

Suffolk Sight News



Autumn Winter 2025/26



Suffolk Sight

Suffolk Sight is your local, community-based sight loss charity supporting children and adults of all ages.

We work hard to provide services that are friendly and practical, and to raise awareness of the different aspects of living with sight loss. These can include daily living aids, emotional support, benefits advice and the latest tech solutions. You're welcome to book a visit to one of our resource hubs or we can arrange to visit you at home. Find out about our social opportunities; connect to our befriending scheme, and be put in touch with other services based on your personal interests.

Our dedicated team are here to offer support, advice and guidance based on your individual sight loss needs. We work closely with you for as long as you need, offering ideas and solutions to help with confidence and independence.

Suffolk Sight is an independent charity and as such receives no funding from the government. We rely on our amazing supporters to continue our work through donations, legacies and non-statutory grants.

Supporting You - Services

As a beneficiary of **Suffolk Sight** you will be able to access a wealth of support and information. It's free and you can choose your level of engagement and involvement.

Our dedicated and highly skilled team of community workers and technical advisers understand the issues that people face as they live their life with a visual impairment.

Continued on inside back cover

Volunteering for *Suffolk Sight*

You can make a difference. We welcome the opportunity to involve volunteers in all aspects of our work.

We have lots of different roles, from social clubs to social media, fundraising, administration, transport and befriending. There are plenty of ways throughout the organisation that you can help.

Contact us and we can tell you about our opportunities and discuss how best we can support each other.

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Image shows the Suffolk Sight team gathered on the lawn at St Edmundsbury Cathedral after this year’s successful Equipment and Information Day.

What a busy Spring and Summer it's been

As you read through the many articles in this bumper edition of *Suffolk Sight News*, you will appreciate how busy our team of staff, volunteers and trustees have been, spreading the message of the services and care we offer to you, our treasured beneficiaries.

'Suffolk Sight Yellow' has been seen in abundance across the county, not only promoting the charity itself but raising funds as well to continue to ensure that we can support those with sight loss in the future. In some instances, the colour has attracted unwelcome, but friendly visitors in the form of a loveliness of ladybirds at The Hut in Felixstowe.

We have a fantastically dedicated and caring team who always go the extra mile in everything that they do, for which I and the trustees are not only grateful, but amazed by their application and heartened by the results. You will read moving, real-life stories of the difference we are making to people's lives.

If you are one of the lucky people who are a member of one of our clubs, then I'd ask you to raise a glass at your Christmas celebration event to the Suffolk Sight Team and I wish you all seasonal best wishes.

Below, I've selected some of the images that show 'Suffolk Sight Yellow' at various events.

Geoff Staff

Chair of Trustees



Suffolk Sight Equipment and Information Day

We were very lucky with the weather this year and everyone was able to enjoy the beautiful surroundings of St Edmundsbury Cathedral on a summer's day. We had an incredible turnout, with 108 people attending.

We were joined by tech suppliers Humanware, Optelec, Vision Aid and Edward Marcus Ltd.

Local charities and organisations in attendance were Newmedica Suffolk, Sensing Change, Bury St Edmunds Library, Healthwatch Suffolk, the Rural Coffee Caravan and the SNEE Diabetic Eye Screening Team.

We received some very positive feedback from members of the public and the exhibitors following the event. The Rural Coffee Caravan team said "Thank you so much for inviting us – it was so lovely to find out about the services that you provide too. It's fantastic old-school support in the community. We look forward to working with you in the future."

The 2026 Equipment and Information Day will be held in Ipswich on Tuesday 9 June at The Key, 15 St Margaret's St, Ipswich IP4 2BB.



Image shows attendees of the Equipment and Information Day in the Edmund Room at St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

Fundraising round up

Over the summer, we were very grateful to our supporters who organised fundraising activities to benefit our charity.

Matthew Rawlings ran the Kirtling Marathon in Newmarket, on Sunday 11 May.

Matthew found out that a close family friend had been supported by our Community Workers:

“Eva, who has optic neuropathy, was diagnosed with leukaemia in 2020 and has been on a painful journey with this. It looked like things were going well but recently she had a setback to her recovery. The charity have been with her and her family from the beginning, at diagnosis and then through the whole journey, providing information and helping them cope and adapt to the changing situation.”

It was a fantastic effort by Matthew, on a challenging hot day and a very hilly route to complete! Matthew raised a fantastic £786.



Image shows Suffolk Sight’s Wendy receiving a cheque for £786 from Matt.

A big thank you to **The Village Store** in Ipswich, who have supported Suffolk Sight by hosting one of our collection tins. Over the last two years, customers have given very generously and managed to raise over £500, which is incredible!

Al Harris organised a charity football match.

Al said "A few years ago I lost a lot of my sight due to an aggressive form of glaucoma and, after having three major operations to save what sight I had left, I didn't know where to turn.



