

How RNIB has adapted its way of working during the pandemic

RNIB Scotland has continued to adapt its services during the coronavirus pandemic, to ensure that blind and partially sighted people receive timely support and access to services.

Our [Sight Advice FAQ](#) website has been brought together by RNIB, Guide Dogs, Visionary, VICTA, Fight for Sight and the Macular Society, to provide accurate and up-to-date information about the coronavirus pandemic for blind and partially sighted people.

Our [Eye Clinic Liaison Officers](#) (ECLOs) provide emotional and practical support to people who have just been diagnosed with an eye condition. They have adapted their service delivery by providing virtual and tele-care appointments. This service has also worked closely with clinicians, nurses and other hospital eye clinic staff, rehabilitation workers and services across health and social care.

Our Scotland Community Connection Volunteers rose to the occasion. As soon as we entered lockdown our brilliant volunteers were eager to step up and help keep our communities connected. Volunteers, staff and community members have since worked hand-in-hand to support and connect with each other and help us all get through these very strange times.

Our [RNIB Helpline](#) (0303 123 9999) has continued to adapt to the crisis by providing an “at-home service” for people with sight loss.

We have worked closely with primary and secondary eye care services and the Scottish Government to ensure that service change information is provided in an accessible format. For example, we are now providing Braille copies of the Test and Protect guidance on behalf of the Scottish Government.

What has worked well?

As the coronavirus pandemic was ever-changing, these communication channels allowed us to stay connected with blind and partially sighted people and sensory impairment organisations, to ensure that people were receiving information directly in a timely manner. Adapting our communication channels was particularly prevalent as restrictions were posed and began to ease, allowing us to clarify information from government sources, in an accessible way and to provide emotional and practical support at a time of unease.

Example from our Scotland Community Connections:

“After some initial training with our volunteers on conference calls, we began to offer daily, weekend and evening telephone conference groups. These have been a lifeline to people who are feeling lonely or isolated or just missing getting out and about as normal. These developed into some themed calls including films, campaigning, a hugely popular quiz and of course football, driven by the interests of the community.

Our volunteers have helped facilitate these calls and their presence and support to staff and community members has been invaluable.”

Examples from our ECLO service:

ECLOs provided COVID-19 calls for welfare checks to vulnerable patients over 65 who lived alone, who had used our service with the past year. The service offered "Stay in Touch" to those people who had no other means of formal/informal support and would benefit from a weekly check in call. In some areas, ECLOs carried out calls on behalf of the NHS to their patients on cancelled appointments list to offer reassurance about returns to clinic being safe, informing of processes and protocols around COVID-19 and identifying people whose sight has deteriorated and required fast-track appointments back to clinicians.

A case study example from a patient who spoke to an ECLO during lockdown:

“We spoke to patient who was very anxious about his appointment. At the hospital, it was just a check-up, so he felt he should not attend. We reassured him that all unnecessary appointments had been cancelled and we spoke about the safety procedures put in place for the health and safety of patients. We emailed his doctor to keep her in the loop, who then spoke to the patient directly and gave him reassurance about coming in - due to his scans she felt it was very important to come in. The patient called back feeling reassured, as he had been very nervous about going into the hospital - he appreciated the doctor taking time to call him and appreciated the ECLO service for support.”

What could have gone better?

Example from our Scotland Community Connections:

“As group calls can be challenging for some to be involved in and can often exclude the people most in need, our volunteers asked what more they could do. In response to community need and volunteer commitment, we were able to set up a one-to-one telephone befriending service. We currently have 45 telephone befriending matches and it has been a privilege to be involved in this and be in awe of the professionalism, commitment, good humour and empathy of our wonderful volunteer telephone befrienders.

“We have worked alongside this group to provide peer support, guidance and training and a highlight of the working month is the volunteer telephone befriender group call where they can all share their experiences. It is uplifting to hear their positive feedback and fair to say that the volunteers also get a huge amount out of these calls. They will continue to work with their befriendees as we slowly come out of lockdown and as more opportunities open up, to ensure they are in the best place to start getting on with their lives in the way they want.”

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