



**Berkshire
Vision**

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

INSIGHT

Summer 2026



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CEO Update



Photo:
A picture of
Laura, our CEO

As we head into the summer months, I'm really looking forward to catching up with many of you at our summer party. It's always one of my favourite moments in the year - a chance to come together, chat, and enjoy the sunshine with the Berkshire Vision community.

This issue also brings a bittersweet milestone. Our Children, Young People and Families Officer, Carol, will be retiring this summer after nearly six years with us. Carol has poured so much energy, compassion and imagination into supporting our VI children and their families, and she's made a lasting difference to so many young people. We'll miss her enormously, and I know many of you will want to join me in wishing her all the very best for the future.

In April, we officially launched our new strategy, and I want to say a heartfelt thank you to every member who took the time to share their thoughts, experiences and ideas. Your input was vital in setting the direction we're taking, and it means a great deal to us.

I'm also pleased to share some exciting news: we've secured our first rehabilitation contract in Reading. With our new Vision Rehabilitation Specialist, Theresa, now in post, we've already begun the work of reducing the waiting list and making sure people get the support they need more quickly.

Hayley Runs the London Marathon

We are incredibly proud of Hayley, who took on the London Marathon this April and raised over **£4,000** for Berkshire Vision. Running 26.2 miles is no small task, and Hayley crossed the finish line in 5:46, a result to be truly proud of.

Hayley chose to run for Berkshire Vision because her Goddaughter, Lux, is supported by us. Lux is a bright and creative little girl living with sight loss and autism, and finding places where she feels understood hasn't always been easy. When her mum, Stacey, discovered Berkshire Vision, it was life changing. Lux found a community where she could grow in confidence, explore her independence and build real friendships. Watching that transformation is what inspired Hayley to take on the marathon and give something back.

Thank you, Hayley. Your run, and the generosity it inspired will help ensure we can be there for more children and adults with sight loss when they need us.



There is still time to donate to Hayley's run:

<https://2026tcslondonmarathon.enthuse.com/pf/hayley-kirby>

If you're feeling inspired to take on your own running challenge for Berkshire Vision, contact **Matthew.thomas@berkshirevision.org.uk**

We can help you find a race, secure a place and make sure you have all the support you need along the way.

Social and Sports Activities

We have had a very busy start to the year, with trips to garden centres and country parks, our usual dancing and ten-pin bowling sessions, a trial football session with Slough FC, and an indoor swim at Palmer Park.

Alongside this, we have also enjoyed tandem cycling, walks and golf, managing to stay active and social whatever the weather.

One of our February highlights was a special visit to Windsor Castle. The team there gave us a private, hands-on tour where members could try on Windsor staff uniforms and explore memorabilia not usually open to the public, an unforgettable experience!

We have also been getting creative, building our own bird boxes with the Eco Skills Learning Centre.

Photo:
Eco Skills
Bird Boxes

It was a brilliant hands-on session where we picked up new skills while working alongside their fantastic volunteers.

Our Dual Sensory Loss group kicked off the year with visits to the Cole Museum at the University of Reading. Students kindly led a private tour, followed by a tactile session exploring animal bones. As the weather improved, the group headed outdoors to enjoy a (very windy!) day at Forbury Gardens and the

Photo:
Visit to
Windsor
Castle

Photo:
Visit to
Abbey
Ruins

Abbey Ruins with a tactile tour and a well-earned café lunch. Coming up, the group are looking forward to visiting Langley Park to enjoy the rhododendrons, as well as their annual quieter ten-pin bowling session.

The 18-25 Social group continues to thrive. Highlights so far include a session with Synergy Dance, social games at The Dairy at the University of Reading, and a summer picnic. There is plenty more to come too, including trips to a museum and more bowling fun.

Photo:
18-25 Social
Group playing
Pool

Meanwhile, our West Berkshire Social Group may have missed the snowdrops at Welford Park (again!) but still made the most of a sunny day with a relaxing wander. Next up is a visit to Greenham Control Tower to explore the site's fascinating local history.

Across Berkshire, our Socialeyes groups have been full of energy and creativity. We have enjoyed live music from singing groups, ukulele players, guitarists and even some of our own talented members! Alongside favourites like bingo, quizzes, and food tastings, we are excited to bring in even more variety, including boat trips, flower arranging, and other activities inspired by members' ideas

Looking ahead, we have got lots to be excited about. New taster sessions will include horse riding, skiing, cricket, paddleboarding, bell boating, and tennis. Plus, we will be keeping our much-loved events like Summer and Christmas parties, theatre trips, outdoor swimming and dancing!

