# My Sight Nottinghamshire Annual Review 2020-2021



Supporting visually impaired people through the pandemic



#### My Sight Nottinghamshire Annual Review 2020-2021

The year under review has been an unprecedented one for My Sight Notts as our team of staff and volunteers worked hard under difficult circumstances, to deliver innovative and relevant services for local visually impaired people during the pandemic.

It is entirely to the credit of our dedicated team that our charity is emerging resilient and confident from the challenges of 2020-21. Not only have we found new ways of delivering our services, we have also developed some exciting new ones. We're emerging from the pandemic with a clear vision for the future, as we focus our efforts on new ways to deliver our mission, which is to support the local visually impaired community to live life to the full.

Michael Conroy CEO



Jacky Fisher
Chair of Trustees





## How we met the challenges of 2020-21

As the country went into lockdown in March 2020, the challenge began when a team of staff and 27 volunteers took on the not-insignificant task of calling every single visually impaired person on our charity's database. Our small team endeavoured to speak to around 1,500 visually impaired people to find out how they were coping with lockdown and what support they needed from My Sight Notts. We also made 16 extra phone calls to support visually impaired people isolated at home alone on Christmas Day.

Our services team worked closely with marketing and fundraising, creating and editing around 45 videos, which enabled many of our services to be accessed online from people's homes during lockdowns. We delivered exercise classes, eye health advice, IT support, equipment advice, peer support and social groups all online or by phone.

From talking to visually impaired people and supporting them during the first lockdown, it soon became clear that while many people with sight loss could access our services online, many did not have the skills or confidence to use technology like Zoom independently. These people were therefore at risk of becoming even more isolated in their own home and marginalised by the pandemic. So we began re-inventing our services, adapting our fundraising, seeking out new communication channels and creating new partnerships that will shape our charity and its services for the future.

#### **Adapting our services**

This year, we began investing in our technology services to make sure we were in a strong position to support local visually impaired people to master the skills that would help them stay connected. We recruited a new member of staff and supported other colleagues to broaden their roles, creating a team of Sight Loss Advisors.

#### **Hospital support**

During a pandemic people continue to be diagnosed with sight loss every day, it sadly doesn't stop because of coronavirus. The suspension and cutting back of many support services has had a real impact on what is already a devastating and life-changing experience for people newly diagnosed with vision loss and their families.

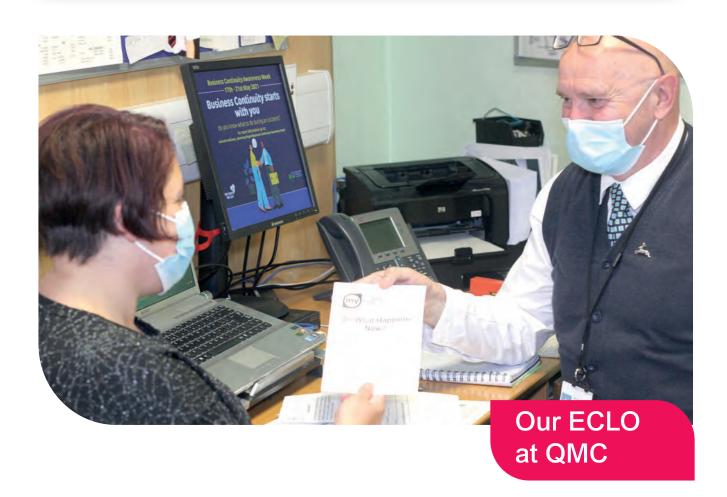
Our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO) who is based at QMC, continued to work throughout much of the pandemic. During April and June 2020, when eye clinics were offering virtual appointments, he was able to support 943 patients. He also produced a number of videos designed to explain different eye conditions, which people could access online.

During 2020-21 our ECLO processed 260 Certificates of Visual Impairment (CVIs) and developed new and improved systems for monitoring the CVI process. This has been instrumental in taking the compliance for turnaround of CVI dissemination from just 8% of patients to a staggering 80% of patients. This is important because a registration of vision impairment (for which a CVI is required) is the key to accessing a range of vital support services, important concessions and welfare benefits that make a real difference to the lives of people living with sight loss..

Our ECLO also found time to deliver two presentations to nursing staff and occupational therapists about the challenges of living with sight loss. He also advised on the accessibility of the new Okko Macular Monitoring smart phone app, helping to assess its suitability for monitoring Macular Disease in older people.



