

Vision Support Impact Report

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1 Introduction

2022 - 2023 has been a busy year for Vision Support with most services finally returning to normal following a tumultuous time during the Covid-19 pandemic.

All of our services went back to face to face and during 2022-23 we supported a vast number of people through our service delivery; whilst in the background strengthening our internal operations to reflect the times and marry up our policies with the post-Covid era of hybrid working.

One thing that we have learned from the pandemic is that online works! We have adopted a hybrid approach to our internal working using technology to support us with meetings and the day to day running of the organisation, which reduces travel time and is better for the environment; as well as leaving us with more time to be able to make great things happen. The ability to meet online has also supported our networking and collaborative work with more opportunities to work with Wales Council of the Blind and Visionary members on issues affecting people with a vision impairment.

This year, we strengthened our commitment to having a common set of values within the organisation. We developed our values by involving our teams, the Board of Trustees and our Steering Group, and they state the behaviours that you can expect from each member of our team.

Vision Support Values

We are committed to standing side by side with people who are vision impaired, ensuring that people's voices are heard in order to support wider positive change.

We work together, ensuring that our services are developed jointly and focused on making a real difference to the lives of people with vision impairments.

We work with honesty and integrity, providing support in a person-centred way to ensure that everyone can achieve their outcomes, develop their independence and maintain their dignity.

We are always caring, reliable, respectful and we work with empathy.

We are inclusive, value diversity and equality and we lead by example.

Outside of Vision Support, provision for people with vision impairments continue to struggle to cope with demand. We hold Local Authority contracts in North East Wales to provide rehabilitation specialist support for people to develop skills, adapt to sight loss and be able to live independently. We see that there is a national shortage of Vision Rehabilitation Specialists (formerly known as ROVIs) and we have experienced our own difficulties with recruitment. We have met with Mark Isherwood, Senedd member and with Sarah Atherton MP for Wrexham to raise the issues around the lack of government input into VI services.

2. Our Story So Far

Our Mission - Vision Support provides services for people with a vision impairment that aim to increase independence, and wellbeing and reduce social isolation across North East Wales, Halton and Cheshire.

In 2022-23, our main aims were to strengthen our governance, maintain and diversify income streams

Increase our reach to people with Vision Impairments across the region and to continue to develop innovative services across all areas.

Throughout the report, you will learn how we have achieved these things.

Internally, we have moved into the 21st century, introducing a new database called CharityLog that will enable us to accurately reflect all of the amazing work that our staff teams do.

Governance - During the year, we carried out a skills audit in the board and we introduced 3 new board members. We have a board of very committed trustees who have a wealth of experience and knowledge in their areas of expertise and within Charity Governance.

We continue to maintain our risk register to ensure that we are monitoring and mitigating risks to Vision Support.

CharityLog have worked closely with our team who use Screen Readers to ensure that their system is fully accessible. We believe that this work will help more people with Vision Impairments to be able to interact with the system, not just within Vision Support but in the wider charity sector.

3. The Year in Your Words

Home Visiting and Rehab Assistants

“Many thanks for all your hard work and determination, I appreciate all your help and support. Stanley (Guide Dog) smells beautiful after his shampoo, although I'm not too sure he's happy with that. Once again many thanks.”

“Many thanks indeed, you've gone above and beyond and I much appreciate your support and help. I will look forward to seeing you tomorrow.”

“Roger from Chester has received support from Vision Support for 5 years. He said thank you to everyone at VS for all the support and he showed appreciation for his Home Visitor's Enthusiasm and described her as wonderful.”

Welfare Rights

“Thank you for your help and patience and understanding towards my mother. I have seen a significant difference in

mum's mental well-being because of your help and reassurance." (From the daughter of someone who received support with benefits application).

Digital Skills

Mrs. X Feels more confident using her iPad and iPhone and has said that she would like time to practice and explore what she has learnt, particularly as this includes many features she had not thought she would be able to use. She may self-refer back into the service in the future if she decides that there are more things she would like to explore.

