeter online via your computer or connected device. You can access the live player at any time directly using the link:
www.hospitalradioexeter.com

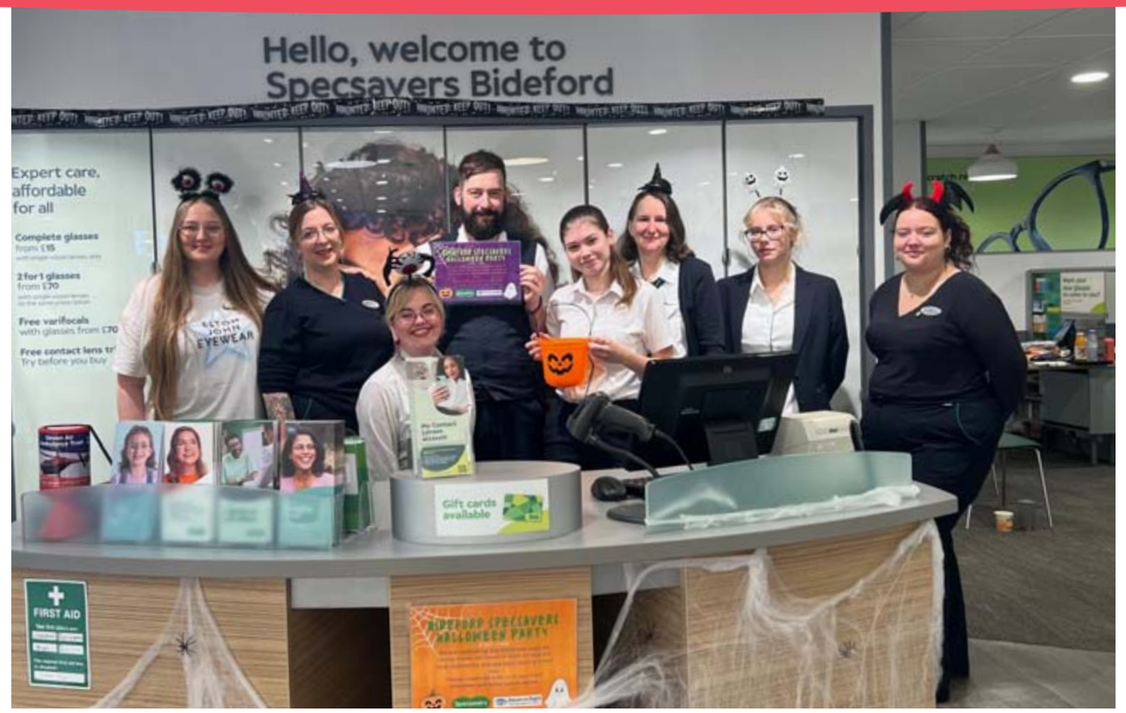
Smart speakers
"Alexa, enable Hospital Radio Exeter!"

It's that easy to get their Alexa skill enabled on your Amazon 'Alexa' compatible device. Once enabled, just simply say "Alexa, play Hospital Radio Exeter" and the radio station will start playing. You'll then be able to listen to Hospital Radio Exeter anywhere you have an 'Alexa' device.

hospital radio exeter

Community Fundraising

Our Community supporting people living with sight loss in Devon!



◀ Photo Credit: Specsavers Bideford

▲ Specsavers Bideford Staff Team

As you may already be aware, Devon in Sight receives no statutory funding and we rely on community fundraising, donations and Trusts and Grants to operate.

Many people generously give their time to raise precious funds for our charity. We would like to say a big thank you to all our fundraisers.

Specsavers Bideford

During Halloween week the staff at Specsavers Bideford got into the spirit with creepy costumes, all whilst raising **£55** in donations for Devon in Sight.



◀ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn (Devon in Sight)

▲ Grahame Flynn with Michael Judd in Freemason's Hall, Exeter

St. John the Baptist Chapter No. 39, Exeter

On the evening of Wednesday 3rd December 2025 Devon in Sight's CEO Grahame Flynn gave a presentation to the Royal Arch Companions of St. John the Baptist Chapter in Exeter.

Michael Judd had selected Devon in Sight as his late mother had received our services when we were based in Topsham. We would like to thank everyone at St. John's for their donation of **£250** towards our services.

