Sister charities Royal Blind and Scottish War Blinded, together known as Royal Blind Group, have achieved the Investors in People accreditation – the most successful framework for business improvement through people in the UK.

The accreditation comes at a time when the charities are about to create around 150 new jobs with their expansion into the West of Scotland, boosting the total workforce to around 600 employees. Royal Blind is building a care home for visually impaired older people and Scottish War Blinded is constructing an activity and support centre for veterans.

The new services will be located side by side in Paisley.

Royal Blind Group Chief Executive, Richard Hellewell (pictured), said: “I am delighted that Royal Blind Group has achieved the Investors in People accreditation.

“It is essential for our workforce to feel supported and motivated to continue to deliver an outstanding level of service to the many visually impaired people who rely on our organisation in their day to day lives.”

Royal Blind Group offers salaries starting at the living wage and is already recognised as a Disability Confident Employer for its practice in employing and retaining disabled people.

Sheila Dick, HR Administrator for Royal Blind Group (also pictured), has worked for the organisation for 42 years.

She said: “In my years working for Royal Blind Group I have seen first-hand how both charities have grown and developed by successfully supporting and managing their staff. Many of our staff, myself included, have been with the organisation for the majority of their careers. I’m very proud to see Royal Blind Group receive the Investors in People accreditation.”
Deputy First Minister visits Royal Blind School

The Royal Blind School played host to a special visitor in February – the Deputy First Minister of Scotland.

Mr Swinney said: “I very much enjoyed my visit to the Royal Blind School and meeting the staff and pupils. It was very interesting to see assistive technology being used in lessons and the student-run coffee shop. This learning project gives young people the chance to develop life experiences and skills that will help them succeed and fulfil their potential – which is my ambition for every child in Scotland, no matter their circumstances.”

Royal Blind School Head Teacher, Elaine Brackenridge, said: “We are delighted that the Deputy First Minister visited the school. It was an excellent opportunity for us, as a grant-aided school, to show how we use our specialist facilities and staff to provide individualised education and care for all of our pupils.

“Many of our pupils have additional support needs as well as visual impairment and benefit from the smaller class sizes and a campus specifically designed to provide independence for the pupils. The pupils were very excited to welcome such an important visitor to the school.”

John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, was invited to the Royal Blind School to see how it delivers education and care to young people with visual impairment, including some with complex needs.

Mr Swinney talked to students and staff as he toured the campus.

He was able to see the wide range of curricular areas covered by the school and the attainment of pupils, from those with significant additional support needs to those who can undertake advanced higher level.

Pupils demonstrated a range of assistive technology equipment to Mr Swinney. This included a BrailleNote, an electronic device that can be used in a similar way to a laptop (see cover picture), and video magnifiers that allow partially sighted pupils to access educational materials.

As well as dropping in on lessons, Mr Swinney visited the Royal Blind School coffee shop, which is run by pupils to enable them to learn valuable life skills through baking, serving and banking.
Resident profile: Mary Mullen on life at Braeside House

A retired nurse and volunteer hairdresser for 15 years, Braeside House resident, Mary Mullen, still enjoys having her weekly cut and finish at the Braeside House salon. As well as making use of the on-site facilities, Mary enjoys taking part in Braeside’s daily activities – especially armchair bowling and the quiz.

“I used to bowl in a mixed team for many years. We had tournaments indoors during the winter,” she said. “The staff have adapted the bowling here so that I can do it from my chair. Of course we’ve all lost some or all of our sight so we aim for a big drum and use our hearing as a guide. I do quite well!”

“I always enjoy the quiz. I go to bible study and they often have music concerts for us. There’s always something to do.”

Born in Shotts, Mary moved to Edinburgh aged 17 to train as a nurse. At 64 she retired to spend time with her family and see more of the world. She travelled to Canada with a friend and spent a month exploring the country and celebrating her retirement.

Colourful collages of Mary’s travels as well as photos of her family and friends and her bowling team, adorn her bedroom wall.

“My daughter made those for me when I moved in,” she said. “I lived in West Richmond Street for 29 and a half years, but my health and sight have started to deteriorate. I moved to Braeside house on 28 June 2016.

“I’m very happy here. It’s the little things like being able to have your hair cut every week that make a big difference. The staff are just wonderful, they can’t do enough for you and I’ve plenty of friends. You go to the dining room and there’s always someone to talk to. But if you don’t want to socialise you can have privacy in your own room.

