



# We'll see you through.

Expanding horizons for people  
in Fife with sight impairment.



# About us

seescape aims to help make sight impaired people's lives more fulfilled by empowering them to live and interact with their families, their communities and surroundings in a positive way. We do so by giving them access to support services, new technology and a new community of friends.

The charity operates across four key services: sight assessment and support, assistive technology, social groups and befriending and an optician.

Our sight assessment and support service, which is commissioned by the local authority, offers focused practical and emotional support through regular contact to those with sight impairment. This is to ensure that people are safe, coping, adjusting, and accessing the financial support that they need. This service is also linked to our community groups and a cohort of befrienders. We also support people emotionally by offering counselling if required, to help with their adjustment to losing their sight and the start of a different life.

We inspire our clients to use life improving assistive technology to connect with family and friends, to move about and to engage with the workplace. Besides working directly with those with a sight impairment, seescape also works with technology companies to develop meaningful technology solutions and with local businesses to educate them on how they can better include people with sight impairment as their customers and in their workforce.

We also operate our own optician. An important part of our early intervention service, The Optician at seescape is an effective means of raising awareness of both the challenges and solutions for those living with some level of sight loss. This also provides a vital link through its low vision clinic to our sight support team.

At all levels, seescape responds to the needs of sight impaired people, changing their lives for the better and champions their cause.

We are a Fife-based charity, with an approach and services that can support sight impaired people across Fife. Since it was established in 1865, seescape has continually adapted and innovated and is now one of the leading advocates for the sight impaired community.

# seescape Life Cycle

Sight loss affects people of all ages. Almost two million people in the UK are living with sight loss. That's approximately one person in thirty. In Scotland, there are 170,000 registered blind and support is needed from birth to later life.

## birth

There are nearly 60,000 premature births every year in the UK and numbers are rising, due in part to obesity and later motherhood. In Scotland, 6,000 are born either premature or sick<sup>1</sup>.

These children are more likely to have sight problems, such as retinopathy of prematurity (ROP). Being born with sight loss can be traumatic for families.

seescape provides counselling and support through every stage, signposting appropriate services.

## education

Analysing government statistics, the RNIB found that more than 16,500 pupils identified as needing a care programme or educational support in UK schools had significant sight impairment<sup>2</sup>.

The risk of sight impairment is exacerbated by the growing issue of childhood obesity. In 2017, 26% of Scottish children aged 2-15 were at risk of being overweight, including 13% at risk of obesity. Since 1998, the proportion of children at risk of overweight (including obesity) has fluctuated between 26% and 33%<sup>3</sup>.

Having the ability and confidence at school to know that you are receiving an equal education is very difficult with sight impairment. Schooling with your peers needs to be a priority.

Transitioning from one school to another can be a particular distressing time.

seescape provides technology support and training to ensure pupils are not left stranded in their education.

We also provide pathway support to ensure everything possible is done to enable learning to their full capability.

Twelve-year old C was left blind following a critical illness. seescape's Assistive Technology expert, Stuart became C's role model. C said:

"I really liked working with Stuart. I was so upset not being able to use my phone and stay in touch with friends. Stuart showed me what to do and now I can talk to friends whenever I want to."

## finding work

Three out of four people with sight impairment are unemployed<sup>4</sup>. This is more than 15% below the average disability employment rate in Scotland<sup>5</sup>. In addition, almost a third sometimes, frequently or always experience negative attitudes from the public in relation to their sight loss and are rarely or never optimistic about the future<sup>6</sup>.

seescape helps and lobbies business, local authorities and government helping them to understand the need for fully inclusive recruitment processes.

seescape has participated in government-led consultations, including those on social inclusion and employing those with disabilities.

seescape is a member of the Cross Party Group on visual impairment, SCOVI and other organisations that champion change.

## at work

Employers perceive it too difficult or risky to employ someone with a visual impairment. There is a 73% unemployment rate for visually impaired. The employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people is 35.8%<sup>7</sup>.

seescape supports the transition into work by building both the employers' and the employees' awareness of the technology to assist - enabling dignity through work.

seescape collaborated with Neatebox to help install the Welcome app in public locations in Fife. This gives reception staff an indication that someone with a sight impairment is approaching the building. It then provides advice and guidance enabling them to interact, provide support and be at the entrance ready to greet and assist the person with sight impairment.

## lifestyle changes

Obesity increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and the number of people diagnosed with diabetes in the UK has more than doubled in the last twenty years<sup>8</sup>.

The latest figures show that there are now almost 3.7 million people living with a diagnosis of the condition in the UK, an increase of 1.9 million since 1998.

Diabetes can cause diabetic retinopathy and even sight loss.

Working in partnership with health boards, seescape promotes joined up services and preventative and early stage interventions to support people with worsening eye sight.

