

# RNIB Cymru

## Impact Report 2022-2023



**See sight loss differently**

**R N I B**

Cymru

Golwg gwahanol  
See differently



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# Foreword

**Welcome to RNIB Cymru's Impact Report, where we celebrate our key achievements from April 2022 to March 2023.**

We envision a world where blind and partially sighted people can participate equally. As our team has grown and developed this year, I am immensely proud of our work and successes.

We have commissioned extensive research and listened to thousands of people to help us identify the areas that will make the biggest difference. We've channelled this insight into a streamlined strategy to deliver sustainable, positive social change. This will take us further than ever before in challenging misconceptions of sight loss, ensuring blind and partially sighted people can participate equally and get practical and emotional support when they need it.

We have hosted and attended events and worked with media across Wales to raise awareness of the societal barriers that blind and partially sighted people face every day – and what can be done to break them down. Our dedicated staff and volunteers have empowered people with sight loss to access life-changing technology, reading materials, support and befriending groups, family events and sports opportunities. We have worked hard to make Wales a more inclusive place to live for everyone, from campaigning for safer streets and accessible health information, to sharing guidance on creating accessible living and work environments.

- Our Make it Make Sense campaign made waves in Wales, with the Welsh Government making accessible healthcare a priority for the first time.
- Our collaborative visually impaired (VI) rugby event with the Cardiff Rugby Community Foundation introduced over 80 children to the sport.
- We directly supported over 7,700 people from across Wales who contacted us about our telephone and in-person services.

**It has been a fantastic year, and we hope you enjoy reading about our highlights.**

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**Ansley Workman,**  
Director, RNIB Cymru

## About RNIB Cymru

RNIB Cymru is the largest sight loss charity in Wales, providing support and services to blind and partially sighted people, their families, friends, and carers. We aim to improve lives and empower people to adapt to sight loss and keep their independence. We work in partnership with public, private and third sector bodies across Wales to deliver projects, training, services, information and advice.

We challenge inequalities by campaigning for social change and improvements to services. We believe that timely treatment should be available to all to prevent avoidable sight loss, and that the right support is there for people when prevention is not possible.

Whether you have full, some, little or no sight, everybody should be able to lead independent and inclusive lives, without facing inequity and discrimination.

## Sight loss in Wales

There are an estimated 112,000 people in Wales living with sight loss, 3.5 per cent of the population. It is predicted that this number will increase by a fifth (19 per cent) to 133,000 by 2032 and double by 2050. One in five people aged 75 and over are living with sight loss, and one in two people aged 90.

To find out more about the data for your area you can use RNIB's **[rnib.in/SightLossDataTool](https://rnib.in/SightLossDataTool)**, the UK's biggest collection of eye health datasets, on our website.

# See sight loss differently

The single biggest challenge that blind and partially sighted people have told us they face is how the public views and treats them. We want to reverse inaccurate perceptions of blind and partially sighted people and change the way people think and act. Even small changes make a big difference.

Our Communications team supports blind and partially sighted people by giving them a platform to tell their stories and get them heard; challenging the misconceptions they face every day. The lived experience of people with sight loss shapes our campaigns, with their stories told through the media, at events and through our campaign work.

Our team has expanded this year, with two new members. This has allowed us to focus on promoting the many services we offer to blind and partially sighted people in Wales, to build strong relationships with the Welsh media, organise engaging events, and support our RNIB colleagues in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England with their valuable work.

## 2022 World Cup

Cai Davies, a rugby player with sight loss, was lucky enough to travel to Qatar to support Wales at the 2022 football World Cup. We supported Cai to become a fan spokesperson for BBC Radio, telling listeners about his experience as a partially sighted fan. He was interviewed by a journalist in Doha and filmed updates on his experience for our social media channels.



## VI Rugby Day

We had a ball with the Cardiff Rugby Community Foundation in February when we collaborated on a visually impaired (VI) rugby day at Cardiff Arms Park, the first event of its kind in the UK.



Many blind and partially sighted children and young people have been told they cannot play sport or feel they are not able to play with their peers. This event aimed to break down those barriers, create opportunities for anybody to participate in sport, and build a pathway to help blind and partially sighted children to continue their rugby journey. We secured high profile bilingual media coverage with BBC Wales, including Wales Today, Radio Wales and Radio Cymru.

### **Venetia Blind**

We have worked with content creator Jake Sawyers for many years and love how he challenges misconceptions about sight loss through his BBC Sesh videos and comedy pilots. Our communications team worked with Jake in 2022 to secure high-profile BBC coverage about his drag queen alter-ego Venetia Blind.

