

Contact Details

A member of the Torch team is waiting to discuss with you how we can support you in *Journeying With* members of your community who are experiencing sight loss. Contact details are provided with this booklet, or via the Torch office below.

Training and equipping
Impacting the local community
Pastoral ministry with a mission

journeying
with

*Mobilising the Church to reach out to the 100 people
each day who learn they are losing their sight*

Torch Trust is a partner in Churches for All
churchesforall.org

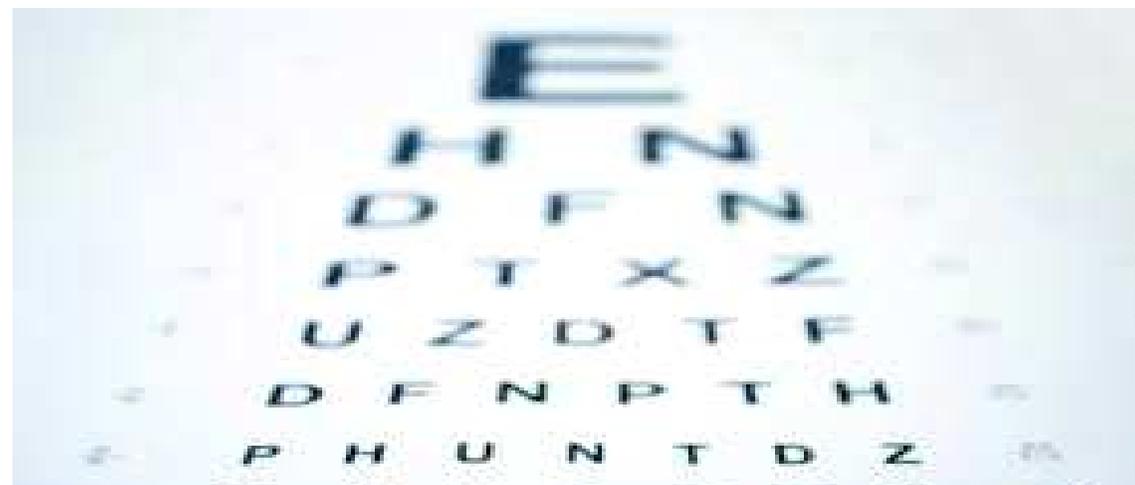


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Ref: 8348



**Each day across
Britain around 100
people are told they
are losing their sight.**

Many are devastated by this unwelcome news. Eye clinics, social services and local charities (where available) all offer expert help, but those struggling with the emotional and practical impact of sight loss need much more time than busy professionals can offer. Only one in five people has someone with them who can support them at diagnosis or afterwards. The local church is in a unique place to offer that help and support.

About Torch Trust

Torch Trust is a Christian organisation which aims to ensure that people with sight loss have the opportunity to hear the Gospel, find a church where they can grow in faith and ministry, and have access to good pastoral support.

Torch runs a range of services for people with sight loss and supports the development of welcoming, accessible churches.

Torch's services include:

- residential breaks to help people adjust to sight loss
- peer support and telephone friendship groups
- specialist holidays and activity weeks
- accessible Christian resources and study guides
- visual awareness training
- guidance on supporting people with sight loss locally
- online creation of accessible worship resources
- radio programmes on faith and disability



Key benefits to the Church

- Equips churches to demonstrate the love of Christ in a practical way.
- Provides new opportunities for Christians to be trained in pastoral work, with an emphasis on visual impairment.
- Demonstrates to the local community that the church cares about 'real' needs.
- Connects local churches with new people and families who may never have been in contact with church before.

First Steps

Supporting people through their sight loss journey is both a privilege and an opportunity. It is an area of work in which the local church can make a very real difference, and demonstrate the love of Christ in a practical way. The vision of Torch is to provide the required training and resources to make this a reality in your church.