Courtand Lodge No. 6706, Paignton

The Worshipful Master of Courtand Lodge No.6706 Paignton Worshipful Brother Derek Burtenshaw chose Devon in Sight as his charity of the year for his term of office in 2025. We were delighted to receive a donation of **£1000** towards our Equipment Bursary Fund.

Community Fundraising

Opticians turn kilometers into kindness with 10,000km challenge for people with sight loss!



◀ Photo Credit: Devon in Sight

▲ Mandy Darling with Tom Mannering at Huxter & Davy

The team at Huxter and Davy Opticians, who have branches in Padstow, Looe, Torpoint, and Kingsbridge, have challenged themselves to run, walk, and cycle the incredible distance of 10,000km to represent the 10,000 people registered with sight loss in the two counties.

The staff will be doing activities in their own free time to count towards the challenge and collectively they must complete 27.4km every day to stay on track to reach the target by the end of 2026.

Optician, Tom Mannering said, “The reason for this challenge is twofold, firstly we have such an incredible patient base who’ve come back to see us these past few years and looked after us, so we wanted to give something back to our local communities. Secondly we’ve partnered up with two fantastic charities, Devon in Sight and iSightCornwall - the two dedicated sight loss charities for Devon and Cornwall – and we want to raise as much money as we can for these wonderful charities this year.”

Company Director Charlotte Davy said, “At Huxter and Davy we pride ourselves on delivering exceptional care and customer service to our patients. Every step, pedal, and stride will be a tribute to the 10,000 people registered as living with sight loss in Devon and Cornwall as well as a push towards better support, awareness, and accessibility. Please join us as we turn kilometres into kindness, and movement into meaningful change.”

We would like to send our sincere gratitude to all the team at Huxter and Davy Opticians for choosing Devon in Sight to benefit from this amazing challenge, and wish them all the very best with their endeavours. Sight loss can have a huge impact on a person’s ability to carry out everyday tasks as well as having a significant effect on their emotional wellbeing.

As a small local independent charity, we rely on donations and the activities of fantastic fundraisers to be able to operate. Good luck to everyone taking part in the challenge!

To support the Huxter and Davy team’s challenge, visit: https://justgiving.com/page/huxter-and-davy-3

SCAN ME

Community Fundraising



▲ Photo Credit: Delia Kennedy

▲ Delia Kennedy on a previous ‘Walk for Sight’ Challenge

Delia’s ‘Walk for Sight’ 2026

There’s no stopping octogenarian Delia Kennedy who is ‘Walking for Sight’ again this year. She will be walking 200 miles over the months of March and April to raise funds for our work.

You can support Delia via her Just Giving page at **www.justgiving.com/page/delia-kennedy-1**

Alternatively, you can send a cheque made payable to ‘Devon in Sight’ to the editorial address. Please mark the envelope Walk for Sight or ‘Delia’.

SCAN ME

Our Community supporting people living with sight loss in Devon!



▲ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn (Devon in Sight)

▲ Ella Morgan getting ready for her challenge

Ella’s ‘Run for Sight’ 2026

Former Devon in Sight Support Worker Ella Morgan will be running the AJ Bell Great Bristol Run on Sunday 10 May 2026. Each year, thousands of runners run Bristol’s super-scenic 10k and half marathon Great Bristol Run routes. Loved by Bristolians and beyond, it boasts stunning views, inspiring history and graffiti murals.

You can support Ella via her Just Giving page at **www.justgiving.com/page/ella-morgann** Alternatively, you can send a cheque made payable to ‘Devon in Sight’ to the editorial address. Please mark the envelope Run for Sight or simply ‘Ella’.

SCAN ME

Supporting You Feature

An Overview of Our Services

Helping You Navigate Your Sight Loss Journey!

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 designed to help you navigate your sight loss journey.

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 as a PDF and audio file through our website at **www.devoninsight.org.uk** under NEWS.

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 Third Sector.

We work with **Sight and Sound Technology Ltd.**, the UK's leading provider of equipment, software and services for people who are blind and partially sighted. We provide an **Employment Hub** in partnership with **Thomas Pocklington Trust** to support people into work or change careers.

