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Royal Blind is Scotland’s largest vision impairment organisation. We care for, educate and employ blind and partially sighted people from across the UK.

Royal Blind supports people of all ages - from babies and toddlers at our pre-school playgroup, children at our school and after school club, young adults through our supported accommodation and respite care, and older people in our care homes. We also run the Scottish Braille Press, a leading UK provider of accessible media.

Visit www.royalblind.org to find out more.

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Please return this form to Royal Blind, 50 Gillespie Crescent, Edinburgh EH10 4JB.

Communication is key at Learning Hub seminar

Communication is an essential part of any school pupil’s day. Saying hello to friends in the morning, asking a teacher for help, or choosing what to have for lunch are just some of the ways that children express themselves throughout the day.

At the Royal Blind School many of the young people have complex needs as well as vision impairment. This can make communication and understanding difficult and the Royal Blind School has developed a range of techniques to encourage communication with pupils.

In February, the Royal Blind School opened its doors to education professionals from across Scotland for a Learning Hub seminar on communication with learners with vision impairment and complex needs at an early stage of development.

The seminar highlighted a range of methods that Royal Blind School teachers use to communicate with their pupils. One such tool is Canaan Barrie signing.

The method of on-body signing was developed at the Royal Blind School and is now used in countries all around the world. It works mainly through touch with most signs having a specific reference point on the body. The method involves movements close to the pupil, using the pupils’ hands, and on-body signing. The aim is to develop a vocabulary of movement and touch that reflects the everyday needs of the pupil.

Royal Blind Teaching Senior, Karen Boyd, said: “The purpose is not to teach the pupil to sign. Using Canaan Barrie brings the adult physically closer to the child they are communicating with. That means the child is aware they are the focus of the communication. If you are speaking across the room to a blind or partially sighted child with complex needs, they don’t know they are being addressed. Communication can cause a great deal of anxiety for a child if they are not sure they are being addressed, especially in a group situation. “By using on-body signing, the child will feel engaged and communicated with, they know when they are no longer the focus of the communication and they are able to express themselves effectively.”

If you are an educator of a vision impaired pupil and would like to learn more about Canaan Barrie Signing, sign up to the Learning Hub’s free workshop on 22 May 2018 at www.royalblind.org/learninghub or call 0131 446 3128.

Did you know?
You can learn a Canaan Barrie on-body sign each week by following the Learning Hub’s blog. Find out more at www.royalblind.org/learninghub or follow us on Facebook.

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225 years of Royal Blind

This year Royal Blind is proud to be celebrating our 225th anniversary.

Established in 1793 as the Asylum for the Relief of the Indigent and Industrious Blind, Royal Blind was the third organisation in the world to cater to the needs of people with vision impairment.

The foundation was set up as a simple workshop providing employment and education for men with vision impairment.

In the two centuries that followed, the charity has expanded far beyond its humble beginnings to provide education, support, care and employment to blind and partially sighted children and adults across Scotland.

Royal Blind will be celebrating this important anniversary throughout the year. You can keep up to date by visiting our website and social media pages.

Education, care, employment and accessible media for people with sight loss.
Richard Baker, a former Member of the Scottish Parliament, has taken up the new role of Policy Manager for both charities, moving on from Age Scotland where he had been Policy and Communications Manager.

Chief Executive, Mark O’Donnell, said the role had been created to ensure that the issues affecting people with sight loss of all ages are taken to local and national government.

He said: “For 225 years Royal Blind has been providing care, education and employment for visually impaired people through its services in Scotland.

“With the number of people living with sight loss in Scotland expected to double by 2050 in line with the population ageing, it is more important than ever to ensure that the challenges facing vision impaired people are taken into account by politicians in charge of implementing policy.

“This new function is part of our commitment to improving the lives of people of all ages living with sight loss across the country.”

Since the establishment of the Policy Manager role there has been engagement with the Scottish Government and MSPs on a range of issues.

