The Partially Sighted Society

SEEING THE WAY FORWARD, TOGETHER

NEWSLETTER

June 2026 Edition

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Welcome to the June 2026 Edition

What a rich edition we have for you this month.

We begin with the journey of Karin Ghattas, a trainee therapist who came to us from a career in pharmacy and found, in the honest work of the therapy room, something she hadn't expected. Her reflections on learning to understand, rather than fix, speak beautifully to the values that guide everything we do at PSS.

We report on our recent attendance at Sight Village Leeds, where it was wonderful to meet so many of you in person, and look back warmly on another Walk, Talk and Tuck-In. Proof, if it were needed, that good company is more than a match for British weather.

This edition also explores the deeply personal question of language: how do people with sight loss choose to describe their own experience?

The responses from our community are honest, varied, and illuminating. Alongside this, we introduce our new High Visibility Rucksack Cover, a practical addition to our range of symbol items.

We continue our accessible walks series, spanning the length and breadth of the UK. From the reimagined waterfront of Belfast to the sun-warmed valleys of Somerset.

We also explore how AI-powered smart glasses are beginning to change what is possible for visually impaired runners, including at this year's London Marathon. Our research feature brings encouraging news on the latest breakthroughs in sight loss science, from cell preservation to gene therapy.

We are also delighted to welcome two contributors: Fiona Scott-Barrett, whose frank and funny account of navigating Edinburgh's tenement staircases will resonate with many, and Simon Mahoney, reflecting on the emotional stages of sight loss from his new book.

Our Culinary Corner champions the humble freezer and offers a recipe for Roasted Red Pepper and Butternut Squash Soup, warming, nourishing, and rather good for your eyes.

We hope you enjoy the read.

Anita

Anita Plant, CEO

'I Learned to Understand Rather Than Fix': A Trainee Therapist on Finding Her Calling in the World of Sight Loss

At PSS, we pride ourselves on offering comprehensive clinical placements to trainees and students through our experienced, specialist team. Over the past year, in collaboration with Sheffield Hallam University, we have supported Karin Ghattas, a Trainee Art Psychotherapist, through her first steps into practice, with clinical supervision provided by Nickie, our Art Psychotherapist and Mental Health and Wellbeing Lead. Here, Karin shares her experience in her own words.

Last June, Karin walked through the doors of The Partially Sighted Society not quite knowing what awaited her. She had spent her professional life in pharmacy, a world built on precision, protocols and the clean satisfaction of a problem solved. Therapy, and this placement in particular, would ask something very different of her.

"I entered the placement unsure of what I would learn, how I would adapt to the setting, and how I would support individuals whose lived experience of sight loss was initially unfamiliar to me," she recalls. "Very quickly, I found myself in a challenging but deeply meaningful learning environment." The transition from pharmacist to therapist would never simply be a change of job title. It demands a reorientation of instinct. For Karin, the impulse to diagnose, prescribe and resolve had served her well for years. At PSS, it needed to be held in check.

"My instinct has often been to problem-solve quickly," she says. "But through my placement I have learned to balance that clinical curiosity with presence, patience, humility and unspoken empathy. My time here

has taught me to spend more time understanding than trying to prove what I know."

It is a shift that sounds subtle. In practice, it is profound; the difference between a session that simply concludes and a session that truly resonates.

Much of that learning came from watching the PSS team at work, observing how staff meet each person precisely where they are in their own journey, rather than where a system might expect them to be.

"I have been particularly drawn to the way PSS supports every aspect of a person's sight loss journey, from the early stages of uncertainty and change through to acceptance, adaptation and renewed confidence," she explains. "Seeing the passion within the team to find thoughtful ways of reaching each individual has deeply inspired my own approach to therapy."

That model, meeting people with curiosity rather than assumption and pacing support around each person's readiness rather than a predefined timeline, has become the compass by which Karin now orients her own practice.

Before her placement, Karin understood sight loss in clinical terms, diagnoses, conditions, the mechanics of the eye. PSS opened a wider, more human picture.

"I have developed a much deeper understanding of what living with sight loss can mean emotionally and practically," she says. "I have witnessed how it can affect identity, confidence, independence, and the need for meaningful self-expression. Being able to journey alongside clients in therapy has been a privilege."

Grief, adaptation, rediscovered agency, these are the interior territories Karin has come to understand not through textbooks but through the quiet, honest work of the therapy room. One of the placement's most formative revelations has been witnessing the role that creativity can play as a therapeutic tool, especially for people whose sense of self has been shaken by the onset or progression of sight loss.

"I have seen how powerful creative work can be," she says, "particularly when it offers clients a way to express feelings or experiences that may be difficult to put into words."

When language reaches its limits, creativity opens another door. It is a lesson Karin says she will carry into every future therapeutic space she inhabits.

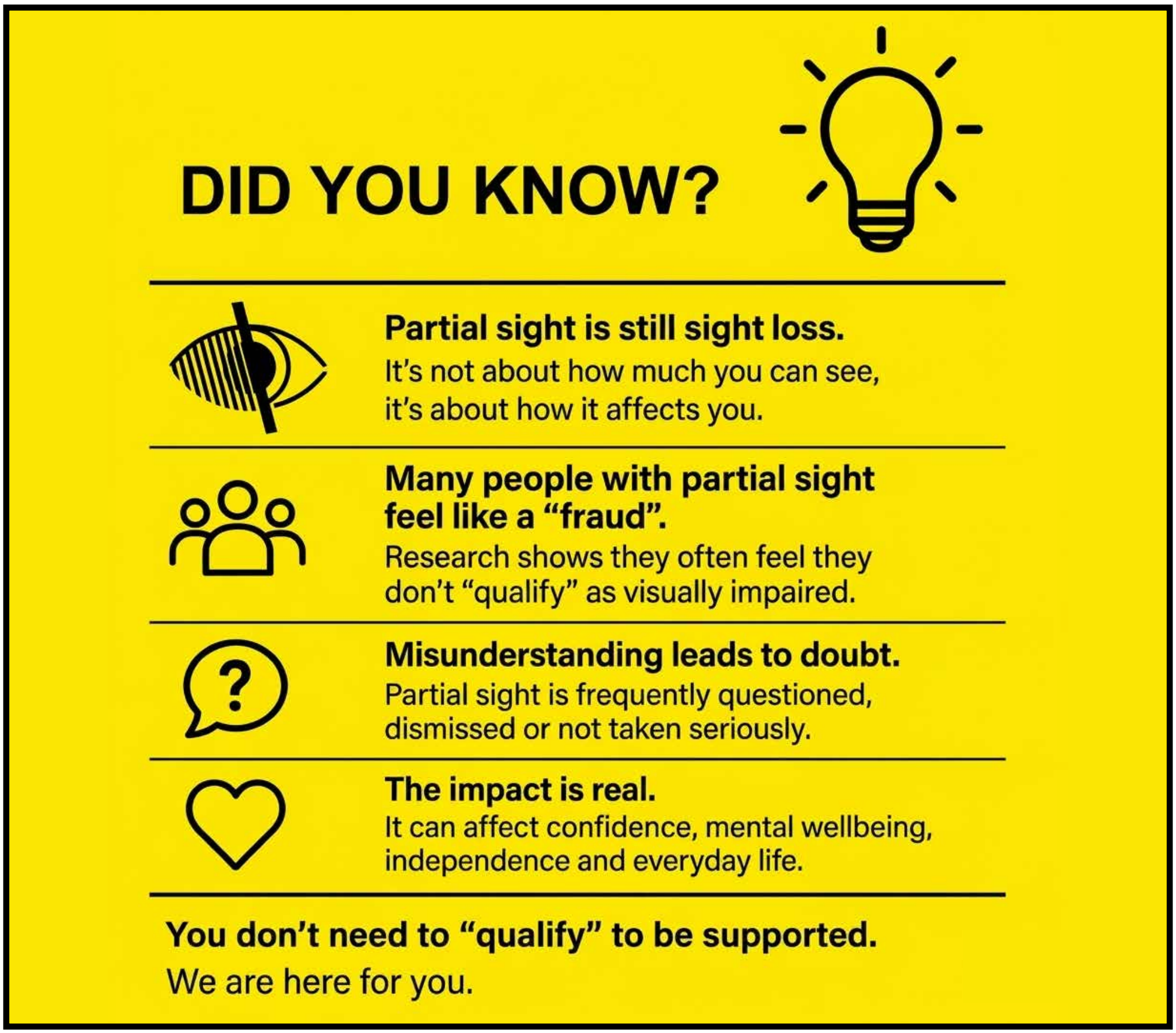
Perhaps the most important lesson the placement has offered has had nothing to do with technique. It has been about learning to recognise and honour progress in its smallest forms.

