

INTRODUCTION

This information pack has been produced by the East Suffolk Association for the Blind (ESAB), primarily for its visually impaired members and their families and carers. It is essentially a reference document of information split into sections as indexed below and has not been written as a book to be read from end to end. Pick and choose the sections that interest you from the index below. If you cannot find what you are after, please contact our office on **01473 611011** where someone should be able to help.

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WHAT CAN EAST SUFFOLK ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND DO FOR YOU?

If you suffer with any form of eye condition, whether you have reached the stage of being formally registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired (blind), we would encourage you to contact the East Suffolk Association for the Blind where you are invited to take advantage of the services the Association has to offer you. To benefit from these, you will become a registered member of the Association for which there is no membership fee. These services which are also not charged for are covered within this Information Pack summarised briefly below.

You should be aware that if you have been formally registered sight impaired or severely sight impaired (blind) by the Hospital Eye Clinic, the Sensing Change Team should ensure that its impact on your daily living is properly assessed and that you are provided with the appropriate help in terms of statutory aid and rehabilitation. The East Suffolk Association for the Blind is a local independent charity and not only does it endeavour to respond to any request for help from you within two weeks, but it will always keep your name on its' books and will provide ongoing support for you as your future circumstances change.

In the East Suffolk area the Association employs four Community Workers, one of whom will visit you in your own home where they can assess your circumstances and make appropriate recommendations. They are there to help you achieve the best possible independent lifestyle. You will be given a Helpline Card with the name and telephone number of the Community Worker in your area which will enable you to make contact at any time. Examples of what is considered during the assessment are:

1. There are a large range of home and personal daily living aids specially designed to help you remain independent in your own home. Typical examples are talking watches, clocks, large button telephones, liquid level indicators, talking microwaves, lighting and document readers. You will be able to purchase whichever of these meet your needs after your assessment by your Community Worker.

2. The Association are agents for the British Wireless for the Blind Charity who issue on long-term loan radios or radio/cassette/CD players to visually impaired people who meet strict criteria laid down by them. Our Community Workers will assess your circumstances against these criteria during the assessment. These players are also available to purchase for those who do not meet these criteria.

3. The Sensing Change Team currently funds the supply of RNIB Talking Books to visually impaired people who meet certain criteria. Our Community Workers will assess your circumstances against these criteria during the assessment and refer you to Sensing Change if appropriate.

4. The Association also has Social Groups who meet regularly at eight different venues within East Suffolk. Groups of volunteers who run these meetings not only provide an opportunity for a regular social gathering with refreshments and entertainment, but also arrange summer outings and Christmas parties for those who are able to participate. Transport to and from such functions is usually provided free of charge.

5. For more active members there are Bowls and Rifle Shooting clubs and for the less active a number of craft activity groups.

6. If you are interested in going on a holiday, the Association can provide you with details of possible options that cater specifically for the sight impaired.

7. During the assessment if it is identified that you need the assistance of any other statutory or voluntary organisation, then with your permission, the Community Worker will make a referral to the appropriate organisation.

8. The Association publishes a twice yearly informative newsletter distributed freely to all members in large print or as an audio CD.

We very much hope the Association can be of help to you. If you are in need do not hesitate to contact your Community Worker on the number quoted on the helpline card, if you have been given one, or contact our Head Office on **01473 611011**.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT; HOW IT FEELS; MYTHS AND FACTS

The onset of sight loss takes many forms and is a deeply personal experience with no two cases being the same. Feelings that people experience with the onset of sight loss are a deep Sense of Loss, Disorientation, Depression, Anger, Inadequacy, Loss of Dignity, Isolation and Frustration. Some people don't see in the dark - others are badly affected by bright sunlight. Some have a restricted field of vision, whether peripherally, centrally or patchy loss, but most experience a loss of contrast. Two people with the same eye condition will cope in different ways. Sight varies - some days we see far better than on others. Blindness and partial sight are formally defined terms which relate to the quality of vision but blindness does not necessarily mean the absence of sight.

Myths and facts - is it true what they say about vision?

Myth 1: Regular watching TV or reading strains the eyes and sight wears out if used too much.

The Facts: Eyes cannot be worn out by use! Eyestrain is due to tiredness which can be overcome by rest or by changing activity. Looking at the same thing for a long time can be very tiring!

Myth 2: Reading or working in dim light will damage the eyes and electric light is also bad for them.

The Facts: Reading in dim or electric light won't damage your eyes, but you may tire quickly if you concentrate for too long. A light level that is comfortable to use – not too bright, not too dim - is likely to give you the best level of vision.

Myth 3: If I am registered as partially sighted or sight impaired it means that I will lose all of my sight.

The Facts: Registration as being sight impaired is merely a description of how well you see, giving no indication of how your vision will change. Most people retain substantial residual vision - very few people who are registered as blind have no sight at all.

Visual Impairment - a new beginning

Many people who become visually impaired or blind, experience a time of emotional turmoil; this is natural but it need not persist. With help towards re-adjustment they are able to continue with their lives and enjoy pastimes and hobbies, new and old. A few simple changes may be all that is required. For example, making sure that things are kept in a certain place and returned there after use, or just making sure there is ample light, avoiding glare and using colour and tonal contrast. On occasions magnifying or telescopic lenses are appropriate and perhaps other more specialised equipment such as liquid level indicators, talking microwave ovens or specialist document readers can help.

Visually Impaired people will benefit as technology becomes more user friendly, enabling everyone to keep in touch, stay informed and cope with the increasing demands of life. For examples of this read the section on Assistive Technology on page 20.

Ultimately, although visual impairment and blindness are serious life changing conditions, with the right help and support, and a willingness to accept a challenge, the feelings of loss and its implications can be overcome. People with visual impairment can continue to enjoy an independent and fulfilling lifestyle. The East Suffolk Association for the Blind is an independent, local charity specifically dedicated to helping such people achieve this goal.

