



**In this issue:**

Freephone  
Support Line  
**Page 4**

Policies making  
a difference  
**Page 8**

Teaching  
braille online  
**Page 12**

## Supporting people with sight loss to do the everyday things they love





## Dear Supporter...

Welcome to the Spring edition of iSight.

This edition shares stories of people affected by sight loss — and the difference we are making through our services.

Advice and information are now available over the phone to anyone impacted by sight loss, with our Support Line taking calls five days a week. Individuals and families are telling us they're now getting the specialist support they need. Read about it on page 4.

On page 6, Marie O'Donnell, our new Rehabilitation and Mobility Officer, tells us about the changes she makes to peoples' homes to help them live more independently. Marie has visual impairment herself and uses some fantastic technology to do her work.

Our Policy team put the most pressing sight loss issues to politicians in advance of the Scottish Parliament election.

We are delighted that politicians from several parties agreed on the need to establish a new national low vision service. Read more on page 8.

These last 12 months have been very difficult for parents and young learners. On page 12,

we share details on how Braille is being taught to young people with visual impairment.

We are determined that no-one should face sight loss alone and our ambition is to reach more people affected by sight loss.

Thank you again for helping us tackle vision loss.

Best wishes,

**Davina Shiell**

Director of Marketing and Communications  
Sight Scotland

### Connect with us

Please let us know if we can communicate about our work, progress and future needs by email and phone so that together we can ensure everyone in Scotland with sight loss has someone to turn to. Please drop us an email to [privacy@sightscotland.org.uk](mailto:privacy@sightscotland.org.uk) and we will be delighted to update your details - thank you.

### Did you know?

Less than one in three adults get help within the first year of their sight loss diagnosis.

### iSight in alternative formats

To receive iSight in large print, Braille or audio CD please contact us on 0131 229 1456 or email [fundraising@sightscotland.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@sightscotland.org.uk)

**Sight Scotland** Registered  
Charity No. SC017167

**Sight Scotland Veterans**  
SCIO Charity No. SC047192

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EH10 4JB



# Watch our video on cooking tips for people with sight loss

There are plenty of smart techniques and equipment that people with sight loss can use to cook safely. Our Facebook page has a video with advice on organising the kitchen, plus a great technique for chopping vegetables, which can help people with sight loss cook safely and maintain their independence.

**Go to [Facebook.com/SightScotland/videos](https://www.facebook.com/SightScotland/videos) to see this video.**

## Find us on social media

You can catch all the latest photos and videos on our social media.



