225 years of Royal Blind celebrated at record-breaking Scottish Parliament event

Hundreds of people joined us at the Scottish Parliament to celebrate our 225th year of supporting blind and partially sighted people – at the best attended event ever in the Parliament’s Garden Lobby.

The reception was attended by our supporters, staff and service users and was hosted by Stuart McMillan MSP.

Royal Blind was established in 1793, the same year Rabbie Burns wrote Scots Wha Hae! Today Royal Blind provides care, education and employment for people with sight loss from across the country.

The event included speeches from Royal Blind Chief Executive Mark O’Donnell, Stuart McMillan MSP and Clare Haughey MSP, Minister for Mental Health.

There was also a performance from Royal Blind School pupil, Connor, and an exhibition of the organisation’s history.

Mr O’Donnell said: “Our reception was a fantastic opportunity to reflect on not only what Royal Blind has achieved in the past two centuries, but to look to the future as we explore new ways of supporting blind and partially sighted people across Scotland.”
Celebrating 225 Years of Royal Blind

To mark our milestone 225th year, Royal Blind has produced a book that examines the evolution of societal perspectives towards sight loss and disability, and how our services have evolved over the centuries.

The publication looks at how Royal Blind has approached the ‘social inclusion’ of blind and partially sighted people over more than two centuries. Wherever possible, this story is told from the perspective of people who used and delivered the services, offering insights into their personal understanding and experiences of inclusion.

In particular, the booklet covers experiences relating to: employment; education; care; independent living; and the use of technology and accessible media.

This booklet aims to offer insight into how the services offered by Royal Blind have changed according to expectations and aspirations for the inclusion of blind and partially sighted people over time. The publication has been developed through a small number of individual and focus group interviews with people who have been involved with Royal Blind, either as members or as employees.

Order your free copy in standard print, large print, audio or braille by emailing marketing@royalblind.org
Royal Blind calls for level playing field in learning for blind and partially sighted pupils

Royal Blind is calling for government action on providing more support for blind and partially sighted pupils through its new campaign, ‘Our Vision for Equal Education’.

Royal Blind has highlighted that because up to 80% of our learning is through our vision, pupils who are vision impaired start at an immediate disadvantage to their fully sighted peers.

The number of children in Scotland’s schools who are vision impaired has more than doubled from 2,005 in 2010 to 4,331 in 2017, but the most recent figures show there has been a fall in the number of specialist teachers.

We are concerned that this is contributing to an attainment gap for young people with vision impairment.

Royal Blind’s Vision for Equal Education is calling for action in four key areas:

• A Scottish Government Action Plan to recruit and retain the specialist teachers we need for increasing numbers of pupils who have vision impairment.

• A new SQA training qualification in vision impairment for education support staff and others including those providing care and therapy.

• Effective transitions for blind and partially sighted young people.

• A fair and pupil-centred placement system for young people who are vision impaired.

Commenting on the launch of the campaign, Mark O’Donnell, Chief Executive of Royal Blind, said: “Our vision for equal education is that all pupils with vision impairment receive the specialist support they need to succeed, whether that be in mainstream or a specialist setting like the Royal Blind School. This needs to be a shared vision for blind and partially sighted young people, because we need to work together in government, parliament, local authorities and the third sector to make this happen.”

Helping to build Chris’ confidence

The Royal Blind School supports 56 pupils in mainstream schools across East Lothian through the East Lothian Vision Impairment Service (ELVIS). ELVIS, delivered in conjunction with East Lothian Council, enables pupils to access learning through the use of braille, large print, specialist technology and adapted learning materials such as tactile diagrams, whilst offering support in developing independence and social skills.

Chris, aged 11, was one of the first pupils to be supported by the service.

Chris’ mum, Heather, said: “The difference in Chris in just a year has been amazing. It was recognised that there was a need for Chris to learn braille before starting high school and that time was a factor, so everything was in place very quickly and he was up and running in no time. They provide support by adapting materials for Chris and ensuring he is able to fully access his classes just as well as his sighted classmates can.

“The year before ELVIS, Chris’ sight had deteriorated quite quickly and he had no confidence whatsoever. He was constantly worrying about the future. Things had gotten so bad he was attending counselling.

“Now, it’s just about a year later and Chris is reading braille which he had never done before. He has taken to it so quickly and seems to really enjoy reading. His confidence is back and he is like a different child. He is happy to go out and play with his friends again and he has stopped worrying about the future.