Royal Blind has responded to the Scottish Parliament’s Health and Sport Committee on the potential impact of Brexit on health and social care provision.

The charity has also highlighted its concerns that too many pupils with vision impairment are not getting the support they need in mainstream schools and the greater role the Royal Blind School could play in addressing these issues.

Royal Blind has submitted responses to the Scottish Government consultations on the presumption of mainstreaming and its proposed education reforms, giving more powers to head teachers.

Speaking about his new role Richard said: “I’m delighted to have joined Royal Blind and Scottish War Blinded at a time when key decisions are being taken which will affect the future of vital services for people with vision impairment.

“It has been great learning about the fantastic services the charities provide, and I've also enjoyed meeting the people who use them. It is their priorities and concerns which will determine which areas of policy will concentrate on as we take this work forward.”
Party animals!
Furry friends visit Kidscene

Children at Kidscene Holiday Club had a very special four legged visitor in February – Scotland’s only possum.

As well as the possum, the children petted and learned fun facts about a gecko, a tortoise, a rabbit and a mouse.

Poppy, who regularly attends Kidscene Holiday Club, said: “I wasn’t expecting to see a possum or a gecko. I liked the tortoise best.”

The holiday club was jam-packed with activities including a music and movement workshop with Boogie Beats, swimming lessons, scavenger hunts and arts and crafts.

Find out more at www.royalblind.org/child-care

The Royal Blind School reopens Drever House

A former house for Royal Blind School pupils has reopened its doors after an increase in the number of residential pupils at the school.

Drever House, near the Royal Blind School’s former Craigmillar campus, accommodates nine residential pupils supported by 11 members of staff.

The house has been fully furnished to meet the needs of the pupils, including two new accessible downstairs bedrooms.

It comes as the Royal Blind School has expanded its provision to include pupils that need to stay at the school for up to 52 weeks of the year.

Claire Murray, Senior Residential Care Worker for the Royal Blind School, said: “Everyone has settled in very well. There’s a lot of space in the new house and it feels very much like home.”

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“The move to Drever has been a very positive experience for me. Drever is very homely.”
Lewis

“I really like Drever because there’s lots of room.”
Amy

“I like Drever because I can find my bedroom really easily.”
Aiden
Resident profile: Evelyn Stephen on life at Braeside House

The 74-year old Braeside House resident keeps her friends and staff entertained as she plays songs completely from memory.

Evelyn joined Braeside House in December 2016 from social housing in Leith.

She said: “I was in hospital when I got the call to say that I would be able to move to Braeside House.

“I was so happy because I really wanted a place. I moved straight in and loved it straight away. The staff can’t do enough for you and I have plenty of friends and people to talk to here.

“I’m blind from birth so I appreciate having specially adapted facilities. I didn’t realise Braeside House was run by Royal Blind until I came to live here. I was very pleased to learn that.”

Evelyn grew up in Granton, Edinburgh. A pupil of the Royal Blind School’s former Craigmillar campus, she had an action-packed extracurricular schedule, spending her free time in the Girl Guides, Scouts and horse-riding.

Whilst many of her close friends came from all over Scotland, Evelyn’s family home was close by, so she would take her friends home with her at the weekend.

“Whenever someone was homesick I would say, ‘why don’t you come home with me?’ My mother was always cooking dinner for one of my school friends,” she said.

“I enjoyed my time at the Royal Blind School. They set you up for life. I don’t know if I would have enjoyed a mainstream school quite as much.”

After leaving the Royal Blind School, Evelyn became involved with her local chaplaincy for more than 40 years, playing the piano and helping out where she could.

An animal lover, she had six guide dogs in her lifetime, although she no longer needs their help to navigate.

Today, her favourite activities at Braeside House are bowling and the weekly quizzes.

She said: “There’s always something going on here or something to do. I’ve done a spot of bowling in the past so I enjoy the challenge of attempting it from my armchair.”

