

INTRODUCTION

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

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

If you suffer with any form of eye condition, whether you have reached the stage of being formally registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired (blind), we would encourage you to contact the East Suffolk Association for the Blind where you are invited to benefit from the services offered. To do so, you will become a registered member of the Association for which there is no membership fee but you would need to agree to us holding your personal data on our secure database. These services which are also not charged for are detailed within this Information Pack.

You should be aware that if you have been formally registered sight impaired or severely sight impaired (blind) by a consultant at the hospital eye clinic, then Sensing Change (Suffolk County Council's Sensory Services team) should ensure that its impact on your daily living is properly assessed and that you are provided with the appropriate help in terms of statutory aid and rehabilitation. The East Suffolk Association for the Blind is a local independent charity and not only does it endeavour to respond to any request for help by you within two weeks, but it will provide ongoing support for you as long as you need it as your circumstances change.

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

1. There is a large range of daily living aids specially designed to help you remain as independent as possible. Typical examples are talking watches and clocks, large button telephones, liquid level indicators, talking microwaves, task lighting and document readers. Your Community Worker will be able to help arrange the purchase of any of these that meet your needs after your assessment.

2. The Association are agents for the British Wireless for the Blind Charity who provide on long-term loan radios (FM/DAB/Internet) or combined radio/CD/USB stick players to visually impaired people who meet strict criteria laid down by them. Our Community Workers will assess your circumstances against these criteria during the assessment and help with any application.
3. Help with arranging for a regular provision to your home of Talking Books, mostly nowadays on USB memory sticks.
4. The Association offers a home magnification service as its' Community Workers are all equipped with an extensive range of modern hand-held magnifiers and are trained in assessing an individual's specific needs; they can also arrange for its purchase, delivery and subsequent training in its' use.
5. The Association also has Social Groups who meet regularly at different locations within East Suffolk. Groups of volunteers who run these meetings not only provide an opportunity for a regular social gathering with refreshments and entertainment, but also arrange summer outings and Christmas lunches for those who are able to participate. Transport to and from such functions is usually provided free of charge.
6. For more active members there are some Blind Bowls and Acoustic Rifle Shooting clubs, sailing days and for the less active craft activity groups.
7. If you are interested in going on a holiday, the Association can provide you with details of possible options that cater specifically for the sight impaired.
8. During your assessment, if it is identified that you need the assistance of any other statutory or voluntary organisation, then with your permission, the Community Worker will make a referral to the appropriate organisation.
9. The Association publishes a twice yearly informative newsletter distributed freely to all members in large print, as an audio CD or on a USB memory stick.

We very much hope the Association can be of help to you. Do not hesitate to contact your Community Worker on the number quoted on the helpline card or contact our Head Office on **01473 611011**.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT; HOW IT FEELS; MYTHS AND FACTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Visual Impairment - a new beginning

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

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

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

COMMON EYE CONDITIONS

MACULAR DEGENERATION

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

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

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

CATARACT

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

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

DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

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

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

GLAUCOMA

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

Diagnosis is usually made by the Optometrist performing the routine check-up. The narrow angle type can cause symptoms but the open angle type does not. However open angle glaucoma does result in gradual loss of visual field which can lead to blindness. Early

diagnosis is sight saving which is why regular checks by the Optometrist are so important. However the incidence does increase with age but it is rare in under 40's.

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

Some words of advice

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

Eye Testing at Home for those that need it

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

REGISTRATION EXPLAINED

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

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

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

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

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

coping with daily life, and may be able to offer some specialist advice, training or equipment.

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

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

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

Why should I register my visual impairment?

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

By registering your sight impairment, you help yourself and your family and also other people who are, or who will be registered in Suffolk. Because so many people are not registered, Suffolk Adult and Community Services have an incomplete picture of the number of sight impaired people in the county. For example they have nearly 6,000 Sight Impaired people on their register; while research suggests that there are at least 9,000 people eligible for registration

as sight impaired. If the authorities lack the information to assess and support present needs and allocate funds for services today they will certainly be under-resourced in the future.

