

# The Partially Sighted Society

SEEING THE WAY FORWARD, TOGETHER

# NEWSLETTER



## February 2026 Edition

[partsight.org.uk](http://partsight.org.uk)



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Registered Charity Number: 254052

# Welcome to Our First Newsletter of 2026

As we step into the new year, the team and I are energised by what lies ahead – continuing our mission to help make sense of the confusion and uncertainty that so often follows a sight loss diagnosis.

On the following page, you'll find our Year in Review, which captures the dedication of our small but determined team and offers a glimpse into the numbers behind our work: the people we've supported, the conversations we've had, the lives we've been privileged to touch. None of this would be possible without the legacies, donations and continued support you provide.

Sight loss remains an invisible disability, one that exists on a spectrum few people truly understand. For someone living with low vision, everyday moments – walking past a

friend on the street, accidentally bumping into someone in a shop – can become sources of anxiety or embarrassment. Our Symbol of Visual Disability items, including our new Visually Impaired badge (featured on page 11), are small but powerful tools that help start conversations and foster understanding.

This month also marks Low Vision Awareness Month, and on page 18 we explore what living with low vision actually looks like day-to-day – experiences many of you will recognise all too well.

As we move through 2026 together, we hope this newsletter continues to inform, support and connect you, while building the awareness and understanding that ensures no one has to face sight loss alone. We hope to hear from you all very soon.

Anita

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Anita Plant, CEO





# Year in Review



The phone rings at all hours. Sometimes it's mid-morning, sometimes late afternoon. The voice on the other end might be uncertain, frustrated, or quietly desperate. Perhaps their sight has deteriorated suddenly. Perhaps they've been waiting weeks for an NHS appointment that keeps getting pushed back. Perhaps they're not even sure what they need, just that they need something.

In 2025, The Partially Sighted Society answered those calls thousands of times. Each one was a person reaching out for support, whether they needed enhanced low vision assessments, adaptive technology training, therapy sessions, wellbeing calls, or simply a

calm and patient voice at the end of the line.

The numbers that follow rarely tell the whole story. They can't capture the hesitation before a first phone call or the relief of being properly listened to. But they do point to something important: how much was done, how often someone reached out, and how consistently support was there when it was needed.

## **Being seen**

Over 500 people accessed free enhanced low-vision sight tests in 2025. These weren't the standard ten-minute appointments where questions feel like an inconvenience. These

were consultations where people were given time, where their concerns were taken seriously, where the optometrist and rehabilitation officer explained what was happening, in plain English.

Due to pressures on statutory services, for many, it was the first time they'd felt truly seen. Not rushed. Not dismissed. Just given the space to understand their sight and what comes next. One woman described it as "the difference between being a case file and being a person."

### **The weight of it**

Sight loss rarely arrives alone. It brings anxiety, grief for what's been lost, fear about what's coming. It can mean isolation, as social situations become harder to navigate. It often means depression, the clinical kind that doesn't lift with a good night's sleep or a walk in the park.

In 2025, The Partially Sighted Society delivered more than 1,000 hours of mental health and wellbeing therapy. These weren't generic counselling sessions adapted for sight loss; they were designed specifically for people navigating the psychological impact of losing their vision. The space to talk openly, without judgement, without having to explain why this is hard, remains one of the most vital forms of support offered.

As one participant put it: "I didn't realise how much I was holding in until I had somewhere to let it out."

### **Reclaiming independence**

Technology can be liberating or utterly bewildering, depending on whether you have someone patient enough to show you how it works. In 2025, 600 hours

of adaptive technology training helped people master the tools that make daily life manageable: smartphones, screen readers, specialist software, and magnification apps.

These sessions were about confidence as much as competence. Being able to send a text message independently, manage your own appointments, or read a book without asking for help are not small things. They are the difference between feeling capable and feeling dependent. They change how someone understands their place in the world. One man in his nineties learned to use voice commands on his phone after months of frustration. "I can call my grandchildren now without bothering anyone," he said. "That matters more than you'd think."

### **The quiet work**

Not all support appears in annual reports or funding applications. In 2025, our volunteers delivered over 100 hours of dedicated wellbeing support — regular phone calls to people who would benefit from a friendly voice. Not therapy, not crisis intervention, just consistent human contact. Someone who remembers your name, asks how the week's been, and genuinely listens to the answer.