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Apprentices working at Edinburgh-based company, Leonardo, were tasked with finding a way for pupils using a computerised power wheelchair, the Smart platform, to find their way to the right classroom.

The Royal Blind School currently uses wall mounted signifiers to indicate to the pupils that they have arrived at the correct classroom. For example, a paintbrush indicates that a student has arrived at their art class. However, students who use the Smart platform rely on staff members to take the signifier off the wall and pass it to them to indicate they have arrived at the classroom.

Now apprentices Macaulay Jarrett, Gavin Davis, Luke Smith and Scott Robertson have adapted existing sensor technology to find a solution. Radio frequency tabs, similar to those found in central locking keys for cars and passports, will be positioned at predetermined places on the white track which the Smart platform follows through the school. A sensor attached to the Smart platform will pick up the signal from these tabs and will process it and announce the name of the classroom the student has arrived at.

Macaulay said: “We decided we wanted to use a friendly familiar voice of one of the school staff for the sensor, to make the pupils feel more relaxed and at home. We visited the school and it was quite amazing to see how the pupils are able to manage and we feel proud to work with technology which will make them feel even more independent.”

The apprentices are hoping that an initial trial of the technology will lead to wider use of the sensors at the school to give the students greater independence. Clare Mackenzie, Occupational Therapist at the Royal Blind School first decided to approach Leonardo apprentices due to her existing knowledge of the sensor technology expertise at the business through her husband, who works at the company as a Lead Engineer.

Clare said: “It’s been a great experience to work alongside the Leonardo apprentices and helpful to get their engineering expertise in being able to move forward a project that will give a new dimension to the use of the Smart platform.”

Billy Barrouman, Apprentice Training Officer at Leonardo, added: “The apprentices really put their heart into this project, as I think they were incredibly impressed by the school and had a genuine desire to enhance the students’ quality of life.

“They took a professional approach and with mentoring from Michael Gray, Senior Mechanical Engineer and myself, built the project from scratch, from gathering the bill of materials to exploring the best means of developing the sensor technology.”
Hosted by DJ Scott Wilson, the Celebrity Golf Day will be held at the exclusive Fidra Links at Archerfield Golf Course and is a fantastic opportunity for friends and co-workers to get together for a fun team building day, whilst raising funds for charity.

Attendees enjoyed stunning weather at last year’s event, which raised £10,000 for Royal Blind.

Teams of three will be joined by a celebrity from the sporting world for the competition, which includes bonus games such as blind-folded golf and black ball challenges.

An auction and raffle of luxury prizes is also offered – all funds raised will go towards supporting children and adults across Royal Blind’s services.

A team costs £650, which includes breakfast on arrival, the use of Archerfield’s facilities, 18 holes of golf in a shotgun start, use of golf buggies and a two course set menu meal.

For more information about any of these events please contact our Fundraising Team on 0131 229 1456 or fundraising@royalblind.org
Scottish Braille Press on the move

The Scottish Braille Press has said a fond farewell to its old building as it moves to new state-of-the-art premises.

“The move has been carefully co-ordinated to ensure there is no disruption to the day to day activity of the Scottish Braille Press.”

The Scottish Braille Press, run by Royal Blind, has operated from its current location at Craigmillar Park, Edinburgh, since 1954.

But due to a rapidly expanding client base and workforce, the decision was taken to move buildings.

The Scottish Braille Press will now operate in Robertson Avenue.

Head of Operations for the Scottish Braille Press, John Donaldson, said: “This is a very exciting time for the Scottish Braille Press, marking a significant new chapter in our history as a leading provider of accessible formats for vision impaired people.

The Press celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2016.

Nathan gets crafty at the Linburn Centre

He’s got a reputation as a comedian among his housemates and Royal Blind staff, but now Allermuir resident Nathan is getting to grips with a new skill.

The 21-year-old first tried his hand at woodworking when he was a student at the Royal Blind School. And after moving to Royal Blind’s home for vision impaired adults, Allermuir, Nathan suggested he would like to continue learning the craft.