### **Sharp End, ITV's current affairs programme**

Our director Ansley and volunteer campaigner Howell were interviewed for Sharp End, highlighting the dangers of e-scooters to blind and partially sighted people and others. Howell took a journalist on a walk from RNIB Cymru's offices through Cardiff city centre, showing just how dangerous e-scooters can be.

### **Welsh Braille Books and World Braille Day**

We worked with S4C ahead of World Braille Day on an uplifting feature for Heno. Martha, a child from North Wales who is learning to read Welsh braille, was interviewed alongside her family for the piece. Our Transcription Manager, Emma, also told viewers about RNIB's Welsh Braille Reading Scheme and how it helps children like Martha across the nation.



# Design for anyone, better for everyone

In an exciting year for our Policy and Campaigns team, we have expanded into a team of three, with a Public Affairs Manager and two Policy and Campaigns Officers covering Wales.

We speak directly with key decision makers to explain the daily issues faced by blind and partially sighted people. Much of our work focuses on getting society to see sight loss differently and calling for design standards to be made accessible by default.

We know how much blind and partially sighted people rely on public transport to maintain independence. However, we also know that buses, trains and taxis can be inaccessible. We are a member of the Transport for Wales Accessibility and Inclusion panel, where we advocate for accessibility features for people with sight loss.

New cycling infrastructure, street clutter, bus stop design and colourful crossings have caused immense challenges to people with sight loss trying to navigate their local areas. It is more important than ever for us to improve awareness of how blind and partially sighted people navigate the streets, and how simple changes can create more accessible and inclusive communities.

Everyone is entitled to receive healthcare information in formats they can read, yet people with sight loss tell us that they regularly receive letters and forms in small fonts without being offered an alternative. For many people, the solution could be as simple as receiving their appointment letter in an email, a larger font or in braille. Through our large-scale accessible information campaign, we have engaged with key policy and decision makers, and have succeeded in ensuring that this issue is given the attention it needs from Welsh Government and health services.

The cost of living crisis is one of the biggest issues currently facing the country. We have reacted to this unexpected and mounting problem by calling on the UK government to uplift benefits in line with inflation. We have engaged with the Welsh Government to ensure that campaigns about the support available to people in Wales are accessible. We have also launched a survey in collaboration with Sight Life and Vision Support to better understand the additional costs of living with sight loss, and what more can be done to support people during this difficult time.

## 2022-23 highlights

- At the beginning of 2022, we launched our manifesto, Keeping Sight of your Community, for the May local authority elections. The manifesto was co-produced with the RNIB Cymru Campaigners group and focused on local issues they faced.
- In March 2022, we held an Introduction to Sight Loss event at the Senedd. Our goal was to increase understanding of experiencing sight loss, how it impacts constituents, and how RNIB Cymru can support Members of the Senedd to provide more accessible information and communication in their area.
- In April 2022, the Senedd Health and Social Care Committee published its report: Waiting well? The impact of the waiting times backlog on people in Wales. We told the Committee about several issues affecting people with sight loss and provided recommendations for how these could be addressed. These included suggestions to improve eye care waiting times, better support for people experiencing delayed eye care treatment, and the need for health services to improve the way they communicate with patients. The Committee listened to what we were calling for and made recommendations to the Welsh Government based on the evidence we provided.

- 2023 started with another event at the Senedd highlighting the importance of accessible health information. A patient panel discussed the challenges they face to accessing healthcare independently, and the risk inaccessible health information poses to their health. The event, hosted by the Cardiff Central Member of the Senedd, was incredibly well attended, and the Minister for Social Justice gave a powerful speech. As a result of our successful campaigning, we have now been invited to work with the Welsh Government and NHS Wales to improve the accessibility of health information.

## Our campaigning work

It is crucial to add voices and faces to our campaigns, rather than just reporting numbers and statistics. While we work strategically with governmental bodies and national organisations, the best way for us to make an impact on the ground is through our volunteers and campaigners. These are the people who inform and lead our work, and in return we support them to run successful campaigns and engage with decision makers themselves.

We have seen our campaigners grow in confidence, finding their voice to speak out about sight loss and how it has impacted them. Here are two of their stories.



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## **David Reaney, Gwynedd: Spreading the word on sight loss**

David approached RNIB as a customer at the start of the pandemic and joined a few phone groups for much-needed peer support. He is now one of our busiest and most engaged volunteers. David is a strong public speaker who has given talks to schools to help young people understand sight loss. He is also a talented golfer and has clocked up many hours playing for the European Disabled Golf Association.