Rehabilitation

"I feel vision support has gone above and beyond with the help and support they have provided me. They have been extremely sympathetic, compassionate and understanding towards my condition. They have made a huge difference to my quality of life with their knowledge and ability to refer me on to other services and the services they provide. I can't stress how satisfied I am with the service I've received from vision support it has had a huge positive effect on my life and how I'm dealing with coming to terms with my condition. Thank you for all the help and support Vision Support." The citizen was so pleased with the outcome and sent through a photo using a head torch for hands free use in the kitchen, to cook a roast chicken with her head torch on!

"We would like to acknowledge how, with experience, knowledge and confidence your service has made our daughters life and experience so much richer. The invaluable strength of the positive, we write to you in praise for 'the satisfaction of a job well done.'"

"Just a quick email to say thank you for being so efficient and so lovely. I couldn't believe how quickly you put into action all the things we discussed at our meeting and we really appreciate it."

Mr C said, that his confidence had grown during mobility training, that he felt like he had achieved something and was very happy with how the training sessions had gone.

Social Groups

A member of our social groups (she has now attended Conwy and Rhyl) said that the group promotes independence, are vibrant and everyone is treated as an individual.

J and his wife are severely sight impaired. J has been known to Vision Support for many years but stopped coming after COVID. J was encouraged to come to the newly launched Rhyl Visionaires. He was very tearful advising how he felt lonely and his wife had been ill so he was really struggling emotionally and practically. J has now been a regular attendee for a year and enjoys his time at the social group

This year, we said a very sad farewell to Susan Leas. Susan volunteered for Vision Support from 2017. Susan spent 3 days a week in our room in AVOW, phoning people to check in with them and provide some company over the phone. During the pandemic, Sue spoke to every member of the social group at least once a week, providing a lifeline and much needed company for some people who would have otherwise been completely isolated. Here are a few things that people said about her:

“I was always so pleased to get her weekly calls. She was so caring and made me feel like I’d always known her. She always thought of other people”.

“Always ready for a chat, very kind, lovely family person. I used to look forward to her phone calls”.

“Marvellous what Sue did, and it will always be remembered in our hearts”

“We met Sue about 6 years ago and honestly, I think we heard her laugh every time. She was one of the kindest people ever!”

Thank you for all of the time you gave, for the laughs and for being there for many people during the hard days of lockdown, you are missed.

4. The Year in Numbers

9109 newsletters sent out - 7276 large print, 879 audio CD, 870 email and 84 braille.

3521 people visited out mobile information unit.

Our social groups met 263 times.

874 people have received digital skills training.

30 people received counselling.

1228 people received rehabilitation from a qualified Vision Rehabilitations Specialist.

243 people have been supported with benefits advice.

549 people have been visited by Home Visitors.

5. The Year in Financials

Annual Income and Expenditure

In 2019 the organisation received a total income of £1,017,603. The charitable activity income was £537,603, Gift Aid from VST was £360,802, legacies and donations were £91,056, and the charity's total expenditure was £804,068.

In 2020 the organisation received a total income of £1,079,437. The charitable activity income was £447,614, Gift Aid from VST was £581,474, legacies and donations were £44,839, and the charity's total expenditure was £849,277.

In 2021 the organisation received a total income of £1,089,749. The charitable activity income was £378,857, Gift Aid from VST was £639,897, legacies and donations were £50,989, and the charity's total expenditure was £857,629.

In 2022 the organisation received a total income of £1,088,955. The charitable activity income was £398,453, Gift Aid from VST was £385,471, legacies and donations were £275,580, and the charity's total expenditure was £86,3774.

In 2023 the organisation received a total income of £983,536. The charitable activity income was £447614, Gift Aid from VST was £504,621, legacies and donations were £4,345, and the charity's total expenditure was £1,114,928.

Income and Expenditure for 2022/23

The total income received over the year from April 2022 - March 2023 was £930,000. This is made up of the following:

April charitable activity income was £37,3414, legacies and donations were £275, and total expenditure was £81,826.

