

The Bugle

Spring 2023



**Sight Scotland
Veterans**

Tackling vision loss together

sightscotlandveterans.org.uk

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Events and activities you might be interested in

April

Veterans' Sight Support Groups

- Motherwell: Tuesday 4 April
- Perth: Thursday 6 April
- Kirkcaldy: Wednesday 12 April
- Hamilton: Thursday 13 April
- Inverness: Monday 17 April
- Banff: Thursday 20 April
- Dundee: Tuesday 25 April
- Seamill: Please call us on 0800 035 6409 if interested.
- Dumfries: Please call us on 0800 035 6409 if interested.
- Hawick: Groups are being held quarterly in Hawick. Please call us on 0800 035 6409 for info about the next group.

Face-to-face Veterans Sight Support Group events are being held in these towns in April. Our Independent Living Workers and Rehabilitation Officers are hosting these events. Please call the Sight Loss Support Line on 0800 035 6409 if interested. You can read more about these groups on Page 31.

May

Telephone support group for Charles Bonnet Syndrome

- Available Scotland-wide over the phone
- Thursday 4 May, Thursday 11 May, Thursday 18 May
- 1.30pm–2.30pm

Charles Bonnet Syndrome is when your imagination creates hallucinations and images to fill in the gaps of what your eyes can't see. You can learn strategies for recognising and overcoming this syndrome at one of our telephone-based support groups. Call us on 0800 035 6409 if interested.

May

Veterans' Sight Support Groups

- Inverness: Monday 15 May
- Perth: Thursday 18 May
- Dundee: Tuesday 23 May
- Kirkcaldy: Wednesday 24 May
- Dundee: Tuesday 23 May
- Seamill: Please call us on 0800 035 6409 if interested.
- Dumfries: Please call us on 0800 035 6409 if interested.
- Hawick: Held quarterly. Please call 0800 035 6409 for dates.

Face-to-face groups are being held at these cities and towns. If you are interested, please RSVP on 0800 035 6409 and we will confirm the venue and start time. More info on page 31.

June,
July,
Aug,
Sept,
Oct

Veterans' Sight Support Groups

- Hamilton: Thursday 8 June
 - Dundee: Tuesday 20 June
 - Perth: Thursday 29 June
 - Kirkcaldy: Wednesday 5 July, Wednesday 27 September
 - Perth: Thursday 10 August, Thursday 21 September
 - Kirkcaldy: Wednesday 16 August
 - Hamilton: Thursday 17 August
 - Hawick: Held quarterly. Call us on 0800 035 6409 for dates.
- You can read more on these face-to-face groups on page 31.

Nov

Remembrance Day trip to the London Cenotaph

- Friday 10 November to Monday 13 November

Join our Sight Scotland Veterans group journeying to London to attend Remembrance Day commemorations at the Cenotaph. A bus will depart from the Central Belt and accommodation will be arranged. Please call us on 0800 035 6409 if interested.

A message from Clair Bryan, Director of Services

Hello and welcome to our Spring edition of The Bugle. It's been an exciting start to the year at Sight Scotland Veterans with colleagues across Scotland connecting with veterans to explore how we can best support you.

I'm really pleased that we're starting to be able to offer opportunities for our veterans to participate in activities and trips once more. You can see a list of upcoming activities on the previous page.



Our Veterans Community Lead, Jason – whom many of you know from his previous roles at the Hawkhead and Linburn centres – is also working on providing, or connecting you to, other sporting activities to enjoy throughout the year. And our Independent Living team are working on Sight Loss Support Groups, to help veterans connect in their local areas. There is a lot to look forward to.

As we know from the research we did in preparation for our Sight Scotland Veterans Strategy 2021-2024, financial wellbeing is a key area that veterans want us to focus on. So, I'm pleased to see the impact our new Financial Wellbeing Service is already starting to make only a few short months since its launch. You can read more on page 33 – including how to get in touch should you wish to.

On that note, I also wanted to say thank you to everyone who took the time to respond to our survey about the rising cost of living, and whether this is affecting you. Our policy and campaigns team has reviewed all of your responses and we very much appreciate the candour and honesty in your replies. This will help us make sure your views are represented when we communicate with politicians and policymakers on this incredibly important issue.

This edition of the Bugle is packed with stories from you, our veterans. I was especially touched to read about how the first face-to-face encounter of some of our veterans who first met during lockdown through our telephone groups!

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did.

In the meantime, I hope you are keeping well and enjoying the beginning of spring. Lighter nights and longer days are always welcome.

