

BLINDAID

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

2023



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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



**AJAY
RAWAL**

Chair of Trustees, BlindAid

Dear Friends,

I am immensely proud to share BlindAid's 2023 Annual Report, highlighting the incredible work we've achieved together this year. Our mission remains steadfast: to reduce isolation, foster independence, and improve the wellbeing of blind and visually impaired adults across the 12 inner London boroughs.

The past year has brought continued and new challenges for the community we serve, whilst loneliness and isolation remain critical issues. The rising cost of living has disproportionately impacted those already navigating the complexities of vision loss.

The impact on our community is profound. Research by the RNIB shows that 66% of blind and partially sighted people say the cost-of-living crisis has had a negative impact on their mental health; 38% have reported a drop in their physical health and 39% are spending less on social and leisure activities which also negatively impacts on one's mental health and wellbeing.

Like many charities, BlindAid has faced significant fundraising challenges, however, through your generous support, we've still managed to reach more chronically isolated people, increase the number of home visits, deliver life skills trainings and help more visually impaired adults explore and engage with their local environments and communities. These programs provide vital lifelines to those who might otherwise feel invisible and forgotten in our fast-paced city.

This year we've also deepened our connection with the NHS, working more collaboratively with them and other agencies through the newly formed NHS Integrated Care Systems. Our work is more important than ever as the challenges facing blind and visually impaired individuals have evolved significantly.

As we look ahead, we are determined to sustain and grow our outreach, continuously learning and adapting our approaches to existing and new challenges through our deep engagement with and feedback from our service users. With your continued support, we can ensure that BlindAid remains relevant and reliable for all who need us.

Thank you for being part of our nearly 200 year journey. Together, we can build a more inclusive and equitable society for blind and visually impaired Londoners.

With gratitude from Sue O'Hara, our dedicated Chief Executive Officer, our staff and volunteers, our Board of Trustees and, of course, our service users.

Ajay Rawal



WHAT WE DO.

OUR VISION

BlindAid's vision is a world in which blind and visually impaired individuals can enjoy the same opportunities, quality of life and independence as sighted people.

OUR MISSION

To make a positive, life changing impact for blind and visually impaired adults living in the 12 inner London boroughs via:

- Reduced isolation & loneliness.
- Improved quality of life, mental wellbeing and independence.
- Social Inclusion & Community Connection.
- Improved access to health, care, welfare and community services.

HOW WE'RE MAKING A DIFFERENCE...

REDUCING ISOLATION

80% of BlindAid beneficiaries live alone;
54% can't leave home alone;
75% get few or no visits from friends & family.

Our programmes provide companionship to reduce loneliness and opportunities for social outings and peer group socialisation.



ADDRESSING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

90% of blind and visually impaired people don't get health information e.g. appointment communications, in an accessible format such as braille, large print, or audio.

BlindAid ensures individuals aren't excluded from vital health and welfare services.



INCREASING INDEPENDENCE

BlindAid's community classes in cooking, yoga and I.T., along with practical home help, enable individuals to remain at home while they learn to adjust to their sight loss, rebuild their confidence and regain their independence.



IMPROVING MENTAL & PHYSICAL HEALTH

BlindAid provides advice, encouragement, and support to help individuals cope emotionally with their sight loss, rebuild their confidence and avoid slipping into depression.



THE SIGHT SUPPORT PATHWAY

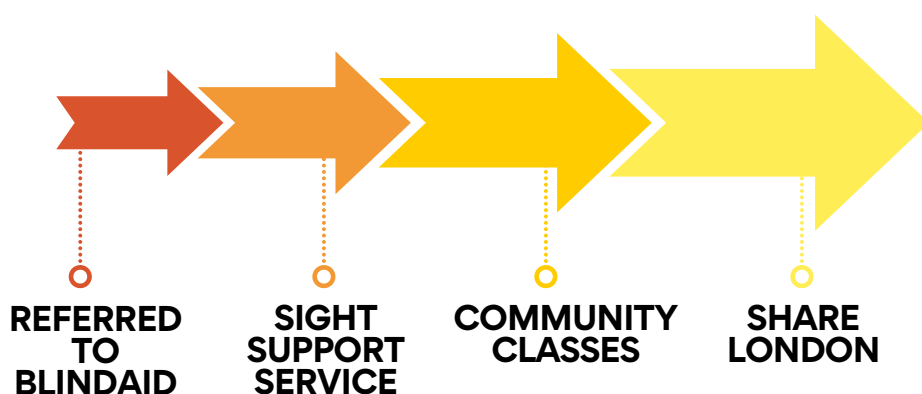
BlindAid offers 3 core services: The Community Sight Support Service; Community Classes and Share London. Together these services provide vital support not offered by other charities. Our Sight Support Pathway offers maximum support that users often describe as “life changing”.

