

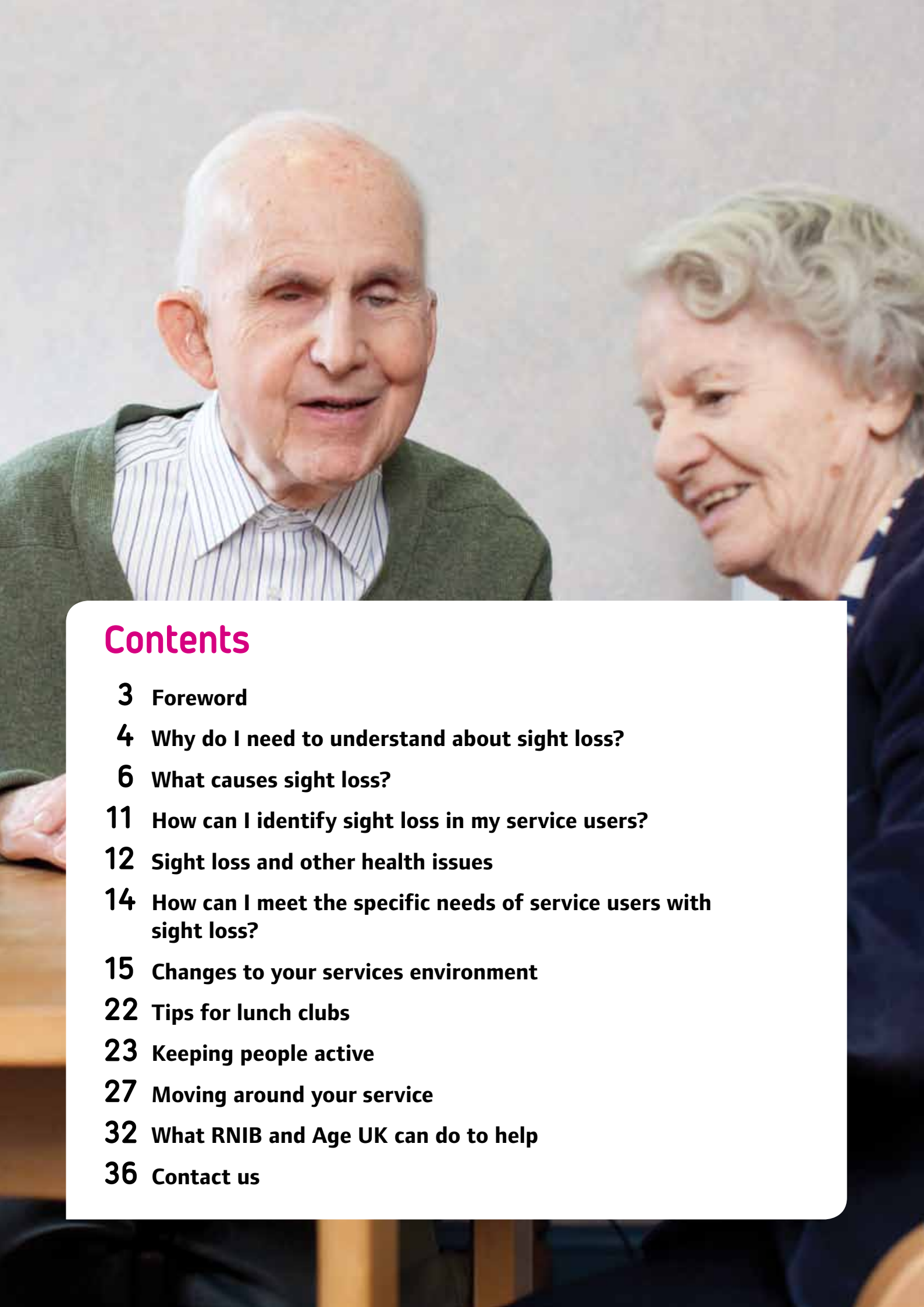
Seeing it from their side

Adapting older people's services to support sight loss



supporting blind and partially sighted people





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Foreword by Clare Vollum, Head of Service Development, Age UK

Our population is ageing. There are currently 13 million people in the UK aged over 60, and demographic changes will result in a dramatic increase in the number of older people over the next decades. Although it can affect anyone at any time, losing our sight becomes increasingly likely as we get older. Almost two million people in the UK are living with sight loss.

Compared with previous generations, many older people now experience a long period of good health and wellbeing and continue to be active, contributing members of society. People with sight loss should still be able to equally enjoy these benefits in later life.

Older people with sight loss need sensitively designed services that are appropriately delivered by trained staff, and accessible and inclusive activities. They may also need a bit more specialist support to help them maintain good physical health, social and economic wellbeing, and to participate in social, civic and cultural activities.

Services for older people should routinely be well equipped to meet the needs of older people with sight loss. Many local Age UKs and Age Concerns, as the case studies in this guide show, provide such services. Some have adapted existing services and activities, seeking advice from local specialist blind and partially sighted associations and accessing training for staff. Others provide personalised support, such as information and advice, and practical assistance with day-to-day activities, for older people living with sight loss.