But wellbeing support isn't confined to those scheduled calls. It filters through almost every interaction The Partially Sighted Society has with people. The reassurance offered during a conversation about an upcoming appointment. The patience shown when someone needs to talk through their anxiety before getting to their actual question. The knowledge that when you ring, someone will be there to answer, and that they'll care about

what you have to say. This kind of work is hard to quantify and harder still to justify to funders who want measurable outcomes. But consistency - the knowledge that someone will check in, that you can ring and be heard - builds the kind of trust that makes everything else possible.

### **Pages upon pages**

Since 2021, The Partially Sighted Society has printed more than 8 million pages of bold-lined exercise books. Let that sink in for a moment: 8 million pages. These resources support students across the country, helping them write, learn, and work with greater accessibility, ease and dignity.

It's a staggering figure that represents something simple but essential: the right to participate. To take notes in class, complete homework, or even practice their handwriting. Things that shouldn't require special equipment but often do, and which can be prohibitively expensive or simply unavailable. The Partially Sighted Society stepped in to fill that gap and continues to do so.

### **Showing up**

Community remains at the heart of this work. In 2025, 174 hours of social and support activities offered connection, shared experience, and the chance to feel less alone. These weren't formal therapy sessions or training workshops; they were spaces where people with sight loss could meet

others who truly understood, people who had walked the same path and shared the same experiences.

For many, these gatherings were as important as any clinical appointment. There's something powerful about realising you're not the only one facing a particular challenge, discovering a tip that makes daily life easier, or simply sharing a laugh with people who don't need everything explained.

As one regular attendee said: "I came for the advice. I stayed for the company."

### **What makes it possible**

None of this happens in isolation. Every hour delivered, every call answered, every page printed depends on people who care enough to make it happen — people like you, reading this now.

Whether through donations, fundraising, sharing this work with others, or simply staying engaged, your support turns need into action. It gives people the courage to attend their first support group. And, it ensures that when someone rings in distress there's someone there to answer.

The numbers matter because they represent lives touched, confidence rebuilt, and independence strengthened. As we move into a new year, they remind us why this work continues and who makes it possible.



**DONATE NOW WITH**  
**JustGiving™**

# **This Month's Support Group Hosted A Familiar Special Guest**



**This month's PSS support group took an unexpected turn. Andre Plant, who manages our print room, offered to speak about something he doesn't often discuss: growing up as a white person in Apartheid South Africa.**

**Nobody quite knew what to expect. But what Andre gave the group that evening was rare: a willingness to sit with the uncomfortable parts of his own history.**

**He talked about being a child in a system built on injustice, about the things he saw and didn't understand, and later, the things he understood but wished he hadn't seen.**

**There was no attempt to soften it or make himself the hero of the story. Just an honest reckoning with what it meant to inherit a world already divided, and**

**what it's taken to unlearn some of those divisions.**

**People listened. Really listened. And when Andre finished, the conversation that followed felt different to the usual support group discussions. Someone mentioned how easy it is to avoid looking at the harder parts of where we come from. Another said Andre's honesty made them think about their own assumptions in a new way.**

**What struck people wasn't just the content of Andre's story, but his willingness to tell it without polish or defensiveness. That kind of vulnerability is infectious. It gives others permission to do the same.**

**The PSS support group has always been more than a monthly calendar fixture. It's become a place where**

visually impaired people can show up as they are, histories and all, and find others willing to meet them there. This month proved, again, that the most meaningful connections often come from the stories we're willing to share.

If you missed it, there's always next month. For more information on groups at The Partially Sighted Society, give us a call on 01302 965195.



## Our Year in Numbers

**3,500+**  
CALLS ANSWERED

**1000+**  
HOURS OF MENTAL  
HEALTH SUPPORT

**100+**  
HOURS OF  
WELLBEING CALLS

**500+**  
FREE ENHANCED  
SIGHT TESTS

**600+**  
HOURS OF TECH  
TRAINING

**174**  
HOURS OF SOCIAL  
GROUPS

**8 MILLION**  
PAGES OF BOLD-LINED EXERCISE BOOKS  
PRINTED SINCE 2021

# A Morning of Warmth, Community and Legendary Bacon Sandwiches



**Wayne and Sarah Hackett are generous supporters of PSS**

On a cold, rain-lashed winter morning in Conisbrough, Wayne and Sarah Hackett once again hosted their coffee morning to support The Partially Sighted Society. And what a morning it was.

