



Working to make life better for blind and partially sighted people

# Sight Action News

December 2016 Edition

Supported by the Highland & Islands Society for Blind People

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**Happy Christmas from all of us here at Sight Action**

This edition includes a note from our new Chair – Maureen Macmillan and an introduction to a new Director, who lives in Caithness, Dr Shona Turnbull. Also a reminder about the services that the volunteers provide, and contact details for all the Support Groups and Talking Newspapers, plus much more!

**Sight Action will be closed for the holidays from 4.00 pm Friday 23 December 2016 re-opening on Wednesday 4 January 2017 at 9.00 am.**



### **A WORD FROM THE CHAIR**

I joined the Board of Sight Action some years ago, after having my arm twisted by our Chair at the time, Ann Maclean. Now I have been appointed Chair of the Board.

Being a Director ensures the aims and objectives of the organisation are carried out, making sure it stays solvent, spends funds wisely, and supports the staff in their work. Directors also work with senior staff to develop business plans and long term strategies. My job as chair is to work with Murray Cochrane, our Chief Executive, to make sure everything runs smoothly and that we are fulfilling Sight Action's objectives.

This can't happen in a vacuum of course. The Board must remember that Sight Action's reason for existing is to support visually impaired people. Gillian Mitchell, Client Services Manager, suggested I attend the Service Users Forum, which brought home to me the daily challenges faced by all of you.

At the other end of the scale, Gillian and I attend the cross party group on visual impairment at the Scottish Parliament where hopefully we can influence Scottish Government Policy. Already we have been asked by the government to research the impact of Low Vision Services throughout Scotland. An important recognition of Sight Action's expertise.

Supporting service users throughout the Highlands is challenging. Our geography means the excellent rehabilitation and support workers often travel vast distances to reach you or, worse still, you have impossible

journeys to access support groups or drop-in services. This is a hard nut we are hoping to crack by enrolling volunteers in local areas, under the direction of Sarah Shaw, Volunteer Co-ordinator. These volunteers, who will then be trained by Sight Action staff, play a hugely important part in Sight Action.

We know the future will be challenging. An ageing population in the Highlands will mean an increase in vision problems and other disabilities. Often a person will have more than one disability and we must learn to support the whole person. Already we are moving towards Sensory Services rather than sight or hearing in isolation. I would hope to see this taken further and would also hope to see the whole issue of mobility and access to services addressed in the Highlands. With political will it can be done.

Maureen Macmillan  
CHAIR OF THE BOARD

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### **A WORD FROM SHONA, OUR NEW DIRECTOR**



As someone who is still new and fresh to Sight Action, it has been really useful to be attend a couple of Board meetings. I am beginning to get an understanding of how the meetings work and my role within the charity. So far, I do know that the Sight Action staff and volunteers have had an exceptionally busy year, with an increased workload, yet have carried on with great passion and enthusiasm. However, I still have a lot to learn about their extensive workload. I hope to remedy this by sitting in on some of the volunteer training, visiting the drop-in sessions in Caithness and of course, at this time of year, getting to know everyone at the Christmas lunch.

I hope the excellent work that Sight Action has done over the year has helped you, your family and friends by providing the support you need to make life a little easier. So whilst we are all hopefully spending our Christmas the way we would wish, with those we love and cherish, let's

try and make sure we don't forget those who may be on their own. If you can, invite them to lunch or just a sherry and mince pie!

Happy Christmas,

Shona

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### **MAKE YOUR NEEDS KNOWN!**

Recently a couple of incidents have been brought to our attention where some clients have been unable to complete medical forms at their dentists, as they could not read the text.

The text was very small but also printed on buff coloured paper, therefore not a good contrast.

Sight Action has highlighted these issues at a Dentists' planning meeting and Dentists have recommended that if you have any issues regarding communication, please make this known to the practices, to prevent embarrassing situations.

It would be good practice to make all health professionals that you visit aware of your communications needs. This might prevent appointments etc being sent out in inappropriate formats.

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### **STOP PRESS**

#### **CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL CARD INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT**



This is the current card that needs to be replaced by 31 December 2016.

Councils are currently replacing the National Entitlement Cards which are used for concessionary travel for anyone aged 60 or over or anyone who has received a card on grounds of disability.

The new style card will either have a "mygovscot" or "saltirecard" logo on it, replacing the One Scotland logo. **Both card designs are valid for travel and will be accepted by bus operators.**



You will notice that the new style over 60s card no longer has a “valid to” date. This means it is now a card for life.

