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**Social Work Services
for People with
Low Vision**

Information Book

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Introduction

In Scottish Borders, services to people with a visual impairment are co-ordinated by Low Vision Services (LVS) which is part of the Sensory Services Team within Social Care & Health.

The team is located in the social work office at the Borders General Hospital in Melrose.

You can visit us on the Scottish Borders Council website - www.scotborders.gov.uk - just follow the links: social care & health – disabilities – how our sensory services team can help.

Low Vision Services work closely with people of all age groups who are living with sight loss to undertake an assessment of their needs. They also offer information, advice and guidance on any problem relating to a visual loss.

Some people have a dual sensory loss (i.e. they have both a hearing loss and low vision). These factors are taken into account at the initial assessment stage and if necessary the specialist worker with people who are Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing will work alongside to offer additional support.

How do I get a service?

If you are experiencing difficulties with your vision or have a family member, relative or friend who would benefit from any of our services, please contact us on 01896 826272 and ask to speak with one of our workers.

Certification

Many people have poor vision and in general their difficulties can be resolved by prescriptive spectacles obtained from their local optician or optometrist.

Unfortunately, the optician or optometrist may be unable to resolve the problem by prescribing corrective spectacle lenses and will refer the person to a specialist eye doctor; known as an ophthalmologist.

In Scottish Borders, Ophthalmological Services are co-ordinated through the Ophthalmological Clinic (Borders Eye Centre) at the Borders General Hospital, Melrose.

The consultant ophthalmologists, orthoptists and nurses treat patients who have a variety of eye conditions or disorders such as cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy or macular degeneration.

In April 2018 the Scottish registration status for visual impairment changed to bring it in line with England and Wales:

- Partially sighted is now known as sight impaired
- Blind is now known as severely sight impaired

If the ophthalmologist is unable to rectify your sight or prevent further loss and you meet the criteria, they may then discuss the option of being referred to social work for registration as either sight impaired (previously partially sighted) or severely sight impaired (previously blind).

With your consent a referral for registration will then be made to Low Vision Services Social Care & Health.

Registration

There are two registers kept by the local authority.

These are known as the sight impaired (previously partially sighted) register and the severely sight impaired (previously blind) register.

Registration as severely sighted impaired does not necessarily mean that a person is, or will be, totally without sight; only that the loss is causing significant problems. Registration as sight impaired is similar, although the loss of functional vision is generally less severe.

Registration is voluntary. You do not have to be placed on the register if that is your wish and it will not affect your entitlement to an assessment of need.

The registers are confidential however, your details may be shared with our customer services to confirm your entitlement to certain benefits – blue badge, travel pass etc. Information to the Scottish Government for future planning would also be shared.

Home Visit

Low Vision Services will initially contact you with an introductory letter. Soon afterwards you will be contacted; usually by telephone and offered a home visit.

A worker from Low Vision Services will interview you at home to discuss the difficulties you are experiencing and the services available to assist you. If the home visit is for registration as discussed on page 5, your eligibility for registration will be explained so that you may decide whether or not to be placed on the local authority register. The registration process is voluntary.

The worker will complete a low vision assessment, or if your need is greater, a personal assessment document. A specialist assessment of your visual impairment will also be conducted.

It may be helpful for a friend or family member to be present during this assessment process.

You may be coping fine with your visual loss and only require information or advice about certain services. However the assessment may lead you to accept additional services which are intended to help you retain your independence and improve your quality of life.

Alternatively, the worker may offer you a rehabilitation assessment at home which could lead to a training program; this to enable you to continue carrying out tasks which, as a consequence of your low vision, you may be having difficulties with.

The specialist workers are trained to listen, understand, provide help in getting through the feelings of loss and, if necessary, set up a programme of practical help to meet your individual needs.

Low Vision Services adopt the social work eligibility criteria. These are the means by which decisions are made regarding whether an individual is entitled to be provided with services by, or on behalf of social work.

Eligibility is based on an individual's need and the associated risks to safety, independence and wellbeing.

This will provide an eligibility framework whose aim is to target those most in immediate need.

