

**Shared goals,  
no barriers**



## Mission:

**National Blind Children's Society's mission is to enable children who are blind and partially sighted to achieve their educational and recreational goals.**

## Vision:










**Our vision is a world where blind and partially sighted children have equal access to education which is adequately supported with sources of information, provided in a suitable format for their needs, and where there are no barriers to sport and recreational activities.**

**We do all this with the ultimate aim that every child with visual impairment will be able to achieve their full potential during childhood and teenage years, and to enjoy varied and purposeful lives as adults.**

A child or young person is considered to have a visual impairment if he or she has an eye condition that cannot be fully corrected by wearing glasses

There are an estimated 24,000 visually impaired children in the UK, many with additional needs



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# The future is bright

**Childhood and teenage years are the building blocks for the future. Unless we give children and young people with visual impairment the tools, opportunities and support they need, they will have little chance of enjoying fulfilled adult lives.**

Fortunately we live in a time of enormous potential change for people with visual impairment (VI). The UK Vision Strategy launched in 2008 calls for major changes to the way services are delivered to all children and adults with visual impairment, and to counteract the 'widespread ignorance and apathy' around eye health and preventable causes of blindness.

This strategy embodies many of the principles National Blind Children's Society has been working towards during the past five years, and I was delighted to be invited to chair the Children and Young People's VI Group, so we can work collectively to turn that strategy into a reality.

As the largest independent provider of services to children with visual impairment, National Blind Children's Society is developing all the time and intends to remain at the

forefront of highlighting and providing for the needs of all children who are visually impaired and their families.

We believe that services should be available to everyone and that financial circumstances, geographical location, language and cultural differences should never be a barrier to children obtaining the support they need.

A child doesn't remain a child forever, and unless we guarantee children with visual impairment the best chance of a fulfilled adult life, our job remains only partially done. With your support we can help today's children with visual impairment look forward to a future as tomorrow's fully participating citizens.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "C. Fullard".

Carolyn Fullard  
Chief Executive

“Children and young people should be assured full access to the curriculum and equality of opportunity and participation, including social activities throughout their education...”

(UK Vision Strategy, a Vision 2020 UK initiative)



# Starting out on the right path

Since our specialist Family Support Service was set up in 2004 we have worked with over 3,500 families in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each year this number increases – and we are now becoming the first point of referral as soon as a family learns their child is visually impaired.

When a family is referred to us we spend time getting to know the whole family, not just focusing on the child's eye condition – and then we provide support tailored to their individual needs.

## Specialist service

Our support ranges from helping families identify the questions they need to ask during a hospital appointment, to accompanying them to hospital visits when required. We provide information about all types of eye conditions, help families cope with complex forms and bewildering systems and ensure that parents can access the very best services for their children. Families know they can come back to us again and again – whenever they need information and support.

As children grow older we adapt our support as individual needs change, by continuing to provide help

with accessing education and opportunities and helping them to develop their independent living skills.

## Providing direction

To get the best for their children, families need information about their child's eye condition and the type of support services available. Our staff bring their own individual expertise in the visual impairment field but also have access to other specialists across the UK.

Our library of reports, books and magazines as well as our resources room of toys and equipment, also help parents to identify what is available for their child. Our unique Direction Point directory helps families navigate the range of services available for children and young people, up to the age of 25, who have visual impairments and often additional needs.



“National Blind Children’s Society is our knight in shining armour! The staff are so dedicated and have done so much to help us. It’s unbelievable how far our son has come in a year.”

Charlie Wells, father of six-year old Billy who is visually impaired.

### Putting parents in control

Parents frequently turn to us because they feel confused and fearful about their children’s futures – and we are always looking for new ways to build on this service. We work in partnership with local agencies, providing training and support to help them set up their own children’s services and family support groups.

We are also producing a new range of resources for families’ direct use. Our colourful storybook *A Day with Tom at the Eye Hospital*, which we published in conjunction with The International Glaucoma Association, has been very successful in helping to demystify the process of hospital visits for children.



**FACT:** Nearly 50% of families with children with visual impairment say they need support, advice and information or educational advocacy but only 25% of families currently receive these services

# Imagine a bestseller produced just for you

**National Blind Children's Society is the leading producer of bespoke large-print books for children and young people, and supplies books for the Royal National Institute of Blind People's National Library Service. We are continually working to improve our service and increase the range and number of publications available.**

Imagine how frustrating it is when you can't read the new book all your friends are talking about or obtain the textbooks you need to study for your exams. This is why National Blind Children's Society is committed to reproducing books in the print size and colour of paper best suited to the individual young person's needs.