“His one-to-one support in school is great and if anything comes up that they think Chris might struggle with, his ELVIS teachers are able to suggest adaptations to class materials so he can keep up with his peers.”
Royal Blind School rated ‘excellent’ in Education Scotland inspection

The Royal Blind School has been praised for its ‘outstanding positive learning environment’ following an inspection by Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate.

The school achieved the top-rating of ‘excellent’ for its learning, teaching and assessment, and ‘very good’ ratings in the categories of raising attainment and achievement, quality of care and support, and quality of staff.

The inspection took place in September 2018. Head Teacher, Elaine Brackenridge, said: “I am absolutely delighted with this positive report which captures the ethos of our school community. I am thrilled to see staff given high praise for their creative, individualised teaching and skilled, focussed assessment techniques. It is a proud moment for everyone here at Royal Blind.”

The school is run by Scotland’s largest vision impairment charity, Royal Blind, which also runs residential services for young and older adults with vision impairment and the Scottish Braille Press. Royal Blind is 225 years old this year.

The school is Scotland’s only residential and day school specialising in the care and education of vision impaired children and young people, including those with additional complex needs.

In a letter to parents and carers, HM Inspector Ken McAra highlighted several of the school’s strengths. He said: “The school has an outstanding positive learning environment where all children and young people are highly valued.

“Staff know children and young people extremely well and work as a team to meet their individual needs very effectively in creative and flexible ways. “The school demonstrates very high expectations for all children and young people. Children and young people are motivated through their high-quality learning experiences and their interactions with staff to achieve as well as they can.”

Comedian and children’s author David Walliams gave his only interview at the Edinburgh International Book Festival to pupils from the Royal Blind School.

Mr. Walliams, who was the biggest selling author of 2017, has written 13 books including The Boy in the Dress and Bad Dad.

He met five pupils from the Royal Blind School in Edinburgh at the event organised by BBC Scotland’s LAB team.

Royal Blind School pupil Amy was among the young people to meet Mr. Walliams.

She said: “It was good to meet David, I really enjoyed interviewing him. My favourite book is World’s Worst Children.”

Royal Blind School English Teacher, Beth Laughlin, said: “This has been a fantastic experience for pupils of the Royal Blind School to meet one of the biggest children’s authors in the UK.

“We are very grateful to BBC Scotland LAB for selecting the Royal Blind School’s pupils to interview David Walliams, and for coming along to the school to prepare the pupils for the big day.”

Johanna Hall, Project Leader, BBC LAB Scotland, said: “The young people from our workshop are big David Walliams fans. With their newly honed interviewing skills they were ready to do a great interview. They had some interesting questions lined up, including one about brussel sprouts!”
Enter our raffle!

Each year we hold a raffle to raise money for Royal Blind. Why not enter today and be in with a chance of winning one of these fantastic prizes?

**FIRST PRIZE**
Hilton Coylumbridge Overnight Stay for two with Dinner & Breakfast

**SECOND PRIZE**
Norton House Hotel Rasul Experience with full spa access

**THIRD PRIZE**
Dinner for Two at the Black Ivy in Edinburgh

**FOURTH PRIZE**
Amazon Echo

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Amazon Echo

**Draw to take place on Monday 25 March 2019.**
Entrants must be 16 years or older.
Please see website for more information. www.royalblind.org

**Pub Quiz raises £1,000 for Royal Blind**

Quiz goers from across the city joined Royal Blind staff and supporters to raise an amazing £1,000.

**Take on a challenge for Royal Blind!**

**Edinburgh Marathon Festival**
Date: 25 May 2019

With a new route for 2019, now is the time to take on the iconic Edinburgh Marathon Festival. Whether you’re starting out your running journey with the 5k, or going for the full 26.2 miles, the world famous Edinburgh Marathon Festival has a course that’s right for you.

With stunning scenery and a flat route, this is the perfect race to beat your personal best with style. The route takes you right through the heart of the city, where you’ll see some of Edinburgh’s most iconic sites, including Greyfriar’s Bobby, the Scottish National Gallery, and the Scott Monument.

If you would like to take part in a challenge event, email fundraising@royalblind.org or find out more at www.royalblind.org/how-you-can-help.

**Kilomathon Scotland**
Date: 7 April 2019

The Kilomathon offers something a little bit different to your usual running event. The Kilomathon takes place in Edinburgh and is run on the beautiful Edinburgh cycle path network.