Photo:
Park
Walk



Photo:
Matthew
making our
new film

Matthew's Journey Through Sudden Sight Loss and Toward a New Future

When 24-year-old Matthew moved to Reading at the beginning of 2024, he couldn't have imagined how drastically his life would change just a few months later. In April 2025, Matthew lost almost all of his sight after being diagnosed with a brain tumour. He has no light perception in his right eye and can only see light and vague shapes in his left. He is now registered as severely sight impaired.

Understandably, the sudden loss of his vision was overwhelming. "Those first few weeks were a blur of confusion," Matthew recalls. "There was so much information to process and so many adjustments to make, all while I couldn't see."

What followed was an emotional journey, one that Matthew describes as moving through the five stages of grief.

"It felt like losing yourself, almost," he says, reflecting on those early days when fear and uncertainty overwhelmed him.

The Shock of Sudden Change

In the immediate aftermath, Matthew struggled not only with the practical challenges of sight loss, but also with its emotional toll. He found himself worrying about his independence, his future family, and whether he would be able to support himself. "I had those fears — will I ever have my own money? Will I be able to look after potential future children?" he says.

Those closest to him wanted to help, but often weren't sure how. "In the early days, everyone was sort of on eggshells around me," he remembers. "Talking slightly differently, treating me slightly differently..." What he needed most was to be spoken to like the same person he had always been.

A Lifeline: Berkshire Vision Steps In

While Matthew was still in hospital, nurses referred him to Berkshire Vision.

Cara, our Sight Loss Support Officer, contacted him and within weeks visited him at home when he felt ready to talk. "Having Berkshire Vision there to help me work through those stages and understand these things was really important to me," Matthew says. "They get it. They understand people and the issues that come with sight loss." Cara supported Matthew through the maze of benefits, practical adjustments, and emotional challenges that came with sight loss.

"For me, Berkshire Vision's support was life changing," Matthew says. "When you lose your sight, the amount of information you have to take in is overwhelming. Berkshire Vision gave me the tools and the confidence to move forward."

With Cara's support, alongside the Technology and Equipment team and the Employability team, Matthew began to rebuild his sense of independence.

Redefining What's Possible

One of Matthew's biggest early fears was that his career dreams were no longer achievable. Teaching, something he had always wanted to pursue, felt impossible at first. But Berkshire Vision's team quickly reassured him.

Working with Jenna from the Employability team, Matthew began preparing applications and exploring the adjustments available to him. With their support, he is now planning to begin teacher training.

Matthew has shared his story as part of our new film that highlights the work we do. You can watch it here.



Real life experiences of using META GLASSES:

DOM'S STORY

Dom, is one of our Sight Loss Support Officers here at Berkshire Vision, she regularly draws on her own experience of severe sight impairment to support others in building independence and confidence. She has been using Meta smart glasses for around a year, and they have significantly improved her day-to-day life. She uses them to read out letters and small print and to identify settings on her oven dials so she can cook safely at home. The glasses also offer navigation support through maps, this is particularly useful when she is walking her dog, as the glasses can let her know her location if she gets lost. While she recognises they are not perfect and can sometimes be inconsistent, she describes them as a powerful and practical tool, often recommending that others trial them, as for many people they quickly become an invaluable everyday companion.

JUDY'S STORY

In 2024, Judy experienced a sudden loss of sight over the course of just three days. The cause of her sight loss remains unclear, and this period was extremely difficult for her.



Photo:
Dom wearing
her Meta
glasses

Overnight, Judy had to begin adjusting to life with little to no vision.

Following her diagnosis, Judy was referred to Berkshire Vision, where she was introduced to Dom. Dom visited Judy at home to provide practical support, helping her to apply for Attendance Allowance, discussing assistive technology options and ongoing support to help Judy remain as independent as possible.

Judy went on to attend our Living Well with Sight Loss course, which she found extremely helpful. The course gave her practical skills, confidence, and reassurance that she was not alone in her journey. During the course, Dom delivered a demonstration of her Meta smart glasses. This session sparked Judy's interest, as she could see the potential for the technology to support her independence in everyday life. Dom visited Judy at home to give her a one-to-one demonstration of the Meta glasses. After seeing first-hand how useful the glasses could be, Judy decided to purchase her own pair.

The Meta glasses have made a significant difference to Judy's ability to manage daily tasks at home and when she is out and about.

They support her with:

- ✓ Sorting coloured and white laundry
- ✓ Identifying items in her fridge
- ✓ Following cooking instructions
- ✓ Identifying spices and ingredients while cooking
- ✓ Reading letters and other printed mail
- ✓ Identifying household items she is holding
- ✓ Reading menus when out in restaurants and cafés

Judy feels the glasses play a vital role in helping her maintain her independence and confidence.