Take care,

Clair

Veterans' stories

Tommy Moffat shows sight loss isn't holding him back, and lifts 500 tonnes in a week

Sight loss doesn't have to be a barrier to keeping fit, says army veteran Tommy Moffat, who has glaucoma and cataracts and receives support from Sight Scotland Veterans.

To prove his point, the 69-year-old Hamilton resident set himself an insane challenge: to lift 500 tonnes of weight over 7 days.

Yes, 500 tonnes. That's 500,000 kilograms of weight – equivalent to lifting a 1,000 kg Vauxhall Corsa hatchback 500 times! Or 83 lifts of a 6,000 kilogram African Elephant.

Tommy says: "For my ability, that was achievable, with not too much bother. I started on a Monday at my local gym, Maximum Strength gym in Hamilton, and did 2,000 kilos worth of leg presses to start."



Tommy says: "Using the standing press machine added the most weight to my total because I was pushing 300 kilograms each time. I am very, very tired from that."



Tommy has diabetes-related sight loss, as well as glaucoma and cataracts, and receives support from Sight Scotland Veterans to help him live independently.

Tommy says: "My eyesight's not too bad, but it does get a bit fuzzy. I have daylight lamps from Sight Scotland Veterans in my house now. Because they make it so much brighter, I can see much more around the house."

The keen gym-goer hit his 500-tone weight target on the seventh day of lifting.

"I had 200 kilograms on the leg press machine, and I just kept pumping them out on Sunday," Tommy says.

"I went over the target by 2 tonnes and reached 502 tonnes, just because I hadn't added the tickets to my total and I wanted to make sure I reached the target.

"I'm recovering now. The last two days were really tough."

Tommy encourages other people impacted by sight loss to try visiting their local gym.

"You don't need good eyesight to be in the gym. You just adapt. You adapt to the surroundings and there's always someone to help you in there."

Tommy say: "The health benefits of going to the gym are overwhelming. I say, get 'oot the house with your cane or whatever you're using. Get into the gym and do some exercise, and you'll feel a lot better about yourself."

Tommy says gym equipment can be easy to use and doesn't have to involve dumbbells or loose weights.

"I use the peg system where you put a peg in at the required weight, and away you go.

"I would encourage everyone to go. It's very social. You can speak to people and enjoy yourself. Whether it's heavy or light weights, it doesn't matter. It's you participating that's the benefit."



What does lifting a total of 500 tonnes equate to?

500 tonnes = Lifting a 100 kilograms weight 5,000 times

500 tonnes = 500 lifts of a Vauxhall Corsa hatchback

500 tonnes = 19 lifts of a fully-loaded cement truck

500 tonnes = 83 lifts of an African Elephant

Are you interested in exercising at your local gym?

Our staff member, Jason Duncan, is focused on helping veterans impacted by sight loss get involved in sports and exercise. If you have concerns about the accessibility of the gym or your local sports club, Jason may be able to help and can discuss options with your local gym or sports club.

You can contact Jason, Veteran Community Lead, on 0800 035 6409. Read more about Jason on page 35.



Veterans' stories

The mechanic who kept the 1905 Rolls-Royce rolling

Sitting proud and prominent, the Rolls-Royce motorcar at Glasgow's Riverside Museum is admired by hundreds of people every day. Most visitors to the museum can only imagine it rolling down cobbled streets.

But Kilmarnock veteran John Cassidy remembers many a trip in the vintage motorcar.

John maintained the green Rolls-Royce over several decades when it was owned by Adam McGregor Dick, the owner of the Dick Brothers garage in Kilmarnock. The Rolls-Royce was built 118 years ago in 1905. It is the second-oldest Rolls-Royce in the world.



John, who is now aged 92 and experiences macular degeneration, said he started working at Dick Brothers garage in Kilmarnock in 1944 when he was just 14 years old.

John said: "When I was a boy, there weren't many cars about. It was horses and carts. I worked in the Dick Brothers shop, then started my apprenticeship when I turned 16.

"Adam Dick was a middle-aged man at that time, but he and I struck up a good friendship. I don't know why, but he took me under his wing."

John worked as a mechanic for decades years— and the Rolls-Royce was his special charge.

"We got the Rolls-Royce in good shape. It had a three-cylinder engine. Adam used to call it his 'Old Girl'. Whenever there was something wrong with the Rolls, I was down there repairing it. We made a new cylinder for the engine and repaired all its different parts," he said.

As John recalled, Adam Dick collected many historical items.