Marcus and Shaun from PSS were among those who gathered to enjoy what can only be described as Wayne's legendary bacon sandwiches and Sarah's particularly fine coffee. The verdict? A definitive 10/10, though perhaps the company and the cause made everything taste that bit better. The event raised an impressive £267 for the charity, but for Wayne and Sarah, this wasn't a one-off gesture. Last year, they hosted a similar morning, and between the two events, they've now raised well over £500. It's the sort of quiet, sustained generosity that rarely makes headlines but makes all the difference.

What struck those present wasn't just the fundraising – important

though that is – but the atmosphere itself. Familiar faces from the local community, many of whom have benefitted from PSS services, came together over hot drinks and conversation. In an age when isolation affects so many, particularly those living with sight loss, these moments of connection matter profoundly.

The Hacketts' support has created something beyond a charitable donation. They've built a space where people feel welcomed, valued, and part of something larger than themselves. For the partially sighted community in Conisbrough, that sense of belonging can be transformative.

As the morning drew to a close and guests headed back out into the winter drizzle, the warmth lingered. Not just from the coffee and sandwiches, but from the knowledge that some people still believe in the simple power of opening their door and inviting their community in.

# March 2026



## PSS EVENTS



**04/03/2026 (Wed) – Knit & Natter 2pm – 4pm**

**05/03/2026 (Thu) – Coffee Morning 10:30am – 12pm**

**11/03/2026 (Wed) – Creative Wellbeing 2pm – 4pm**

**18/03/2026 (Wed) – Walk, Talk & Tuck-in 12pm – 2pm**

**19/03/2026 (Thu) – Coffee Morning 10:30am – 12pm**

**25/03/2026 (Wed) – Support Group 2pm – 4pm**

👉 **All Welcome!** 👈



For a full list of 2026 events, please call us on 01302 965195 and we'll be happy to send you an accessible large-print version on request.

# Donated Keyboard Continues to Transform Lives in Tanzania



**Years after its donation, a keyboard still supports visually impaired students, while forgotten exercise books unexpectedly solve a rural school's shortage.**

A recent photograph from Tanzania shows Jairos, a Form 2 student in the visually impaired unit at a secondary school, working at a BrailleKey machine. Beside him sits an alternative keyboard – donated by PSS several years ago – still in regular use and helping students learn in ways that suit them best.

The image came with warm thanks from school staff, who mentioned they had been following reports of the UK's recent stormy weather on the BBC World Service and hoped everyone at PSS was coping well.

Last year's shipment of exercise books has also been well received across multiple schools. While staff couldn't

visit every recipient personally, they made a point of sharing the students' gratitude. The books have "made a big difference," and most schools would happily accept any future surplus – though only if it happens to be convenient.

There is one notable exception, with a rather amusing twist. Ernest Mbilu at Mvumi Secondary School has opted out of future donations after an unexpected discovery.

When a teacher from another school collected exercise books from the town post office in 2025, Ernest realised he had also received six boxes sent in 2024 that had been completely forgotten. From facing shortages the previous year, Mvumi suddenly found itself remarkably well stocked. The staff signed off with warm regards, sending their best to everyone at The Partially Sighted Society.



We're delighted to announce the latest addition to our identification badge range: the PSS "Visually Impaired" badge.

This new design joins our existing "Partially Sighted" and "I Am Blind" badges, completing a collection that recognises something we've always known: how you describe your sight loss is deeply personal, and the choice should be yours.

### **Your identity, your words**

Over the years, we've heard from our community that people use different language to describe their sight loss. Some identify as blind. Others prefer partially sighted. Many feel that visually impaired best captures their experience.

There's no right or wrong answer. These aren't just labels—they're part of how you understand yourself and how you choose to communicate with the world. That's why we've made all three available, so you can wear a badge that truly reflects your identity.

### **Making the invisible visible**

Sight loss often feels like an invisible disability. Without a white cane or guide dog, people around you can't always

tell you have a visual impairment. Bus drivers pull away before you've found a seat. Shop assistants mistake your hesitation for indecision. Strangers think you're being rude when you don't respond to a wave you cannot see. Having to explain yourself repeatedly is exhausting.

Our badges offer a simple solution: bold yellow with high-contrast black text, instantly recognisable, letting people know you have sight loss without you having to say a word. For many members, this small piece of identification has reduced anxiety, prevented misunderstandings, and made everyday situations easier.

