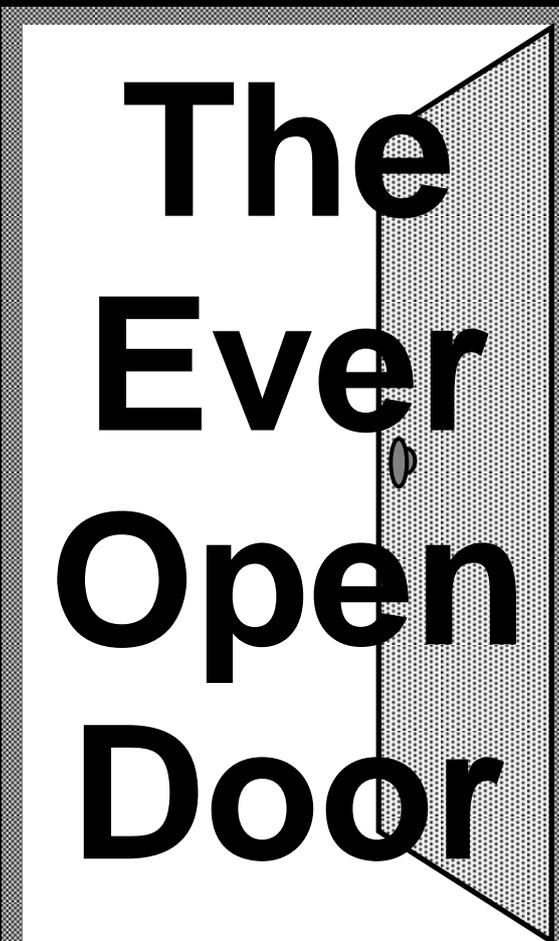


VISION PROBLEMS, WHAT NOW?



The Ever Open Door

**A guide
for all Sheffield
people with sight
problems**

Compiled, Edited and Published by



Making a Difference in Sheffield

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Whilst every effort has been made to provide accurate and up to date information within this publication, it is simply a guide. Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind does not accept liability for any inadvertent errors or omissions.

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Introduction

Don't Panic!

You have probably been given this book by a member of staff at the Sheffield Royal Hallamshire Hospital, 'Eye Clinic', following a consultation. You may have been advised to register as 'Partially Sighted/Sight Impaired' or even 'Blind/Severely Sight Impaired'.

Understandably, you may feel confused and uncertain about the future. In some people this can manifest itself as anger, depression, a loss of confidence and even fear. You may even pretend it isn't happening and try to carry on as if nothing is wrong.

However you feel, rest assured you are not the first to have these thoughts and emotions. Believe it or not, there are over 3,000 registered sight impaired people in the Sheffield area alone and all of us have been in the same situation as you. We have all gradually adapted to our enforced change of circumstances and in most cases, have been able to carry on living enjoyable and stimulating lives.

To support you initially and in the future, you have a large number of organisations and groups at your disposal, so your future may turn out better than you think. That said, it can take a while to find out about and obtain the support you may need.

This book was created for that very reason, to save you the trouble we went through. Conceived and constantly updated by fellow sight impaired Sheffield people, it is the most comprehensive local guide available. Keep it handy, as you will probably refer to it many times over the next year or so.

We wish you all the best for the future, and always remember.....

You aren't alone!

General Information

It is easy for those working around people with sight loss to forget that some of the terms used may be confusing if you are just starting with vision problems, so here are a few definitions and explanations before we go any further.

What exactly does ‘Partially Sighted/Sight Impaired’ mean?

This is the lesser of the two categories of sight loss on the ‘Certificate of Visual Impairment’. To qualify, the best you should be able to see is the top letter of a standard eye test chart at 6 metres. If you can see more than this, but have a restricted visual field, you may still qualify.

A person who is registered ‘Partially Sighted/Sight Impaired’ can generally see and function better than someone registered as ‘Blind/Severely Sight Impaired’.

What does ‘Blind/Severely Sight Impaired’ mean?

This is the other category on the CVI. To qualify, the best you should be able to see is the top letter of a standard eye test chart at 3 metres. (3/60 vision): In effect, you can only see at 3 metres what a fully sighted person can see at 60 metres. If you can see more clearly than this, you may still qualify if your visual field is also restricted.

Worth noting is that only a small minority of ‘Blind/Severely Sight Impaired’ people have no sight at all.

What do the terms ‘Visually Impaired’ ‘Vision Impaired’ and ‘Sight Impaired’ mean?

These are all just general terms used to describe anyone with sight loss that cannot be corrected by normal glasses.

What is a Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI)?

This is the official document completed by your eye specialist at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital Eye Clinic, if you meet the criteria and then decide to register your visual impairment. Your copy should be kept safe for those occasions when you may be asked to prove you are visually impaired, such as when purchasing concessionary tickets etc.

How do I register as visually impaired?

You become 'registered' once the City Council Social Services Department (who manage the register) receives their copy of your CVI. The 'Register' is confidential and it is managed locally.

Is registration compulsory?

No, you may choose not to register for a number of personal, or professional reasons, but choosing not to, when advised to do so, may create unforeseen problems. Insurance companies may contest future accident or holiday illness claims if they discover you have a sight impairment you have not declared. There could also be serious health and safety issues in the workplace, particularly if you work with, or near dangerous equipment, vehicles, or materials.

Why bother registering?

We recommend registration if you meet the relevant criteria, as it is needed if you wish to apply for most of the help, benefits, services, travel and leisure concessions you may now need.

If you are in work, you may fear registration on the grounds that it could affect your career. This may be true in some cases, but hiding sight loss from your employer can create problems if ever you either have, or cause, an accident at work. 'Muddling through' is likely to cause relationship problems with fellow workers as well. You may be perceived by colleagues as 'losing it' or they may question your ability to carry out your duties.

Once registered, your boss and colleagues will understand what the problem is. You will also be covered by the company's insurance, as well as the latest disability discrimination legislation. Ironically, your job may actually be safer if you have a registered disability. Equipment and personal assistance may also be available through the Department of Work and Pensions' 'Access to Work' scheme (see 'Employment' section).

What do I do next?

Once registered, the Neighbourhoods and Community Care, 'Sensory Impairment Team' will make contact and arrange to come and see you, (see 'Local Services'). In the meantime, you could get in contact with Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind (SRSB), and they will give you all the help and advice you need.

What can others experiencing sight loss see?

Although you are experiencing sight loss yourself and know your own symptoms only too well, there are numerous medical conditions that affect sight in different ways. This is why some people seem more or less able to cope than others. Yes, some of this is down to confidence, but even people of the same age, with the same condition can experience different symptoms and levels of sight loss. Across different conditions, the variations can be extreme. For example, someone with the onset of 'Macular Disease' loses the ability to see detail in the central area of their visual field. Whilst those affected can often find their way around unaided, they are unable to read, watch Television normally, or recognise people. Those with 'Retinitis Pigmentosa' however, often have the exact opposite effect. They usually develop tunnel vision, which makes getting about very difficult, but they can usually read until the condition is very advanced.

Other conditions can cause colour blindness, night blindness, distortion, discomfort and detail loss in bright light, halo or patchwork effects, fogging, and even double vision.

The RNIB Website has an excellent section on eye conditions that should cover everything you need to know about your own and other people's conditions, symptoms and possible treatments. Go to www.rnib.org.uk and click on the 'Eye Info' link.

What is 'Communities and Neighbourhood Care'?

This is the new name for the Social Services Department; however, the public still refer to them as 'Social Services'.

What is 'First Point'?

This is the agency you talk to when you telephone, or enter Howden House. They also carry out 'Personal Assessments of Need' on behalf of Social Services. They are in effect, your first contact with Social Services, hence the name.

What does 'SRSB' stand for?

SRSB stands for 'Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind' (see 'Local Services'). Older people may still refer to it as 'The Blind Institute' or just 'Mappin Street' but 'SRSB' is taking over as the name of choice. Worth noting is that the 'Royal National Institute of Blind People' (RNIB) is a totally unrelated national sight charity and SRSB receive no funding from them.

Local Services

The Royal Hallamshire Hospital

Ophthalmic Out-patients Department

You will be referred to the Eye Department, if your doctor or optician identifies a problem with your eyes that cannot be corrected by simply wearing prescription glasses.

First consultation and subsequent visits are by appointment only and it is within this department that any tests will be carried out to establish the nature of your condition.

Treatment, if appropriate, is carried out either in the Eye Department or the Day Case Centre. It is in the Eye Department that those who qualify, can choose to be certified as visually impaired.

Other services include a Contact lens service, Prosthetic Eye Department, Orthoptic Department, Electro-diagnostic Unit and Low vision services.

Contact:

Royal Hallamshire Hospital

Glossop Road

Sheffield

S10 2JF

Telephone: (Clinic Reception) 0114 271 3930

Low Vision Services

The Low Vision Clinic and Assessment

The purpose of a Low Vision Assessment is to work out the best way of using the vision of someone whose sight cannot be improved by medical treatment or ordinary spectacles. This is often achieved by better use of lighting, contrast and reducing the effects of glare in addition to the use of appropriate magnifying aids. You will not be tested for glasses at this assessment.

A Low Vision Therapist will discuss the implications of your poor sight with you and suggest ways to improve your ability to read, write and undertake other activities which you may be having difficulty with.

For most people, some of the effects of sight loss can be compensated by the use of appropriate low vision aids.

You will usually be able to choose from a range of magnifiers that have been shown to help. You will be shown the best way to use them as well as special techniques to help you see more clearly. They will then be loaned to you for use at home.

A recommendation to the relevant organisational bodies will be given to you should you require aids solely for education or employment purposes. Information about other organisations and services that may help you, local and national, is also available.

Referral to other services such as Neighbourhoods and Community Care, formerly Social Services Sensory Impairment Team, and Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind (SRSB) can be made.

The range of aids available for tasks such as reading small print include simple hand, stand and pocket magnifiers, illuminated stand and pocket magnifiers and hands free magnifiers. Distance binoculars and monocular telescopes are also available to aid distance viewing, including television.

Initial referral to this clinic is made by your Ophthalmologist at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital, or Sheffield Children's Hospital.

The Low Vision Clinic operates an appointment system. After your first attendance, subsequent advice on low vision issues can be requested if your vision or needs change. There are no facilities for seeing people who arrive without an appointment.

Contact:

Low Vision Service

A Floor

Royal Hallamshire Hospital

Glossop Road
Sheffield S10 2JF Telephone: 0114 271 3021

Karen Dolling, Support Nurse for the Visually Impaired, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals Foundation Trust

My role is to meet the needs of visually impaired patients, their carers, relatives and staff. I am able to use my networking skills to liaise and provide information about local and national agencies who work with the visually impaired.

I am also a Low Vision Trainer, able to help with problem solving ideas for patients in their everyday lives. I work with adults and children of all ages.

Contact:

Karen Dolling
Support Nurse for the Visually Impaired
The Ophthalmic Department
Royal Hallamshire Hospital
Telephone: 0114 226 1262

Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind (SRSB)

'SRSB' is the primary independent provider of services to local sight impaired people, even those not yet registered. Founded in 1860 and at the Mappin Street Centre since 1939, the society has recently redeveloped the site to give the people of Sheffield a brand new, purpose made centre.

This completely independent charity is funded entirely from local sources, donations and legacies. Services are provided by a dedicated and highly motivated team of paid staff and volunteers and most of their services are provided at no cost. A daily lunch club and trips are charged for, but prices are heavily subsidised. Help is just a simple phone call away.