“The best thing is knowing there’s always someone nearby to help if you need it. It really feels like home to me.”

Mary, aged 97, moved into Braeside House last year from her flat in Edinburgh’s South Side where she lived for nearly 30 years after retiring from her career as a nurse.

Now the great-grandmother of eight enjoys her weekly pampering session, visits from her family and friends, and taking part in Braeside’s daily activities.

“It’s wonderful to have a hairdressers just upstairs. It makes a big difference to me to be able to have my hair cut without having to leave Braeside. I was a volunteer hairdresser at my local community centre for many years, so I like to keep my hair looking its best,” said Mary.

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Travelling Far
A poem by the residents of Braeside House

Adventuring freely along life’s open page,
Life is for living: whatever your age!
Bold and intrepid, individual and free
Whatever I choose, I know I can be.

Sometimes I am happy curled up in a chair,
Listening to my book with no-one else there!
Or I meet up with friends for biscuits and tea,
Socialising means so very much to me!

I enjoy classical music and opera and jazz,
But I may prefer something more razzmatazz
So I’ll play a few songs by the famous Rat Pack
And sing along loudly to my favourite track!

Love them or loathe them, my family are mine,
Both when I am sad and when I feel fine.

I could have a pet dog or cat on my knee
But the thing I like best – is just being me!
With the opening of our new care home for visually impaired older people in Paisley, set for October, we have launched an appeal to help fund the specialist equipment we require to provide the best possible care and support to residents and their families. Royal Blind is building the specialist home to meet the increasing demand for nursing care placements for older people who are blind or partially sighted. Jenny’s Well will offer residential care to older people with visual impairment as well those with other medical needs such as dementia.

Now we are inviting our supporters to make a one-off donation to help raise funds for specialist equipment that will make the difference to the day to day lives of our residents. By donating today, you can help us create a happy, homely environment for our residents. On this page you can find examples of projects that your generosity could support.

Thank you again for your wonderful support. We really couldn't do so much without you.

£500 could pay for a garden shed
A specially adapted garden shed that makes it easy for blind and partially sighted people to access tools, containers and plants.

£75 could pay for a vintage style radio
Music players with old style looks but modern digital sound are a great of helping older people with sight loss keep in touch with current events, relax and enjoy themselves.

£300 could pay for a loveseat
Cosy loveseats are a great way for residents and visitors to sit together and chat, get some fresh air and enjoy the beautiful gardens that will feature in the grounds of Jenny’s Well.

To make a donation, complete the form at the back of iSite.
You can also visit www.royalblind.org/donate/donate-to-a-project

£18 could pay for a double handed mug
These specialised mugs reduce spillage and are easier to hold, which will help residents enjoy their daily cuppas.

£5 could pay for sensory plants
Sensory plants that have a strong smell, are tactile or make a noise when they blow in the wind.

£500 could pay for a garden shed
A specially adapted garden shed that makes it easy for blind and partially sighted people to access tools, containers and plants.
Kidscene opened its doors in January 2012 with the aim of catering for visually impaired children within a group of all abilities in a safe and integrated environment — the first club of its kind in Scotland.

Today Kidscene is flourishing with around 35 children every weekday, as well as a popular holiday club, and staff, children and parents celebrated in January with a special party to mark the milestone in Kidscene’s journey.

Entertainer Gary James dazzled the audience with a magic show and party goers were given a chance to meet Animal Encounters’ collection of exotic pets. Among those at the party was Rhys Edwards, who was one of the first members of Kidscene.

The 10–year-old said: “It was just me and one other child at the first ever club. I think I was about five or six at the time.

“Kidscene has changed a lot since then. There are more children so there’s more people to make friends with. I remember Kidscene’s first birthday because I was one of the only ones who ate the cake. Now there’s lots of people to share the cake with!”

Julie Jamieson, Care Services Manager, said she was ‘extremely proud’ of what the Kidscene team have accomplished.

She said: “I can’t believe that five years have passed so quickly. It has been a really good chance to reflect on what we have achieved here, we’ve done so much in that time.

“Kidscene is an integrated service, so we have children with a real range of abilities and needs. As far as we’re aware we are the only club like this in Scotland that has specialist staff and facilities so parents know their child’s specific needs will be met.

“We had never done anything like this before, so it was a bit of an experiment, but it couldn’t have gone better and I’m so proud of the team here.”

Happy Birthday Kidscene!