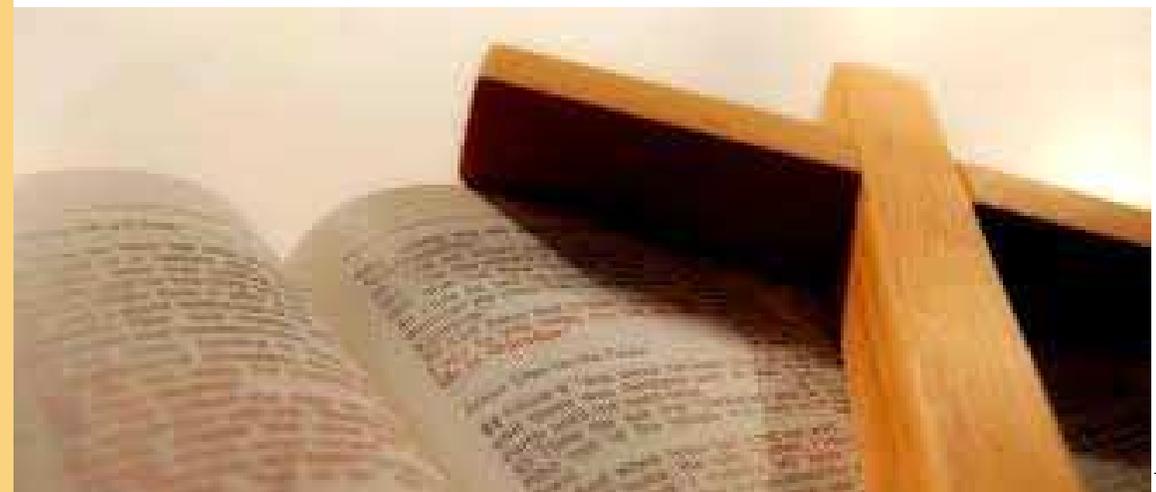
'It makes a great change in your life. If you get the right volunteer they are a great companion to you. They listen to you and talk to you. There is no distance between you - they are very friendly.'

The Motivation

It's not unusual to hear people describe sight loss in a similar way to the grief of bereavement. They have lost, or are losing, something very significant that will radically change their lives. From the Bible, we recognise that part of the Church's mandate is to 'proclaim good news to the poor ... bind the brokenhearted ... comfort all who mourn ... and provide for those who grieve in Zion.' (Isaiah 61:1-3, NIV)

God cares for and calls Christians to support people who are grieving the loss of their sight. His heart is towards them: 'I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.' (Isaiah 42:16) If God leads the blind and never forsakes them, then so should we.

There are many appropriate ways for the Church to respond to this need. We could pray with and for those who are losing their sight, and encourage them to find strength in faith. But, perhaps one of the most powerful responses is simply to 'journey with' people as they face personal struggles. Jesus calls us to walk with people for the 'extra mile'; giving them the gift of time, and practically showing the love of God in a holistic and non-judgemental way.



The Vision

Torch's vision is to mobilise Christians in local churches to respond to this need by becoming companions to those who are in the early stages of losing their sight; journeying with them as they come to terms with the life-changing impact of sight loss.

'Her coming through the door and 'shining'... Just coming to the door - that means a lot because I don't have many people coming here at all. I'm so lonely, very lonely.'

Our vision is to resource churches throughout the UK in setting up teams of 'befrienders' who have links with local eye clinics, charities and other sight loss organisations. These teams can connect with people at the start of their 'sight loss journey', and help them adjust, rebuild confidence and establish a support network. Above all, these volunteers will ensure that someone losing their sight has someone to talk to. Where appropriate, volunteers are also able to offer prayer and discuss deeper feelings and faith issues, which sometimes come to the fore at times of crisis.

The Programme

After training, *Journeying With* volunteers are linked with individuals who have recently been diagnosed with debilitating sight loss. By offering friendship they can help people to cope better with the challenges they may be facing - such as emotional upheaval, a sense of isolation or exclusion, and other practical difficulties.

This support is typically given on a weekly basis for up to 26 weeks, with volunteers providing a listening ear, companionship and information. Befrienders also help clients find new ways of doing everyday activities such as cleaning, shopping, cooking, and maintaining mobility. The scheme is open to clients over 18, who are in the process of losing their sight and live in a scheme area.

Volunteers may come from experienced pastoral care teams, have personal experience of helping others, or may be completely new to offering pastoral support. Volunteers need to be recruited in line with current safeguarding best practices, since they may be working with vulnerable adults.

The scheme is usually set up with one local church or Christian organisation taking 'ownership' of the programme. This is highly effective as the planning, recruiting of volunteers and networking with other professionals should reflect the local needs. Torch works alongside the local team to develop the programme by providing training, assisting in networking with sight loss charities and professionals, and providing a comprehensive programme guide.

For the programme to be effective, it must have the endorsement of the local church leadership. However, the planning and running of the programme can be delegated to any 'mature' Christian.

This co-ordinator will receive extra training from Torch and have access to support from the national and regional Torch teams, and other *Journeying With* co-ordinators where possible.