Cards issued on the grounds of disability will continue to display a “valid to” date, although you only need your proof of entitlement and current card to renew this.

If your current card has the “mygovscot” or “saltirecard” logo, then you already have the new card and do not need a replacement.

New cards are being issued to everyone in advance of the current card expiring and once you receive your new card you should start using it straight away. It is important your old card is destroyed to avoid confusion.

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As well as Scotland-wide free bus travel, sight impaired cardholders with the eye symbol on their card, are also eligible for free train (in Scotland, as far as Berwick-upon-Tweed and Carlisle) and Edinburgh tram travel, and concessions are available on ferry travel, although you should contact the service operator for further information.

Eligibility for eye symbol - people who are registered as severely sight impaired (blind) or sight impaired (partially sighted).

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Companion Travel Logo – If you have this symbol on your card, you’re entitled to have a companion travel with you, on the same journey, for free. Your companion and journey can vary, but your companion can only travel free when with you. You are not obliged to travel with a companion, but the entitlement is there if needed.

Travelling on a bus service outwith Highland, a booking fee of 50p is charged for outbound Journey and 50p for the return, which is only valid if booked in Highland ie £1.00 payable for return.

Travelling on a train service outwith Highland, a booking fee of 50p for outbound Journey and 50p for the return which is only valid if booked in Highland ie £1.00 payable for return.

This will only apply if train journey destinations are at Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Destinations outwith these three, will not honour the Companion concession.



Eligibility for Companion - You are registered as severely sight impaired (blind)

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This information has been condensed to reflect the needs of people with visual impairment.

Further information may be found on the Transport Scotland website.

[www.transport.gov.scot/public-transport/concessionary-travel](http://www.transport.gov.scot/public-transport/concessionary-travel)

**\*Applications for Travel Cards –** NCT001 form from the Service Point (Application for a National Entitlement Card – Scotland wide free bus travel for disabled people or those requiring a companion element +1).

Form needs to be completed on first application and subsequently renewed by producing your evidence of entitlement at the Service Point.

\*Information from Customer Service Operation Manager, Highland Council

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## CONNECTING CARERS

Connecting Carers is a registered charity based in Dingwall which offers help, support and information to any unpaid carer across Highland. Figures suggest there are over 30,000 unpaid carers in Highland alone and over the ten years Connecting Carers have been identifying and helping thousands, but we still have a long way to go to find the ever growing number of carers.

Caring can happen at any time, to any one, and every day in the UK 6,000 people become carers. For some it's sudden and unexpected; someone is taken ill or has an accident; a child is born with a disability. For others caring creeps up unnoticed; parents who can't manage any more on their own or a partner whose health gradually gets worse.

Many unpaid carers are unaware of the benefits and support that are available to them and often care in isolation with many suffering from physical, emotional or mental stress. Connecting Carers can signpost carers in the right direction. We also offer a free advocacy service to help carers find their voice when dealing with the challenges of being a carer.

As well as offering advice and information, Connecting Carers make small financial awards that allow unpaid carers to take a break from caring. These awards can be anything from £30.00 up to £250.00.

Connecting Carers doesn't just look after adult carers. The Connecting Young Carers team works with schools to raise awareness of the challenges young carers face and provides respite opportunities for them to have a break from caring. Carers can be as young as five years old, looking after a parent or sibling and it is estimated that one in 12 secondary school pupils has a caring role. There are currently over five hundred 5 – 15 year olds in a caring role in Highland.

The Scottish Government recognises the huge contribution made by unpaid carers and estimate it at over £2 billion per annum to the Scottish economy. The recent Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, due to come in April 2018, places a duty on local authorities to provide support to carers. Under the Act all carers should receive a specific Adult Carer Support Plan or Young Carer Statement to identify individual carers' needs and personal outcomes which will help carers to access benefits, support and care packages.

Connecting Carers has a remit to carry out Carer Support Plans in Highland and if you think you would benefit from having a Plan please give them a call, number below.

Looking after someone can be tough, rewarding and uplifting. It can also be physically and emotionally draining to the point that the carer's own

health begins to suffer. Support and recognition for the work of unpaid carers is vital because without them our health care system would be in a state of crisis.

If you are an unpaid carer and would like to find out more about your rights and options available please give the team at Connecting Carers a call on **01463 723560** or email [carers@connectingcarers.org.uk](mailto:carers@connectingcarers.org.uk) . We look forward to hearing from you.