An assessment would take account of an individual's immediate need and of the possibility that those needs could worsen if timely assistance was not provided. This to maintain existing skills, learn new coping strategies and to continue to live as independently as possible.

Rehabilitation Services

If required, a rehabilitation assessment would be undertaken to address your needs with a view to promoting your continuing independence.

General topics covered can include the following:

- **advice on appropriate lighting, preferred contrast levels and the use of low vision equipment**
- **practical advice and training in the use of aids to promote independent living; these being specifically designed and commercially available**
- **training in mobility needs and guidance in making the best use of public transport**
- **acquiring compensatory communication skills – advice regarding an awareness of new technology and I.T. skills, etc.**
- **information on the range of services available to you – within education, training and employment as well as social and recreational activities**
- **advice to allow continued involvement in the community**

Independent Living Equipment

There is a wide range of specialist equipment available which can help people with low vision to maintain or regain a measure of independence in their daily lives.

There are simple aids to daily living such as signature guides and stamps, thick lined writing paper and writing frames – these will help you to sign a form or document, write a letter or complete a shopping list.

Liquid level indicators will assist you in safely pouring liquids such as a cup of tea or coffee, preventing under or over filling of cup or mug.

Talking clocks are available and have been designed to help you to tell the time irrespective of your degree of visual loss.

You can even weigh and measure things with a range of measuring tapes, spoons and cups, kitchen and bathroom scales.

There is also a range of commercially available equipment not specifically designed for low vision but invaluable in helping people cope with sight loss.

Indoor leisure activities have not been forgotten. Many well known board games as well as playing cards, dominoes and chess are available in large print or tactile format.

In Scottish Borders, social work services have a policy of lending limited items of equipment on a permanent loan basis to service users; if an assessed need within our eligibility criteria has been established.

Additionally, any person who has been registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired who does not possess a radio, a radio CD player and is on a means tested benefit can be assessed and possibly supplied with an appropriate model on a permanent loan basis. This equipment is provided through The British Wireless for the Blind Fund for which Low Vision Services acts as an agent.

For those experiencing difficulty reading newspapers, magazines and books, the worker can advise you about talking books, newspapers and magazines which are available from local as well as national agencies.

Through the Scottish Braille Press in Edinburgh, people with a visual impairment in Scotland can access this facility to have ordinary printed material transcribed into a medium that suits their needs. This can vary from audio transcription, Braille translation, large print and tactile diagrams. You can contact them on 0131 662 4445 or email: enquiries.sbp@royalblind.org

Low Vision Assessment

The majority of people who present with low vision may still have some useful sight and they can be helped and encouraged to make better use of their vision.

The ophthalmologist can refer a person to the Low Vision Aid (LVA) clinic at the Borders General Hospital or a local optometrist who will assess and if appropriate provide a person with a suitable magnifier (optical low vision aid).

People who could benefit from using one or more types of optical low vision aids are entitled to receive them free after assessment through NHS Borders.

Staff from Low Vision Services work closely with the LVA clinic and can provide a home LVA assessment for those who would be unable to attend the LVA clinic at BGH because of illness or disability.

The rehabilitation worker can also provide advice on how to make a visual task a little easier:

- **Light** - adapting or improving existing lighting and luminance levels.
- **Contrast** - using tone and colour to enhance certain objects.
- **Size** - determining appropriate print font and object size.

RNIB

Royal National Institute of Blind People Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO)

The RNIB Scotland Eye Clinic Liaison Officer for Borders works in the Eye Centre within Borders General Hospital in Melrose and liaises regularly with Low Vision Services Social Care & Health.

The ECLO is one of the most effective ways of supporting patients who have been diagnosed with sight loss. While health staff deal with the medical side of patient care, the ECLO deals with the emotional issues and provides ongoing support to ease the impact of sight loss.

Early intervention helps people understand their diagnosis, provides ongoing emotional support and allows patients to manage and come to terms with the varying degrees of loss that can be experienced.

The ECLO service at the Eye Centre is available during designated clinics. The service provides general information and can also refer or signpost to other agencies. The ECLO will discuss a person's concerns or needs as well as offering hints and tips on living with sight loss.

