



**Sight Scotland  
Veterans**

# **Annual Review 2021-22**



**Tackling vision loss together**

# At a glance

Total amount spent supporting veterans with sight loss:

# £5,327,000

Total income:

# £1,612,000

Net gain on investments:

# £4,066,000

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# Who we are

We support veterans with vision loss, assisting them and their families to adapt to the impact of visual impairment. We help veterans to regain confidence, restore independence and make new connections. We are continually evolving our approach to ensure we can reach every veteran who needs us.

We are there to support veterans with sight loss by:

- Developing people’s skills and resources for independent living.
- Supporting and meeting individuals’ needs and aspirations.

Involving people as leaders, employees and supporters, and proactively engaging people in shaping the services they receive.

Campaigning for equal rights and funding medical research into visual impairment.

Innovating our services to reflect the changing needs of those who need us most.

The vast majority of veterans that we support lost their sight after their time in service due to old age and conditions like glaucoma and macular degeneration. A smaller number of veterans lost their sight during active service.

None of our work would be possible without the commitment of our outstanding community, including our staff, volunteers and donors. The contribution of veterans affected by sight loss is also invaluable in enabling us to grow and reach more veterans experiencing sight loss.



## Our Patron, President, and Board

Sight Scotland Veterans is the operating name of Scottish War Blinded, a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, charity number SC047192

### Patron

His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester, K.G., G.C.V.O.

### President

His Grace The Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, K.B.E.

### Trustees (The Directors of Sight Scotland Veterans)

Elected by Contributors:

- Michael Craig (Chair)
- Graeme Bold
- Professor Mike Donnelly
- Mike Martin (resigned 29 June 2022)
- Jay Hogarty (resigned September 2021)
- David McArthur
- Aidan McCorry
- Michelle McWilliams
- Stephanie Philips
- Elizabeth Porterfield
- Dianne-Dominique Theakstone
- Catherine Topley
- David McArthur
- Catherine Topley
- Dianne-Dominique Theakstone
- Laraine Aikman (appointed 13 April 2022)
- Sif Rai (appointed 13 April 2022)

### Chief Executive and Secretary

Mark O'Donnell – Chief Executive (resigned 6 October 2021)

Theresa Shearer – Interim Chief Executive (20 October 2021 – 19 January 2022)

Craig Spalding – Chief Executive (appointed 24 January 2022)

**Principal Office** – 2a Robertson Avenue, Edinburgh, EH11 1PZ

**Auditor** – BDO LLP, Citypoint, 65 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5HD

**Bankers** – The Royal Bank of Scotland plc, 26 Home Street, Edinburgh EH3 9LZ

**Solicitors** – Thorntons, Citypoint, 3rd Floor, 65 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5HD

**Investment advisors** – Willis Towers Watson, Watson House, London Road Reigate Surrey RH2 9PQ

## Words from our Chair



I am proud to present Sight Scotland Veterans' 2021-2022 Annual Review.

On behalf of my fellow Trustees, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed so much to the mission of Sight Scotland Veterans. Our dedicated members of staff and volunteers have done a wonderful job in supporting over 1,400 veterans to live as independently as possible.

I was delighted to welcome our new Chief Executive, Craig Spalding, to Sight Scotland Veterans and Sight Scotland in January 2022. We are enjoying working with Craig, who brings a wealth of experience in leadership from the health sector.

The 2021-2022 year – in common with the previous year – was dominated by the management of the Covid pandemic. No person or organisation was left untouched by its effects and although restrictions have now been lifted, we continue to adopt best practice to keep our service users and staff safe.

The pandemic brought with it opportunities to re-think working practices, too. We adopted several new procedures and practices, and we also developed a new service that provides remote support to veterans. This new service, The Hub, links veterans socially through group telephone calls and was so popular that it has continued operating after restrictions eased. We also developed a new direction for Sight Scotland Veterans. Our new strategy seeks to reach out to significantly more veterans with sight loss, so that we can now support veterans at an earlier stage of their diagnosis as well, whilst also seeking to extend our services to families and friends to provide advice and support. You can read more about our strategy on the next few pages.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed so much to the mission of Sight Scotland Veterans.

**Michael Craig**  
Chair of the Board  
Sight Scotland

# Our new strategy

In 2021, we set ourselves a new strategy for the next three years.

Our new strategy aims to reach out to significantly more veterans with sight loss, at an earlier stage where possible, whilst also aiming to extend our services to family and friends to provide advice and support.

## Why we developed this new strategy

Over the last decade, our support has predominantly been for veterans with significant visual impairment. This support has taken place at our activity centres and through our outreach and community work across Scotland. However, we recognised that there are many more veterans who could benefit from support at an earlier stage in their sight loss journey. Early intervention can have significant benefits, in terms of slowing down the impact of sight loss. We also recognised that family members of those experiencing sight loss could benefit from support and advice.



## Planning this new direction

In early 2021, we sought both feedback on our current services and new ideas from a number of veterans and colleagues. We held focus groups and ran telephone interviews through a market research agency. Combining this with prior research, we developed our new strategy.

## Our new aims

We want to support all veterans in Scotland who have sight loss, regardless of the cause. If a veteran is struggling with their sight – or they struggle with their sight after a sight loss diagnosis – we are here to support them, their family and their friends.