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

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

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

THE ROLE OF SENSING CHANGE

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

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

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

Mobility

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

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

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

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

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

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

Independent Living Skills

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

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

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

Communication

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

Advice and training in reading by touch, e.g. Braille and Moon can be offered. This can be used in many practical forms such as labeling packets, tins, tapes, videos, CD's, USB sticks, for address and telephone numbers. Further training can enable individuals to read magazines and books, or produce their own material. Advice can be given around the use of telephones, particularly those that are best suited to those with a visual impairment.

Advice can be given on the use of Assistive Technology which gives access to specialist computer equipment with enlarged text or with synthesized speech.

Lighting and low vision

Advice is given on improving use of residual vision in all aspects of rehabilitation mentioned above eg mobility, reading and writing. They can advise on appropriate general lighting levels as well as looking at safety in specific task areas eg kitchen, stairs and bathroom. They can also advise on colour contrast, reading techniques and using low vision aids. Use of magnification and assistance in making the most of low vision aids is also available.

Benefits

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

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

To make a referral with Sensing Change:

Ring 01473 260030

Email: info@sensingchange.org.uk

Or visit: www.sensingchange.org.uk

BENEFITS AND FINANCIAL HELP

Income-related benefits

The big change that has taken place is the rollout of the 'full service' of Universal Credit across the whole of Suffolk from 12th December 2018. This means that Universal Credit is now the default income-related (means-tested) entitlement for people of working-age.

Those people who are already receiving one of the six benefits and tax credits that Universal Credit is replacing (Child Tax Credit, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and Working Tax Credit) will still receive those entitlements as long as they continue to satisfy the conditions of entitlement that apply to each one.

There will be a process of 'managed migration' from the existing entitlements to Universal Credit, which at the moment is not expected to start before November 2020. People whose circumstances change before then are likely to have to claim Universal Credit in a process known as 'natural migration'.

People who have worked or who have become unfit for work will still be able to claim the versions of Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance that are based on their National Insurance contributions. These used to be called Contributory Jobseeker's Allowance and Contributory Employment and Support Allowance and are now called New Style Jobseeker's Allowance and New Style Employment and Support Allowance, although the rules governing these entitlements are the same as they were.

Universal Credit has to be claimed online (there are no paper claim forms) via www.GOV.UK and each Jobcentre has one or more members of staff who are designated as a Special Point of Contact to assist vulnerable claimants.

Other benefits and financial help

1. Depending on your circumstances, you may be entitled to:
 - Attendance Allowance (0800 731 0122) – select ‘option 1’
 - Disability Living Allowance (0800 121 4600) – select ‘option 1’
 - Carer’s Allowance (0800 731 0297) – select ‘option 1’
 - Council Tax Reduction and other Council Tax discounts – contact your borough or district council
 - Pension Credit (0800 99 1234) – select ‘option 1’
 - Personal Independence Payment (0800 917 2222) – select ‘option 1’

2. **Attendance Allowance** is for people with a disability aged 65 or over. Disability Living Allowance is for people with a disability aged under 16. Personal Independence Payment is for people with a disability aged between 16 and 64.

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

OTHER BENEFICIAL SERVICES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. **BT** – A free 24 hour directory enquiry service is available if registered severely sight impaired (blind). You can register with BT for this service by calling **0800 587 0195** or dial **195** and ask for “**Registration**” **Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4.30pm**. You will receive a card on which you will have a personal identification number or "pin" in large print or Braille. When you need to find a 'phone number you just dial **195** and quote your pin number and name - you will get the number you need free of charge. Furthermore, if you are eligible for this service and if you have difficulty dialling a number, the trained operator can help by connecting you to the chosen number, although you will obviously pay for the actual call as you would do for any call.

9. **Telephones for the Blind** – This charity is temporarily stopping their landline offer since ways of communicating are changing, in order that they can examine what they should be doing now. For further information please visit their website www.tftb.org.uk

10. **Fire Safety in the Home Check**

You can contact Suffolk Fire & Rescue directly on 01473 260588 for a “fire safety in your home check”. Please note this is not an emergency contact number.