For more information about RNIB ECLO service, please contact RNIB Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (Mon to Thurs):

07771 940 387 (mobile)

RNIB email: alison.patonday@rnib.org.uk

NHS email: alison.patonday@borders.scot.nhs.uk

Financial Matters

Information and advice on some financial benefits is available through Low Vision Services.

There are government benefits that are often not means tested to which you may be entitled.

Government surveys indicate that many people are not in receipt of benefits to which they are entitled.

This additional financial support may help you and your family to adjust to changing circumstances. In the first instance, if an application for a particular benefit would seem appropriate, we can refer to the DWP (Department of Works and Pensions) who will visit you at home to help with form completion.

The local CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) can also help you complete the necessary application. Alternatively you, a friend or family member can download the forms from the DWP website and complete the application independently.

If you disagree with a DWP award decision you may be able to appeal against this. A financial inclusion officer within the Council's Financial Inclusion and Support Team could offer you advice.

You can contact the Customer Advice and Support Advisors on 0300 100 1800 who will be able to answer queries; they can also refer you to the Financial Inclusion and Support Team.

Due to ever changing government legislation, it always pays to seek expert guidance.

Computers and Information Technology

Information Technology is of particular advantage to people with a visual impairment who can benefit from accessing information in a format they can understand as well as being able to communicate with others using the internet, social media and e-mail.

To make the best use of computer technology, it is important to obtain appropriate training. A person with low vision requires specialist training from a tutor who understands the issues and difficulties involved in learning and mastering computer skills such as touch typing, e-mail, SMART phone, tablet and internet use.

Advice can also be given on the correct computer system for your specific needs by various organisations if you decide to acquire equipment of your own. Advantages of having Screen Text Magnification, Screen Text Readers or Voice Recognition programs can also be explained.

If you feel this may be of interest, you can contact either:

Low Vision Services Tel No: 01896 826272 who will endeavour to put you in contact with the right professional.

or

Ability Net Tel No: 0800 048 7642

www.abilitynet.org.uk

[Request Free IT Support At Home | AbilityNet](#)

Library and Information Services

The library and mobile library services are now provided by Live Borders and continue to offer a wide selection of talking books and large print titles. Lists of 'new talking book titles of the month' are displayed in libraries and are available on request (a list is also sent to the Borders Talking Newspaper).

SBLibraries eAudiobooks is a free online service which allows you to download popular fiction and non-fiction titles. Visit the council website or contact Library HQ for more information.

Live Borders operates a local mobile library service. If you are unable to walk to the mobile library or require more information, visit the council website for information on mobile libraries in your area or contact Library HQ on 01750 726400.

Talking books are available from national organisations.

- **RNIB Talking Book Service** – all books are free. Books can be downloaded or streamed via an Alexa enabled device or posted out to you in DAISY CD or USB memory stick format. Visit their website: www.rnib.org.uk/talking-book-service or phone 0303 123 9999
- **Calibre Audio Library** – all books are free. Books can be streamed, downloaded or posted out to you in USB memory stick format. Visit their website: www.calibreaudio.org.uk or phone: 01296 432339

RNIB Scotland's Employment Support

RNIB Scotland's Employment Support Services is committed to helping adults with sight loss throughout Scotland to remain in employment. They want to support as many people with a visual impairment as possible to stay in work and believe that sight loss should not equal job loss.

Who can they help?

- **employees: support to remain in your job if you're experiencing difficulties relating to sight loss**
- **employers: advise how best to support employees with sight loss and how to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace and work practices**
- **job-seekers: we help you find local organisations who can offer skills assessment, guidance and advice**
- **organisations: advice to pre-employment providers who are supporting people to find a job**

How can they help?

- **RNIB Scotland's employment team provides advice and practical solutions to retain employees**
- **working with employers to encourage positive recruitment policies**
- **working with employability services to build their knowledge to support people with sight loss**
- **advise employees and employers on practical solutions including the use of technology**

Contact:

Tel: 0303 123 9999

email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Travel Pass

The National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Person's Travel Pass is available to residents in Scottish Borders area who are registered as either sight impaired (previously known as partially sighted) or severely sight impaired (previously known as blind).