Age UK is very pleased to be working in partnership with RNIB to produce this resource, which aims to provide Age UKs with a guide to the issues affecting older people with sight loss. We hope that the case studies will provide ideas and practical examples that can be used to help make your services accessible to blind and partially sighted people.



Why do I need to understand about sight loss?

Sight loss isn't confined to those who are registered blind and partially sighted. Many older people are living with significant sight loss, and some have vision which is equivalent to people who are partially sighted or blind. This includes people waiting for or having treatment such as cataract surgery to improve their sight. And it includes people whose vision loss could be improved by wearing the right glasses. Any level of sight loss, and the impact on a person's day-to-day living is important.

Although it can affect anyone at any time, losing our sight becomes increasingly likely as we get older. It is important to raise awareness of the importance of taking up the free sight test for everyone over 60. Up to 50 per cent of sight loss can be avoided if it is detected early enough. RNIB recommend having a sight test at least every two years.

Currently, sight loss affects:

- one in five people over 75 and
- one in two people over 90.

This means that if you work with or offer services to older people a significant proportion – maybe more than half in elderly services – will have a degree of sight loss that can have a serious effect on the quality of their lives.

Losing your sight can be a very isolating, lonely experience and you can make a huge difference to ensuring older people with sight loss are able to maintain their independence and wellbeing. We've produced this 'refresher guide' to raise awareness of the small changes that you can make that will make a big difference to people with sight loss.

“Up to 50% of sight loss can be avoided if detected early enough”



What causes sight loss?

Five common causes of sight loss are:

- age-related macular degeneration
- diabetic retinopathy
- glaucoma
- cataract
- refractive error.

To help you and your staff understand these conditions and how they may affect your service users, there's a brief description of each one on the following pages. There's also lots more detailed information available at www.rnib.org.uk

It is possible to have more than one condition, and for it to be more or less severe. Getting older is one of the biggest risk factors for developing eye conditions which cause sight loss. The impact of each condition on a person's sight and life can differ.

Age-related macular degeneration

Also known as ARMD and AMD. It can lead to loss of central vision while side vision remains, and is the most common cause of sight loss in the UK.

AMD occurs when the delicate cells of the macula (a small area at the very centre of the retina) become damaged and stop working. Wet AMD, which can develop very quickly, can sometimes respond to treatment if it is caught in the very early stages. Dry AMD, which develops slowly and causes gradual loss of central vision, can't be medically treated.

Loss of central vision can make it difficult for someone to read or recognise facial expressions.



Age-related macular degeneration



Diabetic retinopathy

Glaucoma



Cataract



Examples of how eye conditions may affect sight.

Diabetic retinopathy

Diabetes can affect the eye in several ways. The most serious affects of diabetes on the eye are the changes it causes to the retinal blood vessels, known as diabetic retinopathy. This happens when diabetes causes the blood vessels in the eye to bulge, leak fluid and blood. This can have a serious affect on vision if left untreated.

Most people with diabetes should have a yearly examination of their retina to check if there are any changes to their blood vessels. This is important because there is a stage of diabetic retinopathy when laser treatment can be used to avoid serious sight loss. Without any treatment diabetic retinopathy can cause very serious loss of vision, affecting both central and side vision.

As well as the yearly examination of their retina, good control of blood sugar (glucose) levels has been shown to help to lower the risk of diabetic retinopathy developing.

Glaucoma

This covers a group of conditions in which the optic nerve is damaged at the point where it leaves the eye. This can result in tunnel vision, and may not be noticed until considerable damage to the person's side vision has been done.

In some people the damage is caused by raised eye pressure, which can occur when the aqueous fluid doesn't drain away properly. It can also be caused because of a weakness in the optic nerve.

Glaucoma can be medically treated through the use of eye drops, drugs, laser treatment or operations, although any damage already caused by the condition can't be repaired.

Cataract

Cataract is a very common eye condition that affects many people over 60. Age-related cataract is the most common cause of reversible blindness worldwide. Cataract is a frequent cause of visual impairment and blindness in older people. Cataract surgery is a common procedure and in the NHS it is the third most frequent hospital intervention. The average age of cataract patients is 75 years.

The symptoms include blurry or cloudy sight, being dazzled by light and fading colour vision. A cataract is a clouding of the lens. Vision becomes blurred because the cataract makes the usually clear lens cloudy, interfering with sight.

It isn't a layer of skin that grows over the eye as is sometimes thought. Cataract can be surgically treated by removing the cloudy lens and replacing it with a clear plastic lens called an intraocular lens implant. Usually this is a simple and quick procedure.

Refractive error

Everyone can play a role in raising awareness of the importance of taking up the free, yearly sight tests for everyone over 60.

Refractive errors are problems like short sightedness (myopia), long sightedness (hypermetropia) and presbyopia (need for reading glasses) which can be corrected using spectacles or contact lens. These problems often go undetected.

Some older people may simply have low expectations of their sight and believe nothing can be done, or, due to other disabilities, symptoms of deteriorating sight can go unnoticed by carers or staff. An eye test is the best way to detect eye conditions and the over 60s receive this free on the NHS. They can get support with the cost of glasses if they receive the Guarantee part of Pension Credit or are on a low income and qualify for help through the NHS low income scheme.

