



**Berkshire
Vision**

Supporting the Visually Impaired
www.berkshirevision.org.uk
Charity number 1146413

INSIGHT

Summer 2025



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14 A year of firsts
And so much more!

CEO Update



Photo:
A picture of
Laura, our CEO

As we move into autumn, I'm delighted to welcome you to the latest edition of Insight. What a season it's been! From our very first Summer Party at Cantley House Hotel, complete with garden games, music and laughter, to the inspiring stories of independence and achievement from our Members.

I was especially impressed by Julia's journey with **Realeyes Guiding**. Her determination to reclaim her independence is a powerful reminder of what's possible with the right support. If you are interested in exploring how a Realeyes guide could support you to access new places or regain confidence navigating older ones, do get in touch with Jo in the office on 0118 987 2803.

Equipment and Technology appointments at **Midleton House every Wednesday** are proving very popular. If you'd like to explore assistive devices or get hands-on with tech that could support your independence, do contact the office to book a slot.

I'm really pleased to see our expanded offer for **free will writing** launching. The new offering through our partnership with Octopus is much more accessible than the previous one as we can now access a professional face to face or on the telephone as well as online to write our wills for free.

Looking ahead, I'm excited about the **Maidenhead Boundary Walk** this October. It's a wonderful opportunity to come together and raise vital funds to support others on their sight loss journey. Whether you're walking the full 13.1 miles, joining the family-friendly mini walk, or sponsoring others to walk, I hope you'll be part of it if you can.

New **FREE** will writing offer in partnership with Octopus Legacy

A Special Way to Say Thank You: Leave a Gift in Your Will to Berkshire Vision

If Berkshire Vision has made a difference in your life, you are not alone. Whether it is through Sight Loss Support visits, social and sports activities, equipment and technology support, or just having someone at the end of the phone.

Some people choose to say thank you in a very special way, by leaving a gift in their will.

We have made it even easier to write your will for **FREE** and leave a gift, **you can now do it by phone or in person**, as well as online.

Why Leave a Gift?

Leaving a gift in your will is your chance to help others like you in the future. It does not have to be large, just a small amount can help someone who is newly diagnosed, feeling isolated, or adjusting to life with sight loss.

It is a way to make sure the support you have found at Berkshire Vision can continue for years to come, for the next person who needs it.

A Lasting Thank You

A gift in your will is a powerful way to say, "Berkshire Vision mattered to me." It is your way of helping others get the same support you did from a charity that truly cares.

Want to Know More?

You can write your will for **FREE**
Online at:

<https://will.octopuslegacy.com/BERKSHIREVISIONFREE>

Or Call **020 4525 3605**
to do it over the phone or arrange
a meeting to do it in person.

Or call Clare at Berkshire Vision
on **0118 987 2803** to find out
more.

Social and Sports Activities

The warmer months at Berkshire Vision have been bursting with exciting social activities and sports, creating lasting memories for everyone we support.

From scenic boat trips along the Thames to relaxing Tai Chi sessions and refreshing outdoor swims, there has been no shortage of ways to stay active and connected. Our popular theatre outings also continued to delight, offering cultural experiences and social time together.

A special highlight this July was our very first summer party at Cantley House Hotel, held on what felt like the hottest day of the year! Everyone enjoyed a delicious buffet, live music, and garden games in the sunshine, a truly joyful celebration.

Photo:
Our summer party



As the temperatures rose, we made the most of the outdoors with picnics during our park walks, relaxing visits to local garden centres, whilst our Dual Sensory Loss Group enjoyed a mini golf session.

Not only did the Mortimer Alpacas pay a special visit to our Reading group, bringing smiles and soft snuggles, but our West Berkshire Social Group also had the chance to visit them at their home!



Photo:
Our summer
party

Everyone enjoyed a hands-on experience, feeding the alpacas carrots, giving them gentle sprays with the hose to help them cool down, and learning more about these gentle, curious animals.

As many of younger people we support move up into the adult programme, they join our 18-25 group. In April the group kicked things off with a lively and competitive round of ten pin bowling, followed by a hands-on cooking session in July, where we prepared and enjoyed pizza and cookies. We are looking forward to this group flourishing, with more activities and friendships ahead!



Photo:
Meeting the
alpacas



Photo:
Park
Walks

Our Socialeyes Groups have been truly making the most of their monthly meetups, enjoying a fantastic mix of activities, from music and singing sessions to crafts, games, and meals out.