The travel pass gives free travel on all bus, coach and rail services as well as concessions on ferries within Scotland only. In addition the travel pass is also valid on bus services to Berwick upon Tweed and Carlisle.

The pass will be issued free of charge and is valid for three years. You will need to renew the pass yourself, two weeks before expiry as no reminders are sent out to you.

You can apply for a pass with a '+1' (with companion) entitlement only if:

- you are registered as severely sight impaired
- in receipt of Attendance Allowance
- receive high or middle rate care DLA
- in receipt of standard or enhanced care PIP (Personal Independence Payment)

The +1 'with companion' will allow a companion to travel free on buses in Borders and throughout Scotland but not on the trains and ferries. However, from the 2nd Sept 2018 the companion will be able to travel for a 50% fare on Borders railway to Edinburgh.

Contact low vision services for more information on 01896 826272

Leisure and Recreational

Macular Society Scottish Borders Support Group:

The group will meet on the first Monday of each month, except for January, July and August.

**Galashiels – Church of Scotland 60 High Street
Galashiels, TD1 1SE Time: 13:30-15:00**

Free transport by Teviot Wheels departs at 12.30pm from Abbey Row Community Centre Kelso, TD5 7BJ. They can also provide a door-to-door service for anyone who requires pick up at their home address.

If anyone from neighbouring communities such as Selkirk, St Boswells, Melrose, Innerleithen etc is interested in using transport to our meetings then please get in touch so that we can organise a pick-up point using an additional bus.

To book a seat contact Iona McLean below

Join us at your local support group to hear how we can help you, your family and friends.

For more information contact:
Advice and information Service
Macular Society 0300 30 30 111
Group currently being organised by Iona McLean
Mob: 07517 543 998
email: Iona.McLean@macularsociety.org

Benefits and Concessions

BENEFIT/CONCESSION	STATUS		COMMENTS
Television Licence at reduced cost	SSI		50% concession if registered as severely sight impaired
'Blue Badge' parking concession	SSI		Apply to Low Vision Services or Customer Services
Free BT Directory Enquires Service	SSI	SI	Apply to Low Vision Services
R.N.I.B. Talking Book Service	SSI	SI	See page 15
Calibre Audio Library	SSI	SI	See page 15
Free Postage on items marked 'Articles for the Blind'	SSI	SI	Apply to Low Vision Services or RNIB.
NHS Sight Tests (Free in Scotland)	All	All	Advise Optician of Registration Status
Free permanent loan of Radio or Radio CD player – must be registered and on a means tested benefit	SSI	SI	Supplied by 'British Wireless for the Blind Fund' – LVS act as local agent

BENEFIT/CONCESSION STATUS COMMENTS

Travel Card	SSI	SI	Free public travel in Scotland only – see page 17
Optical Low Vision Aids – such as magnifiers	All	All	Supplied free by NHS
Welfare Benefits – extra financial benefits you <u>may</u> be entitled to	SSI	SI	See page 16
Blind Person’s Tax allowance	SSI		For those registered SSI only and paying income tax.

SSI: severely sight impaired (blind)

SI: sight impaired (partially sighted)

All: Do not need to be registered but must be referred by Eye Centre at the BGH

Useful Contacts - National

Ability Net (National Helpline).....	0800 048 7642
Action for Blind People (now part of RNIB).....	0303 123 9999
Action on Hearing Loss (Scotland).....	0141 341 5330
	0808 808 0123
Textphone.....	0800 808 9000
SMS:	0780 0000 360
Age (Scotland) – Silver Line - Helpline.....	0800 4 70 80 90
Blind Veterans UK (London).....	0300 111 2233
British Retinitis Pigmentosa Society (helpline)....	0300 111 4000
B.T. Inclusions (services for sight or hearing loss).....	0800 800 150
Deafblind Scotland.....	0141 777 6111
Diabetes (UK) Helpline Scotland.....	0345 123 2399
Glasgow City Council Sensory Centre Partick.....	0141 276 5252
Guide Dogs for the Blind Association Edinburgh.....	0345 143 0203
International Glaucoma Association	01233 648 170