"I continue to be inspired by the steady breakthroughs that can happen within sessions," she reflects. Not the dramatic turning points of cinematic transformation, but the quieter shifts: a client who speaks a fear aloud for the first time, or reclaims a small piece of the confidence sight loss had taken from them. Evidence, as Karin puts it, that "change, however gradual, is real."

Karin arrived at PSS as a trainee, uncertain of what she would find. She leaves the formal structure of her placement having found something she wasn't expecting: a place she wants to stay.

"The care shown by the team, and the meaningful community that has been created for people living with sight loss, is something I would be proud to continue being part of," she says.
The road from pharmacist to therapist has not been a straight one. What is clear is that this placement has shaped Karin in ways that go beyond the clinical, not just as a practitioner, but as a person.

The team at PSS have been privileged to witness that journey, and we are proud to have played a part in it.



The Partially Sighted Society at Sight Village Leeds

Anita and Shaun manning the PSS stand.

The team from The Partially Sighted Society recently attended Sight Village Leeds, held at the iconic Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds, and what a fantastic event it was.

Anita, Nickie, Karin and Shaun were on hand throughout the day to meet visitors, answer questions and share information about the wide range of services and products the Society offers. Whether people were looking for practical daily living aids, accessible products, or simply wanting to find out more about how we can help, the team was there to listen and support.

Sight Village is one of the most valuable events in the calendar for anyone living with sight loss, bringing together the latest technology, products and support services all under one roof. It offers a unique opportunity to explore what is available, connect with specialists, and discover new ways to live more independently. It was wonderful to meet so many people on the day, hearing your experiences, answering your questions and introducing new visitors to the work of The Partially Sighted Society.

Events like Sight Village highlight the strength of the sight loss community, and we are grateful to everyone who came to say hello. Special thanks to Queen Alexandra College for putting on such a brilliant event.

We look forward to seeing you all again next time.

Cold Weather with Warm Company at PSS's Walk Talk and Tuck In

Last month's Walk, Talk and Tuck-In went ahead in the face of some thoroughly uninviting weather and proved, once again, that a bit of wind and rain is absolutely no match for good company.

The forecast was far from promising. The kind of grey, blustery afternoon that sends most sensible people straight to the sofa. And yet, attendees arrived in fine spirits, umbrellas in hand and smiles firmly in place, ready to make an afternoon of it regardless. What followed was exactly what Walk, Talk and Tuck-In does best.

Conversation flowed easily, laughter came often, and the warm, unhurried atmosphere that has made this event a firm fixture in the PSS calendar was present in abundance, entirely undimmed by the weather outside. There is something genuinely moving about a group of people who choose to show up anyway. Who decide that connection matters more than comfort, and that an imperfect afternoon spent with the right people is worth far more than a dry one spent alone. That spirit was everywhere on the day, and it is what makes events like this one worth cherishing.

A heartfelt thank you goes to everyone who braved the elements to be there. Events like this are only ever as good as the people who show up and on this occasion, the people were, without question, excellent.

If you've been thinking about coming along to a future Walk, Talk and Tuck-In, we'd love to see you there. No special kit required. Just yourself and packed lunch. Visit partsight.org.uk/events or call us on 01302 965195 to find out what's coming up.

Sight Emergency: Act Fast, Don't Wait

A sudden, severe change in your vision is not something to sleep on or book a routine appointment for, it is a medical emergency, and the clock matters.

If you or someone you know experiences a sudden loss of sight, a dark curtain or shadow across your vision, flashes of light, or severe distortion, treat it with the same urgency you would a heart attack or stroke. In many cases, the difference between acting immediately and waiting even a few hours can mean the difference between saving and losing your sight permanently.

If you hold private health cover, it is natural to reach for your membership card first. But in a sight emergency, this instinct can cost you precious time. Insurance providers can confirm that you are covered, but they cannot pull strings to get you seen faster, override clinic appointment books, or manage emergency triage on your behalf. Waiting on hold, seeking pre-authorisations, or chasing referrals during a crisis is time your eyes simply do not have the luxury of. Skip the admin and go straight to your nearest NHS emergency eye hospital, an urgent care optician with emergency appointments, or your local A&E department. Tell them clearly what you are experiencing. These services are equipped to assess and treat sight-threatening conditions without delay.

The Simple Rule:
When in Doubt, Go

Eye emergencies are not always dramatic or painful. Some of the most serious conditions, such as a detached retina, can begin with symptoms that feel easy to dismiss. If something feels suddenly and significantly wrong with your vision, trust that instinct and seek help immediately.

For non-urgent support, whether you need advice on visual aids, low-vision equipment, or guidance on living well with a visual impairment, please do get in touch. But for emergencies, don't pause: first and absolutely foremost; get seen, get treated, and protect your sight.

Be Seen This Summer: The PSS Activewear T-Shirt

With the warmer months arriving and more of us heading outdoors, there has never been a better time to think about visibility.

Whether you are a regular runner, a gym goer, a keen walker, or simply someone who enjoys getting out and about when the weather is on your side, the PSS Activewear T-Shirt is made with you in mind.

Bright yellow for maximum visibility, it carries the internationally recognised symbol of visual impairment alongside a clear, confident message: Visually Impaired, Please Be Aware. No explanations needed, no awkward conversations to start.