Image shows supporters enjoying the charity football match.

I was pointed in the direction of the charity Suffolk Sight and I'm extremely grateful for the support I have received from them. I wanted to give something back."

The match took place on Sunday 11 May at Bury Town Football Club. The game was played in good spirits, which matched the atmosphere of the whole afternoon.

Al didn't have a target in mind, but he was thrilled to report that with online donations and money taken on the day, the event raised a total of £1038.77!

As a small independent charity, we do not receive any government funding and are incredibly reliant on donations and funds raised by our wonderful supporters, so we really can't thank you all enough.

If you would like to make a donation, take on a challenge, or provide a location for one of our collection tins, please get in touch.

Call 01473 611011 or email info@suffolksight.org.uk

Seeing yellow everywhere at this year's festival

Suffolk Sight were chosen as one of a select number of charities to benefit from the proceeds raised by The East Anglian Beer and Cider Festival 2025.

We responded by providing a record number of volunteers, who were decked out in Suffolk Sight-branded bright yellow t-shirts, which were highly visible over the six days of the festival.

We also contributed to a first for the festival and probably a first for any festival. We had our very own Kevin Ramsey serve beer – never before has somebody who is blind served at an event like this, let alone for six continuous days. Because it was such a special achievement, it raised a lot of local media interest.

Radio Suffolk were the first to contact us. Originally, we had planned a couple of shorter shifts for Kevin, so that he could be eased into what would be a tiring schedule of over 30 hours working behind the Showcase Bar in St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

However, Radio Suffolk wanted a live chat with Kevin on the first day of the festival, which meant meeting for an interview with Luke Deal at 7am in the Cathedral car park! Later, after two interviews, a general introduction to the layout of the event and some practice pouring, Kevin and I were ready to meet the first customers.

Our shift ended at 7pm, so what was supposed to be a soft, less tiring start turned out to be entirely the opposite! The media interest continued into the second day with the recording of a piece for Look East, which was shown later in the week.



Image shows Kevin behind the Showcase Bar.

How did this all come about? Kevin had expressed his wish to be involved with the beer festival for a number of years. Initially we weren't as creative in our thinking as we might have been. However, with Chris McCausland showing that he could win Strictly Come Dancing, surely we could come up with a way for Kevin to serve beer.

The first attempt involved modifying three liquid level indicators so that they would be triggered when they reached the third-, half- and full-pint measures. What we hadn't appreciated, is that the head of the beer would trigger the buzz of the indicator, which meant that at best a customer would end up with about three quarters of a pint rather than the full measure, which obviously wouldn't go down well - nothing worse than a short pint at a beer festival! So, Kevin and I agreed a countdown system. While I took the voucher value of the beer and watched over Kevin pouring, I counted down from three to the required measure. What was surprising to me was that after the first day, Kevin began to sense when the beer reached the asked-for measure, and started saying 'stop' at exactly the same time as I did, without the need for counting down.

It brought home to me that a key thing I have realised since being involved with Suffolk Sight is that those of us who are blessed with



Image shows Kevin serving beer to Joe Hawes, Dean of St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

good sight need to be open to the fact that, perhaps with minor adjustments, those who experience sight loss to any degree can do much more than we might first expect and we need to spend time and effort being more creative in finding solutions to the challenges faced by the visually impaired. I know that our Community Workers do this for our beneficiaries on a daily basis.

So far, I've singled out Kevin's contribution, but he was one of a team of our volunteers who helped out in multiple capacities over the six days, putting in significant hours and lots of hard work which we believe will result in us receiving a record share of the proceeds. Above all, it was great fun, and it made me proud to see an extensive peppering of yellow.

Geoff Staff

A huge thank you to ...

... our amazing volunteers: you poured, you smiled, you hustled, and together we raised funds and boosted the profile of our charity!

Your hard work has made a lasting impact and I'm so proud to work alongside such fantastic people.

This couldn't have happened without you. Thank you!"

Agnieszka Jeffrey

Social Club and Volunteer Co-ordinator



Images show four of our many fantastic volunteers showing off their Suffolk Sight yellow t-shirts.

Behind the scenes at Portman Road!

In an unforgettable experience, a group of our visually-impaired members took to the pitch and beyond at Portman Road, the home of Ipswich Town Football Club!

Our beneficiaries immersed themselves in the rich history of the club, guided by knowledgeable and passionate tour guides, Blake and Pete.

The highlights of the tour included access to the Directors Box, the Home and Away dressing rooms, and the Manager's office.

The group also had the chance to sit in the home dugout and walk through the tunnel, echoing the footsteps of their favourite players.

The tour concluded with a visit to the Hall of Fame and the press conference room

A huge thank you to Ipswich Town Football Club for their hospitality and support in making this event a success. We're already looking forward to the next adventure.