## Our new strategy

Our new strategy aims to reach out to significantly more veterans with sight loss, at an earlier stage where possible, whilst also aiming to extend our services to family and friends to provide advice and support.

We set ourselves a number of strategic goals to guide us on achieving our strategy, as well as corresponding objectives.



## Our strategic goals and objectives

To accomplish our strategy, we set four goals.

### Goal 1: Enhance the support we provide

We will ensure that the individual is always at the heart of all our services by focusing on all stages of their sight loss journey, and we will extend our services and provide a more responsive approach at an earlier stage.

We will do this by:

- Supporting veterans to increase their emotional wellbeing and their financial wellbeing
- Building our knowledge of Assistive Technology
- Creating a community of peers.

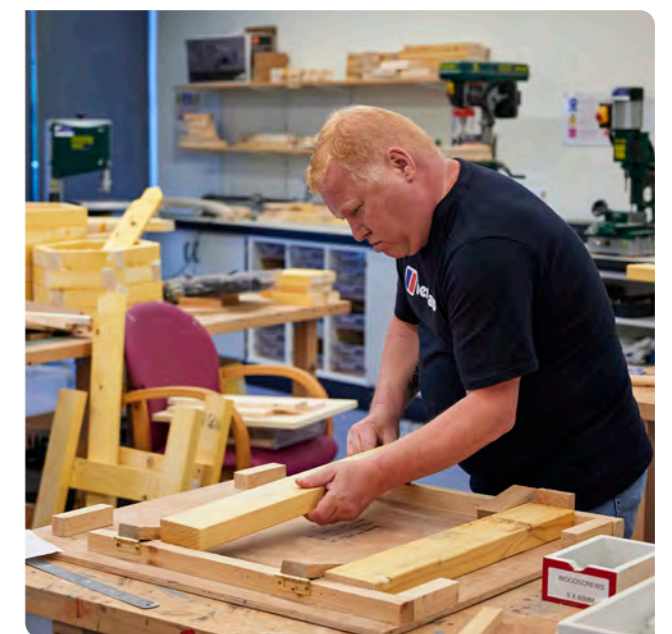


### Goal 2: To remove barriers and become more accessible

We will expand our eligibility criteria to help veterans across Scotland at any stage of their sight loss journey, and not only those with significant sight loss. We will make it easier for veterans and their families and friends to contact us and get the support they need in a timely manner.

We will do this by:

- Tailoring our existing services to ensure we are responding to the most urgent and important needs of our veterans
- Providing support quickly and easily
- Developing a centre without walls to ensure veterans across Scotland can benefit from some of the support we can offer in our centres in West Lothian and Paisley
- Reviewing who we support and how we support them.



**Goal 3: Understand what success looks like and ways to improve**

We will capture and measure the success we are having, so we can strengthen our services and demonstrate the difference we are making.

We will do this by:

- Understanding the difference we are making by strengthening the way we measure our impact
- Working alongside our community through co-production

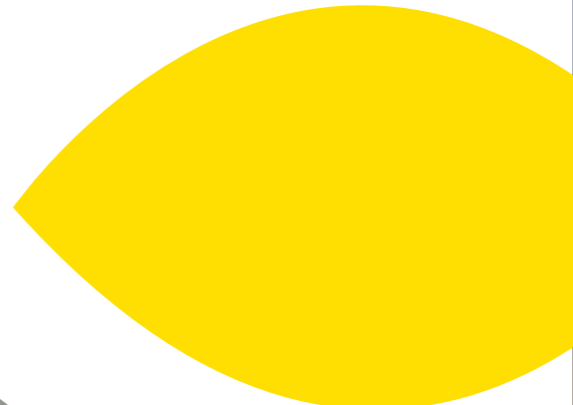
Responding to what people tell us and innovating.

**Goal 4: Use our resources wisely.**

We will balance how we plan, manage, and operate our services to make the best use of our resources and ensure our funding is spent responsibly.

We will do this by:

- Constantly evolving and developing our operating model and investing in digital technology to ensure efficiency
- Prioritising those in need
- Involving volunteers in our work.



# Independent Living

Veterans with sight loss can experience difficulties in their daily lives – whether it is around their house or in their community.

Our Independent Living teams support veterans to overcome these challenges, to live well and independently, giving them the skills needed to adapt to sight loss.

Our Independent Living Workers provide the veterans with:

- information about their visual impairment
- an empathic, listening ear
- assessment for equipment, and the provision of equipment to support independence
- support to continue their hobbies, such as through better lighting or magnification
- signposting to other local services that can offer social opportunities or help.

Rehabilitation Officers coordinate their support with our Independent Living team, providing comprehensive assistance to veterans with sight loss.

Our teams conduct an expert review of each veteran’s mobility and use of their low vision. To support their independence, they are taught a wide range of skills appropriate to each individual, including learning how to use canes and assistive technology.

Veterans can be supported to learn to use long canes for navigation and mobility. This can include lighting, magnifiers, accessible mobile phones, liquid level indicators, and talking versions of appliances, such as talking clocks.

We also offer family members and carers advice on being a sighted guide and sighted guiding techniques.