COMMON EYE CONDITIONS

MACULAR DEGENERATION

This is a group of eye conditions which result in loss of central vision because the “Macula” is diseased. The macula is the area of the retina which is responsible for detecting fine detail and colour. ARMD or (AMD) stands for age-related macular degeneration and exists in two forms; dry which is the commonest, and wet. The dry form consists of loss of layers in the retina and is untreatable. The wet form consists of ingrowth of blood vessels which leak or bleed and is treated by injections of Lucentis (Bevacizumab) or Eyelea (Aflibercept). 10-15% of people with dry AMD develop the wet form. It occurs mostly over the age of 60. Of the 500,000 people in the UK who are affected, half are registered as visually impaired.

Diagnosis of macular disease is very important and the Optometrist is the first port of call. Rapid loss of vision should receive urgent assessment even if you already have the “dry” type of AMD. Injections of “wet” AMD are given at monthly intervals in the first instance under sterile conditions in the operating theatre as a day case. They are extremely well tolerated.

There is an increasing interest in the role of the diet and life style in the prevention of AMD. Smoking should be avoided. Dark leafy vegetables and colourful foods such as egg yolk, orange peppers and red grapes which supply luteins and zeaxanthins should be part of your staple diet. Although AMD is serious and can cause difficulty in reading, recognising faces and stop you driving, peripheral vision is never affected so you can still see out of the corner of your eye. Although you can be registered blind or visually impaired there are a number of agencies which can help with training and specialist equipment. These will be recommended after an assessment either by Sensing Change or by the East Suffolk Association for the Blind (ESAB) community worker.

CATARACT

With age the lens in the middle of the eye loses transparency to become a cataract. This usually occurs at the back of the lens but the middle or the front can be affected in certain situations and different types of cataract can occur at any age.

Treatment is surgical; most commonly by opening up the lens and implanting an artificial foldable hydrophilic acrylic lens whose power has been determined in the preoperative assessment clinic. The procedure is performed as a day case and results are generally excellent. Patients are referred by their Optometrist to the Hospital of their choice.

DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

Diabetes is a disease of micro blood vessels which are very fragile and so bleed easily. In the eye this haemorrhage can block the passage of light to the retina and so cause visual impairment particularly at the macular which is responsible for seeing fine details and colour. These fragile capillaries can also leak fluid from the blood which escapes into the layers of the retina causing visual havoc. Diagnosis is made at the annual diabetic retinal screening or by Optometrist or Ophthalmologist.

Treatment is primarily by paying particular attention to the blood sugar levels and maintaining good control of the diabetes. When retinopathy reaches a certain level Argon laser photocoagulation is performed in the Eye clinic to slow or halt progression.

GLAUCOMA

Glaucoma is a condition characterised by raised pressure within the eye. The fluid which is produced behind the iris has to drain out through a meshwork which lies between the front of the outside edge of the iris and the back of the outside edge of the cornea. This is called the angle and can become blocked either because it is too narrow or because the meshwork gets clogged up.

Diagnosis is usually made by the Optometrist performing the routine check-up. The narrow angle type can cause symptoms but the open angle type does not. However open angle glaucoma does result in

gradual loss of visual field which can lead to blindness. Early diagnosis is sight saving which is why regular checks by the Optometrist are so important. However, it is rare under 40 but the incidence does increase with age.

The treatment of the narrow angle is with the YAG laser. Treatment of the open angle is mainly with eye drops but occasionally complicated surgical procedures are required to improve drainage.

Some words of advice

Since three of the four principal conditions leading to sight impairment are treatable they ought not to be amongst the major causes of partial sight and blindness. Early detection of most eye conditions leading to sight impairment increases the possibility of effective treatment, although, in most cases, it is only possible to prevent progression of further sight loss rather than to restore vision to its former level. Eye examinations at two yearly intervals are therefore advisable for everyone. More frequent examinations may be required where pathology is present or where there is an increased risk of an eye condition indicated by family history.

Eye Testing at Home for those that need it

If you find yourself in the situation of being unable to attend your High Street Opticians due to mobility problems, being cared for in your own home or in a Residential Home or you have other disabilities or chronic illness, you are entitled to a domiciliary visit for eye tests. You can choose who you wish to perform this service. Contact your own optometrist who may well be happy to come out and see you in your home, or they will recommend someone else who will. Alternatively there are companies who provide this service. Under NHS rules only one free eye test per year is allowed, and you, the patient or your representative has to request the eye test and choose your provider. So if you live in a residential home, you will have to be careful you do not inadvertently have your eyes tested by an optometrist brought in by the home within twelve months of making such an arrangement privately yourself. If this happens then you would have to pay for the second test and any spectacles dispensed. However if your vision changes before the year is up or you experience some visual difficulty, then you can and should request an earlier eye test.

REGISTRATION EXPLAINED

If you have impaired vision that cannot be improved with spectacles or contact lenses, you will be advised by your Consultant Ophthalmologist (eye doctor) whether you are eligible to be registered with your local County Council as either Sight Impaired (Partially Sighted) or Severely Sight Impaired (Blind). If you agree to be registered, your consultant will record this by signing a Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI). The form contains information about the results of particular eye tests. It also notes any difficulties that your visual impairment may be causing in your daily life. Classifying your sight in this way does not affect the provision of any medical care, and is not an indication that your vision will get worse.

If you agree to the completion of CVI, the following will happen

- A copy will be sent to your own doctor (GP) for information.
- A copy will be sent to the Sensing Change Team who are responsible for local social care to visually impaired people.
- The Sensing Change Team will contact you to ask if you wish for your name to be added to the relevant register. They will be able to explain the benefits that registration entitles you to. Note that you will not be registered until you agree for this to happen.

A further copy of the CVI, with your name and address removed, will be sent to the Royal College of Ophthalmologists to help with research into the patterns of eye disease in England and how these change over time, facts that are important for decisions about the allocation of funding for local services.

Your local Sensing Change Team has a legal duty to provide you with advice and information about the range of services, benefits and concessions available to people with impaired vision. They are also required to offer those with any level of sight impairment an assessment of their needs, whether or not they choose to register. To do this they will discuss matters such as how individuals are coping with daily life, and may be able to offer some specialist advice, training or equipment.

If your Optometrist feels that you would benefit from a referral to the Sensing Change Team they may complete a Referral of Visual Impairment (RVI) form and forward it to the Sensory Team on your behalf. This may be useful for people who are not eligible for registration, or who have not yet seen an Ophthalmologist and are struggling with daily life due to their visual impairment.