The shirt does the talking before anyone gets close enough to ask. It is lightweight and breathable, so it works just as well on a sunny park run as it does in a busy gym or on a crowded high street. And as summer fills pavements, parks and leisure centres with more people moving faster and paying less attention, wearing something that communicates your needs clearly becomes genuinely useful.

Being seen is not just about safety. It is about moving through the world with confidence, knowing that the people around you have been given the information they need to respond with a little more care.

Be seen. Be safe. Be confident.

Available in four sizes, Medium, Large, Extra Large and Double XL. To order, visit partsight.org.uk or call us on 01302 965195.

What's In a Word? How People With Sight Loss Choose to Name Their Own Experience

"I tend to say visually impaired, but people often assume I have more sight than I do."

The language people use to describe sight loss is personal, political, practical, and deeply emotional. The Partially Sighted Society asked its community a simple question: what words best describe your experience?

Ask twenty people with sight loss how they describe themselves and you will likely get twenty different answers. Blind. Visually impaired. Severely sight impaired. Partially sighted. Low vision. Legally blind. Each term carries its own history, its own clinical weight, its own emotional register, and each person reaches for the one that most truthfully maps onto their daily life. This is not a trivial debate. The words we use shape how others treat us, how services respond to us, and, perhaps most importantly, how we understand ourselves. When The Partially Sighted Society put the question to its community, the response was immediate, heartfelt, and illuminating.

> *“I do not think of myself as a broken sighted person. I'm a blind bloke, and I am absolutely ok with that. As blind people we are not incomplete.”*
> — Dave Williams

Dave's words cut to the heart of something important. For many people, arriving at a clear identity, I am blind, is not a concession or a diminishment. It is a liberation. It can

mean letting go of the exhausting comparison between how you see and how sighted people see, and beginning to build confidence in your own way of navigating the world.

But the community's voices reveal something equally important: no single definition can fully capture every experience of sight loss.

The spectrum of self-description

For some, the word blind is the only one that truly fits. Tom Archer values its directness, “most muggles can understand this”, while Carley Gregory, who lost her vision at ten, uses it simply and without qualification. Dave Williams goes further, describing blindness not as something that limited his life, but as something that helped shape it.

Others feel that blind does not quite describe their experience. Visually impaired is one of the most widely used terms in the community, valued by many for what Katerina Za calls its neutrality. But it comes with complications Nicola Richardson knows well:

> *“I tend to say visually impaired, but people often assume I have more sight than I do.”*

Emma Green is clear that, for her, visually impaired and partially sighted are not interchangeable.

> *“I'm not partially sighted, I'm visually impaired.”*

Meanwhile, Zandra Taylor is content to let the term speak for itself, and leave the rest to her white cane. For others, the clinical framing of low vision feels most accurate. Lisa Fuller explains that different lighting conditions can cost her another 50% of her remaining sight. The label is not academic; it reflects a daily and shifting reality. Jennifer Renée finds that even low vision often needs translating for the wider public:

> *“They only get it when I tell them I am legally blind.”*

Severely sight impaired, one of the official UK registration categories, is the term Chris Fawcett prefers, because it communicates that his vision is significantly affected while still making clear that he retains some sight.

For Aubone Braddon, partially sighted is simply the language he grew up with, shaped by the registration systems of an earlier era. Kathryn Jane prefers it too, partly because her sight changes from day to day, and a term suggesting a fixed state feels less honest than one that leaves room for fluctuation.

Not everyone is comfortable making their sight loss immediately visible. Kay Franklin points out that openly disclosing disability can sometimes make a person feel vulnerable or exposed. Conversations around identity do not always leave room for that perspective, but it matters. Choosing how, when, and whether to communicate sight loss is deeply personal, another reminder that autonomy sits at the centre of this discussion.

What emerges from all of this is not confusion, but richness. As Jane Hull puts it, each of these positions

is valid for different individuals with different experiences of sight loss. The variation is not a problem to be solved. It is a reflection of the genuine diversity of visual impairment, in its causes, its severity, its fluctuations, and the lives being lived around it.

Why the words matter beyond identity

The stakes go beyond personal preference. How people identify themselves shapes practical encounters with health professionals, transport staff, employers, shop workers, and strangers in public spaces.

Nicola Richardson's experience, being assumed to have more sight than she does, is a reminder that even widely used language can still mislead. Assumptions about residual sight can lead people to underestimate need, overlook assistance, or fail to adjust their behaviour appropriately.

Ian Windley uses the term written on his Certificate of Visual Impairment because it matches the official language connected to his care and support. Kate Smith notes that the UK has largely shifted from legally blind to severely sight impaired in clinical language, which she feels many people understand more easily. Aubone Braddon's connection to partially sighted is a reminder that terminology is often generational, many people continue using whichever language was current when they were first diagnosed or registered.

Grace Hughes captures the gap that can sometimes exist between official registration and lived experience: registered as blind, but with some peripheral sight remaining, she prefers visually impaired. Her certificate says one thing. Her experience says something more nuanced.

The right to choose the term that best reflects real life, not simply paperwork, matters.

The PSS symbol items are starting the conversation

The Partially Sighted Society produces a range of symbol items, including lanyards, badges, and armbands, carrying phrases members have told us work best in everyday life. Items bearing phrases such as I Am Blind, I Have Poor Vision, Visually Impaired, and Partially Sighted exist for a simple reason: no single term works for everyone.

These items can help start a conversation before a word is spoken. A badge worn in a shop, on public transport, or at a medical appointment can communicate, clearly and in the wearer's own chosen language, what they need others to understand about their sight.

As Sandra Montgomery Thomson says:

> *"Sometimes the simplest of facts are the best."*

As Nicola Richardson's experience shows, the gap between what a term implies and what someone actually sees can be significant. Symbol items can help close that gap, not by debating language, but by communicating practical information quickly and clearly. And as Kay Franklin reminds us, wearing a symbol item is always a personal choice. The

PSS makes them available so that people who wish to communicate their sight loss clearly have words that fit their experience, in the moment they need them.

The breadth of language used within this community is not a weakness. It reflects something the wider world is only slowly beginning to understand: sight loss is not a single experience, and the people living with it have the right to define it in their own words.

> *"I'm blind, and actually feel very lucky that my blindness has given me a very full and active life."*
> — Dave Williams

New From The Partially Sighted Society

High Visibility Rucksack Cover

Code: RUCCOVER

Price: £17.40 incl. VAT
£14.50 excl.VAT

Out and about? This bright hi-vis cover sends a clear message — "Visually Impaired, Please Be Aware" — helping people around you respond with care, without a word being spoken. Has an adjustable fit for most small to medium rucksacks. Includes a reflective strip for low-light safety. Lightweight, weather-resistant, and quick to attach. Priced at £17.40 inc. VAT, with VAT relief available for eligible customers.

Visit partsight.org.uk or call us on 01302 965195 to place an order.