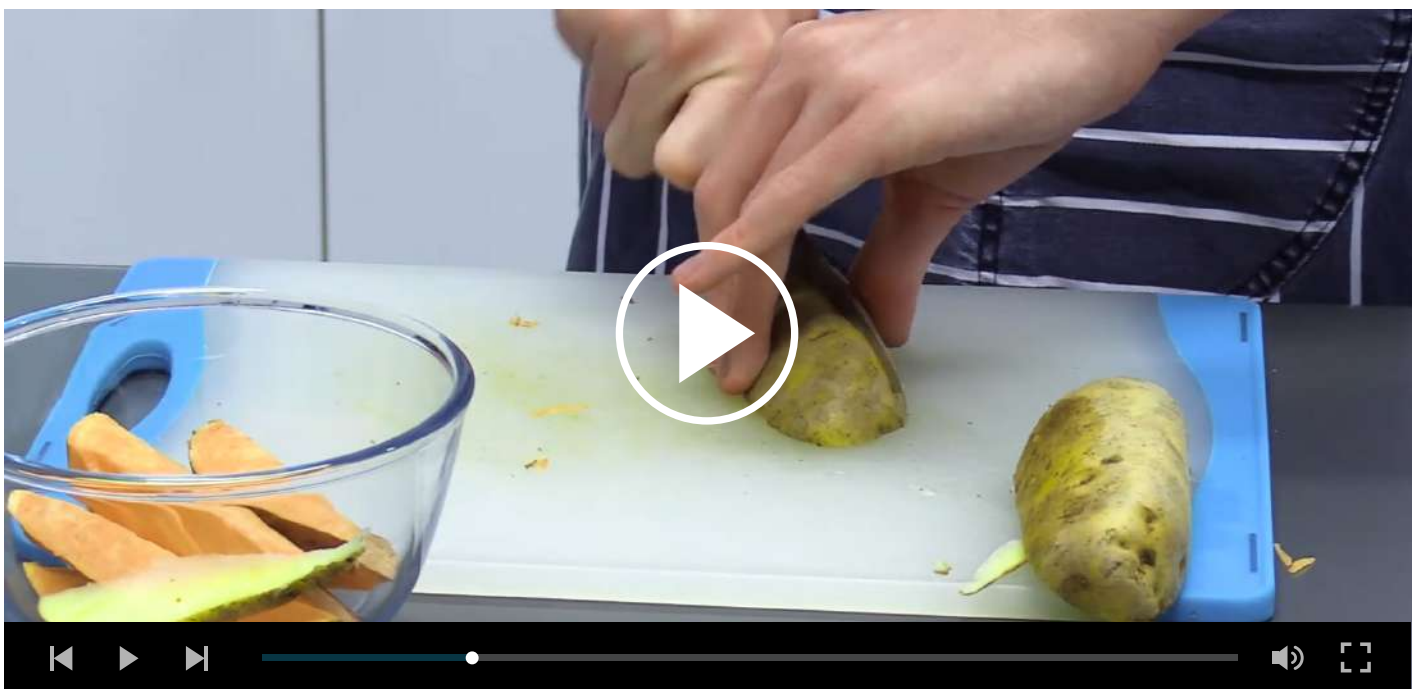
@SightScotland



[Facebook.com/SightScotland](https://www.facebook.com/SightScotland)



[Instagram.com/sightscotland](https://www.instagram.com/sightscotland)



## Sign up to our monthly email newsletter

We have started rolling out new services for people with sight loss.

For the latest updates, sign up to our E-newsletter.

Just scan the QR code with your smartphone, or visit [sightscotland.org.uk/enews](https://sightscotland.org.uk/enews)



# Telephone support for people with sight loss and their families

Individuals affected by sight loss have been ringing Sight Scotland's Support Line since it launched in January.

We realised the need for a Support Line after our research showed that visually impaired people and their families were struggling to get support at the early stages of a sight loss diagnosis.

Run by our Family Wellbeing Service, our new Support Line aims to provide this crucial support, offering advice, information and emotional support to people with sight loss, as well as their families, friends and carers.



Anita, our Senior Community Worker



## Colin and Margaret's story

Colin Fowler, 59, of Linlithgow, contacted our Support Line for advice on a magnification device for his mum.

Colin's mother Margaret has had macular degeneration for several years. The condition has made it a struggle for Margaret to read her favourite magazines.

The Family Wellbeing Service team introduced Colin and Margaret to electronic magnification.

Now, she's delighted to catch up on reading about the Royal family.

Colin said: "There wasn't much forthcoming support offered when my mum was diagnosed. We had bought some hand-held magnifiers in the past and they were of some use, but she could only see so much with them and they weren't really the best to help her reading.

"My mum's now been trying out an electronic magnifier and it's a great bit of equipment. She's really pleased. As a relative and a carer, I found the service very reassuring. Anita, the Community Worker, was always very prompt at getting back to me there was excellent communication."

# Arifa's story

Former Royal Blind School student Arifa Ather, 52, has had visual impairment since she was a child. Twelve years ago Arifa had one of her eyes removed, and more recently doctors say further loss of sight in her remaining eye could be due to a stroke.

After speaking with our Community Worker Debbie, Arifa hopes to discover more assistive technology options to aid her independence.

"I spoke to Debbie about my feelings and the difficulties I'm having," said Arifa.

"When I've called up, it's such a warm feeling over the phone and I feel that's really important. It's just great to know someone else is there if you need support and it's there for all generations.

"If my sight starts deteriorating more, I know that I can be in touch to ask about different things and equipment that could help around the house."



“

**When I've called up, it's such a warm feeling over the phone and I feel that's really important...**”



## Support Line

Talk to us on **0800 024 8973**

10am-12pm and 1pm-3pm, Monday to Friday

## Please help us tackle sight loss

Our Support Line is funded by donations.

To donate, scan the QR code below with your smartphone to visit [sightscotland.org.uk/get-involved/donate](https://sightscotland.org.uk/get-involved/donate)

Or see the back page of this magazine.



# Rehabilitation Officers empowering people with skills and strategies

People with sight loss in Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian are now receiving practical support from Sight Scotland's Rehabilitation and Mobility Officers.

This new service comes after Sight Scotland won three-year contracts to deliver support services for Health and Social Care Partnerships in these local authority areas.