- We supported 943 patients at QMC ophthalmology clinics
- We produced two videos for online access: one describing eye conditions and a second 'Don't Stop the Drops' campaign
- We undertook 260 Certificates of Visual Impairment (CVI), helping patients newly diagnosed with sight loss to access vital support services. We also developed a new CVI monitoring system
- Delivered two presentations to hospital staff to help them understand the challenges faced by people with sight loss
- Supported the development of the Okko new Macular Monitoring Smart Phone App.



#### Telephone befriending

Unable to deliver face-to-face services during the pandemic, 24 of our My Guide volunteers adapted their roles, with support from our Volunteer Coordinator, to become telephone befrienders. This meant offering phone-based support to blind and partially sighted people isolated at home during lockdown. With the support of our amazing volunteers, we created 68 telephone befriending partnerships, which helped some of the most vulnerable visually impaired people through the isolation of lockdown.

#### What we achieved

- 24 My Guide partnerships were transferred to telephone befriending
- New volunteers were recruited, creating 68 telephone befriending partnerships in total
- 16 extra telephone calls (in addition to usual telephone befriending)
   made on Christmas Day to combat loneliness.



"I was on my own for the first time this Christmas. Having a call from My Sight Notts really cheered me up!
We talked about Christmas pudding flavours as there are some ridiculous flavours now! We talked for about an hour and it was an hour that took away my loneliness."

Anon

## Shared Vision, the power of peer support

Following a successful funding application, we remodelled our peer support format and launched Shared Vision; an extensive programme of practical and emotional support groups for people struggling with the impact of sight loss. Due to the ongoing lockdown we set about developing remote and face to face models to ensure people could access this essential support at a time when they needed it more than ever.

- Recruited a new member of staff to develop and deliver our peer support programme
- Developed a detailed programme of support for people struggling with their emotional and mental health as a result of sight loss
- Made links with various external agencies for signposting and referral



## New role for new challenges – our Sight Loss Advisors

#### Support to stay connected

During the pandemic our four Sight Loss Advisors were joined by a fifth as we recruited a new technology expert to strengthen the team and support more local blind and partially sighted people than ever before to get online. Our team of five Sight Loss Advisors delivered 150 remote IT and technology support appointments this year, and we launched our Tech Befriending Project, recruiting and training 16 new Tech Befriending Volunteers who helped us support 86 visually impaired people to use technology with confidence.

In addition, we made 60 tech support calls, helping visually impaired people master video conferencing technology like Zoom to access our arts activities, social groups and peer support groups. Between periods of lock down we were also able to hold 23 IT group sessions with 64 attendances.

- Created a new team of Sight Loss Advisors offering more holistic support and recruited an additional member of the team specialising in technology
- Held 150 remote support appointments for IT issues
- Hosted 23 IT group sessions with 64 attendances
- Developed a new volunteer led Tech Befriender scheme to help more visually impaired people get online
- Provided 14 tech training sessions for staff and volunteers,
   which were attended by 41 participants.

#### **Equipment Advice and Support Service**

Our Equipment Advice and Support service adapted to the new challenges, offering telephone support and posting out equipment that enabled visually impaired people to maintain their independence during the pandemic. We supplied 170 pieces of vital equipment, such as magnifiers, talking time pieces and daily living aids and between periods of lockdown hosted 128 appointments. With many re-enablement services unable to work at full capacity during 2020-2021, this was a real lifeline for many people.

- Our Equipment Centre hosted 128 visits (in between lock downs)
   offering advice on aids and equipment
- We sold 170 pieces of equipment
- Began the development of our new Smart Room where people could view technology and daily living aids in a relaxed home-style environment.



## New role for new challenges – our Sight Loss Advisors

#### **Talking News**

Cont...

Our team of Talking News volunteers were unable to come into Heathcoat Street to record during lockdown, so our staff took on the task of reading and recording. We also took the opportunity to broaden our recordings to include not just local news but also news about My Sight Notts and features of local historical interest.

#### What we achieved

- We recorded eight issues of Talking News during the pandemic, even though our volunteers were unable to come in, our staff took on the responsibility
- Added new elements to our local news offering adding news stories from My Sight News and local historical features.

"The technology staff are amazing. The extra time they gave her to talk it all through was so kind and incredibly helpful. It is the first hope she has had that she will be able to build a working life with vision loss. I have been so worried about her as she has been so very depressed. This morning she got up early to research jobs and she hasn't stopped smiling."