If you do not need to see an Ophthalmologist but feel that you would benefit from contact with the Sensing Change Team, you should obtain a Low Vision Leaflet (LVL) from an Optometrist and send this completed leaflet to the Sensing Change Team.

If you want independent advice or you are experiencing a delay in being contacted by the Sensing Change Team, you can contact East Suffolk Association for the Blind on **01473 611011** who aim to have a Community Worker visit you within two weeks.

Why should I register my visual impairment?

For a number of reasons recently diagnosed people are sometimes cautious of being put on the County Council's sight impaired persons' register. Diagnosis can be a shock and quite enough to cope with on its own. This phase passes more quickly for some than for others. For most people it will pass, eventually. Some fear that registration somehow means that they are more likely to go blind. Registration has no bearing on the outcome of your medical condition. Sometimes people perceive a lack of confidentiality or fear that Big Brother might be watching them. In fact, if you are registered as a sight impaired person, your records will not be released to anyone without your personal permission.

By registering your sight impairment, you help yourself and your family and also other people who are, or who will be registered in Suffolk. Because so many people are not registered, Suffolk Adult and Community Services have an incomplete picture of the number of sight impaired people in the county. For example they have nearly 6,000 Sight Impaired people on their register; while research suggests that there are at least 9,000 people eligible for registration as sight impaired. If the authorities lack the information to assess and support present needs and allocate funds for services today they will certainly be under-resourced in the future.

If you fit the criteria and if you decide to become registered you are helping yourself and your family - here are a few reasons why:

- Registration may be taken into account if you claim benefit.
- There are increased personal income tax allowances for people who are registered sight impaired or severely sight impaired - if you don't work, allowances can be transferred to a working partner.
- Parking concessions (e.g. a blue badge permitting parking in restricted areas) are available for use by people who are registered as severely sight impaired (blind).
- Anyone who is registered severely sight impaired (blind) can claim a 50% reduction in the cost of their television licence.

If you do have any problems or additional questions, the East Suffolk Association for the Blind is happy to offer any information or advice that you need. Please contact the office on **01473 611011**. Alternatively you can contact the Sensing Change Team on **01473 260030**

THE ROLE OF SENSING CHANGE

Sensing Change is an independent Social Work Practice owned by Suffolk County Council that provides assessment, rehabilitation and support to people who have a sight and/or hearing loss.

Sensing Change is able to advise you about all aspects of sight loss and provide rehabilitation services. They will:

- Carry out a specialist assessment in your own home
- Provide advice and information about services and resources in Suffolk and beyond
- Provide useful equipment that can assist you with daily living skills
- Teach you to manage everyday tasks in the home safely and confidently
- Teach you alternative forms of communication such as Braille or Moon
- Provide mobility and orientation training both at home and in your community, teaching you to use equipment such as a white cane. This could enable you to regain some independence and improve your confidence and safety

Mobility

For some people, mobility tuition may concentrate on improving orientation and mobility within their home environment. This may include instruction on how to be guided by a partner, members of the family, regular guide or family carer.

Some people, including those with very limited vision, may wish to travel independently in their own immediate home area, busy town centre or to a place of work. Here training may include instruction to use a mobility aid such as a symbol cane, guide cane or long cane which will improve independence, safety, orientation and confidence. Advice can also be given about other methods of mobility such as electronic devices and Guide Dogs.

Sensing Change Rehabilitation Workers are able to advise you on mobility equipment that is available and also carry out specific training to enable you to continue getting out and about safely and confidently.

It is most important to keep active and mobile despite the difficulties you feel may arise – HELP IS AVAILABLE.

White Symbol Canes - These canes create awareness in sighted people.

Long Cane and Guide Cane- Long cane or guide cane orientation and mobility training is available to any visually impaired person. You do not need to be registered as such in order to receive this training. All mobility training is conducted on a one to one basis from the visually impaired person's home and should only be provided by a suitably qualified Rehabilitation Worker, such as those employed by Sensing Change.

Independent Living Skills

Information, advice and tuition can be given in helping an individual stay independent within their own home. All aspects of food preparation eg washing, peeling, cutting, weighing and measuring can be covered. Preparation of snack meals, making hot drinks, use of hob, grill, oven and microwave for more involved cooking can be included.

Advice and practice regarding laundering clothes, vacuuming and cleaning, personal care and hygiene can be given.

Equipment with dials, eg cooker, washing machine, microwave, iron, thermostats, can be adapted with tactile/visual markings for easier and accurate setting.

Communication

Advice can be given to improve writing skills with specialist equipment such as cheque book, address and signature guides, writing frames and use of additional lighting.

Advice and training in reading by touch, eg Braille and Moon can be offered. This can be used in many practical forms such as labeling

packets, tins, tapes, videos, CD's, USB sticks, for address and telephone numbers. Further training can enable individuals to read magazines and books, or produce their own material. Advice can be given around the use of telephones, particularly those that are best suited to those with a visual impairment.

Advice can be given on the use of Assistive Technology which gives access to specialist computer equipment with enlarged text or with synthesized speech. Touch typing tuition may also be offered to enable a person to type a letter.

Lighting and low vision

Advice is given on improving use of residual vision in all aspects of rehabilitation mentioned above eg mobility, reading and writing. Advice can also be given on general and task lighting and use of colour and contrast in the home. Use of magnification and assistance in making the most of low vision aids is also available.

Benefits

Staff at Sensing Change can provide advice and support to ensure that people have their maximum benefit entitlements.

You can refer yourself directly to Sensing Change and they will arrange a convenient time to visit you in your own home.

For further information on any of the above please contact **Sensing Change on 01473 260030**

BENEFITS AND FINANCIAL HELP

1. Depending on your circumstances, you may be entitled to:

- **Attendance Allowance (0345 605 6055)**
- **Disability Living Allowance (0345 712 3456)**
- **Carer's Allowance (0345 608 4321)**
- **Council Tax Reduction**
- **Housing Benefit**
- **Pension Credit (0800 99 1234)**
- **Personal Independence Payment (0800 917 2222)**
- **Tax Credit Helpline (0345 3003900)**

2. You can get assistance to check that you are receiving all the benefits that you are entitled to, including **Attendance Allowance (if you are 65 or over)**. **Disability Living Allowance** is applicable for all those under 16 yrs. Those aged between 16 and 64 can now claim **Personal Independence Payment**. For more information please call **Age (UK) Suffolk on 01449 674222**.