## Q&A with a Rehabilitation Officer

Marie O'Donnell is our Rehabilitation and Mobility Officer who supports people with visual impairment in Edinburgh. Marie brings 18 years of experience in rehabilitation with her to Sight Scotland. She has visual impairment herself and uses equipment to assist her at work.

### What do Rehabilitation and Mobility Officers do when you visit someone?

Marie: "We carry out a full assessment of their needs. We look at how their vision is impacting their day-to-day life.

"For example, we look at how they're managing to cook a meal, read the newspaper, go shopping, or even how they are getting cash out of a cash machine. We talk about their social activities: how are they meeting friends or meeting family? That's important.

"We then look at solutions to make these tasks safer and easier, giving them more independence."

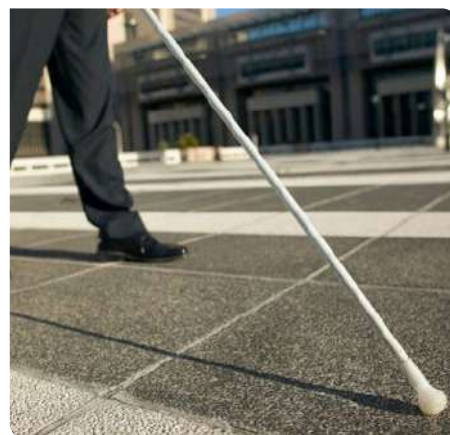
### How do you support people?

Marie: "For some people, we improve lighting in the home, so there are equal amounts of light in each room, with no lighter or darker areas. Otherwise, moving from room to room can make it difficult for the person to adjust.

"I can also teach people how to use a long cane. Someone might want to visit a friend who lives 30 minutes away by bus. So it's about finding a way to do that and helping them regain their independence."

### What equipment do you use to do your job?

Marie: "I've got a guide dog to get to work. When I'm travelling I use Google Maps and Soundscape. When you're approaching a door, Soundscape will beep faster: "beep-beep-beep!". You follow the beep and it'll take you right to the door. Soundscape also announces popular places you go to. For example, it might give a wee alert to say you're passing Greggs. I might think, 'ooh, I fancy a wee donut or a coffee' and I might pop in.



"On my computer, I use JAWS screen reader, which reads out key commands and opens windows for me. I use a keyboard with yellow keys and black letters. I touch-type and I use Lokdots which are little raised markings I put on different keys. I also have a zoom magnifier which blows things up 200x."

### What are the best things about your job?

Marie: "I love going to new places and visiting new people and getting a snippet of their lives and their stories. I love the personalities and the challenges. I've always loved problem-solving. I love helping people. I think it's all about passing on your knowledge. Even 18 years on, I love it."



“

I can also teach people how to use a long cane. Someone might want to visit a friend who lives 30 minutes away by bus.”

### **Do you or your family need support from this service?**

People living in Edinburgh, Midlothian and East Lothian may be eligible for this service. To enquire about support, please call 0800 024 8973 or visit [sightscotland.org.uk/EdinburghandLothians](https://sightscotland.org.uk/EdinburghandLothians)

# Campaigning to make Scotland fairer for people with sight loss

Sight Scotland is working to ensure our society's laws and policies include and are shaped by people impacted by sight conditions.

**By Richard Baker, Head of Policy, Public Affairs and Research**

In the lead-up to the Scottish Parliament elections, we pressed politicians to take more action to support people with visual impairment.

Our research into several areas, such as loneliness and the emotional impact of sight loss, as well as the experiences of blind and partially sighted people during the pandemic, showed how much more we need to do to make our society fairer for visually impaired people.

We used our "Time to Focus" manifesto to highlight why visual impairment needs to be a priority in the next parliament.

The manifesto's key call for action was for sight loss to be made a public health priority by establishing a new national low vision service. We were delighted that during the campaign, this policy was supported by several parties and we look forward to the new low vision service being introduced in the next parliament.



## Our Manifesto's priorities

We called on the next parliament to:

- Make sight loss a public health priority by establishing a new national low vision service and by investing in research.
- Ensure fair work opportunities and support for visually impaired people by establishing specialist employability programmes and apprenticeships across Scotland and by creating a fair benefits system.
- Create better chances for blind and partially sighted young people by increasing the number of specialist teachers in mainstream schools, and better access to specialist support for pupils.
- Create an inclusive Scotland for blind and partially sighted people by incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into Scots Law.

# Our “Time to Focus” Manifesto Pledge



All candidates for election were contacted and asked to sign up to our “Time to Focus” manifesto pledge.