Looking ahead to Autumn & Winter

As we look forward to the upcoming months, we are excited to continue offering a rich variety of activities. We will be bringing back our ever-popular Christmas theatre trips, along with indoor sports such as dancing and ten pin bowling. Plus, we are planning some one-off taster sessions to introduce new experiences and keep things fresh and engaging. There is plenty to look forward to and we cannot wait to share it all with you!

Finding Her Way: How Realeyes Guiding is Helping Julia Walk with Confidence

Staying independent while living with sight loss is a challenge many people face, but with the right support, it's absolutely possible. Just ask Julia.

Julia, who lives with **Macular Degeneration**, has always been determined to maintain her independence. Like many people experiencing sight loss, she found that simple tasks like getting to a hospital appointment became daunting. Busy roads, unfamiliar train stations, and crowded pavements were sources of anxiety. But Julia was not ready to give up her freedom.

That's where **Realeyes Guiding**, from Berkshire Vision, came in.



Realeyes Guiding pairs visually impaired people with trained volunteer guides to help them build confidence navigating real-world routes. Whether it is learning to get to the local shop, catching the bus, or visiting the GP, the service offers practical, one-on-one support so people can travel safely and independently.

For Julia, this meant being able to get to her hospital appointments on her own terms. Berkshire Vision matched her with Richard, a calm, patient, and thoughtful volunteer

who has become an essential part of her journey to confidence. “Richard has been exceptional,” says Julia. “He’s patient, skilled, and really listens to what I find difficult.”

Together, they practised several different routes to the hospital, focusing on avoiding busy roads Julia found intimidating. Richard even showed her hidden gems, like quieter footpaths and the lifts at the train station that made the journey less overwhelming.

One of the most helpful things Richard introduced her to was the use of tactile “spindles” at pedestrian crossings, small, rotating indicators beneath the button box that spin when it is safe to cross. Julia had never noticed them before, and now uses them regularly.

Their work together paid off. Julia recently walked home from the hospital entirely on her own, something she had not felt able to do for years. It was a milestone that filled her with pride and achievement.

But this is not just about getting from A to B. For Julia, Realeyes Guiding is about **future-proofing** her independence. Aware that her sight may get worse, she is taking action now,

learning routes thoroughly, practising regularly, and reinforcing her confidence with every step.

Richard has taken his role to heart. He photographs key landmarks along the way, giving Julia visual references she can use to confirm she is on track. It is a simple gesture, but one that has made a world of difference. “Those little cues help me feel safe,” Julia explains. “They remind me I know where I am and that I can do this.”

Julia’s story is a powerful reminder that with the right support, independence does not have to be lost to sight loss. It can be adapted, strengthened, and even reclaimed.

If you would like to find out more about Realeyes Guiding call us on 0118 987 2803 or email info@berkshirevision.org.uk

Following Sam: One Man's Journey Across Scottish Football Grounds with Sight Loss and Determination

Meet Jon from Perth, Scotland, a lifelong football fan, guide dog user, and now author who turned his love for the beautiful game into a powerful story of accessibility, resilience, and connection. Born with two rare eye conditions, microphthalmia and coloboma, Jon has lived with visual impairment all his life. He had no sight in his right eye from birth and experienced a significant decline in vision

in his left eye after developing glaucoma in 2015.

“The biggest challenge was getting my independence back,” Jon reflects. “That’s when I started using a long cane and eventually got my first guide dog, Sam, in 2016. He changed everything. I had the confidence to go out again.”

This renewed independence became the catalyst for an extraordinary journey, visiting all 42 Scottish Professional Football League (SPFL) stadiums. As a die-hard football supporter, Jon realised during the COVID-19 lockdowns just how vital the live matchday atmosphere was. “Watching on TV without the roar of the crowd just wasn’t the same,” he explains. Once stadiums reopened, he started attending matches again, often with Sam by his side.

Photo:
Jon and his
guide dog
Sam



Along the way, Jon discovered a service he had never known existed, audio descriptive commentary for visually impaired fans. “It was a game-changer,” he says. “I realised some clubs were doing fantastic work in accessibility, and I wanted to see just how far that extended across the whole league.”

He documented his adventures on social media, quickly gaining a following who cheered him and Sam on from ground to ground. “The support was incredible, not just online but from the clubs and fans we met at every stadium. It became more than just a personal challenge. It became about raising awareness of what accessibility should look like in sport.”