### Support during the pandemic

During the pandemic, Rehabilitation Officers conducted their assessments, advice, and support provision over the phone or online. Once guidance permitted it in 2021, we returned to supporting veterans in their homes as this creates the best opportunity to tailor our work to their circumstances, and to ensure they receive the full benefit from any assistive technology supplied.



**“If I keep getting support from Sight Scotland Veterans and make more friends through the charity, I’ll be alright.”**

- Stephen Jennings,  
Territorial Army Veteran

# Stephen’s story



Territorial Army veteran Stephen Jennings said support from Sight Scotland Veterans helped him “reclaim himself” after a stroke left him visually impaired.

Jennings, 61, said he felt “robbed” when he was struck by a stroke two years ago, which impacted the left side of his vision and led to medical retirement.

Struggling to adapt to his sudden sight loss and unable to go out and about independently, the Edinburgh veteran said he battled anxiety and depression.

But with expert support from charity Sight Scotland Veterans, Stephen is regaining his confidence and independence.

Stephen said: “I was very depressed and I was in a dark place, but all of this support has given me back my personality again. My self-esteem has gone back up.

“I’m reclaiming myself now. What I took for granted was things like just walking up the road to go to the pub. But when I’ve done more of my long cane training, I’ll be able to do these things again. I can’t wait.

Stephen learned to use a long cane at sessions with one of our Rehabilitation Officers, Kate White.

“I look forward to my cane training sessions now and I’m starting to trust the cane. Kate’s currently teaching me how to cross roads safely and manage stairs,” Stephen said.

“My Independent Living Worker, Keith, visits and we go out for a coffee. I can take his elbow to guide me if we go out and it’s been really good. He helps me feel relaxed. He took me to the parade in Edinburgh for Remembrance Day and kept talking to me to let me know what was happening. It was like I was watching.”

Stephen said he enjoys speaking with other veterans on The Hub telephone groups.

“I’m talking to other veterans through the charity’s virtual hub and hearing their experiences, and it’s really helpful to listen to what they’ve been through. I’d missed the comradeship, and that’s what it’s all about.

“I look forward to meeting more people at Sight Scotland Veterans’ Linburn Centre in West Lothian. If I keep getting support from Sight Scotland Veterans and make more friends through the charity, I’ll be alright.”



## Henry's story

A Dalkeith veteran with sight loss is keeping active thanks to the support of our Rehabilitation team.

Henry Tyrell, 94, served with the Royal Navy from 1945 to 1947. He has always been an avid walker and loves keeping busy with daily strolls, regular dance classes and gym sessions.

However, with no sight in his left eye and further deteriorating vision due to macular degeneration, Henry's vision loss began to put him in danger around roads.

Henry and his family were worried about the impact his sight loss was having on his independence, as he felt "nervous" about venturing out alone.

But after orientation training sessions with a Rehabilitation Officer, Henry is out again with confidence and navigating safely.

Henry said: "I've got to move."

"When I noticed my sight deteriorating, I was very worried because I thought it was going to take away my activities and that I was going to have to depend on people. Activity is what I need. Getting out to dancing has woken me up to socialising.

With the support of my Rehabilitation Officer, I feel confident again when I go out. She has thoroughly thought about everything for my walks," Henry said.

We also provided Henry with tips and small pieces of equipment to aid his independence at home – including specialist daylight lighting and an electronic magnifier so he can carry on with his Codewords puzzles.

Henry's daughter Kate said: "Sight Scotland Veterans' support has been about how to maximise activities to keep my Dad independent, and that's been fantastic. It's practical advice which means that my Dad can still get full enjoyment out of his life."



## David's story



Army veteran David Murray said he is enjoying local walks independently again thanks to Sight Scotland Veterans' specialist support.

David, 91, was diagnosed with glaucoma over 20 years ago and is now severely sight impaired, which he describes as "unable to tell if it's light or dark".

The keen walker used to do laps of the same spot outside his home, unable to venture any further safely, until he started receiving long cane training from Sight Scotland Veterans.

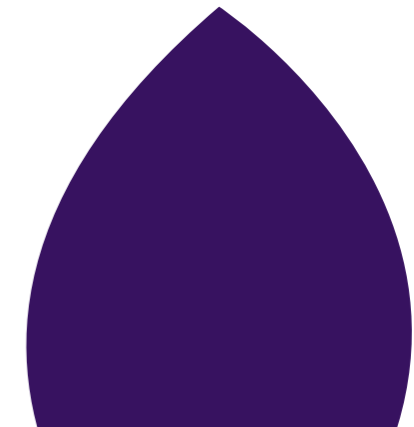
David is now well versed in navigating with a long cane – a mobility tool used to detect objects and provide information to the user about the environment just ahead of them. He is now walking around Galashiels independently to his heart's content.

David said: "I love walking, always have done. Before I had the long cane, when I was on my own all I could do was walk back and forward at home with my short cane and walking stick. I couldn't go out to the roads. People used to ask me how many laps I'd do in a day."

Rehabilitation Officer Sharon McAllister began long cane sessions with David just before the first Covid lockdown in 2020. When face-to-face visits resumed after restrictions lifted, she continued her work with him.

David said: "Using a long cane gives me a lot of confidence. I can go around the town and out for a coffee and a bacon roll," he said.