3. For advice or application for Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit please call the national **Tax Credit Helpline 0345 300 3900**.

4. For **Pension Credit** please call **0800 99 1234**.

5. **Additional Income Support** - there may be additional benefits for those registered sight impaired or severely sight impaired; contact your local Jobcentre Plus office through **0800 055 6688**.

6. **Income Tax** - extra allowance for those registered severely sight impaired (blind). Notify Tax Office of date of registration.

7. **Additional Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction** - contact your local District or Borough Council office for information about additional benefits.

OTHER BENEFICIAL SERVICES

1. **Bills and Banking** - To maintain confidentiality, bills can be sent direct in large print, on tape, or in Braille. Many companies such as Gas, Electricity, Water and Banks will provide this service. Enquire direct.

2. **Eye Tests** – If registered sight impaired or severely sight impaired or you are aged 60 or over, you are entitled to free annual NHS eye tests.

3. **Free NHS Prescriptions** - depends primarily on age and income. Visually Impaired people who cannot go out without assistance may also be eligible. Please enquire at your GP surgery or local pharmacy.

4. **Television** - Currently anyone registered severely sight impaired (blind) is entitled to a 50% reduction off the cost of their TV licence. Proof of registration is necessary - this is available from the Sensing Change Team. No fee is required for just a sound receiver or for those over 75 years.

5. **Radios** etc – East Suffolk Association for the Blind are agents for the British Wireless for the Blind Charity who issue on long-term loan radios or radio/cassette/CD player to visually impaired people who meet strict criteria laid down by the Charity. Our Community Worker will assess your circumstances against these criteria during the assessment or contact the office on **01473 611011** if you want to know more.

6. **Postal Vote** - People registered sight impaired or severely sight impaired are entitled to vote by post in General and Local Elections.

7. **Postal Concessions** - Embossed literature (Braille or Moon) and any specialist equipment and large print documents can be sent to visually impaired people post free by using the term “Articles for the Blind” on the outside cover.

8. **BT** – A free 24 hour directory enquiry service is available if registered severely sight impaired (blind). You can register with BT

for this service by calling **0800 587 0195** or dial **195** and ask for “**Registration**” **Mon – Fri 9.00am - 4.30pm**. You will receive a card on which you will have a personal identification number or "pin" in large print or Braille. When you need to find a 'phone number you just dial **195** and quote your pin number and name - you will get the number you need free of charge. Furthermore, if you are eligible for this service and if you have difficulty dialling a number, the trained operator can help by connecting you to the chosen number, although you will obviously pay for the actual call as you would do for any call.

9. Telephones - Some financial help with telephone rental and/or installation and a free mobile phone may be available to people who meet specific criteria. For further information please visit their website www.tftb.org.uk or call **Telephones for the Blind Fund on 01737 248032**.

10. Fire Protection – If you register with ‘**Fire and Carers Together**’ on **01473 835400**, you can have peace of mind because the Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service will know a vulnerable person lives in your house and needs special attention in case of fire. They will also come to your home to conduct a Home Fire Safety check and put in place fire safety plans to fit your special needs.

11. Personal Alarm System. Aid Call is a personal SOS system approved by Age (UK) Suffolk, which summons help within seconds. It is simple to use and no more trouble to wear than a wristwatch. If anything should go wrong, you know you are not alone. Contact your local participating **Age (UK) Suffolk on 01473 257039** (Ipswich) **01284 757750** (Bury St Edmunds) **01502 586308** (Lowestoft) or the Head Office on **01473 359911** (Claydon)

12. LIONS Message in a Bottle. Store essential information about your health, medication, doctor, friends and relative contact details on a form stored in a plastic bottle in the door of your fridge. A sticker on the inside of your front door and on your fridge door points emergency services to this essential information enabling safer and speedier first aid. Please call the office on **01473 611011** if you would like to obtain one of these bottles.

EQUIPMENT AND INFORMATION CENTRES

This is the term used to define the centres in the County where equipment and aids for daily independent living can be seen and demonstrated. Each provides demonstration facilities for a comprehensive range of daily living aids for people with physical and sensory disabilities and their carers. Visits to all of these centres are by appointment. During a visit, a volunteer will provide advice and information and demonstrate items of equipment that may be beneficial to people with visual impairment. There are three of these centres located around the County, contact details of which are provided below.

Contact details for Suffolk Resource Centres

Sensing Change Resource Centre 161 Rotterdam Road Lowestoft, NR32 2EZ www.sensingchange.org.uk	01502 217079
Ipswich Care for the Blind 19 Tower St Ipswich IPI 3BE www.ipswichblindsociety.co.uk	01473 219712
West Suffolk Voluntary Association for the Blind Disability Resource Centre 4 Bunting Road Moreton Hall Estate Bury St Edmunds IP32 7BX www.wsvab.org	01284 748800

LOW VISION AIDS AND LIGHTING

Low vision aids include specialist hand held magnifiers and head worn spectacles as well as electronic aids for enlarging print (known as CCTVs), and specialist document and screen readers

An Optometric assessment is a building block of low vision care and from this it can be decided on the type of aids which may be of benefit, and if the patient would benefit from referral to any other clinic or professional.

Even patients with poor sight require a regular examination to monitor their condition, screen for any other eye problem and ensure spectacles are optimal. These assessments are available from Low Vision Aid Clinics at your local Hospital Eye Clinic (where some aids are provided free). Referrals to these clinics can be made via your Optician, GP, Hospital Eye Clinics or Sensing Change Rehabilitation Officer. Additionally within East Suffolk, there are two private Optometrists who also provide a full Low Vision Aid Clinic Service. They are:

Derek Dunstone (Optometrist) 3 Queen St, Hadleigh, IP7 5DZ	01473 823755
Alex Gaines (Optometrist) 77 Thoroughfare, Woodbridge, IP12 1AH	01394 382718

Most partially sighted people also benefit from additional lighting. Sensing Change Rehabilitation Officers can offer lighting assessments in your home. They can advise on appropriate general lighting levels as well as looking at safety in specific task areas eg kitchen, stairs and bathroom. They can also advise on colour contrast, reading techniques and using low vision aids.