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## **Howell Williams, Cardiff: Campaigning for accessible streets**

Howell is a prolific Campaigns volunteer who speaks out about the dangers of e-scooters and cyclists in pedestrian areas. He came to RNIB Cymru in 2019 after being knocked down by a cyclist, who then verbally abused him for having sight loss. Howell appears regularly in the Welsh media such as ITV's The Sharp End, to talk about inaccessible streets and has been instrumental in securing city wardens to help keep pedestrian zones clear of vehicles.

# **Welsh Language Scheme**

RNIB Cymru's Welsh Language Scheme sets out our commitment to promoting our Welsh language services and providing services and information in both of Wales' official languages.

We appointed our first-ever Welsh Language Officer in December 2022, who is working with the Welsh Language Commissioner's office to draft a new scheme. This will be compliant with the Welsh Language Offer quality mark, ensuring we deliver at least five high quality services for people with sight loss through the medium of Welsh.

Our Welsh Language Officer is an active member of the Welsh Language Commissioner's Third Sector network and has worked with Welsh Language Units at health boards across Wales to raise awareness of our services and accessible information campaign.

Our Welsh Language Officer is leading on work to ensure that the Welsh Language Synthetic Voices, Geraint and Gwyneth, are updated and available on more platforms, such as Apple and Android.

# No diagnosis without support

We want all people experiencing sight loss to move quickly from diagnosis to confidence and experience equal participation in society.

## Eye Care Support Pathway pilot

It is devastating to be told that you are losing your sight, and this can have a huge impact on your life both practically and emotionally. However, with the right information and support at the right time people can move quickly from diagnosis to feeling confident and informed. Our work to create a consistent, embedded support pathway is gaining momentum. No-one experiencing sight loss should be left without support.

For example, we are working with Cardiff and Vale University Health Board to host an Eye Care Support Pathway Test and Learn pilot. This will allow optometrists in high street practices to refer their patients directly to the RNIB Helpline for non-clinical information, advice and support as part of the new electronic referral system into eye clinics.

We have worked with organisations in Wales to host RNIB guides, which are designed to provide people with sight loss with the information and support they need to face the future with confidence.

## Eye Care Liaison Service

Our Eye Care Liaison Officers (ECLOs) work in eye clinics across many health boards in Wales. They provide patients with emotional and practical support to help them understand their diagnosis, deal with their sight loss and maintain their independence.

"An ECLO, Sarah, called me about my condition. She was lovely to talk to and offered me loads of different services. I was so grateful that someone had reached out as I was struggling so much. I just said I'd take everything she could give me." **Sarah\*, Wales ECLO patient.**

**Our ECLOs reached 4,836 patients, carers, and families in 2022-2023, and provided information and support to professional colleagues across Wales.**

## Talk and Support

Our Talk and Support service provides free weekly telephone befriending groups for adults with sight loss, which build connection and peer support. They are an opportunity for people to share life experiences and discuss the ups and downs of living with sight loss.

- 123 individuals from Wales joined 150 telephone groups that are hosted for people across the UK.
- Through 2022-2023, 140 people across Wales were supported to attend a befriending group.

## Living Well with Sight Loss courses

Our courses provide the opportunity to connect with others, learn from their experiences and find out about services and support available. This is followed by the opportunity to join focus groups for more specific topics like finances, technology in the home, getting out and about, health and wellbeing.

**Throughout 2022-2023, 128 people in Wales joined our 13 Living Well with Sight Loss telephone groups.**



# Closing the gap: Digital inclusion, educational attainment and employment

## Digital inclusion

People with sight loss are twice as likely to be digitally excluded when compared to the general population. Our Technology for Life team and volunteers support people with sight loss to join the digital world. We offer advice and information about using technology and developing digital skills. We also work with partners in the local community to offer digital support and knowledge of accessible technology at a local level.

We support people on low incomes to remain independent by providing financial support to access digital devices through our technology grants programme.

### Across Wales during 2022-2023:

- **251 people** were supported over the phone with their technology enquiries.
- Volunteers made **53 home visits**.
- **22 people** received financial grants to access technology.
- **28 training and information sessions** were provided to partner organisations.

### As a result:

- **74 per cent** of people using the service said they now use tech to make their lives easier.
- **85 per cent** of people using the service said they now know where to get advice, information and help when they need it.

## Educational attainment:

A key achievement for the team is the launch of the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment across the UK, including in Wales.