"I'm out every day. I'll do it for as long as I can. I want to be independent. Without having had this training I wouldn't be able to do what I do."



# Activity centres

Engaging in meaningful activities is important for mental health and for a sense of connection and camaraderie between veterans.



Our Hawkhead Centre in Paisley, Renfrewshire, and our Linburn Centre in Wilkieston, West Lothian, are specifically tailored to the needs of veterans with sight loss. We arrange free door-to-door transport to the centres from most local locations and provide a range of activities including:

-  Meaningful activities, such as woodwork workshops, skills kitchen, IT suite and virtual reality, quizzes, music groups, garden, "chill and chat", games, flower sessions, and arts room.
-  Social network activities, including special events, activities, sports, and lunch with staff, volunteers, and other veterans with sight loss.
-  Sporting activities, including bowls, archery, acoustic shooting, gym exercises, and chair-based light exercises.





## The Hub telephone groups

In late 2020 we worked with Age Concern to run group telephone calls for veterans to participate in. These group calls were very popular because of the social isolation many veterans had been feeling during the Covid lockdown.

From November 2021 onwards, we refocused this remote support provision into its own service, which is called "The Hub". The Hub is a social service that veterans can access through their phone line, wherever they live in the country.

The Hub phone group calls involve up to four attendees and last an hour on average. Groups can be topic based, such as reminiscence and quizzes, or activity based, such as art classes and wellbeing sessions. There is also a group that supports veterans with sight loss who are experiencing the sight loss condition Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

In November 2021, there were 70 people participating in the telephone groups. By March 2022, 115 people were accessing this support.

Veterans have told us in feedback that connection with others was an important driver of participation in the call groups. Veterans also said their groups had become one of the things they looked forward to, as it relieved social isolation and loneliness.

**“ People are social creatures and it’s good for us to talk to other people, even if we’re talking over the phone and in different towns.”**

- Joe Gallie, Royal Navy veteran



## Joe’s story



Joe Gallie, 58, said the Hub calls are a “fun and interesting focal point” of his day.

“On Wednesdays and Fridays, I take part in the quizzes. It’s good: it exercises the old brain matter,” Joe said.

“I also take part in the discussion groups, where we talk about current events and politics in other countries: Joe Biden, Putin, or Macron.”

Joe lives in Aberdeen and served in the Royal Navy.

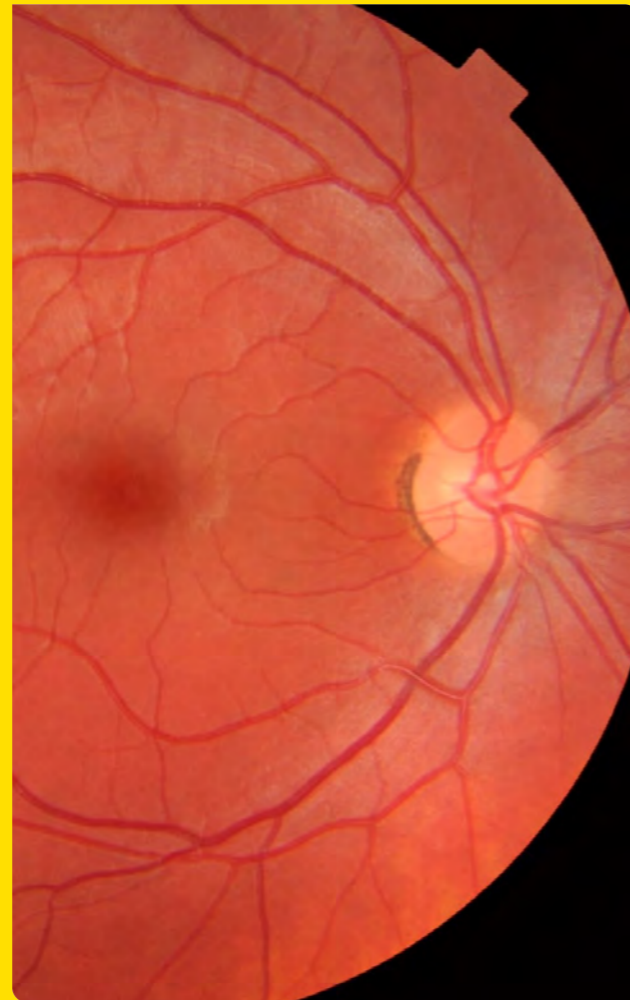
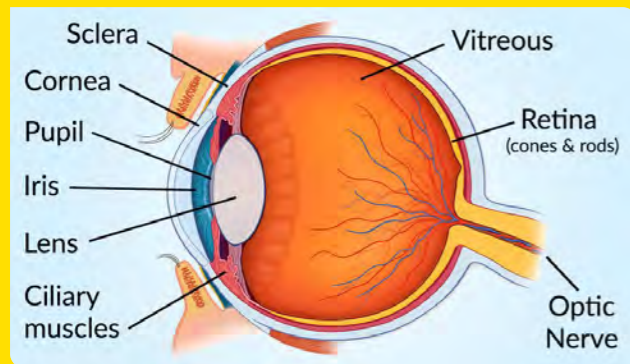
Joe said: “People are social creatures and it’s good for us to talk to other people, even if we’re talking over the phone and in different towns.