Service Users may be referred to BlindAid when they have just been diagnosed or registered with sight loss, or, at a later time when their sight has already deteriorated.

Engaging with our Sight Support Service means they have an appointed Sight Support Worker (SSW) with whom they can begin to build a relationship of trust. Sight loss is a unique and individual journey, we work alongside our Service Users at their own pace.

In time, when people feel ready, and if they wish to, they may be enrolled in our Community Classes for a couple of courses of their choosing. Once they ‘graduate’ they have an opportunity to be referred to our Share London Project. This capitalises on and maximises Service Users new found independence and fosters a new social life for them in the capital.

Each individual service can be used independently however our evidence shows that when users follow this pathway, they are provided with a holistic, beneficial development pathway that tangibly improves independence and wellbeing, and encourages many to take back control and enjoy more fulfilling, active lives once again.



DEMOGRAPHICS

An overview of the demographics and distribution of BlindAid's Service Users.

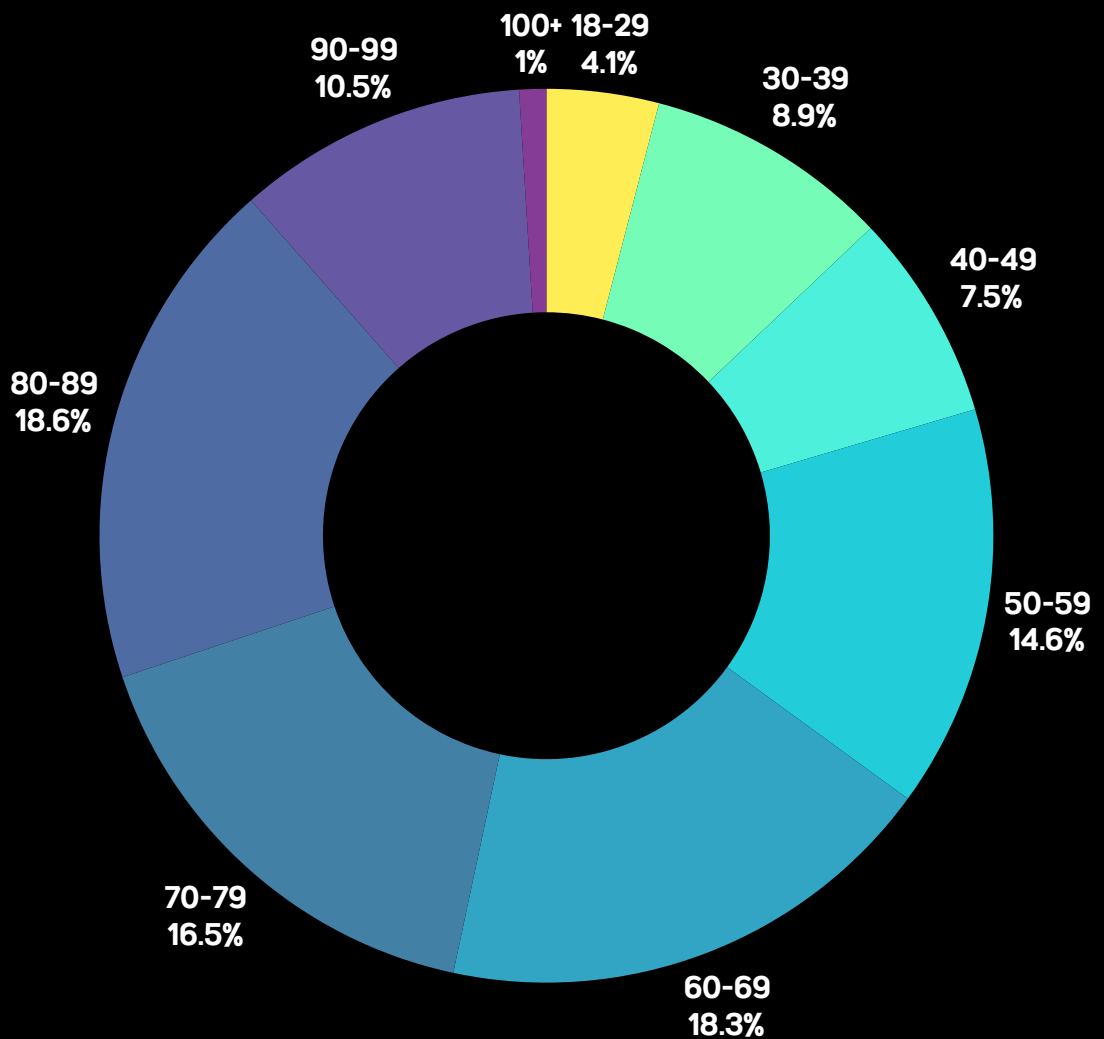


51%

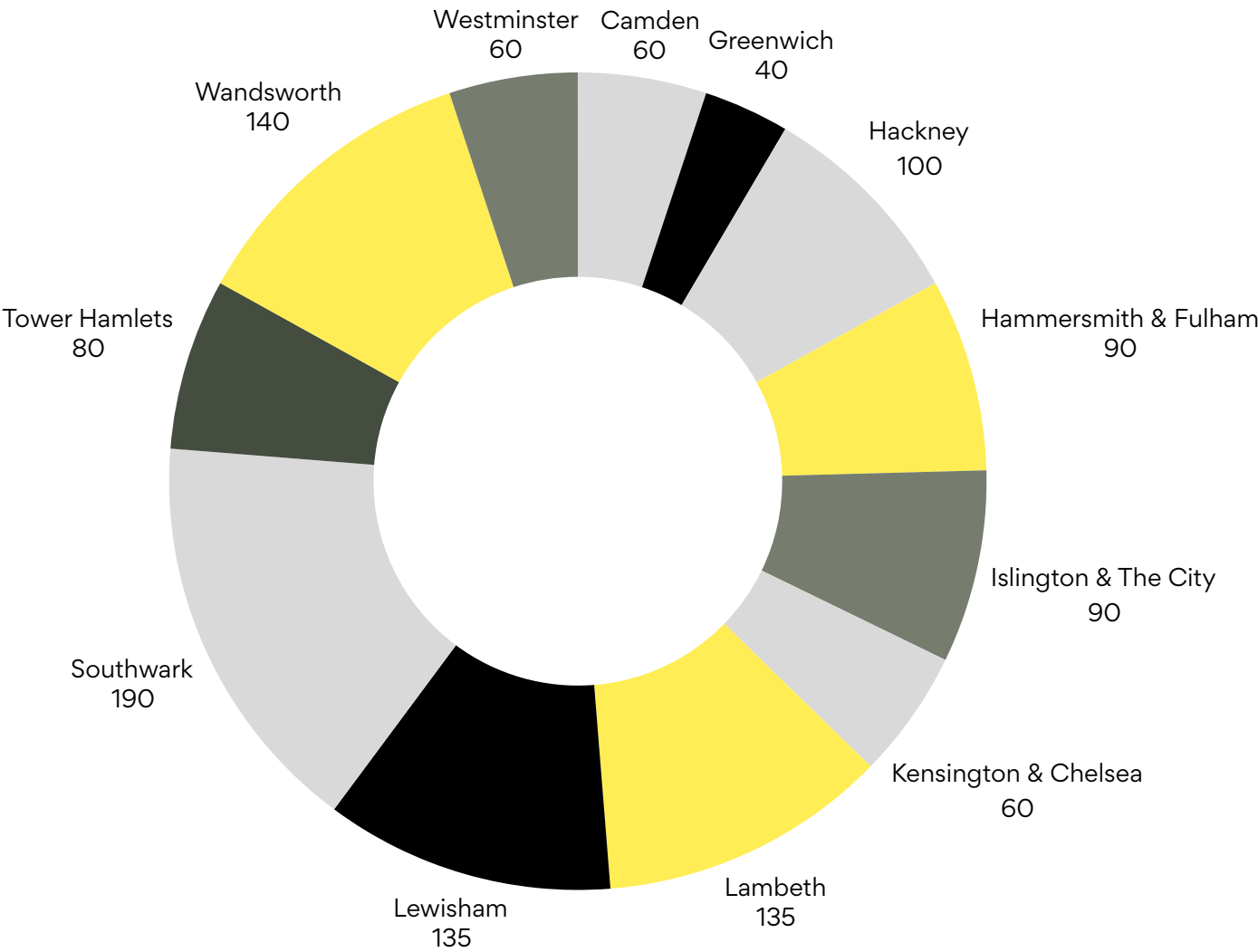


49%

Age



NUMBER OF SERVICE USERS BY BOROUGH





2023 OVERVIEW

- 1,353 people accessed BlindAid's services in 2023.
- Since the introduction of our Hybrid Sight Support Service model our SSWs are now able to serve around 70 beneficiaries each, up from 40-50 at Pre-pandemic levels.
- 5,211 home visits were made, an increase of 23% up from 2022.
- We consulted with and listened carefully to over 250 service users from across all 12 boroughs through 14 online focus groups.
- BlindAid saw its involvement with the newly formed NHS Integrated Care Systems increase in 2023 by participating in many consultation meetings with NHS Intergrated Care Panels and Boards, alongside medical professionals, ophthalmologists and other 3rd sector actors.
- 3 new trustees and 7 new staff were recruited whose expertise is already helping to strengthen BlindAid's future.

1400

INDIVIDUALS
SUPPORTED



22%

Increase in home visits
to beneficiaries



COMMUNITY SIGHT SUPPORT SERVICE

Our core service offers regular outreach visits for isolated service users in their own homes. For many, their Sight Support Worker is their only contact with the outside world.

Our service users' needs naturally vary and are as unique as they are themselves. The majority are over 50 years old and a significant percentage experience more complex health conditions in addition to their sight impairment. We deliver individualised support accordingly to ensure they can access the care they need. Sight Support Workers provide a range of assistance from emotional support to help service users cope with the trauma of their sight loss, companionship to reduce loneliness and encouraging engagement with NHS appointments, to more practical help to ensure a smooth homelife can be maintained.

This includes reading mail, checking food use by dates, filling out forms and finding "lost" items - often items are simply dropped on the floor and cannot be easily found again.



3,787 instances of information provision.

1,974 referrals made to other appropriate local organisations

841 referrals to social services, with agreement from service users.

826 instances of supporting access to/engagement with NHS primary services.

786 contacts made with housing depts/associations for home repairs.