Images show the Suffolk Sight team in the very blue changing room (top) and the terraces at Portman Road (bottom).

Social Club round-up

We're delighted to share a round-up of some of the highlights of our recent social club activities - and what a busy few weeks it's been!

Our clubs continue to grow stronger, bringing people with sight loss together for laughter and lasting friendships.

It was a pleasure to receive some very positive feedback, regarding one of our social groups.

"Mum has only this year started to go along to your local social club, and what a difference it has made to her life! We speak to Mum on the phone every day, and every time she has been to one of your events, she is absolutely buzzing! She loves the coffee mornings, meals in pubs, the quizzes, and the trips out, such as the summer one to Felixstowe.

Having lost her husband (our step-dad) at the very beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, and because we weren't allowed to visit, she spent a lot of time alone. Mum is a sociable person, so found this hard. Then, her sight started deteriorating to the point where she was registered blind, and when the world opened up again, she had lost a bit of her confidence in going out and about and meeting new people.

It is very hard for her to recognise people or remember names (not having much visually to work on). This doesn't seem to matter with your group! She has been welcomed in, and your staff take such good care of her, including phoning to check that she knows the dates and times of the next meeting (this is very helpful as she can no longer see her calendar).

What a difference your services make! Mum is more like her old self; happy and chatty. She always says what a laugh you all have.

We wanted to let you know that you make Mum and her family very happy. Thank you for your warm welcome and for taking care of her. She is precious to us"

A firm favourite on the social club calendar is a trip to 'The Hut' in Felixstowe.

'Oh, I do like to be beside the seaside'

This popular British Music Hall song from the early 1900s, and signature tune of the resident organist at the Blackpool Tower Ballroom, encapsulates our feelings of all loving to be beside the sea; listening to children playing in the sand; waves crashing on the shore; gathering shells; eating fish & chips, and ice cream.

'The Hut' run by the FOPWA (Felixstowe Old People's Welfare Association) situated on the Felixstowe promenade, allowed members from the Bury and Ipswich groups to do just that this summer. Lots of fun, laughter and chat was had by all, including a walk along the promenade in the sunshine, accompanied by a 'loveliness' of ladybirds who seemed to adore travelling with us – particularly for those of us wearing yellow t-shirts!!

But none of this can happen without a lot of support. So our thanks go to all the volunteers that helped make the day so special, to Dan's Coaches for enabling us to have such a smooth journey even with the Orwell Bridge closed, and to The Oddfellows (Bury St. Edmunds Branch) for a financial donation which helped to fund this great event.

A Grand Day Out – recommended for all.

Meg Staff



Images show members of the Bury and Ipswich groups enjoying fish & chips at 'The Hut'.

Shotley Club

Suffolk Sight were invited to attend the South Suffolk Seniors Fair, hosted by James Cartlidge MP.

The Fair brought together a mix of statutory and voluntary organisations with lots of information, advice and support that is available for the over 65s.

Jean and Pat, our fantastic volunteers from the Shotley Club, attended and said "It was an excellent morning all round and well worth the effort. We've had lots of interest in the club from people wanting to attend, and some volunteer interest too!"

The club have a full calendar of events planned for 2026, including music from Bob Whiting, and Brian and Pauline Cann. They also have a talk from Bryan Thurlow, in his guise as Billy Jackson from Bethnal Green, with his talk entitled 'We'll Meet Again', experiences of his evacuation to a Suffolk Farm just prior to WW2.



Image shows Jean and Pat with the Suffolk Sight information stand.

Musical Lifelines

Our **Beccles and Bungay Social Club** had the pleasure of welcoming Caroline from Musical Lifelines.

Caroline is a classical violinist and music educator and set up the creative music project to help tackle loneliness and support people living with long-term health conditions in the community.

The poster (shown opposite) promotes the free music workshops. Caroline will visit homes in Bungay, Beccles and Halesworth.

Every Friday in term time, between 10.30 am and 12.00 noon, you can also go along to Bungay Community Centre. (Carers welcome, refreshments provided and transport upon request.)

For more information call 07920 063244 or email clarkecaroline@live.co.uk



2026 Suffolk Sight large-print calendars and diaries

We have the following calendars and diaries in stock (pictured)