John said: "Adam was a direct descendant of Rob Roy McGregor (the Scottish outlaw and folk hero) and had items owned by Rob Roy, including a window from his house which had Rob Roy's signature etched into the glass. Adam also had Rudolf Hess's flying suit – he was the Nazi party member who flew to Scotland during World War Two to try to negotiate a peace deal. Adam also had the stuffed head of a black bear from Germany in his front room. You got such a fright when you looked at it."

Several years later, the dedicated mechanic would be lent the Rolls Royce to go on trips with his wife and sons. Ian Cassidy, John's son, remembers the Rolls fondly.

Ian said: "I remember being in the Rolls when I was 10 years old, in 1966. Everywhere we went, everyone who saw this Rolls just stopped and stared.

"One time, my dad drove the Rolls from Kilmarnock to St Andrews. I remember going down the old A77. We were going down a hill, and suddenly the solid rubber tyre came off! We saw it roll past us down the hill, overtaking us!

"My Dad recognised it and pulled over. He retrieved it, and changed the wheel with a spare wheel, and got us up and on to St Andrews. Back then, St Andrews Golf Club was a place where common folk didn't get into, but Adam got us in."

John used his mechanical nous during his National Service with the British Army. He served in Egypt from 1951 to 1953. At the time, the British Army watched over the Suez Canal, which connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean.

John said: "I was assigned to the Royal Artillery. All of us soldiers were patrolling and defending the ammunition dumps. We camped in tents, with six soldiers to a tent. I met an awful lot of good fellas: English, Welsh, guys from Glasgow, you name it.

"The army knew I was a motor mechanic, so I worked on repairing the vehicles. The captain liked motorbikes and so he secured motorbikes for me and him. I got them shipshape, and then we'd go out into the desert."

John recalls many odd sights in the Egyptian desert, where his regiment would camp out for military exercises.

“One time, one of my pals came over...and says, ‘John, come and see this’.

“We walked over a sand dune and suddenly, there was a field of melons. A football field-sized valley enclosed by bamboo, full of watermelons – and nobody around. Unbelievable.

“The captain said, ‘Don’t touch anything’. We were told the Bedouins depended on the melons for their livelihood, and they defended them. No one went near them. The following morning, we moved on.”



Another time, the sergeant was fishing in a lake near the Suez Canal.

John said: "He pulled in this enormous fish, an absolute monster. You have no idea the size of this fish. It was as tall as he was and fearsome looking. We had been swimming in the lake before that, but we never went back in after seeing that monster. There were a lot of good times, looking back at them."

John returned to Kilmarnock when his service concluded and raised two sons with this wife. These days, John enjoys listening to the Beatles, Elton John and Elvis on his records and CDs.

John said: "With my eyesight, I've got to be very careful. I've got to use a walking stick, which I put in front of me to make sure I won't walk into anything."

Many years earlier, John had asked Adam what he planned to do with his Rolls-Royce.

"Adam asked me, 'What would you do with it if I gave it to you?' I said I'd sell it, no question.

"Adam said, 'I know, that's why I won't leave it to you. I'll give it to the Royal Automobile Club and they won't sell it and it won't leave Scotland. It'll stay at a museum'."

And so, the 1905 Rolls-Royce – the second-oldest ever built – remains at the Riverside Museum on the shore of the Clyde, near Partick in Glasgow, and can be visited to this day.