### **DEVELOPMENTS WITH TALKING BOOKS**

The Talking Book Library Team, at present consisting of Susan, Adam, Belinda and Imogen, would like to update you on developments.

Susan is moving to pastures new when we close for the Christmas Holiday – she will be missed and Sight Action would like to thank her for her help and enthusiasm and wish her the very best in the future.

A replacement volunteer will shortly be in place, while Adam and Belinda will continue as volunteers on Mondays and Thursdays, sending out new titles as speedily as possible (computer and viruses permitting!).

Adam is also adding new titles to the archive. As we are now sourcing titles from CD rather than cassette tape, the audio quality is greatly improved and we hope this will add to your enjoyment of the service.

Please keep sending your requests, as many and as often as you like, and remember that if you need any help with your Talking Book Library Service just let us know and we will respond as quickly as possible.

Finally, and very importantly, we would like to send you very best wishes for the Festive Season.

The Talking Book Library Team

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### **VISION SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS**

<b><u>AVIEMORE</u></b>	<b>When</b>	Variable
	<b>Where</b>	Different locations
	<b>Time</b>	2.00 – 4.00
	<b>Contact</b>	Joy Roberts – 01479 812456
<b><u>DINGWALL</u></b>	<b>When</b>	4th Thursday of the month
	<b>Where</b>	Dingwall Community Centre
	<b>Time</b>	2.00 – 4.00
	<b>Contact</b>	Dawn Furze – 01463 233663
<b><u>GRANTOWN ON SPEY</u></b>	<b>When</b>	1st Wednesday of each month
	<b>Where</b>	Grant Arms Hotel
	<b>Time</b>	2.00 – 4.00
	<b>Contact</b>	Peter McLoughlin - 01381 621572
<b><u>INVERNESS Chat Club</u></b>	<b>When</b>	Meets every Friday
	<b>Where</b>	Various locations
	<b>Time</b>	9.30 – 4.30 (includes being picked up and returned)
	<b>Contact</b>	Margaret Johnson – 01463 222527
<b><u>INVERNESS Daytrippers</u></b>	<b>When</b>	1st Wednesday of every month
	<b>Where</b>	Various locations
	<b>Time</b>	10.00 – 4.30 (this includes being picked up and returned home)
	<b>Contact</b>	Sarah Shaw – 01463 233663
<b><u>INVERNESS Walking Group</u></b>	<b>When</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Tuesday of every month
	<b>Where</b>	Various locations
	<b>Time</b>	10.00 – 4.30 (this is dependent on where the walks are taking place)
	<b>Contact</b>	Sarah Shaw – 01463 233663

<b><u>LOCHABER</u></b>	<b>When</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month
	<b>Where</b>	Various venues
	<b>Time</b>	2.00 – 4.00
	<b>Contact</b>	Catriona Menzies - 01463 233663
<b><u>NAIRN</u></b>	<b>When</b>	1st Tuesday of each month
	<b>Where</b>	Queenspark Gardens Sheltered Housing Complex
	<b>Time</b>	2.00 – 4.00
	<b>Contact</b>	Bob Stewart – 01667 454101 John Mathieson – 01667 453508
<b><u>SKYE AND LOCHALSH</u></b>	<b>When</b>	3rd Thursday of each month
	<b>Where</b>	Various venues
	<b>Time</b>	2.00 – 4.00
	<b>Contact</b>	Donald John MacLeod – 01599 522207
<b><u>THURSO</u></b>	<b>When</b>	1st Wednesday of each month
	<b>Where</b>	British Legion Hall
	<b>Time</b>	2.00 – 4.00
	<b>Contact</b>	Edward Fraser – 01847 893391

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### **5km PARK RUNNING**

9.30 On Saturday at Bught Park. Assistance provided to those with a visual impairment.

**Please contact Howard Swindells on 01349 882302**

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### **PORTRAIT PROJECT IN THE NORTH OF SCOTLAND**

My name is Roddy McKenzie and I am a photographer living in Easter Ross. I would like to undertake a project that involves doing portraits of

blind or visually impaired people in the north of Scotland. It might seem strange to have your portrait taken if you cannot see the image but that is the very important the point. There has been a huge increase in self-portraits – commonly referred to as a ‘selfie’ – and whether you like them or not, what happens in such a dominant visual culture is that it is taken for granted about who constitutes society. I think it is important that all members of society are represented and I see photography and the portrait as one of the most powerful ways of doing this. Photography is the ideal way to document and record moments we experience and wish to preserve and the people, places and things we find remarkable. With each portrait there are stories to be told and heard and so it is also a powerful way of starting a conversation.