Large-print wall calendar (A3)
suggested donation of **£5**

Large-print pocket diary (A6)
£ 6.50

Large-print midi diary (A5)
£8.50

Large-print desk diary (A4)
£10.50



Suffolk Sight Juniors

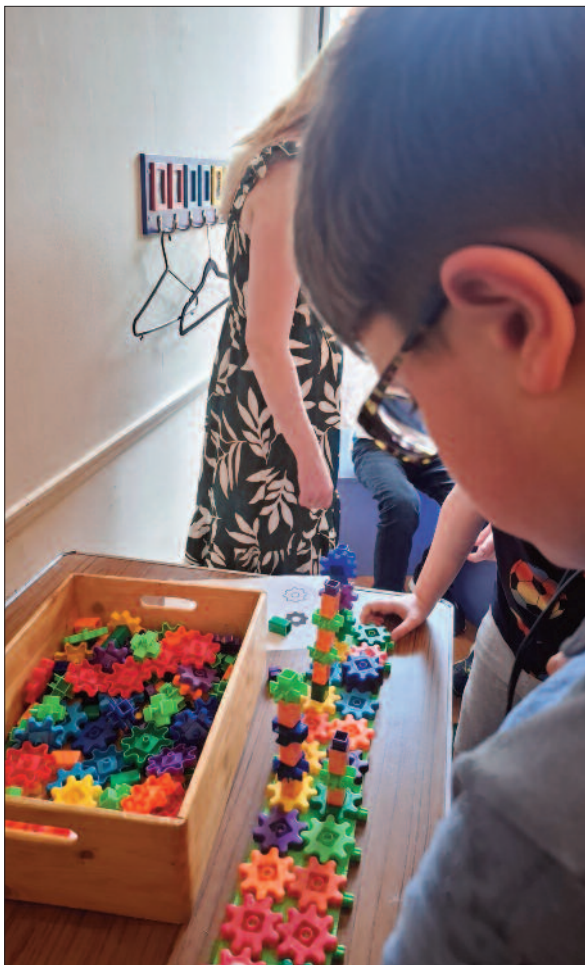
In May, the Suffolk Sight Juniors enjoyed a visit to Christchurch Mansion, facilitated by Duty Officer, Liz Bowell.

The session focussed on toys from the past and the present, comparing the types of toys played with in the past to those from the present, and also talking about the materials they were made from then and now.

The children were lucky enough to be able to handle teddies, dolls and bricks from over 100 years ago.

Our families all said what an interesting and educational morning it was. Huge thanks to Liz for the time and thought she put into making the session so interactive and enjoyable for the children.

We have been invited to get involved in the Christmas Tree Festival at the Mansion this year, so do go and along and find our tree. The Festival Runs from 25 November until 5 January.



Images show Liz and some of our Suffolk Sight Juniors enjoying playing with toys from the past.

A heartfelt “Thank You” to our amazing volunteers!

What a wonderful time we had in Beccles at our annual Volunteer Thank You Event.

Each year, we come together to celebrate the incredible dedication and hard work of our volunteers across Suffolk. The afternoon was a perfect way to show our appreciation for the people who give their time, energy and compassion to support Suffolk Sight throughout the year.

Guests enjoyed an afternoon of light refreshments, warm company and lovely live music, provided for us by Roger Eno. It was an opportunity to relax together, share stories and enjoy some well-deserved fun.

We were also thrilled to be joined by local MP Jess Asato, who came along to thank our volunteers personally and recognise the amazing difference they make in our community.

Jess said “It was a real privilege to join Suffolk Sight’s volunteer celebration and to thank those who give their time to support people living with sight loss. I am so grateful to the dedicated volunteers who are at the heart of this important charity.”

To every single one of our volunteers, thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Your time, care and commitment mean the world to us and we simply couldn’t do what we do without you.

Agnieszka Jeffery
Social Club and Volunteer Co-ordinator



Image shows Arlette with Roger who provided the musical entertainment.



Image shows Jess Asato MP with Geoff and Meg.

Mel on the move!

Mel, one of our Access Tech Advisors, loves the opportunity to attend exhibitions, meet developers and accessibility advocates, and find out about the latest technology for the visually impaired.

Over the summer, Mel had the pleasure of attending two such events and wanted to share his experiences.

First in the diary was a visit to London to find out more about the Glide device. This cutting-edge technology uses AI, robotics and sensors to guide a user through indoor and outdoor environments.

The Glidance Founder and CEO, Amos Miller, lost his sight in his 20s due to retinitis pigmentosa (RP) while getting his Computer Science degree but he refused to let it hold him back.

His team of engineers, researchers, designers and technologists are currently developing Glide, the world's first self-guided mobility aid.

You can listen to Mel interviewing Amos over on our Facebook page.

For more information about Glide you can visit the Glidance website: <https://glidance.io/about-us/>

Mel took a second trip to London and visited the exhibition - Touch: Beyond Vision, "Art you can feel. Stories you can touch."

The exhibition was open to everyone, but especially crafted to enable people with low or no vision to access visual culture in a meaningful way.

Over 20 tactile artworks of iconic images, figures and landmarks



Image shows Mel with Amos who is holding one of the Glide devices and describing how it works.

were created with 3D-printing technology. Each exhibit included Braille and Audio Description.

Mel made his way around the exhibition, feeling the incredible displays, which included David Bowie and the Beatles. He was also able to create his own 3D image of his retired guide dog, Gus.