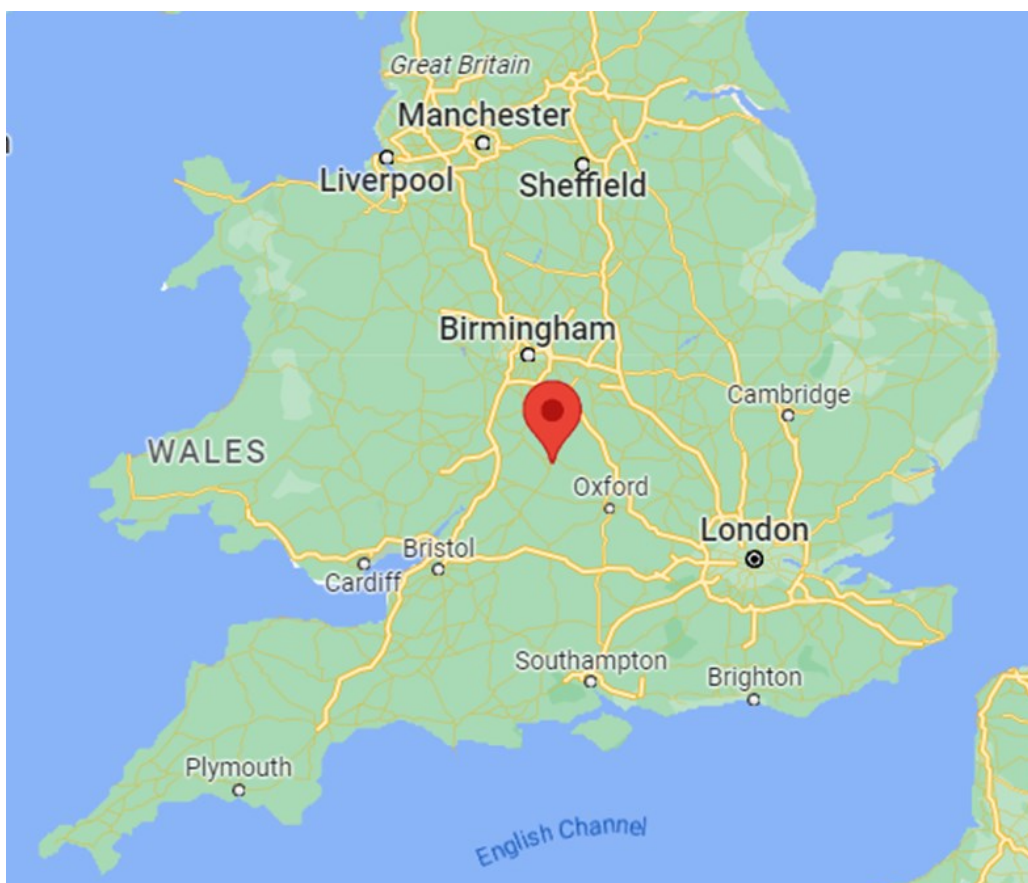
Veterans' Stories

RAF airfield turned into training ground for fire officers

Military properties can lead some very interesting lives. In the Autumn 2022 edition of *The Bugle*, Kilmarnock veteran Jim Pike spoke about serving on an RAF base in Gloucestershire called Moreton-in-Marsh.

The name 'Moreton-in-Marsh' jumped off the page when another veteran, Jim Pickering of Barrhead, read his copy of *The Bugle*. Jim served in the Royal Marines Class A Reserves for 15 years after completing his National Service, and served with the Fire Service for 28 years until 1973. He recognised the Moreton-in-Marsh and wrote to us.

Jim Pickering writes: "I read with great interest an article in a recent edition of *The Bugle* about veteran Jim McPike, whose first posting, as a National Serviceman, was to an RAF training camp in Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, located south of Birmingham.



He may, or may not know, that the airfield at Moreton-in-Marsh was converted by the Home Office into one of the finest Fire Service Officer training establishments in the world, the Fire Service College.

The airfield runways serve as roads and every conceivable fire and rescue situation can be produced within the college boundaries. These situations can include domestic fires and industrial fires, as well as rail, aircraft, oil tank, and road accidents.

The M96, which is an official UK motorway but not found in any road map, is used to train firefighters how to deal with motorway incidents.

There is a concrete ship called the 'Sir Henry' which is surrounded by water. There are also concrete sewerage pipes within the Breathing Apparatus (BA) training section to crawl through. The pipes are dry, but crawling through the pipes wearing a BA set, which greatly restricts the amount of space you have, is a good test for claustrophobia.

I had the privilege of attending courses at this training facility on numerous occasions whilst serving in the Glasgow Fire Service and Strathclyde Fire Brigade. At this former airfield, I met Fire Officers from as far afield as Australia, Afghanistan, The Bahamas, Cyprus, Malaysia and Nigeria.

The first course I attended was the Advancement Course to Station Officer in 1972 and the last course I attended was the Divisional Command Course in 1987.

I also heard that Special Forces units used the college as a training ground because of the realism of the facilities and the attention to detail that was afforded.

You can find more information about the college on the internet by keying in: "Fire Service College" and "Moreton-in-Marsh".

I hope Jim, and any other ex-member of the RAF who served at Moreton-in-Marsh, read this and find it of interest.

Yours Aye,

Jim Pickering

Veterans' Stories

Telephone friends who met on lockdown phone calls finally meet face to face at the Hawkhead Centre

Just before Christmas, staff at the Linburn Centre were lucky to witness the coming together of a group of friends who bonded on Hub telephone call sessions, which were organised by Sight Scotland Veterans.

For many months now, Jimmy, Paddy, John and Peter have all been taking part in fun quiz sessions on Fridays.

In December, Jimmy and his partner Christine travelled from Newton Stewart to have a holiday at the Linburn Centre's Cottage accommodation. The couple decided it would be a great opportunity to meet up with their phone group friends from afar.



