

# Who is Sight Action?

**Sight Action** is a registered charity supporting visually impaired people throughout the Highlands and Western Isles.

Our field work services assess, support and offer information and training to blind and partially sighted people of all ages, helping them to live as independently and as safely as possible.

We support visually impaired children and their parents / carers and provide them with opportunities to meet other partially sighted and blind children.

Sight Actions' Visual impairment awareness training programmes, encourage other service providers and agencies to meet the needs of visually impaired people using their services.

We monitor developments in specialist assistive devices and offer advice and training in the use of equipment that promotes safety, independence and social inclusion.

**Sight Action** can be contacted at:

**38 Ardconnel St**

**Inverness**

**IV2 3EX**

**Tel: 01463 233663**

**Or visit our website: [www.sightaction.org.uk](http://www.sightaction.org.uk)**

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# **Introduction**

The purpose of this booklet is to provide information about certification, the advantages of registration and about some of the services available to people with a visual impairment.

There are a wide range of benefits and services available to people with a visual impairment. Some benefits are dependent upon registration and are only available to those registered as visually impaired. Other services are available to anyone with a severe loss of vision and not dependent upon registration.

Registration as either blind or partially sighted is voluntary, but it does act as a doorway to many services that can support you to retain or regain independence in important areas of your life.

## **Certification**

Many people with poor vision are helped to overcome the difficulties they face through the provision of appropriate prescription glasses by the Optician. For some, however, prescription glasses will not resolve their difficulties and they will be referred to the Eye Clinic to see a specialist, known as a Consultant Ophthalmologist.

If the Consultant Ophthalmologist is unable to rectify your sight or prevent further loss, he may

discuss certifying you as being eligible to be registered as either blind or partially sighted and referral to Sight Action for assessment and support.

## **Registration**

Sight Action, on behalf of the Highlands Council and Western Isles Council, has a statutory obligation under the National Assistance Act (1948) to maintain a register of all those who are registered as either blind or partially sighted in the region.

Registration is voluntary but is necessary to obtain certain benefits. However, it can make accessing some services and benefits provided by national and local government and voluntary organisations easier.

People registered as blind are often concerned that the term 'blind' does not describe their situation. However, a high proportion of people who are registered 'blind' have some useful vision and never totally lose their sight.

## **Initial Contact / Home Visit**

On receipt of the referral from the Consultant Ophthalmologist, Sight Action will make contact with you and make arrangements for one of the Rehabilitation Officers to visit you at home.

During this visit the process of registration will be explained to you and you can determine if you wish

to be placed on the register. Services and assistance that may be available to you will be outlined and you will be able to talk about any difficulties or concerns you may have.

If appropriate, and in partnership with you, a specialist assessment will be undertaken to ensure your 'needs' are accurately identified and methods of meeting / addressing them agreed.

## **Specialist Assessment**

The areas covered during the assessment include:-

Remaining vision and how it is used.

Emotional well-being and general health.

Housing suitability and social situation

Education / Employment needs.

Independent Living Skills

Communication Skills

Mobility.

Finances / Possible Benefits entitlement.

During this assessment it may be identified that some of your 'needs' are best met by referring you to other service providers. The Rehabilitation Officer will discuss this with you prior to doing so.

# **Information Sharing**

Sight Action works in partnership with Highland Council, Western Isles Council and NHS Highlands and NHS Western Isles, as well as other agencies to ensure the support and services you receive are appropriate. Therefore, information about you may need to be shared. We will ask for your consent to share necessary information as part of the assessment process.

## **Rehabilitation Officer – VI**

In addition to undertaking the 'specialist assessment', the Rehabilitation Officer can design and implement rehabilitation training programmes to help you adapt existing skills and / or adopt new skills in order to maintain your independence and safety.

The Rehabilitation Officer can also help those around you to gain an understanding of your visual impairment and how it impacts on all aspects of your life.