Electronic aids for enlarging print and other tools such as document readers and screen readers are available for demonstration at the Equipment and Information Centres, whose contact details are given on page 18.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

HOME COMPUTER BASED SOLUTIONS

East Suffolk Association for the Blind is working with another charity called Action for Blind People to provide demonstrations and some training for our members in the use of specialist software running on traditional desktop or laptop computers. This specialist software gives sight impaired people access all the services that sighted people might use on computers such as:-

- Writing letters
- Scanning in personal correspondence and having the computer read it out aloud to you
- Keeping in touch with family and friends through email
- Browsing the world-wide web
- Doing shopping on line
- Listening to music or a myriad of world-wide radio stations

If you would like to arrange for a demonstration please call the office on **01473 611011**. A visually impaired member of staff with Action for Blind People will then contact you to arrange a home visit.

NEWLY AVAILABLE PERSONAL PRODUCTS.

There are many new devices on the market such as **Tablets**, **Smartphones** and **eBook readers**, all having a wide range of assistive features that enable people with visual impairment to use them with ease. Some of the more popular Tablets include the Apple iPad, Google Nexus, Microsoft Surface, Nokia Lumia, Samsung Galaxy, and Sony Xperia. Popular eBook readers include the Amazon Kindle, Barnes & Noble Nook and the Kobo Aura.

Whilst eBook readers started life as just that, some are now including other features such as watching movies, browsing the web, listening to music and downloading games and some “Apps”. Tablets on the other hand offer a greater range of services through the use of a myriad of downloadable “Apps”, a large number of which are free of charge.

Both Tablets and eBook readers offer differing levels of assistive access to those with visual impairment. The following gives a flavour of some of these facilities:

Larger Font Sizes - All Tablets and eBook readers have adjustable font sizes for reading a digital book.

Contrast Sensitivity - One of the helpful features included on Tablets is the ability to adjust the brightness of the screen. There is also the ability to change the colours of the font and backgrounds on the book reading “Apps” on the Tablets, but be aware that many of the lower priced eBook readers do not have this feature.

Zoom - One particular feature that is very useful to the visually impaired is the ability to zoom in and out on nearly anything.

Audio Books - Tablets and some eBook readers have access to audio books as well as digital ones.

Voice Recognition, Dictation and Document Reading - Some, if not all Tablets offer voice recognition. In Apple’s iPad it is known as “Siri” which helps you do the things you do every day through voice commands. All you have to do is speak; you can dictate instead of typing and it will send your messages, make phone calls on command and set up reminders. Other speech related features common to most Tablets are the facility where you or where the Tablet reads aloud your emails, other messages and books.

Music - All Tablets are set up with access to digital music stores where songs can be purchased, downloaded and then saved on the devices and can then be transferred to computers or mobile phones. eBook readers do not generally have access to music.

Skype - an instant message and live person to person video and voice call application that can be downloaded onto Tablets.

Whether you choose to purchase a Tablet or an eBook reader, any of these devices can significantly improve daily living for visually impaired people. They help make reading possible again, allow users to browse the Internet, chat with friends, listen to music, and much more.

TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT FROM THE RNIB

RNIB's Technology Support Squad (TSS) is a free national service that can set up new technology, fix problems and help you use your technology. If you're having trouble setting up or getting the most out of your technology the RNIB has a Technology Support Squad of 800 volunteers across the UK who are there to help with:

- tuning in your digital radio
- learning to use your landline or mobile phone
- getting the most out of your Freeview, satellite and cable TV
- setting up a new computer or laptop, or items like a new printer or monitor
- installing computer software such as Microsoft Office or JAWS
- setting up your internet connection
- investigating - and fixing - problems with an existing computer
- using your eBook reader or DAISY Talking Book.

Visit RNIB's Technology Support Squad webpage online or call their Helpline on **0303 123 9999** to find out more.

KEEP IN THE KNOW

You can sign up for "Switch On", RNIB's free quarterly e-newsletter with information and advice for making the most of everyday technology of products available from the high street and specialists. Call the RNIB Helpline on **0303 123 9999** to **subscribe or sign up online at www.rnib.org.uk/subscribe-switch**

TRAVEL, TRANSPORT & MOBILITY

Mobility

For issues relating to personal mobility, please see the section entitled “The Role of the Sensing Change Team” on page 12.

Guide Dogs

Anyone who is physically fit and is experiencing difficulty in getting about because of sight impairment is eligible to apply for a guide dog (there is no age limit). Contact **Guide Dogs for the Blind** direct on **0118 983 5555** www.guidedogs.org.uk

Community Transport Schemes (providing Door-to-Door transport)

As well as the concessions available on public transport, there are various other door-to-door transport services available such as Dial-A-Ride and Community Car Services, run mostly by a number of voluntary charity organisations - contact details are listed below.

COMMUNITY CAR SERVICES (CCS) DIAL-A-RIDE (DAR)

Aldeburgh/Leiston/Saxmundham (CCS)	01728 831215
Beccles & Bungay (DAR)	01986 896896
Beccles & Bungay Area (CCS)	01986 896896
Botesdale Area (Volunteer Gordon Lawrence)	01379 897109
Coastal Area (DAR & CCS) Aldeburgh, Leiston Framlingham, Saxmundham, Woodbridge	01728 830516
Coastlink – Blythburgh, Walberswick, Dunwich, Knodishall, Thorington, Darsham, Yoxford, Leiston. Minsmere, Saxmundham,	01728 833526
Diss Borderhoppa	01379 854800
Eye Area (CCS)	01379 871200