Runners take in the historic Royal Yacht Britannia, picturesque Victoria Park and enjoy tranquil cycle paths before a fantastic finish in front of the West Stand at Murrayfield Stadium.

The pub quiz, at the Merlin in Edinburgh, was held during National Braille Week – our annual week to raise awareness of braille and alternative formats. Over 100 people attended the event and competed to be named pub quiz champion.

Fundraising and Supporter Development Officer Laura MacMillan said: “I would like to thank everyone who attended our pub quiz which raised a fantastic £1,000 – all of which will go towards supporting blind and partially sighted people at our services across Scotland.”
Happy Birthday!
Paisley services mark successful first year

Residents and staff from Royal Blind’s first West of Scotland service are celebrating a successful first year.

Jenny’s Well first opened its doors in 2017, and is now home to more than 50 blind and partially sighted older people.

In the past twelve months, the home has become an important feature of the local community, hosting open days for nearby residents and a summer fayre with games, food and entertainment.

Jenny’s Well has received fundraising support from local organisations such as Paisley Golf Club Ladies’ Section and St Mirren Football club.

And in November, Jenny’s Well Care Assistant, James Ross, was named a finalist in the Scottish Care Awards in the category of Innovative Practice for his outstanding efforts as part of the Jenny’s Well Care Team.

Staff from the home have also raised an amazing £3,627 for Royal Blind by taking part in challenges such as Movember and the Kiltwalk.
As part of science week, Ross Walker from Edinburgh-based company Infinity Robotics visited the club to help children design their very own 3D models.

Using a tablet app, the children were able to create their designs by assembling different virtual components.

Infinity Robotics then took the designs away and printed them on a 3D printer before sending them back to Kidscene for the children to keep.

The children voted on the best design – with the winner getting to keep a pre-printed model award printed by Infinity Robotics.

Ross said: “The children seemed to really enjoy themselves. There were some great creative designs – I was very impressed!”

Each design is printed in plastic – taking around four hours for a small model.

Children Services Manager, Roseanne Allison, said: “The children absolutely loved having Infinity Robotics here at Kidscene. It’s something really different and interesting to try, and they have been able to actually produce something that they will be able to keep.”

Minions, castles and robots were among the creations produced at a special science-themed session at Kidscene Holiday Club.

Robot wars!
Kids design 3D models with help of Infinity Robotics

LEARNING HUB

We offer training, resources and support to educators working with vision impaired children and young people.

UPCOMING SEMINARS

Communication in Practice with Learners at an Early Stage of Development with Vision Impairment and Complex Needs
Tuesday 5th February 2019, 09:30am to 15:00pm

Using Drama Techniques and Sensory Stories to Explore Real Situations and Provide Opportunities for Inter-Disciplinary Learning
Thursday 28th February 2019, 09:30am to 15:30pm

Art for Children with Vision Impairment and Complex Needs
Wednesday 6th March 2019, 09:30am to 15:30pm

Independent Living Skills
Thursday 14 March 2019, 09:30am to 15:30pm

Music – Vision Impairment and Complex Needs
Thursday 21 March 2019, 09:30am to 15:30pm

VI and Autism Spectrum Disorder: Communication and Learning
Thursday 2 May 2019, 09:30am to 15:30pm

Find out more about the Learning Hub
Royalblind.org/learninghub | learninghub@royalblind.org | 0131 446 3128

iSite Magazine Winter 2018
Lots of skele-fun at Braeside House Halloween party!

Terrifying tales of witchcraft, ghoulish games and spooky treats were enjoyed by residents at Braeside House in Edinburgh for their frighteningly fun-packed Halloween Party hosted by the Meaningful Activities team.

Lots of skele-fun at Braeside House

Halloween party!

Terrifying tales of witchcraft, ghoulish games and spooky treats were enjoyed by residents at Braeside House in Edinburgh for their frighteningly fun-packed Halloween Party hosted by the Meaningful Activities team.

Many of the residents shared fond memories of ‘guising’ with their families when they were growing up and spoke of how they’ve seen fancy dress change over the years.

One resident, Jean, said: “We would just use anything we could get our hands on. Usually a black bag or if you were sneaky, a bed sheet. But you had to make sure you hid that from your mother! Children today are very creative with their costumes.”