Practical help can often be the most valuable for people adjusting to their visual loss. Rehabilitation Officers can offer advice and deliver training on low vision, independent living, communication and mobility.

## **Low Vision Assessment**

Many people with visual impairments have some useful remaining vision and can be helped, advised and encouraged to make best use of this.

Low Vision Aids (LVA) is the term used for equipment that can help you to make the best use of the vision you have, very often a magnifier.

Sight Action work in conjunction with Low Vision Aid clinics in hospital eye departments and offer assessment of low vision at home.

The Rehabilitation Officer can also assist you in making the best use of lighting and suggest strategies to make full use of your remaining eyesight.

## **Independent Living Skills**

We offer advice / training to ensure that you are able to maintain your independence and safety, either by applying your existing skills appropriately, or by acquiring new skills that enable you to do so.

We can work with you in areas such as personal care, food and drink preparation, housework, telling time, identifying money.

# **Communication**

We can provide advice, assistance and training to enable you to maintain your ability to read, write and communicate independently. This may include, using large print or audio formats, Deaf/Blind sign language, tactile languages – Braille & Moon, lighting and low vision aids, writing guides, keyboard and IT skills.

# **Mobility**

Mobility is about getting around safely either independently or with another person. Advice and training can enable you to move around your own home or elsewhere in safety and with confidence.

Skills taught may include:-

Sighted Guiding.

Room or building familiarisation.

Advice on crossing roads.

Using public transport.

Using a white cane.

# **Assistive Technology**

Visually impaired people can benefit from using computers / assistive technology. It can provide an alternate means of accessing information in a suitable format and can enable you to communicate with others using the internet and e-mail.

Sight Action can offer advice on scanners, screen text magnifiers, screen text reading and voice recognition programmes. Training is also available at our centre in Inverness.

# **Specialist Equipment**

There is a wide range of specialist equipment available to help visually impaired people. Sight Action, following assessment, aims to provide you with equipment that promotes safety, independence and social inclusion. We can also demonstrate or advise on other assistive devices that are available to purchase, as well as signposting you to other agencies where equipment may be available.

# **Benefits of registration and other services**

## **Blind Person's Income Tax Allowance**

If you're registered blind you can claim the Blind Person's Allowance. This does not apply to people registered partially sighted.

### **How the Blind Person's Allowance works**

Blind Person's Allowance is added to your tax-free Personal Allowance - so is an extra amount of income you can get each year without paying tax. If you are on a low income or even if you don't pay any tax you may be able to transfer your Blind Person's Allowance to your spouse or civil partner.

### **How you get Blind Person's Allowance**

To claim Blind Person's Allowance contact HM Customs & Revenue on their priority telephone number 0845 366 7887. Lines are open from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm, Monday to Friday and 8.00 am to 4.00 pm, Saturday

## **TV Licence Reduction**

If you or someone you live with is registered blind, you could receive a 50% concession on the cost of your TV Licence. If you already have a licence, but it isn't in the name of the person who is blind, you will need to transfer the licence into their name.

If you have any further queries or if you would like more information on how to apply for the blind person's concession for your TV Licence for the first time, call TV Licensing on 0844 800 6779 and they'll talk you through what you need to do.

People who are partially sighted do not qualify for the concession.

## **Car parking concessions**

### **Disabled parking - Blue Badge Scheme**

Registered blind people qualify for the blue badge scheme. It enables badge holders to park on some single and double yellow lines and provides free parking in all Highland Council car parks.

People registered partially sighted may be eligible for a blue badge if they have additional health problems or a physical disability. Such applications will need to be supported by their General Practitioner.

## **To apply for a blue badge**

In the **Highland Region**, telephone your local Highland Council Service Point and a form will be sent to you. Alternatively you can download an application form from the Highland Council website, [www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk)

Return completed applications to the Service Centre:

Blue Badge Scheme  
Highland Council Service Centre  
Osprey House  
Alness Point Business Park  
Alness  
IV17 0UP

In the **Western Isles** please contact your local Social Work Office.