Other causes of sight loss:

Stroke

Every five minutes someone in the UK has a stroke and stroke is the third biggest killer and a leading cause of disability in the UK.

A high proportion of people (around 70 per cent) who have had a stroke will have some form of visual dysfunction as a result.

Strokes can affect sight and vision in a number of ways. The most common effect is called hemianopia. This occurs when the stroke causes damage to the visual parts of the brain. Hemianopia causes a loss of sight in one side of the visual field, which means someone would lose all the right or left side of their vision in both eyes. Unfortunately there isn't a treatment for this kind of problem, although some people may see a slight improvement over time.

Some people with stroke also have problems with visual perception and neglecting to take notice of parts of their vision (visual neglect). Other visual problems that can occur are eye movement problems and focusing and reading problems.



How can I identify sight loss in my service users?

When a service user first comes to your service, we recommend that you ask either the referrers or the service user themselves about their sight. Do they wear glasses, have they any diagnosed conditions or any self reported sight loss? Bear in mind that:

- total blindness is quite rare: most blind people have some useful sight even though this may be limited in some way
- most people with serious sight loss have had sight earlier in their life and so have 'sighted mannerisms' or appear to look you in the eye.

It can be difficult to notice if someone is experiencing difficulties with their sight. They might be reluctant to admit it, but some of the signs could be:

- walking slowly and appearing worried about falling
- appearing less confident or very quiet in social situations
- feeling for things even though they appear to be looking at them
- not happy to read or write in front of you
- not recognising people instantly – especially if you have not spoken immediately
- difficulty in bright light, low light or both
- have changed how they read, watch television, drive, walk or engage in hobbies
- unable to locate food on a plate
- constantly bumping into things, shuffle their feet or steps hesitantly
- complains that the lighting is inadequate for reading and other activities
- have less clear writing than before
- difficulty identifying faces or objects
- over-fill their drinking glass when pouring themselves a drink.

Don't forget, whether these apply or not, you need to recommend that people aged over 60 have a full eye examination as sight can change quite rapidly.

Sight loss and other health issues

Dementia and sight loss

Most people with dementia are over 60, so there is a high likelihood that they may be living with sight loss. Some forms of dementia have particular effects on vision. When someone has dementia and sight loss, day-to-day living, mobility, wellbeing and communication are all more difficult.

Dementia combined with sight loss can lead to:

- profound disorientation and isolation
- increased risk of falls
- difficulties moving between light and dark
- difficulties learning to use new equipment
- more visual mistakes
- less independence
- misperception and misidentification
- increased worry for carers and relatives.

Visual hallucinations may be associated with dementia or sight loss. They may be distressing for those affected, and for those caring for someone with dementia. More information on visual hallucinations can be found on the RNIB website.

There are practical things you can do to improve people's quality of life and independence, such as using effective lighting and design, which can make the most of their vision and reduce disorientation. Ensuring that the environment makes the most of sight and light, supporting people to wear appropriate spectacles, and spending time getting to know the person all help.

Sight loss and falls

Vision plays a direct role in stabilizing balance. Sight problems may predispose a person to trip over hazards in the home and outdoors, for example steps, curbs and uneven pavements. When climbing stairs, a reduction in depth perception might mean you don't put your foot down properly.

- If you're assessing falls risk, ask about vision.
- If someone has had a fall, advise them to tell their GP and also to have a sight test.
- Ensure that vision is a part of any health education programme related to falls and home safety.
- Ensure that high colour contrast is provided through the service to limit falls.

Sight loss and hearing – dual sensory loss

Over half of all people over 60 have a hearing loss. Combined with the prevalence of sight loss, the likelihood is a high percentage of older people with both.

The daily and ongoing challenges for people who cannot hear and see properly can be hard to understand by the people around them. People with sight loss use their hearing to help them by listening for sound clues, for example someone vacuuming nearby or a car door shutting outside. People with a hearing loss use their sight to compensate by watching people's lips and interpreting body language. If both are impaired then people can very quickly feel frustrated. Hearing and sight loss cause many people to become depressed, angry or withdrawn.

When supporting older people who may have dual sensory loss, it's important not to put too great an emphasis on either audio or visual guides. Clarity is the key in all communication.

The charity Sense provide expert advice and information as well as specialist services to deafblind people and the professionals who work with them. Find out more at www.sense.org.uk

How can I meet the specific needs of service users with sight loss?

The Equality Act

The Equality Act became law on 1 October 2010. The changes made by the Equality Act mean you will need to review your organisation's policies and practices to make sure they comply with the Act. The Equality Act includes age.

The public sector equality duty is 'anticipatory', which means you cannot wait until a disabled person wants to use your services, but must think in advance (and on an ongoing basis) about what disabled people with a range of impairments might reasonably need, such as people who have visual impairment, hearing impairment, mobility impairment or learning disability.

Ensuring your services cater for the needs of blind and partially sighted people can be easy. Consider your environment, your communication materials, the activities you provide, the way people are transported and how all these can be made more accessible. This also applies if you hire out premises, so please be aware of this when making bookings. To find out more about the Equality Act, visit www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities



Changes to your services environment

Not all changes need to be expensive to implement. A few small changes to your Centre's environment can make a big difference.