11. **Personal Alarm System.** Aid Call is a personal SOS system approved by Age (UK) Suffolk, which summons help within seconds. It is simple to use and no more trouble to wear than a wristwatch. If anything should go wrong, you know you are not alone. Contact Age (UK) Suffolk on 01473 359911 for further information or speak with your East Suffolk Blind Community Worker.

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

EQUIPMENT AND INFORMATION CENTRES

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

Contact details for Suffolk Resource Centres

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

ESAB RESOURCE CENTRE IN IPSWICH

East Suffolk Association for the Blind (ESAB) operate an Equipment and Information Resource Centre at their Ipswich office location in Tower Street where a variety of daily living aids and technologies are displayed, demonstrated and purchases arranged. Demonstrations and some training on some Information Technology products is available on an individual basis by prior appointment. Please call the office on **01473 219712** for further information.

LOW VISION AIDS AND LIGHTING

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

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

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

D.J Dunstone Optometry 3 Queen St, Hadleigh, IP7 5DZ	01473 823755
Eyepractice 77 Thoroughfare, Woodbridge, IP12 1AH	01394 382718

ESAB's Community Workers are also all equipped with an extensive range of modern hand-held magnifiers and are trained in assessing an individual's needs; they can subsequently arrange for purchase, delivery and training in the use of a suitable magnifier.

Both ESAB's Community Workers and Sensing Change are able to offer advice on lighting in the home, both general and task specific.

If you require help in these areas, please contact your Community Worker on their Helpline number or call the office on 01473 611011.

On page 19, you will see three locations in east Suffolk where you can see demonstrations of low vision aids and lighting.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The whole area of assistive technology is very fast changing so impossible to summarise simply in a document such as this. The best place to carry out your research and obtain up to date fact sheets is on the RNIB web site at:

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/practical-help/technology/resource-hub>

At this web address you will find a number of fact sheets that come broadly under the following headings:

1. Home assistance.
2. Phones, Tablets and Desktop computers.
3. Entertainment, TV and Books.
4. Specialist Access Technology.

TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

RNIB's Technology for Life team can help with both simple and complex technology queries and issues offering information, advice and guidance over the phone, via email or through setting up a volunteer request.

They navigate customers to a variety of ways and means of support and training relating to Technology and Digital services. This might be in a structured group setting or one to one; delivered at RNIB or partners premises, in their homes or in community venues.

Technology Support volunteers also provide one-to-one support to people with sight loss in their homes. Their volunteers help you to use computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones, e-readers and to get online.

They can provide information and support you with:

- Using accessibility software such as JAWS and Zoom Text
- Suitable apps for your smartphone or tablet
- Specifications of products
- Other assistive technology that could be relevant to you

Their helpful volunteers can support you with:

- Setting up smartphones
- Demonstrating the features of a tablet, iPad, smartphone or eReader
- Setting up Skype or other Digital applications
- Making the most of the internet and the different online tools
- Setting up and using social media accounts

They aim to respond to a customer request with a call or visit within seven days. Where a volunteer is unavailable, or has not accepted the request this could take up to 21 days. During this time their team will contact the customer to keep them up to date.

KEEP IN THE KNOW

You can sign up for “Switch On”, RNIB’s free quarterly e-newsletter with information and advice for making the most of everyday technology of products available from the high street and specialists.

Call the RNIB Helpline on 0303 123 9999 to subscribe or sign up online at www.rnib.org.uk/subscribe-switch

TRAVEL, TRANSPORT & MOBILITY

Mobility

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

Guide Dogs

Anyone who is physically fit and is experiencing difficulty in getting about because of sight impairment is eligible to apply for a guide dog (there is no age limit). Contact **Guide Dogs for the Blind direct on 0345 1430229** or visit www.guidedogs.org.uk

Connecting Communities launched in June 2016 is a transport service provided by Suffolk County Council to provide rural transport provision across the county.