The PSS M to T of Accessible Walks

In the second part of our accessible walks feature, we return to the roads and pathways of the UK in search of routes that offer something too rarely guaranteed: the freedom to walk with confidence. Each walk has been chosen for its clear orientation, reliable surfaces, and the simple, uncomplicated pleasure of being somewhere worth the journey.

M - Midlothian

Dalkreith Country Park

Ancient woodland closes around you as the path descends toward the North Esk river, the sound of fast-moving water growing steadily until the river announces itself long before it comes into view.

Firm, well-maintained trails wind through the estate with clear orientation throughout, the treeline and riverbank serving as natural, reliable guides. The air carries pine and damp earth, woodpeckers drum intermittently overhead, and the sheer quietness of the park — just eight miles from Edinburgh's centre — lends every step an unexpected sense of escape.

N - Northern Ireland

Titanic Quarter, Belfast

There is something profoundly extraordinary about walking the ground where the Titanic was built, the sheer scale registers physically before it registers intellectually, the vast dry docks and slipways imposing a sense of proportion that no photograph quite prepares you for.

Belfast's waterfront has reinvented itself dramatically, and the Titanic Quarter walk moves through that transformation with a logic that makes independent navigation feel natural and deliberate.

Wide, smooth quaysides run in clean, predictable lines, the angular facades of the Titanic Belfast museum rising unmistakably to the north as a constant orienting presence. Riveted dock edges and monumental ironwork offer remarkable tactile detail at every pause point, the industrial past legible through touch as much as sight. Flat, traffic-free, and generously wide throughout, this is urban accessible walking at its most compelling.

O - Oxfordshire

Christ Church Meadow

Bordered by the Thames and the Cherwell, Christ Church Meadow offers something rare in a city centre, genuine countryside quiet, just minutes from Oxford's medieval heart. The meadow's paths are flat and clearly bounded, the rivers providing natural, reliable orientation on two sides, their gentle current audible on still mornings.

Cattle graze the open grass in warmer months, the smell of the river and cut meadow mingling in the air, and the distant toll of college bells marks the passing of time with unhurried regularity.

Travel Tip: Follow the Longhorns

Enter via Memorial Gate on Broad Walk for the most step-free start, then let the sound of the Thames draw you south. In spring and early summer, Christ Church's pedigree Longhorn cattle graze the lower meadow, their presence a surprisingly useful and thoroughly charming acoustic landmark along the way.

P - Peak District

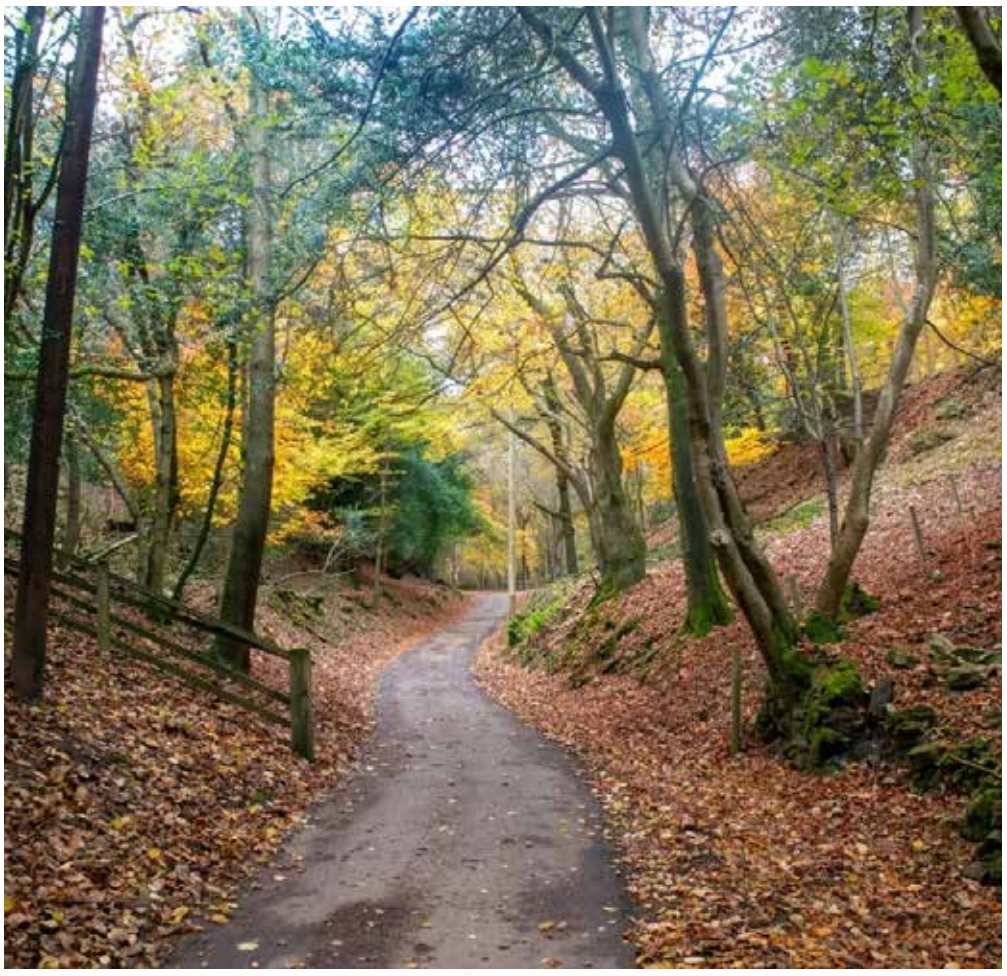
Monsal Trail

There is a particular kind of freedom that comes with a path that simply doesn't end, and the Monsal Trail, threading eight traffic-free miles through the White Peak limestone plateau, offers exactly that. It follows the ghost of a Victorian railway line, and the old formation still shapes the experience: gradients barely register, the surface stays firm and honest underfoot, and the route commits to its direction without hesitation or complication.

Limestone cuttings close in at intervals, funnelling the breeze into something cooler and sharper, and the tunnels — sudden, echoing, smelling faintly of stone and damp, are a sensory event in themselves. Walk as far as you like, then turn back. The trail will meet you wherever you stop.

Q - Quantock Hills

Bridgwater, Somerset



In 1956, the Quantocks became the first landscape in England to be designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty — and walking its ridgelines today, it is not difficult to understand why. But statistics and designations fall away quickly here. What stays with you is the smell: wet earth and wild garlic rising through ancient oak woodland, gorse warming in the afternoon sun, the faint salt carried inland from the Bristol Channel on a westerly.

The Disabled Ramblers' route from Ramscombe woodland is particularly well-suited to visitors with sight loss — firm, wide, and thoughtfully laid out through one of the valley's most sheltered and atmospheric stretches. Red deer move through the trees with an indifference to human presence that feels almost prehistoric, and the land drops away on both sides of the ridge in a way that keeps orientation instinctive — you always know, without quite knowing how, exactly where you are.