Small changes that make a big difference

- Make sure that all the clocks in communal areas are large and that they're at eye level so that people can see them.
- Improve signage by enlarging print on posters and notices.
- Consider announcements instead of notice boards.
- Encourage everyone to be tidy. Furniture left out of place can cause hazards.
- Buy equipment that can be used by people with sight loss easily. We will tell you more about this later in this guide.
- When a new person comes to your service, spend some time showing them how to get from one place to another. It's worth explaining the route you are taking in detail. For those with a greater degree of sight loss, point out any clues along the way that will help the person remember the route, such as different flooring etc.
- Use tactile signage like large raised numbers on doors that people can touch to help them find their way around. If this isn't possible, then large-font-size print outs can also help.
- Introduce colour contrast in the built environment, for example different coloured doors for the toilet, coloured handrails, or painted walls. RNIB can provide support and advice on colour contrast decorations on request.
- Make adjustments when organising activities to be more inclusive such as large print puzzles, quizzes that are read out rather than filled out, and activities that involve partners.

Adapting a Day Centre: Saxon Day Centre – Age Concern Orpington

“With advice from RNIB, we were able to train all our staff in how to guide”

The Saxon Day Centre always make an effort to include all clients whatever their ability by making all activities as accessible as possible, and if necessary they alter the way an activity is being delivered.

The manager of the Centre says: “One of our service users is an elderly blind man who has a guide dog. When we received the referral for this gentleman we were apprehensive that we might not be able to accommodate his needs. This was the first time that we had been asked to have a guide dog at the Centre, where we receive 63 clients each day, including clients who are wheelchair users, some who use Zimmer frames and some who are partially sighted. We contacted RNIB for advice on how to guide a blind client,

and all our staff were trained in how to do this. We also sought advice on how to control the guide dog, and gained a better understanding of his role as a working dog.

When we looked at the environment in the Day Centre, we worked out where it would be best for RC to sit so that he would feel included, but also where the guide dog would not be a distraction to any of our other clients. RC was guided around so that he became familiar with the environment and the layout of the Centre and he was included in all activities where appropriate. His guide dog was taken on regular toilet breaks throughout the day by staff or volunteers.”

Buying new products for your service

Many essential day-to-day items that have been adapted for people with sight loss are also excellent for people with limited mobility, problems with touch and with dementia.

There are many aids available such as tools for helping in the kitchen, talking clocks, big button telephones, talking digital televisions, talking microwaves, magnifiers etc, and you can encourage people to use them (see back cover for how to order these products). There are also a variety of aids for leisure activities too, such as playing cards and board games.

If your service is looking to upgrade or renew items then please consider purchasing ones from a range suitable for sight loss. RNIB can offer free advice and demos on request.



Good lighting – simple changes can make a big difference

Improving lighting reduces the risk of trips and falls and can help people live more independently. It's vital in older people's centres too.

Adapting to changes in light levels gets harder for all of us as we get older, not just for people with sight loss. However, it affects people with some eye conditions more than others. It is a particular difficulty for people with residual peripheral vision only.

It is important to keep light levels in premises and homes consistent. A flexible lighting system that can be adapted or altered quickly to suit an individual or a specific task is a good option. This could be good quality main lights, with small task lights for activity areas. The impact of bright lighting and task lamps should not be underestimated, and both can be purchased very cost effectively.

Most low energy bulbs unfortunately do not offer enough light for those with sight loss. The change from tungsten bulbs to energy efficient ones has caused problems for many people due to the energy bulbs not reaching their full brightness quickly especially in areas like hall, stairs and landing. Lighting at the head and foot of stairs and on landings can reduce the risk of trips and falls. However, there are some energy efficient bulbs that warm up quickly offering a bright light. These bulbs do tend to be slightly more expensive, but last longer than many conventional bulbs and prevent hazards.

RNIB and Thomas Pocklington Trust have produced a practical guide to lighting **Make the most of your sight, improve the lighting in your home**. This free guide explains how to make the most of general and additional lighting, provides tips on best practice for lighting areas in the home and illustrates different types of light fittings and bulbs. It also has advice suitable for adoption by services. It can be ordered for free via RNIB's Helpline on 0303 123 9999, alternatively you can download it from the RNIB website www.rnib.org.uk/lighting. A variety of lights and bulbs can be ordered from RNIB's online shop (see back cover for details on ordering).

Using print to communicate

- Always produce general information in clear print. This will benefit the majority of your service users – and probably many visitors and staff! RNIB recommend 14 point as a minimum for text, and black text on white or yellow backgrounds.
- Always ask the person what their preferred reading format is – this could be braille, audio CD, large (16 point and above) or clear print.
- For larger print you could use a black bold marker pen or a computer to enlarge the font size. You could put information onto a Dictaphone for audio.
- Arrange to have large or clear print, and if possible audio CD copies of all your general information such as contracts, fire information and welcome packs. Braille can be obtained on demand from RNIB.
- Think about audio announcements instead of posters and notices.
- Provide simple magnifiers in common areas.

Communicating with people who have a greater degree of sight loss

Do

- Mention who you are when you start speaking.
- Touch people on the arm gently by way of a greeting to let them know where you are.
- Let people know when you are going away from them.
- Don't worry about using everyday terms like: "Nice to see you!"