The pledge asked candidates to agree with three policy commitments: early treatment and access to support; fairer chances in

education and employment; and more inclusive communities and accessible communication.

We were delighted that 81 candidates from across the political parties signed up to the pledge. We will work with the MSPs in the next parliament to make the case for action on the key issues facing people with visual impairment.

## Get involved

If you have sight loss and would like to have your voice heard by participating in our research, email Richard at: [richard.baker@sightscotland.org.uk](mailto:richard.baker@sightscotland.org.uk)

# Sharing ideas about inclusive workplaces

People with visual impairment can do all sorts of different jobs, and Kirin Saeed is leading by example.

Kirin works as Braille Proof Reader at the Scottish Braille Press. Previously, Kirin has worked at a restaurant, at a cinema, in an administration role, as well as performing on stage and singing.

Now, the active campaigner is co-leading online workshops for employers to raise awareness of ways to create more inclusive workplaces for blind and partially sighted people.

Kirin said blind and partially sighted people had unique knowledge to offer workplaces.

“The more variety of people in a workplace, the better it is - we can all learn from each other and it makes for a better society.”

In the workshop, Kirin encouraged employers to consider the changes they could make.

“We got employers to think about action plans for an employee who is gradually losing their vision and how they can manage that process better to support that person to stay in their job.

“People told us they really got what they wanted from the training and learned how to work with someone who is visually impaired.”

Sight Scotland is a member of the Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE). As part of its membership, Sight Scotland is working in a Public Social Partnership to help the Scottish Government address the disability employment gap.

Kirin said employment was very empowering.

“As a visually impaired person, employment is the foundation of getting you to do all the other things you want to do with your life. Once you’re employed you can be more part of society, make more friends, get better housing, and it just means you’re more established in life.”



Kirin ran the workshop with Sandra Taylor, Lead Rehabilitation Officer at Sight Scotland Veterans. Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans plan to deliver more of these sessions in the next year.

## Learn more about supported employment

Visit [suse.org.uk](https://suse.org.uk) or contact Richard Baker at [richard.baker@sightscotland.org.uk](mailto:richard.baker@sightscotland.org.uk) for more information about our policy campaigns on supported employment.

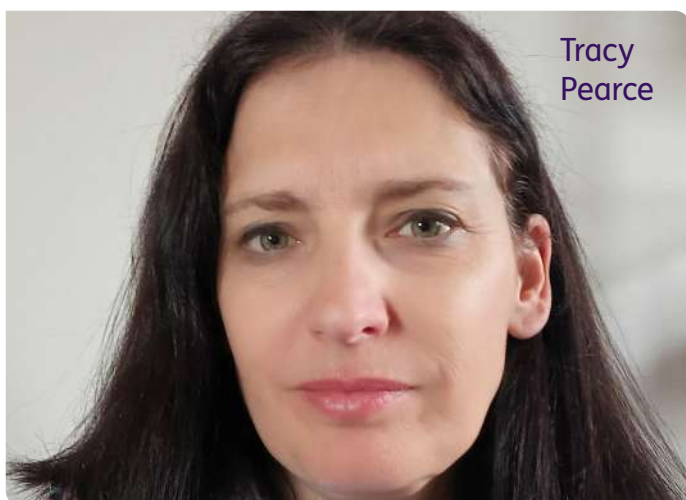


“

As a visually impaired person,  
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other things you want to do  
with your life.”

# Specialist support for children's learning

Sight Scotland provides specialist education support for children with visual impairment. We provide this learning support at the Royal Blind School and at a number of mainstream schools across the country, in partnership with local authorities.



“One of my high school students puts her camera on a tripod and points it down at the braille page. With the camera angled correctly, I can see the student's fingers and the braille dots easily, so can assist when needed. The student is doing really well. In just a few months, she's really pleased she can read whole words and she is starting to read sentences too.”



## Learning in new ways

Children with visual impairment are being supported to learn in innovative new ways by Sight Scotland's Outreach teachers.

Tracy Pearce is an Outreach teacher with 17 years' experience who supports 40 children in the Midlothian council area.

Tracy works with children, their families, classroom teachers and support staff to ensure children with visual impairment have equal access to education.

“Often, this involves supporting schools and encouraging them to bring in the routines, equipment and resources available to overcome the barriers of visual impairment.

“I also teach and use Braille and encourage pupils to develop good I.T. skills, such as touch typing, magnification and use of voice software, as appropriate.”

One of the students Tracy supports has been learning to read braille over Microsoft Teams.