The services SRSB provide are:

Community Advisory Service

A team of full-time Community Advice Officers is available to visit people in their own homes and give practical help and advice, as well as assisting in the completion of benefit and welfare forms. They also undertake 'Needs Assessments', on behalf of Social Services, for people aged over 75 when they are first registered as Sight Impaired.

Welcome Group

All new clients are invited to a 'Welcome Group' meeting at the Mappin Street Centre. This provides a useful introduction to all the services available in Sheffield and is a great opportunity to make useful contacts.

Carers' Support Scheme

This is a service that runs with the help of volunteers, who provide breaks of a few hours per week for carers of visually impaired people.

Activities Centre

Of particular interest to the older members of the society, activities take place at the Mappin Street Centre, weekdays from 10am till 2:30pm. Transport is usually available in the society's own minibuses. Tea and biscuits are served on arrival as well as a subsidised cooked lunch at 1pm. A range of activities, entertainment and the occasional outing, are organised by staff and volunteers. It is a great place for members to make new friends and socialise with others in the same boat as themselves. Activities for people of all ages are currently being developed.

Equipment Shop

Open from 8:30am to 4:30pm the Resource Centre sells a wide selection of goods designed to help people with sight loss maintain their independence. On offer are items such as talking watches/clocks/mobile phones/radios and even a talking microwave oven. The range of smaller items is far too large to list, so the best thing to do is call in and ask at Reception.

Library Service

Talking books are available on free loan from SRSB's Library and Information centre. The Society can also apply on your behalf for the much more comprehensive RNIB National Library Talking Book Service, if required. This uses 'Daisy' format CDs and free loan of a new player is available to registered, sight impaired people.

Wireless for the Blind

SRSB administer the British Wireless for the Blind Fund in the Sheffield area. They can provide on loan Radio/Cassette/CD players free of charge to registered, sight impaired people, subject to certain additional criteria being met.

Residential Home

SRSB operates Cairn Home for the Elderly Blind at Crosspool, which is registered with the National Care Standards Commission and provides the highest quality of residential care for visually impaired people. For further information or to arrange to look round the home please contact the Manager on 0114 266 1536.

Overend Cottages

SRSB have 3 flats at Crosspool which are let to visually impaired people. They are all on the ground floor with level access and consist of Kitchen/Living Room, Bedroom and Bathroom. There is also a 2 bedroom house at Crosspool.

Sports & Leisure

SRSB organise numerous activities and events through the year, including Day Trips, Holidays, Social Events, Gardening, Archery, Creative Writing and Swimming. Some of these activities take place at their Centre and others take place round and about Sheffield. For the latest information, ring the Mappin Street Centre, get hold of a newsletter, or check the website.

Newsletter

Members are sent quarterly, large print newsletter and events diary. This is also available on audio cassette, braille and by email if required.

Contact:

Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind
Mappin Street
Sheffield
S1 4DT

Telephone: 0114 272 2757

Website: www.srsb.org.uk

E-mail: info@srsb.org.uk

Sheffield Social Services

'Neighbourhoods and Community Care' as they are now called, are the provider of local authority social services in Sheffield, including the 'Support Service for Visually Impaired People'. You are entitled to ask the council to assess your needs for services regardless of whether you are registered partially sighted or blind (Detailed earlier in this book). You should contact Social Services on 0114 273 4908. There is a wide range of booklets that give full details of the service provision in Sheffield and they are available free in large print, Braille and audio cassette.

If you are registered, you will automatically be contacted by the Sensory Impairment Team or for some, by a Community Advice Officer from SRSB. The Rehabilitation Officers from the Sensory Impairment Team can offer practical advice and information, mobility training, independent living skills and help with communication skills, based on your personal requirements.

Social Services also handle the applications for the free travel passes and blue parking badges. Here again, you do not need to wait for a visit from a Rehabilitation Officer or Community Advice Worker to apply for these, simply take your certificate (from the Ophthalmologist at the hospital) along to First Point in Howden House and they will process your

application. Call 0114 273 4897 if you require more information.

There is a resource centre at Smelterwood Drive, Stradbroke, where equipment for people with a visual impairment is on display. It can be visited individually by appointment or by attending one of the groups arranged by the team.

The Sensory Impairment Team also offer a group for carers of visually impaired people to demonstrate safer guiding techniques and to give an outline of the type of problems encountered as a result of a specific eye condition.

There are various other groups such as a Women's Group (primarily a literary group with some other occasional activities), the Taster Group (encompasses all aspects of what the team can offer) and a Touch Typing and Computer Group.

The Role of Rehabilitation Officers

Neighbourhoods and Community Care (formerly Social Services) Rehabilitation Officers are there to enable people to live independently.

Their main areas of responsibility are:-

Mobility

An important part of independent living is being able to get around freely and safely, both indoors and away from home. They can help you in the following ways:

Training in techniques on moving around safely.

Helping to familiarise with an indoor area.

Training in the use of a white cane.

Training in specific route travel and mental mapping skills.

Help with Daily Living Skills

They will help you with the skills necessary for everyday independent living. The main areas here are:

Advice and Training on Kitchen Equipment

Safe cooking and organising work surfaces.

Training in safe ways to prepare food,

Preparing and cooking food as well as weighing, measuring and baking.

Home Management Advice

Training on cleaning, laundry (including minor adaptations to washing machines), as well as labelling and marking clothing.

Personal Care

Help and advice on all aspects of personal care, such as grooming, taking medication etc.

Help with Communication Skills

Help to adopt new methods of reading, writing, keeping records and even using the telephone. Touch typing lessons are also available or new computer technology, which has made a dramatic difference to many sight impaired people through the use of specialist software.

Other alternatives such as learning Braille or Moon can be discussed and the officer will advise on what the best options are for you.

General Advice

They will also give advice on the equipment, benefits and services that are available to people with a visual impairment.

Help Seeing

Whilst Rehabilitation Officers cannot improve or treat your sight, they can advise on how to make best use of any remaining vision. The main areas covered here, are advice on lighting, the use of colour contrast, self-help and low vision aids.

The Sensory Impairment Team is available on duty, without an appointment, at Howden House on Tuesday afternoons from 2pm until 4:30pm.

Contact:

Sheffield Neighbourhoods and Community Care

Sensory Impairment Team

Floor 1

Howden House

Union Street

Sheffield

S1 2SH

0114 273 4977

Website: www.sheffield.gov.uk

City Wide Alarms Service

This is a 24/7 support service that is ideal, and some would say essential, for sight impaired people who live alone.

When you join, for just £3 per week, you are given an alarm pendant to wear all the time when at home. When activated by you, your telephone automatically calls for help. There is also on-going telephone help that you can ring as well.

Contact:

City Wide Alarms

1st Floor Priors Office

Station Road

Darnel

Sheffield

S9 4JT

Telephone: 0800 013 0980

Local Groups

In addition to SRSB and Social Services, a number of smaller independent or affiliated groups operate in this area. These are often run by fellow sight impaired people. Some receive support from SRSB and Social Services but they tend to just get on and do their own specific thing. Some are sport or socially based and others are self-help groups. Sight impaired members often join more than one group as they sometimes only meet once or twice per month. Here is the current list, but remember, if you find that you need a new group in your area, you can always start your own. For help with this, feel free to contact SRSB for guidance and practical help.

The Ravenscroft Group

This group, for the "young at heart", meet every Tuesday between 10am and 12:30pm at Ravenscroft Resource Centre, Stradbroke. Activities include Days out, Ten Pin Bowling, Cookery and just social chats.

Tip: This group is particularly good at finding out the latest 2 for 1 ticket deals and other concessions due to the diversity of membership and the fact that they are always looking for something new to try. Those not familiar with the Stradbroke area usually meet up near Wilkinson's, Haymarket and go as a group, so don't worry about getting lost.

Contact: Jill Thompson on 0114 273 4977

Sheffield Macular Disease Self Help Support Group

This social group meets at the Friends Meeting House in St James Street on the first Thursday of each month (except January and August) from 1pm to 3:30pm. Guest speakers on a wide range of subjects are invited and coach trips are arranged during the summer. Members also have an annual Christmas lunch.

Contact Christine Roe on 0114 266 5473 or Pat Turner on 0114 255 0758. Website: www.sheffieldmacular.org.uk

Charles Bonnet Syndrome Support Group

This group is for people experiencing 'Phantom Visions' as the syndrome is often called. This can be a very worrying side effect of sight loss, where the brain tries to compensate for not seeing, by creating hallucinations. The group meet once a month at SRSB's Mappin Street Centre.

Contact: June Lloyd on 0114 272 2757

The Visually Impaired Gardeners Group

This group works an allotment at the Meersbrook Site, most Thursday mornings, growing vegetables, fruit and flowers.

Contact: Dennis Cooke on 0114 249 2134

Blind & Partially Sighted Bowling Group

This group plays at Hillsborough Park during summer outdoor season and indoors during the winter, at Concord Sports Centre, Wednesdays at 10am. Coaching is available for new members. Membership costs £5 per season.

Contact Graham Draycott on 0114 286 4121

Ten Pin Bowling Club

This is a very popular and successful group with members of the team representing Great Britain although it caters for people of all abilities. Their main aim is to socialise and have fun in doing so. It meets at Handsworth FastLane on alternate Tuesdays from 7:00 pm to 9:30 pm.

Contact: Lee Hartley on 0772 574 5110

Swimming Group

The swimming group meets every Thursday and is taken to Upperthorpe Baths. Participants leave the Red Deer public house late morning for a 1 hour swim. The cost of the swimming is just over £3 but nearer £2 with a "slice card".

After the swim, members are brought back to the Red Deer where they promptly retire to this local hostelry for lunch and a drink.

Contact: Kathy Greenwood on 0114 272 9885

Visually Impaired Archery Club

This is a very popular group suitable for people of all abilities. It meets every Wednesday afternoon at the Northern General Hospital, Spinal Injuries Unit Sports Hall.

Contact: Les Culf on 0114 246 5515

Rambling Groups

There are two rambling groups. One meets on the second Wednesday of every month and the other on the last Sunday of every month throughout the year. The walks are conducted with sighted guides and are not too strenuous.

Contact: Betsy Wilson on 0114 234 1271

Sheffield VIP Creative Writers Group

This lively and diverse group meet from 11:15am to 12:45pm every Friday at SRSB's Mappin Street Centre. All abilities and writing styles welcome. Members who cannot see enough to read their own work have it read out by a sighted volunteer, so there's no excuse not to have a go. This group produced a CD of their poems and prose in 2004 and it is being sold for £4 by SRSB to raise funds for the society.

Contact: SRSB on 0114 272 2757 for more information on either the group or the CD.

SRSB Social Group

This informal group meet on a casual basis at about 4:30pm in The Old Queens Head public house on Pond Street, next to the bus station, The combined group then take over a corner of the pub and put the world to rights over a drink and a bar snack.

Contact: SRSB 0114 272 2757

Yorkshire VIP Football Club “The VIPS”

Meets on the last Sunday of every month at SWFC sports hall.

Contact: Kathryn Fielding 01924 279 305 or e-mail kfielding@fdso.co.uk

Crafty Ladies

This is an art and craft group, currently comprised entirely of women, which meets alternate Fridays at the Ravenscroft Resource Centre Bungalow. If you fancy getting involved in this kind of creativity in spite of failing sight, then give the group a try.

They are also keen to encourage men to have a go but this may mean a group name change.

Contact: Trina Brown 0114 268 1102

National Organisations

This section lists the key national organisations and charities that you may wish to contact for specific help or information, not available locally. There are many others, but we feel this list will more than suffice for the vast majority of local people. If you DO want more, the RNIB has a database of ALL UK organisations.