The Optician at seescape has partnered with local businesses to adopt its pioneering employee scheme, which provides staff with free eye examinations.

## sudden sight impairment

Sudden sight loss through trauma or illness will have a terrifying impact.

seescape provides assessments for keeping people safe in their home, work and community environment.

We provide all aspects of counselling, mental health and practical support for sight loss, including technology, work and benefits sign-posting.

## as we get older

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a common condition that usually affects people in their 50s and 60s. It is estimated that 30% of people 65 years or older have a sight impairing cataract in one or both eyes.

- 1 in 5 people aged 75 and over are living with sight loss
- 1 in 2 people aged 90 and over are living with sight loss.
- Nearly two-thirds of people living with sight loss are women<sup>9</sup>.

Loneliness and isolation become major factors in shortening life expectancy and increasing number of people in care homes

seescape helps with befriending, social groups and assistive aids to help older people stay at home and connected to their family, friends and community.

82% of people referred to seescape are over 50.

“Getting involved with seescape’s Befriending Service has been better than I ever imagined. I have met some fantastic people and learned new skills whilst supporting people to lead the life that we often take for granted, such as going out to a café, travelling on a bus, going to the shops and so much more.

“I can thoroughly recommend becoming a volunteer with seescape. I have been well supported, met great friends and am helping to make a real difference for people with sight loss.”  
seescape volunteer

The reality is that the number of people in the UK with sight loss is set to increase significantly. Along with an ageing population, there is a growing incidence of key underlying causes of sight loss, such as obesity and diabetes. It is predicted that by 2020 the number of people with sight loss will rise to over 2,250,000. By 2050, the numbers of people with sight loss in the UK will double to nearly four million<sup>10</sup>.

# The seescape model

The Scottish Government set out its aims to improve local care pathways and ensure that this is achieved through person-centred local partnership-working between statutory and third sector agencies. seescape supports people with sight impairment in Fife through partnership working and varied services that aim to empower people to live independent and fulfilling lives.

## 1.

Over a number of years, seescape and NHS Fife have worked in partnership where people who are diagnosed with sight impairment are referred to seescape services. seescape now receives the majority of referrals from the local health board.

In addition, we receive a growing number of referrals from our optician. The Optician offers a free NHS eye test for people in Fife and acts as an early intervention service, if there is an indication of sight loss.

Long-established and robust local partnership working and a community-based basic screening service ensures that people in Fife can receive timely support from our organisation.

## 2.

After being referred to us, we reach out to people and arrange a sight assessment visit in their home. During the visit our sight support team will assess a person's needs and advise them how to best continue to do everyday activities like cooking, getting around and general household chores and what equipment might be suited to help them do so.

Through individual assessments we aim to empower people to live independently, safely and support them with the best start during times of transition. We aim to keep in regular contact to ensure that the support we provide is ongoing and always tailored to their needs.

There are more than 4,000 people living with sight loss registered in Fife. On more than 6,000 occasions annually, seescape connects with those who are registered and while seescape doesn't reach everyone, we are constantly trying to offer services that are relevant to the needs of the people we support.

## 3.

A key element of this approach is our Assistive Technology service. This supports people with sight impairment to familiarise themselves with the latest technology that can help them live more independently, communicate easily with family and friends, and enjoy their hobbies. As well as running our own technology hub, The Karten Centre, run by a dedicated member of staff, we also undertake Fife technology roadshows along with the leading technology suppliers to demonstrate the benefits of screen readers, iPads, Skype and the latest assistive apps to a wider audience. This activity has also opened up collaborations with tech companies and the University of Abertay with the aim of developing new applications to support sight impaired people in their communities and in the workplace.

## 4.

Figures from RNIB suggest that up to 73% of people with sight impairment are unemployed, which is a significant proportion. At seescape we advise employers how to make the workplace more accessible for people with sight impairment – for example, raising awareness of funding available for work station alterations, or making sure that it's easy to move around.

More importantly we try to make employers realise that it is not a burden to hire someone with sight impairment by showing them how the right attitude and equipment can make a huge difference.

## 5.

Our befriending service is another example on how we have adapted our services to the needs of the people we support. A large proportion of our clients are elderly and might not be able to go out to socialise. In these cases, our befrienders can visit them at home or take them on a trip out. All volunteers, who are currently befrienders, work in Fife. Furthermore, seescape engages in numerous networks where we talk to peers who support people with sensory impairments, to learn from best practice and to establish common interests. seescape also advocates on behalf of people with sight impairment and engages with consultations, conversations and decision-makers on topics that affect the people we support.

**PLEASE SUPPORT US.** It is our aim to increase our reach to help more people and we will do this by championing those with sight loss, delivering the highest quality services and partnerships while consistently pioneering new innovations and positively influencing the development and implementation of good policy decisions. We need your support. [www.seescape.org.uk](http://www.seescape.org.uk)

# References

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