## **Concessionary Travel**

### **The Scotland wide free bus scheme**

This scheme allows blind and partially sighted card holders to travel FREE on registered bus services, trains, underground and ferries throughout Scotland.

For those registered as blind, their card can be endorsed to enable a 'sighted' companion to travel

free on buses throughout Scotland and on trains, underground and ferries in certain regions.

People registered partially sighted must also be in receipt of either Attendance Allowance, or Disability Living Allowance at the middle / higher care component, before they are eligible for a companion to travel free as indicated above.

Registered blind or partially sighted concession card holders will have their card endorsed with the letter C +1 to indicate companion entitlement.

To apply for a travel card please complete an application form which are available from Post Offices, Highland Council Service Points and all Comhairle area offices on the Western Isles.

## **Discounted Taxi Fares**

City Taxis based in Inverness offer discounted rates to registered blind and partially sighted people. Contact City Taxis on 01463 222555 for more information.

## **Postal Concessions**

Royal Mail operate a scheme called Articles for the Blind, that allows blind and partially sighted people to send certain items of post free of charge, using special 'Articles for the Blind' labels.

Items that can be posted free include:-

Embossed or large print (minimum font size 16pt) books, papers or letters.

Computer discs, CD's and audio described DVD/video

Talking books and newspapers

Specialist equipment.

For further information about this scheme contact your local post office or Royal Mail Customer Services on Tel:- 08457 740 740

## **Free permanent loan of audio equipment**

Registered blind and partially sighted people may be entitled to the loan of specially adapted radio, radio/CD/cassette players from the charity, British Wireless for the Blind Fund. Provision of equipment is dependent upon need and those people who already have a set they can easily operate or are able to purchase a set do not qualify. Sight Action can provide more details.

## **BT – Free Directory Enquiries**

People who are registered blind or partially sighted, or have a significant visual impairment, can register with and call British Telecom's free Directory Enquiries Service.

Sight Action can assist you in registering for this service.

## **Disabled Persons' Railcard**

Registered blind and partially sighted people qualify to purchase a Disabled Persons Railcard. The railcard allows you to get a 1/3 off most rail fares throughout Great Britain. If you're travelling with an adult companion they also can get the same discount.

The railcard costs £18.00 for one year or £48.00 for three years.

Application forms are available from stations and once completed should be posted to:-

Rail Travel Made Easy  
PO Box 11631  
Laurencekirk  
AB30 9AA

You can also telephone 0845 605 0525.

# Welfare Benefits

There are a number of welfare benefits that people with a visual impairment may be entitled to claim, depending upon their circumstances. The information below gives a very brief overview of possible benefits. The Rehabilitation Officer will be able to offer further information and direct you towards appropriate sources of help for detailed benefit advice.

## Pension age welfare rights

### 60 or over

If you need help from other people to look after yourself because of your sight problems, and you are under 65, you may be entitled to **Disability Living Allowance**.

If you have a low income, you may be entitled to **Pension Credit guarantee credit** .

If you live in rented accommodation you may be entitled to **Housing Benefit**.

If you have to pay Council Tax, you may be entitled to **Council Tax Benefit and/or the Council Tax Disability Reduction**.

If you have to care for your partner or spouse, or they care for you, they/you may be entitled to **Carers Allowance**.

You are also entitled to free prescriptions, and winter fuel payments.

## **65 or over**

If you need help from other people to look after yourself because of your sight problems, you may be entitled to **Attendance Allowance** . Please note that you cannot get Attendance Allowance if you already get Disability Living Allowance.

If you have a low income but have some savings, you may be entitled to **Pension Credit savings credit**.

## **25 or over and in work**

If you need help from other people because of your sight problems (at home, in work or both) you may be entitled to **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)**.