During their phone call sessions, Jimmy had struggled to have the energy to join in at first. However, but with a little persuasion from Christine and the Hub facilitators, Jimmy transformed from the “sleepy man to the life and soul of the party”.

The group had coined their own catchphrase on the calls, “Give that man a coconut”.

So, you can imagine there were plenty of mentions of coconuts flying around when they met face to face.

Jimmy brought along presents for Paddy and Peter. Here he is giving them Bounty Bars, in a nod to their coconut catchphrase.



Jimmy said: "It has been great, speaking to friends who have V.I. issues just like you. Sharing experiences makes such a difference."

"They understand what you are going through. We call ourselves the Four Musketeers and have so much fun."

Sight Scotland Veterans staff members Annmarie and Donna helped to facilitate the groups.

Annmarie said: "The joy and laughter in the group is amazing and infectious. We have a cat, a dog and a duck who frequently appear in the sessions. This is aided by Jimmy's meowing, quacking and barking, and then we all join in.

"I am so happy that I was here to witness Jimmy and Christine meeting up with Paddy and Peter at the Hawkhead Centre.

"The Hub sessions are an amazing service and to see these friends meet up, is overwhelming".

Would you like to chat with other veterans on a Hub telephone call? Please call us at Sight Scotland Veterans on 0800 035 6409 and we can look at organising a call for you.

Veterans' Stories

France's highest military medal for Peebles veteran

A 102-year-old Peebles veteran has been awarded France's highest military award, more than 78 years after taking part in the D-Day landings at Normandy.

John McOwan received his Legion D'Honneur medal just before Christmas in 2022. He described the medal as "the best Christmas present ever".

The former "Desert Rat" only realised he was entitled to the medal in 2019, after joining other veterans in Normandy to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day.

John, whose story of being an Instrument Mechanic in the army featured in the summer edition of The Bugle in 2022, had almost given up hope of receiving the Legion D'Honneur medal. The veteran had been unable to attend a presentation ceremony at the French Embassy before the pandemic because of ill health. When the pandemic hit, it put everything on hold.



Finally in winter 2022 though, with assistance from Sight Scotland Veterans and Legion Scotland, along with representations from Edinburgh's Lord Provost, the Scottish Government and Baroness Goldie, the medal was awarded to John.

John said: "When it came in the post it was a complete surprise. I'd been waiting for this for years. It was the best Christmas gift ever. I hope that this might encourage other veterans to come forward and apply if they have missed out. My family are all very proud, and my great-grandchildren were very interested and wanted to know more about my story."

John has received several letters following press coverage of the medal story.

"I was quite surprised to receive a letter in February which had 'Prime Minister' printed at the bottom. It was from a Rishi Sunak, congratulating me on being presented with the medal. It had a lot of details and it was obviously something he or someone else had gone to a lot of trouble to find out the facts. I was absolutely delighted to get it. It was signed by him personally as well. I must write back and thank him for it."

John joined the Royal Artillery aged 18 in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of war. He travelled to Egypt in 1940 and served as an Instrument Mechanic with the 7th Armoured Division.

The division served for several years in North Africa, then in the south of Italy, before joining the Normandy landings. John and his division continued on to victory in Berlin, and he finally left the Army in 1946 as a Sergeant. He returned to Peebles and took over the family jewellery business with his brother, retiring in 1990. He and his late wife Betty had one daughter, and have three grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

Tips and Tricks

Vision loss and sleep, plus 12 tips for a better night's rest

By Katrina Campbell, Rehabilitation Officer

Sleep is essential for our general health and wellbeing. It enables the body to repair, fight infections and be fit and ready for another day. However, a visual impairment can affect the body's sleep schedule. This can lead to insomnia and tiredness during the day. Fortunately, there are techniques you can use to get to sleep faster – and have a better night's sleep.

In this article, we discuss why people with sight loss can have difficulty getting to sleep. We also offer 12 tips you could try, to help you get better sleep.

Why people impacted by sight loss can find it hard to sleep well

The main cause of sleep problems for people with visual impairment appears to stem from a disruption to the body's circadian rhythm.

Circadian rhythm is people's "internal body clock". It regulates biological processes such as hormone production and sleep. Each day, our circadian rhythm is reset in accordance with natural environmental cues, such as the rising and setting of the sun.

Photoreceptors in the retina of our eyes receive these light cues and signal the approximate time of day to the brain. These processes repeat daily on a cycle that is close to a 24-hour cycle.

Someone who is not impacted by vision loss can take this daily synchronisation process for granted.

However, a person who is severely sight impaired has a reduced capacity to perceive light - and a reduced capacity to receive these light cues.