This project will do that by having an exhibition and awareness raising activities as the end product. Any portraits done will take full accounts of the needs and preferences of the person being photographed and they will have full control over whether their photograph is used or not.

If you would like to take part in this project please contact Gillian Mitchell, (at Sight Action) in the first instance who will pass your details to me. Thanks for taking the time to read this. I look forward to hearing from you.

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## VOLUNTEER SERVICES

Sight Action’s volunteers can assist in lots of ways:

**Handy Person Volunteers** Both John and Alfred can help with small jobs in the home and garden. It is important to remember they do not touch gas, electricity or plumbing. If you need the help of a handy man and live in Inverness, Nairn or Badenoch & Strathspey, give us a ring.

**Drivers** We can help with lifts to appointments but we do need a minimum of three days’ notice.

**Talking Books Service** If you want to find out more about this a volunteer can phone or come out to see you. A volunteer can come and demonstrate the boom box, leave you with a talking book and a copy of the catalogue so you can spend some time deciding if the service is for you.

**Support Groups** There are groups in Inverness, Dingwall, Aviemore, Grantown, Wick, Thurso, Kyle of Lochalsh and the Western Isles.

If you live in Sutherland and Tain and are interested in a group starting in your area please let me know.

**Walking Group** Meets once a month on the first Tuesday. If you would like to find out more we can arrange for one of the volunteers to talk to you about it.

**IT** The IPad training will start Tuesday 10 January 2017 and will be held at Beechwood. The class will run from 1.00 – 2.30 and will be held over six consecutive weeks finishing Tuesday 14 February. Sight Action has six iPads that can be used. Please ring Sarah on 01463 233663 and let her know if you are interested in attending.

**Caithness and Sutherland** - Sight Action is now recruiting volunteers in both Caithness and Sutherland. We have someone who will help with Talking Books, IT and visiting in Caithness. In Sutherland we have a gentleman who will help with odd jobs, driving and IT.

**Please contact Sarah Shaw on 01463 233663 or direct dial 01463 256112.**

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### **DO NOT FORGET THE TALKING NEWSPAPER SERVICES**

Inverness Talking Newspapers – 01463 242600

Talk Lochaber - 01397 702240

01397 702990

Caithness Talking Newspapers - 01955 606170

Sutherland Talking Newspapers - 01408 633405

Skye Talking News - 01478 613113

(West Highland Free Press)

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## **OrCam's Breakthrough Assistive Technology Device Delivers Independence to People who are Blind and Partially Sighted**

*Revolutionary Advances in Wearable Artificial Vision  
have Transformed the Lives of British People Living with Sight Loss*

"It relaxes you, makes you feel safer. You experience less tension. OrCam gives information, leading to self-reliance." This assertion by Allan Mabert, from Essex, who has experienced deterioration of vision over the years to the point where he can now only perceive light, results from Allan's embrace of OrCam's artificial vision technology.

OrCam Technologies, the artificial vision innovator for people who are blind or visually impaired, has introduced its breakthrough device in the United Kingdom. The world's most advanced wearable assistive technology solution, OrCam MyEye communicates visual information by instantly reading any printed text as well as recognising faces of individuals and identifying products. "OrCam is an assistive device, the support it provides is very convenient, discreet and simple to operate," explained Allan.

OrCam has dramatically improved Allan's independence and now plays a vital role in his daily life. Almost unnoticeable, the device is a tiny camera that fits on the side of almost any glasses frame. The back of the camera is positioned towards the ear, without blocking it, and speaks to the wearer.

The inconspicuous OrCam camera and speaker, connected to a processing unit that fits in a pocket, converts visual information into the spoken word. Any printed text – on any surface – is naturally readable, including newspapers, books, computer screens, restaurant menus, labels on supermarket products, and road signs.

OrCam's device is so perceptive that it reacts to the most natural of human gestures – pointing. When Allan wants something to be read to him, he simply points at it. The revolutionary visual recognition technology which powers the OrCam device instantly converts the text into audio.