Felixstowe Area (DAR)	01394 270339
Felixstowe Area Community Transport Services FACTS	01394 282857
Felixstowe Area (CCS)	01394 284770
Framlingham & Woodbridge Area (CCS)	01728 621210
Halesworth Area (CCS)	01986 874290
Ipswich (DAR)	0845 347 9379
Lowestoft Area (CCS)	0845 556 4177
Mid Suffolk (DAR)	01449 614271
Pathfinder – Halesworth Area	01986 874479
Royal Voluntary Service (CCS) for Ipswich, Felixstowe, Stowmarket, Claydon	01473 749927
Southwold Area (CCS)	01502 724549
Stowmarket Area (CCS)	01449 614271
Suffolk Link South (for Needham Market & Area)	01449 616000
Waveney (DAR) – Lowestoft Town Area	0845 556 4171

Wheelchair Accessible Car Services around Ipswich		
Company Name	No. of Vehicles	Tel Number
Avenue Cars	4	01473 407070 or 257777
Beeline Cars	7	01473 417417
Britannia Cars	2	01473 714146
Cabs Smart	1	01473 444444 or 252525
Hawk Express Cabs	6	01473 222222
Ipswich 289 Cabs	2	01473 289289

For **Community Car services** for your area go online to www.suffolkonboard.com and click on **Community Transport**, select **Community Car Services** and then open up the leaflet with the contact numbers for all areas within Suffolk. **For more details call 0845 606 6171**

Helpline for Free Bus Pass

Call **Suffolk County Council** on **0345 600 0659** for information

Suffolk Concessionary Travel Voucher Scheme

If you are unable to travel by conventional public transport because of where you live or health or mobility difficulties, you may be eligible to receive travel vouchers to assist with the cost of taxis or community transport service. To find out more, contact **Suffolk County Council** on **0345 600 0659**.

OTHER TRANSPORT INFORMATION

Traveline for advice on local and national buses, express coach and rail services - **0871 200 2233** - www.traveline.info

Disabled Persons Railcard

If you are registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired (blind) you are eligible for a Disabled Persons Railcard and save one third on most rail fares across Britain. If you travel with a non-registered helper they receive the same discount. The card costs £20 per year or £54 for 3 years. To get a Disabled Persons Railcard, call **0845 605 0525** for an application form and send it together with payment and the required proof of disability, or register via their website at www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk.

Train Travel Assistance

When travelling by train, you can book assistance by phoning the rail “journey line” number at least 24 hours before your journey – **0844 811 0125**, **select Option 2**. (Calls are charged at local rates). Such assistance will help you with train transfers at all stations. **Greater Anglia** can be contacted on **0800 028 2878**

Blue Badge Scheme

If you are registered as a severely sight impaired (blind) person or as a disabled person you qualify for a Blue Badge. The badge enables the driver to park in designated disabled persons' parking places and restricted areas for limited periods of time. You can telephone **Customer First on 0808 800 4005 (select Option 2)** between 8.00 am and 6.45 pm, Monday to Friday to request an application form.

RADAR – The Royal Association for disability & Rehabilitation

RADARs publications include a wide variety of access guides, holiday guides and books and leaflets on various aspects of mobility and travel. They also run a national key scheme which will provide a disabled person with a universal key for disabled toilets around the country. Contact No: **0207 250 3222 – www.radar.org.uk**

Information for driving licence holders

In accordance with the advice shown on the driving licence, any driver with impaired vision is legally required to inform the DVLA, whose medical officer will consider each case on an individual basis. The DVLA can be contacted at: **The Drivers' Medical Branch DVLA, Swansea, SA99 1TU. Phone: 0300 790 6806**

RECREATION AND LEISURE

Below is a list of organisations and groups both national and local who provide social and leisure activities including holidays and outings, mixed social groups, men's groups, craft classes, bowling, rambling, sailing, fishing, tandem riding, pottery, quiz events and much more. Local groups are always looking for new members with new ideas!

NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

BBC In Touch Programme Radio 4 Tuesday evenings 8.40pm, gives advice and news relevant to sight impaired people.	
British Blind Sport	01926 424247
RNIB Leisure Services www.rnib.org.uk	0303 123 9999
English Blind Golf Association	01276 512538
Gardening Advice for visually impaired gardeners can be obtained from RNIB direct and from THRIVE who can be contacted at 'Blind Gardeners' Helpline'	0118 988 5688

COUNTY ORGANISATIONS

Optua Provides information and help on leisure and sporting activities for those with disabilities in Suffolk. Ipswich 01473 836777 www.optua.org.uk

EAST SUFFOLK GROUPS

East Suffolk Association for the Blind have Social Groups that meet at eight centres in Suffolk meeting once a month as well as having special events and outings. For details of your nearest group and transport arrangements, please contact the ESAB office on 01473 611011.	
Felixstowe Sound Shooters for Visually Impaired	07917 665 661
Ipswich Town Football Club	01473 400500

East Anglian Sailing Trust www.east-anglian-sailing-trust.org.uk	0333 088 3278
The Woolverstone Sailing Project at Woolverstone and Alton Water www.woolverstoneproject.org.uk	07507 906719

NORTH SUFFOLK GROUPS

Lowestoft Blind Bowls Club	01502 514700
Lowestoft VI Sports & Activities Group (answerphone)	01502 513371
Lowestoft Live Arts (answerphone)	01502 513371

HOLIDAYS

Vision Hotels from Action for Blind People available to book on their website www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk	01603 455767
Torch Trust www.holidays@torchtrust.org	01273 832282
Royal National Institute of the Blind www.rnib.org.uk	0303 123 9999
Creative Travel www.creative-travel.co.uk	01503 220422
Traveleyes www.traveleyes-international.com	0113 274 6000

Other general services

Equipment

RNIB sell a variety of useful aids for people who enjoy woodwork, gardening, knitting, sewing, etc.

Internet – Radio

ACB Radio showcases and nurtures the creativity and talents of the blind/low-vision community from many parts of the world. ACB Radio is heard by a global audience via the internet, and has visitors from over seventy countries. <http://www.acbradio.org/>

Talking Newspapers and Books

Please see page 31 in this information pack for contact details for Talking Newspapers and Books both locally and nationally.

Radios for the visually impaired

Some visually impaired people qualify for the long-term loan of radio or radio/ /CD system supplied by the British Wireless for the Blind fund. Speak with your ESAB Community Worker or contact **East Suffolk Association for the Blind 01473 611011** for advice on this.

Audio Description Services.