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

This is the largest organisation providing services for sight impaired people in the UK.

They have a comprehensive range of services including help and advice on financial benefits, education, employment, health and leisure.

They sell a wide range of products for pleasure, daily living and mobility, all of which can be found in their free catalogues. Telephone: 0845 7023 153 for copies.

The New Beacon is the main monthly magazine of the Institute, and is available in print, Braille and audio cassette.

RNIB is now a membership organisation enabling blind and partially sighted people to get in touch with other people who have had similar experiences and give them a chance to exchange information and opinions.

Through the scheme, they will provide information about how they can help, as well as details of other organisations specially tailored to the needs of blind and partially sighted people. Each new member will receive a Welcome Call from a trained operator on RNIB's Helpline to check whether they need information about relevant services and support, their eye condition, leisure interests etc. RNIB members will be able to vote for members of RNIB's Consultative Assembly.

Ring Customer Services if you are interested in becoming a member or need advice.

Tip: The RNIB Website: is a superb resource for anything to do with sight loss, with lots of information on specific eye conditions and possible treatments.

Contact:

Royal National Institute of Blind People

105 Judd Street

London

WC1H 9NE

Telephone: 020 7388 1266

Helpline 0303 123 9999

Customer Services 0303 123 9999

Website: www.rnib.org.uk

Action for Blind People

Action for Blind People provides a comprehensive information service on a range of subjects including employment, residential care and welfare benefits. They also provide an excellent holiday and leisure resource.

Information is generally available in a series of leaflets in large print and on audio cassette. The organisation owns a number of hotels specialising in holidays for sight impaired people and have a number of housing schemes which are based in the south of the country.

Their 'Your Choice' team will help if you are seeking, or wishing to change your accommodation. They offer advice, practical help and benefit advice relating to your housing needs.

Contact:

Action for Blind People

14-16 Verney Road

London

SE16 3DZ

Telephone: 020 7635 4800

Email: info@afbp.org

Website: www.afbp.org

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (GDBA)

Probably the best known sight charity amongst the general public, and for people with severe sight loss, who need help getting around independently.

For those able to handle and care for a dog, this service transforms lives. Successful applicants undergo a three week training course with a guide dog at a local hotel and the benefits of regaining independence soon follow.

Almost all costs are met by the charity and support is always just a phone call away.

Contact:

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association
1 Hale Court
Northfield Road/Northfield Avenue
Crookes
Sheffield
S10 1QS
Telephone: 0845 3727 427
Head Office: 0118 983 5555
Website: www.guidedogs.org.uk

The Macular Disease Society

If your eye condition is one of those collectively described as 'Macular Disease', this organisation may be of interest.

The Society provides information and practical support so that those with loss of central vision can make the most of their remaining vision. To this end, there is an office hours telephone helpline and a very useful website. Affiliated to the society, there are a large number of locally based self-help groups (one of which is based here in Sheffield).

They produce a quarterly magazine, 'Side View', written by members for members and this is available in large print or on audio cassette.

WAM (Working Age Macular)

As the majority of people with a macular disease are elderly, the younger members of the 'MDS' have formed 'WAM'. These active members aren't willing to go down without a fight and are hell bent on maximising their potential, as well as having fun. They also pass on to each other useful information, specific to working or working age people with Macular Disease. There is no local 'WAM' group as yet, but contact with the group may still be advantageous to you if you fit this category.

Contact:

The Macular Disease Society
PO Box 1870
Andover
SP10 9AD
Telephone: 01264 350551
Advice Helpline: 0845 241 2041
email: info@maculardisease.org
Website: www.maculardisease.org

The Association of Blind Asians

Sensitive to the cultural and language needs of all sight impaired members of the British Asian community, they produce and distribute a monthly magazine and weekly newsletter in Asian languages, either printed or on audio tape.

As well as giving help and practical advice by telephone, the organisation is building links with local charities and Asian groups. Ring 0208 558 6972 for further information.

The Partially Sighted Society (PSS)

Formed in 1973, the Partially Sighted Society's services include the following:

Low vision assessment in its Clinics - London, Doncaster, Exeter, - or advice on where to go for a low vision assessment and low vision aids.

Mail Order Catalogue of daily living aids for visually impaired people.

Advice and information on all aspects of living with a visual impairment.

Note: Good though this organisation's services are, it doesn't offer Sheffield people anything they can't get locally through SRSB, Social Services, the Low Vision Clinic, and local equipment supplier, 'ic'.

Contact:
The Partially Sighted Society
7/9 Bennetthorpe
Doncaster
DN2 6AA
Telephone: 0844 477 4966
Website: www.partsight.org.uk

St Dunstan's

Are you an ex-Service man, or woman with a visual impairment? Founded in 1915, this national charity's objective is to provide training, rehabilitation and lifelong after-care for ex-Service men and women who are experiencing sight loss and to help them overcome the difficulties they experience as a result.

With an excellent training centre on Fulwood Road in Sheffield and local rehabilitation staff, St Dunstan's is really making a difference to the lives of local people.

Contact:
St Dunstan's
12 -14 Harcourt Street
London
W1H 4HD
Telephone: 020 7723 5021
Email: enquiries@st-dunstans.org.uk

Training Centre
276 Fulwood Road
Sheffield
S10 3BN
Telephone: 0114 267 2550

The National Blind Children's Society (NBCS)

NBCS is steadily increasing the range of services it provides to children and young persons up to the age of 25, their families and professionals.

The Charity donates computers and CCTVs plus a wide range of aids completely free to low income families. Grants are also given towards music, sports, other recreational activities and holidays. They hold an activity week for VI children during the summer and they also have a specially adapted mobile home at Burnham Holiday Village, which is available for rent.

Their customised large print book service has become recognised as the leading source of reading material for children who are unable to access standard print or Braille. The Education Service always has an expert advisor on hand to give parents who are concerned about their child's rights to entitlement of support when in school and can also offer IT training and assessment free to families who are not conversant with equipment that they supply.

Their latest venture is SHOP@NBCS, a new retail outlet which can offer nearly all the gadgets that a VI person could want.

Contact:

The National Blind Children's Society

Bradbury House

Market Street

Highbridge

Somerset

TA9 3BW

Telephone: 01278 764 764

Website: www.nbcs.org.uk

The National Federation of the Blind of the United Kingdom (NFBUK)

The NFBUK is a campaigning organisation whose aim is to improve the quality of life of all visually impaired people. They campaign for a safer environment, for example, drawing to the attention of the public the dangers of obstacles on pavements - including parked cars, better social services and benefits etc. They publish a quarterly magazine 'Viewpoint' in print, Braille and on audio cassette. Membership of the Federation is £4.00 per year.

Contact:

The National Federation of the Blind UK

Sir John Wilson House

215 Kirkgate

Wakefield

WF1 1JG

Telephone: 01924 291313

email: nfbuk@nfbuk.org

Website: www.nfbuk.org

The National Federation of Families with Visually Impaired Children (LOOK)

LOOK brings together local groups of families with children who are visually impaired and who are facing similar problems so that they can share information and offer mutual support.

LOOK can provide assistance and expertise, keeping local groups and individuals up to date with all the key issues affecting their children such as benefit entitlements, advice about suitable toys, games and education choices.

Contact:

LOOK

Queen Alexandra College

49 Court Oak Road

Harborne

Birmingham

B17 9TG

Telephone: 0121 428 5038 or 0121 427 9800
Website: www.look-uk.org

Torch Trust for the Blind

Torch is a national non-denominational Christian fellowship whose local branch "Sheffield Torch Fellowship" meets monthly on a Saturday from 2:30pm at Owlerton Evangelical Church, Borough Road, Sheffield. For further information or to arrange transport please contact Christine Clay on 0114 258 6272.

Contact:

Torch Trust for the Blind

Torch House

Torch Way

Northampton Road

Market Harborough

Leicestershire

LE16 9HL

Telephone: 01858 438260

Website: www.torchtrust.org

Email: info@torchtrust.org

There are many more National, regional and condition-specific organisations out there, so it is impossible for us to cover them all. We believe the above selection covers what most people need at first.

To seek out more organisations, carry out an internet search in www.google.co.uk or www.speegle.co.uk but limit the search to 'United Kingdom' or you will be swamped.

Condition Specific Organisations

The Albinism Fellowship, Burnley

Phone 01282 771900

Website: www.albinism.org.uk

The British Retinitis Pigmentosa Society, Buckingham

Telephone: 01280 815900

Website: www.brps.org.uk

International Glaucoma Association, London

Telephone: 01233 64 81 64

Website: www.iga.org.uk

Nystagmus Network, Newark

Telephone: 0845 634 2630

Website: www.nystagmusnet.org

The Retinoblastoma Society, London

Telephone: 0207 377 5578

Website: www.chect.org.uk

Allowances, Benefits and Grants

General Notes

Note 1. This section does **NOT** cover benefits that any able bodied person can claim, such as, Income Support, Rent Rebate, Job Seeker's Allowance, Council Tax Benefit etc. We are sticking to those benefits specifically for sight impaired people.

Note 2. The criteria for claiming some of the following benefits may change depending on the Government's Welfare Reform plans.

Note 3. We strongly advise you to seek the help of a competent advice worker or social worker when applying for benefits such as Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Incapacity Benefit. SRSB employ an excellent team of Community Advice Officers, who can offer advice and practical help filling in the forms. Contact them on 0114 272 2757 in the first instance.

Note 4. You should consider asking Social Services for an 'Assessment of Need'. You are entitled to this and you could be offered services such as home help, mobility training, equipment or even home adaptations. Contact Social Services if you wish to find out more.

Section A. Blind/Severely Sight Impaired People Only

Blind Person's Personal Income Tax Allowance

An Inland Revenue tax allowance which can be transferred to your partner if you no longer pay tax, on request. The telephone number to claim this allowance is 0845 366 7887 or contact your local tax office. Don't forget to renew your claim in each subsequent tax return.

Reduction in Television Licence Fee

People aged 75 and over are entitled to a free TV licence so if you or anyone you live with is aged 75 or over you should be getting a free TV licence – If you are still paying for your licence then telephone TV Licensing on 0870 241 6468 and they should arrange for a refund of any licence fee overpaid.

If you are registered blind/severely sight impaired and under the age of 75 then you are entitled to a 50% discount on the TV licence fee. People wanting to purchase a concessionary TV Licence now have to apply to TV Licensing at Bristol (you can no longer do this at a Post Office). You will also need to supply proof that you are registered blind/severely sight impaired – this should be a photocopy of your registration document (Form BD8 or CVI) issued by your ophthalmologist when you were first registered. If you can not find this certificate then you will need to obtain a letter from Social Services confirming that you are registered – you can obtain this by contacting the Sensory Impairment Team on 0114 273 4977.

A good tip – if the TV licence for your house is not in your name – perhaps it is in the name of your spouse, parent or child etc – then transfer the licence in to the name of the person registered blind/severely sight impaired and you will then be entitled to claim the 50% concession. To arrange transfer of a TV licence telephone 0870 241 6468.

Or if you have already paid the full licence then you can phone the above number to get a refund up to as far back as April 2000.

Help with Telephone: Rental and Installation Costs

Assistance may be available depending on circumstances. You should first apply to Social Services. Should your application to them be unsuccessful, you could then try 'Telephone for the Blind Fund', 7 Huntersfield Close, Reigate Surrey, RH2 0DX. Tel/Fax: 01737 248032
Website: www.tftb.org.uk

Exemption from 'Non-Dependants' Deduction from Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

Deductions for non-dependants living in your home are not made. Ask for a written breakdown of benefit to check that you are not paying for a non-dependant, or how you could be exempt.