The contracts to deliver these transport services have been won by local organisations that have many years of experience delivering services across Suffolk, working together with the local communities they support.

- Ipswich – Aspire Together and subcontracting to RVS (Royal Voluntary Service)
- Mid-Suffolk – Aspire Together and HCTG (Hadleigh Community Transport Group)
- Suffolk Coastal - CATS (Coastal accessible Transport Services) and subcontracting to FACTS (Felixstowe Area Community Transport)
- Waveney - BACT (Beccles and Bungay Community Transport) and subcontracting to HVC (Halesworth Volunteer Centre)
- BSEVC 9Bury St Edmunds Volunteer Centre)
- GoStart
- TVN (The Voluntary Network)

For general enquiries about Connecting Communities

Call: 0345 606 6171

Email: connecting.communities@suffolk.gov.uk

Website: <http://communities.suffolkonboard.com>

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

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

COMMUNITY BUS, COMMUNITY CAR SERVICES (CCS) AND DIAL-A-RIDE (DAR) SERVICES

BACTS (Beccles Area Community Transport Services) offering Bus, DAR and CCS services	Covers towns and villages in Waveney District	01986 896896
CATS (Coastal Accessible Transport Services) offering Bus, DAR & CCS	Aldeburgh, Leiston Framlingham, Saxmundham, Woodbridge	01728 830516
FACTS (Felixstowe Area Community Transport Svces) offering bus and CCS	Felixstowe and surrounding area	01394 282857
Connecting Communities – Ipswich and Mid Suffolk areas		0345 606 6171

OTHER SMALLER COMMUNITY CAR SERVICES (CCS) AND DIAL A RIDE SERVICES (DAR)

Aldeburgh/Leiston/Saxmundham (CCS)	01728 831215
Botesdale, Rickingham & surrounding area district community service.	01379 897109
Diss & Eye (DAR) (Borderhoppa)	01379 854800
Eye Area (CCS) (office open Mon & Fri 10.30-2.30)	01379 871200
Eye & Diss Area (DAR) (Borderhoppa)	01379 854800
Felixstowe Area (DAR)	01394 270339

Felixstowe Area (CCS)	01394 282857
Framlingham & Woodbridge Area (CCS)	01728 621210
Halesworth Area (CCS)	01986 874290
Royal Voluntary Service (CCS) for Ipswich, Felixstowe, Stowmarket, Claydon	01473 749927
Southwold Area (CCS)	01502 724549
Woodbridge Area (CCS)	01728 621210

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

Helpline for Free Bus Pass

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

Suffolk Concessionary Travel Voucher Scheme

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

OTHER TRANSPORT INFORMATION

TravelLine for advice on local and national buses, express coach and rail services - **0871 200 2233** - [**www.traveline.info**](http://www.traveline.info)

Disabled Persons Railcard

If you are registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired (blind) you are eligible for a Disabled Persons Railcard and save

one third on most rail fares across Britain. If you travel with a non-registered helper they receive the same discount. The card costs £20 per year or £54 for 3 years. To get a Disabled Persons Railcard, call **0345 605 0525** for an application form and send it together with payment and the required proof of disability, or register via their website at **www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk**.

Train Travel Assistance

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

Abellio Greater Anglia Assisted Travel for journeys starting in our region can be contacted on **0800 028 2878**

Blue Badge Scheme

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

RADAR – The Royal Association for disability & Rehabilitation

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

Information for driving licence holders

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

RECREATION AND LEISURE

Below is a list of organisations and groups both national and local who provide social and leisure activities including holidays and outings, mixed social groups, men's groups, craft classes, bowling, rambling, sailing, fishing, tandem riding, pottery, quiz events and much more.

NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

BBC Radio 4 In-Touch Programme on Tuesday evenings 8.40pm, gives advice and news relevant to sight impaired people.