R - Rutland

Rutland Water

England's smallest county punches well above its weight — and nowhere more so than at Rutland Water, one of the largest man-made reservoirs in Europe, its 25-mile perimeter path offering some of the most quietly rewarding accessible walking in the Midlands.

The water is an ever-present companion, its surface shifting from silver to deep grey depending on the light and wind, and the path hugs the shoreline closely enough that orientation is never in doubt. Surfaces are firm and well-maintained throughout, gradients gentle, and the route generous in width. Ospreys fish the reservoir from spring onwards — listen for the splash before you ever see the bird. Small, unhurried, and unexpectedly magnificent, Rutland has a habit of surprising people. Let it.

Travel Tip: Stop at Lyndon First

The volunteer-led Waderscrape Hide is about 1km from the visitor centre along firm but uneven ground. Highly knowledgeable Birders are on hand throughout the season, and are widely praised for the quality of their guidance.

S - Shropshire

Stiperstones All Ability Trail

There are accessible walks, and then there are walks designed with genuine intention — and the Stiperstones All Ability Trail falls firmly into the second category.

Threading across one of Shropshire's most atmospheric upland landscapes, the 500-metre route has been thoughtfully laid out with visually impaired walkers specifically in mind: a tapping rail runs the length of the path, rest areas appear at regular intervals, and the surface underfoot is firm and consistent throughout.

The surrounding moorland does the rest, wind moving through the heather, the sharp resinous scent of gorse, and the particular exposed quietness of high ground that feels a long way from anywhere.

A word of warning: beyond the all ability trail the path deteriorates and the site is notably exposed, so weather checks before setting out are strongly advised.

T - Tyne & Wear

Newcastle Quayside River Walk

Few riverside walks in the north of England reward quite as generously as the Quayside. The path is flat, wide, and straightforward to navigate, but it's the river that does the real work: broad, tidal, and audible throughout, it anchors every step in a way that makes independent walking feel natural rather than effortful.

The Millennium Bridge and the Tyne Bridge mark the route like punctuation, each one arriving with a change in acoustics and atmosphere.
Plan to visit on a weekday morning when the path is less busy and unhurried — the city is just waking up, the coffee shops are opening their doors, and the whole stretch feels like it belongs to you.

Travel Tip: Start from Gateshead

Cross the Millennium Bridge from Gateshead rather than Newcastle and you'll have the river and the famous skyline ahead of you from the first step, a far more rewarding direction of travel.

The BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art sits right at the Gateshead end and makes an excellent starting point.

How AI Smart Glasses Are Changing Running for People with Sight Loss

At this year's London Marathon, visually impaired runners used AI-powered smart glasses to help navigate 26.2 miles of crowded city streets. For many, it wasn't just a race — it was a glimpse of how mainstream technology might reshape accessibility in sport.

When Tilly Dowler took up running last year, she started where most beginners do: a couch to 5K programme. What set her journey apart was what she wore on her face.

Dowler, who has Stargardt's disease and retains around 10% useful vision, progressed from short training runs to the start line of the 2026 London Marathon in under twelve months. She completed the race with her boyfriend as her guide runner, supported by AI-powered smart glasses that helped her interpret her surroundings.

"They are AI assisted," she said ahead of race day. "While running, I can ask for live cues, such as what landmarks are around me and how far I have run." The glasses also allowed her to stay connected to her guide without losing her own experience: "I can put my music on but still be able to listen to my guide runner."

Her motivation extended beyond sport. "My mission was to inspire other people with sight loss and people going through something really tough and inspire them to believe in themselves."

From loss to the start line

Sha Khan, who lost around 90% of his vision in 2021 due to retinitis pigmentosa and Stargardt's disease, began running in 2022 after sudden sight loss. Since then, technology has become central to his independence.

“It’s like literally a part of me now,” he said. “If I step out the front door, I wouldn’t do that without my glasses on.”

During training, he uses voice commands with guide runners. “If they say that’s Big Ben ahead of us I can just say ‘hey Meta, take a picture,’” he said, describing how it turns landmarks into accessible, recordable experiences.

Reflecting on his journey, he added:

> ***“Losing my sight made me have to rely on people around me. Once I accepted that reality, I met some of the most amazing people I could ever meet — volunteers who give their time selflessly and encourage and challenge me. While the eye may not see, the heart feels.”***

What the technology actually does

The glasses used by Dowler and Khan are part of a new wave of consumer smart eyewear combining cameras, microphones and open-ear audio with artificial intelligence.

They interpret visual input and convert it into spoken feedback, describing surroundings, movement and changes in real time. Users interact through voice, buttons or simple gestures such as tapping the sides of the frames.

Shaun Fowler, Technology Lead at The Partially Sighted Society, said the shift is significant but must be treated with caution:

“Consumer technology is starting to bridge into real-world independence in a way that was previously limited to specialist systems. That opens real opportunity for people with sight loss, but it also raises expectations. If these tools are going to support mobility and confidence, they need to be consistently reliable in the environments people actually move through.”

He also highlighted the practical limitations. Large, crowded events such as marathons can strain connectivity and affect real-time performance, a serious concern for assistive use.

“If visually impaired people are going to rely on this technology to navigate busy streets or cross roads, then it has to be instantly responsive, every single time,” Shaun added.

These stories matter beyond sport. They show how mainstream consumer technology - not just specialist assistive devices - is beginning to offer meaningful, practical support for people with sight loss.

For some, this is a shift in everyday independence: not replacing human support, but extending it in unfamiliar or challenging environments. A marathon remains a deeply personal achievement. For visually impaired runners, it can also reflect something broader: that barriers can be reshaped through determination and technology itself.

Reasons to Be Hopeful: The Latest Breakthroughs in Sight Loss Research

Sight loss research doesn't always make the front page. But behind the headlines, scientists are making steady, meaningful progress — and the latest findings give real cause for hope.

Sight loss research doesn't always announce itself with fanfare. Progress tends to arrive in the form of a peer-reviewed paper, a clinical trial result, or a funding announcement that most people never see. But for the millions of people living with conditions affecting their vision, the direction of travel matters, and right now, it is cautiously encouraging.

The question researchers are increasingly able to answer is no longer just, "can we cure this?" It is, "can we slow it, understand it better, or intervene earlier?" On all three fronts, there is genuine progress to report.

Slowing sight loss before it takes hold

One of the most active areas of research focuses on protecting the retinal cells that are still working, rather than waiting until they are lost.

Photoreceptor cells, particularly cones, are responsible for colour vision and the fine central sight we use for reading, recognising faces, and navigating the world. They are also the cells most prominently affected in conditions such as age-related macular degeneration and inherited retinal disease. Peer-reviewed studies have identified compounds that may help preserve these cells and slow degeneration, even when the underlying condition cannot yet be stopped entirely.

In practical terms, this matters enormously. Retaining useful vision for longer, even by months or years, can be the difference between independence and dependence. The shift in ophthalmology research from restoration to preservation is not a consolation prize. For many people, it is the most meaningful goal of all.