Section B. All Registered Sight Impaired People

Disability Living Allowance (DLA)/Attendance Allowance (AA)

For help with personal care and mobility, DLA should be claimed by anyone under 65 with sight loss, working or not. The care component can be claimed on behalf of children aged from 3 months and the mobility component on behalf of children aged from 5 years. In some circumstances the higher rate mobility component may be payable to children aged 3 and 4 if they are severely disabled and have difficulty walking. Providing that the form has been completed correctly, you should receive at least the lower rate of care and the lower rate of mobility. DLA must be claimed before your 65th birthday. Those aged 65 or over can claim AA. Note that both DLA and AA are not means tested so you can normally receive them in addition to any other wage, pension or benefit and they are also non taxable. Contact the Disability Carer's Service on 0845 712 3456.

Employment and Support Allowance

This is for people below state pension age who are unable to work because of an illness or disability. Sight loss used to be a good reason why a person could not work but recent and proposed changes in the rules mean that everyone is now assessed individually as to their ability to work. Your sight loss may make you eligible, if you decide to apply, depending upon the extent of your sight loss.

This change has come about because companies now are legally obliged to give disabled people equality with able-

bodied personnel. Also, due to improvements in technology, there are many jobs now that can be done by visually impaired people that 20 years ago would have been impossible.

Anyone wishing to work should be provided with all the training and equipment they need as well as safeguards to ensure that benefits can be reinstated if a job ultimately proves too difficult.

Personal Capability Assessment

At time of writing it would be unwise of us to explain this procedure in detail as it is still in a state of change in relation to sight impaired people. Best advice is to contact one of the Community Advice Officers at SRSB who will be able to give you the latest information on Incapacity Benefit and how the current changes are likely to affect you.

Contacting the DWP (Department of Work and Pensions)

In order to make a benefit claim, you need to phone the following numbers as local walk-in enquiries at Job Centre Plus etc. are now discouraged.

If you are aged under 60, phone 0845 600 1267

If you are over 60, phone 0845 606 0265

Website: www.dwp.gov.uk

Additional Income Support

If you are already claiming Income Support, contact the DWP and ask about the additional 'Premiums' you may be entitled to.

Contact:

The Benefits Helpline

Telephone: 0800 882 2000

Additional Housing Benefit

If you are already claiming standard 'Housing Benefit', contact the Housing Department and ask about additional 'Premiums' for sight impaired people.

Additional Council Tax Benefit

If you are already claiming 'Council Tax Benefit' you should be entitled to this extra help. For details, ring the Council Tax Office at the Town Hall and ask about 'Council Tax Benefit Premiums' for sight impaired claimants.

Contact:

Sheffield City Council, Council Tax Office

Telephone: 0114 273 6777

Council Tax Disablement Rebate

If you use a room in your home specifically for activities relating to a disability (sight loss in your case), you may be entitled to a Council Tax discount. This is unrelated to any other benefit and is not means tested.

If you have a small bedroom kitted out with strong lighting, a computer and document scanner, as well as recording/playback equipment that enables you to listen to information and communicate with others, ring the Council Tax Office for an application form. Once they receive it back, an inspector will call, to check that your claim is fair and if he gives the go ahead, you will be moved down one band. If your home puts you in the bottom band, you will get a one sixth reduction from then on. If, for some reason, your application is refused, it is also worth appealing against the decision if you feel your claim is fair.

Note: You WON'T get this benefit by just shoving a PC on a desk in the corner. The claim must be valid.

Contact:

Sheffield City Council, Council Tax Office

Telephone: 0114 273 6777

Help towards the Cost of Residential or Nursing Home Fees

Financial help towards residential/nursing home costs may be available. Contact Social Services for further details.

Working Tax Credit

Working Tax Credit has a disability component for disabled people who are either returning to or taking up work. For more information phone 0845 300 3900.

Disabled Students Allowance

If you decide to do a College or University course, you will probably qualify for 'Disabled Students Allowance'. This is not paid to you directly, but funds the purchase of equipment and software you may need in order to complete your studies. Funding may also cover the cost of personal assistance or a reader/note taker. As every applicant is different, you will undergo an assessment of need and any help given will be tailor made for you. The specific school, college, or university you hope to attend will be able to provide you with any information you need.

Grants

Grants from the RNIB

If you are in receipt of a means tested benefit but not one that is a tax credit you may be able to claim a grant from the RNIB. You may be able to receive a grant for carpets and furniture, "white goods" (cooker, fridge, freezer, washing machine), debts for essential services, essential adaptations, repairs or redecoration, and other domestic equipment. They cannot give grants for clothing, holidays, computer software or other assistive technology.

The maximum amount that they can give is £400 at any one time, and in order to apply or to obtain more information, contact:

Information Resource Team

RNIB

105 Judd Street

London

WC1H 9NE

Telephone **0303 123 9999**

Email helpline@rnib.org.uk

The Family Fund

This is a government fund administered by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to help families who are caring for a severely disabled child under the age of 16.

Contact:

Family Fund
4 Alpha Court
Monks Cross Drive
York
YO32 9WN
Telephone: 0845 130 4542
Website: www.familyfundtrust.org

Royal Blind Society Grant

You may be able to claim a grant towards a holiday or the purchase of items which will help you with daily living.

All claims must be made with the recommendation of a rehabilitation officer, social worker or an official from a recognised blind association (SRSB in Sheffield) or agency such as a Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Contact:

The Royal Blind Society
RBS House
59 – 61 Sea Lane
Rustington
West Sussex
BN16 2RQ
Telephone: 01903 857023
Website: www.royalblindsociety.org

Non-Financial Benefits

Although less important than the straight financial benefits detailed above, these other benefits all add up and can make a big difference to your life if they are for you. For example, a Free Travel Permit may save you £300+ per year in bus fares!

Free NHS Sight Test

Even if your sight problem has been diagnosed as untreatable, you should continue to have regular sight tests so that any new disorders can be detected early, and to safeguard any residual vision you have. Tell the optician you are registered sight impaired before the sight test.

Free Spare NHS Hearing Aid

If you use a NHS hearing aid, your blind or partially sighted registration entitles you to have one spare aid free. Telephone: 0114 271 2913 for more information.

Free Postage on Items Marked ARTICLES FOR THE BLIND

This only applies to large print documents, Braille or recordings such as talking books and Newsletters.

Special Arrangements for Voting at Elections

Contact the Electoral Registrars office at the Town Hall and ask about postal or proxy voting well before the election.

Free Directory Enquiry Service

All registered sight impaired people qualify for the free 195 Directory Enquiry service. Simply call 195 and an operator will ask you for your PIN number (given when you register) and your name. The operator will then ask you for the name of the party you want to call and find the number. They can also help you find a service contact number such as a Plumber or Electrician.

Tip: They don't usually offer, but you can ask the operator to connect you as well.

To register, call 195 from any phone.

BT 1471-3 Discount

(Only for those with BT land lines) If you are registered for the previous service, you should ring 195 again and ask to be registered for the BT 1471-3 discount scheme as well. Once

registered, whenever you check for missed phone calls (by dialling 1471), you can then press '3' to return the call at no extra cost. All right, so this one isn't going to save you a lot of money, but you may as well register and save a bit.

SYPTE 'Special' Mobility Travel Permit

This permit allows you to travel free of charge on all public transport (buses, trams and trains) in South Yorkshire. For full details of this and other travel concessions, see the separate 'Travel Concessions' section.

RNIB National Library Talking Book Service

Applications are administered locally by SRSB. This excellent service is free to all registered, sight impaired people. Those not registered have to pay an annual subscription fee.

A purpose made 'Daisy' format CD player is delivered to your home and you receive a selection of books on CD via a very efficient postal system. The player will play standard CDs and MP3 CDs but output is mono so music lovers are best using a separate player for music.

Portable CD/Radio/Cassette Player on Free Loan

SRSB administer the British Wireless for the Blind Fund for the Sheffield area. They can provide on loan Radio/Cassette/CD players free of charge to people registered as Blind or Partially Sighted, subject to certain additional criteria being met.

2 for 1 Deals

Increasingly, entertainment and leisure organisations are offering '2 for the price of 1' or discount concessions to sight impaired customers. These include cinemas, swimming pools, gyms, festivals, etc. As a rule, **ALWAYS ASK!** Some systems are highly formalised, using in-house ID Cards but with others, it is just a case of asking and showing proof of disability as you pay.

Travel Concessions

This section provides information on how to save yourself a lot of money travelling and how to get around using public and private transport.

The Blue Badge Scheme

This is a car parking concession. The car does not need to be yours. To qualify for this concession you must be registered blind/severely sight impaired. Registered partially sighted people can only qualify if they have an additional disability which impairs mobility. Contact Social Services or SRSB for more information.

Help With Travel to Work Costs

You may qualify for travel to work expenses under the 'Access to Work' scheme. (See full details in 'Employment' section of this book).

Disabled Persons Railcard

This card entitles you to a third off the cost of most rail tickets for both you and a travelling companion. The card is renewable each year and currently costs £18 or £48 for 3 years. To apply, pick up a 'Disabled Person's Railcard booklet from any ticket office, Social Services, SRSB or contact:

Disabled Persons Railcard Office
PO Box 11631
Laurencekirk
AB30 9AA

Telephone: - **0845 605 0525** (7am to 10pm, Monday to Sunday)

Website: www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk

Disabled Persons' Travel Assistance (Trains)

Train travel can be daunting even for fully sighted people. This service co-ordinates personal help at stations. Staff will help you finding the right platform, a seat on both platform and

train, changing trains at an unfamiliar station and help with luggage.

If you are registered blind or partially sighted AND have a Disabled Persons' Railcard, you can book assistance at the same time as you buy your ticket. It is advisable to give at least 48 hours notice before your travel time.

Having booked assistance, you should report to the 'Customer Service' desk on the station concourse 20 minutes before the scheduled departure time of your train.

Community Transport

If you have difficulty using public transport then Sheffield Community Transport may be the answer. It is much cheaper than taxis, and it provides you with a door to door service using accessible minibuses. Community Transport operates Monday to Friday from 9am until 5pm and will take you anywhere within the city boundary. Bookings must be made 7 days in advance and you must be registered with them.

Contact:

Telephone: **0114 276 6148**

Website: www.sheffieldct.co.uk

South Yorkshire 'Special' Mobility Permit

If you are registered as blind or partially sighted, you can obtain a 'South Yorkshire Special Mobility Permit.' This is like the bus pass for senior citizens although it allows free travel at any time of day. The mobility special pass is like all other mobility passes and has an orange stripe down the right hand side – it should also have an eye symbol near the top right hand corner, which means that you should not be issued with a ticket.

The pass is valid on public service buses (not coaches) throughout England. It also allows you to travel free of charge on local Supertram and rail services. The card is only valid for tram and train travel throughout South Yorkshire, plus some trips to and from West Yorkshire.

If you are registered blind or partially sighted SRSB can help you with the application process. If you do not have a bus pass at all then we can issue a letter confirming your registration for you to take to the Travel Information Centre. You will also need to take proof of your address and identity, this can include recent utility bills, bank statements, passport, birth certificate. You no longer need to take a photograph as they will take a digital picture at the Travel Information Centre. For more information on what proof of identity you need please call the Travel Line **01709 51 51 51**.

If you are registered blind or partially sighted and you already have a senior citizen pass please contact SRSB as we will usually be able to arrange for a mobility special pass to be sent to your address.