“A lot of people on the calls just want to hear the opinions of others. There are no arguments – you just say what you think and other people agree or disagree.

“It’s refreshing to see for a change. And you don’t have to talk a lot, you can just listen and talk occasionally.”

# Medical Research

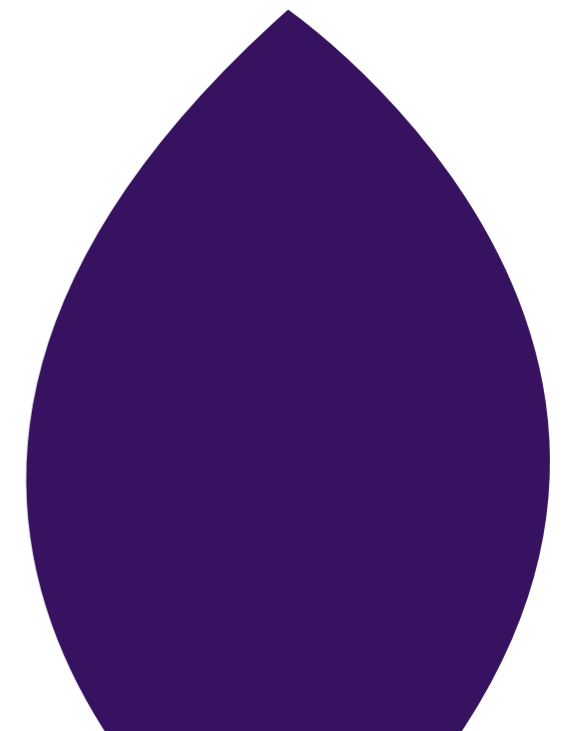
We continued our commitment, which began in 2019, to provide funding of £250,000 spread over 3 years as a co-founding charity of Action Against Age Related Macular Degeneration (AAAMD). AAAMD, a charity in its own right, was founded by four leading sight loss charities to join efforts in identifying new interventions to stop the progression of early age-related macular degeneration.



# Marketing and Communications

The priority for marketing has been to further promote the new brand and to attract new service users through advertising campaigns and press coverage.

The campaigns we ran succeeded in attracting new referrals and strengthening brand awareness.

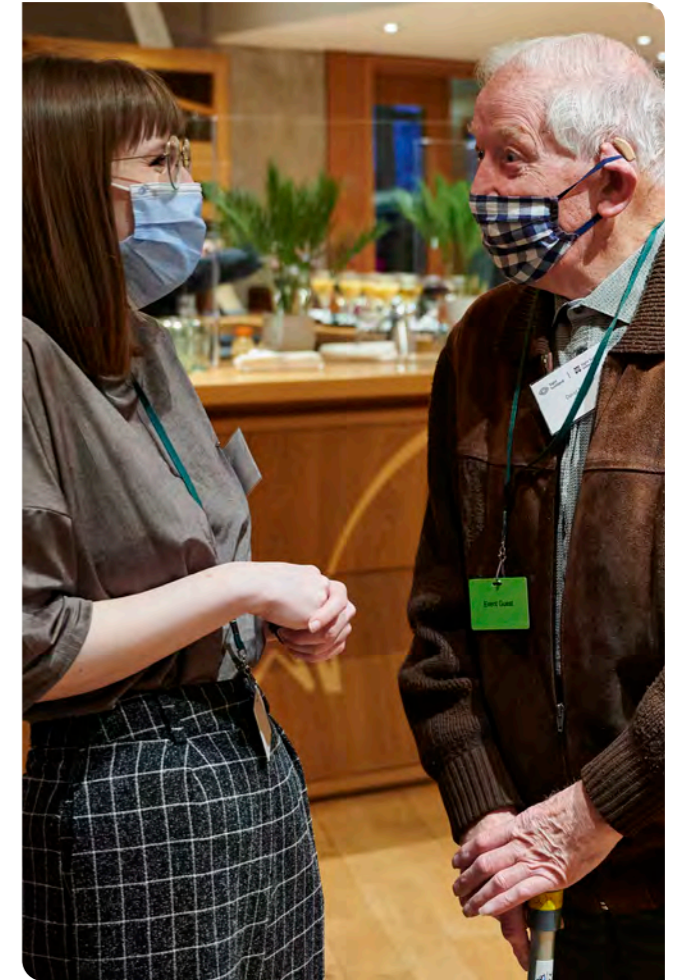


# Policy

Our policy work focussed on the Scottish Parliament elections in May 2021. Prior to the elections, we launched our first manifesto “Time to Focus on Sight Loss” jointly with Sight Scotland. The policy calls highlighted in the manifesto were promoted through a social media campaign, and 80 candidates supported the pledge. The key policy call was for a new national low vision service to be established, and this was endorsed by three political parties. Ahead of the elections, we worked with the Electoral Commission to raise awareness of support and information available for blind and partially sighted voters.

We were delighted to be able to hold our first networking event in the Scottish Parliament since before the pandemic. The networking event was hosted by Maree Todd MSP the Minister for Public Health, Women’s Health and Sport, (pictured)\* Among the guests was David, a veteran with visual impairment, supported by Sight Scotland Veterans pictured on the top right of the opposite page.