Image shows Mel feeling the display of the four members of the Beatles.

Making voting accessible for everyone

Every person should be able to register and vote at elections and Suffolk's district and borough councils can help remove some of the accessibility barriers and challenges that people face when voting.

If you or someone you know requires support to vote, you can contact your local council as they will be able to provide information about methods of voting and the equipment and facilities available at polling stations.

If you require additional support or equipment, then the council can look at the adjustments that could be made to support you to cast your vote independently and in secret.

Please contact your council in advance of the election:

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils: telephone 0300 123 4000 option 7, or email elections@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk

East Suffolk Council: telephone 01502 523251
or email elections@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

Ipswich Borough Council: telephone 01473 432000 option 3,
or email elections@ipswich.gov.uk

West Suffolk Council: telephone 01284 757131
or email elections@westsuffolk.gov.uk

The Suffolk district and borough councils are proud to be working with local organisations like Suffolk Sight to improve accessibility across the county. Our feedback helps to shape better services and ensure that voting is inclusive for all.

If you have suggestions or would like to share your experience, your council would love to hear from you. Together, let's make Suffolk's elections open and accessible to everyone.



Images show our team trying out some of the tactile voting devices that the local authorities are looking to purchase for the 2026 elections.



Synapptic Smart Watches

The first ever smart watches specifically designed for sight loss.

Smart watches are wearable touch-screen devices that combine the features of a traditional watch with helpful tools for daily life, such as setting alarms, tracking health data, and staying connected through calls and messages. Many include accessibility features like voice feedback and magnification, but none until now have been designed from the ground up with sight loss in mind.

The new Synapptic Smart Watches change that, offering two models built specially for people with sight loss – the Lite and the Plus. Both are simple, talking watches with clear speech, large print, and high-contrast colours, but each has its own strengths.

Synapptic Smart Watch Lite £149

The Lite version focuses on simplicity and ease of use. It speaks everything on screen, has bold, high-contrast text and over forty large, clear watch faces to choose from. You can also adjust the colour scheme to suit your vision and even tell the time by touch, using gentle vibration pulses.

It includes everyday essentials like alarms, timers and settings that are easy to navigate with simple swipes and taps.

Synapptic Smart Watch Plus £299

The Plus version includes everything the Lite offers but adds a range of advanced features for those who want to do a bit more. It tracks your steps, distance, heart rate, and fitness goals, and includes reminders, weather updates, and voice memos.

What really sets the Plus apart is that it can make and receive calls



Image above shows the classic display on the Synapptic watch.



Image above shows the chunky display.

and text messages completely independently — no smartphone required. It even comes with a free pre-installed SIM card loaded with £10 credit so you can get started straight away. There is also an SOS function for emergencies, providing extra peace of mind.

Like the Lite, it comes with a comfortable black strap as standard, but extra colourful straps are available for adding that personal touch.

Both Synapptic smart watches are designed to make everyday life more accessible, practical, and enjoyable. Whether you prefer something simple and fuss-free, or a watch that can help you stay connected and track your health, there is now a smart option designed with sight loss in mind.

For more information visit the Synapptic website or contact our office to request a demo.

Call 01473 611011 or email info@suffolksight.org.uk

Welcoming Brigitte to our team of trustees.

I have recently joined Suffolk Sight as a trustee, but I first became aware of the charity over the last year when I suddenly lost my sight. I live alone and I do not accept help easily!

The Suffolk Sight team helped me with practical things and advice on how I can live a productive life even after such changed circumstances.

The team helped me to apply for PIP and subsidised transport. This help has made me feel so supported and encouraged to just get out there and live my best life.

Suffolk Sight are an essential support for the sight impaired across Suffolk, as advisors and a support pillar. Listening and friendly ears are offered with kindness, compassion, and in a really supportive way.

I am proud to be part of Suffolk Sight and cannot wait to meet everyone and work with you all.



Sailing at sunset

We are really disappointed, but totally understand, that our sailing trips with the East Anglian Sailing Trust had to be cancelled this year. The weather was not on our side!

We're pleased to report though that Jim, one of our beneficiaries and a devoted volunteer, had the opportunity to sail earlier in the summer.

Jim loved the experience and said " I have just had the most amazing evening sailing on the River Orwell, I am absolutely buzzing and guess who was steering, yep me... and I didn't hit any other boats!"

We will endeavour to book some nicer weather when we arrange another sailing trip next year.



Image shows Jim at the tiller sailing on the River Orwell.

My love of art - by John Poole

After 37 years of teaching art to adults and young people I retired in 1999 and had a heart attack six months later. In the ensuing years my sight started to deteriorate and in 2015 I was registered severely sight impaired (SSI). Glaucoma and Optical Nutritional Syndrome have now left me virtually colour blind and with very little sight.