### **Available now from our website!**

All our badges are clear, lightweight, durable and affordably priced at £2.52, and every purchase directly supports our work providing specialist aids, information services and vital support for people with sight loss across the UK.

A badge might seem small, but for many it makes a profound difference; offering greater independence, reduced anxiety and the quiet reassurance that you don't always need to explain yourself to be yourself.

# Seeing the Whole Picture: Insights from Consultant Ophthalmologist Mr Subramanian Dinakaran Part Three



**Sometimes the smallest details make the biggest difference in eye health. Consultant ophthalmologist Mr Subramanian Dinakaran explains how patients and relatives often reveal crucial information in unexpected ways.**

**“Sometimes we are not fully trained to address certain issues,” he says. “For example, a young patient may present with optic disc swelling caused by increased pressure in the brain. Weight loss could help, but addressing that with a teenager requires balance. You don’t want to push them too far or make them feel accused. It has to be done sensitively.”**

**He stresses the importance of patient advocacy. “You have to be your own best advocate. Ask questions. Bring up anything unusual. Sometimes patients**

**will reveal things to a healthcare assistant or a relative that they won’t say to a doctor.”**

**One example he recalls involved a patient whose daughter noticed unusual visual experiences. “She was seeing birds outside the window, or shapes that weren’t there. She had been suffering this for months but was hesitant to tell anyone, worrying that it might lead to something serious. A simple conversation led to her being booked into my clinic, and we were able to explain what was happening.”**

**This reassurance is crucial. “It’s not that they’re imagining things,” Mr Dinakaran says. “It’s the brain interpreting signals incorrectly. Explaining that to both the patient and their family provides real relief.” The conversation also touched on**

virtual clinics, which he helped develop. “The advantage is that all necessary information is collected for a consultant-led opinion. This doubles our capacity, allowing patients to be seen within one to two weeks. If there’s something significant in the images, we bring them in. Otherwise, monitoring continues safely.”

Age-related macular degeneration, one of the leading causes of vision loss, requires vigilance. “Early detection is key, especially in the first eye. Simple methods like covering one eye and checking vertical blinds or tiles at home can pick up early distortion. That’s often enough to get people in quickly for treatment.”

Lifestyle is also a critical factor. “Smoking is the biggest modifiable risk,” he says. “The benefits start the day you stop. Blood pressure, cholesterol, a healthy diet with green vegetables, and specific vitamin supplements for certain stages of AMD can all help.”

While advances such as Lucentis injections have transformed treatment for wet AMD since 2008, dry AMD remains challenging. “Current treatments can slow progression, but they don’t improve vision. That’s why early monitoring, lifestyle management, and prompt intervention remain the cornerstones of care.”

He also highlights the role of family and support networks. “Relatives often notice changes before the patient does. Even a casual comment like ‘Dad said he saw something strange outside’ can be the clue that leads to early intervention. Those small observations are powerful. Patients often feel intimidated, especially in clinics. Taking time to listen, explaining what is happening, and providing reassurance can make all the difference. The right words, the right timing, and a bit of empathy can transform a stressful appointment into something empowering.”

**Listen on YouTube for more.**

## Product of the Month: PSS Beanie



**Product Code: BEA001**  
**Price: £12.00 incl. VAT**  
**(£10.00 excl. VAT)**

Made from soft, high-quality knit, this beanie helps raise awareness wherever you go. One size fits all adults. Comfortably stretchy and suitable for most head sizes but not recommended for children.

# The Neuroscience Behind Charles Bonnet Syndrome

## When Vision Fades, the Brain Creates Its Own Reality



For illustrative purposes – this artwork exaggerates multiple hallucinations and does not reflect typical experiences.

For thousands of people with sight loss, seeing is no longer simple. Alongside diminished vision, they may experience vivid, often startling hallucinations: geometric patterns dancing across walls, strangers' faces materialising in empty rooms, children in Victorian dress playing in overgrown gardens. These phantom visions are the hallmark of Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS), a condition long misunderstood, shrouded in silence, shame, and fear of mental illness.

Now, groundbreaking research from King's College London is changing that narrative, explaining why these hallucinations occur and dismantling decades of stigma.

### The Brain That Refuses to Go Dark

Dr Dominic ffytche, Professor of Visual Psychiatry at King's College London, has spent years studying the neural

basis of CBS. Using advanced brain imaging techniques, including fMRI and EEG, his team has mapped how the visual cortex, the brain's primary centre for sight, reacts when it is starved of input.