We also launched #OurFairRailVision campaign, which is calling on the Scottish Government to work with local authorities to establish a new national policy for free rail travel across Scotland for those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons card and their companions. Several of our veterans fed into the design and messaging for this campaign.



# Financial Review

Income is shown in total at £1.6 million, derived mainly from investments and legacies. Income from legacies at £477,000 is showing a marked increase from last year's receipts of £181,000. Investment income was £860,000 (2021, £884,000).

As a result of Covid measures, the Hawkhead and Linburn Centres were closed for activities, and the Independent Living service was delivered remotely. Expenditure at the Linburn Centre was slightly less than last year at £1.14 million (2021, £1.18 million), and financial support to veterans continues to decrease as we lost some of our veterans during the year. Total expenditure for financial support was £612,000 (2021, £678,000). The Hawkhead Centre in Paisley has shown increased total expenditure of £1.16 million (2021, £1.14 million).

The Independent Living service reports expenditure of £2.14 million for the year (2021, £1.88 million). Although Independent Living Workers have not been able to meet veterans directly during the year, they continued to support veterans with regular phone calls and also arranged any equipment required to be delivered to veterans.

The result from our operations, including everything except the gains on our investments and the actuarial gain on the pension scheme, was a deficit of £3.7 million. This is in line with our strategy to utilise our reserves for the benefit of veterans and develop innovative services for them.

Investments recovered during the year, regaining losses reported in the previous year. The gains in the value of the investments totalled £4.1 million. We have drawn from our investments during the year to sustain both capital and revenue expenditure.

The overall result (Net movement in funds) is an increase of £250,000.

The balance sheet shows tangible fixed assets of £14.3 million, mainly comprising of our two activity centres, properties at Linburn, and associated vehicles. We maintained a healthy cash and bank balance in order to meet our commitments and we continue to draw from our investments of £48 million in a managed fashion in order to maximise returns.

Sight Scotland Veterans do not proactively fundraise due to income levels received through investments. We remain incredibly grateful to all the individuals and trusts who donate to our work and allow us to give enhanced care and support to veterans.

## Reserves Policy

Sight Scotland Veterans will continue to deploy our reserves for the benefit of the people who use our services and in line with our constitution, whilst ensuring that the level of reserves does not fall below our current minimum level.

Sight Scotland Veterans' financial plans are based on a five-year financial forecast, which determines the extent of the services we can fund in the coming years, mainly from the existing reserves, leaving a reserve sufficient to enable us to sustain the organisation's activities thereafter. The strategic review will serve to keep this reserves policy under review.

Our total funds are £62 million, all unrestricted as to their purpose. Of that £62 million, £14.3 million is held in fixed assets and