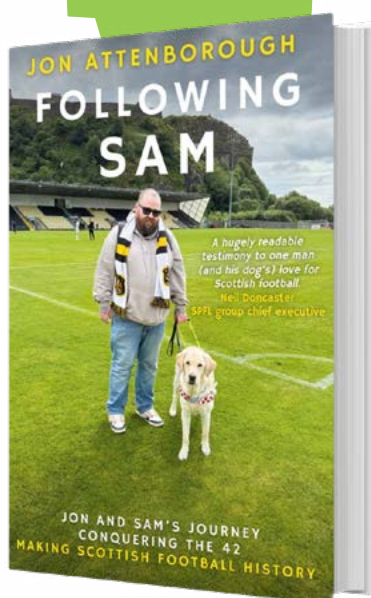
The journey was not without its trials. Relying entirely on public transport, Jon encountered his fair share of cancelled trains, strikes, and missed connections. But each obstacle added to the richness of the experience something he now captures in his memoir, *Following Sam*. “Writing the book was never the

plan,” he admits. “But friends encouraged me to share the story in full. It’s been such a rewarding experience.”

Now an advocate for accessibility in football, Jon continues working with clubs to improve facilities and training. “When I started, only around 60% of top-league clubs offered audio commentary. That’s now over 70%, but there’s still work to do, especially in promoting these services.”

He encourages fans with disabilities to reach out. “Every club has a Disability Liaison Officer now. Don’t be afraid to get in touch. They want to help make matchdays inclusive.”

Photo:
Jon’s book -
Following Sam



Jon’s story is more than football. It is about belonging, resilience, and challenging perceptions of disability. His message is clear: “Accessibility matters. And when it’s done well, it transforms lives.”

You can find *Following Sam* at Waterstones, Amazon, Kindle, Audible, and the RNIB Talking Books library.

Accessible Technology for Employment

Technology is opening new doors in the workplace, especially for those with visual impairments and there are a wide range of tools available that support greater accessibility at work.

A vital first step is touch typing. Learning to type by memory builds speed, accuracy, and confidence, key skills for independence in computer-based tasks. Various programmes are available to help users develop this essential skill.

Once foundational skills are established, users can explore assistive technologies that

match their individual needs:

- **Built-in screen readers** like VoiceOver (Apple) and Narrator (Windows) provide basic functionality.
- **NVDA** is a free, open-source screen reader popular for personal use.
- **JAWS** remains the most widely used in professional environments, supporting complex tasks such as web browsing and document editing.
- **Dolphin SuperNova** combines screen reading and magnification, making it ideal for users with mixed vision.

Wearable technology is also reshaping accessibility:

- The **OrCam MyEye** is a compact device that attaches to glasses and reads text aloud. It recognises faces, products, and currency, all without internet access, making it ideal for secure workplaces.
- **Meta smart glasses** include a camera and voice assistant, offering real-time support when paired with a smartphone (internet required).

Smartphone apps further enhance independence:

- **Seeing AI** uses the phone's camera to read text, recognise faces, and scan barcodes.
- **WeWalk 2**, a smart white cane, connects to a phone for navigation and obstacle detection.

To fund these tools, the **Access to Work** scheme offers financial support for equipment, software,

and training beyond standard workplace adjustments. As assistive software, AI, and wearable devices evolve, they continue to reduce barriers in employment. While challenges remain, such as training access and employer awareness, technology is paving the way for a more inclusive workforce.

How Berkshire Vision Can Help

Berkshire Vision supports visually impaired individuals in developing the skills and confidence to succeed at work. Our employability programmes offer group sessions, one-to-one support, technology demos, and help with job applications. We also provide guidance on funding options.

To learn more,
contact Jenna at
employability@
berkshirevision.org.uk
or call **0118 987 2803**

Spotlight on Alex: Growing Confidence Through Berkshire Vision

At Berkshire Vision, we are proud to support young people like Alex, whose journey shows how the right opportunities and community can transform lives.

Alex was born without vision in his right eye. “When he was born, one of his eyes was completely closed,” his mum recalls. “It was hard at first. The specialists said his right eye was much smaller than average and couldn’t be examined properly until further tests were done. It was all a bit overwhelming at the time.”

Despite these early challenges, Alex grew up with



Photo:
Alex
petting
rabbits

a natural curiosity and gentle humour. But making friends was difficult. Limited vision and social confidence meant he often preferred to play alone.

That changed when Alex’s mum received an email from Vanessa at the Slough Consortium introducing Berkshire Vision. The charity’s holiday activities, accessible outings, and supportive community sounded like exactly what Alex needed. “She told us about Berkshire Vision and how they run activities for children during half terms and the summer holidays. I filled out the form straight away, and soon after, Alex was signed up as a member.”