Our **Living Well with Sight Loss Events** take place across the county where you can meet partners in Health & Social Care, the Third Sector and Community Groups.

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 which take place every first and third Wednesday of the month. To access the calls simply dial 0808 169 79 30 at 10.30am.**

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 32 and 33.**

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. **If you would like to support the charity to make Devon a Sight Loss Friendly County give us a call.**

To receive our latest Welcome Pack please ring:

Sight Loss Helpline 01392 876 666

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

Living Well with Sight Loss Events 2026

Helping you maintain your independence and live life to the full



◀ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn (Devon in Sight)

▲ Sight Loss Adviser Louise Millington at a previous event

In March 2026 we start this year's schedule of Living Well with Sight Loss Events around Devon.

Devon in Sight's Living Well with Sight Loss Events are an ideal opportunity to meet with our partners in Health & Social Care, the Third Sector and Community Groups all of whom can help you on your sight loss journey. Exhibitors usually include Rehabilitation Officers from the Sensory Teams, Low Vision and Daily Living Equipment Suppliers, Blind Clubs, Talking Newspapers, The Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service together with local and national charities.

Registered clients of Devon in Sight will automatically receive an invitation to the event in their area. Please register your interest in attending these events by ringing the helpline.

Living Well with Sight Loss Event Schedule 2026

Our Living Well with Sight Loss Events are FREE* to attend and refreshments will be provided.

1. Teignbridge & Torbay Event
Tuesday 17th March 2026 (10am-2pm)
Christ Church Paignton, Torquay Road,
Paignton, TQ3 2AG

2. Mid Devon Event
Thursday 16th April 2026 (10am-2pm)
The Parish Church of St Andrew, Blundell's Avenue,
Tiverton, Devon EX16 4DL

3. North Devon & Torridge Event
Tuesday 19 May 2026 (10am-2pm)
Westward Ho! Baptist Church
42 Nelson Drive, Westward Ho! EX39 1LQ

4. Plymouth & South Hams Event
Thursday 11 June 2026 (10am-2pm)
Totnes Civic Hall, Market Square, Totnes TQ9 5SF

5. Exeter & East Devon Event*
Thursday 15th October 2026 (10am-4pm)
The Annual Devon Sight Loss Conference & AGM
Mercure Exeter Rougemont Hotel, Exeter

*** The Exeter Event is held as part of The Devon Sight Loss Conference & AGM and has a small fee to help cover costs.**

To **Register your interest in attending** these events please ring:

Sight Loss Helpline 01392 876 666

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

Sight Village South West returns to Devon

The unmissable event where you can connect, explore, and experience everything in person!



◀ Photo Credit: Queen Alexandra College

▲ Visitors to a Sight Village Event

Queen Alexandra College (Q.A.C.) is a national college for the blind, visually impaired and learners with Asperger's Syndrome and/or Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

For over 30 years, Q.A.C's Sight Village has been the place where communities, professionals, and organisations come together to share knowledge, try new products, and experience assistive technology in a vibrant, sensory-rich environment.

Alongside their flagship Central England and London events, they travel across the UK with roadshows in cities such as Leeds, Blackpool, Exeter, Cardiff, Glasgow, and many more—ensuring communities nationwide can experience Sight Village first-hand.

Sight Village South West will be taking place at Westpoint Conference Centre, Exeter on Tuesday 14th April 2026.

This unmissable event is for all ages, professionals supporting VIPs, and businesses enhancing services for the low-vision community.

In 2026, visitors can once again see, touch, and experience the very latest tools and services designed to enhance independence and wellbeing.

Step into the UK's premier exhibition for blind and low-vision communities—now bigger, bolder, and more inspiring than ever. Every Sight Village event takes place under one roof, in a large, fully inclusive space designed for comfort, accessibility, and hands-on discovery.

Discover the latest technology, products, and services that make everyday life easier and more enjoyable. Get hands-on with brand-new innovations, explore emerging trends, and speak directly with leading experts from across the sector.

Explore an impressive range of charities, businesses, and voluntary organisations from the UK, Europe, and beyond—showcasing products and services.

Admission to all Sight Village events is currently FREE.

sight village South-West

To Register for Sight Village ring Queen Alexandra College on:

Telephone 0121 428 50 50

Website: www.qac.ac.uk

Assistive Technology Clinics Exeter

Sight and Sound Technology strive to provide the best solution and support to improve the lives of those who have a sensory disability.