Co-produced by the education and visual impairment sectors, the framework supports specialists working with children and young people with a vision impairment by defining the specialist skills, development and best practice support needed to promote equity and inclusion.



## Employment

RNIB is dedicated to reducing the significant barriers blind and partially sighted people face to accessing employment. Only one in four people with sight loss of working age are currently employed, and there are currently 11,000 people with sight loss in the UK actively seeking work. We know that many people leave work unnecessarily each year because they did not receive the support they needed to continue to work with sight loss.

During 2022-2023 we provided employment advice, information and support to 109 blind and partially sighted people in Wales, helping them to remain in work. Employment work across Wales with blind and partially sighted individuals also focuses on offering assistance in gaining employment and training.

RNIB have also set up the See Work Differently work placement programme, to support blind and partially sighted people to secure that first rung on the career ladder, or to return to work following a career break. We are looking forward to welcoming two new Campaigns Assistants to our team here in Wales during 2023.

## Services and support

### Helpline and Sight Loss Advice Service

Our Helpline is available to anyone living with sight loss. It is open from 8am until 8pm on weekdays and from 9am until 1pm on Saturdays. This year, our Helpline Advisers supported with 4,174 enquiries from people across Wales.

Our Sight Loss Advice Service provides vital emotional and practical support and information to blind and partially sighted people, their friends, families and professionals on a range of issues. Between April 2022 to March 2023, the Sight Loss Advice Service received 867 enquiries from people across Wales. The service supported blind and partially sighted people, friends and family by answering 1,308 calls and responding to 519 emails this year.

### Community Connection

Our Community Connection team supports blind and partially sighted people, and their friends and families to connect with others for peer support. Participants can meet like-minded people with common interests such as sport, movies, books, gaming and arts and crafts. They can also find out what RNIB, local societies and their community have to offer.

"It keeps my sanity, I'm very isolated so it keeps me going. It's nice to listen to other people and different views." John\*, South Wales valleys chat group member.

In Wales throughout 2022-2023:

- Community Connection ran seven monthly, five fortnightly and three weekly telephone social groups, plus two face-to-face monthly social groups.
- **We reached 1,498 blind and partially sighted people**, friends, family and professionals.
- The RNIB Connect Cymru **Facebook group gained 164 members**.
- **11 volunteers** were supported to facilitate our groups.

## Eye Care Liaison Officer call backs

Call backs ensure that patients can talk to someone from RNIB about services, advice or support they may need after seeing an ECLO. This gives people time to digest the information they have received and consider the different options available. We also ensure that any referrals made are underway or have been completed.

**This year the Community Connection team completed 308 call backs to people in Wales.**

## Befriending Support

Our Befriending Support is delivered by volunteers who have experienced sight loss themselves. They reach out to blind and partially sighted community members to listen and share their own experiences.

## Children, Young People and Families (CYPF)

Our CYPF team works directly with children and young people in Wales who are blind or partially sighted. The team shares information and guidance on topics such as peer support, parent guides, available support services and learning and development.

In November 2022 we hosted our first in-person Shape and Share event since the pandemic. Joined by 35 participants from across South Wales, we explored the exhibits at a local science discovery centre and spent the afternoon bowling.

Our CYPF team has also delivered six virtual Shape and Share events, which were introduced during the pandemic but have continued to be popular with families across the UK.

"We had such a lovely day with RNIB on Saturday. My daughter absolutely loved Techniquet and bowling and it was so nice to get to meet and talk to other families too. Thank you!" Helen\*, Shape and Share event attendee.

"We had an absolutely amazing day! It was especially great to meet so many wonderful families. A massive thank you for organising it, can't wait for the next one." Mike\*, Shape and Share event attendee.

Shape and Share Cymru is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.



## Transcription service

At RNIB Cymru, we understand the importance and power of the written word. Our bilingual transcription service helps to remove barriers to reading by transforming information into accessible formats such as braille, large or giant print, electronic text or audio.

The service helps people across Wales to stay in touch with their local communities, continue to attend social groups and activities, enjoy their favourite hobbies, and read their favourite books and newspapers. We also provide accessible sheet music and musical scores, as well as tactile maps and diagrams. Our small team is actively supported by dedicated volunteers.

**From April 2022 to March 2023, our volunteers in Wales logged:**

- **2,174 hours** – 198 hours per month on average!
- **119** commercial jobs
- **418** Newsagent jobs
- **69** personal transcriptions.
- **60,000 minutes** of audio books, newspapers and magazines.

