



2019

NHS 70

2018

2017

News

Floods 2015

Social media

 Communications and
 Engagement Team

Picture library

Video library

Useful links

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Cumbria's Low Vision Service celebrated in National Eye Health Week

[Homepage](#) » [News](#) » [Cumbria's Low Vision Service celebrated in National Eye Health Week](#)

Cumbria's Low Vision Service celebrated in National Eye Health Week

Posted on Monday 17th September 2012

When retired head teacher Peter Holyfield's central vision became blurred in 2003 he was referred to a consultant in Preston who diagnosed him with wet macular degeneration. Over the past nine years the condition has deteriorated to the point where he can see nothing in front of him though his peripheral vision remains.

Since diagnosis Peter has been learning and developing ways to live as independent a life as possible despite the loss of his sight, and has found the Low Vision Service, a service funded by NHS Cumbria an invaluable source of information and support.

NHS Cumbria is highlighting services available to people with sight loss as part of the National Eye Health Week, which runs from September 17-23.

Peter, 89 who lives in Kendal explained: "There isn't one aspect of my life that is not affected by the loss of vision. Things I could do 10 years ago myself I can no longer do, such as repairing my clocks, rewiring a plug or enjoying reading a book.

"I can no longer get the same pleasure as I use to from visiting gardens or even eating a meal as a restaurant. The chefs take great care with the presentation of a meal, but this is lost on me now.

"However I am learning how to cope in the world I've always lived in with this condition. I am very fortunate to have my wife Janet to help me, and I am working to manage my independence.

"I would not have been able to cope and adapt as well if it hadn't been for the South Cumbria Low Vision Service.

"They provide equipment such as magnifiers which help me tremendously, but it also provides advice, training and for many people it is the emotional support they give that's important.

"I found out about the service when I was at the consultancy room at Westmorland General Hospital. I was given a support officer who told me what kind of facilities were available, and in Kendal we are very fortunate to have the Sight Advice Centre, who also run outreach in South Lakeland.

"The staff are dedicated to helping people with all forms of sight loss.

"I must admit when I was first registered as blind I did feel a bit of a fraud as I could still see fairly well except for the central part of my vision. But that has gradually deteriorated to no sight in the central vision now.

"Charles Ely, the technology adviser has been able to give me guidance on software that helps me make the most of my computer. I have a big monitor and special mouse with magnifier, however it is the software which enables me to dictate emails that has been a great bonus to me.

"I have spent a great deal of time researching gadgets and equipment on Google. I was able to find the only mobile telephone which tells you the numbers as you are dialling. I just Googled 'mobile phones for visually impaired'.

"I am also a member of several groups who meet periodically to share experiences. Everyone has a different experience of the same condition. Though I'm not a member there are walking and craft groups organised by the Low Vision team.

"For me, the Low Vision Team provides me with support to help me cope, and gives practical advice and training.

"I am due to go on an 'Eccentric Viewing' course in Manchester later this year, which aims to help people with my condition maximise the use of their peripheral vision.

“Though listening to a talking book is not the same as reading yourself, and reading individual letters through a magnifier with my peripheral vision is not the same as reading for pleasure, these are ways of keeping my independence.

“As the condition deteriorated dramatically three years ago I had to give up driving, however I took my first train journey alone last month and I continue to develop my confidence going out alone.

“The support from the Low Vision Service helps people help themselves to manage their independence.”

South Cumbria Low Vision Service provides advice and support to people are experiencing sight loss to enable visually impaired people to lead full and independent lives. Based in Stircklandgate House, Kendal, the service also runs outreach sessions at: Goodly Dale Health Centre, Windermere, Grange Clinic, Grange-over-Sands and Furness General Hospital, Barrow-in-Furness.

From advice on the benefit system to providing magnifying aids and training to maintain independence, you can refer yourself, or your optician, doctor, social worker or carer can contact the Low Vision Team on your behalf.

For more advice on the South Cumbria Low Vision Service call 0844 824 8799.

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