After the loss of my wife, reflecting on life, I began to ask myself the question: if Beethoven could write music when deaf, what could I do with my own artistic abilities, although obviously limited?

Through trial and error, with at times exasperation and also much patience, by restricting my choice of media I was able to produce artwork that sighted people regarded as acceptable.

This artwork is the result of very small visual recall, motor activity, guesswork and luck!

Of course, one also needs support with everyday things, and in this respect Suffolk Sight have been most helpful: for example providing me with assistance to set up my television, and offering encouragement and inspiration to pursue my passion for art.

Without exaggeration, I regard continued involvement with art as my act of defiance against sight loss and old age and I would encourage anyone experiencing restricted vision to do similarly.

If you have a particular hobby or activity you enjoy, do all that you can to continue with it, don't let sight loss deny you the pleasure and fulfilment you derive from it.

If any members share a similar interest in art and would like any advice or simply conversation on the subject, I can be contacted through Suffolk Sight and will be only too happy to help in any way I can.

John Poole



Image shows one of John's artworks.

Looking Ahead

Suffolk Sight's Looking Ahead Emotional Support is a unique service which offers short-term confidential telephone counselling. This enables our beneficiaries to speak to someone in confidence, helping them explore their feelings, develop crucial coping strategies and improve their mental wellbeing.

We continue to work hard to develop and improve our service and we always welcome feedback from beneficiaries who have used it.

The following feedback is from a recent service user.

"I found the counsellor to be extremely sensitive and understanding. Having someone to talk through issues that have built up over years relating to sight loss has been invaluable, and providing new insight on my feelings has been inspiring. I feel as though I have discovered so many useful coping strategies to work on and have gained a clearer understanding of how my brain works. Bottom line is that I feel so much more positive about my life now, and the future. I still have a lot to work through but feel I have made a good start thanks to these sessions."

They also liked the adaptability – being able to explore new areas as they arose and felt that there was a *"real sense of understanding – that all feelings are valid and nothing to be ashamed of"*

Our Suffolk Sight Community Workers have also told us about the service:

"The beneficiary was much more upbeat and couldn't praise the service enough"

"The beneficiary sounded very positive during the latest check in"

When we receive feedback showing the positive outcomes and how our service has helped so many beneficiaries over the past five years it shows how valuable and in demand the service is.

We could not continue offering the service without the help of funding grants and donations. If you would like to make a donation to the Suffolk Sight Emotional Support Service please contact our office for more details.

Once again, we thank you for all your continued support.

Celebrating Kevin joining our team of Volunteer Ambassadors

We're delighted to announce Kevin as our newest Volunteer Ambassador, a well-deserved recognition for someone who truly embodies the spirit of our charity.

Kevin has become an essential part of our team. From his role as co-leader of the Bury Club, to providing tech support for our beneficiaries, and even helping with transport at the Haverhill Club, Kevin is always ready to lend a hand wherever it's needed.

What makes Kevin truly special is the way he connects with everyone. The members absolutely adore him; his warmth, patience and sense of humour brighten every club he's part of. His reliability, kindness and leadership shine through in everything he does. Kevin's energy and commitment have inspired both new and long-standing volunteers alike.

Watching his growth over the past years, from a dedicated helper to a true leader, has been nothing short of remarkable.

We're so proud to have Kevin as one of the shining stars of our charity family, an incredible example of what teamwork and compassion look like in action.

We can't wait to see all the great things he'll continue to do.

Junior Ambassador update from Oliver

Since my last newsletter report quite a lot has happened. I attended a charity event in Great Waldingfield Village Hall; everyone had a great time enjoying music from Dan McClelland.

Meanwhile, on a lovely sunny Sunday afternoon in Bury St Edmunds, I attended a charity football match. It was a very exciting game. It was also great to meet the other members and volunteers at Suffolk Sight.



Image shows Kevin.

I've enjoyed lots of activities with the Suffolk Sight Juniors including drama, writing letters to the children in Kenya, learning Braille and swimming at a local pool.

I have also been doing some work experience with Suffolk Sight which involved talking to the Red Gables lunch group, visiting the Pakenham Group and listening to their members discussing their interesting lives.

I visited the Tower Street office to be shown some of the administration work and counted some of the donation tins.

It has been interesting to see what Suffolk Sight does and the ideas that I can take forward as Junior Ambassador.

Special thanks to Amanda for showing me around.



Image shows Oliver and new volunteer, Irene, taken at the Pakenham Group.

West Suffolk Hospital

The VOICE network at West Suffolk Hospital is a group of individuals and representatives from charities and local groups who provide patient feedback to help improve services.

Members get involved in decisions about the Trust's developments, have opportunities to influence the new hospital building design, and can participate in quarterly meetings and role-specific discussions.