Service Users

1,177



Visits

5,211



Support Calls

15,540

10

SIGHT SUPPORT SERVICE IMPACT

88%

Feel **less isolated**



61%

Feel **more independent**



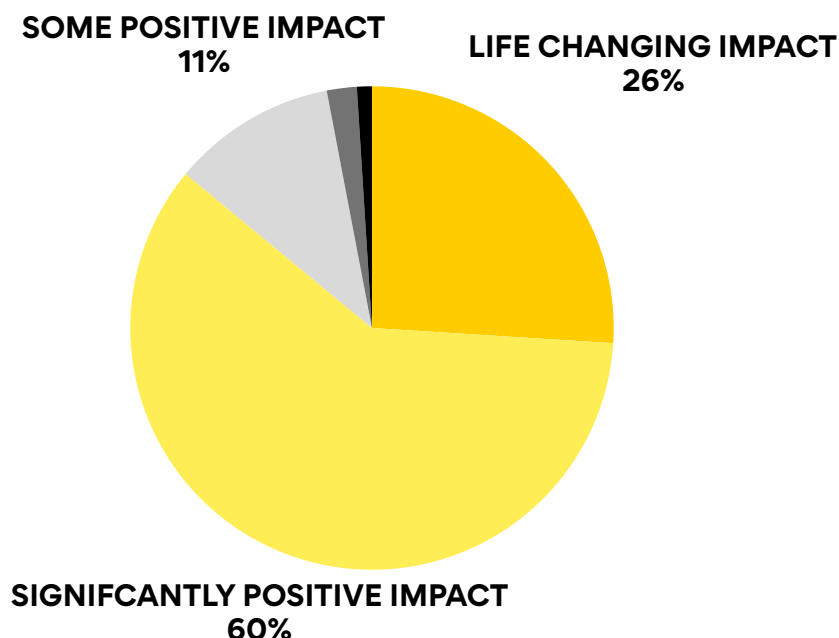
61%

Feel **more confident**



54%

Coping **better emotionally**



A survey of 195 service users from all 12 boroughs highlighted the significant impact of the Sight Support Service on their lives. The results demonstrate that BlindAid delivers an essential service that users deeply value and depend on.

COMMUNITY CLASSES

BlindAid offers service users the opportunity to join 16 weeks of classes to either learn new skills or relearn lost skills. Classes include: Accessible I.T. (beginners & intermediate); Healthy Eating & Safe Cooking; Yoga; Art & Creative Writing.

Our classes empower users by fostering greater independence in a supportive environment whilst having the opportunity to socialise with peers and form new, lasting connections.

BlindAid is immensely grateful to The Living Centre in Camden for hosting our classes free of charge. We are also enormously grateful to The City Bridge Foundation for financing this vital project.



“Service User: ”I love every minute of it, I like the people, we are one group and have merged nicely. I love the activities, it has not only helped my mental and physical health, but I am also just not as shy as I used to be. I was housebound for 20 years and it was so hard coming out and meeting new people - now - when I am here - I don't want to go home!”



Service Users

60



Feel more confident

70%



Learnt new skills

90%

SHARE LONDON

BlindAid's Share London project connects housebound blind and visually impaired Londoners to local, trained volunteers, enabling both to socially enjoy London together. This could be anything from a simple walk in the park, enjoying a drink at a local coffee shop, a cinema/theatre trip, shopping, sensory tours of kew gardens, busking or even a themepark visit. People are matched by similar interests, hobbies and, where possible, languages. Our volunteers and service users go on to form long lasting, meaningful friendships. Where trips aren't possible volunteers make social phone calls instead.



2023 was a great success! Of our 139 Service Users:

- **100%** would miss the service if it ceased.
- **93%** say Share London has reduced their social isolation.
- **85%** say they can now access events, places & activities they otherwise couldn't.
- **70%** say Share London increases their independence.
- **63%** say their confidence to leave home has significantly improved.

The project also has a transformative impact for our volunteers with 73% reporting that Share London has had positive impact on their wellbeing. 19% report a *life changing* impact while 46% say it has had a significantly positive impact. 100% said they have a good connection with the person they have been matched with, while 92% feel valued and well supported by BlindAid as a volunteer.



Service Users

139



Volunteers

135



Outings

798

GROUP OUTINGS

BlindAid is incredibly grateful to its corporate partners whose generosity has enabled us to organise a wide range of sensory experiences for our Service Users following Sighted Guiding training of their employees by us.

RIVER WALKS

Many of our Service Users have enjoyed walking along the Southbank from London Bridge to the Royal Festival Hall with their EY volunteer walking alongside them audio-describing the buildings and river activity. Many especially like to stop by the shoreline to enjoy the sound of the waves.

THE BRITISH LIBRARY

BlindAid offers special exhibitions and art classes within the British Library.



TOUCH TOURS OF THE TATE

BlindAid regularly runs group Touch Tours of the Tate and supports some users to experience specific artists' exhibitions.

SENSORY COCKTAIL EVENING

This exciting evening sensory event allowed Service Users to enjoy cocktails and mocktails designed to be especially aromatic and have sounds (popping candy) as well as multi-level flavours. This proved to be a very popular event with users also invited to taste various spirits and learn the stories of how they were distilled.