Dawn

#### **Sports and Healthy Lifestyles**

It has been a challenging time for our sports and healthy lifestyles services, which have been subject to extended restrictions over the last year. Undaunted, we adapted our provision, creating video exercise classes that people could do at home. Video classes were created for those who preferred gentle chair-based exercise and for those able to benefit from a more robust standing exercise.

We took the opportunity presented by periods of lockdown to plan a safe return for our Walkie Talkie Wednesday gentle walks and our Goalball teams and to work on a Development Plan for a range of new and exciting healthy lifestyle initiatives, including the re-launch of blind cricket in conjunction with our partners at Notts CC.

- Developed physical activity videos chair based and standing exercise programmes
- Re-started Walkie Talkie Wednesday gentle walks for health
- Planned a safe return to the paralympic sport of Goalball
- Started working on a development plan for sports and healthy lifestyles to include new activities



#### **Arts**

Delivering arts for visually impaired people has proved challenging during the pandemic, nevertheless we have maintained arts activities for 32 local visually impaired people, ranging from posting out Christmas craft packs and kits for springtime herb growing and plant pot decorating. With support from our team of Sight Loss Advisors, we supported local visually impaired people to master Zoom and take part in online art sessions.

As we look towards the future, we are making plans to help visually impaired people use art to speak about the impact of the pandemic on their lives with an exciting quilting project, which we hope will see people use a variety of art forms to articulate their experiences, not only improving people's creative skills but also improving their mental health.

- Kept the lines of communication open with 32 members
- Sent out packs for people to create art at home
- Developed virtual arts sessions in collaboration with our Sight Loss Advisors
- Distributed packs for people to decorate plant pots
- Made links with visually impaired Astronomer, Nic Bonne and began plans for an exciting new Tactile Universe project.



Created by Adan



Created by Rob



Created by Erica

#### **Social Groups**

During the pandemic we supported our social groups in Nottingham, Mansfield, Bassetlaw and Newark to use telephone conferencing facilities to keep in touch. 15 members of our Newark Group and four volunteers have successfully used telephone conferencing to keep in touch and support each other throughout the pandemic. Members from our Nottingham, Mansfield and Bassetlaw social groups were telephoned regularly by volunteers and some met in pubs and outdoor venues between periods of lockdown. One volunteer, Sandra phoned all 30-or-so members of our Nottingham Group every single week during lockdown, doing shopping for some and even arranging the funeral for one group member who sadly died during the pandemic and had no family to take on the task.

#### What we achieved

- Conference calling for to groups during lockdowns
- Re-opened meetings for Nottingham Group between lockdowns
- Newark group used conference calling to stay in touch
- Volunteer, Sandra phoned group members every week and also arranged a funeral for someone who died and had no family
- Mansfield group met when restrictions allowed
- Worksop participants were telephoned weekly by volunteers

"Im pleased to be going back to the Nottingham social group.
I chose a special outfit to celebrate. Seeing everyone in
person will be so good after such a long and difficult time."

Lynne

## Supporting our volunteers through the pandemic

During the pandemic our amazing team of volunteers have really stepped up for local visually impaired people, working with us to innovate the way they deliver services and going the extra mile for people with sight loss.

Volunteers remain the life-blood of our charity and we were committed to attracting new volunteers to support our new services whilst at the same time supporting existing volunteers to innovate. We moved our volunteer training programme on line and so despite lockdowns we were able to deliver 10 training sessions during 2020-2021, which attracted 41 participants. We also sent out over 180 tea bags to invite volunteers to enjoy a 'cup of tea with us'!

24 My Guide volunteers adapted the support they offered to visually impaired people becoming telephone befrienders during periods of lockdown and we now have 68 telephone befriending partnerships offering a friendly listening ear to visually impaired people isolated at home. 27 volunteers helped us telephone our entire database twice during lockdown and we recruited and trained 16 volunteers to the new role of Tech Befrienders who now play a pivotal role in our mission to get more visually impaired people online.



#### What we achieved

- 24 My Guide partnerships were transferred to telephone befriending and new volunteers were recruited, creating
   68 telephone befriending partnerships in total
- Sighted Guide training for volunteers was converted to online training, with 10 virtual training sessions delivered for 41 participants
- 16 extra telephone calls (in addition to usual telephone befriending) made on Christmas Day to combat loneliness
- 184 tea bags sent to volunteers to 'have a cup of tea with us' at Christmas
- 27 Volunteers took part in telephoning our entire database of visually impaired people twice during the year under review
- 16 volunteers recruited to the new role of Tech Befriender
- Our volunteer Tech Befrienders supported 86 people to access our online arts, Shared Vision peer support and other services using Zoom.