Gene therapy: from laboratory to clinic

If one area of sight loss research has moved most dramatically from promise to reality in recent years, it is gene therapy.

Peer-reviewed clinical trials have now demonstrated that in certain inherited retinal conditions, those caused by specific, identifiable genetic mutations, targeted gene therapies can genuinely improve visual function. In a small number of cases, patients have regained the ability to recognise shapes, detect movement, or see facial features more clearly than before treatment. These are not statistical improvements on a chart. They are people seeing things they could not see before.

The treatments are currently highly specific. They only apply to particular

genetic conditions, and they do not work for everyone. But the principle they establish is significant: when the cause of sight loss can be understood at a genetic level, it may be possible to go to the source and intervene directly. Researchers are now focused on extending these approaches to a wider range of conditions and improving how long the benefits last.

Understanding vision itself

Behind the treatment breakthroughs lies an equally important body of work: scientists are building detailed maps of how vision is actually processed, from the moment light enters the eye to the point at which the brain makes sense of it.

Recent neuroscience projects have been charting the complex circuitry of the retina, tracing how visual information travels through layers of cells and signals before it ever reaches the brain. This kind of foundational research helps explain something that has long puzzled clinicians: why two people with damage to similar parts of the eye can experience very different effects on their vision.

That understanding matters practically, not just theoretically. Better maps of retinal circuitry will support more targeted treatments, improve the design of retinal implants and visual prosthetics, and help researchers predict how conditions are likely to develop in individual patients.

Spinach, photosynthesis, and the future of dry eye treatment

Progress does not always arrive from the directions you might expect. Researchers at the National University of Singapore have developed an experimental eye-drop treatment derived from spinach leaves that could offer a new approach to dry eye disease, a condition affecting more than a billion people worldwide, and one that can significantly affect quality of life for those already managing other forms of sight loss.

The treatment works by harnessing photosynthesis. Photosynthetic structures extracted from spinach, activated by ordinary ambient light, generate molecules that help eye cells defend against the inflammation and oxidative damage that drive the condition. In early testing, levels of one key damaging oxidant were reduced by up to 95%. The treatment also outperformed one of the most commonly prescribed dry eye medications in animal studies. Human clinical trials are now being prepared.

The researchers believe the same underlying technology could eventually be adapted for other inflammatory conditions where tissues are exposed to visible light, suggesting that what begins as a treatment for dry eyes may prove to have wider implications still.

None of this is an outright cure. But it represents something real: a field that is moving, and moving in the right direction. For people living with sight loss today, the most important message from current research may simply be this: the science has not given up, and neither should you.

PSS provides information, practical support, and community for people living with sight loss. Whether you are living with sight loss or supporting someone, we are here to help.

Culinary Corner

Nobody Ever Brags About Their Freezer.

There is a particular kind of satisfaction that comes from opening a freezer and knowing exactly what is in it. Not the chaotic kind, stacked with mystery parcels and ice-encrusted bags of something that might be peas, might be sweetcorn, nobody is entirely sure. The good kind. The organised kind. The kind where Tuesday's dinner is already sorted, and you did the hard work on Sunday without even really thinking of it that way.

For anyone who finds the daily rhythm of cooking tiring or unpredictable, a well-run freezer is one of the most liberating things in a kitchen. It removes that question which arrives every evening like an uninvited guest — what are we having tonight — and replaces it with something far more comfortable. A choice you already made, on a day when you had the time and energy to make it.

The principle of batch cooking is simpler than its reputation suggests. When you're already cooking, make more than you need. Bolognese for four? Make it for eight. Soup for two? Double it. The extra effort is minimal. The payoff, on a Wednesday when nobody has the energy for anything, is enormous. Stews, curries, soups and casseroles batch best, dishes where the flavours deepen over time and freezing them at their peak means eating them at their best.

The freezer works best as a system rather than a storage unit. A rubber band around a bag, a consistent shelf for each food type, a short list kept in a kitchen drawer, small habits that make the difference between a freezer you trust and one you rummage through hoping for the best. Raised orange bump-ons, available from the PSS shop, work well for making tactile markings for containers, and several smartphone apps now manage freezer contents and send reminders before things expire.

As for what freezes well, most cooked meals do. Pasta sauces, cooked grains, soups, stews, and curry bases all take to the freezer beautifully. Cooked pasta and potatoes are better made fresh. Cream sauces can split, but usually come back together with a patient stir over a low heat. And a note beyond the cooking: frozen berries deserve a place in any well-stocked freezer. Better than fresh for porridge, crumbles, and smoothies, and available every single month of the year.

Recipe of the Month: Roasted Red Pepper & Butternut Squash Soup

Serves 4

Time: 15 minutes prep, 35 minutes roasting, 10 minutes resting/ peeling, and 5 minutes blending and finishing. 65 minutes total.
Equipment: A large baking tray for roasting, a blender or stick blender, a large saucepan for heating, a sharp knife, chopping board, and a bowl (plus clingfilm or a plate for resting the peppers).

There's something almost magical about what a hot oven does to a pepper. The skins blister and darken, the flesh turns sweet and smoky, and your kitchen fills with a smell that draws everyone in to ask what's cooking.

This soup begins there, with deeply roasted peppers, lifted by golden butternut squash and finished with a soft swirl of cool yogurt.

It's slow, leisurely cooking at its best: the kind that fills the kitchen with warmth long before it reaches the bowl. The sort of food that feels right on a grey afternoon, yet still light enough for a warm evening when you want comfort without heaviness.

And while it tastes like comfort, it brings more than that to the table. Red peppers deliver a burst of vitamin C and beta-carotene, while butternut squash adds lutein and zeaxanthin - antioxidants linked to supporting eye health. Olive oil helps the body absorb them, turning a simple bowl into something deeply nourishing in every sense. It's good food, doing good things.

Ingredients

- 3 red peppers, halved and deseeded
- 4 cups butternut squash, peeled and cubed (roughly ¾ inch)
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, roughly chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, unpeeled
- 3 cups vegetable stock
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- 4 tablespoons Greek yogurt
- 1 tablespoon fresh basil leaves, to serve
- Salt and pepper to taste

Method

1. Preheat and Prepare: Preheat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Place the red peppers skin-side up on a large baking tray along with the butternut squash, onion, and garlic cloves. Drizzle with olive oil and season with the salt and black pepper. Toss well to coat evenly.

2. Roast the vegetables: Roast for 35 minutes, or until the squash is tender and the pepper skins are charred and blistered.

3. Peel and Rest: Remove from the oven. Transfer the peppers to a bowl and cover with a plate or clingfilm for 10 minutes to loosen the skins. Peel and discard the skins. Squeeze the roasted garlic from its skins.

4. Blend: Transfer the roasted peppers, squash, garlic, and onion to a blender, or use a stick blender in a large pot. Add the vegetable stock, cumin, and smoked paprika. Blend until completely smooth. Add extra stock if a thinner consistency is preferred.