Another of the residents, Jenny, recalled her family’s tradition of carving turnip lanterns, saying: “It was very hard work, carving a pumpkin is much easier.”

Continuing with the creepy theme of Halloween, residents also took part in a Touch and Feel game in which mystery items were presented in containers with everyone taking it in turns to guess what was inside. Some of the mystery items include a giant pipe cleaner, cooked rice and cooked slimy spaghetti.

Meaningful Activities Assistant, Anthony Daley, commented: “This is my first Halloween party at Braeside House and it was great fun. It was lovely to hear residents share their stories and our party cakes were a great treat – no tricks there!”

Pupils play ranger at Holyrood Park

Royal Blind School pupils played park ranger for the day during a visit to Holyrood Park.

Pupils have been visiting the Historic Environment Scotland (HES) centre in Holyrood Park, Edinburgh, throughout the term for interdisciplinary learning.

And in October, the pupils spent time in the HES yard, learning about the duties of a park ranger by exploring a tractor, and helping to clean it with a hosepipe, helping to tidy piles of leaves with a leaf blower, and learning how to use a walkie talkie.

The session was led by Lily Laing from the Historic Environment Scotland Ranger Service. She said: “This session was focussed on exploring the role of a ranger in carrying out this responsibility. It’s a practical way of learning that incorporates lots of different disciplines. Sound is particularly important to the pupils. After walking around the tractor and getting familiar with its size and the way it feels, the pupils were able to sit in the driver’s seat. We showed them the keys, how to turn the engine on, how loud the engine is, what the horn sounds like.”

Previous sessions have covered history and geography, including Iron Age and Volcano-themed events.

Lily added: “We went into Craigleith Castle to learn about Mary Queen of Scots. We’ve also had an Iron Age day where the pupils dressed in Iron Age attire, made bread, and met people acting as different characters, for example a druid and a farmer.

“The pupils are so well behaved and inquisitive, it’s a pleasure to have them here and see their confidence and independence grow.”

With a Halloween themed music playlist feeding the party atmosphere, residents listened to stories of the origins of Halloween including tales of witchcraft in Scotland, and shared their personal experiences of Halloween as children.

Pupils play ranger at Holyrood Park
Peter conquers the climbing wall

Scottish War Blinded veteran Peter Conaghan conquered a climbing wall in his very first attempt at the sport.

Peter, 54, a regular at Scottish War Blinded’s Linburn Centre, travelled to Edinburgh International Climbing Arena in Ratho with Linburn Centre Officer Gill Raw.

The ex-paratrooper suffered a stroke two years ago, which resulted in him losing his sight and has forced him to relearn how to walk and talk.

An exhilarated Peter, who was an accomplished distance runner before the stroke, said of his first experience climbing: "When Gill asked if I wanted to give it a go, what she did was instil confidence. She thought I could do it and I thought, ‘My goodness, that’s fantastic.’

"It was amazing to go along to the climbing centre. If she hadn’t suggested it, I never would have thought to try it. It’s the can-do attitude she has – it’s because she cares.

"Everyone there instilled confidence in me. The staff were very, very good."

"I have paralysis of my right arm. As I started to climb the eight-metre wall I was thinking, ‘How am I doing this? I’m actually trying to do this.’ Somehow or other I could do it.

"The first climb I managed quite well, I thought. Then they gave me a little break which was fine.

"The 20-metre wall was more challenging, not being able to get to the hand grips. I was given verbal instructions, using clock positions so I knew where the grips were.

"When the instructor told me I was at the top I thought, ‘No’. I was determined to take another step so that I felt I was at the top. The sense of achievement was fantastic. I can’t express what it felt like. It was totally amazing. I’m still buzzing now.

"The way I was taken along, given guidance and encouraged was fantastic. At the Linburn Centre, I take part in the strength and fitness classes and that’s brought my progress along miles – the climbing felt like another level to those classes."
I would like to help support Royal Blind

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

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Address: __________________________________________ Postcode: _____________________

E-mail address: ___________________________________ By giving us your email address you consent to receiving email updates from Royal Blind

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I enclose a cheque or voucher made payable to Royal Blind [ ] Individual gift amount: __________________________

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

2. My monthly gift to support Royal Blind
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

I would like to make a monthly gift of £3 [ ] £5 [ ] £10 [ ] My own choice of £ __________________

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Make your donation worth 25% more with Gift Aid

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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 privacy@royalblind.org

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