You will be given your permit in an orange wallet. If you use this wallet at request stops, the bus driver should realise you have a sight problem and he or she will then understand if you have stopped the wrong bus by mistake. If you have not been given an orange wallet then please contact SRSB to arrange to get one.

If you are not registered blind or partially sighted and are entitled to a 'Blue Badge' (see above) then you will also qualify for a mobility special bus pass. Apply through Social Services at Howden House in the first instance and then renew the card every five years free of charge at your nearest SYPTE Travel Centre. When in use, simply show the driver or conductor your pass and you will not be asked to pay.

How to make the most of your permit

You can also use your pass to travel by train to and from West Yorkshire on Northern Rail services (without changing trains in West Yorkshire).

If you also have a 'Disabled Person's Railcard', you must show this when buying your ticket if you want the extra discount this card entitles you to.

For full details of boundary points on bus and rail services, contact any SYPTE Travel Centre, or ring Travel Line **01709 51 51 51**.

Straight Discounts

At time of publishing, both 'National Express Coach Travel' and 'Virgin Trains' offer a straight 50% discount off ticket prices for sight impaired people. Offers change regularly so it's always best to check when you are booking. Proof that you are registered visually impaired is required at time of booking and may be requested when you are travelling.

National Rail Travel 'Two for One' Scheme

To muddy the waters even more, there is also a lesser known rail travel concession available nationally on **ALL** full price rail tickets. It is a 2 for the price of 1 deal, to cover the cost of a guide, or carer's ticket, but (and it's a big but), it is **ONLY** on **FULL PRICE** tickets. This deal is a 'non-event' as two 'standard' discounted tickets are invariably cheaper than 2 for 1 at full price.

Large Print Bus Timetables

If you require a bus timetable in large print, simply ring Travel Line and ask for one to be posted directly to you. You will need to specify the route to ensure that you receive the correct one.

Unfortunately, at time of printing, there is no equivalent large print service for rail journeys, but we are working on it. In the meantime, ring Travel Line and they will give you the information you need verbally.

Contact:

Travel Line

Telephone: **01709 51 51 51**

Website: www.sypte.co.uk

Under 16

The Service for Visually Impaired Children

This service caters for the needs of all sight impaired children up to the age of 16.

Staff

All teaching staff appointed to the service are required to qualify as teachers of visually impaired people. In addition to the teaching staff, the service also employs Teaching Assistants, Technicians and Specialist staff to deliver mobility and independence skills.

The flexible use of a well-qualified and experienced team of staff together with a comprehensive range of resources and facilities allows pupils to be taught in the educational environment that is most appropriate to their individual needs.

The Support Teacher Service

Support teachers for children with visual impairments are based at Prince Edward Primary School. They provide a city wide Service to visually impaired children and their families including pre-school children, children in mainstream schools, and pupils placed in special schools who have visual difficulties in addition to other special educational needs. Members of the support team are available to give advice and support to schools and families as well as having direct contact with the children.

Support for Pre-School Children

The Support Teachers responsible for pre-school children with visual impairments work with families of young children from the time the child's visual difficulties have been diagnosed. Often such children are placed in mainstream nursery schools with visits from the support teacher as appropriate. Where a child has other special needs in addition to their visual

impairment, there is close co-operation with staff from other services.

Secondary Education

Secondary aged pupils with a severe visual impairment may be offered a place in the Integrated Resource at Tapton Secondary School. The age of entry is 11 years and pupils can progress through the school to follow a wide range of GCSE courses. Pupils within the Integrated Resource are included in mainstream lessons alongside their sighted peers wherever this is practical and in the interests of the pupils. For those who require a higher level of direct teaching by staff experienced in working with visually impaired pupils, a separate teaching area is used, but a strong emphasis is placed upon helping the pupils to develop those skills that will make a greater level of inclusion possible.

For students who wish to continue their education into the sixth form a number of options of subjects leading to 'A' levels are available.

Pupils with Additional and Complex Needs

A child who is visually impaired and has additional special educational needs will be offered a place in whichever special school is felt to be most appropriate.

The Service offers support and advice to staff as well as direct contact with the child.

Relevant qualified staff from the Service will supply mobility and independence programmes appropriate to individual need.

Mobility and Independence

All children involved with the Service are assessed for mobility and independence needs. Following assessment, they are taught according to need.

Programmes of work vary from familiarisation with the school environment to independent travel throughout Sheffield.

Staff will also deliver programmes of work in a child's home area.

Contact:

Specialist Support Services

'Visually Impaired Service'

Mrs M Broadhurst

Head of VI Service

Tapton School

Darwin Lane

Sheffield

S10 5RG

Telephone: 0114 267 1414

16 And Over

The Sheffield College

Sheffield's 'Sensory Impairment Service' for this age group is based at The Sheffield College, Castle Centre, Granville Road. The support offered to students with a visual impairment covers a wide spectrum of involvement depending on the needs of the individual student and the nature of the course. In addition to all the courses available in the FE and HE sectors, there are two specialist classes - one for Braille and the other for Cookery.

Support consists of:

Classroom Support

A support lecturer works alongside the student to facilitate full participation in class activities.

Additional Support

A support lecturer works on a one-to-one basis with the student with regard to coursework (see Technical Tutorial) and topics not related to the rest of the class, e.g. use of specialised equipment, Braille etc. Group sessions can be arranged covering aspects of leisure, socialising and counselling.

A rehabilitation officer teaches independent travel and life skills at home, to and from college buildings and in and around campus.

Adaptation of Materials

The transcription of course/lecture notes into Braille or print of a suitable size and clarity together with the production of audio materials, tactile diagrams, maps and models.

Loan of Equipment

The very specific nature of some of the equipment used by students means that it can be extremely expensive. Consequently, resources permitting, the service would be pleased to lend out and maintain such items for the duration of the course.

In-Service Training/Awareness Raising

Fundamental to the successful integration of students with a visual impairment is the guidance offered to course lecturers and fellow students. The support service is very willing to run in-service training and awareness raising sessions for appropriate lecturers.

Technical Tutorial

A valuable contribution to past successes has been the willingness of colleges to arrange Technical Tutorials (usually on a weekly basis). Here the student receives an individual tutorial from a course lecturer in her/his specialist subject.

It could transpire that a student may at sometime during a course make use of any number (if not all) of the previous facilities. The Visually Impaired Service sees as important its role of liaising with students, parents, lecturers, medical and careers personnel. Consequently it is hoped that from the earliest possible moment, the Service is notified of an application by a student with a visual impairment to ensure the optimum structure of support is available.

First contact with the college should be through 'Student Services' who will arrange an appropriate meeting with the Sensory Impairment Service.

Contact:
Student Services
City College
Granville Road
Sheffield
S2 2RL
Telephone: (Switchboard) 0114 260 2600
Telephone: (SI Dept) 0114 260 3636
Website: www.sheffcol.ac.uk

Local Universities

Both universities in Sheffield have very good support services for sight impaired students. If you don't work because of your sight but are frustrated due to lack of stimulation, university may be worth looking at. First stop at Sheffield Hallam University, is 'Disabled Student Services', or at The University of Sheffield, 'Disability and Dyslexia Support Services', who will give you advice and information about how to proceed and what help is available. They will also advise you on the academic requirements needed to enrol. Mature and disabled students may not need the usual number of 'A' Levels to be admitted if you have appropriate life or work experience.

Some people choose to do an 'Access Course' first to make sure they get off to a good start, but this often isn't necessary.

Disabled Students Allowance

If you do decide to 'go for it', you will undergo a needs assessment and if you live in Sheffield, a report will be sent to the Student Services Department of Sheffield City Council who will then (hopefully) agree a 'Disabled Student Support' package. This will include equipment, personal assistance and help with related costs, funded by a 'Disabled Students Allowance'.

Contact : - see next page

Contact:
The University of Sheffield
Disability and Dyslexia Support Team
Telephone: 0114 222 1303

Sheffield Hallam University
Disabled Student Services
Telephone: 0114 225 3964

Education Further Away

Royal National College for the Blind (RNCB)

The RNCB claims to be “the UK's leading college of further education and training for people (16+) with sight impairment”. They provide a range of full time programmes and short courses designed to prepare people for progression to Further Education, Higher Education and the world of work ... but most importantly... Life.

Accommodation is geared to the specific needs of each student. This includes on-site purpose made provision that includes all facilities a totally blind person, may need, to student houses near the college for independent students who want to take care of themselves.

The cost of courses and all expenses (including accommodation and even rail fares home) can often be covered by applying through your Job Centre Plus, who actually provide the funding.

Contact:
The Royal College for the Blind
College Road
Hereford
HR1 1EB
Telephone: (General Enquiries) 01432 265725
Programme Helpline: 01432 376621
Fax: 01432 376628
Minicom: 01432 276532
Website: www.rncb.ac.uk
Email: info@rncb.ac.uk

Queen Alexandra College

QAC is a College for people aged 16 to 63 who have a visual impairment or another disability. Programmes include residential assessments, life skills, entry level qualifications, GNVQ, NVQ and Work Preparation. QAC also offers professional training services, Access to Work Assessments, Braille and tactile sign production and much more.

Contact:

Queen Alexandra College

Court Oak Road

Harborne

Birmingham

B17 9TG

Telephone: 0121 428 5050

Website: www.qac.ac.uk

RNIB Vocational College

RNIB Vocational College, Loughborough works in partnership with the neighbouring Loughborough College of further education offering a wide range of vocational and educational opportunities for visually impaired people. It has fully supported access to a wide range of courses at Loughborough College allowing students to gain nationally recognised qualifications.

The Vocational College offers specialist courses at Foundation level as well as training in Business Administration (including audio-word processing and telephony) and Information Technology at NVQ Level. Access courses also prepare students for mainstream further education.

Its Outreach Service offers support to students at other Colleges, short courses and on-the-job training.

Accommodation for students is available in its purpose built halls of residence or in RNIB houses in Loughborough.

Contact:
The Vice Principal
RNIB Vocational College
Radmoor Road
Loughborough
LE11 3BS
Telephone: 01509 611077
Website: www.rnibvocoll.ac.uk

Related Services

ABAPSTAS

ABAPSTAS was founded in 1970 by a small number of visually impaired people with the primary aim of supporting students, teachers and lecturers. Since then, ABAPSTAS has grown into a national self-help and campaigning organisation with a strong voice. Their main focus is still on education and employment but members now include people who have moved into careers other than teaching.

The main event of the year is their annual conference, which is held over an autumn weekend. ABAPSTAS produce a magazine four times a year. This gives information about the work of current campaigns, individual experiences as well as news and opinions.

Contact:
Nick Clarke
2 Damhead
Holmbridge
Holmfirth
HD9 2PB
Telephone: 01484 690542
Website: www.abapstas.org.uk

Employment

Confused? You will be

Don't even try to understand which of the following services is the best one for you. The current strategy for meeting the needs of disabled people either in, or seeking work, has evolved over a number of years and it has gradually become more and more confusing.

That said, there has never been more support and funding available to help us either into work or to keep our jobs if we are struggling to cope. The 'Disability Discrimination Act' is also doing its bit on our behalf, so if you want a job, now's the time to do something about it.

Here are the organisations and schemes currently available, in the first instance though, it may be best to ring the 'Disabilities Services Team (see below) for their advice.

Disabilities Services Team (Job Centre Plus)

This dedicated (but small) team provides practical advice, support and assistance to both working and unemployed people seeking work. One of their responsibilities is to carry out individual assessments in order to match people with suitable employment opportunities or schemes. The team are often involved in negotiations with employers on behalf of employees when issues need sorting out.