▲ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn (Devon in Sight)

▲ Stefanie Davies from Sight & Sound Technology Ltd.

Devon in Sight has a long term partnership arrangement with Sight & Sound Technology, the UK's leading provider of equipment, software and services for people who are blind and partially sighted.

For those of you who do not like the hustle and bustle of Sight Village we will be offering two Assistive Technology Clinics at our head office where you can book a private consultation with the Sight & Sound Technology team.

Our friends Stefanie Davies and Iain Kennedy will be providing hour long appointments for detailed equipment demonstrations tailored to your needs.



▲ Iain Kennedy

Alternatively, you can make an appointment for a more general overview of Assistive Technology Solutions.

Assistive Technology Clinic Dates 2026

Wednesday 15th April 2026 & Tuesday 23rd June 2026
Devon in Sight, Unit 3, Splatford Barton, Kennford, Exeter, EX6 7XY

Sight & Sound's Services include: Braille notetakers, video magnifiers and scan and read solutions, hand picked new technology solutions, a wide range of Apps and Smart Home Solutions, accredited suppliers for students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance and employees in receipt of Access to Work Allowance and a wide range of supported IT services.

The Devon in Sight Team will be on hand to tell you more about our services too. Sighted family members may like to try our **VisualEYES Sight Loss Simulator** to gain a better understanding of what it is like to live with a sight loss condition for themselves.

If you would like to attend these events you must book an appointment or register so that we manage the clinic. Give us a call today to discuss your Assistive Technology needs.

To book your Sight & Sound Consultation Appointment ring:

Sight Loss Helpline 01392 876 666

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

Telephone Chit-Chat Call Service

"The Chit-Chat Call really lifts my mood for the day!"



◀ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn (Devon in Sight)

▲ Regular Chit-Chat Call host Tessa Barrett

Blind and partially sighted people can feel cut off from the people and things around them. This is compounded by inaccessible information, difficulty with everyday tasks such as shopping for groceries and problems navigating pavements or using public transport.

Chit-Chat Calls provide a welcoming and compassionate place where callers can support one another and build confidence. They help break down feelings of isolation giving our clients the opportunity to meet others experiencing sight loss.

This service is usually facilitated by Tessa Barrett our Head of Services.

Tessa explains, "Devon in Sight's Chit-Chat Calls provide a safe space for callers to air thoughts, share experiences and ask questions.

This type of peer support fosters an atmosphere of non-judgmental support, promoting openness and personal growth. There is no obligation to take part in the conversation so you can just listen if you want to and join when you are ready. We look forward to you joining us."

Chit-Chat Call Schedule 2026

March 2026

- 10.30 - 11.30am Wednesday 4 March 2026
- 10.30 - 11.30am Wednesday 18 March 2026

April 2026

- 10.30 - 11.30am Wednesday 1 April 2026
- 10.30 - 11.30am Wednesday 15 April 2026

May 2026

- 10.30 - 11.30am Wednesday 6 May 2026
- 10.30 - 11.30am Wednesday 20 May 2026

June 2026

- 10.30 - 11.30am Wednesday 3 June 2026
- 10.30 - 11.30am Wednesday 17 June 2026

Chit-Chat Calls are free from your landline and mobile telephones.

To access our Chit-Chat Call Service for FREE please ring:

FREEPHONE 0808 169 79 30

Calls start at 10.30am prompt and finish at 11.30am

Clinical Trials for Stargardt's

"The Retina Clinic London has become the first site for a new clinical trial in Stargardt's"



◀ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn (Devon in Sight)

▲ Innovative imaging equipment at The Retina Clinic London

Our friends at the Retina Clinic London, are dedicated to advancing retinal care through cutting-edge research and clinical innovation. They actively collaborate with the pharmaceutical industry to bring the latest treatments to patients, ensuring that individuals have greater choice in their ophthalmic care.

The Retina Clinic's clinical trials provide patients with early access to pioneering therapies, often years before they become widely available. Led by Professor Stanga and his team of world-renowned retinal specialists, they focus on developing new diagnostic techniques, advanced treatments, and surgical innovations to improve vision outcomes.