## **Responding to need**

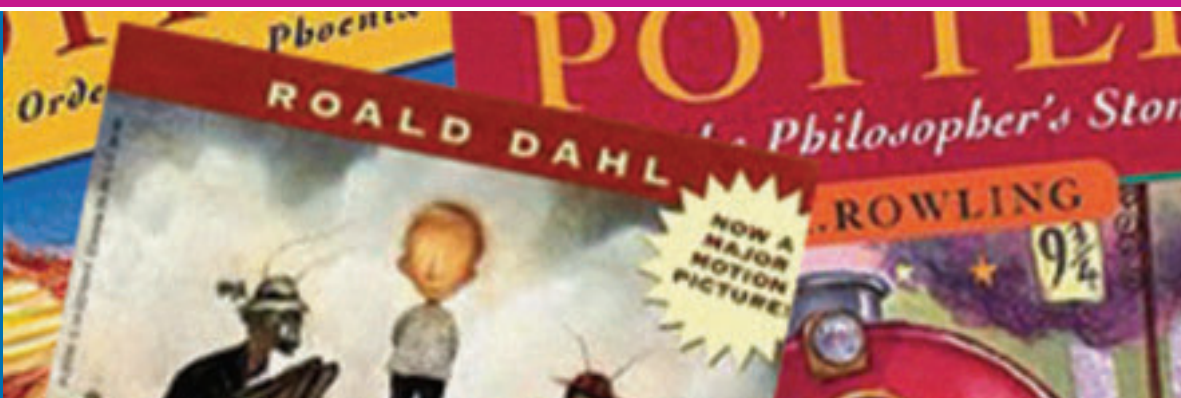
We conducted research to ensure that our CustomEyes service is creating and delivering publications which will benefit children and young people with visual impairment – in all aspects of their education and development.

Findings from this research showed that our current service was effective and highly valued – and also highlighted ways we can respond to

growing demands even more efficiently. As a result we have invested a large sum of money to refurbish and update our existing equipment to include state-of-the-art printing systems which will allow us to produce more books to keep up with the ever-growing demand.

## **Keeping up with classmates**

Children can't wait months for essential text books. They need them as quickly as possible to keep up with their studies. Books enlarged on the school photocopiers are often too bulky for children to carry around and unwieldy to use – that is if staff can find enough time to reproduce them in the first place. Through our new digital printers we are better equipped to meet the enormous need for large-size copies of vital text books.



We are also producing starter packs of large-print books for schools as we believe this will encourage teachers to place advance orders – so children who are visually impaired need not be left behind.

### Variety

New printing equipment also enables us to expand the range of fiction we produce. Following our fast turnaround of the entire Harry Potter series we are constantly adding new titles to our list to make sure that children with visual impairment can get a copy of the latest book by their favourite authors quickly. Other exciting additions to our catalogue are cookery books and Christmas annuals.

We are also examining ways to expand our range of publications for older students – especially for those taking A-levels and going to college or university.

Our Textbooks on Demand programme, a priority in our expansion plans, will enable many more children to have essential National Curriculum titles in large print.

“My pupil used his new large-print textbook in class yesterday. It made the world of difference – he could follow the lesson, took part in the oral section of the class and his written work was much improved too.”

Lynne Woodall, teacher at Lambrook Haileybury School in Bracknell, Berkshire



**FACT:** In a survey of schools and services for the visually impaired, 89% of respondents said large print was the format most in demand for use by pupils with visual impairment rather than Braille or audio

# Accessing the best school for every child

## National Blind Children's Society has driven the establishment, support and funding of the National Educational Advocacy Partnership (NEAP).

Education is the gateway to the future – especially for children with visual impairment. We are committed to developing a national network dedicated to giving children and young people the education they deserve.

### **The role of advocacy**

Through our team of educational advocates National Blind Children's Society opens doors of constructive communication between families of children with visual impairment and the local authorities that provide their education, working within NEAP (National Educational Advocacy Partnership) guidelines.

NBCS co-ordinates NEAP's work in strengthening and co-ordinating relationships between schools and families of children with visual impairment.