Contact:

DWP

Telephone: 0114 203 3000

Access to Work

The 'Access to Work' scheme which aims to help people overcome barriers to work resulting from their disability, is now a separate part of the DWP. Assistance at work can be provided by a funded support worker, if you need practical help. Subsidised enabling equipment can also be provided so you can carry out your duties unaided. This can include items

as small as magnifiers, or lamps and as large as free-standing CCTV units worth thousands of pounds, at no cost to you and little cost to your employer.

'Access to Work' is available to employed, self-employed and unemployed people.

Contact:

Access To Work

Telephone: 0113 214 2345

Minicom: 0113 271 4785

Work Step

About 600 sight impaired people nationally are currently employed as a direct result of this scheme. Run by 'Job Centre Plus', 'Work Step' is aimed at disabled, and able bodied people on benefit, who have been unemployed for over 6 months, but who are sufficiently experienced to work with just basic training, help and support. For some people, help with the cost of getting to work may also be available.

Contact:

DWP

Telephone: 0114 203 3000

New Deal for Disabled People

Funded, but not run, by Job Centre Plus, this initiative uses independent 'Job Brokers' who will help anyone on Incapacity Benefit to find, secure and keep an appropriate job. Unlike 'Work Step', 'New Deal for Disabled People' is geared towards people less well equipped for work. Long term and multi-disability clients are given a great deal of help and support both before and during employment. Funding for 'Work Mentoring' and other on-going support is also available. Employers may also be incentivised to take on a disabled job applicant and, importantly, there are safeguards built into the system to allow the employee to go back on benefit more easily, if things don't work out.

We have 4 'Job Brokers' to choose from here in Sheffield.

Yes2Work

Telephone: 0808 144 7080 or 0122 671 8558

Textphone: 0808 144 7082

Fax: 0808 144 7081 or 01226 707898

Email: info@yes2work.org.uk

Shaw Trust Employment

110 The Moor

Sheffield

S1 4PD

Telephone: 0800 085 1001 or 0114 279 2010

Website: www.shaw-trust.org.uk

Action for Employment

A4e Sheffield

1st Floor

14 Matilda Street

Sheffield

S1 4QD

Telephone: 0114 270 6800

Employment Opportunities

Manor Development Centre

40 Alison Crescent

Sheffield

S2 1AS

Telephone: 0800 458 2363 or 0114 265 2070

Textphone: 0114 265 0520

Email: eopps.sheffield@connectfree.co.uk

Enabling Equipment

General Products

There are catalogues full of daily living aids for sight impaired people. These products range from large print stickers for your PC keyboard, to talking clocks, scales, microwaves, radios and even a radar equipped cane, the 'Ultra Cane' which can warn of obstacles ahead and indicate distance and height through a vibrating button. Call in at SRSB Resource Centre or the Ravenscroft Centre to see a selection of what is available.

There is a vast choice of equipment and computer software available to help you carry on living as normal a life as possible. Some will be of no use whatsoever, depending on your particular condition and severity of sight loss, but there are some great products out there that you will find invaluable.

Magnifiers and more

A simple optical magnifier may be all you need for general reading and these can be as cheap as £1 from the nearest 'Pound Shop' but more sophisticated versions with increased magnification, wider viewing area, built in lights and stands are also available through specialist suppliers such as SRSB and local company "ic".

If you find conventional optical magnifiers fail to meet your needs, you may consider buying an electronic magnifier.

There are four types in common use:-

1. Self-contained TV tube, or flat screen monitor type, (referred to generically as CCTV magnifiers) with movable book holder either underneath or just in front. These can be very expensive and tend to be favoured more in the workplace than at home.
2. The portable self-contained hand held miniature TV monitor which is hand-held like an ordinary magnifier.

3. The hand held scanner which plugs into a domestic TV set or computer. This is the lightest option and magnification is only limited by the size of your TV or computer monitor.

4. The small hand-held scanning camera connected to a miniature monitor fitted into a frame and worn like spectacles.

These types of equipment are only available from specialist companies and are quite expensive so you should ask for a demonstration or trial period before buying. Initially, you should be able to see units in daily use at (for example) SRSB's Equipment Shop. Another way of trying before you buy is to visit one of the many exhibitions held throughout the year, where you can compare similar products from different manufacturers. See the separate section on exhibitions for more details. SRSB also stock a wide range of equipment including talking clocks and watches, talking labels for tins and other packages, electronic and optical low vision aids at reasonable prices

Local company "ic" are probably the only other convenient local supplier of enabling equipment. Personal callers are advised to telephone in advance

SW (Retail) Ltd T/A ic
Unit 3
Marrtree Business Park
Kirkwood Close
Oxspring
Sheffield
S36 8ZP Telephone: 01226 762528
Website: www.ic-online.co.uk

Cobolt Systems Ltd

This is a UK company specialising in the design, manufacture and supply of innovative aids for sight impaired people. They can supply a printed catalogue with photographs of their complete range, all of which can be ordered direct.

The company has developed a number of products themselves. They designed the world's first talking kitchen scales, talking microwave oven, talking time switch, talking calendar clock and talking tape measure. They have

developed their own high quality speech system which is used in all the products which they manufacture themselves. Rather than using synthetic speech this system uses digitised human speech and is much more pleasant to the ear. Talking watches, clocks and innovative voice note recorders are also available, some of which can be viewed at SRSB's Resource Centre.

Cobolt Systems Ltd
The Old Mill House
Mill Road
Reedham
Norwich
Norfolk
NR13 3TL
Telephone: 01493 700172
Website: www.cobolt.co.uk

Hagger UK Ltd

This company specializes in electronic products for disabled people. The extensive selection includes Telephones, alert devices, loop systems, 4 track tape recorders and television sound receivers.

Hagger UK Ltd
Telephone: 01462 677331
Website: www.hagger.co.uk

Other companies include:

Horizon
Telephone: 01884 254172
Website: www.magnifiers.co.uk

Videospec
Telephone: 01483 722273
Website: www.videospec.co.uk

Computers

The abundance of helpful information now available on the Internet plus Email, which has now largely replaced letter writing, are just two of the many reasons why computers are

becoming a 'must have' for many sight impaired people. Choosing the correct computer and software can be a difficult task especially for people with poor eyesight. Good PCs are available at bargain prices on the High Street, but getting the right software for a low vision user is another thing.

There are a growing number of companies specialising in computers for visually impaired people, who will gladly give advice before they supply and install a system to suit your needs. They also offer training packages and good backup service.

Some partially sighted people may decide that they can save money by purchasing a PC first from a local retailer where there are stacks of bargains to be had and then sourcing the software only through a specialist. This can be a great way to save money but be aware that occasionally conflicts occur between a particular brand of PC and a software package, so be very careful to check out compatibility issues before you buy.

Tip: If you are partially sighted, get the biggest TFT monitor you can afford and experiment with screen resolution settings to optimise it for your particular needs.

Computer Software

Screen reading software, which verbally tells you what is on screen and what you are typing is probably the most useful type of software for severely sight impaired users and its use becomes second nature once you are familiar with all the keystrokes. For partially sighted people, screen magnifiers may be a more appropriate solution. These simply enlarge whatever is on the screen to a point at which you can see what is going on.

Windows XP has a number of useful 'Accessibility Options' that may also help and these come free with your PC. You can enlarge your mouse pointer, or change its colour, and you can set up the Ctrl key so when you press it, a circle zooms in on screen to show you the pointer's location. The colour scheme can also be changed to give higher contrast. The great thing about Windows XP is that each user of the PC can

have a different setup, so the rest of the family can use the PC normally when they log on.

Here are a few established suppliers of hardware and software.

Aspire

Telephone: 01904 762788

Website: www.aspire-consultancy.co.uk

Dolphin Computer Access Ltd

Telephone: 01905 754577

Website: www.dolphinuk.co.uk

Moving-Mountains Technology Ltd

Telephone: 0870 765 6000

Website: www.moving-mountains.com

Sight and Sound Technology

Telephone: 01604 798070

Website: www.sightandsound.co.uk

Techno-vision Systems Ltd

Telephone: 01604 792777

Website: www.techno-vision.co.uk

Visualeyes

Telephone: 01422 846051

Website: www.visualeyesuk.com

The Internet

(See also 'Internet Media' for relevant website information)

Most sight impaired computer users find the internet (email in particular) invaluable and now, with appropriate enabling software, even totally blind people can use it to the full. For new PC users, we recommend basic training in how to get the best out of this exciting medium (although it's amazing just how much your kids can teach you).

This area is so dynamic that a list of courses available would soon be out of date, so the best people to speak to on this, are Social Services. They will have up to date information on what is currently available.

Getting On-line

There are many companies offering low cost internet access, from the large multi-national companies such as AOL and Tiscali, to the more local provider, such as Plus.Net based in Sheffield. SRSB use Plus.Net as they are very competitively priced, reliable, and have a low cost helpline.

AOL claim that their software is easier to use than what you get already installed on your PC. The disadvantage of this is that you get used to non-standard software and can only then use your own PC. Also, AOL email addresses tend to be a bit long or have random numbers included because each address has to be unique and AOL have so many customers.

A smaller internet provider will let you use the software that came with your PC. So once you have learnt to use it, you can switch computers more easily. Also, the email address will be nearer what you want it to say.

Tip: If you use the internet we **STRONGLY RECOMMEND** that you have up-to-date anti-virus and firewall software running automatically on your computer. It is also important to make sure you have the latest Windows security updates installed.

Audio Tools

Sound recording and playback equipment can be invaluable to sight impaired people as a method of keeping notes, transferring information and organising things. Voice Recorders, Minidisk players and even talking PDAs are all now available at affordable prices. If you have a few thousand pounds spare, you can even buy a purpose made, high capacity organiser, designed specifically for blind or partially sighted users. Some even have special one-handed Braille input.

For advice, contact SRSB's Equipment Shop and if they can't help, they will advise you of an appropriate specialist company such as the ones detailed below.

Radio Equipment

In the last 4 years or so, radio has undergone 2 changes, both of which are a boon to sight impaired listeners. Firstly, the launch of DAB Digital Radio and secondly, radio on demand via the internet.

DAB Digital Radio

What's so wrong with FM you may ask. Well, if all you listen to is BBC Radio Sheffield, and you can get it without interference, don't bother changing. If, however you want a greater variety of stations, particularly specialist music stations like Jazz FM, Planet Rock, and Classic Gold, you will love DAB!

DAB tuners to add to your Hi-fi start at £80 and portables start at just under £50. The best portable for someone who cannot see properly is currently the Pure Digital 'Sonus 1XT Talking DAB Radio' which has spoken feedback on all functions as well as telling you what station you have just tuned into. For a demonstration, call in to SRSB's Equipment Shop. The unit costs about £120, but it is very well constructed and has great sound quality.

If you can't stretch to £120 and want to go for a cheap one, BE WARNED! We have tested a number of the budget models and found a wide variation of sound and build quality. We highly recommend that you try a unit out before buying it.

Consumables

Tape Sense

Set up to save visually impaired people money on blank compact cassettes, CDRs, mini discs, and other Hi-fi accessories, Tapesense is a subsidised mail order service backed by Richer Sounds plc and developed and run by the Persula Foundation. They offer top quality brand-new products at a fraction of shop prices to registered visually impaired people. They also supply the Pure Digital Sonus 1XT Talking Radio, at a subsidised price.