Since then, Alex has embraced a variety of activities that help build confidence, social skills, and independence. These include tandem cycling, try-a-train and try-a-bus sessions, farm visits, outdoor adventures at Thames Valley Adventure Park, swimming, and most memorably, a residential trip to Ufton Court.

“The residential was definitely his favourite,” his mum shares. “There was archery, water games, shelter-building, it was in the forest, so it really felt like an adventure. Something new. Something different. He loved it.”

Before joining Berkshire Vision, Alex struggled to connect with peers. Now, he is part of a WhatsApp group with other children from the Berkshire Vision. “They message each other sometimes about silly things, just to chat. He’s got people now,” his mum says.

Berkshire Vision’s support extends to the whole family, too. “I work during half terms, so it’s not always easy to

get out to things,” Alex’s mum explains. “But Berkshire Vision’s transport for trips like the theatre, has made such a difference. It means families like ours don’t have to miss out.”

With accessible transport and inclusive activities, Berkshire Vision removes barriers and opens doors for young people like Alex to thrive.

“Berkshire Vision has given him the chance to try things he wouldn’t have done otherwise,” his mum reflects. “And it’s not just the fun stuff, it’s being around others like him, knowing he’s not alone.”

As Alex looks forward to future adventures, we are proud to be part of his journey and grateful to support families like his across Berkshire.

Photo:
Alex at
Ufton Court



Children, Young People and Families

A Year of Firsts:

Celebrating New Experiences and Achievements

It has been a fantastic year so far, and we are delighted to welcome new members to our growing community, it is wonderful to have you with us!

This year has brought many exciting firsts for our children and young people. From new outings to outstanding individual accomplishments, there is so much to celebrate.

Among the highlights of our activities so far:

- ★ Our first-ever train and underground trip
- ★ A fascinating visit to the fire station
- ★ Wheelchair tandem cycling
- ★ Skiing on real snow at Hemel Hempstead

These new experiences have brought happiness, fostered new friendships, and helped build confidence and independence.



Photo:
Try a
train trip



Photo:
Wheelchair
tandem
cycling



Photo:
A visit to the
fire station



Photo:
At
Paddington
train station



Photo:
Skiing

Photo:
Dayzie holding her
1st place rosette with
Paralympian Mari
Durward-Akhurst



Photo:
August on
her horse



A huge congratulations to **August** and **Dayzie**, who qualified at the RDA (Riding for the Disabled Association) Regional Championships and went on to compete at the RDA National Championships! What an amazing accomplishment, we're so proud of both of you.

By the time you read this, we will have added even more adventures to the list: a journey involving the train, the underground and a ride on the Thames Clipper; a historical exploration of the Reading Abbey Ruins; and a nature-packed visit to Windsor Great Park Environment Centre during the school summer holidays.

We have also seen some incredible achievements by our young people.

Fundraising update

Photo:
Our brave skydivers



We would like to say a huge thank you to our wonderful fundraisers who have gone above and beyond to support Berkshire Vision so far this year.

A huge well done to **Ellie**, who completed the Big 5 Challenge, walking 5km a day for five days and raising £168! And a huge well done to our brave skydivers, **Sam, Don, and Clare** who took the plunge and raised over £2000. What a leap of faith! **Andy** is still going strong in his year-long challenge to cycle around the world on his indoor bike, and he is now nearing the finish line!

We are also grateful to **Oratory Prep School and Highdown School** for choosing us as their nominated charities and organising fantastic fundraising activities throughout the year.

Thank you to everyone who attended our quiz night, hosted by the legendary Chris Tarrant. It was a fantastic evening and raised over £2,500!



Feeling inspired?

As someone supported by Berkshire Vision, you know first hand the impact our work can have. Why not get involved and give something back through fundraising? It is a great way to have fun and make a real difference.

One fantastic way to take part this autumn is by joining Team Berkshire Vision for the **Maidenhead Boundary Walk.**

Other ways to get involved:

You could host a garden party,

organise a cake sale, declutter and sell your unwanted items on eBay, Vinted or at a car boot sale, or even take on a local race. You can also sponsor one of our amazing fundraisers, contact Matthew to find out more.