Kidscene staff, children and their families joined together to celebrate five years of the after school and holiday club.

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“We had never done anything like this before, so it was a bit of an experiment, but it couldn’t have gone better and I’m so proud of the team here.”

Pupils Christina and Craig sold handmade goodies and Royal Blind merchandise in Morningside Library to celebrate the day and raise awareness of Royal Blind.

Christina said: “It went really well. People were interested in the shop and we sold lots of things. We sold quite a few tea towels and magnets that our photography club made.”

English teacher Beth Laughlin and music teacher Karl Macrae led a sensory storytelling session for local children. They narrated children’s book, Dirty Bertie, with sound effects and props. Children were encouraged to wear a blindfold and experience the difference between hearing the story without sensory affects, and the interactive version, to give an understanding of how visually impaired children can enjoy and learn from stories.

Habilitation specialist, Paul Taylor, said: “The aim of the pop up shop was to raise awareness of the Royal Blind School in our local community. I would like to thank Morningside Library for agreeing to host the pop up shop and storytelling session. Everyone who attended had a great time.”
MSPs, including convener Stewart McMillan, and representatives of visual impairment organisations attend the Cross-Party Group on Visual Impairment.

The Cross Party Group aims to draw together the blind and partially sighted sector in Scotland to identify issues and seeks to influence policy, legislation and decision makers to better reflect the needs of visually impaired people.

Following the meeting of the group in February, guests were invited to attend an exhibition of Braille technology from the last 100 years from Royal Blind’s historic collection, to celebrate 125 years of the Scottish Braille Press.

Jim McCafferty, who first joined the Scottish Braille Press in 1971 after graduating from the Royal Blind School, delivered a speech on the history of the organisation and his own memories of the Press.
Royal Blind School pupil Junjie got a taste of office life in March when he took part in a work experience placement at Royal Blind’s finance department.

Junjie, who is in his final year at the Royal Blind School, visited head office for his placement for one day per week throughout February and March.

He said: “I want to work in finance one day because my best subject is maths. I really enjoyed coming in to head office and learning about how the finance department works. It’s something I can definitely see myself doing when I leave school.”

Work experience placements are a chance for pupils to practice their independent living skills. Junjie travelled from the Royal Blind School to head office each day by bus.

He added: “In the past I’ve done work experience at RNIB. It’s good because it gives you an idea of what it will be like to work in an office and I can put it on my CV.”

Finance focus for work experience pupil
Care Home Idol

Festive performance secures residents runner up spot in music contest.

Forward Vision residents have been named runners up in the UK-wide Care Home Idol music competition.

A group of young adults starred in a festive music video filmed at one of their regular music workshops in December.

Forward Vision staff members Esther and Patty penned the catchy Christmas tune, ‘Is it Nearly Christmas Time?’ performed by Amanda, Alex, Andrew and Claire.

The video was viewed more than 5,000 times and received the most ‘likes’ out of all non-professional entries in the annual competition – with 299 people casting their vote in favour of the team.

This was the third time Forward Vision have participated in the ‘Care Home Idol’ competition, which celebrates all forms of musical entertainment in care homes and supported accommodation.

Care Services Manager, Julie Jamieson, said: “We are delighted to have been named a runner up in the Care Home Idol competition. As a service for young adults with sight loss, music is a hugely important part of our residents’ lives, and everyone loves taking part in our regular music workshops.

“We are really proud of our residents for once again producing such a great music video, and our two staff members Esther and Patty for writing such a catchy song for them to sing!”

Teachers get active in Learning Hub PE seminar

Trampolining, bowling and boccia were just some of the activities that teachers took part in at the Learning Hub’s PE seminar at the Royal Blind School in March.

The day was divided into a morning of talks on different equipment and techniques that can be used to adapt PE lessons, and an afternoon of practical activities and a demonstration of the school’s hydropool.

The teachers also had a go at an adapted version of boccia, which is a Paralympic sport related to bowls.”

Teachers attending the seminar were also invited to try Rebound – an exercise therapy which uses trampolines to provide opportunities for movement, therapeutic exercise and recreation.

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The Learning Hub provides free seminars and resources for educators of vision impaired pupils.

To view upcoming seminars, visit www.royalblind.org/learninghub

“The teachers also had a go at an adapted version of boccia, which is a Paralympic sport related to boulas.”

Sandy said: “One of the key ways of adapting a PE lesson is bring in an auditory element to the class.