The results are remarkable. When vision declines due to conditions like macular degeneration, glaucoma, or diabetic retinopathy, the visual cortex does not simply shut down. Instead, it becomes hyperactive, generating its own imagery. Brain scans show specific regions lighting up during hallucinations, the fusiform face area during facial visions, colour-processing regions during colourful images.

It is as if the brain, accustomed to a lifetime of visual input, refuses to accept darkness and begins composing elaborate visions. This mechanism, called deafferentation,

occurs when the loss of signals from the eyes triggers heightened neural activity in the visual cortex. Recent studies from Dr ffytche and colleagues confirm that this hyperexcitability is central to the formation of hallucinations. CBS is therefore entirely physiological, a normal, if sometimes unsettling, response to vision loss, not a sign of mental illness.

For decades, people with CBS feared their hallucinations meant dementia or psychosis, leaving many too ashamed to speak with doctors, family, or friends. The resulting silence compounded their isolation.

### **A Syndrome Named After an 18th-Century Grandfather**

The syndrome is named after Charles Bonnet, an 18th-century Swiss naturalist. Bonnet first documented the condition after observing his grandfather, Charles Lullin, who began seeing men, women, birds, and carriages with perfect clarity following cataract surgery at age 89. Lullin knew none of it was real and reportedly enjoyed the experience, often chatting about the visions.

Bonnet recorded these observations carefully, noting that his grandfather's mind and personality remained unchanged. It would take more than two centuries for science to fully validate his compassionate insight.

### **The Lived Experience**

Dr ffytche estimates that around one million people in the UK live with CBS, though underreporting suggests the true number is higher. Hallucinations vary widely: some see simple patterns such as grids, brickwork, or tessellating shapes, while

others witness complex scenes, from historical crowds to playful animals in impossible settings.

What unites all experiences is the viewer's awareness that they are not real. Unlike hallucinations in psychiatric conditions or dementia, people with CBS retain insight. This knowledge does not make the visions any less startling, or, for some, distressing.

CBS affects people of all ages, including children. The hallucinations are not always temporary and are not always benign: while some people enjoy them, around a third find them genuinely disturbing. They typically appear in low-light conditions or moments of rest and can last seconds or hours. Their content depends on which part of the visual cortex is firing, and the experiences are purely visual.

### **From Mystery to Medicine**

King's College research validates thousands of experiences. Brain scans show the exact areas lighting up during hallucinations, while multiple techniques confirm increased cortical excitability. This is neurology, not psychiatry. It is the brain adapting in extraordinary ways to the loss of visual input.

For healthcare professionals, this understanding provides a framework for conversation. In the past, patients rarely volunteered information, and doctors seldom asked. CBS was assumed to be rare and easily tolerated. Now, clinicians can explain CBS as a normal neurological response, reassure patients about their cognitive health, and offer practical strategies for managing

hallucinations. CBS is also recognised in the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), reflecting both scientific evidence and advocacy from the CBS community.

### **Living Well With CBS**

There is no cure, but understanding transforms the experience. Simply knowing that hallucinations are a natural response to sight loss, not a sign of mental deterioration, can reduce anxiety significantly.

Dr ffytche has developed a simple eye-movement technique that can sometimes shorten or stop hallucinations while they are happening. When a vision appears, keep your head still and move your eyes slowly from left to right, about once per second, for 15 to 30 seconds.

Then pause. If the hallucination continues, the movement can be repeated a few times. The aim is to activate visual brain areas in a way that interrupts the internally generated imagery. It does not work for everyone, but many people find it helpful.

Other coping strategies include adjusting lighting, blinking deliberately, shifting your gaze between two fixed points in the room, or engaging in a mentally absorbing activity such as listening to music or conversation. Some people find that hallucinations become less frequent over time as the brain adapts, though this is not universal.

Breaking the silence is key. Sharing experiences with family, friends, or healthcare providers lifts isolation. Support groups for CBS offer spaces

to connect, providing reassurance and community for those who might otherwise feel alone.

### **Our Commitment**

At The Partially Sighted Society, we are inspired by these advances. Each breakthrough clarifying the link between vision loss and the brain strengthens our ability to support people effectively.

CBS is one aspect of sight loss, but an important one. For those experiencing hallucinations: you are not imagining things in a psychiatric sense. You are not going mad. Your brain is responding naturally and remarkably to changed circumstances. You deserve support, understanding, and access to accurate information.