British Blind Sport	01926 424247
RNIB Leisure Services www.rnib.org.uk	0303 123 9999
English Blind Golf Association http://www.blindgolf.co.uk/	0208 390 0699
Gardening THRIVE the 'Blind Gardeners' Helpline' https://www.thrive.org.uk/	0118 988 5688

COUNTY ORGANISATIONS

Optua

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

EAST SUFFOLK GROUPS

East Suffolk Association for the Blind have Social Groups that meet at various centres in East Suffolk meeting once a month as well as having special events and outings. For details of your nearest group and transport arrangements, please contact the **Head Office on 01473 611011.**

Felixstowe Sound Shooters for Visually Impaired	01394 211418
Ipswich Town Football Club (offering the audio description service 'Soccer Sight' for partially	01473 400500 or 01473 400556

sighted and blind supporters to use at home fixtures at Portman Road)	
East Anglian Sailing Trust www.east-anglian-sailing-trust.org.uk	0333 088 3278
Hand in Hand social clubs for people with dual sensory loss http://www.shss.org.uk/Hand in Hand/hand in hand.html	Online application form
The Woolverstone Sailing Project at Woolverstone and Alton Water www.woolverstoneproject.org.uk	

NORTH SUFFOLK GROUPS

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

HOLIDAYS

Torch Trust www.holidays@torchtrust.org	01858 438260
Royal National Institute of the Blind www.rnib.org.uk	0303 123 9999
Creative Travel www.creative-travel.co.uk	01503 220422
Traveleyes www.traveleyes-international.com	0113 834 6094

Other general services - Equipment

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

Internet – Radio

ACB Radio, a project of the American Council of the Blind, streams via the internet, up-to-date and relevant information worldwide for persons who are blind or who have low vision, provides

programming produced by blind programmers, and a platform on which blind musicians and artists express their talents.

<http://www.acbradio.org/>

Talking Newspapers and Books

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

Radios for the visually impaired

Some visually impaired people qualify for the long-term loan of a Radio or Radio/CD/USB system supplied by the British Wireless for the Blind Fund. Speak with your ESAB Community Worker or contact their head office on 01473 611011 for advice on this.

Audio Description Services.

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

Cinemas

If you are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance or you are registered as severely sight impaired (blind), you can apply to the Cinema Exhibitors Association for a national card that entitles you to one free ticket for a person accompanying you to the cinema. The card is valid for 1 year and is subject to a processing fee of £6.00. Application forms are available from participating cinemas or from their website at www.ceacard.co.uk or you can contact the Card Network on **01244 526016** for details.

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

Theatres in East Anglia having Audio Described Performances

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

TALKING NEWSPAPERS, LARGE PRINT AND BRAILLE TALKING BOOKS

1. National Talking Newspapers

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

2. Local Talking Newspapers

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

Leiston & District Talking Newspapers.	01728 453579
<i>Newstalk</i> Stowmarket and District Talking Newspaper	01449 615678
<i>Sound On</i> Ipswich and District Talking Newspaper	07484 130 819
<i>Sound East</i> - Lowestoft & District Talking News www.soundeast.org	01502 539656 (office) or 01502 581823
<i>Three Rivers</i> Beccles & Bungay District Talking Newspaper	01986 895503
<i>Waveney Words</i> Talking Newspaper	01379 608774

3. Talking books

Calibre Audio Library - www.calibre.org.uk	01296 432339
RNIB Talking Book Services	0303 123 9999
Suffolk County Library Service www.suffolklibraries.co.uk	01473 351249
Torch Trust for the Blind	01858 438260

4. Large Print Books

Large Print Book Shop. www.largeprintbookshop.co.uk	0800 009 6036
Library Magna Books Ltd	01729 840225
Suffolk at Home Library Service www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/community-services/home-library-service	01473 351249
Ulverscroft Books and Tapes - www.ulverscroft.co.uk	0116 2364325

5. Braille Books

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

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

Employment

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

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

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

RNIB - Tel: **0303 123 9999**

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

Training opportunities

Papworth Trust's Work Programme in Ipswich can help you get the right job to help you live as independent a life as possible. They also provide advice and support regarding training opportunities and work experience. They also offer advice and support to employers. They can be contacted on: **01473 232146**.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

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

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

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

Social Clubs

Introduction to social clubs catering for multiple disabilities providing activities and friendship can be arranged through the Sensing Change Team on **01473 260030**. Assistance with transport may be a possibility.