Contact:
Tape Sense
The Persula Foundation
Telephone: 0207 357 9298
Website: www.persula.org/tape.html

Exhibitions

Exhibitions play a very important role in the market place - especially in the often expensive computer and electronics field - as they provide the opportunity for people to try out and compare products without having to cope with sales pressure.

It would be a pity, for example, for someone to splash out £2,000 on a top of the range CCTV only to find out later that one costing around £250 would have been more than adequate for their particular needs.

There are numerous, but irregular exhibitions taking place all over the country throughout the year, so we are only giving details here about two regular annual events.

Sight Village

This three day event takes place each year in Birmingham during the third week in July and is considered by many as being the main showcase of products and services consequently most British and many overseas companies and societies exhibit here.

Contact:
Sight Village
Telephone: 0121 428 5050
Website: www.qac.ac.uk

Reveal

Held in Leeds, this one day exhibition is smaller than Sight Village, however, it is still well worth a visit. Being fairly local, easy to find and easy to get round, most of the larger suppliers of computers, low vision and daily living equipment exhibit here.

Contact:

The Leeds Centre for Blind and Partially Sighted People

Telephone: 0113 214 4544

SRSB

At least twice a year, SRSB allows one or two suppliers to display their product ranges for a day at their Centre. Details of these 'Product Days' can be found in the regular SRSB newsletter or in the Diary page of their Website.

Contact:

SRSB

Telephone: 0114 272 2757

Website: www.srsb.org.uk

On The Radio

Sheffield In Focus

Produced and presented by local sight impaired people, 'Sheffield In Focus' is a weekly magazine style show broadcast by 'Sheffield Live Community Radio'. Of particular interest to visually impaired people living in Sheffield, the show is a mixture of news, information, product reviews, interviews and music. At time of writing, the show is only available on the internet, but you will soon be able to hear it on FM radio as well. For the latest information about how and when to tune in, call the station.

Contact:

Sheffield Live Community Radio

The Drum Media Centre

6 Paternoster Row

Sheffield S1 2QQ

Website: www.thedrum.org.uk

Telephone: 0114 281 4092

In Touch (BBC Radio 4)

Broadcast each Tuesday evening at 8:40pm, this show has become a 'must hear' for most people with sight loss. Aimed at bringing the latest sight orientated news and in depth discussion on relevant topics, the show is not afraid of ruffling a few feathers. A magazine relating to the show is also available free.

Contact:

The In Touch Office

Room 6084

Broadcasting House

London

W1A 1AA

Telephone: 08000 440 440 (Radio 4 Action Line)

Website: www.bbc.co.uk/intouch

On the Internet

Overview

The internet is a much richer source of sight loss related media, due to the relatively low cost of creating web sites and even internet broadcast operations.

Here is a selection of the best known sites worth checking out, but new ones are coming along all the time, so it's worth doing a search every few months to see what's new.

Tip: 'Soundings' is probably the best way of hearing about new media services as they start up. So give them a ring and ask for their free monthly audio magazine. (See below)

Speegle

Everyone who uses the internet will probably have used 'Google' to find a particular website or piece of information and very good it is too. Well now they have introduced a talking version, 'Speegle'. It works in exactly the same way, but actually reads out its results verbally. The synthetic voice is very good as well.

Go to www.speegle.co.uk to check it out.

Insight Radio (formerly VIP on Air)

Through your PC, you now have access to the first radio station in the UK for (and presented by) sight impaired people. Daily output offers a full range of programme types that are of particular interest to people with low vision. We cannot recommend this service highly enough. The presenters are excellent and the balance between information and entertainment is very good.

Listen on-line at www.insightradio-net.com

Soundings

This audio magazine, available on cassette, streaming internet, podcast and on a 'National Talking Newspapers' compilation, is one of the best available. Professionally

recorded and very informative, the service concentrates on giving its listeners the latest information on all things sight-loss related.

Phone 0845 725 8852

Email: magazine@soundings.org

Website: www.soundings.org

Soundaround

Originally available only on audio cassette, 'Soundaround' is a free, monthly, audio magazine, for sight impaired people.

Although you can still request the cassette, their new website is definitely the best way of listening to the recordings, with both current and archive editions available to hear directly using an excellent 'audio menu' system that allows you to skip bits you don't want to listen to, or repeat sections instantly. For more information, contact:

Soundaround

74 Glentham Road

Barnes

London

SW13 9JJ

Telephone: 08009 176 008

Website: www.soundaround.org

Tip: (Soundings, Playback, Soundaround and National Talking Express). If you use a computer and can access the internet, not only can you listen instantly to their latest magazines, you can also access back copies.

The Audio Network

A speaking magazine on-line that is accessed using easy to understand key strokes. As well as the kind of content you might expect, this service has two unique extra services. Firstly, you can have your own 'Audio Weblog' where you can record regular ramblings and get them put on the web by simply emailing the file to the service. Secondly, the site has a great easy to use system for listening to nearly a hundred internet radio stations without having to navigate multiple complex web pages and make out what to do. A simple

talking set of menus leads you to the different categories of radio station and eventually to individual stations. As spoken prompts lead you through to what you want, it is easy even for someone with no sight at all.

Website: www.Yrguk.com

The Accessible Friends Network (TAFN)

This is an excellent web based self-help organisation for sight impaired computer users and people who like technology. Members communicate in a number of ways but the most exciting of these is a real-time talk based system where you chat verbally to other members anywhere in the world using your internet connection. Worth noting is that the audio quality is particularly good and is limited only by the quality of each user's microphone. TAFN is a non-profit making, self-help organisation so the cost of their service is negligible. For example, with broadband, you can chat as long as you want at no extra cost, other than the £6 per year membership fee that just covers costs.

Insomniacs will be pleased to know that the service is available 24/7. This really is the ultimate way to chat to distant friends and relatives. The only limitation is that all participants must have an internet connected computer and the special (free) software installed and running. Obviously, you also need a microphone and speakers as well.

Have a look on the Website: to see everything the service has to offer. You will be amazed.

The Accessible Friends Network

Website: www.tafn.org.uk

Radio on Demand

The other great innovation of the last few years is 'Radio on Demand' exemplified by the BBC's internet radio player, which allows you to listen to any BBC radio program from the last 7 days whenever you want.

To use the service, all you need is an internet enabled computer and away you go. The service can be found via

www.bbc.co.uk. The sound quality is NOT as good as listening to a real radio and you also have the wiring of the computer to put up with, but for talk programs it is fantastic.

There are now thousands of radio stations available to listen to, live on the internet but as with 'Radio on Demand', the sound quality is poor, and good quality talk stations are few and far between.

Audio Description

Audio Described Theatre Performances

People with sight loss, often tend to miss or misunderstand much of the action and detail in theatre productions. Provided through headphones, audio description is an additional narration that fits between dialogue and describes action, body language, facial expression, scenery and costume plus anything else that helps a visually impaired person follow and enjoy the show.

Both the Crucible and Lyceum theatres usually provide at least one audio described performance of each production.

A programme of each season's productions is available on audio cassette.

Contact Sheffield Theatres Box Office
Telephone: 0114 249 6000
Website: www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk

Audio Described Cinema

'Vue Cinemas' at Meadowhall, Sheffield offer both the '2 tickets for the price of 1' scheme (See 'Benefits' section for details) AND an audio description service on enabled films. To find out which films and screens are enabled on a given week, ring 0871 224 0242.

Tip: yourlocalcinema.com is a great website, full of all the latest information on audio described cinema. Go to www.yourlocalcinema.com for the latest news.

Audio Described Videos

The RNIB produce a wide selection of feature films and popular TV programmes on videos which have added narration to describe costume, scenery and on screen action. These videos can either be purchased or rented.

For a full list of titles contact:-

RNIB
Customer Services Department
PO Box173
Peterborough
PE2 6WS
Telephone: 0845 702 3153

Audio Described Television

With the advent of digital television broadcasting, audio description is now becoming available to augment the normal TV output. In effect, a voice-over describes what is happening visually on screen. This is independent of the normal program dialogue. Some systems also vocally talk you through equipment setup and channel or menu information.

The BBC is the best source of information about what is available currently for Freeview users.

www.bbc.co.uk

At the time of writing, Sky TV offers a superior service with audio description already built in to the system as a switchable option. They also have a 'Disabled Customers Line' where you can get a great deal of help, including a CD version of the Sky Magazine in audio format.

Contact: Sky Disabled Customer Line
Telephone: 08705663333

Audio Described Radio

Just kidding, but we had you going for a moment.

There is however a 'Talking Radio', that is ideal for sight impaired people. The Pure Audio 'Sonus X1P' DAB Talking Radio can be used easily by even totally blind listeners, as a clear voice talks you through everything you do and tells you what station you have just switched to. Sound quality is excellent and this portable unit can be plugged into a home system using standard leads. The 'Sonus' can be seen at SRSB's Equipment Shop and you can speak to a regular user before you decide to buy.

Audio Books, Newspapers & Magazines

Sheffield Talking News

This is a weekly compilation of articles from the Sheffield Star recorded on compact cassette. A monthly magazine tape is also produced. There is no annual subscription.

Sheffield Talking News
c/o SRSB
Mappin Street
Sheffield
S1 4DT
Telephone: 0114 278 0440

Talking Newspaper Association for the United Kingdom (TNAUK)

This registered charity provides a wide (but fixed) range of quarterly, monthly and weekly publications on Daisy format CD, audio tape, floppy disk, e-mail and CD-ROM to visually impaired and other disabled people, who find reading difficult.

An annual subscription is charged, (cost varies) but for approximately £50 per year, users of a 'Daisy CD' machine receive nearly 40 hours of magazine articles EACH WEEK!

For full details contact:
TNAUK
90 High Street
Heathfield
East Sussex
TN21 8JD
Telephone: 01435 866102
Website: www.tnauk.org.uk

The National Talking Express and Media Roundup

This is a monthly stereo, audio cassette magazine for sight impaired people. There is an initial membership fee of £5 to offset some of the cost of media etc. Benefits include, free advertising, competitions, entertainment and information. Media Roundup is what it says on the can. A magazine for sight impaired users of all media such as TV, Radio, film and the internet.

Tip: If you use the internet, you can listen free to both current and archive editions of both publications on-line. Even though you aren't a member, you can still enter competitions and place adverts etc.

Contact:
NTE
Telephone: 0207 055 5121
Website: www.ntexpress.org.uk

Playback

'Playback' is a very useful recording service providing newspapers, magazines, a reading service and a tape library. They will record anything requested for an individual or non-government organisation if it is not available elsewhere, and providing copyright clearance has been given. The service sends out over 40,000 tapes each month with 20 regular publications.

Main publications are: Playback Magazine, information and news for the visually impaired, every month, and Sunday Mail and Daily Record Newspapers every week. They also send out a CD called 'ABC Audio News' which is aimed at those

interested in audio and video technology. Their reviews of equipment are thorough and concentrate on usability issues as well as sound and build quality.

The Playback library contains over 1,000 titles covering a wide range of subjects. Audio Described Videos are now also available on loan.

All parts of the service are available free to sight impaired people.

Playback
Centre for Sensory Impaired
17 Gullane Street
Partick
Glasgow
G11 6AH
Tel: 0141 334 2983
Fax: 0141 334 2983
Web: www.play-back.com

SRSB Audio Book Service

Talking books on compact cassette and CD's are available on free loan from SRSB's Library and Information Centre.

RNIB National Library Service

This is the new name for the 'National Library for the Blind', known best for its extensive Braille library and the RNIB Talking Book Service, known best for its Daisy format talking books and players. These organisations merged at the end of 2006 to create the most comprehensive multi-format book service in the UK.