5. Heat and Taste: Pour into a saucepan and warm gently over a medium-low heat for 5 minutes.

6. Serve: Ladle into bowls and finish with a swirl of Greek yogurt and torn basil leaves.

Final Notes:

If you're after something a little more substantial, stir in a drained tin of cannellini beans before you blend. It adds a lovely creaminess and turns a light lunch into something genuinely filling. On warmer days, try serving this slightly warm rather than piping hot, It takes on an almost gazpacho-like quality, making it perfect for enjoying alfresco while you relax in the sunshine.

This soup freezes wonderfully too. Allow it to cool completely, then portion it into freezer-safe containers and store for up to 3 months. When you're ready, defrost overnight in the fridge and reheat gently on the hob.

One final thing - don't be tempted to rush past the resting and peeling stage for the peppers. Those charred skins can turn bitter in the blender, and a couple of minutes' patience here makes all the difference to the finished soup.

When Stairs Become the Enemy

We are delighted to welcome back Fiona Scott-Barrett as a contributor to our newsletter.

Fiona is a visually impaired writer and former educator who has turned to fiction since retirement, earning recognition for her thoughtful and humorous storytelling, including prize winning work. She also writes regularly on her Substack about sight loss, writing, and self-publishing, sharing insight with wit and honesty.

Four years ago, in the third week of May, my world turned upside down. At that time I lived on the first floor of a classic Edinburgh tenement with a stone internal staircase. Nineteen steps led from the ground floor to the first floor landing, with a curve in the wall of the stairwell about two thirds of the way up. This curve necessitated a short series of steps being narrower at one side than the other, rather like a wedge of cheese.

On the top floor of the tenement there lived a woman who, despite getting through about three litres of wine per day, went up and down the stairs with the speed and agility of a mountain goat. Already hampered by my eyesight, I plodded downstairs one step at a time while holding onto the banister. I marvelled at her ability to skip the light fandango down the steps while I lived in fear of turning cartwheels down the stairs.

Well, on that fateful evening in May 2022, that is precisely what I did. Five steps from the top, I tripped on the thin end of a wedge-shaped step, ricocheted off the wall of the staircase, failed to right myself and flipped upside down. I plummeted down the remaining fourteen steps and landed forehead first on the bottom one.

I spent six hours in A&E undergoing various tests and was finally

discharged with a bump the size of a tennis ball on my forehead, a corker of a black eye that lasted for the next three weeks, a bruised rib, several other bumps and bruises, and a small graze on the shin that later went septic.

Oh, and I caught Covid in the hospital. But on the whole, I was very lucky: no bones were broken, there was no internal bleeding and I wasn't concussed.

My physical recovery took about a month, but the psychological side effects have lasted much longer. The sound of people, or worse, running, behind me causes me to shrink in on myself, or move to the nearest wall or lamppost and stand with my back to it, for fear of being jostled and knocked over. A phalanx of students walking towards me, each with their eyes fixed on their phones, has a similar effect.

And then, of course, there are stairs and steps everywhere, especially in a town built on seven hills. Unless there are banisters within easy reach on both sides of a stair, I won't go downstairs without leather gloves on. These give a better grip on a banister and the wall of a stairwell and allow me to brace myself and keep my weight back.

Perhaps this sounds like a ridiculous palaver and you think I should just man up and get over my fears, but my bathmophobia (fear of stairs and steep inclines) is relatively mild. I have not stopped going out entirely, as some sufferers do, nor do I regularly undergo major panic attacks at the top of stairs.

However, there are some places I no longer go as the descent of the stairs is too intimidating. Edinburgh Council pays for the electricity consumed by stair lighting in tenements, but it no longer replaces bulbs when they fail.

As the bulbs are housed in fittings that require a specific, hard-to-source screwdriver to open, they remain unreplaced and many stairwells feature pools of Stygian darkness interspersed with Tinkerbell-like glimmers of bulbs that are hanging onto life by a thread.

Not long after my accident, I mounted a quest through every electrical equipment store and hardware shop in Edinburgh to try and locate one of these rare, endangered screwdrivers, but in vain. I finally discovered that some companies that carry out communal stair cleaning own specimens of the correct screwdriver and will change dud bulbs for a modest fee if they are also contracted to clean your tenement stair.

Luckily, the tenement I lived in consisted of only twelve flats, most of whose occupiers saw the sense in having functioning stair lighting and were prepared to share the cost of replacing spent bulbs. A couple of years after turning upside down, I decided to move into the retirement block I live in now. The issue of the stairs was not my only reason for moving, but it did play a role in my decision, and I do feel generally more at ease now that I live in a ground floor flat.

The next challenge was that my daughter then moved to a new flat on the first floor of a tenement with a Stygian stairwell. This building houses sixteen flats, and there is no obvious system for collaborating on

maintenance work, so the lack of lighting is compounded by filth on the stairs.

Back in the middle of the last century, stairwells were ruled by martinets, often widows in their fifties or sixties, who maintained a strict rota for stair cleaning; each week a notice would be hung on the door of the flat whose owner's turn it was to clean the stairs.

Failure to comply met with opprobrium from the martinet and social censure from other occupants on the stair. This efficient system broke down when the population became more mobile, people bought and sold flats more frequently and the sense of community on one stair dissolved.

The rise of holiday lets or student rentals has made things worse and it is hard to organise communal maintenance or cleaning in large tenements with floating populations.

So, the process of leaving after a visit to my daughter's flat had to be carefully orchestrated: she would lean over the banister and shine a torch into the stairwell and I, gloved, would descend at a snail's pace, hoping to avoid slipping on swirls of dust or sweetie wrappers on the steps that might precipitate a slip.

Then, to compound bad eyesight, I developed a foot problem that necessitates wearing insoles. These are generally helpful, but they shift my centre of gravity slightly forwards and make me feel like I may topple, even when walking on flat surfaces.

Bathmophobia mounted again and threatened to make visits to my daughter's flat terrifying or impossible. Then I remembered a childhood brush with the fear of stairs. Until I was about three years old, my parents and I lived in a caravan parked on the building site that would become our family home.

My father and mother built our wooden, modernist house themselves and we gradually expanded out of the caravan to two rooms on the ground floor, then up to bedrooms, a dining room, study and sitting room on the first floor.

I scampered up and down long ladders happily, delivering tools or materials to my parents at work on the upper floor. Then disaster struck in the shape of a staircase. I stood at the top of this terrifying device, bawling my head off, unable to understand how you could possibly stay upright while going down it facing forwards.

Eventually I went down it backwards on my knees, but it was far less easy to use than a ladder as the steps were wide and made of slippery polished wood, with no obvious handholds for toddler-sized hands.

I finally worked out that it was less scary to go down facing forwards while sitting on my bottom and holding onto the edge of each step and moving first my feet, then my bum, one step at a time.