RNIB Cymru receives a Welsh Government grant to produce accessible Welsh language school curriculum materials. In partnership with Qualified Teachers of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVIs) and other colleagues we recently authored, designed and produced two new

Welsh Braille Reading Schemes, made up of 48 books, with a stripey dinosaur called Zigi as the star of the show. Our next project is to develop and produce pre-braille resources to support the teaching of early years children and those with special educational needs.

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"I've been with Transcription for four years. The importance of the work has been brought home by my own eye health problems, which have much reduced my availability. Some of the time I cannot read at all, which has given me an insight into what being blind really means. When I can read, I do, to help those less lucky than I am. Volunteering has been fun, and now I understand more fully how I am able to help." **Diane\*, Transcription volunteer.**

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### **Learning Disabilities and Dementia**

In 2022, our Health and Social Care Skills Development Team partnered with the Welsh Ambulance Service Trust, Learning Disability Wales and local authorities in Wales to deliver a range of training courses. 163 people from health and social care professions attended development opportunities over the year.

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"I now have a better understanding of the difficulties that people with sight loss face. I'm definitely going to be more mindful of how I approach and interact with others. I'm also more confident in supporting people with sight loss, which will make a massive difference (for the better) in how I support our service users." **Steffan\*, course attendee in 2022.**



## Volunteering

We could not support blind and partially sighted people without our amazing volunteers who generously and enthusiastically contribute their time, experience and skills. We have many volunteering opportunities and provide training and support for all our volunteers.

This year we delivered a Festival of Volunteering in Wales, bringing together volunteers and staff to celebrate the contribution and impact of RNIB volunteers. We received wonderful feedback from those who attended the day:

"It was enjoyable and interesting to hear some of the things about RNIB services that I didn't know existed. The one that really excited me was the transcription service. Before losing my sight I had bought books that I had intended reading during my retirement but then losing my sight put paid to that plan. But I did get a little excited listening to Mary and what she does, so I will seriously be following up on this service. Can't wait for the next one!" Halima\*, **Festival of Volunteering event attendee.**

## Visibly Better Living

Visibly Better Living is a certification scheme developed by RNIB Cymru to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of people with sight loss who live in sheltered housing and extra care homes.

When housing and care staff understand more about the needs of older people with sight loss, tenants can be empowered to regain some independence, therefore needing less assistance with everyday tasks. The knowledge and information gained through the training gives care providers the confidence to handle problems and work towards improved care, service, maintenance and design.

**Throughout 2022, three sheltered housing and two extra care homes completed the Visibly Better Living certification, bringing the grand total to 54 certified supported living homes in Wales.**

The Visibly Better Living team also worked with the Senedd Commission to show how small changes, such as using contrasting colours for wall signage, can improve the accessibility of the building.

## Vision Friends

Our Vision Friends project is funded by the Welsh Government to deliver free training to staff, carers and family members. The aim is to create a network of Vision Friends across Wales who have the skills and knowledge to identify, understand and support older people living with sight loss. So far, we have worked with Alzheimer's Society, RNID, Sense and Innovate Trust, as well as 13 housing organisations across Wales.

Our easily accessible training takes place through short, live, online modules or recorded sessions. The modules include understanding

and identifying sight loss, inclusive environments, accessible communication, lighting and colour contrast, and products that can make life easier in the home.

**This year we trained 196 people to identify, understand and support older people living with sight loss.**

The project has also trained 14 professionals to deliver Vision Friends training in their own organisations.



# Looking forward

After an exciting year, RNIB Cymru will be working harder than ever to break down barriers for blind and partially sighted people in Wales.

We will reveal the results of our in-depth research into how the cost of living crisis is affecting blind and partially sighted people in Wales. This will allow us to build a strong campaign for change, while raising awareness of the additional costs of sight loss.

We will work with local authorities across Wales to improve the accessibility and safety of our communities, including the accessibility of new bus and cycling infrastructure and public transport.

We will be working with colleagues in the Technology, Innovations and Partnerships teams to increase the accessibility of our Welsh language Synthetic Voices and ensure that they are available on a wider range of platforms, such as Apple and Android.

We will work closely with content creators and the media in Wales to increase positive representation of blind and partially sighted people and reverse inaccurate public perceptions.



We are looking forward to organising the next Wales Festival of Volunteering in June 2023.

We will continue to provide life-changing information, services and experiences for people with sight loss across the nation.

We cannot wait to see what the next year will bring. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our volunteers, campaigners and fundraisers who make this work possible.

## **RNIB Helpline:**



**0303 123 9999**

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