COUNSELLING

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

British Association for Counselling www.bacp.co.uk	01455 883300
Suffolk Association for Counselling	01473 212113
International Glaucoma Association Sightline	01233 648170
Listening Eye (run by blind people) – www.whitestick.co.uk/listen.html	0800 783 1979
RNIB Counselling enquiries - www.rnib.org.uk	0303 123 9999
Macular Society Counselling Service - www.macularsociety.org/	0300 3030 111

FURTHER INFORMATION

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

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

The above booklets and others can be obtained from the RNIB by calling **0303 123 9999**.

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

GENERAL TIPS FOR SIGHTED CARERS

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

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

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

DO's

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

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

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

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

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

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

DON'TS

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

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

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

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

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

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

DON'T buy or sell anything at your door.

NATIONAL & LOCAL SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

Support Groups for specific eye conditions:

The Albino Fellowship www.albinism.org.uk	07946 457979
The Childhood Eye Cancer Trust www.cheect.org.uk	0207 377 5578
Charles Bonnet Syndrome http://www.charlesbonnetsyndrome.uk/	0207 391 3299
Diabetes UK www.diabetes.org.uk	0345 123 2399
The Dystonia Society www.dystonia.org.uk	020 7793 3650
International Glaucoma Association www.iga.org.uk	01233 648170
Keratoconus Self Help and Support Association www.keratoconus-group.org.uk	0208 993 4759
Macular Society www.macularsociety.org	0300 3030 111
M S Society www.mssociety.org.uk	0808 800 8000
Nystagmus Network https://nystagmusnetwork.org	01427 718093
RP Fighting Blindness www.rpfightingblindness.org.uk	0845 123 2354
Sense UK – The National Deafblind and Rubella Association www.sense.org.uk	0845 127 0060
Sense East Anglia Branch www.sense.org.uk	01473 622443

Suppliers of Daily Living Aids

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

Other useful Organisations

Age (UK) Suffolk- Ipswich	01473 351234
Blind in Business - www.blindinbusiness.org.uk	0207 588 1885
Blind Veterans (UK) www.blindveterans.org.uk	0207 723 5021
Cruse Bereavement Care	0844 477 9400
Deafblind UK www.deafblind.org.uk	0800 132 320
DAS (Disability Advice Service East Suffolk) http://www.daseastsuffolk.org.uk	01394 387070
Disability Living Foundation www.dlf.org.uk	0207 289 6111
National Careers Service	0845 603 1059
Guide Dogs for the Blind www.guidedogs.org.uk	0800 953 0113
Independent Living – www.independentliving.co.uk	No tel only online enquiry
Ipswich Hospital www.ipswichhospital.nhs.uk	01473 712233
James Paget Hospital	01493 452452
Children and Young People Services provided by Guide Dogs for the Blind www.guidedogs.org.uk	0800 781 1444
The National Federation of the Blind	01924 291313
NHS Direct www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk	Dial 111
Norfolk & Norwich Association for the Blind	01603 629558
The Pensions Advisory Service www.pensionsadvisoryservice.org.uk	0345 123 1047
Police – Non emergency number	Dial 101
Royal National Institute for the Blind www.rnib.org.uk	0303 123 9999

The Samaritans	116 123
The Silver Line (free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to older people, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year <u>http://www.thesilverline.org.uk/</u>	0800 470 80 90
Suffolk Mind	0300 111 6000
Suffolk Family Carers <u>www.suffolkfamilycarers.org</u>	01473 835477
Suffolk Fire Service	01473 260588
Suffolk Doctors on call <u>www.suffolk-doctors-on-call.co.uk</u>	Dial 111
Suffolk Police – Advice on security or bogus callers	01473 613500
West Suffolk Sight <u>www.wsvab.org</u>	01284 748800
The West Suffolk Hospital	01284 713000