Even those with milder vision loss can experience issues with their circadian rhythms. This means hormones can be released at the wrong time of day, resulting in inconsistent sleep patterns. This can lead to fluctuating periods of healthy sleep, punctuated by periods of poor sleep at night, and a corresponding urge to sleep during the day.

Vision loss, sleep, and mental health are all closely related. Depression and anxiety are issues that can be associated with vision loss and in turn, can lead to sleep issues like insomnia, hypersomnia (oversleeping) or poor quality of sleep. Likewise, a lack of sleep can make depression and anxiety even worse, creating a vicious cycle. Lack of sleep can also negatively impact vision. Like other parts of our bodies, our eyes need sleep to recover and work properly. Insufficient sleep can lead to issues like eye twitches, dry eye or redness.

Vision loss can also lead individuals to be nervous about going out and more isolated. This can ultimately lead to people spending more time indoors – which is especially true for older individuals. Not only does this limit exposure to sunlight, but it also means fewer stimulating activities that may help keep a person alert during the day, and ready to sleep at night.

Whilst vision loss can have an impact on your quality of sleep, there are changes you can make to counteract this. Here are our top tips that might improve your night's rest.

Twelve tips for good sleep hygiene

1. **Routine:** A regular routine is first on the list. Going to bed around the same time every night and getting up at the same time every morning will help you programme your brain and internal body clock.
2. **Wind-down time:** A relaxing bedtime routine helps you to wind down and get your body ready for sleep. A bedtime routine could involve: a warm bath, reading a book, drinking herbal tea, or relaxation exercises such as yoga or stretching.
3. **Environment:** Create a relaxing bedroom that is a comfortable temperature and is dark and quiet. Seek out a comfortable mattress. Carpets, earplugs and thicker curtains might help reduce noise.
4. **Screen time:** Avoid using mobile phones, tablets or other electronic devices for an hour before bed as the light from screens can trick our brains into thinking it is daytime.
5. **Food and drink:** Avoid eating or drinking right before bed as it can disrupt sleep. Sticking to a nutritious diet will help general health and improve sleep quality.
6. **Amount of sleep:** Adults generally need seven to nine hours of sleep but everyone is different. Aim to get an amount of sleep every night that helps you feel rested in the morning.

7. **Sunshine:** Exposure to sunshine will help you feel more energised during the day and ready for sleep once it gets dark.
8. **Exercise:** Exercise during the day can help relieve tension and physically tire your body, helping you sleep better at night. However, be sure to engage in exercise several hours before bed.
9. **Limit naps:** Short naps (30 minutes or fewer) can help with alertness during the day, but frequent or long naps will make it harder for you to sleep at night.
10. **Avoid smoking, caffeine and alcohol:**
Nicotine is a stimulant, people who smoke can take longer to fall asleep, wake up more frequently and often have more disrupted sleep. Caffeine and alcohol can interfere with sleep, so limit your intake, especially close to bedtime.
11. **Stay calm:** It's easy to get frustrated when you can't sleep, making getting to sleep even harder. Try to stay calm and engage in a relaxing activity such as reading a book until you are ready to try again.
12. **Speak to your GP:** You can speak to your GP if changing your sleeping habits has not worked and your insomnia is affecting your daily life in a way that makes it hard for you to cope.

We hope you try a few of these tips, and they help you get a better night's rest. Please feel free to contact us on the Sight Loss Information Line if you need more help: 0800 035 6409

Sight Scotland Veterans Updates

One telephone number for all our services: 0800 035 6409

You can now call the freephone Sight Loss Information Line to access all our services, including the Independent Living Team, making it easier than ever to receive support.

For info on your sight loss condition, or advice on living independently, 0800 035 6409 is the number to call. We have a dedicated team ready to receive your calls from 10am to 4pm on Mondays to Thursdays, and 10am to 3pm on Fridays.

Calling 0800 035 6409 is also the best way to contact your local Independent Living Worker or your local Rehabilitation Officer. You can reach them through this number, or leave them a message to call you back, which they will do as soon as they can.

You can also reach The Hub, our new support services, through the Sight Loss Information Line on 0800 035 6409.

Call 0800 035 6409 for The Hub services:

1. Face-to-face groups ————— more info on page 31
2. Telephone support groups — more info on page 32
3. Financial info and wellbeing — more info on page 33
4. Info on sports and activities — more info on page 35.

Face-to-face groups: Veterans Sight Support Groups

We are launching in-person Veterans Sight Support Groups, and we would love for you to attend if you live nearby and are interested.