Challenging local education departments' decisions can be a daunting experience for families,

and our advocates can help empower parents who believe their child is being held back from fulfilling their potential at school because of a lack of support or specialist equipment.

If necessary, the support extends to representing families facing educational tribunal hearings, although many cases are settled with the advocates' help before reaching this stage.

### **The role of NEAP**

National Blind Children's Society alone cannot meet the needs of every family seeking educational advocacy. So when the opportunity arose to work with a group of like-minded organisations we saw the potential for developing a national framework.

On behalf of the group we applied for a grant from Futurebuilders to carry out a feasibility study to see if local education authorities would co-operate and work with NEAP.

Sadly we found that local education



authorities were not motivated to do this, so together with other founder members of NEAP we took up the role of developing a national network of educational advocates.

National Blind Children's Society plays a central role in this group – employing the co-ordinator and providing administrative support. NEAP also has access to training and quality assurance procedures – and most importantly advocates share their expertise to help support families.

### The way forward

We are proud to be at the forefront of supporting organisations as they recruit new educational advocates – and in sharing the resources and advice we have gathered through our years of providing these services ourselves. In the coming years we will be working to attract more organisations to join the NEAP partnership as well as providing educational advocacy ourselves to ensure that all children with visual impairment receive the educational opportunities they deserve.

**FACT:** Nearly 19,000 children between five and 16 years old in England and Wales have a visual impairment of such severity that they require specialist education support

“National Blind Children's Society helped me get my grandson into his specialist school. I now feel he has the learning and confidence to do his own washing and make meals, and to recognise when he needs additional help to do things safely.”

Vanda Rettie, grandmother and main carer of a 14-year-old boy



# How new technologies can transform a life

The potential for supporting children through information communication technology (ICT) was an inspiring factor in the foundation of National Blind Children's Society. And as we develop we seek to take every opportunity to help children and young people access the right equipment that can truly change their lives.

How can a child reach their potential when they can't do their homework properly, or study in the library after lessons? Yet a laptop, or a small handheld device for reading text, can mean a world of difference to a child's experience of education.

## Responding to change

Just like the technology itself our ICT services are constantly evolving. For a two-year period we joined the government's Communication Aids Project for England, but continued to use our own money to support children who were ineligible for this funding. After the closure of the project we re-evaluated and created our Specialist Equipment Key Service, which builds on our existing expertise and our grant-making programme.

## Individual needs

We support many parents who face the daunting task of trying to find the best possible equipment for their child, and we also make grants when other sources are not available.

Using our specialist knowledge of current technology and expertise in visual impairment and educational systems, we create tailor made packages of equipment and software to support all aspects of the child and young person's development. By working closely with the families and the professionals involved in the case – and by understanding the personality of the individual child – we can identify the most relevant package for them.

“The gift of the computer was amazing. I can use all the latest software to read any document. I can do my schoolwork and revision and I am also set for university, hopefully, next year. I love it!”

Asameh (14)



### Our grants programme

We believe there should be no limits for the future of young people with visual impairments. So whether it's talking toys to encourage interaction, an adapted trampoline for fun and exercise, or the chance to pursue music, art, sport or horse-riding, our grants enable children to enjoy activities their families could not normally afford.

### The way forward

We aim to make available the many varied ICT resources from portable CCTV systems to screen magnification software which can enable text to be enlarged to the child's individual need. From education to play we aim to give children with visual impairment the means to play alongside their sighted peers whether playing on the latest consoles to creating digital music. We see part of our role for the future as educating visual impairment support societies about what technology can do for children. We will also be exploring exciting ways in which ICT can support young children so they can enter school on a level with their peers.



### Example costs of specialist equipment

- A datapen loaded with all the young person's specialist software costs around £1,000
- It costs us about £200 to assess an individual child for access technology
- A smart-view CCTV can cost £1,500 - £2,000

# Unleashing the potential of play

Whether it's a trip to the zoo, playing a musical instrument, abseiling, attending a West End musical or stepping into our amazing Christmas party in a glittering ballroom – all our activities are designed to help visually impaired children and young people develop confidence and self-esteem.

Children and young people with visual impairments miss out on many of the experiences enjoyed by their sighted peers. So when they enter the adult world they may find it harder to integrate and to gain employment. We want to widen the horizons of all children with visual impairment so that they can achieve their personal potential and develop into fully rounded adults.