If you would like to find out more about Meta glasses please get in touch with us on **0118 987 2803** or email **info@berkshirevision.org.uk**

Children, Young People and Families

Our younger members have had a wonderfully busy and exciting few months. Theatre and dance have featured as some of our activities. We enjoyed performances at Reading Rep theatre and at the Watermill, Newbury. This included touch tours where we were able to explore the stage, and feel the different props and speak to the actors. The Watermill also gave us a two day workshop to explore how a story is converted into a performance. We had great fun sailing a ship and looking for treasure!



Photo: Lux meeting a seagull at the Watermill.

Synergy Dance have been running dance workshops for us too. We have even made up our own dance moves to some K-pop and Abba songs, as well as learnt how to relax.



Photo: Group dancing with scarves.



Photo: Group in workshop with sailboat prop.



Photo: Isla and mum ready to race up the hill!

Tandem cycling with Newbury Velo has given us all some exercise. Some of our teens and parents took part in their annual road race last September, and we have also enjoyed cycling circuits at an athletics track.

We continue to enjoy travelling by train with a 'Travelling with Confidence' project, funded by Motability and the 'Try a Train' project funded by Great Western Railway. So far this year, we have been on a train to Didcot Steam Railway and experienced a steam train ride. We have also been to Hungerford, and helped open some of the canal locks! We have planned our summer travel day out to go to London and go on a boat, the Thames Clipper.

In April we built our own bird box at the Eco Skills Learning Centre in May half term, and we made bug hotel to go with our bird boxes.

We are looking forward to warmer weather to enjoy the planned Summer activities which include boat trips, tandem cycling, and tennis!



Photo: Exploring the braille at Reading station



Photo: Group with their finished bird boxes

Fundraising update

A huge thank you to everyone who has fundraised or donated to us over the last six months.

Many of you know first hand the support we offer, and your donations and fundraising activities helps make that same support possible for others, whether they are newly diagnosed with sight loss or at any point along their journey.

Thank you to everyone who supported our Christmas campaign. Fundraising at that time of year makes a real difference, and we were really touched by the messages that came in alongside many of the donations, often from people sharing how our support has helped them. Thank you as well to everyone who took part in the Christmas raffle, and to those who joined the Santa Run, helping to raise funds while having a bit of festive fun.

Photo:
Santa Run



We would also like to say a huge thank you to Hayley, who took on the incredible challenge of running the London Marathon for us. You can read more about Hayley's marathon on page 3.

Our New Fundraising Pack

As a charity, we rely heavily on fundraising to keep our support available, and fundraising is something anyone can take part in, especially those who understand the value of what we do. **You do not need to take on a big challenge to make a difference.** We have recently launched a new fundraising pack designed to make it easy for everyone to get involved. The pack includes lots of simple, achievable

ideas, such as inviting friends or family round for coffee and cake, organising a sponsored walk, or running a small fundraiser with colleagues or within your community. These everyday activities really do add up. If you are feeling more ambitious, there are also ideas for larger challenges, like running a local 10k. Whatever you choose, let us know and we can help you.

To get a copy of our fundraising pack please email:
matthew.thomas@berkshirevision.org.uk

If you would prefer to take part in an event we have already organised, there are opportunities coming up, including a skydive and the Maidenhead Boundary Walk.

Upcoming Fundraising Events

Skydive – Multiple dates throughout the year

Join us for a tandem skydive at Brackley Airfield and take on an unforgettable challenge while raising vital funds. Several of our members took part last year, so please be reassured this is an activity suitable for those with a visual impairment.

Minimum fundraising target: **£450**

Maidenhead Boundary Walk – Sunday 4th October

After an incredible year in 2025, we are excited to be returning to take part in the Maidenhead Boundary Walk, please join us if you can. Choose from:

- > **13.1 mile full walk**
- > **6.5 mile family friendly option**

Fundraising targets:
£75 per individual
or **£250 per family/team**

If you are interested in either event or would like to find out more, please contact **matthew.thomas@berkshirevision.org.uk**

You could win a prize in our summer raffle, see staff at activities to buy tickets or call us on 0118 987 2803

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Supporting Your Independence: New Audio Bus Stop Displays Launched in Reading

At Berkshire Vision, we know how important it is to maintain your independence, not just in the big moments, but in the everyday routines that help you stay in control of your own life. For those of you who feel able to travel independently around your community, we understand that public transport can sometimes feel challenging, especially when information isn't accessible.