These face-to-face groups are an opportunity to access advice from our Rehabilitation Officers and Independent Living Workers. You can receive information about sight loss conditions, mobility ideas, and equipment. You will meet other veterans with sight loss in your region, and their families and friends. You can find out about other support services in your local area. Tea, coffee, and biscuits will be provided. Groups will run for 2 hours at venues in the following locations:

- Hawick: Wed 15 March. Groups are being held quarterly in Hawick. Please call 0800 035 6409 if interested in attending the next group.
- Dumfries: Wed 22 March, Tues 2 May, then Wed 14 June, Wed 26 July, Wed 6 Sept, Wed 18 Oct, Wed 29 Nov
- Seamill: Tues 28 March. Meetings are planned for April and May. Please call us on 0800 035 6409 if you are interested in attending.
- Motherwell: Tues 4 April. For future dates, call 0800 035 6409
- Perth: Thurs 6 April, Thurs 18 May, 29 June, 10 Aug, 21 Sept, 2 Nov
- Kirkcaldy: Wed 12 April, Wed 24 May, Wed 5 July, Wed 16 Aug
- Hamilton: Thurs 13 April, Thurs 8 June, Thurs 17 Aug
- Inverness: Mon 17 April, Mon 15 May
- Banff: Thurs 20 April. For future dates, please call 0800 035 6409
- Dundee: Tues 25 April, Tues 23 May, Tues 20 June

Please call us on 0800 035 6409 if you are interested in attending any of our groups. We will confirm the venue and start time.

Sight Scotland Veterans Updates

Telephone support groups:

Charles Bonnet Syndrome groups

You can take part in telephone support groups being held in May if you experience Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

Charles Bonnet Syndrome is a common condition that results from vision loss and causes visual hallucinations. It can affect people of any age who have vision loss. The hallucinations vary greatly from person to person, with some people seeing everyday items such as animals or flowers, while others experience frightening hallucinations.

Our Rehabilitation team linked in with the Charles Bonnet campaign organisation Esme's Umbrella at the beginning of 2021 and set up the first Esme's Friends telephone support group in Scotland. Since then, we have supported many veterans to understand and cope with Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

The Rehabilitation team continue to offer our Charles Bonnet Syndrome telephone support group. Our next planned phone support group will commence on Thursday 4 May, weekly from 1.30pm to 2.30pm for three weeks.

In April, we are also planning face-to-face support groups at the Hawkhead Centre, at the Linburn Centre and at a venue in the North of Scotland.

Please call our Sight Loss Information Line on 0800 035 6409 if you are interested in attending either a telephone group or a face-to-face Charles Bonnet support group.

Sight Scotland Veterans Updates

Financial information and wellbeing

Sight loss can be unexpected, and it can have an impact on your personal finances.

You might want to make adaptations to your home. You may need to buy new appliances that are easier to use. New costs may arise, and it can be difficult to budget for.

The good news is, you can get advice on financial matters from our Financial Wellbeing Service. The Financial Wellbeing Service can provide personalised advice on:

- grants you may be eligible for
- concessions you might be eligible for
- budgeting
- benefits you might be able to claim.

Already, our service has secured:

1. Grants for two veterans to renovate their bathrooms to suit their vision loss.
2. A grant for the cost of a chess set that is adapted for a veteran with sight loss.

This is only the start – there is so much more support you could receive. Any information you provide is strictly private and confidential.

Meet Sue McKay from our Financial Wellbeing Service



Sue McKay is here to support you at our Financial Wellbeing Service, as our Financial Wellbeing Lead.

Sue says: "My motivation is for people to have the support and the financial confidence to continue living well in their own homes.

"I've worked in social services for more than 25 years. This includes 15 years working with housing associations in tenancy sustainment, helping people to maximise their income and continue managing their bills.

"I have a wealth of knowledge about the benefits and grants that people can be eligible for. For example, I've secured grants for bathroom renovations, so that the bathrooms are easier to use for someone with visual impairment."

Sue says: "I've also secured a grant for a chess set that's suitable for someone with sight loss, so a veteran can continue their hobby. I'd love to hear from any veterans who are looking for support – we are here to help you live as independently as possible."

You can call 0800 035 6409 to arrange a phone call or meeting with Sue McKay.

Info on sports and activities

Want to get involved in a new sport, but unsure how? Our dedicated staff member Jason Duncan is focused on helping more veterans become involved in sports.

"Across Scotland, we have veterans playing sports like blind golf or blind bowls at their local club," Jason says.

"But for many veterans, joining a new club can be intimidating. So, I'm working with local sports clubs to pave the way. I'm creating the links to make it easier for veterans to become involved."