A large number of TV programmes, Cinema and Theatre Shows now support audio described performances. This is where a narrator describes supplementary information in the silence between the spoken words to help visualise all that is going on. For TV, there are specialist TV sets or set top receivers and recorders that have this functionality built in. Please contact East Suffolk Association for the Blind **01473 611011** or speak to your Community Worker for more details. More and more cinemas and theatres are putting on shows with specific performances that provide this service. Please contact your local cinema or theatre to find out more.

Cinemas

If you are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance or you are registered as severely sight impaired (blind), you can apply to the Cinema Exhibitors Association for a national card that entitles you to one free ticket for a person accompanying you to the cinema. The card is valid for 1 year and is subject to a processing fee of £5.50. Application forms are available from participating cinemas or from their website at www.ceacard.co.uk or you can contact the **Card Network on 0845 123 1292** for details.

To find out what audio described films are being screened in your area, you can phone **0845 056 9824** or if you have a computer with built in speakers you can have the cinema listings read aloud to you at:-

<http://www.yourlocalcinema.com>.

Theatres in East Anglia having Audio Described Performances

The New Wolsey Theatre – Ipswich www.wolseytheatre.co.uk	01473 295900
The Theatre Royal - Bury St Edmunds www.theatreroyal.org .	01284 769505
The Mercury Theatre - Colchester www.mercurytheatre.co.uk	01206 573948

TALKING NEWSPAPERS, LARGE PRINT AND BRAILLE TALKING BOOKS

1. National Talking Newspapers

These are available locally and nationally. Talking Newspapers are managed by the RNIB and has lists of magazines as well as newspapers available on audio-tape, CD and on-line. Please contact the RNIB on **0303 123 9999** for further details.

2. Local Talking Newspapers

Local Talking Newspapers are available on memory stick (using Boom Boxes) and other media from the following organisations:

Leiston & District Talking Newspapers.	01728 453579
<i>Newstalk</i> Stowmarket and District Talking Newspaper	01449 615678
<i>Sound On</i> Ipswich and District Talking Newspaper	07484 130 819
<i>Sound East</i> - Lowestoft & District Talking News www.soundeast.org	01502 566470
<i>Three Rivers</i> Beccles & Bungay District Talking Newspaper	01986 895503
<i>Waveney Words</i> Waveney District Talking Newspaper	01379 6512746

3. Talking books

Calibre Audio Library - www.calibre.org.uk	01296 432339
Local County Library Service	01473 584563
RNIB Talking Book Services	0303 123 9999
Suffolk Library Service www.suffolklibraries.co.uk	01473 263811
Torch Trust for the Blind	01858 438260

4. Large Print Books

Large Print Book Shop. www.largeprintbookshop.co.uk	0800 009 6036
Magna Large Print Books	01729 840225
Suffolk at Home Library Service www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/community-services/home-library-service	01473 263818
Ulverscroft Books and Tapes - www.ulverscroft.co.uk	0116 2364325

5. Braille Books

RNIB National Library Service	0303 123 9999
The Scottish Braille Press	0131 662 4445

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

Employment

Disability Services Teams employ Disability Employment Advisors (DEAs) who are based at local Job Centres. Under the "Access to Work Scheme" they can advise on training and help you find work or to remain in your present employment. They can also help with specialist equipment and adaptations, fares to work, personal readers etc. Contact your local JobCentre Plus office and ask for an appointment with their local Disability Employment Advisor. You can be put through to your nearest office by calling **Jobseekers Direct on 0345 604 3719 and select Option 7 (all other enquiries).**

Sensing Change Team Rehabilitation Officers can support you in the more practical aspects around employment e.g. learning the route to work, advising on specialist equipment or necessary adaptations to your work environment. To refer for Rehabilitation Officer support, contact **01473 260030.**

Other organisations that provide information and support regarding all aspects of employment and training are:-

Action for Blind People - **01603 455767**

Blind in Business – **020 7588 1885 – www.blindinbusiness.org.uk**

Training

Papworth Suffolk Progression Centre in Ipswich gives training and work skills for disabled adults.

The centre typically provides training in woodwork, reception skills plus other courses and has an employment advisor and can be contacted on: **01473 232146.**

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

The Sensing Change Team provides a comprehensive service for visually impaired people who have multiple disabilities and are able to put people in touch with local and national organisation that specialise in other disabilities. They can be contacted on **01473 260030**. East Suffolk Association for the Blind Community Workers will however be happy to provide support making a home visit and making a referral to the Sensing Change Team where required.

The Sensing Change Team has a Dual Sensory Loss Assessment and Development Officer who will be happy to carry out an assessment. Alternative methods of communication e.g. deaf-blind manual, block, hands on signing can be discussed with this Officer and tuition offered. Contact **01473 260030**.

The RNIB provide a comprehensive service for this particular group, producing “Focus” fact sheets about eye-tests, education, staff training, etc. They can also advise on advocacy, respite care and equipment. They can be contacted on **0303 123 9999**.

Social Clubs

Introduction to social clubs, which meet once a month for activities and friendship, can be arranged through the Sensing Change Team. Assistance with transport may be a possibility.

COUNSELLING

East Suffolk Association for the Blind Community Workers and Sensing Change Team Rehabilitation Officers can provide a listening ear and practical advice for people experiencing difficulties in coming to terms with their sight loss. However neither of these are trained counsellors, so for long-term and qualified guidance please contact one of the following:

British Association for Counselling www.bacp.co.uk	01455 883300
Suffolk Association for Counselling	01473 212113
International Glaucoma Association Sightline	01233 648170
Listening Eye (run by blind people) – www.whitestick.co.uk/listen.html	0800 783 1979
RNIB Counselling enquiries - www.rnib.org.uk	0303 123 9999
Macular Society Counselling Service - www.maculardisease.org	0845 241 2041

FURTHER INFORMATION

The RNIB produce the following booklets in Braille, Print and CD, giving practical ideas and advice:

Sight Problems;
Living with Sight Problems;
On The Move;
See for Yourself.

The above booklets and others can be obtained through RNIB. Call **0303 123 9999** to obtain any of these booklets.