If you work for 16 hours or more a week and you get DLA, you may be entitled to **Working Tax Credit (WTC)**

If you have a dependent child or children, you may be entitled to **Child Tax Credit (CTC)** . If you have a child who is sick or disabled, you may be entitled to **Disability Living Allowance for a Child**.

If you live in rented accommodation and your household income is low, you may be entitled to **Housing Benefit**.

If you are liable to pay council tax and your household income is low, you may be entitled to **Council Tax Benefit** and/or the **Council Tax Disability Reduction**.

## **Over 25 and not in work**

If you need help from other people because of your sight problems you may be entitled to **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)**

If you are well enough to work and are looking for a job, you may be entitled to Jobseekers Allowance (JSA).

If you are not well enough to work, you may be entitled to **Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)**.

If you have a dependent child or children, you may be entitled to **Child Tax Credit (CTC)** . If you have a child who is sick or disabled you may be entitled to **Disability Living Allowance for a Child**

If you have to care for your partner or spouse, or they care for you, they/you may be entitled to **Carers Allowance**

If you live in rented accommodation, you may be entitled to **Housing Benefit**.

If you are liable to pay council tax you may be entitled to **Council Tax Benefit** .

If you are entitled to ESA or JSA you may be able to claim a Community Care Grant.

If you are entitled to ESA, JSA or CTC you may be able to claim **Health Benefits**.

## **16 plus and still in education (school or college)**

If you need help from other people because of your sight problems, you may be entitled to **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** . Your parents may have been claiming this for you while you were a child, but once you are 16, you can have it paid directly to you instead.

If your course is part-time (less than 21 hours a week), or if it is full-time but you get DLA, you may be entitled to **Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)** .

You can also claim **Education Maintenance Allowance** – this is available to all students who stay on in education when compulsory schooling ends at 16. The amount you get will depend on the income of your parents/ guardian.

## **The Family Fund**

The Family Fund, a registered charity, helps families with severely disabled children to have choices and the opportunity to enjoy ordinary life.

They give grants for things that make life easier and more enjoyable for the disabled child and their family, such as washing machines, driving lessons, hospital visiting costs, computers and holidays.

Further information is available from Sight Action or the Family Funds' website [www.familyfund.org.uk](http://www.familyfund.org.uk)

# **Talking book Service**

People registered as blind or partially sighted can access the RNIB Talking Book Service, which provides a wide range of books on Compact Disc. A special machine is provided on which to play these discs.

As well as those who are registered anyone who has a significant visual impairment can access the Calibre Talking Book Service which provides a wide range of books on tape, CD and MP3CD

Sight Action offers a selection of audio books on cassette tape.

In addition to the above most Libraries throughout the Highlands, including mobile libraries carry a selection of audio books.

# **Talking Newspapers**

There are a wide range of talking newspapers available, both local and national. Highlands and Islands Tape Service for the Blind and Disabled offer the following titles, which are supplied and delivered free of charge:-

Highland News, Inverness Courier, Narinshire Telegraph, North Star, Ross-shire Journal, Strathspey & Badenoch Herald, Scotsman, Scotland on Sunday and Church Services.

For Visually Impaired people in Lochaber, 'Talk Lochaber' is produced every week and contains news from the local press.

The Western Isles visually impaired community is served by an audio version of the Stornoway Gazette.

'National Talking Newspapers and Magazines' produce national newspapers and magazines in audio on tape, CD, DAISY CD and by MP3 download, and in digital full-text format by, e-mail, download and CD-ROM for visually impaired and print disabled people who find reading a strain. A membership subscription is required to receive this service.

Applications for all the above can be made though Sight Action.

## **Newsletter**

Sight Action produces a free newsletter two or three times per year, offering a range of information and advice. It is posted to all registered Blind and partially sighted people. Print and audio copies are available.

# **Electoral Rights**

All polling stations must provide a tactile voting device and at least one large print version of the ballot paper. This makes it easier for visually impaired people to vote without the assistance of another person.

Should assistance be required, polling station staff can read the list of candidates and their details to you.