Don't

- Assume people can see very little or nothing at all; you will be surprised by their clarity of vision under the right circumstances.
- Ignore people as you pass them just because they can not see you.
- Suddenly leave people in the middle of a space after guiding them.
- Assume people do not know what colours or items look like, sometime if people lost their sight a while ago it may be difficult to recall this information, so more time needs to be taken.
- Be offended if people say "no" to help.

Support and advice: Age UK Herne Bay

“Helping people with sight loss to feel informed about money matters is vital”

Age Concern Herne Bay has developed a financial advice and support service which really benefits blind and partially sighted people. Based both in the community and in the centre, they operate a free service supporting people with their finances and correspondence. Users of the service have reported that it resolves their worries and concerns, gives them better financial awareness and makes them feel more informed when making decisions.

Ian Andrews, Information and Advice Officer says: “Being able to read the print and then respond if needed is a big problem for our clients, so I visit clients at home on a regular monthly basis or they come to the day centre and I will go through the letters and advise on what action may be required.

An 87 year old partially sighted woman started using our service after losing a close friend who had helped her with

everyday tasks, including shopping for her and collecting her pension. I visited her, as she was worried about her bills and money, and getting into debt. I worked with her to set up Direct Debits for regular bills and for her pension to go straight to her bank. I encouraged her to come to the Day Centre which she does twice a week; we do her shopping. She now knows exactly how much money she has to spend each week, and we have been able to set her up a separate savings account.”

Richard, who is age 90 and partially sighted, says: “Without doubt Ian has helped me in every way a man in my situation can be helped. Without his patience I would be in a real mess, financially and mentally.”

Recommending magnifiers

For many older people who start to find it hard to see things clearly a hand-held magnifier is one of many solutions that are available.

It's not suitable for everyone so RNIB recommend that a person has had an up-to-date sight test at their opticians before purchasing. We also recommend that they:

- have been examined by an ophthalmologist at hospital or discussed their sight with a GP, and have been advised that their vision cannot be improved by medical or surgical treatment
- have asked their eye specialist for a referral to a Low Vision Clinic for an assessment.

RNIB's free guide **Choosing your magnifier** explains the benefits of an assessment and the variety of magnifiers available and their benefits. It can be ordered via RNIB's Helpline, and magnifiers can be ordered from the RNIB's online shop, details on back cover. (RNIB sell magnifiers up to 6x magnification only).



Tips for lunch clubs

With a few small changes, lunchtimes can be made more enjoyable for people with sight loss. Always ask a person discreetly how they want to do something, remembering that people often don't want to appear to need help.

- Serve food on crockery that contrasts with the tablecloth, for example, white crockery on a dark green tablecloth.
- Consider using plates with rims.
- Always set tables in the same way and make sure that you've told people where everything will be.
- Consider using different shaped pots for condiments – say a round salt pot and a square pepper pot.
- For people with a considerable sight loss (such as those registered), consider using the clock method when you're serving food and tell people you're using it – meat/fish at six o'clock, potatoes/rice at 12 o'clock and vegetables at three and nine o'clock.
- Consider using coloured jugs and cups rather than clear ones.
- Always tell people what you're serving them. Let them know the options, especially when it is a buffet.
- Print menus in clear print (14 point as a minimum).
- Help people collect their food and always explain the choices.
- Ensure support is available for everyday tasks such as collecting a hot drink, or finding the toilet – people are often reluctant to ask for help, so make sure they are comfortable to ask.



Keeping people active

Just because someone has lost their sight, doesn't mean they can't still continue to enjoy the activities they used to do, or even new ones too.

Activities and games

RNIB can provide specific advice on individual activities, and adapted equipment for popular hobbies including games, puzzles and music. A range of adapted activities such as card games are available from RNIB's online shop.

Gardening: There are a number of custom made gardening tools, techniques and methods you can use to make gardening easier. Thrive, the gardening organisation for people with disabilities can offer support and advice for blind and partially sighted people who wish to garden. More information can be found at www.thrive.org.uk

Radio: RNIB's Insight radio broadcasts on the internet, Sky channel 0188, freesat channel 777 and on 101 FM in Glasgow. Insight Radio is Europe's first radio station for blind or partially sighted people. It offers everything from daily newspapers, movie reviews, TV, events and job guides.

The British Wireless for the Blind Fund supply radios, radio cassette recorders and CD players to registered blind and partially sighted people who are in need and who live in the UK.

Television: Much of the meaning of a TV programme or film can be lost if you can't see the action or facial expressions. Many programmes now have audio description. Like a narrator telling a story, audio description (AD) is an additional commentary describing body language, expressions and movements. AD gives you information about the things you might not be able to see, meaning that you can keep up with the action. Audio Description on TV is available on digital television via Sky, Freesat, Virgin Media and certain Freeview devices.

RNIB recently launched a talking digital set-top box called Smart Talk that supports people who struggle to read TV guide menus. Providing navigation in an audio format is not only great for the homes of older people, but in community settings too.