ANNUAL CHRISTMAS SHOPPING TRIP

25 Service Users were matched with EY employees for an enjoyable day of shopping followed by a buffet lunch and refreshments which everyone enjoyed enormously.

TUDOR MANSION VISIT

Through our partnership with the Charterhouse, BlindAid regularly organises for groups to tour their historic building and former monastery, and enjoy our coffee club there.

“

*In
Their
Own
Words...*

”

"I was stuck inside for years. Now, I really look forward to visits from my Sight Support worker. A walk makes me feel so good."



"My Sight Support worker has helped me in so many ways. I have more confidence and less fear."



"I had no support, nobody wanted to support me. I was depressed... Without BlindAid I could not have found myself."



"I would miss hospital appointments and have unpaid bills and unread letters if I didn't have BlindAid visits."

"As well as having Visual Impairment I have memory loss. I live alone so visits from my Sight Support Worker make a big difference to how I'm feeling and it helps me remember things when we chat together."



"The Sight Support Service has made a lot of impact in my life particularly with reading and explaining how to do things. It's made me feel more confident in my home"



Since I've done the cooking class, I've been independently cooking and because I have diabetes, my diabetes has been doing really well. My medication has dropped down too because of the fresh ingredients.



"Blindaaid is the only service that comes to help me. You are the best. You do so much to support me."

Sight Support Service User



After being told that I was losing my sight and could not continue my work, I was deeply distressed - ***I felt isolated and very frustrated.*** I did not feel that anyone understood what losing sight meant for what I do and most of all for who I am.

At times I thought I should just have to give up. I felt that no-one really understood what I am going through and the challenges I face everyday, alone. ***With BlindAid's encouragement and support,*** however, I feel I have the chance to take back some control of my life in both my work and my self-respect.

I have always been very independent in my work and daily life - I hope I can get back to where i was and finally achieve my goals.

I am partially blind and having the confidence of someone walking with me is so vital for me, and that tended to be what ***kept me indoors***. Having someone like my volunteer to walk alongside me is wonderful.

The weather has been so dark and wet at the moment and that is particularly restrictive, making it even harder for me to get out, and my volunteer has helped me with this.

I am delighted with the matching process, BlindAid has found someone who shares my interests and opinions and ***we get on very well indeed***. My volunteer is also much younger than me and I find that very stimulating and she keeps me going!

Share London Service User



Richard's Story

Registered blind in 2019, age 78

Richard was referred to BlindAid's Sight Support Service by the NHS in early 2021. Having no friends and only one relative living in Australia, his Sight Support Worker (SSW) Fiona, found him severely isolated.

Richard dearly missed reading so Fiona referred him to British Wireless for the Blind, who provided him with a accessible radio/cd player and introduced Richard to RNIB's talking book service. Richard was delighted, his books became an enjoyable discussion topic with Fiona.

During a phone call Richard advised Fiona that he had a fall at home and had been unable to get up for 14 hours. He had not told anyone else about this. Fiona contacted his GP and he was admitted into hospital. Prior to his return home, Fiona arranged for him to have a pendant alarm and keysafe fitted via Adult Social Services. She also organised an assessment by the Occupational Therapy and Sensory Teams after which Richard received a care package and talking microwave –significantly increasing his ability to remain at home independently.

“

Fiona talked through options to make Richard's daily living easier and BlindAid covered the cost of a toaster and kettle and replaced his dysfunctional cooker – items which Richard could simply not afford.

Richard, a native Cantonese speaker, confided in Fiona how much he missed speaking Cantonese. We were able to match him with a Cantonese-speaking volunteer, Tiffany, who took Richard out for occasional walks and lunches. It was a thrill for Richard to be able to communicate again in his mother tongue. During a month-long spell in hospital Fiona continued regular phone calls and, upon his discharge, arranged for some replacement dentures and a significant council tax rebate due to him not paying via direct debit.

When Richard was diagnosed with a terminal illness he requested Fiona join a GP meeting to discuss his end-of-life care. Fiona continued to provide Richard with emotional support for the rest of his life, supporting him with his move to a hospice and continuing her visits – always bringing him one of his favourite mango drinks - until he passed away.