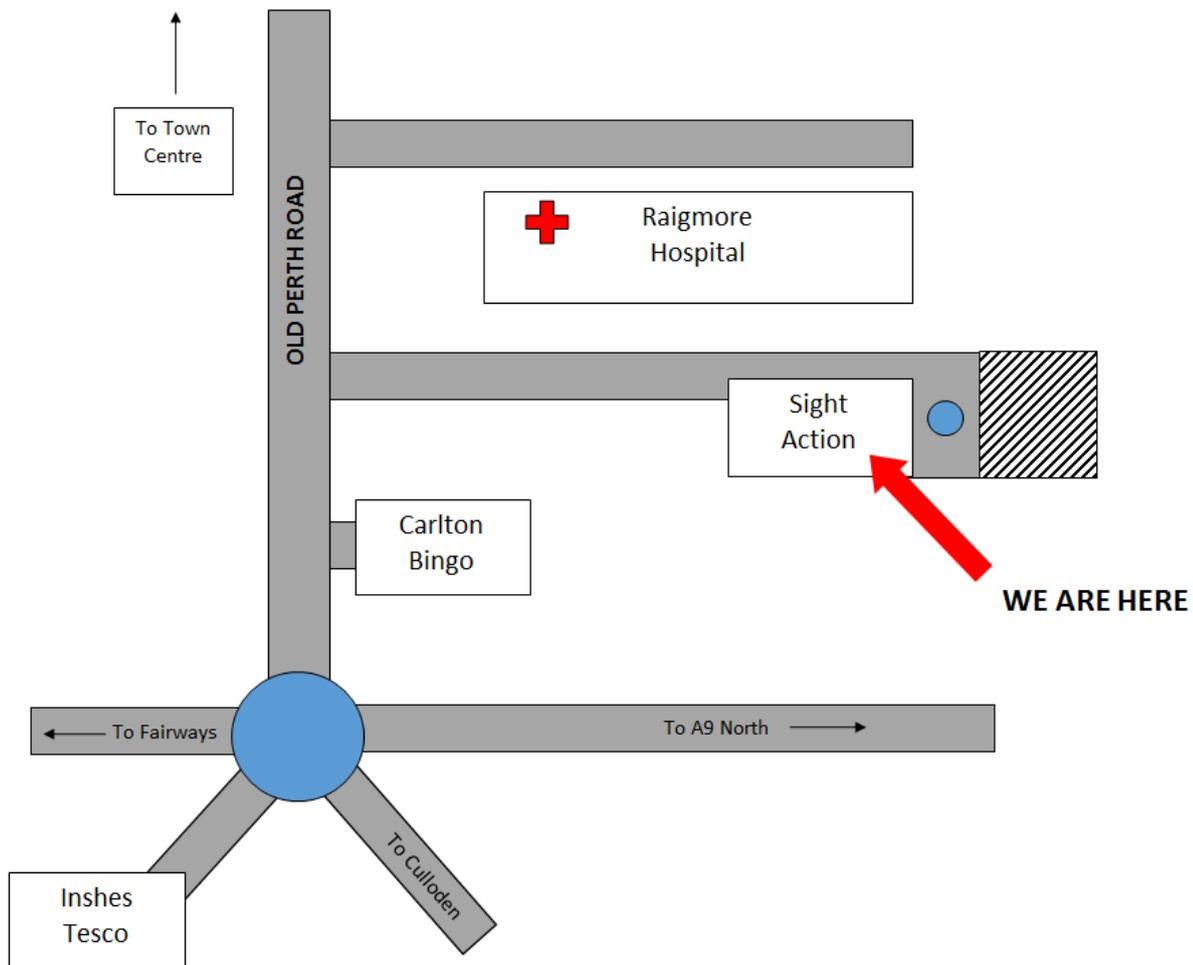
Every OrCam MyEye device is hand-delivered by a certified OrCam Trainer™ who teaches every new user how to incorporate the device's technology into their daily lives.

To see for yourself:

A demonstration of OrCam MyEye will be given on 6 January at the Sight Action Office at Beechwood House, Inverness. To book an appointment and for more information, please ring Catriona Menzies at 01463 233663.

To book a personal demonstration of OrCam, please ring 0800 358 5323 or visit [www.orcam.com](http://www.orcam.com).





## HOW TO FIND US

**SIGHT ACTION, BEECHWOOD HOUSE, 69-71 OLD PERTH ROAD,  
INVERNESS IV2 3JH**

**TEL: 01463 233663**

**EMAIL: [ADMIN@HIGHLANDSENSORY.ORG.UK](mailto:ADMIN@HIGHLANDSENSORY.ORG.UK)**

**WEBSITE: [WWW.SIGHTACTION.ORG.UK](http://WWW.SIGHTACTION.ORG.UK)**