The Retina Clinic has become the first site for a new clinical trial in Stargardt's. This is a Phase 1 industry-sponsored gene therapy study.

Stargardt disease is a rare, inherited condition causing progressive loss of central vision, affecting detailed and colour sight due to damage in the macula (center of the retina), often starting in childhood with blurry vision, wavy sight, or blind spots, but typically leaving peripheral vision intact, with no cure but management focused on low vision aids and supportive care. It's linked to gene mutations (like ABCA4), causing buildup of toxic waste (lipofuscin) in the eye, leading to photoreceptor cell death.

They will be receiving patients from across the United Kingdom and looking after them at their site. All clinical trials conducted at Retina Clinic London have full ethics committee approvals, ensuring patient safety, ethical integrity, and scientific validity. In many of these studies, Professor Paulo Stanga serves as the Chief Investigator at a national level, overseeing the trial's implementation across multiple sites and playing a key role in the ethics approval process.

As usual, the trial is free of charge with all travel expenses covered for you and an accompanying person. This means that it will be easy for you to take the train to London for the study and to be accompanied as well. You can also stay overnight in London if necessary for some of the visits, for example, for the surgery.

Whilst Devon in Sight cannot endorse any product or service we can furnish you with more information for you and your Health Care Professional to make informed choices.

To be referred to the **Clinical Trials Team at The Retina Clinic** ring:

Sight Loss Helpline 01392 876 666

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

Health & Wellbeing Feature

Sight Loss Speaker Seminars

Devon in Sight's Telephone-based Sight Loss Speaker Seminars are an opportunity for you to hear from our partners across Health and Social Care, the Third Sector and others 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.

The full archive of Sight Loss Speaker Events can be accessed through our website at www.devoninsight.org.uk (under Events) or by using the QR & Navilens code opposite on your smart phone.

SCAN ME

Tuesday 10 March 2026

'Introducing Age UK'

Age UK is a charity that supports older people (50+) in the UK, providing free information, advice, and practical services to help you live well, from navigating benefits and later life planning to tackling loneliness and offering home help, transport, and digital inclusion assistance.



▲ Sarah Gunn

Our Guest Speaker is **Sarah Gunn, Advice & Wellbeing Manager, Age UK Devon.**

Devon Age UK Let's change how we age

Tuesday 21 April 2026

'Making the Digital World Accessible to All'

For more than 25 years AbilityNet has been a pioneering UK charity, providing specialist services and impartial support to create a digital world accessible to all.

Their free online resources and a network of over 450 community-based volunteers help individuals with any disability and of any age to use all kinds of digital technology.

Our Guest Speaker is **Donna Baker-Smith, Community Relationship Officer, AbilityNet.**



▲ Donna Baker-Smith

AbilityNet

Tuesday 12 May 2026

'Introducing The Rambling Association'

Joining a walking group can be a life-changing experience. It's a chance to meet like-minded people and make new friends while discovering stunning views and exploring new places.

Our Guest Speaker is **Gemma Twitchen, Chair, North Devon Ramblers, The Ramblers Association.** *(TBC)*

RAMBLERS North Devon

To access **Telephone Sight Loss Speaker Seminars** ring:

Tel: 0808 169 79 30

Calls from your home telephone or mobile are FREE

Counsellor Rachel Hoare Qualifies



◀ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn (Devon in Sight)

▲ Rachel Hoare in the Fearnside Counselling Room

As part of Devon in Sight's Health and Wellbeing Service we provide a range of emotional support solutions to anyone whose life has been impacted by sight loss.

One of the services that we developed in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic was an Adult Counselling Service for those people whose emotional distress due to their sight loss was interfering with their ability to function in daily life, or for those in immediate crisis. This innovative new service proved to be phenomenally successful with 100% the participants who completed their therapy sessions demonstrating a clinical improvement. The impact of the service was exceptional.

We always aspired to extend our Adult Counselling Service to include Children and Young People.

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Tessa Barrett, Head of Services adds, "Coincidentally, we were contacted by Rachel Hoare who was nearing the end of her theoretical training as a counsellor and was looking for a placement in order to complete her qualification.

We already knew Rachel from her work with Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service and as we were looking to develop an Emotional Support Service for young people, her approach came at the right time.