No one else visited Richard during this time.

”

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Volunteer Accessible I.T. Teaching Assistant

Our volunteer accessible I.T. teaching assistant, Paul, is visually impaired. Like our I.T. tutor Kazeem, Paul first joined BlindAid as a service user. Paul attended a BlindAid community project many years ago and decided to become an NVDA I.T. volunteer. He has been volunteering for BlindAid's I.T. classes for 6 years.

Paul and Kazeem work hard to create a positive, welcoming and inclusive environment for our classes, and lead by example in their reliance on NVDA and other accessible IT.



Share London Volunteer

Share London has made a huge difference to my life. If someone had told me when I started losing my sight, that I would now be supporting someone else with a visual impairment, I would have laughed at them. Spending time with someone who is completely blind yet who is so upbeat and positive, is really inspiring to me. Meeting my service user initially was a really big step for me but I'm doing it now and it has built my confidence like nothing else. BlindAid has been a great resource for me, and I tell everyone about it. I am so proud to be a Share London volunteer.

FUNDRAISING REVIEW



158%

Donations &
Grants



Despite the post-Covid fundraising environment remaining tough for all charities, including BlindAid, we did manage to increase income from donations and grants by 159%. We also made the decision to re-purpose our small, central London property for use on a commercial basis. Rental income for the property to be used by a third party will generate a sustainable income stream for Blindaid's future operations amounting to around 10% of our operating budget.

We also generated sufficient NHS funding from South West London ICB to recruit a second Sight Support Worker for Wandsworth borough. However, despite these successes, we did not manage to generate sufficient external funding to fully cover the cost of service delivery. The decision to release some of our reserves to achieve a balanced budget will see us working on a deficit budget for another couple of years as we implement our new funding strategy to grow and diversify income.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

| * INCOME STATEMENTS | 2023 | 2022 |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Income | £344,182 | £223,025 |
| Expenditure | £969,997 | £747,271 |

| * BALANCE SHEET | | |
|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Fixed Assets & Investments | £664,950 | £900,256 |
| Investment Property* | £1.2M | - |
| Current Assets | £716,256 | £1.127M |
| Liabilities | (£46,880) | (£27,422) |

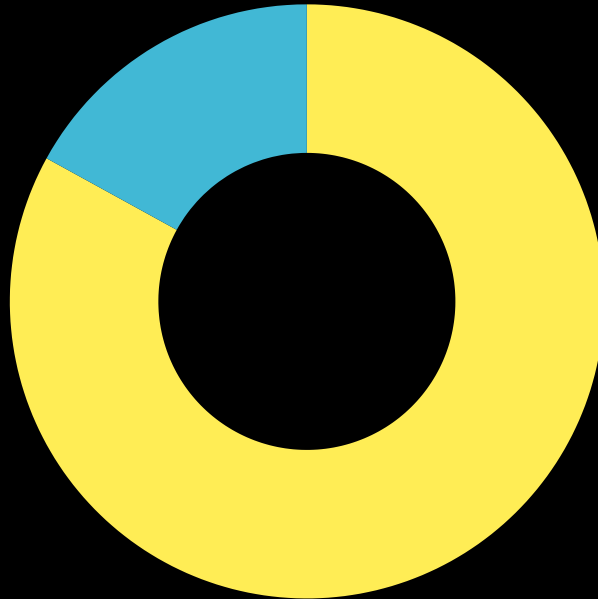
* Head office reclassified from Fixed Assets to Investment Property & revalued

| * REPRESENTED BY FUNDS | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Free Reserves - General Fund | £130,693 | £232,015 |
| Designated Fund for Core service* | £747,886 | £1,020M |
| Restricted & Endowment Funds | £454,070 | £450,394 |
| Fixed Asset Fund | £1.2M | £298,165 |

* Designated Fund: ring-fenced for core support service.