## **Including the whole family**

Through our developing programme of Family Days Out we provide opportunities that would normally be outside the reach of most families of children with visual impairment. By working closely with venues such as adventure centres, zoos, theatres and theme parks, we are able to ensure special parking provision and to provide

priority access to rides, play facilities and hospitality rooms so that families can eat and relax together – all at a fraction of the normal price.

Our family weekends also create wonderful opportunities for children with visual impairment and their siblings to enjoy exciting new experiences and make friends. And while their children are being kept busy with challenging but carefully supervised activities, parents can be given information and support – from one another and from our specialist staff. We include relaxation activities for parents, because we know they too need time to unwind and recharge.

## **Holidays**

Many families with visually impaired children never enjoy a holiday because they cannot afford the cost or find



“It was fantastic to get my own viola from the National Blind Children’s Society and it’s given me the incentive to work even harder at my music.”

Joshua, 15, Gloucester Youth Sinfonia

somewhere suitable to meet the needs of their child. So our adapted mobile home in a Somerset holiday village provides a haven for the whole family to take time out together. Each year we receive booking requests earlier and earlier and the caravan is always fully booked from March to October.



**FACT:** One of the top priorities for parents of visually impaired children is to ensure that their children have access to enjoyable and stimulating activities, particularly in school holidays



# Building partnerships for the future

**National Blind Children's Society is at the forefront of building effective partnerships to help children with visual impairment and their families while supporting environmental initiatives.**

We pride ourselves on our financial independence from public funding because this means we can always put the individual child's needs first, irrespective of where they live. Our core funding comes from donations, legacies and fundraising by our supporters.

## **The power of recycling**

Our mobile phone recycling campaign enabled us to spread the word about NBCS while generating funds – and helping to save the planet! Thanks to opportunities such as our campaign with Clear Channel's market leading outdoor advertising network, our posters about the service have appeared on bus shelters around the country.

Another exciting recycling initiative is the support we receive from Care2Collect, run by family firm I&G Cohen which in 2008 received the Queen's Award for Enterprise. Its recycling bags

are distributed to more than 750,000 households per week in the UK, to be filled with unwanted clothes, shoes and handbags which are then sold on to produce funds for us. Not only do the bags spread the word about National Blind Children's Society but we also receive a significant contribution from Care2Collect.

## **Tasty profits**

We also enjoy a very valuable relationship with the ChariSnack franchise organisation. Their self-service boxes of healthy-eating snacks are distributed to offices, schools and organisations nationwide and for every packet of rice crackers, fruit and nuts or chocolate-coated peanuts sold, NBCS receives a donation.

Other exciting initiatives we have benefited from include being adopted as the official good cause by the Puxton Park farm centre in Somerset.

“My 10-year-old daughter Sarah had gone through a lot since the diagnosis of her eye condition and we had huge support from NBCS. Everyone was very generous with their support and it was great to see Sarah’s teacher as well as all our family and friends cheering me on.”

Simon Chapman, 45, who raised more than £4,000 for National Blind Children’s Society in the Flora London Marathon



### Wonderful support

We are also fortunate to benefit from the initiative and commitment of many individual supporters who are out climbing mountains, running marathons – especially the London Marathon – and trekking in far-flung places to raise money for National Blind Children’s Society. And on a slightly less adventurous level – but still a lot of fun – our supporters are organising competitions using our bespectacled soft toy animals. These cuddly little creatures come with a ready-made competition for 50 entrants – and the winner gets to keep the toy.

### Example costs of supporting children and their families

- A computer with specialist software costs around £1,500
- Installation and training for equipment costs around £150
- Telephone support for families costs around £10 per call
- The first copy of a customised novel costs around £200, each additional customised copy thereafter costs around £25

# Careful financial planning

**Children's futures can't be put on hold, so National Blind Children's Society is committed to channelling funds into the direct support and services which make a real and lasting difference. Through careful long-term planning we ensure that we have the resources available to help families at the most crucial times in their child's life.**

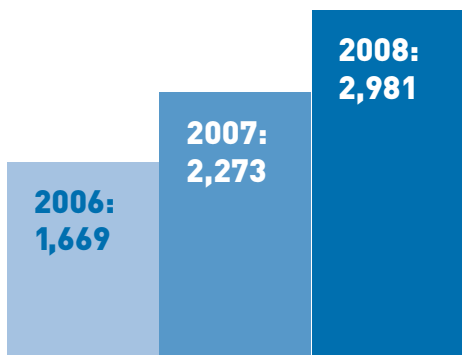
In the current economic climate our priority is safeguarding the provision of our five key services in the medium and long term.