DVDs: There are over 500 audio described films now available on DVD to make the viewing of the latest blockbusters and old classics more enjoyable for people with sight problems. A list of the titles can be downloaded from RNIB's website www.rnib.org.uk

Cooking: Making simple changes to the equipment used can make a big difference. This could include using brightly coloured utensils, talking scales and timers and tactile markings on buttons.

Reading: There is no need for older people to miss out on the pleasure of reading just because they can't see to read standard print. Some books are available in large print or audio from local libraries and other providers. Alternatively, you could recommend the popular RNIB Talking Book Service, which can supply a huge range of books in audio format. RNIB National Library Service can also lend books in either giant print (24 point font size) or braille. National Talking Newspapers and Magazines produce a wide range of magazines and journals in audio. You can contact RNIB's Helpline directly for these services, and there is no need for a referral.

Using computers: RNIB's Technology Support Service is a network of volunteers across the UK. They can visit homes or centres to help with hardware and software setup, upgrades and ongoing technical queries. Call RNIB's Helpline for more information.



An inclusive Activity Centre: Age UK Portsmouth

“I feel welcome and relaxed, as there is always someone to guide me to the door”

Age UK Portsmouth’s Activity Centre is open five days a week, catering for people aged over 50 in the Portsmouth area.

The manager of the Centre says:

“We provide a sociable environment for people to meet and have a meal together, enjoy the activities going on, and regain their self confidence. When an older man who was totally blind started to attend the Centre regularly, it gave us pause for thought; how could we make his time with us more fulfilling? We obtained some braille games and periodicals, and involved our partially-sighted and sighted people too. They came up with a broad range of things they could all enjoy together. There were a lot of oral games, like quizzes and descriptive activities; tactile activities, from handicrafts and cookery to model-making; and braille dominoes and playing cards.

Reminiscence projects included everyone, and both sighted and blind participants enjoyed the space to relax and chat. The Centre now has a real emphasis on integration and sharing of ideas and experiences.”

A user of the Centre says: “I started attending here when I moved to Portsmouth to be near my daughter when my wife died. As I am blind, it was difficult to get used to getting around on my own in a strange city, and my guide dog had died, so my daughter arranged for me to come to Age UK for a trial day. I enjoyed it so much – I now come five days a week. I feel welcome and relaxed, as there is always someone to guide me to the door. I follow the hand rail till I reach the place I want and the same on my return. I feel independent, and have help when I need it. Everyone is very nice.”

Vision Impaired Bowls Group

“I love the opportunity to get out and I love that I can still play bowls”

The East Sussex Association of Blind and Partially Sighted People (ESAB), Vision Impaired Bowls Group started in Summer 2009 as a pilot project, with the aim of offering people with sight loss an opportunity to enjoy some gentle exercise and a sociable environment. The main benefits the players talk about are the opportunities bowls gives them to socialise and to exercise – for several of the group, bowls days are the only time they get out.

One member of the group, Linda, says “I like being out in the fresh air and bowls is surprisingly good exercise. People say I’ve lost weight since I started

playing, which is good. I initially found it quite difficult getting from one end of the green to the other but as I get fitter this gets easier.” Renee, at 90 the oldest member of the group, played bowls for many years before having to give up and she says “I just love the opportunity to get out.” Whilst Dorothy says “I love that I can still play bowls, even though I’m not as good as I used to be!”

The group use the facilities of the Herstmonceux Bowls Club and four members of the Club regularly volunteer to assist. They hope the project will inspire other bowling clubs to set up similar projects.

Moving around your service

Moving around can be difficult for people with sight loss. It can be tempting to keep them safe by asking them not to move around independently in your service. But this means restricting their freedom of movement – imagine how the following would make you feel.

- You were served all your meals where you sat because staff did not feel confident guiding you.
- You could never walk around without someone telling you to sit down because it's not safe.
- You were constantly bumping into things because they were always being moved.
- You were being guided along a passage and suddenly fell because you reached a step a care worker hadn't told you about.
- You didn't know where you were being taken.

Guiding a person with sight loss

Each person's sight loss is different, and some people will require more support than others, it is not directly related to the amount of sight lost. If a person does need guiding, here are the top tips.

- Always ask them how they would like to be guided – don't assume you know.
- Don't hold the person's arm. Let them hold your arm at the elbow, with your arm by your side.
- While you're walking, keep talking to the person, telling them where you're going and what to be aware of (for example, when you're going up and down steps).
- Always look back when you're going through doorways to make sure the person is in the right position and is not going to hurt themselves.
- If the person wants to sit down, allow them to manoeuvre into the chair independently, offering further verbal guidance if it looks as if they may miss the chair. Don't push or pull people into the chair as this can be very distressing.
- Always let a person know when you are leaving them, and never leave them in the middle of a room.

To and from the service

The outside environment can be a difficult place for people with sight loss.

- Ensure that any transport services you offer take people from their door to the door of the service where a person is met by a guide and back to their door when returning home.
- Do not 'drop off' or pick up from designated places as these exclude people with sight loss who may not be able to make their way to and from the transport. A guide to take them into their home is an essential part.
- Shopping services need to include support for people with sight loss within a shop as well as transportation. Shopping can be a particular challenge for people with sight loss. Some large stores will provide support on request, but this is often not available.