## Making documents more accessible

Tracy said that while remote learning was difficult for pupils, a silver lining had been that teachers putting lessons online had made more learning materials accessible by screen readers.

“I have found that teachers have been happier to make simple adaptations to documents to make them more accessible to screen reading software. For anybody using a screen reader, it's much easier to navigate a document when the text for headings and subheadings is formatted as Heading 1 or Heading 2, rather than simply made larger or made bold.

“If the headings are formatted as Heading 1 or 2, the computer knows there's a heading there and then screen readers can provide a list of the headings, which helps children to skim documents. I think teachers are more of this aware now.”

# Day pupils returning to Royal Blind School campus

Following on from school closures due to the government's COVID guidelines, day pupils have been returning to the Royal Blind School in Edinburgh since mid-February.



Lucy Chetty, Sight Scotland's Head of Learning, said it was a happy return for the children and young people who had been learning at home this year.

"The pupils have all been really excited to be back at school and have enjoyed the experience of returning. They were keen to come back and by all accounts, have been very pleased once they were back."

The Royal Blind School's full-time residential pupils have remained living at the school's on-site accommodation for the past year, receiving their education with appropriate safety measures in place.

Royal Blind School



## Good times continue at Forward Vision

The continued lifting of Coronavirus restrictions is bringing more hugs and good times to the people we care for at Forward Vision.

Forward Vision provides residential care for young adults who have visual impairment and additional disabilities.

Family visits have taken many different forms over the past few months, in accordance with government advice.

Simon Pearce Madge, Senior Residential Care Worker, said outdoor visits to Forward Vision's sensory garden had been very popular with families.

"For months, families have been coming in and spending time with their loved ones in the garden. We also ran our cafe here, which meant families could be outside, have a coffee and spend time here, when the regulation allowed it," Simon said.

Recently, guidelines have allowed family members to visit and care for their loved ones in their rooms too.

Simon said: "The guidance is, one family member can come in to visit if they wear PPE and pass a lateral flow test before coming.

"You can also hug a family member now, too. The first hug I witnessed was for one of the guys I support, when his mum came to visit one weekend in March for a surprise.

"It was his 21st birthday. All of a sudden, his mum was there, giving him a hug. It was lovely. That was something so simple, but you take it for granted."

Simon said families and colleagues had thought up plenty of imaginative ways to facilitate family get-togethers safely.

"People have been really inventive and creative. We've had Zoom quizzes, remote parties and games with families. People have been very innovative with the time they've had together."



“

It was his 21st birthday. All of a sudden, his mum was there, giving him a hug. It was lovely.”



# All hands on deck at the Scottish Braille Press

Colleagues at the Scottish Braille Press are looking forward to summer, after working a busy year through the pandemic.

The Scottish Braille Press, which is run by Sight Scotland, provides financial statements and other documents in alternative formats for people who need them – including our very own iSight.

When the Coronavirus pandemic struck the UK in March 2020, the Scottish Braille Press went into overdrive so people with visual impairment could get the information they needed in an accessible format.

In the month of April 2020, the Scottish Braille Press processed 16,000 more letters than the 31,000 letters it would normally send out in April — increasing its output by 52 per cent.

Production Manager Tracy Christie said she was proud of her colleagues' dedication.

“All the staff who were able to stepped up and worked overtime for the first two months of the pandemic. We were doing evenings and weekends,” Tracy said.

“It was all hands on deck, transcribing and processing to get information to the people who needed it.



“We prioritised requests from the Scottish Government and local councils for leaflets about COVID-19.”

Tracy said: “The work we produced was sent to blind and partially sighted customers throughout the UK, who were amongst the most vulnerable and least able to obtain this information via other means.”

Preventative measures were introduced in the office, such as spacing colleagues throughout the building, the use of styluses for touch screens, and the provision of hand sanitiser, latex gloves and anti-viral wipes.

Tracy said her colleagues went above and beyond during a very difficult time for everyone.

“The Scottish Braille Press provides supported employment opportunities for people with disabilities, in particular those with visual impairment.

“Approximately 50 per cent of colleagues here have mental or physical health conditions so the impact on people’s mental well-being and the implications around social distancing for those with a visual impairment was exacerbated.

“I’m so proud of their dedication and the way everyone supported each other. Even if someone has their own anxiety, colleagues are continuing to support each other and put each other at ease, which is lovely.”