* WHERE OUR MONEY COMES FROM

Investments & Endowment
17%



Donations & Legacies
83%

* WHERE OUR MONEY GOES

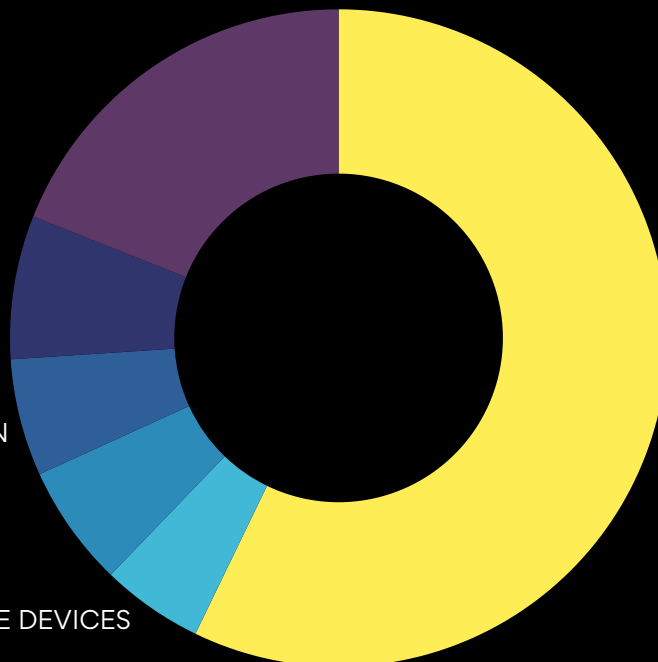
OPERATIONS & MANAGEMENT
19%

FUNDRAISING
7.1%

SHARE LONDON
5.8%

GRANTS FOR ASSISTIVE DEVICES
6%

COMMUNITY CLASSES
5%



SIGHT SUPPORT SERVICE
57.2%

FUTURE OUTLOOK

OPERATIONS

Emphasis in 2024 will be on sustaining the delivery of our current services and maintaining the number of visually impaired Londoners we have reached in 2023 with our unique and bespoke support. As we continue to operate on a deficit budget, we will not have the resources to expand our outreach or beneficiary numbers in the short term, but this ambition remains critical for us and our service users.

Our fundraising and programming partnerships, with an increasing number of delivery partners, will help us to influence and raise awareness of the number and needs of Londoners living with sight loss which we believe will enable us to leverage more support and integrate services for visually impaired people in the work of others.





Thank You

We're grateful to the many individuals, companies, trusts and public bodies that have supported and collaborated with us this year.

By investing in our services, our supporters play a vital role in empowering individuals to lead richer, more empowered lives, ultimately contributing to stronger communities and a lasting positive impact for the people we serve.

In particular we'd like to thank the following supporters:

A

AGE UK WANDSWORTH

B

BRITISH LIBRARY

C

CHARLES S. FRENCH C. T.
CHARTERHOUSE
CLOTHWORKERS FOUNDATION
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS (LEWISHAM)

D

E

ELIZABETH BENNETT
ERNST & YOUNG (EY)

F

FINANCIAL TIMES

G

H

HAPPIER OUTDOORS
HOARE BANK
HOME OFFICE

I

J

JOHN R. MURRAY
JUBILEE HALL GYM (COVENT GARDEN)

K

L

M

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NHS SOUTH WEST LONDON ICS
NHS NORTH WEST LONDON

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REFUGE

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SOUTHWARK CHARITIES

T

TATE MODERN
THE PLACE (CAMDEN)

U

V

VISION FOUNDATION

W

WALLACE COLLECTION
WEINSTOCK FUND
WILLIAMS GRANT DISTILERIES

X

Y

Z

Thank You

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the 120+ volunteers who generously sacrifice their precious time, allowing our isolated service users to experience companionship and the opportunity to rediscover the vibrancy of their city. With deepest thanks from all of us at BlindAid.



CONTACT US



BLINDAID

Phone/

020 7403 6184

Email/

enquiries@blindaid.org.uk

Website/

www.blindaid.org.uk

Address/

Office 44, A30 Business
Centre, Higher Stockley Mead,
Devon EX20 1BG

Charity Number/

262119

Full Audited Annual Report:

<https://blindaid.org.uk/who-we-are/charity-reports/>