Now he is attending weekly sessions at the Linburn Centre – an activity hub run by Royal Blind’s sister charity, Scottish War Blinded.

Working under the supervision of Workshop Instructor, James Gregson, Nathan has crafted a range of gifts for his friends and family including a coffee table, plant pots, a bench and a bird table.

He has also learnt to use a range of tools and enjoys chatting to Scottish War Blinded members.

Nathan said: “It was at school that I learned a lot about different woodworking tools and how to use them. I’m really happy I can continue with woodwork at the Linburn Centre again now.”

Nathan is currently working on a wishing well.

He said: “My favourite thing I’ve made so far is the well. It’s really good to come out to Linburn and speak to the veterans. I’ve made a friend called William. We have really good banter.”

James said that he is ‘extremely impressed’ by Nathan’s progress.

He added: “It’s lovely to have Nathan come over because we get to work on something a little different. He’s a hard worker, good fun and a bit of a comedian – he loves telling jokes - so it’s always great to have him here, for the members as well as the staff.

“I’ve been really impressed by how much he has learned, particularly watching Nathan repeat a project. For example the well he was making today, will be his second well and I’m happy to see he remembered many of the steps without needing to be prompted. He’s doing a fantastic job.”
WW2 veteran Gordon takes to the slopes

Second World War veteran, Gordon Mills, has taken to the slopes for the first time – just two days after his 96th birthday.

Gordon had his first ever ski lesson at Midlothian Snowsports Centre in February in a trip arranged by Scottish War Blinded.

Gordon said: “It was a little harder than I imagined, but extremely worthwhile. I enjoyed it very much.

“My lack of sight was a bit of a challenge, but the feeling was quite amazing.”

Gordon served in the Royal Air Force from 1941-46, taking part in the Burma Campaign. He was later attached to the Navy and then served in 300 Parachute Squadron of the Royal Engineers (TA).

The great-grandfather of six began to lose his sight around 20 years ago due to age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and joined Scottish War Blinded in 2014.

But Gordon’s sight loss hasn’t stopped him living an adventure-packed life – trying hot air ballooning, paragliding and flying in a glider.

A regular attendee of Scottish War Blinded’s activity hub, the Linburn Centre in West Lothian, he first suggested trying skiing to Centre Officer, Caroline O’Hara.

Caroline said: “He was quite determined to tick skiing off his bucket list, so we set it up for him. Gordon is a real inspiration – our own James Bond. He’s also a truly lovely person and I’m so glad he was able to tick this activity off his bucket list.”

Gordon was instructed by Lauren Henderson, instructor for Disability Snowsport UK (DSUK).

Lauren said: “He was absolutely brilliant. Gordon is the oldest person DSUK has ever instructed. I was so impressed. To try skiing for the first time at 96 is an incredible thing and he really rose to the challenge.”

Last year Gordon also took on a 70ft abseil at the Edinburgh Indoor Climbing Area. Now he is looking forward to trying off-road 4x4 driving with Scottish War Blinded, as well as going up in a glider once again.

Gordon’s wife, Yvonne, aged 74, described her husband as an ‘adrenaline junkie’.

She said: “Nothing fazes him. He’s more afraid of wasps than he is of extreme sports. I know I’m his wife but I think he is quite remarkable, you would never know how little sight he actually has.

“He says that when he’s up in the air he can make out more with his peripheral vision than he can when he’s on the ground. It’s fantastic that Scottish War Blinded can support its members to do these things. The doctors say that it’s activities like this that keep him young – I think it’s having a younger wife.”

Gordon added: “If you’re fit enough you’ve got to go after what you want to do – you can’t let age stop you. It’s like what George Mallory said when questioned why he wanted to climb Mount Everest – ‘because it’s there.’”

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*The last three digits on the signature strip (four for American Express)

2. My monthly gift to support Royal Blind
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Please complete and return this form or set up a direct debit at royalblind.org/donate
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