

28/06/2023

Dear Sam Heynes

On behalf of the staff, Board, volunteers and clients of 4Sight Vision Support, I would like to thank Cuckfield Parish Council for generously supporting our work over the past years, most recently in 2022 with a grant of £150. Your support enabled us to help people in your Parish to continue leading positive independent lives, whilst living with sight loss. I am writing today to ask if Cuckfield Parish Councillors would consider supporting our work again.

It is estimated that there are 36,200 people living with sight loss or low vision in West Sussex (RNIB West Sussex Data 2020), and we support 5 who are living in your Parish. Our vision is that every person with sight loss is aware of, can access and benefit from 4Sight Vision Support's services, so that everyone can experience a life without limits.



The current challenges

Adjusting to life after the pandemic

Covid-19 had a profound impact on people living with sight loss, reducing confidence and independence and increasing levels of loneliness and isolation. Now, almost three years since the pandemic began, our clients continue to feel the effects with many having experienced a deterioration to their sight, in some cases irreversibly. Some of our clients have still not returned to the social and leisure activities they accessed before and have lost confidence in maintaining the independence they once had. Collectively, this has had a detrimental impact on clients' mental health and wellbeing.

During the pandemic we adapted our services to provide support by phone, email and video conferencing, offering everything from advice on eye health, emotional support, guidance around daily living aids and assistance with a broad range of accessible technology – including phones, tablets, TVs and home speakers. This new way of supporting people confirmed our thoughts, along with learnings across the sector, and we reassessed our frontline services. Our revised Services Strategy provides greater levels of more specialist one-to-one support and streamlines our clients' journey.



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Now contacting 4Sight Vision Support will mean speaking with a member of our Client Services Team. They will triage the clients' needs, which are often more complex than the client realises, and by speaking with our Team it will help us to unpick these needs, so that we can put them in contact with the right area of our specialist support.

Our specialists work in the following areas:

- Starting Well – supporting children, young people and their families and educators.
- Living Well – supporting those of working age (and sometime their employers) with employment, training, benefits and housing.
- Ageing Well – supporting older people with prevention and benefits information.
- Health and Wellbeing – supporting all ages to access activities, events, groups, leisure, peer support, virtual groups and transport.
- Low Vision Service – supporting all ages with Low Vision Assessments, clinics and daily living aids.
- Accessible Technology – supporting all ages with accessibility, digital inclusion, communication tools, digital technology.

Increasing demand

Since hospital eye clinics began offering more appointments, this has resulted in increased levels of diagnosis, and we have subsequently seen a significant rise in demand for our services. In 2021-22 we supported 525 new clients, a 55% increase on 20-21, and between 1st April and 30th June 2022 we had already supported 217 new clients. There is currently a 9-month backlog of appointments at local hospital eye clinics, which, along with the RNIB's predicted 25% increase in demand by 2030, is likely to result in an unprecedented demand for our services over the next few years.

Cost of living crisis

Last year saw us move out of one crisis and into another; as Covid-19 restrictions eased, people started facing surging costs in food, gas, electricity and fuel. **People with sight loss are more reliant on benefits than the general population; only one in four registered blind and partially sighted people of working age are in employment.** In April 2022, the UK Government increased benefits by just 3.1 per cent – despite bills and prices rising far faster and inflation predicted to reach 11 per cent later in the year (RNIB – July 2022). Blind and sight impaired people continue to experience disproportionate challenges and we have already seen an increase in requests for support with completing complex benefits forms.

Please help us to continue to be there for our clients:

We receive no Government support and rely solely on voluntary donations to deliver our services **free of charge** to our growing client base, which currently stands at 2,842; 5 of which live in your Parish.

“Thank you, I do appreciate everything you are doing for me. You have got everything sorted out so quickly, and have taken the time to find out what would be best for me.”



A donation, however great or small, will enable us to:

- Listen, and provide emotional and practical support for our clients after diagnosis, which can be a devastating and life-changing time.
- Help people to understand their condition and what it means.
- Carry out our dedicated assessments to identify magnification, techniques and products to help with everyday tasks such as reading, shopping, medication, preparing meals; helping our clients to make best use of their remaining sight, enabling them to carry out tasks more easily and safely and remain independent.
- Support our clients with accessing benefits and concessions, helping them to complete often complex and paper-based forms, such as Personal Independence Payments, Attendance Allowance and Blue Badge.
- Assist with setting up and using a broad range of tech devices, providing clients with a wealth of information through simple voice-activated commands, helping them to access online shopping, banking and feel more connected with loved ones and the wider world – reducing isolation.

£55 would enable us to support 1 client for a year

£110 would enable us to support 2 clients for a year

£165 would enable us to support 3 clients for a year

Our Chief Executive, Kirstie Thomas, would welcome the opportunity to speak at a forthcoming council meeting, to explain our work in more detail and discuss how we may support more people living with sight loss in your Parish. If this would be of interest to you, please email me: lorraine.squire@4sight.org.uk or phone: 01243 838 001 to discuss this further.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider our request.

Yours sincerely,



**Lorraine Squire
Trusts & Grants Officer**