May charitable activity income was £37,414, legacies and donations were £275, and total expenditure was £84,678.

June charitable activity income was £37,414, legacies and donations were £131, and total expenditure was £96,885.

July charitable activity income was £36256, legacies and donations were £1130, and total expenditure was £97,885.

August charitable activity income was £36,256, legacies and donations were £443, and total expenditure was £97,194.

September charitable activity income was £34691, legacies and donations were £184, and total expenditure was £81,818.

October charitable activity income was £34,335, legacies and donations were £25, and total expenditure was £84,954.

November charitable activity income was £34,435, legacies and donations were £301, and total expenditure was £93,171.

December charitable activity income was £38,490, Gift Aid from VST was £504,621, legacies and donations were £110; and total expenditure was £106,980.

January charitable activity income was £34,335, legacies and donations were £184; and total expenditure was £81,818.

February charitable activity income was £34,435; legacies and donations were £1397, and total expenditure was £93,074.

March charitable activity income was £38,851; legacies and donations were £310, and total expenditure was £98,022.

6. National Context

There are multiple challenges affecting people living with vision impairments at present. As an organisation, we are endeavouring to ensure that those individual's voices and experiences are being heard.

The context around Vision Rehabilitation

We currently hold rehabilitation contracts in 3 counties in North East Wales, and we employ 5 qualified Vision Rehabilitation Specialists (VRSs) and one trainee Vision Rehabilitation Specialist. We struggle to recruit vacant posts, currently and historically, so we have used charitable funds outside of contract funding to pay for employees to complete the qualification.

There is a national shortage of VRSs (formerly known as ROVIs) in Wales, with the situation set to worsen in the next 5 years as people retire. Vision Support have worked closely with Wales Council of the Blind to try to influence a change at government level to get Welsh Government to engage in finding a solution to the crisis of the rehabilitation workforce. As yet, we are not getting much help. We will continue to push Welsh Government to ensure that people with vision impairments are held front and centre in their minds when they are developing legislation, ensuring that they bring clarity around what Local Authorities should provide, making it easier for the commissioning of services for people with vision impairments.

Context around Campaigns

We held stakeholder events in December 2022 and January 2023. During these events, we heard from people that street furniture and parking on curbs continue to be a problem. We also heard that communications from the NHS can be provided in inaccessible formats. We have fed this into National Campaigns through the RNIB and Guide Dogs. Members of our team attend campaigning groups and also share concerns that people raise within those groups with people's consent.

7. The Year to Come

The priorities for the coming year are as follows:

- To implement new IT processes to bring the charity up to date, including a new website and CRM.

- To continue to develop governance with a particular focus on anti-fraud policies and processes, and cyber security.
- To develop a social media and website strategy to promote the charity's services to people with vision impairments of a working age.
- To develop services in-line with what our stakeholders tell us is important to them.
- To carry out more vision impairment awareness sessions.
- To promote positive eye health and carry out some sight loss prevention workstreams.

We will also continue to deliver our services through contracts with Local Authorities and we will be launching our Cheshire Sight Loss Information Line. The line will provide a single point of access for anyone in Cheshire affected by sight loss, ensuring that they have access to information at a time when they need it.

8. Acknowledgments

All of the good work that Vision Support does would not be possible without the tireless hard work of our team of paid staff and volunteers. All of your work is appreciated, along with your ideas and perspectives on everything we do.

Thanks also go to our Board of Trustees who freely give up their time and share their expertise to ensure Vision Support is governed and well led.

A big thank you as well to Vision Support Trading who work hard every year and gift aid an amazing amount of money to enable us to carry out our charitable work.

Thank you as well to our Commissioners in different Local Authorities, your support is greatly appreciated

And finally thank you to all people who use our services, we appreciate your trust in us and thank you for allowing us to come into your lives and your homes.

We thank you for your continued support in our programs.