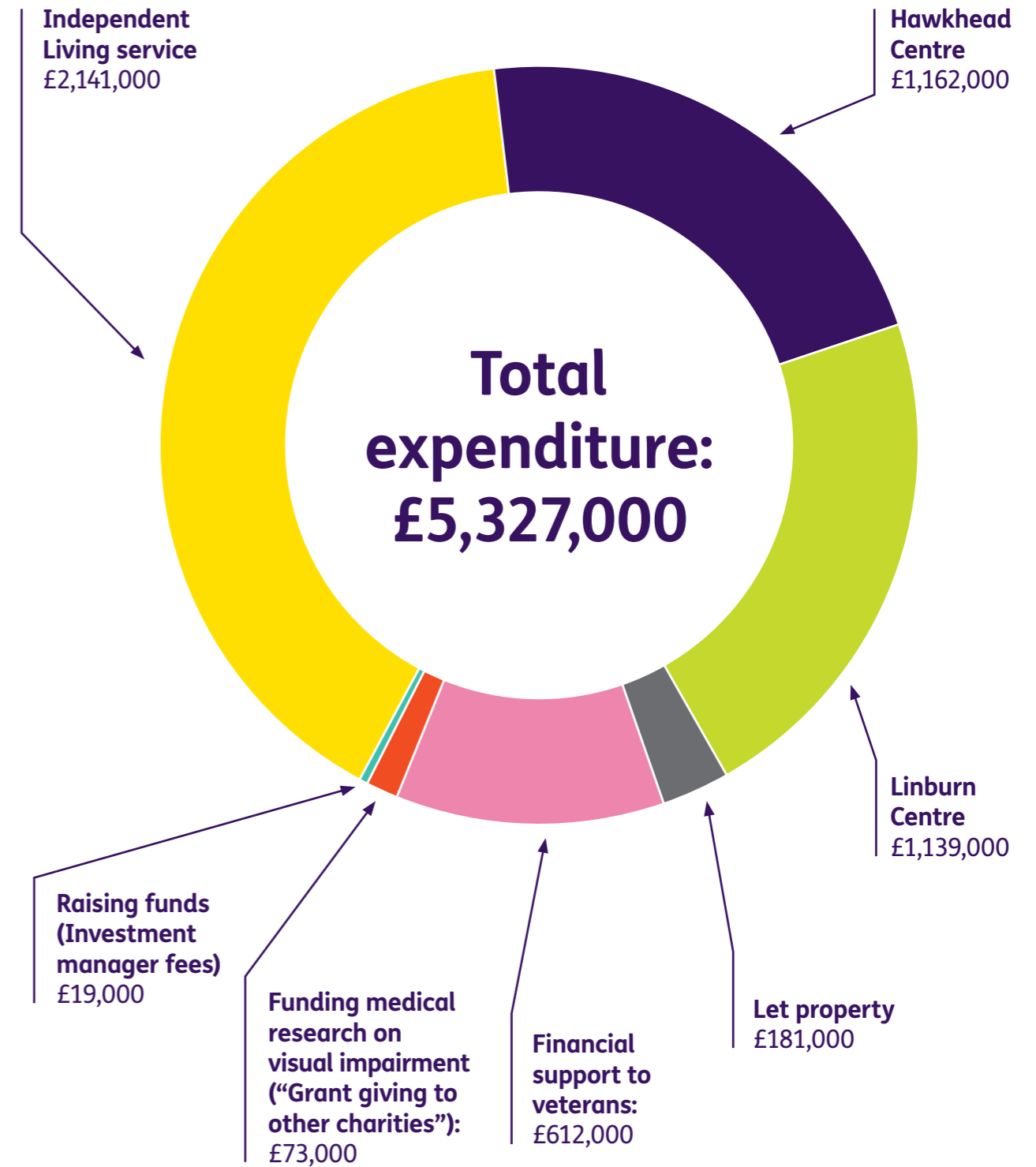
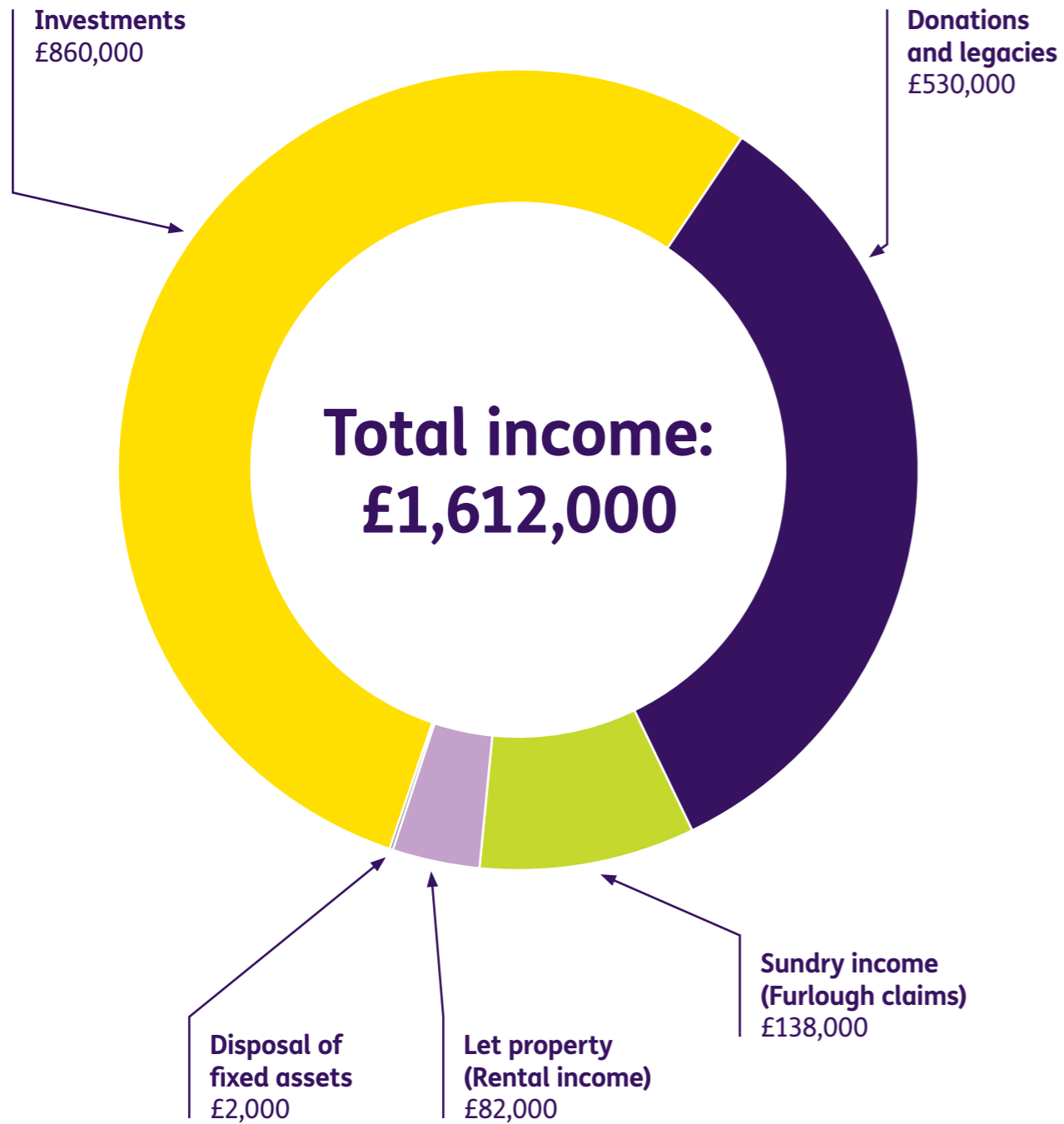
£47.6 million is in investments. Our free reserves are therefore £0.1 million but our investments of £47.6 million (2021, £46.2 million) can be realised as required and are regarded as free reserves in nature.

