



PRESS RELEASE

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Sight loss charity launches new virtual ‘ask the expert’ service

People living with sight loss across Dumfries & Galloway will be able to get clinical advice from a dispensing optician or optometrist to help manage their eye conditions during lockdown, thanks to the launch of a new digital service.

Visibility Scotland, one of Scotland’s leading sight loss charities, is working in partnership with Optometry Scotland to implement its new “Ask The Expert” service across Scotland, offering people living with visual impairments access to community optometrists and dispensing opticians over a number of virtual and digital platforms including conference calls, video chats and group text messaging.

The new project is designed to give people vital access to support and advice from eyecare professionals at a time when people are trying to manage their eye conditions at home and may have some concerns. These sessions will not replace patients’ routine appointments but will provide extra advice on eye health and on managing eye conditions plus give reassurance to people living with sight loss during this difficult lockdown period.

Lindsay McDowall, Head of Service at Visibility Scotland, said: “We’re really pleased to be able to collaborate with Optometry Scotland to provide people across Dumfries & Galloway and beyond with the opportunity to access information from eyecare professionals in an accessible way during this difficult time.

“Our team of staff and volunteers have been working from home since mid-March, calling hundreds of people with visual impairments to offer emotional support, advice on technology and daily living tips. We can help with enquiries around practical things, such as getting essentials and shopping as well as letting people know about other services that can help in their local community. However, when it comes to clinical questions, queries around medication and changes to their vision or disruption to routine appointments, people sometimes aren’t sure what to do, or who to contact about their concerns.

“We feel this service will give people peace of mind and the chance to speak with someone from the comfort of their own home.”

Nicola McElvanney, Chair of Communications for Optometry Scotland said: “Optometry Scotland is delighted to be working with Visibility Scotland to assist its members with any concerns that they may have about their vision and eye health during this unprecedented period.

“My colleagues and I look forward to getting to know and chatting to service users about any challenges that they may face.’

A number of Q&A sessions will be facilitated by staff from Visibility Scotland, using platforms like WhatsApp, Zoom, Group calls and Facebook Live, depending on how people feel most comfortable getting in touch. Some of the members from Optometry Scotland will be volunteering their time and expertise to assist with the new project.

Jimmy Brown, from Newton Stewart, is taking part in one of the first sessions.

The retired army veteran said of the new service: “A routine visit to the hospital for me is a 100-mile round trip, and I’ve had to make a few of those during the pandemic as I have some other things going on with my health.

“I have questions about my eyes and I’ve been waiting on an appointment for a while, but the hospital staff are busy enough as it is just now. So this is an ideal opportunity for me to speak with someone and find out if what’s going on with my eyes is anything to be worried about, or if it’s a normal symptom of my condition. I think this new service is a great opportunity, and if anybody else has questions I’d definitely recommend they get in touch and take advantage of it.”

Lindsay added: “If anyone is uncomfortable speaking about their eye health in a group setting and would prefer a one-to-one conversation, this will also be an option through their preferred contact method.

“For more information, or to register your interest in taking part in one of the upcoming consultations, please contact Visibility Scotland on 0141 332 4632 or email info@visibilityscotland.org.uk.”

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Notes to editor:

For further information, please contact: [insert details]

About Visibility Scotland

Visibility Scotland is a charity working with people of all ages affected by sensory impairment. Visibility Scotland provides a range of services and activities including information, advice, emotional support, training in technology, mobility and to cope with neurological sight loss and social and recreational activities including toddlers groups and children and family events. Visibility covers Dumfries and Galloway, North, South and East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Glasgow, North and South Lanarkshire, East and West Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute.

About Optometry Scotland

Optometry Scotland is a non-profit making organisation established to develop and represent the views of the entire Optometry sector of Optometrists, Dispensing Opticians and Optical Bodies Corporate to the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government Health Directorates and other relevant stakeholders. Its aim is to develop, maintain and promote and world class eye health and primary eyecare service for the people of Scotland.