Listening Eye Support Service 6pm to 9pm – Tues Wed Thurs	0800 783 1979
Macular Society UK Helpline.....	0300 3030 111
Macular Society - Edinburgh & S.E. Scotland Support Group Helpline.....	0300 3030 111
National Talking Newspapers and Magazines (previously TNAUK now run by RNIB).....	0303 123 9999
Nystagmus Network	01427 718093
Partially Sighted Society (Doncaster).....	01302 965195
RNIB – National Helpline & Customer Services...	0303 123 9999
RNIB - National Library Service.....	0303 123 9999
Scottish Braille Press (now part of Sight Scotland).....	0131 662 4445
Sense (Scotland) National Deafblind & Rubella Association	0300 330 9292
Sight Scotland – Veterans..... (formerly Scottish War Blinded)	0131 333 1369
Stroke Association Helpline.....	0303 3033 100
THRIVE..... Gardening for people with sight loss	0118 988 5688

Useful Contacts - Local

B.I.A.S. (Galashiels).....	01896 752200
Borders Independent Advocacy Service	
Blackstock Trust (Borders Charity).....	01896 752379
(Pike & Chapman Solicitors Bank St Galashiels)	
Borders Care & Repair.....	01750 724895
Practical help with small jobs around the home	
Borders Carers' Centre	01896 752431
Borders Talking Newspaper	01361 884206
Contact – Wendy Moss	
Borders Voluntary Care Voice.....	01896 757290
British Red Cross (Galashiels).....	01896 751888
Customer Services - Scottish Borders Council.....	0300 100 1900
Encompass Galashiels.....	01896 759700
Macular Society Support Group - Galashiels.....	0300 30 30 111
Contact: Laura Gray mobile no.....	07948 352967
Macular Society Support Group - Kelso.....	0300 30 30 111
Contact: Laura Gray mobile no.....	07948 352967
Multiple Sclerosis Society Scotland and helpline..	0131 335 4050
Peeblesshire Talking Newspaper	
Contact – Mrs Wilma Barrett	01721 721465

RNIB Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO) (Mon to Thurs).....	07771 940 387
Royal Voluntary Service (RVS).....	01896 754481
Sight Scotland – Veterans (Edinburgh Office)..... (formerly Scottish War Blinded)	0131 333 1369
Borders Support Worker - Rachel Thomas.....	07880 199 408

Borders Community Transport Service (BCTS)

The BCTS Flow Centre was created to address customer difficulty in contacting community transport providers in Scottish Borders. The Flow Centre co-ordinates community transport in a partnership with Berwickshire Wheels, Gala Wheels, Teviot Wheels, Tweed Wheels and the Royal Voluntary Service.

The partners have fully accessible vehicles and minibuses together with a number of volunteers using their own cars.

The BCTS Flow Centre (or HUB) has created a 'one stop shop' approach to community transport provision throughout Scottish Borders and provides an efficient link between the customer and transport providers to help people get where they need to go, when they need to go.

Community Transport Flow Centre – 0300 456 1985

The service can be used by older adults and/or people with a disability who have no access to a family car and who cannot use public transport. It is necessary to register with the service before transport is provided.

There is a charge for the service depending on the miles the vehicle travels. You will be advised of the cost at the time of confirming that transport will be provided.

Transport can be provided for hospital appointments, local health appointments including dental and podiatry, shopping, attendance at social events and visiting relatives of friends.

Community Transport Partners:

Area: Scottish Borders

Royal Voluntary Service..... 01896 754480
www.rvs.org.uk

Area: Berwickshire

Berwickshire Wheels..... 01361 884652
allister.hart@bavs.org.uk

Area: Cheviot/Teviot & Liddesdale

**Teviot Wheels/Roxburgh Accessible
Transport.....01835 863554**
www.the-bridge.uk.net

Area: Tweeddale

**Tweeddale Community
Transport.....01721 723123**
www.the-bridge.uk.net

**This booklet is also available in electronic format,
USB memory stick and audio CD. A Braille version
can be obtained on request.**

Please contact:

Low Vision Services: 01896 826272