We registered Devon in Sight as an agency for placement counsellors. This also gave us the momentum to expand our office space to include a dedicated counselling suite thanks to a legacy left to us by the late Anita Fearnside.

Rachel joined our sessional counselling team on a voluntary basis and has provided over 100 hours of practical therapeutic support to our clients either over the telephone or face-to-face. She has now concluded her time with Devon in Sight and is now a fully qualified and accredited counsellor.

The team at Devon in Sight would like to say a huge thank you to Rachel for all her hard work. Who knows what the future holds for her but we are proud to have played a small part in supporting her achieve her qualification. Rachel continues to offer her services voluntarily.

Devon in Sight's Counselling Project has proved very successful culminating in 2025 with a National Visionary Award for Outstanding Customer Service. We are now seeking funding opportunities to provide this as an ongoing service.

Congratulations Rachel from us all at Devon in Sight.

What is Mindfulness?

Working together to create a healthier, happier life for you.



◀ Photo Credit: fizkes (iStock)

▲ Older lady on the sofa with her eyes closed

For our October 2025 Speaker Event we were joined by Devon in Sight's Placement Counsellor Rachel Hoare. At the end of her presentation we were introduced to a session of mindfulness.

Rachel explains, "It can be easy to rush through life without stopping to notice much. Paying more attention to the present moment; to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you; can improve your mental wellbeing.

Some people call this awareness "mindfulness". Mindfulness can help us enjoy life more and understand ourselves better. You can take steps to develop it in your own life.

Mindfulness involves paying attention to what is going on inside and outside ourselves, moment by moment. It's easy to stop noticing the world around us. It's also easy to lose touch with the way our bodies are feeling and to end up living "in our heads" – caught up in our thoughts without stopping to notice how those thoughts are driving our emotions and behaviour.

An important part of mindfulness is reconnecting with our bodies and the sensations they experience. This means paying attention to the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the present moment.

Another important part of mindfulness is an awareness of our thoughts and feelings as they happen moment to moment. Becoming more aware of the present moment can help us enjoy the world around us more and understand ourselves better.

When we become more aware of the present moment, we begin to experience things afresh that we have been taking for granted."

Rachel has recorded a introductory Mindfulness session on USB data stick that you can request through the Helpline. A minimum suggested donation of £5 will help us cover the cost of the USB data stick and packing materials.

If you would like a **Mindfulness USB Data stick** please call:

Sight Loss Helpline 01392 876 666

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

Social Clubs for the Visually Impaired

These gatherings provide an opportunity to build friendships and enjoy good company



◀ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn (Devon in Sight)

▲ Graham Leach Chair of Torbay Social Club for the Blind

Attending a Social Group for people living with sight loss might not be something you've considered, but people tell us it really makes a difference in their lives.

Graham Leach has been a member of Torbay Social Club for the Blind for 14 years and Chair for six years. He is keen to share the value of such groups.

Graham explains, "Social Groups offer a welcoming space to connect with others living with sight loss who understand the challenges often faced by people with little or no sight.

Beyond sharing experiences and helpful tips, these gatherings provide an opportunity to build friendships and enjoy good company. Plus, they're a lot of fun!

Social Groups are usually led by dedicated volunteers, many of whom have visual impairments themselves. You'll receive a warm welcome, with someone there to introduce you to the group, ensuring you know who's present even if you can't see them easily. You can relax, enjoy a tea or coffee and biscuits, and take your time getting to know others. Group sizes and atmospheres may vary, but whether lively or more intimate, you'll always be met with a friendly face.

Some groups offer structured activities, like guest speakers, topics for discussion or specific equipment demonstrations from a supplier, while others are all about conversation and companionship.

If you're attending for the first time and feeling a bit nervous, don't worry, we understand that anxiety of "where will I sit?" or "will anyone speak to me?", but everyone is incredibly supportive and will make you feel welcome.

Many clubs struggle to recruit volunteers so they are a good way for sighted friends and family to become involved.

We enjoy a warm relationship with the team at Devon in Sight regularly attending their Living Well with Sight Loss Events and also exhibit at their Annual Devon Sight Loss Conference."