We walk alongside you, whether navigating CBS, adapting daily tasks, or connecting with others who understand. Knowledge, shared compassionately, transforms fear into understanding, isolation into community, and uncertainty into hope. Together, we are not merely raising awareness, we are changing lives.

Bassetlaw  Centre 

## **Need transport help?**

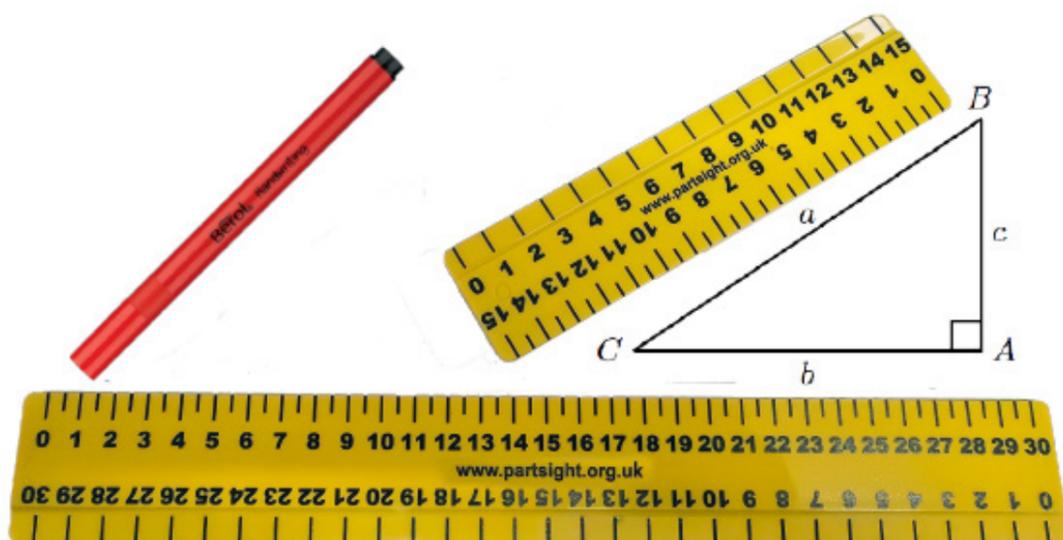
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# PSS Launches New High-Contrast Rulers



We're pleased to introduce a new tool designed to make measuring simpler for people with visual impairments: a dual-sided, high-contrast centimetre ruler, now available in both 30cm and 15cm sizes.

For many children and adults with sight loss, a standard ruler can be surprisingly difficult to use. The tightly packed millimetre lines that offer precision for some can create visual clutter for others, turning a basic classroom task into a frustrating guessing game. Our new centimetre-only ruler removes that clutter, offering a clearer layout that helps users find and follow measurements more quickly and confidently.

“Following discussions and consultations with qualified teachers of visual impairment, or QTVIs, who support visually impaired children in schools, we've developed a ruler that shows only centimetres, not millimetres,” explains our Print Room Manager, Andre Plant. “This makes it simpler and quicker to use, removing unnecessary detail while keeping measurements clear.”

The ruler was shaped through close collaboration with professionals

who see these challenges every day in real classrooms. “We are always listening to ideas from specialists working directly with visually impaired children,” Mr Plant adds. “Their insight helps us create practical tools that genuinely support learning and independence.”

Its dual-sided design means it can be read on the top and bottom, saving time and reducing small but constant barriers during lessons, homework, or everyday tasks at home. These details may seem minor, but they add up, especially for students already working harder to access visual information.

We will continue to supply our previous rulers for those who prefer them, but we are proud to expand the range of options available. Whether measuring a line in maths, marking out materials in design and technology, or tackling a craft project at home, the right tool can make the difference between struggling and getting on with the job.

The new rulers are available now through our resources website at [schoolzone.partsight.org.uk](http://schoolzone.partsight.org.uk), along with our wider range of learning aids.

# Living with Low Vision: The Everyday Realities



FEBRUARY IS  
**LOW VISION**  
AWARENESS MONTH

February marks Low Vision Awareness Month, and for those of us living with partial sight, it's a welcome opportunity to share what our daily lives actually look like. Visual impairment remains widely misunderstood, even though it affects millions of people across the UK. It's not about needing stronger glasses, and it certainly doesn't mean we're completely blind. Rather, it describes sight loss that can't be fully corrected with glasses, contact lenses, medication or surgery, and that has a genuine impact on how we navigate each day.