“

**All the staff who were able to stepped up and worked overtime for the first two months of the pandemic.”**



### iSight alternative formats

If you have sight loss and would like to receive our iSight in an alternative format, just give us a call on 0131 446 3099.



# Tackle a Sight for Sight

## Help people with vision loss

Take on a personal fundraising activity inspired by your favourite Scottish sight. From cycling around Loch Ness to climbing Arthur's Seat, the choice is yours.

 Visit [sightscotland.org.uk](https://sightscotland.org.uk)

   **#SightForSight**

Registered Charity No. SC017167

# Newbie skater tackles Kiltwalk Challenge



Mame

A huge thank you to everyone who took part or donated to this year's Kiltwalk fundraising challenge!

One keen Kiltwalker was 10-year-old Mame, who lives in West Lothian.

Mame challenged herself to roller skate 100 laps of her school playground wearing tartan on Saturday 24 April.

It was a bold challenge - particularly since she was only just learning to roller skate!

But Mame was undeterred.

"I practised every Friday after school," Mame said.

**“Even though it was hard, I had lots of fun and really enjoyed my challenge.”**

"At first, it was really hard. I was scared of a little hill I had to go down, but once I got better, it was easier."

Mame's mum, Laura, said she was proud of Mame's determination.

"After lap number 50, we had to take her skates off and put plasters on her feet as blisters were forming. But she kept going."

Mame's fundraising effort raised more than £300 to help Sight Scotland tackle sight loss. Mame's donation will be topped up an extra 50 per cent by The Hunter Foundation to a total of £450.

"Even though it was hard, I had lots of fun and really enjoyed my challenge," Mame said.

"Next year, I'd love to skate 5 kilometres. But, I'll need some practising and hopefully not get as many blisters!"

Thank you to all our teams who took part in the Kiltwalk - that's you Imogen, Mick, Cheryll, Rachel, Mame, Laura and Robert!



# I would like to help support Sight Scotland



## Sight Scotland

Tackling vision loss together

Please complete and return this form or donate online at [sightscotland.org.uk/donate](https://sightscotland.org.uk/donate)

Title: ..... Forename: ..... Surname: .....

Address: .....

Postcode: ..... Email address: .....

Phone number: ..... By giving us your email address you consent to receiving email updates from Sight Scotland.

### 1. I would like to make a donation

I enclose a cheque or voucher made payable to Sight Scotland ☐ Individual gift amount £ .....

Please debit my Mastercard ☐ Visa ☐ CAF Card ☐

Card no.                 Expiry date   /   Security code

Name on card ..... Signature(s) .....

### 2. I would like to set up a regular gift

Please consider making a monthly donation. Monthly donations support Sight Scotland's ongoing work and future planning to ensure everyone with sight loss in Scotland gets the help they need.

I would like to make a monthly gift of £5 ☐ £9 ☐ £15 ☐

My own choice of £ .....

Starting on the 1st ☐ 15th ☐ of month  year

To: The Manager ..... Bank / Building society .....

Address ..... Postcode .....

Name(s) of account holder(s) ..... Signature(s) .....

Account no.         Sort code    Date   /   /   June 2021

#### Originator's ID 251709



Instruction to your bank or building society:  
Please pay Sight Scotland direct debits from the in this instruction, subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Sight Scotland, and if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

### 3. My Gift Aid

Make your donation worth 25% more with Gift Aid. If you are a UK tax payer, we can reclaim 25p for every £1 you donate - just tick the box below.

☐ Yes, I am a UK tax payer and I would like Sight Scotland to reclaim tax on all donations I have made in the past 4 years or will make in the future until I notify you otherwise. I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and / or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. Please notify us if you want to cancel this declaration, change your name or home address or if you no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and / or capital gains.

*giftaid it*

### 4. Communications preferences

If you would prefer not to hear from us or would like to change the way we communicate with you please contact us on 0131 446 3089 or email [privacy@sightscotland.org.uk](mailto:privacy@sightscotland.org.uk)



#### The Direct Debit

This Guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that accept instructions to pay Direct Debits. If there are any changes to the amount, date or frequency of your Direct Debit Sight Scotland will notify you ten working days in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed. If you request Sight Scotland to collect a payment, confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request. If an error is made in the payment of your Direct Debit, by Sight Scotland or your bank or building society, you are entitled to a full and immediate refund of the amount paid from your bank or building society. If you receive a refund you are not entitled to, you must pay it back when Sight Scotland asks you to. You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by simply contacting your bank or building society. Written confirmation may be required. Please also notify us.