I decided to apply this technique on my daughter's scary stairs and she refined the process by cutting an old pair of tracksuit trousers off at the knee. Before I leave her flat, I put the cut-off trousers on top of my regular ones, to protect them from the dirt on

the stairs, then I whip the cut-offs off when I reach the dark sanctum of the ground floor and my daughter takes them back upstairs, ready for my next visit.

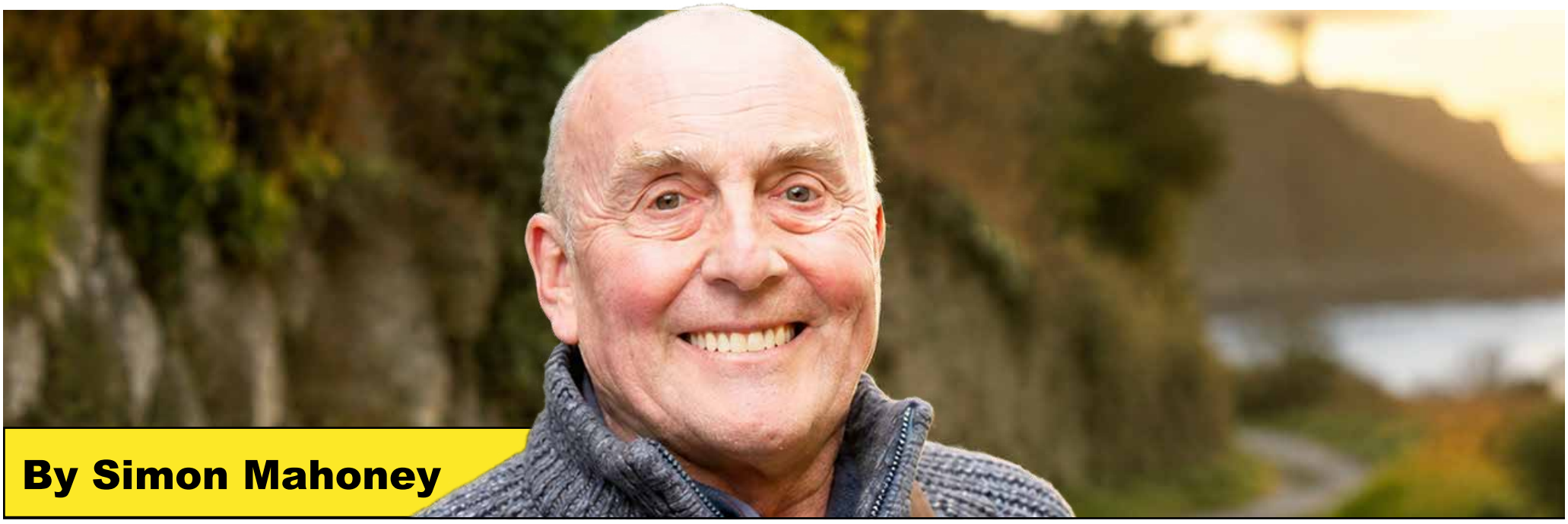
So far nobody has caught me going downstairs toddler-style but if they do, I don't much care.

My blue hair and high-vis 'visually impaired' labels already proclaim me as a bit of a loony and, frankly, I'd rather be that than be upside down at the bottom of a steep, dark stairwell.

With thanks to Fiona Scott-Barrett for sharing her story with honesty, humour and insight, and for her continued contributions to our newsletter. Her novel The Exit Facility is also available as an audiobook, available to purchase on Amazon for £9.99.

Go to: bit.ly/exit-facility

Simon Says…



By Simon Mahoney

Simon Mahoney is a man of many lives: a former Royal Marines Young Officer, an accomplished artist, a published author, and a passionate advocate for sight loss awareness. Having navigated the profound challenges of sight loss himself, Simon brings a unique blend of resilience, creativity, and empathy to his writing. This month, Simon shares a reflection drawn from his new book, *Magic in the Mess — Or How, Not Can't*, exploring the emotional journey that so often accompanies sight loss.

As we all know, losing your sight can be a deeply stressful and emotional experience. It is something that touches every part of a person's life, not just their practical day-to-day routines, but their sense of identity, independence, and wellbeing. I have long felt that the psychological aspects of sight loss deserve far more attention than they typically receive.

While researching my new book, **Magic in the Mess — Or How, Not Can't**, I came across a framework that stopped me in my tracks. Buried in one of my many internet rambles, I found what is described as the Seven Stages of Sight Loss. The source appears to be a chapter from a book on how patients cope with sight loss, published in 2017 and used by the San Diego Center for the Blind.

These seven stages resonated with me so deeply that I found myself wondering how they had escaped my notice for so long. They articulate, with remarkable clarity, what so many of us have felt but perhaps struggled to put into words:

1. Trauma
2. Shock and denial
3. Mourning and withdrawal
4. Succumbing and depression
5. Reassessment and reaffirmation
6. Coping and mobilisation
7. Self-acceptance and self-esteem

What strikes me about this framework is the journey it maps from the raw pain of the early stages through to something that looks, ultimately, like hope. It is not a linear path, and not everyone will move through these stages in the same way or at the same pace. But there is comfort, I think, in simply knowing that what you are feeling has a name, and that others have walked the same road.

Golden, Substantial, and Clearly Well-Considered: Audio Description at Its Finest

Audio description is, in theory, a straightforward proposition: someone watches television on your behalf and reports back. In practice, it is something considerably more entertaining.

The good ones are genuinely brilliant — crisp, timed to the millisecond, slipping information between lines of dialogue like a skilled pickpocket working in reverse. You barely notice them. The drama breathes, the tension holds, and you know exactly who has just walked into the room and why everyone has gone tense.

Then there are the others.

There is a particular school of audio description that appears committed to stating only what is already obvious from context. A door slams. The describer, rising to the moment, informs you: "A door slams." Thank you. Invaluable. One member sat through an entire thriller in which the describer, at the climactic moment, noted: "He looks worried." He had just discovered a body. Worried was doing a great deal of heavy lifting. The opposite problem is equally cherished. Some describers appear to have trained as novelists and cannot resist the richer canvas. "Her eyes carry the accumulated sorrow of a difficult decade" is a genuine description reported by a reader in Derbyshire. It concerned a woman waiting for a bus.

Food, members agree, brings out the very best of the form. Dishes are described with a reverence usually reserved for Old Masters, or possibly restaurant critics on a very good day. A lasagne, reportedly, was once described as "golden, substantial, and clearly well-considered."

Nobody is quite sure what a well-considered lasagne looks like, intriguing concept though it is. That, perhaps, is the point. Audio description, at its most gloriously over-extended, does not merely describe the picture. Sometimes, accidentally, it creates a better one.

Have a favourite audio description moment? We want to hear it.

Your Voice Matters.

Created for you, shaped by you. The PSS Newsletter comes alive when members share their stories, tips, and local news. Whatever you've got — big or small — we want to hear it.

Drop your ideas, stories, or news to shaun@partsight.org.uk — and you could find yourself in the next edition. *Thank you for reading.*

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