There are other means of voting available:-

## **Voting by post.**

Anyone is entitled to vote by post if they wish to do so, no reason is required.

## **Voting by proxy.**

People registered as blind are also entitled to vote by proxy. Partially sighted people can also apply to vote by proxy but their entitlement is not automatic.

Anyone applying to vote either by post or proxy should do so, at least six working days before the election date.

# **Employment**

If you are unemployed but thinking about work, or in employment and having to think about the effects of sight loss on your work, the Disability Employment Advisor (DEA) at your local Job Centre Plus, are able to offer support and assistance.

The Access to Work scheme can provide advice and practical support to blind and partially sighted people and their employers, and help overcome work related problems arising from their visual impairment.

It can offer a grant towards any additional employment costs incurred as a result of a disability. It may also be able to help with the additional costs of travel to, or in, work for those who are unable to use public transport.

# **Leisure and Recreation**

Whilst many people are not interested in participating in organised activities or prefer to continue to be involved in the activities they enjoyed prior to loss of vision, others welcome the opportunity to meet with other visually impaired people.

The following groups may be of interest to you:-

## **Highland Blind Tandem Club, Wednesdays 6pm April - October (weather permitting)**

Would you like a cycle ride but visually impaired? No problem! Join us for a summer evening cycle ride around Inverness. All ages welcome. Meet at 6pm Wednesdays outside Sight Action, 38 Ardconnel Street from Easter onwards.

Phone Ron Archer (01463) 239552 for further information.

## **Vision Support Groups meetings**

**Alness / Invergordon Group:** meets 3rd Tuesday of each month at the Perrins Centre Alness from 2pm till 4pm. Contact Frank Dinnee, 01349 853355, for further information

**Aviemore Group:** meets last Monday of each month in the Common Room of the Hanover Housing complex. Contact Joy Roberts, 01479 812456, for further information.

**Dingwall Group:** meets 1st Tuesday of each month at the St. James Church Hall, Castle Street, Dingwall from 2pm till 4pm. Contact Sheila Campbell, 01349 863873, for more information.

**Grantown-on-Spey Group:** meets 1st Wednesday of each month at Grant House. Contact Evelyn Grant, 01479872055, for more information.

**Kingussie Group:** meets 1st Thursday of each month at the Wade Centre, Kingussie from 2pm till

4pm. Further information from Susan Kennedy,  
01540 651207

**Lochaber Group:** meets 3rd Thursday of each month Venues vary. Please call Catriona, 01463 233663, for further details.

**Nairn Group:** meets 1st Tuesday of each month at Queenspark Gardens Sheltered Housing. Contact Isobel Clark, 01667 454994, for more details.

**Skye and Lochalsh Visually Impaired Association:** meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month in various venues. Contact Donald John MacLeod, 01599 522207, for further information.

**Thurso Group:** meets 1st Wednesday of each month at the British Legion Hall Thurso from 2pm till 4pm. Further information is available from June Dyson, 07241 851326.

**Western Isles Support groups** are being set up. If you are interested please telephone 01463 233663.

**Working Age Group:** This group meets at Sight Action, 38 Ardconnel Street, Inverness. For further information please telephone Rod Murchison, 01463 230066.

# Audio Description

Audio Description is an additional commentary that helps visually impaired people to picture the on screen / stage action, body language and facial expressions.

A range of TV programmes now have audio description. To access them your TV must be able to receive digital TV. An information booklet is available from Sight Action.

Some theatres and cinemas offer audio described performances. The Eden Court theatre, in Inverness, offers Touch Tours, Audio Described and Signed performances for many shows. Their cinemas are equipped with the latest DTS Access technology, including hearing assist, audio description and for specified performances, soft subtitling. Contact Eden Court, 01463 234234, for more information.

# **Sight Action Information**

**Sight Action**

**38 Ardconnel St**

**Inverness**

**IV2 3EX**

**Tel: 01463 233663**

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