That's why we're pleased to share news of a change in Reading that has the potential to make local journeys easier and more reassuring for many of you. Reading Buses and Reading Borough Council have installed new audio enabled information displays at more than 100 bus stops across the town. Each stop now includes a large yellow button that, when pressed, reads out the next buses due to arrive. This means you can hear which services are approaching, how long you may need to wait, and whether you're standing at the correct stop, all without needing to rely on sight or the help of a passer-by.

Photo:
Bob using the
new audio bus
stop



If you are keen to become more independent, our Real Eyes guiding service can help you build confidence. A trained volunteer can help you to practise a route, with the goal being that you can then do this on your own. This could be getting the bus and using the new audio announcements, it could be getting the train or going to the local shop or the hospital.

If you would like to find out more about this service, please get in touch with **Jo** on **0118 987 2803** or by emailing **jo.davis@berkshirevision.org.uk**

We are currently looking into how accessible public transport is in other areas of Berkshire and will share what we learn in future updates.

Ask a Sight Loss Support Officer:

What Benefits might I be entitled to?

Personal Independence Payment

PIP is a benefit aimed at helping you with the extra costs caused by illness or disability, including sight loss. It has replaced Disability Living Allowance (DLA). It is for people aged 16 or over and under the state pension age when they make a claim. This is not means tested. DLA still exists for people under 16.

Attendance Allowance

You may qualify for Attendance Allowance if you have reached state pension age and need help to do things, like choosing clothes, reading and replying to mail, walking around safely and taking part in social activities. Attendance Allowance is not a means-tested benefit, so it doesn't matter how much other income or savings you have. You can get Attendance Allowance even if you live alone and don't have anyone looking after you; it is your need for help that is important.

Universal Credit

The government has now replaced several working-age benefits with a single new benefit called Universal Credit. You may be eligible for it if you are not working or on a low income. It doesn't matter whether you're in or out of work. It has replaced the following existing benefits, which are now known as "legacy benefits":

- ✓ Income Support
- ✓ Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- ✓ Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- ✓ Child Tax Credit
- ✓ Working Tax Credit
- ✓ Housing benefit

UC can include extra money and help, including help with essentials, housing costs and health costs.

Blind Persons Tax Allowance

You are entitled to the Blind Person's Tax Allowance if you are registered blind or severely sight impaired with your local council.

Having the allowance means you can earn more before you start paying tax. Unfortunately, the allowance will not be given to you. You have to claim it.

Pension Credit

Pension Credit is a benefit for anyone who has reached the qualifying age and has a relatively low income. You may get it even if you have some savings and modest retirement income. It can be paid on top of your state retirement pension. If you have built up a pot of money through a defined contribution pension, how and when you choose to draw money out of it will affect the amount of Pension Credit you can receive.

Travel

The Disabled Person's Railcard gives at least one-third off the price of certain rail tickets for the cardholder, and an accompanying adult where applicable, in England, Wales and Scotland. Even if you do not have the Disabled Person's Railcard, you can get discounted rail travel of 34% or 50 % on certain tickets, or free travel for a companion when you travel on your season ticket.

For buses, you can apply for a free disabled person's bus pass, providing free off-peak travel on local buses nationwide. In some areas, disabled bus passes allow companions to travel for free. You can apply online through your local council website.

Car parking - the Blue Badge scheme

If you are registered as severely sight impaired, you could be eligible to apply for the Blue Badge scheme. The scheme, run by local authorities, allows drivers to park in spaces reserved for disabled people.

TV Licence

If you are severely sight impaired and can provide the appropriate evidence, you are eligible to apply for a 50% concession. Your licence will also cover anyone who lives with you. If you are partially sighted (sight impaired) you are not eligible.

If you would like support with claiming benefits, please call us on **0118 987 2803** or email **info@berkshirevision.org.uk** and a Sight Loss Support Officer will be able to help.

Write your will for **FREE**

Writing a will can give peace of mind, knowing that your wishes are clear and that the people and causes important to you are looked after.



We've partnered with **Octopus Legacy** to offer this free will writing service to our members:

You can write your will for free online at:

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

If Berkshire Vision has made a difference in your life, you're not alone. Many people have benefitted from sight loss support visits, social and sports activities, equipment and technology support, or simply knowing there's someone at the end of the phone when it matters most.

Some members choose to include a gift to Berkshire Vision in their will as a way of showing their support for our work. This is entirely optional and there is no obligation to leave a gift in order to use the free will writing service.

If you have any questions please contact
Clare at Berkshire Vision on 0118 987 2803

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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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