If you would like to know about clubs in your area, Devon in Sight holds a directory of independent Blind Clubs and Macular Society Groups. Give us a call.

To **receive our Fact Sheet about Social Clubs in Devon** please ring:

Sight Loss Helpline 01392 876 666

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Skin Cancer Awareness



◀ Photo Credit: Grahame Flynn (Devon in Sight)

▲ Grahame Flynn's skin lesion

Devon in Sight's Chief Executive Officer Grahame Flynn shares his recent skin cancer journey.

Did you know that skin cancer is the most common cancer worldwide. Non-melanoma skin cancer, including basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC), refers to a group of cancers that develop in the upper layers of the skin. Melanoma skin cancer is less common, but can be more serious, as it can spread to other organs in the body.

Skin cancer is a significant concern in Devon, with rates notably higher than the England average, particularly in coastal areas, due to high UV exposure from outdoor lifestyles. It can affect people of any age but with more cases in the over-50s.

"Skin cancer is a significant concern in Devon, with rates notably higher than the England average"

Grahame explains, "For about four years I had a small lesion on my upper right cheek. It would appear, I'd scratch it, it would bleed and heal. This scratch, bleed, heal cycle ceased when the lesion turned into a pale waxy lump with small blood vessels running through it. It then began to slowly spread.

Suspecting that it may be skin cancer I shared a photo with a friend who is a retired GP. He confirmed my suspicions and told me to get a Doctor's appointment as soon as possible.

I had to be very persistent to get a GP appointment having originally been told there was a six week wait. I politely shared my concerns about the delays in seeing a Doctor. Once I saw a GP they again confirmed my self diagnosis and referred me to the hospital. Two weeks' later my Dermatologist examined the area of skin in question, and also looked at other areas of my skin. She confirmed my suspicions too. I had skin cancer!

Surgery is the main treatment for skin cancer. Some non-melanoma skin cancers may be suitable for alternative treatments, include freezing (cryotherapy), anti-cancer creams, radiotherapy and a form of light treatment called photodynamic therapy (PDT). The treatment used will depend on the type, size and location of the skin cancer you have, and they will discuss options in detail with you.

My surgery took place under local anesthetic in November 2025 and my scar is healing well. I subsequently shared my story with my friends on social media to raise awareness. Two people very dear to me have received their own skin cancer disagnosis and are awaiting treatment.

The moral of the story dear reader is that if you suspect that you may have skin cancer, please make an appointment to see your GP as soon as possible. Early diagnosis may lead to smaller scars!

Supporting us

How you can support our work?

Our community supporting people living with sight loss in Devon



◀ Photo Credit: IvanJekic (iStock)

Devon in Sight has been supporting people living with sight loss for over 100 years. We are your local, independent sight loss charity.

It may surprise you to know that Devon in Sight is not part of a national charity like the RNIB or Guide Dogs, and we do not receive any statutory funding. **We are independent and fundraise ourselves to make all our services free for you.**

Your financial support helps us make a tangible difference and helps empower more people living with visual impairments to live fuller, more independent lives.

Together, we can continue to offer vital services that positively impact on those living with sight loss and ultimately realise our vision to **make Devon a sight loss friendly county.**

Ways you can support us financially include:

Friends of Devon in Sight

Our Regular Giving Scheme **'Friends of Devon in Sight'** is the best way that you can support your local sight loss charity. You can give as little or as much as you would like with a monthly direct debit. **Please ask for more information.**

Donate by Cheque

If you prefer you can also make a one off donation by cheque made payable to **'Devon in Sight'** and send it to **Devon in Sight, Splatford Barton, Kennford, Exeter EX6 7XY.**

Donate by Bank Card

We can take bank card donations over the telephone.

Donate by BACS

Name:	**The Devon County Association for the Blind**
Sort Code:	**30-80-37**
Account No:	**62326768**

Make a Lasting Legacy

If you would like more information about making a gift in your will we can send you a copy of our **'Making a Lasting Legacy Pack'.**

For more **information about how you can help us** please call:

Sight Loss 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

SCAN ME

Sight Loss Helpline 01392 876 666
enquiries@devoninsight.org.uk
www.devoninsight.org.uk

Devon in Sight
Splatford Barton, Kennford,
Exeter, EX6 7XY

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