Whether it is something big or small, your efforts will help us continue to support more blind and visually impaired people across Berkshire. Let us know what you are planning by speaking to Matthew on **0118 987 2803** or emailing **matthew.thomas@berkshirevision.org.uk**

Maidenhead Boundary Walk

Date: Sunday 5th October

Location: Starting and finishing at Boulters Lock car park in Maidenhead.

Choose between the 13.1 mile full walk or the 4.4km family-friendly mini walk. Entry is completely free, all we ask is that you pledge to raise: **£75** per individual, **£250** per family or group of four.

Why Walk?

If you have ever received support from Berkshire Vision, you already know the life-changing impact it can have. Now is your chance to give back and help others benefit from that same incredible support.



Whether you are blind, visually impaired, a family member, friend, or supporter, everyone is welcome. Walk with us, raise vital funds and be part of our community. To sign up, email **matthew.thomas@berkshirevision.org.uk**

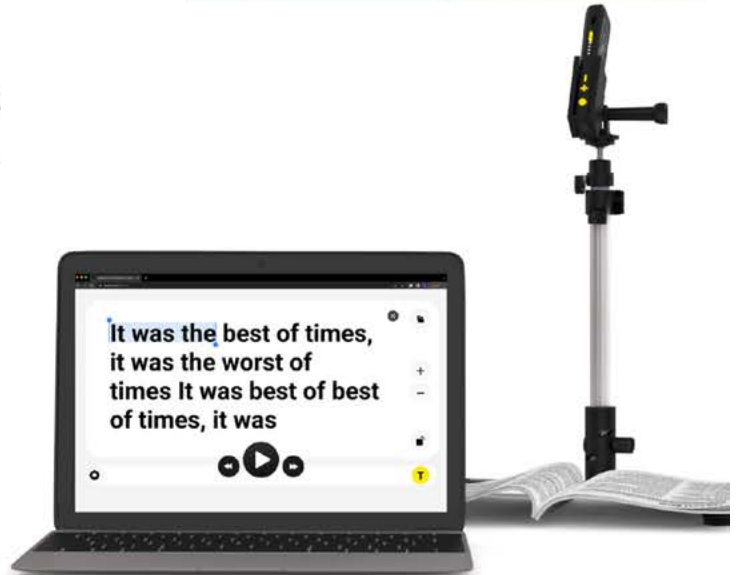
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Orcam **Read 3** is a highly sophisticated lightweight smart camera. Using AI technology, it instantly reads any printed or digital text from books, newspapers, smartphone screens, computers, and more. It is intuitively operated, with just the press of a button.



Perfect for those at **home, work and school**. Great for those with moderate **low vision, reading difficulties, including dyslexia and reading fatigue**.



Sale Price: £1700

Reads a full page with one press!

Simply point, press and listen!

Freephone: 0800 145 6115 For a FREE home demonstration or for more information.



Become a Friend of Berkshire Vision and Help Others Thrive

If you or someone you love has benefited from the support of Berkshire Vision, you know how life-changing it can be. Every day, we provide practical and emotional help to over 1,600 blind and visually impaired children and adults across Berkshire, helping them build confidence, develop skills, and live more independently.

Now, you can help ensure others receive this same life-changing support by becoming a Friend of Berkshire Vision. Your generosity enables us to continue offering essential services and reach even more people in need.

Even a small donation makes a big difference.

By giving just £5 or more each month, you become part of a caring community committed to raising awareness of sight loss challenges and funding the services that truly transform lives.

When you become a Friend of Berkshire Vision, you will receive:

- ✓ A Berkshire Vision supporter pin to show you care
- ✓ Regular updates on how your donations are making an impact
- ✓ Personal invitations to our fundraising events

Supporting Berkshire Vision is easy, just set up a monthly donation using the enclosed form, visit berkshirevision.org.uk/friends to sign up online or give us a call in the office on 0118 987 2803. Your support means the world to us and to the people whose lives are changed by your kindness. If you cannot commit to regular giving please consider a one off donation.

Every £ makes a difference.

To make a donation please call us in the office or visit www.berkshirevision.org.uk/donate.

Thank you for giving back. Every gift counts.

Get in touch

Please get in touch if you have any stories, experiences or recommendations to share with other members of Berkshire Vision.

Marketing and Communications Manager Clare would love to hear from you and feature your story in Insight. Telephone **0118 987 2803** or email **clare.matthews@berkshirevision.org.uk**

If you'd like to receive your Insight magazine in a different format in the future please let us know. Insight is available in large print, on email, or audio (on USB, CD or email).

Contact clare.matthews@berkshirevision.org.uk for more information

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