Befriending and volunteering: Age UK Kensington and Chelsea

“The young people who visit me are charming and I enjoy talking to them about history”

Since 1997, Kensington and Chelsea Age Concern has been connecting young volunteers (aged 16-25) with older community members with sight loss through a project that not only benefits older blind and partially sighted people, but the youngsters too.

The young volunteers visit older people with a visual impairment in their own homes and assist with reading letters, writing responses or simply reading a book or newspaper to the older person. They also make time for a chat and a cup of tea.

Mrs S, a user of the service, says:
“They are charming girls. As an ex-school mistress I have had a lot of contact with children in the past, but young people today seem to be more in touch with the world than when I was

growing up. I am always amazed how little they know about history, so I hope the things they read can broaden their horizons and extend their knowledge of the British past. They probably think it is an extension of school coming here!”

Service users are referred from the borough’s Sensory Impairment Team, Social Services and Blind Aid (formerly Metropolitan Society for the Blind). The volunteers are then primarily recruited from local secondary schools and colleges, and the same volunteer visits once a week for about one hour. Most of the young volunteers participate for one academic year. Visual awareness training for the volunteers is facilitated by Action for Blind People.

Going on trips

Cinema and theatre: Audio description (AD) is now available in over 250 cinemas in the UK. The majority of mainstream film releases now have audio description written for them. Description is received via a headset that can be requested at the box office. Many large theatres also offer AD for performances. RNIB can provide a list of local cinemas and theatres with AD.

Museums and galleries: Museums are happy to offer assistance to people with sight loss, for example by providing a guide around the collections, offering touch tours or special events or providing an audio guide. To make sure a guide is available, it is important to give advance notice of your visit (in most cases, one to two weeks).

A growing number of museums and heritage venues also provide information in large print, braille or on tape, so if you need information in these formats, ask if they are available before you go. Alternatively, they may be able to send them in advance.

There are several cathedrals in the UK which have tactile plans/models, tape and braille guides. Further information can be obtained directly from the individual cathedrals.

If you are organising a trip out somewhere locally, think about making your own audio guide.

RNIB have information on local clubs, and specialist holidays. Call RNIB's Helpline for more information on local activity organisations for blind and partially sighted people.

Arranging assistance for train travel

Your service users can ask for help when travelling by train. Rail Enquiries (on 08457 48 49 50) can tell you which train company operates from your station and how you can make arrangements for assistance. We recommend you do this as far in advance as possible, giving at least 24 hours notice. London Underground offer a similar service.

Partnership working in action: Age UK Lincoln and Action for Blind People

Action for Blind People – East Midlands (an associate charity of RNIB) placed an officer in the Age UK Lincoln centre allowing a close working relationship between the two charities to develop. This includes a cross-referral route for benefits advice and the promotion of each others

services when speaking to service users. Age UK Lincoln are hosting Action user groups and we work together on raising awareness on older peoples issues, including sight loss, in local schools. There has also been awareness training for Age UK Lincoln staff.

Partnership working in action: Age UK Oxfordshire – Banbury Centre

In 2008 Age UK and Oxfordshire Association for the Blind (OAB) set up a joint project at the Banbury Centre. The OAB provides a project worker for one afternoon per week, supported by volunteer assistants. The project worker is also available by telephone for another two days per week should service users need further support.

The aim is to bring knowledge and advice to people newly experiencing sight loss. Benefits include:

- referral to other support services

- specialist equipment to try out
- access to emotional support and counselling services, information about healthy walks and social groups for people with sight loss.

In addition, the project helped reduce the isolation often felt after sight loss by providing a number of volunteer home visitors. One of their greatest achievements was supporting a man with sight loss to learn how to cook his meals again.

What RNIB and Age UK can do to help

We hope that this guide will help you to improve the quality of services provided to those with sight loss, but it's just a start. There's also a whole range of support, advice, products and services that RNIB, Action for Blind People and Age UK can provide to help you achieve this. Our specialist advisers are just a call or click away.

Partnership working

RNIB, working in partnership with Action for Blind People, have a network of regional centres across the UK, as does Age UK. At local level, many Age UKs already have good working relationships with their local Society for the Blind. Local partnership working is a very effective and practical approach when adapting services or developing new services for older people with sight loss – as illustrated by many of the case studies included in this guide. Contact RNIB's Helpline for more information on local organisations for the blind and partially sighted in your area.

Advice and support from RNIB

We know that, for many people with sight loss, just being able to carry on doing everyday things like telling the time or reading the daily newspaper can really help their quality of life.

RNIB offers a range of emotional and practical support services. People do not need to be registered blind or partially sighted to get advice or support from us.

The RNIB Helpline offers confidential telephone support, information and counselling to people experiencing emotional difficulties following their sight loss. You can refer your service users to this service or call yourself on 0303 123 9999.

RNIB products and publications

RNIB's range includes many of the aids mentioned in this guide as well as magnifiers, talking clocks and watches, lighting, magazines, a talking telephone, Big Print newspapers, calendars and diaries to name but a few. We also produce information on making things easier to see.

Our Understanding series of booklets provides information on many of the eye conditions that may affect older people, including treatment and how to live well with the condition.

You can also browse our full range of books, magazines and products online at www.rnib.org.uk/shop

We also provide catalogues in accessible formats.