Books are available in Braille, Moon, large print and 'Daisy' format CD for those with 'Daisy' players.

In Sheffield this service, which is free to registered visually impaired people, is administered by SRSB and includes the loan of a special CD player.

Contact:
SRSB Tel: 0114 272 2757
RNIB National Library Service Telephone: 0845 762 684

Calibre Audio Library

This audio book library has well over 6,000 books recorded on tape cassette which can be used on any cassette recorder and a growing collection in mp3 format on CD. These mp3 CD's save space as a full book will fit on just one disc and most new CD players will play this format as well as DVD players. This service is free to people unable to read print but there is a charge of £2.50 for the catalogue which is available in your preferred format.

Contact:

Telephone: 01296 432 339

Website: www.calibre.org.uk

Sheffield City Libraries Service

Sheffield's branch libraries have a great (and ever growing) selection of audio books in both audio CD and tape formats. If you need help making your selection, staff are more than happy to assist. If a title is at another branch or on loan already, you can reserve it in the same way as with ordinary books.

In addition to these normal services, you can also join the V.I. Readers Group which meet at the Central Library, and if you are housebound, there is a special service which delivers and takes away books directly to and from your home.

If you are registered as visually impaired, all books, music and DVDs are free to borrow.

Sheffield City Lending Library

Surrey Street

Sheffield S1

Telephone: 0114 273 4727

Housebound Service

443 Handsworth Road

Sheffield,

S13 9DD

Telephone: 0114 293 0013

The Audio Book Collection

Telephone: 0800 136 919

Website: www.audiobookcollection.com

The Country Bookstore

Telephone: 0162 981 3444

Website: www.countrybookshop.co.uk

Listen2Books

Telephone: 0870 191 3415

Website: www.listen2books.co.uk

The Talking Book Shop

Telephone: 0207 491 4117

Website: www.talkingbooks.co.uk

Large Print

The 'Big Print'

Big Print a weekly newspaper now produced by RNIB, is prepared in slightly larger and bolder print than conventional newspapers. It contains international and national news, sport, giant crossword, television guide and recipes; in fact, everything you would expect from a good newspaper. It is available for a yearly, half yearly or a quarterly subscription.

Contact:

Big Print

RNIB

PO Box 173

Peterborough

PE2 6WS

Telephone: 0800 12 40 07

Large Print Books

The three companies listed below can supply books in large print or audio tape and will send you their catalogues on request.

Isis Large Print

Telephone: 01865 250333

Website: www.isispublishing.co.uk

Magna Large Print Books

Telephone: 01729 840225

Ulverscroft Large Print Books Ltd

Telephone: 0116 236 4325

Website: www.ulverscroft.co.uk

The Bible Society

Telephone: 01793 418100

Holidays

SRSB

Firstly, you should check out your local society. SRSB organise accompanied, group holidays for members, both home and abroad. Accommodation is always carefully selected to make sure facilities are suitable for sight impaired travellers, including guide dogs. Call in, or telephone the Mappin Street Centre for more details.

Contact:

SRSB

Telephone: 0114 272 2757

Website: www.srsb.org.uk

The Royal Blind Society

The Royal Blind Society has two hotels for sight impaired people. The Belmont in Llandudno (Telephone: 01492 877770) and Honeywood House in East Preston, West Sussex (Telephone: 01903 770339). Grant assistance for holidays is available depending on circumstances.

Contact:

The Royal Blind Society

Telephone: 01903 857023

Website: www.royalblindsociety.org

Creative Travel

This company organises group holidays for visually impaired people at numerous locations throughout the UK. A courier experienced in accompanying visually impaired people is present on every trip and the holidays incorporate outings on most days. The cost of the holiday includes insurance and transport door to door.

Contact:

Creative Travel

Telephone: 01503 220422

Action for Blind People

Action for Blind People manage four Hotels. They are The Cliffden Hotel in Teignmouth, Devon (Telephone: 01626 770052), The Lauriston Hotel in Weston-super-Mare (Telephone: 01934 620758), The Russell Hotel in Bognor Regis (Telephone: 01243 871300) and Windermere Manor in the Lake District (Telephone: 01539 445801).

All cater for the needs of sight impaired people, their friends, relatives, carers and guide dogs. The experienced staff are specially trained to guide and assist guests and understand their needs. Facilities include guiding rails, talking clocks and talking lifts.

In addition to traditional holidays, Action Hotels offer numerous themed holidays and breaks throughout the year, such as rambling, fishing, murder weekends, indoor bowling, dancing and beer festivals.

Contact:

Action for Blind People

Telephone: 0207 635 4800

Website: www.afbp.org

The Winged Fellowship Trust

If you want to meet new friends, add challenge and excitement to your life, travel abroad, or simply enjoy a weekend break in the UK, 'Winged Fellowship Trust Holidays' is for you.

Membership brings a 6 monthly magazine. For further details,

Contact:

Vitalise

Recreational Activities for Blind People

Telephone: 0845 345 1970

Website: www.vitalise.org.uk

Century Hotel, Blackpool

Recently sold by RNIB, the new owners are keen to carry on specialising in holidays for sight impaired people. Facilities and accommodation are all designed for users with sight loss and guide dogs are welcome.

Contact:

The Century Hotel, Blackpool

Telephone: 01253 354958

Website: www.centuryhotel.co.uk

Traveleyes

Traveleyes is a company that organises independent world travel for sight impaired people. They also publish a number of travel guides in an appropriate format.

Contact:

Telephone: 0844 804 0221

Website: www.traveleyes.co.uk

RNIB

The RNIB no longer owns its own hotels, but they produce a 'Holiday Ideas' Information Pack which you can request by calling them on 0207 391 2108. Alternatively, send an email to: leisure@rnib.org.uk

Quick Tips

(Tips from fellow local sight impaired people)

As my sight gradually gets worse, I find using plain white crockery makes a big difference to me when trying to work out what is on my dinner plate.

I have brightly coloured 'Bump-Ons' on the controls of my cooker and washing machine so I can easily find the most used settings.

If you cannot watch TV and follow all the action, obtain a 'Digibox' that has an audio description option.

If you need to sit very close to the TV to see the image, consider buying a TFT (flat screen) monitor that has a phono style input for video. Link it to a 'video sender' unit (dead easy) so you can sit with this light weight monitor on your chair arm.

If you have a piece of good looking electronic equipment and cannot locate or remember the main buttons, use 'Locator Dots,' (small see-through stick-on dots), instead of 'Bump-Ons', so you can feel the button without spoiling the look of the equipment.

Get yourself a DAB radio that has vocal prompts such as the Pure Digital 'Sonus 1XT' model.

Next time you change your mobile phone, get one which 'Talks' or equivalent software that reads out verbally all screen messages and texts.

Make sure the lighting at home is very good. A task light on the dining table can make a great deal of difference to many sight impaired people when eating meals.

Avoid anything made of clear glass. It is difficult to see and if smashed, creates a real problem cleaning up the fragments. Coloured plastic is safe and easier to spot. You soon get used to the change.

Always carry proof of registration with you when taking advantage of discounts or concessions for disabled people. You will usually be asked for proof of eligibility, even if you look disabled.

Get a special 1+1 'Slice Card' from your sports centre. It costs £3 for 12 months, but you then get both a discount to swimming pools etc AND a free ticket for a friend/guide.

In restaurants, always ask for a table that is lit well and if alone, don't muddle through, ask the waiter/waitress to read you the menu.

Black Gel pens or fine tipped marker pens offer the best contrast for partially sighted people still able to read and write.

If you used to enjoy going to the theatre, but are afraid you will no longer be able to enjoy it, book a performance that has audio description. (Detailed earlier in this book).

Ask your bank for free templates for your cheque book and paying in book. These have slots in exactly the right place for filling in the details.

If you are a gardener, put sliced ping pong balls on top of all canes standing vertically. The unprotected tops can cause serious injury if not seen when bending down.

Have a white or yellow line painted on the edge of all outside steps to improve their visibility.

A simple voice recorder is a very effective way of 'taking notes' and recalling them later.

Conclusion

Never be Afraid to Ask

Now you've read this book, you should have a good basic knowledge of the help available to you, both locally and nationally. However, there is only so much that support services can do for you and in many situations you will need to take the initiative yourself. When travelling around on buses, coaches and trains don't just try and muddle through. You may get away with it much of the time, but, aside from giving yourself unnecessary stress, you will eventually end up on the wrong bus or train, heading in completely the wrong direction. (We have all done it!!) All transport organisations now have Customer Services staff, trained to meet the needs of disabled passengers, so make full use of them.

When booking a holiday or flight, ask the travel agent to notify the appropriate airport, or hotel of your circumstances and needs.

In large stores, ask an assistant to help you, or at least take you to "Customer Services" so they can.

Don't try to hide your sight problem from family or friends as they will become your main source of help. Don't stop going to your favourite pub or club because you're afraid of bumping into things or spilling your drink. If friends know you have a sight problem, they will help you. If they don't realise, simply tell them you are having difficulty seeing and make sure they keep an eye on you. At a gig or concert, don't just put up with a poor seat. Ask if you can sit near the front so you can see what is going on.

Get into the habit of walking routes with 'Pelican Crossings'. If you can't see the green man, most new crossings have a small 'knob' facing downwards, below the right-hand button box. This will swivel when it is safe to cross.

Never take risks when crossing other roads. If unsure, simply wait a little longer to be certain there are no cars or bikes

coming. A good tip is to cross away from road junctions when practical, to avoid confusion.

At the time of your initial visit from Social Services or SRSB, you may be offered a symbol cane even if you are only partially sighted. Don't be shocked, this is a visual tool. It is NOT for tapping along the pavement with. It is just a sign to indicate to others (pedestrians, shop assistants, motorists, bus drivers etc.) that you can't see properly. They will then realise you may need additional help or consideration.

The larger, more robust cane that you may need for navigation if you are severely sight impaired, is only issued along with training and support from a Rehabilitation Officer. This type is not to be confused with the smaller, thin 'symbol cane'.

Finally, always remember the words at the beginning of this book. **DON'T PANIC! You aren't alone.** SRSB is open weekdays from 8:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. If you ever need help, advice, information or support, either call in, or ring us on 0114 272 2757

Key Phone Numbers

Action for Blind People 0207 635 4820
British Retinitis Pigmentosa Society 01280 815900
City-Ride 276 5766
DWP Benefits Advice Freephone 0800 882 2000
DWP (Job Centre Plus etc.) 0845 600 2556
Guide Dogs for the Blind Association 267 0340
Henshaws Society for Blind People 0161 872 1234
International Glaucoma Association 0207 737 3265
Macular Disease Society 0845 241 2041
National Blind Children's Society 01278 764764
National Deaf Blind League 01733 573511
National Federation of the Blind 01924 291313
National Fed. of Families with VI Children 0121 428 5038
Partially Sighted Society 01302 323132
Royal Blind Society 01903 857023
Royal Hallamshire Hospital Low Vision Service 271 2978
Royal National Institute of the Blind Helpline 0845 766 9999
RNIB National Library Service 0845 762 6843
RNIB Vocational College 01509 611077
Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind 0114 272 2757
Sheffield Sensory Impairment Team 273 4866 or 273 4977
Sheffield Talking News 0114 278 0440
St Dunstan's 0207 723 5021
Talking Newspapers Association 01435 866102
Torch Trust for the Blind 01858 438260
Travel Line 01709 515151
VI Service (Under 16s) Tapton School 267 1414
VI Service (16 & Over) City College 260 2693