The accumulated reserves continue to provide all the protection the Trustees require against any financial difficulty in the event of adverse circumstances. It is the view of the Trustees that proper stewardship demands that a reserve be maintained to guard against insolvency, but that the level of reserves currently held makes the likelihood of such an eventuality extremely remote in the short and medium term. The Trustees have agreed that the charity should hold a minimum reserve of 12 months running costs (currently £7 million) and this is currently well within our free reserves.



## How we achieved our income

## How we spent our funds

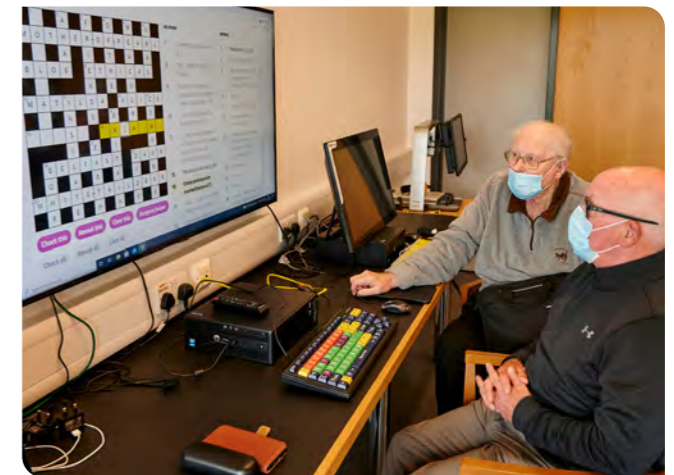
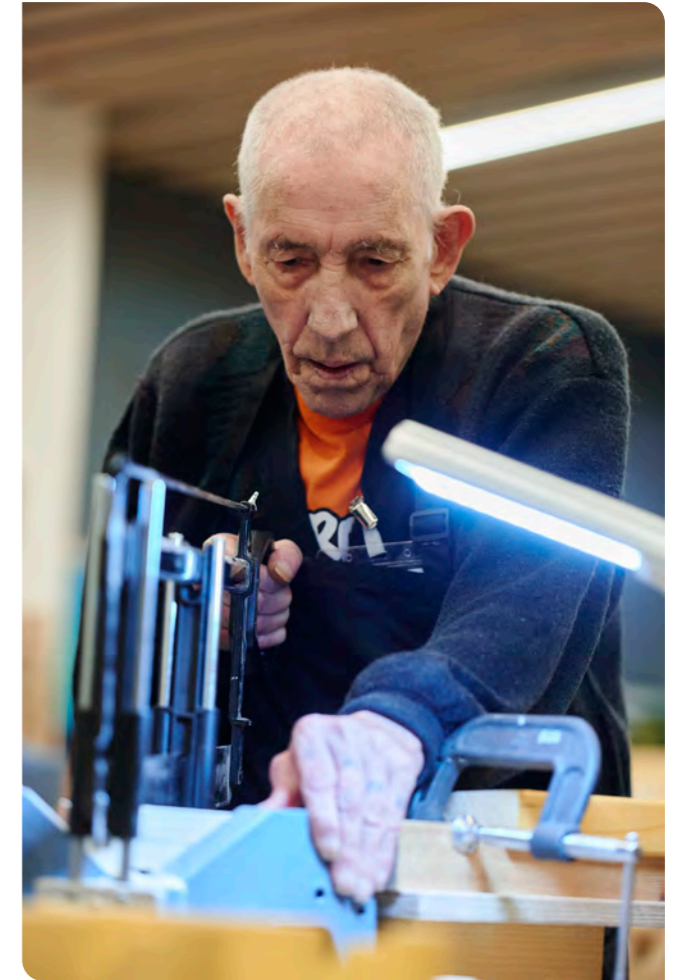


# Thank you for your support

Thank you to all those who support us in our work for veterans with sight loss in Scotland.

The following charitable and corporate trusts, listed in alphabetical order, contributed greatly towards the services we provide:

- Glebefoot Charitable Trust
- Hillhouse Group
- Mr W J & Mrs C G Dunnachie's Charitable Trust
- Mrs Jean S Innes Charitable Trust
- Nairn Charitable Trust
- Scobie Church Fund
- Templeton Goodwill Trust
- The Charles and Jane Allen Memorial Fund
- The Guy-Lockhart Charitable Trust
- Thomas Robertson Charitable Trust
- William Dawson Trust
- Yorkshire Building Society Charitable Foundation





# Sight Scotland Veterans

Tackling vision loss together

The new name for  
Scottish War Blinded.

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**Email:** [hello@sightscotlandveterans.org.uk](mailto:hello@sightscotlandveterans.org.uk)

**Web:** [sightscotlandveterans.org.uk](http://sightscotlandveterans.org.uk)

Sight Scotland Veterans  
is a Scottish Charitable  
Incorporated Organisation,  
Charity Number SC047192