Colin Presland, one of our fantastic Volunteer Ambassadors, represents Suffolk Sight on the VOICE panel. If you would like to get involved or tell us about your experiences at West Suffolk Hospital, please get in touch.

Call 01473 611011 or email info@suffolksight.org.uk

Eye conditions explained – this edition's is Stargardt Disease



Raj Hanspal, Consultant Ophthalmologist, Clinical Director of Newmedica Suffolk and Suffolk Sight trustee, has kindly written this article explaining Stargardt Disease.

What is Stargardt Disease?

Stargardt Disease is a rare, inherited eye condition that causes progressive vision loss, especially in the central vision.

It is the most common form of juvenile macular degeneration, typically beginning in childhood or adolescence, though it can also appear in adulthood.

Causes

Caused by mutations in the ABCA4 gene.

This gene helps remove waste from the retina. When it doesn't work properly, fatty deposits (lipofuscin) build up in the macula (the central part of the retina), damaging light-sensitive cells.

It is usually inherited in an autosomal recessive pattern, meaning both parents must carry the faulty gene.

Symptoms

- Gradual loss of central vision in both eyes.
- Blurry or distorted vision.
- Dark, grey, or hazy spots in the centre of vision.
- Sensitivity to light (photophobia).
- Difficulty adjusting between light and dark environments.
- Colour vision problems or colour blindness.
- Peripheral (side) vision usually remains intact.

Diagnosis

Eye doctors may use several tests:

- Dilated eye exam to look for yellowish flecks (lipofuscin) on the retina.
- Fundus photography to capture images of the retina.
- Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) to get detailed images of retinal layers.
- Electroretinography (ERG) to test how the retina responds to light.

Genetic testing to confirm mutations in the ABCA4 gene.

Treatment & Management

No cure currently exists.

Vision aids (like magnifiers or special glasses) can help.

Vision rehabilitation programs teach strategies to make the most of remaining vision.

Protecting eyes from UV light (e.g. wearing sunglasses) may help slow progression.

Clinical trials are ongoing, including studies on medications like oral metformin (used in diabetes) as well as new drugs that are based on Vitamin A to alter how it is processed in the retina. There are also gene therapy trials that are being conducted to help correct the gene mutation or restore its function.

Living with Stargardt Disease

Most people do not go completely blind.

Maintaining peripheral vision helps with mobility and independence.

Emotional support and counselling can help manage the psychological impact of sight loss.

If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of Stargardt Disease, it is important to seek medical advice and explore available resources such as those offered by Suffolk Sight to manage the condition effectively.

My experience of Retinitis Pigmentosa by Michael Peak.

Hello, my name is Michael Peak. I am a trustee of Suffolk Sight and I have an eye condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP)

In the last newsletter I read Raj Hanspal's explanation of RP and thought perhaps you would like to hear my experience of the condition.

When I was young (a long time ago) I joined the police force as a Special Constable, a position I held for fifteen years. However, one night whilst out on patrol I noticed my night vision was not as good as usual and in fact it soon disappeared altogether. As a lot of police work is done at night, I had to resign from the force.

It was not long before tunnel vision reared its ugly head and slowly progressed until it began to create problems with my daytime



Image shows Michael at this year's Lowestoft Lion's Family Funday along with the Lion's mascot.

work. As I was a high-speed wood-cutting machine operator, I realised I was becoming a danger to myself and the people I worked with, so I had to resign from that job too.

I applied for lots of other work, but no-one was willing to employ me. I was only forty-eight at the time and, never having been out of work, found this very hard to accept. However, I was most fortunate as I had a very loving, caring and understanding wife who supported me all the way.

The tunnel vision has got much worse recently and it could close up altogether, something I am not looking forward to.

But, with Suffolk Sight and all their experienced staff to help me, I can try to live as normal a life as possible, knowing I can call on them at any time.

I now have a very full social calendar, I enjoy playing bowls and going along to our social club in Lowestoft.

One of the highlights of the year is the Lions Family Funday held at the end of August. I am tasked with finding (and filling my spare room with) cuddly toys for our tombola!

So, you see, there is still life and light at the end of the tunnel (oops, sorry about that!) but whatever we do, we must maintain a sense of humour.

Charles Bonnet Syndrome Group

It's now over a year since Suffolk Sight's Charles Bonnet Syndrome Group started and it's pleasing to report that within this time the core number of participants has grown from six to fifteen.

During the regular sessions, members have generously shared their particular experiences and circumstances around the condition to the great benefit of all taking part.

On two occasions, the group received input from outside speakers including a member of Esme's Umbrella, a charity dedicated to supporting people experiencing CBS, and also one of our trustees, Dr Hanspal, who kindly offered some professional advice on the condition.

Given that members of the group live across Suffolk, meetings are conducted monthly over the telephone, in the form of a conference call. As members have got to know each other, friendships have grown and some have exchanged numbers to talk further outside the group.