Clinical definitions only tell part of our story. The lived experience reveals itself in small, constant ways throughout the day that many sighted people never consider.

Take the morning post. For many of us, envelopes accumulate on the hallway table because the print is too small, the contrast too faint, or the layout too cluttered to read comfortably. Something as routine as checking a bank statement or a hospital appointment letter can require magnifiers, bright task lighting, or

digital tools that read text aloud. What takes others thirty seconds might take us ten minutes – or might require asking someone else entirely. In the kitchen, sight loss transforms familiar tasks into carefully choreographed routines. Margaret, one of our members, jokes that she's become a better baker since losing her central vision because she's had to be so much more methodical.

She uses bold markers on her oven dials, tactile stickers to distinguish between tins of similar size, and a talking kitchen scale that announces measurements. Pouring a hot drink safely involves a liquid level indicator that beeps when the cup is nearly full – a simple device that prevents painful burns and ruined clothing. "It's the small victories," she says. "Being able to make my grandson a cup of tea when he visits means the world."

Getting out and about brings its own challenges. Navigating public transport often means struggling to read bus numbers at a distance, station departure boards, or platform signs in time to make quick decisions.

James, who developed visual impairment in his forties, describes the anxiety of rush hour travel: “The glare on sunny days, poor lighting in the evenings, fast-moving crowds – it’s exhausting in a way people don’t see. By the time I get to work, I’ve already navigated what feels like an obstacle course.” Many of us rely on mobility training, high-contrast route planning, and assistive apps to travel with more confidence, though even these don’t eliminate the anxiety that comes with unfamiliar journeys.

Recognising faces is another often overlooked difficulty that can be socially isolating. A person with visual impairment may see that someone is there but not be able to make out facial features clearly, especially in low light or from across a room. James remembers walking straight past his neighbour in the supermarket. “She thought I was being rude, blanking her deliberately. I had to explain that I genuinely couldn’t see it was her until she spoke. Now she always calls out “hello” first, and it’s made such a difference.”

The good news is that the right support and small practical changes can make an enormous difference. Anita Plant, our CEO and Vision Rehabilitation Officer, has seen it countless times. “People are often surprised that it’s not one big piece of equipment that changes everything,” she explains.

“It’s lots of small adjustments. Better lighting in the right place, simple contrast changes at home, learning how to use the accessibility features on a phone – these things can transform someone’s confidence and independence. I’ve watched people go

from feeling housebound to planning their first solo shopping trip in years.” Low Vision Awareness Month is also about challenging the assumptions that make life harder than it needs to be. The assumption that we’re totally blind when we can still see shapes and movement. The assumption that stronger glasses will fix everything. The assumption that if we’re moving confidently around familiar spaces, we must be exaggerating our difficulties elsewhere. There’s also the well-meaning but misguided idea that bright light always helps – sometimes glare and harsh light are just as disabling as dim lighting.

Perhaps the biggest misconception is that sight loss is only about reading. It influences our confidence, social interactions, mobility, employment opportunities and mental wellbeing in ways that are often invisible to others. Anita puts it simply: “When someone can’t read the label on a tin, that’s inconvenient. When they stop going to their book club because they can’t see faces anymore and feel embarrassed, that’s isolating. We’re not just supporting people to see better – we’re helping them stay connected to their lives.”

By understanding what visual impairment really looks like in daily life, everyone can play a part in creating more inclusive, supportive environments. Small changes in awareness, communication and design can make the world significantly easier to navigate for all of us living with sight loss. This February, we’re asking people to look beyond the stereotypes and see the reality – our reality, lived every day with resilience, adaptation, and more humour than you’d expect.



**PSS Culinary Corner**

# Winter Foods That Care for Your Eyes



Winter is often a time when our meals become heavier, beige, and a little repetitive. Yet January and February are actually a brilliant opportunity to nourish our eyes through food, using ingredients that are easy to find, affordable, and comforting in colder weather.

Many of the nutrients linked to eye health are found in everyday foods. Leafy greens such as broccoli, kale, and spinach contain lutein and zeaxanthin, which help protect the macula from damage caused by light and ageing. Brightly coloured vegetables like tomatoes, carrots, and sweet potatoes are rich in vitamin A and beta-carotene, essential for night vision and general eye function. Oily and white fish, including cod and salmon, provide omega-3 fatty acids, which support the retina and can help reduce dry or irritated eyes.

