7th March 2025

Dear Sam Heynes - Parish Clerk

On behalf of the staff, Board, volunteers and clients of 4Sight Vision Support, I would like to thank Cuckfield Parish Council for generously supporting our work over the past years, most recently in October 2023 with a grant of £100. Your support enabled us to help people in your Parish to continue leading positive independent lives, whilst living with sight loss. I am writing today to ask if Cuckfield Parish Councillors would consider supporting our work again.

We receive no Government support and rely solely on voluntary donations to deliver our services **free of charge** to our clients. We currently support 4 residents from your parish who are blind or partially sighted. Your support would directly impact them. Our vision is that every person with sight loss is aware of, can access and benefit from 4Sight Vision Support’s services, so that everyone can experience a life without limits.

**The current challenges**

**Cost of living crisis**

People continue to face increased costs in food, gas, electricity, fuel and housing. People who are blind or partially sighted are, once again, experiencing disproportionate challenges:

* They are more reliant on devices (additional lighting in their homes, Alexa to help them manage their everyday tasks, etc.) which are now costing more to run
* They are more reliant on benefits than the general population; only one in four people who are registered blind or partially sighted of working age are in employment
* The process of claiming Government benefits is complex, forms are often lengthy and paper based

With more and more of our clients being pushed into poverty, having to make impossible decisions about what to cut back on and at increasing risk of a decline in their mental health, access to the correct financial support has never been more important.

Since April 2022, we have experienced a huge increase in requests for support with accessing benefits and completing complex benefits forms/assessments, increasing from 40 clients in 2021/22 to 128 clients in 2023/24. We expect this demand to continue.

The crisis has also affected us as an organisation, our operating costs are going up and income is going down – some have less to give and competition for funding has increased.

**Increasing demand**

There are an estimated 36,200 people living with sight loss or low vision in West Sussex, and our county has the largest incidence of age-related sight loss in the UK, with over 6,000 people registered as blind or partially sighted (RNIB Sight loss Data). RNIB projections indicate this number will rise a further 22% by 2032.

Since hospital eye clinics began offering more appointments, resulting in increased levels of diagnosis, we have subsequently seen a significant rise in demand for our services, with an average of 63 new referrals each month. In 2022/23 we supported 761 new clients, a staggering 45% increase on 2021/22.

There is now a backlog of appointments at local hospital eye clinics, which, along with the RNIB’s predicted 22% increase in demand by 2032, is likely to result in an unprecedented demand for our services over the next few years.

**Life after the pandemic**

Covid-19 continues to have a profound and lasting impact on the daily lives of people with sight loss – over four years later. Many of our clients experienced a deterioration to their sight, in some cases irreversibly. While others lost confidence and mobility and have still not returned to social and leisure activities, losing the independence they once had. This has had a detrimental impact on clients’ mental health and wellbeing.

***Please help us to continue to be there for our clients:***

We receive no Government support and rely solely on voluntary donations to deliver our services **free of charge** to our growing client base, which currently stands at just over 3,400; 4 of which live in your Parish.

***A donation, however great or small, will enable us to:***

* Listen, and provide emotional and practical support for our clients after diagnosis, which can be a devastating and life-changing time, helping people to feel less isolated and alone.
* Help people to understand their condition and what it means.
* Carry out our dedicated assessments to identify magnification, techniques and products to help with everyday tasks such as reading, shopping, medication, preparing meals; helping our clients to make best use of their remaining sight, enabling them to carry out tasks more easily and safely and remain independent.
* Support our clients with accessing benefits and concessions, helping them to complete often complex and paper-based forms, such as Personal Independence Payments, Attendance Allowance and Blue Badge, ensuring they and their families are provided for, which improves their financial stability and reduces stress and anxiety.
* Assist with setting up and using accessibility features on a broad range of tech devices, providing clients with a wealth of information through simple voice-activated commands, helping them to access online shopping, banking and feel more connected with loved ones, the outside world and their wider community – reducing isolation.

**£65 would enable us to support 1 client for a year**

**£130 would enable us to support 2 clients for a year**

**£260 would enable us to support 4 clients for a year**

Our Chief Executive, Kirstie Thomas, would welcome the opportunity to speak at a forthcoming council meeting, to explain our work in more detail and discuss how we may support more people living with sight loss in your Parish. If this would be of interest to you, please email me: julie.branson@4sight.org.uk or phone: 01243 838 001 to discuss this further.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider our request.

**Yours sincerely,**

A close-up of a signature

Description automatically generated

**Julie Branson**

**Fundraising Manager**