"Volunteering for the ring around helped me get through lockdown. It filled my day with something positive, I felt I was helping people and listening to what other visually impaired people were going through made me realise I wasn't alone."

Russ



#### Supporting our staff

Our staff have demonstrated unprecedented levels of commitment and flexibility during the pandemic and we are very proud of what they have been able to deliver for local visually impaired people.

We furloughed four Sight Loss Advisors from March 2020 – three returned in August 2020 (one subsequently went back on furlough in January, returning in March), one other returned March 2021.

We continued to keep in touch with our team through monthly staff meetings via Zoom, staff What's App groups, Zoom coffee breaks and a weekly online 'tea dance' to support staff and reduce isolation for staff who were working from home.

We took the opportunity presented during periods of lockdown to develop and improve our appraisals system with peer reviews and development plans, offering staff structure and direction during this time of change and upheaval. We also used the time to create our Values and Behaviours Policy.

- We developed an improved appraisals system with peer reviews and development plans
- We kept in touch with our staff, those working from home and those who were furloughed through staff meetings on Zoom, WhatsApp groups, virtual Tea Dances and a virtual Christmas Quiz!

## Communicating through the pandemic

Marketing and Services have worked closely during the pandemic to keep the lines of communications open and to adapt to the changing circumstances in which we operate. This has often required setting up new channels of communication, including the increased use of videos, blogs and social media to keep connected with our supporters, volunteers and the visually impaired community.

Together we created 45 videos and actively sought out opportunities to appear on local media with 7 BBC appearances and six stories in the local newspaper. We also worked on a new, more accessible website alongside our panel of visually impaired testers, which we plan to launch in the next financial year.

- We created 45 videos enabling people to access support
- We achieved 7 appearances on BBC TV and radio
- We set up 6 stories in local newspapers
- We worked with a panel of visually impaired people on the development of a new website



## Fundraising and financial challenges

This Annual Report also reveals the struggles behind My Sight Nottinghamshire's extraordinary achievements against a backdrop of enforced charity shop closures and cancelled fundraising events.

Although coronavirus put a stop to many of our community fundraising events, we'd like to thank Cllr Wallace, Chair of Nottinghamshire County Council for nominating us as his chosen charity for the year. A big thank you also goes to all those county council staff who supported his appeal with individual fundraisers.

Faced with a potential sharp fall in income and at the same time an increase in the need to adapt the support offered to our visually impaired beneficiaries during the pandemic, our charity successfully applied for government support through the Furlough and Business Interruption schemes and we successfully applied for a number of COVID resil-

applied for a number of COVID I

ience grants.

By adapting our fundraising strategy to the changing circumstances we were forced to operate in, we have remained financially secure, despite the pandemic, which is a significant achievement.

By the end of the year, including the funding from the Government, the charity's overall income was down by £64,929; however we were to reduce our expenditure by a similar amount (£62,738) keeping us on an even keel.



able

#### **Our future vision**

Our Charity has been challenged by the coronavirus pandemic, but thankfully, due to the resilience of our trustees, staff and volunteers we have successfully risen to the challenge.

We know that visually impaired people have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, as we all increasingly rely on visual technologies like Zoom, and other online services.

In the coming year, we will find new ways of delivering services remotely as well as face to face, as we adapt to living with Covid 19.

This will include launching our new Shared Vision groups, launching our technology Smart Space and increasing the support we offer visually impaired people to access new technologies. We will explore new partnerships with other sight loss organisations to improve opportunities for local visually impaired people.

The changes to society over the past year have been extremely difficult and threaten to marginalise people with sight loss. We are determined to ensure they are not excluded by these changes and we will do everything we can to empower them to live fulfilled and independent lives.

We will continue to adapt our services to tackle digital exclusion and improve access to opportunities for emotional and practical support. We will consult with the visually impaired community on exciting new arts, sports and healthy lifestyles activities so that are able to live life to the full!

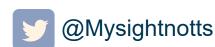


## Supporting Nottinghamshire's Blind and Visually Impaired People to get more out of life



### Get in touch 0115 9706 806

www.mysightnotts.org.uk info@mysightnotts.org.uk







Registered charity: 511288