Winter meals are also an opportunity to think about balance. Pairing vegetables with a source of protein and healthy fats helps the body absorb fat-soluble vitamins such as A, D, and E more effectively. A drizzle of olive oil, a spoon of tapenade, or a handful of nuts can make a real difference, both to flavour and to nutritional value.

For people with sight loss, food can be about more than just nutrition. Cooking with seasonal ingredients often means stronger aromas, clearer textures, and more reliable cooking cues.

The smell of garlic softening in oil, the sound of vegetables sizzling in a pan, or the feel of fish becoming firm as it cooks can all make the kitchen a more confident and enjoyable space.

Choosing foods that support eye health is not about restriction or complicated rules. It is about gently tilting everyday meals towards ingredients that look after the eyes while still feeling satisfying and familiar. In winter, that might mean roasting vegetables until they smell sweet and earthy, adding greens to warming dishes, or enjoying fish with simple, bold flavours.

Food will not cure sight loss, but it can play a supportive role in long-term eye health and overall wellbeing. Small, consistent choices made throughout the colder months can help us feel energised, nourished, and connected to our food — something that matters just as much as the nutrients on the plate.

# Recipe of the Month: Baked Cod with Olive Tapenade & Tomatoes



**Serves:** 4 people

**Time:** 6 minutes prep, 10 minutes cooking.

**Equipment needed:** Baking sheet, parchment paper or foil, cooking spray, spatula, knife, cutting board, spoon.

This month, we're shining a spotlight on a dish that's as simple as it is nourishing: Baked Cod with Olive Tapenade & Tomatoes. Perfect for the chilly days of January and February, this recipe is a celebration of flavours, textures, and, most importantly, nutrients that support eye health.

Cod is a lean, protein-packed fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which help protect the delicate structures of the eye and support overall vision. Paired with briny olive tapenade, juicy tomatoes, and a sprinkle of panko breadcrumbs, it's a meal that's

not only tasty but also layered with vitamins and antioxidants that can help maintain healthy eyes.

We've chosen this as our Recipe of the Month because it's quick, accessible, and adaptable for all skill levels in the kitchen. Its sensory cues - aromas, textures, and even the gentle sizzle in the oven - make it an ideal dish for visually impaired cooks to enjoy preparing and sharing. In just 15 minutes, you can have a colourful, satisfying meal that nourishes both body and sight, making it a win-win for your winter menu.

## Ingredients

### For the Cod

- 1 pound cod fillets
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 5 tablespoons store-bought olive tapenade
- 1½ medium tomatoes, sliced into thin rounds (about ¼ inch)

- 3 tablespoons panko breadcrumbs
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley

### For the side dish

- 1 large head of broccoli, cut into florets
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Pinch of salt

## Method

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment or foil. Spray lightly if using foil.
2. Prepare the cod fillets: Pat dry, season with salt and pepper. Spread olive tapenade on top, layer with tomato slices, then sprinkle with panko breadcrumbs. Place in the oven.
3. Cook the broccoli while the fish bakes:
4. Heat olive oil in a large pan over medium heat.
5. Add minced garlic; you'll hear a gentle sizzle and smell the fragrant aroma—this is your cue it's ready.
6. Add broccoli florets, sprinkle with a pinch of salt, and stir gently.
7. Cover with a lid for 3–4 minutes, then uncover and continue cooking for 3–5 minutes until the broccoli is tender but still slightly crisp. You can test by gently pressing a floret with a fork—the firmness is your cue it's done.
8. Check the cod: Around 9 minutes in, gently press the fillet with a spatula—the flesh should feel firm but springy. Smell the roasted tomato and olive aroma as confirmation it's cooked.
9. Serve: Place cod on a plate, add the garlic broccoli on the side, and sprinkle parsley over the top. The mix of textures, aromas, and colours creates a satisfying, nourishing meal.

### Sensory Tips:

- Touch: Firm but springy fish = cooked; soft or mushy = needs more time.
- Smell: Olive tapenade and tomatoes roasting = cooking is progressing.
- Hearing: Light sizzling sound in the oven = heat is on and cooking.

### Nutrition (per serving):

Calories 247 kcal | Protein 26g  
Carbs 17g | Fat 9g | Vitamin A  
600 IU | Vitamin C 10.1mg

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