“At the Royal Blind School we have a huge variety of different balls that contain bells or rice to make different noises so the pupils can track where the ball is. You could use this technique to adapt traditional games like football or bowling.

Mainstream and special school teachers alike were invited to hear advice on making PE lessons fun, challenging and inclusive for all students in their class, including those with vision impairment and complex needs.

Sandy, who has taught at the Royal Blind School for 10 years, said: “This was my first seminar for the Learning Hub and it was a very positive experience.”

The Learning Hub provides free seminars and resources for educators of vision impaired pupils.

To view upcoming seminars, visit www.royalblind.org/learninghub

“We are really proud of our residents for once again producing such a great music video, and our two staff members Esther and Patty for writing such a catchy song for them to sing!”
Remote IT support for Scottish War Blinded members

A new IT service will offer technical support to Scottish War Blinded members across Scotland.

Since the Linburn Centre in West Lothian opened, members have enjoyed free support as they use the centre's computers.

Now, Brian Wilson, Linburn Centre IT Instructor, is offering a free one-to-one remote support service for members' technological questions and issues.

Members can access remote support by connecting to their computer, tablet or smartphone. Brian can then access the computer through a secure line.

He will also answer any queries about how remote access works and issues.

“Having lost my sight, my dependence on technology designed for those with sight loss.

Brian said: “I’m delighted to offer this Scottish War Blinded service – I’d like to help more people get connected online and make the most out of all that technology can offer to people with sight loss.”

Ronnie Morrison, of Glasgow, was the first member to try out the new remote access service. He said: “It was very reassuring to know that the remote support service offered by Scottish War Blinded is secure and wouldn’t make my computer vulnerable.

“Whatever level of computer literacy you have, whether you have got stuck with setting up emails or are developing your own website I know that Brian will be able to help get you connected.”

His contribution to the Allied war effort during World War Two remained a secret for more than 60 years. Now Scottish War Blinded member Marshall Rogers has shared his story with iSite.

Fighting a secret war against the Germans, Marshall served as a Special Army Wireless Operator intercepting German communications coordinating operations on land, sea and air.

The intercepts were sent to Bletchley Park for decoding and contributed to the cracking of the Enigma code. Marshall was unable to talk about his role as a Special Wireless Operator for 60 years after signing the Official Secrets Act. It is only in recent years his three daughters and extended family have learned about his wartime experiences.

Marshall (pictured to the right) was conscripted into the Army at the age of 18 and reported to Fort George, Inverness in December 1942. It was there where his aptitude for listening and recording signals was recognised.

Marshall was assigned to a Signals unit in Queensbury and was subsequently selected to train as a Special Wireless Operator on the Isle of Man. He spent the majority of the war in the Middle East based in Egypt, Palestine, Alexandria and Iraq.

Marshall recalls: “I wasn't aware of what we were intercepting as it was going in the ears and coming out through your pencil. Although I was aware that I was listening to enemy communications I never really thought about what it could mean.”

Marshall developed sight loss many years ago and joined Scottish War Blinded in 2015 after his sight further deteriorated. He added: “I would say the main thing is not really tangible as it is knowing that Carole, my Outreach Worker, is fully behind me. Provision of specialist equipment has been a huge help, particularly anti-glare glasses and electronic magnifiers.

I hadn’t been able to read letters, invoices, credit card statements and online bills for a long time and now my electronic magnifier has made that possible once again. I also enjoy attending Scottish War Blinded’s monthly social group at Rosendael in Dundee, where I have met fellow visually impaired veterans in the local area.”

Member story:

Marshall Rogers’ secret World War Two role

Do you know a veteran with sight loss? Joining Scottish War Blinded is free and changes lives.

www.scottishwarblinded.org
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There’s no need to fill in this section if you just want to give a one-off gift to support Royal Blind.

Please complete and return this form or set up a direct debit at royalblind.org/donate

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Make your donation worth 25% more with Gift Aid

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Yes, I am a UK tax payer and I would like Royal Blind to reclaim tax on all donations I have made in the past 4 years or will make in the future until I notify you otherwise. I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and / or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. Please notify us if you want to cancel this declaration, change your name or home address or if you no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and / or capital gains.

4. Communication Preferences

If you would prefer not to hear from us or would like to change the way we communicate with you please contact us on 0131 229 1456 or fundraising@royalblind.org

Please complete and return this form or donate online at royalblind.org/donate