RNIB National Library Service

Reading is an essential part of everyday life, whether someone wants to read for pleasure or learning, relaxation or inspiration, by themselves or with others. We offer a wide choice of books and information in audio, braille and giant print (24 point font size). Books are sent postage-free direct to readers' homes and we offer help with choosing books. There is also free online access to our reference information, braille sheet music, book lists and a magazine "Read On". There is a subscription fee for the Talking Book Service; all our other library services are free.

Newspapers and magazines

RNIB and National Talking Newspapers and Magazines also offer a wide range of magazines and newspapers in accessible formats (such as large print and audio) for readers of all ages. Service users can take out their own individual subscriptions directly or you could consider providing these services to your clients. Contact our Helpline on 0303 123 9999.

RNIB Consultancy service

RNIB can support you by improving access to your organisation's environment and services through our consultancy service.

- Visual and disability awareness training courses that aim to give staff more confidence in reaching customers with disabilities. These courses can be modified to meet specific needs and are well suited to cascading skills through training your trainers.
- Website audit and certification to ensure that your online presence is accessible.
- Access audits of existing buildings and design appraisals of both new buildings and redevelopments. We will assess all of the features of your property and recommend practical solutions to overcome any potential issues.

- We can also help you to provide the information that empowers blind and partially sighted people to be more independent (in a variety of formats on demand).

For more information on any of our Consultancy services, please call 01733 375 370 or email businesslink@rnib.org.uk

RNIB's residential care for older people

We have three residential homes offering a range of permanent and short-term accommodation options for older people who are blind, partially sighted or deafblind, all designed to enable independence. Our homes are set in beautiful grounds and are well equipped with a number of adaptations including talking notice boards, talking lifts, braille embossers, magnifiers and access to a library of large print, braille and audio books. We also run a varied social and activities programme.

As our homes are committed to excellence, we are registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and are a Founder Member of the National Skills Academy for Social Care.



Founder Member

Action for Blind People

Part of the RNIB group of charities, Action for Blind People offers practical support to blind and partially sighted people in England. To find out about Action services in your area, call RNIB's Helpline 0303 123 9999; email helpline@rnib.org.uk or visit www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Age UK Information and Advice

Age UK offers a wide range of information for older people and their carers on topics ranging from money benefits to housing options and care and support at home.

Our information guides aim to help older people enjoy good health for as long as possible. Titles range from “Caring for your eyes” to “Healthy living” and “Healthy eating”. They are available in large print on request and can be ordered in bulk to distribute to your clients. Factsheets provide more detailed information and are suitable for advisers. You can order the guides and factsheets through Age UK Advice 0800 169 65 65 or download them from www.ageuk.org.uk/publications

Age UK Services

We are the largest provider of services to older people in the UK after the NHS. We make a difference to the lives of thousands of older people through working nationally and in partnership with over 170 local Age UKs to provide local services such as befriending schemes, day centres and lunch clubs, health and wellbeing services, home services and digital inclusion programmes. Specialist services include:

The Wellbeing Services Department aims to develop and provide services that enable people to combat isolation and loneliness, stay well and enjoy later life. Two major project areas are “fit as a fiddle” a healthy ageing programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund, which aims to reach 300,000 older people by October 2012 and improve their physical activity and mental wellbeing, and “Call in Time”, a national telephone support service funded by Zurich Community Trust and other partner organisations, which matches older people to volunteers who alleviate the impact of isolation by regular phone calls.

The Home Services Department focuses on helping older people to live independently in their own homes, primarily through the provision of practical support. Services are themed around home safety, home security, minor aids and adaptations, small repairs and remaining well and independent.

The Service Development Department provides expertise and support to our local partners in the areas of: health and social care; equalities and human rights; tendering and contracting; business development; evaluation and outcome measurement, and marketing.

Contact us

RNIB website

Our website has all the latest information about our work, establishments, services, discussion forums and much more. Please note that none of the RNIB services referred to are restricted to people on the register of blind and partially sighted people; they're available to anyone who's experiencing a sight problem, their family, carers or the professionals who work with them. Please visit www.rnib.org.uk

RNIB Helpline

Your first point of contact for advice, information and questions. Call **0303 123 9999** or email helpline@rnib.org.uk

Ordering RNIB products

To order a product, publication or magazine and for information on joining the National Library Service, call **0303 123 9999**, email helpline@rnib.org.uk or visit www.rnib.org.uk

Age UK website

Our new and improved website includes a wide range of regularly updated information about our services, campaigns and policy influencing work. It also has a dedicated section for professionals working for and with older people, or on ageing issues, with a series of specialist resources and reports, such as our recently launched "Expert Series". Please visit: www.ageuk.org.uk

Age UK Information and Advice

For information and advice from anything from health to housing and to order free factsheets and guides, call **0800 169 6565**.

Age UK Services Helpdesk

For all enquiries about Age UK's services please contact our Helpdesk. Email services@ageuk.org.uk or call **020 303 31091**.

RNIB is the leading charity working in the UK offering practical support, advice and information to anyone with sight loss or those who work with them.

Age UK has a vision of a world in which older people flourish. We aim to improve later life for everyone through our information and advice, campaigns, products, training and research.