We do not receive any statutory funding at all, relying entirely on the following sources of income:

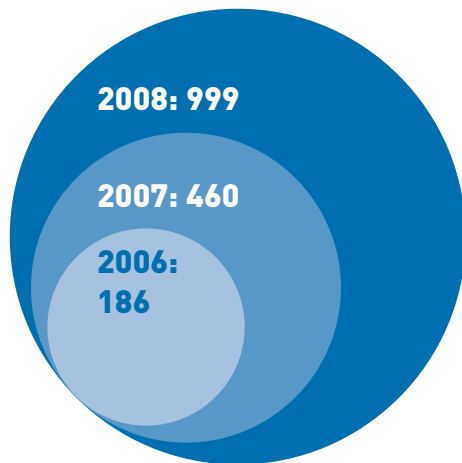
- Private donations
- Corporate donations and grant-making trust awards
- Legacies
- Fundraising
  - Recycling
  - Soft toy workplace games
  - Healthy eating workplace snacks
  - Corporate team-building and corporate events
  - Challenges: marathons, trekking, mountaineering and walks

We support many hundreds of families, with ever-growing numbers of new referrals coming through to us every month from leading national and regional hospitals. NBCS is now recognised as the first port of call referral for parents when their child is diagnosed with a visual impairment.

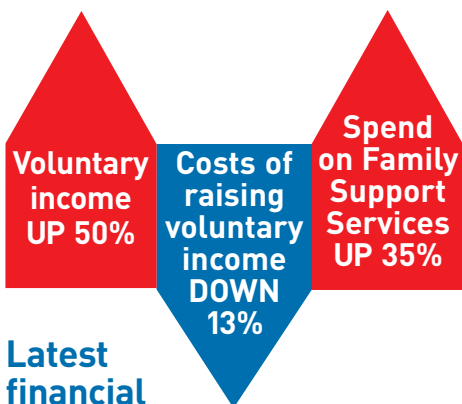
Through careful planning and frugal financial management we continue to provide long-term support to children and their families, as well as running capital investment projects such as our CustomEyes large-print book production – our state-of-the-art print room enables us to supply on demand more than 1,500 works of modern fiction, classic literature and National Curriculum text books and revision guides.



**Number of services accessed by families**



**New families referred**



**Latest financial highlights**



# Setting future goals and building support

**National Blind Children's Society is committed to turning the UK Vision Strategy for eye health and sight loss services into a reality. We want to break down barriers so that no child misses out on the future they deserve.**

## **Support for all children**

In our multi-cultural society we recognise the need to reach out to families who feel isolated from support or are struggling to access services because of cultural or language issues. Our pilot family day with Punjabi and Urdu translators was warmly received by Asian parents of children with visual impairment. We have plans to extend our contact with other ethnic minority communities in order to help them access the very best services for their children.

## **Educational advocacy**

We are working to end the postcode lottery in education provision for children and young people with visual impairment by ensuring all parents can receive support from trained educational advocates. Through the central role we play in funding and

supporting the National Educational Advocacy Partnership (NEAP) we are striving to help more visual impairment organisations recruit and train their own advocates.

## **Immediate support for families**

Our aim is to ensure that all families of children with visual impairment receive appropriate support at the earliest stage. Through our relationship with Family Support Services at Great Ormond Street and Moorfields Eye hospitals, and awareness-raising work with many regional hospitals and local VI societies, more and more families are being referred to NBCS immediately after their children are diagnosed with visual impairment.

## **Prevention**

Some forms of sight loss are preventable and some children's failing



eyesight can be maximised if the problems are detected early enough. We are exploring ways to implement the UK Vision Strategy promise to raise awareness of eye health among health and social care practitioners, so that conditions such as diabetes and glaucoma can be detected and treated as early as possible. We also want to ensure that the government's Healthy Schools programme adequately prioritises and promotes eye health.

We encourage all parents of pre-school and school-age children to take up the available annual free eye tests where opticians can detect eye conditions at an early stage. We are also working to ensure that children have access to free eye testing as they get older through school nurses and opticians.



# Shared goals, no barriers

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**Our mission is to enable children  
who are blind and partially sighted  
to achieve their educational and  
recreational goals.**

Registered Charity No. 1051607

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