Jason is also organising a group trip to London in November 2023 for veterans to attend the national Remembrance Day service at the Cenotaph. Read more below.

Jason Duncan is here to help you. If you have concerns about the accessibility of the gym or your local sports club, Jason may be able to help and can discuss options with your local gym or sports club. Call our Sight Loss Information Line on 0800 035 6409, and Jason will be in touch.

Are you interested in visiting the Cenotaph in London for Remembrance Sunday in 2023?

Jason Duncan is planning a trip to London in November 2023 to attend the National Service of Remembrance.

The trip is from Friday 10 November to Monday 13 November 2023. We will go to the Remembrance Sunday service on Sunday 12 November as a group.

Transport and accommodation will be organised. From a central pick-up point in the Central Belt, you would travel in a coach down to London. Your partner or family member, or your carer, can certainly come too. The trip will be a wonderful chance to meet new friends and spend time with old acquaintances, as well as visit London. Take the opportunity to have a wonderful trip in the company of fellow veterans, and commemorate Remembrance Day together.

Would you like to join us in November? Jason Duncan, your Veterans Community Lead, is organising the trip. Please call us on 0800 035 6409 to register your interest, and we will follow up with more details.

Update from our Policy team

Our Policy team wants to make life easier for everyone impacted by sight loss. We believe it is vital that decision-makers at every level are aware of the needs and experiences of people with vision loss.

The Policy team works on behalf of Sight Scotland Veterans and our sister charity Sight Scotland. Here are some of the projects we have been working on.

Progress with our Fair Rail campaign

When you're impacted by visual impairment, driving a car is usually not an option for you. Public transport is often what you'll rely on. Train travel is a popular way to travel, however, to travel by train, you'll often need some help from a loved one, friend or carer. Free train travel is offered for people with visual impairment, but a concession isn't offered for their travel companion – someone who needs to travel too. This adds more complexity.

To help people with sight loss travel more easily, our Fair Rail campaign has been pushing for free train travel for the companions of people with sight loss.

Recently, the Fair Rail campaign has gone from strength to strength.

Nicoletta Primo, our Policy Lead, gave evidence at the Scottish Parliament to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee (CPPPC) about free travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel.

We then secured a Members' debate sponsored by Graham Simpson MSP about free rail travel for blind and partially sighted people. Since then, we have received a letter from the Transport Minister, Jenny Gilruth MSP, who has shown initial support for our campaign and is exploring costings with Transport Scotland and free companion travel as part of the Fair Fares Review. Now, we are waiting to hear back from Transport Scotland about the costings of the national scheme and how this might be brought forward under the Fair Fares Review.

Street and town centres accessibility

In late January, we took part in a BBC news story about street accessibility in Edinburgh and Glasgow. We focused on Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow, and Leith Walk in Edinburgh, where streets are unsafe for people with visual impairment. The story was published on the BBC website. To find it, search online for the heading: "New street layouts still unsafe, say blind people".

Following this story, our Policy team met with Scott Arthur, the Edinburgh City Council's Transport Convener, to discuss what can be done to fix the re-development of Leith Walk and ensure such examples of unsafe practice are not mirrored in other areas of Edinburgh.

Pension Age Disability Payment event

We attended an online event run by the Scottish Government about the Pension Age Disability Payment. Following the event, we provided feedback advocating for older people with vision loss.

Veterans event with Scottish Labour

Our Policy team attended an event at Erskine House so we could meet with Scottish Labour Party leaders, and discuss how we can continue to support veterans with visual impairment across Scotland.

Party Conferences

Our Policy team attended the Scottish Labour Conference (17-19 February), along with several people impacted by sight loss who are also members of our policy group. We spoke with MSPs, Councillors, and MPs, discussed our current campaigns, and raised key issues regarding visual impairment. We had a lot of positive engagement and hope to work with those we met in the coming months. We will also be attending the Scottish Conservative party conference in late April.

Summary

Overall, we are making progress on many fronts. We thank you very much for any advocacy, personal stories, or support you've offered our Policy team in the past. If you have ideas or a personal experience related to one of these issues, which you might like to share, please feel free to email us at policy@sightscotland.org.uk or call the Sight Loss Information Line on 0800 035 6409. Thank you again, we'll provide an update in the next edition of The Bugle.

Warm regards,

**The Policy team at Sight Scotland Veterans and
Sight Scotland**

Email: policy@sightscotland.org.uk

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latest edition of The Bugle.**

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**Sight Scotland
Veterans**

Tackling vision loss together