Similarly, back in July this year some members were able to meet in-person for the first time, which proved to be a happy and pleasurable experience for all. So much so in fact, that it is hoped that some members may once again be able to meet up towards the end of the year.

The Charles Bonnet Syndrome Group meet 1-2pm on the final Wednesday of each month.

If anyone would like more information about the group please feel free to contact Suffolk Sight either by phone: 01473 611011 or email: info@suffolksight.org.uk

Suffolk Sight Walking Group

Our Suffolk Sight Walking Group launched in April this year and has been a great success, therefore we are delighted to announce that we will be continuing it in 2026.

The group is led by experienced walker and Suffolk Sight trustee, Steve Giddings. It is aimed at people who like to walk longer distances and enjoy the outdoors, whilst being in the safety of an organised group.

Dates and locations for next year will be as follows:

1 April	Debenham	5 Aug	Nowton Park, Bury St Edmunds
6 May	Ickworth Estate	2 Sept	Claydon
3 June	Felixstowe	7 Oct	Dunwich
1 July	Woodbridge		

Walks all start at 10.30am and are approximately 2–5 miles in length. Transport is available from the nearest bus or train station.

For more information, please contact our office on 01473 611011

Healthwatch Suffolk

If you're living with a visual impairment in Suffolk, please take a moment to share your experiences in a local survey.

Healthwatch Suffolk (your local health and social care champion) wants to know what it's like to use local NHS or social care services, and what could make life easier for you locally.

Your feedback will help Healthwatch to influence standards of accessible care and support from the NHS and social care services.

Please take part before 31 January 2026.

How to take part now

The survey is open to everyone in Suffolk who is over the age of 16 and living with a visual impairment that glasses cannot fully correct.

You can phone Healthwatch Suffolk on freephone 0800 448 8234 and request a paper copy of the survey that can be returned to Healthwatch by Freepost.

Alternatively, you can complete the survey over the phone with one of the Healthwatch team. If, when you call you receive the answerphone, please leave a message and someone will return your call.

This survey is a part of a campaign from Healthwatch Suffolk called 'Your Care, Your Way'.

The campaign aims to raise awareness of people's rights to accessible information, care and support from health and social care services. It is also encouraging services to check how well they are meeting people's needs.



Outreach across the county

We will continue our monthly drop-in sessions with our Community Workers, at Lowestoft and Newmarket.

Our team will be available to give personalised advice and support including:

- Daily living and independence – aids and adaptations
- Low vision – magnification and assistive reading (with referrals to our low-vision specialist where appropriate)
- Financial matters – benefits, grants and concessions
- Tech solutions – gadget advice and demonstrations
- Social opportunities and befriending service
- Advice about services that can help you get out and about safely

Lowestoft

Venue: Disability Advice North East Suffolk (DANES)
161 Rotterdam Road, Lowestoft, NR32 2EZ

Our team will be available on the second Tuesday of the month, on the following dates:

9 December	10 February	14 April
13 January	10 March	12 May

Time: 10am–1pm

Newmarket

Venue: Brampton Manor Care Home

Fordham Road, Newmarket, CB8 7AQ

(in the lounge area on the ground floor)

Our team will be available on the second Wednesday of each month, on the following dates:

10 December	11 February	8 April
14 January	11 March	13 May

Time: 10.30am–12.00pm

For more information about any of the drop-in sessions please call 01473 611011 or email info@suffolksight.org.uk

Continued from inside front cover

They have extensive experience and knowledge of the opportunities and choices available to you. The list below highlights some of the areas we can support you with:

- Daily living and independence – aids and adaptations
- Low vision – magnification and assistive reading (with referrals to our low vision specialist where appropriate)
- Financial matters – benefits, grants and concessions
- Safety and security – in and around the home
- Tech solutions – gadget advice and demonstrations
- Social opportunities and befriending service
- Advice about services that can help you get out and about safely
- Children and Families Support Group

Supporting Us – Legacies

As an independent charity, we rely solely on donations, legacies and non-statutory grants to continue our work helping people in Suffolk with sight loss maintain independence and live fulfilling lives.

If you would like to leave a gift to **Suffolk Sight** in your will then you can be sure that you will be contributing to the work of the charity, helping us to reach and support even more people.



Suffolk Sight

**19 Tower Street,
Ipswich, IP1 3BE**

Tel: 01473 611011

email: info@suffolksight.org.uk



Visit us on facebook

**Suffolk Sight is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Charity Number 1183608**

www.suffolksight.org.uk

Suffolk Sight is the sight loss charity for the county. Its purpose is to improve the lives of people who are affected by sight loss, throughout Suffolk.

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Ipswich, IP1 3BE**

Tel: 01473 611011

email: info@suffolksight.org.uk



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