The Royal College of Psychiatry produce print and audio general information on strategies for coping with depression in elderly people and children and can be contacted on **0207 2352351**

GENERAL TIPS FOR SIGHTED CARERS

1. Don't move so far away from the visually impaired person that you lose "touching" body contact.
2. Never pull or push the person. Remember you are guiding him or her.
3. When speaking to a visually impaired person there is no need to shout. Do not avoid the use of sighted language and do not speak through a third person.
4. If you have to leave a visually impaired person alone ensure he or she can touch a wall, counter, chair etc. This helps to establish surroundings.
5. When you leave a blind person, say so. Would you like to be seen talking to yourself?
6. You may need to adapt some guiding techniques according to the age and disability of the visually impaired person.
7. If offering assistance to a visually impaired person who may be using a white cane or guide dog, approach him or her on the opposite side.
8. Marking everyday equipment such as cookers and microwaves with hi-mark or other tactile methods encourages independence. Advice is available from the East Suffolk Association for the Blind on **01473 611011**.
9. To avoid problems with unauthorised callers, encourage a visually impaired person to take advantage of the use of passwords. Passwords can be arranged through a phone call to the Customer Services of Gas, Electricity and Water Companies, Local Authority or others who do not regularly visit his or her home.
10. Many leaflets on everyday living issues such as Kitchen Sense, Gardening, how to Guide a Blind Person and Meeting Blind People are available from the RNIB. Contact RNIB at Peterborough local call rate on **0303 123 9999** to order.

DON'T GET CAUGHT OUT ON YOUR DOORSTEP BY BOGUS CALLERS

Remember YOU are in charge of your doorstep. YOU decide who comes into YOUR home. If you follow the 'do and don'ts' below this should help you deal with bogus callers.

DO's

DO close and lock the **BACK** door and remove the key **BEFORE** answering your **FRONT** door.

DO put on your door chain or bar **BEFORE** opening your front door.

DO ask for identification from the caller and ask him or her to pass it through the gap without removing the chain.

DO close the door again whilst you check the identification carefully. A genuine caller will not mind waiting outside while you do this.

DO ask them to come back another day when you can have a friend or relative with you if you are still unsure.

DO call the police on **999** if you are suspicious. Police do take these incidents very seriously and it will not be any trouble to them.

DON'TS

DON'T let anyone in who says they are from the Water, Electricity or Gas Board. These boards no longer exist and anyone who says they work for them is bogus!

DON'T believe all callers are genuine – even if they look respectable.

DON'T allow anyone into your home if you are at all unsure.

DON'T believe 'scare stories' a caller may tell you, or be pressurised into a cash or quick sale.

DON'T have any work done on your home by a doorstep caller until you have taken alternative advice.

DON'T keep large amounts of cash in your home.

DON'T buy or sell anything at your door.

NATIONAL & LOCAL SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

Support Groups for specific eye conditions:

The Albino Fellowship www.albinism.org.uk	01282 771900
The Childhood Eye Cancer Trust www.chect.org.uk	0207 377 5578
Diabetes UK www.diabetes.org.uk	0845 120 2960
The Dystonia Society www.dystonia.org.uk	0845 458 6322
International Glaucoma Association www.iga.org.uk	01233 648170
Keratoconus Self Help and Support Association www.keratoconus-group.org.uk	0208 993 4759
Macular Society www.maculardisease.org	0845 241 2041
M S Society www.mssociety.org.uk	0208 438 0700
Nystagmus Network www.nystagmusnet.org	0845 634 2630
RP Fighting Blindness www.rpfightingblindness.org.uk	0845 123 2354
Sense UK – The National Deafblind and Rubella Association www.sense.org.uk	0845 127 0060
Sense East Anglia Branch www.sense.org.uk	01473 622443

Suppliers of Daily Living Aids

Cobolt Systems www.cobolt.co.uk	01493 700172
Dolphin www.dolphinuk.co.uk	01905 754577
IC –Vision Ltd – www.icswretail.co.uk	01226 762513
Optelec www.uk.optelec.com	01923 231313
RNIB – Customer Services www.rnib.org.uk	0303 123 9999

Other useful Organisations

Action for Blind People, East Anglia www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk	01603 455767 or via RNIB on 0303 123 9999
Age (UK) Suffolk- Ipswich	01473 257039 or 359911
Age (UK) Suffolk– Bury St Edmunds	01284 757750
Age (UK) Suffolk– Lowestoft	01502 586308
Blind in Business - www.blindinbusiness.org.uk	0207 588 1885
Blind Veterans (UK) www.blindveterans.org.uk	0207 723 5021
Cruse Bereavement Care	0844 477 9400
Deafblind UK www.deafblind.org.uk	0800 132 320
Disability Living Foundation www.dlf.org.uk	0207 289 6111
East of England Next Steps (careers advice)	0845 603 1059
Government Services & Information www.gov.uk/contact	
Guide Dogs for the Blind www.guidedogs.org.uk	0118 983 5555
Independent Living – www.independentliving.co.uk	0808 252 4182
Ipswich Care for the Blind www.ipswichblindsociety.co.uk	01473 219712
Ipswich Blind Society	
Ipswich Hospital www.ipswichhospital.nhs.uk	01473 712233
James Paget Hospital	01493 452452
National Blind Children’s Society www.nbcs.org.uk	01278 764764
The National Federation of the Blind	01924 291313

NHS Direct www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk	Dial 111
Norfolk & Norwich Association for the Blind	01603 629558
The Pensions Advisory Service www.pensionsadvisoryservice.org.uk	0345 601 2923
Royal National Institute for the Blind www.rnib.org.uk	0303 123 9999
RP Fighting Blindness www.rpfightingblindness.org.uk	0845 123 2354
The Samaritans	0845 790 9090
The Silver Line (free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year http://www.thesilverline.org.uk/	0800 470 80 90
Suffolk Mind	0300 111 6000
Suffolk Family Carers www.suffolkfamilycarers.org	01473 835477
Suffolk Fire Service	01473 260588
Suffolk Doctors on call www.suffolk-doctors-on-call.co.uk	
Suffolk Police – Advice on security or bogus callers	01473 613500
West Suffolk Voluntary Association for the Blind, B www.wsvab.org	01284 748800
The West Suffolk Hospital	01284 713000