



Supporting the vision and print impaired community through library services



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Share the Vision is a coalition of UK organisations that work together to improve the quality, availability, and accessibility of library services for visually impaired and print disabled people.

A WELCOME MESSAGE FROM SHARE THE VISION

We are delighted to produce and share this resource, to help libraries engage with those in their community who have a vision or print impairment.

Funding from library service contributions and The Ulverscroft Foundation have enabled us to work with a variety of partners to create this guide and supporting resources.

The information and promotional materials highlight ways to support people to keep reading, and the providers who specialise in this area. Additionally, we want to raise awareness of the challenges that many people with sight loss face to get reading they want, in the format they need.

Libraries do so much to positively impact people's lives, and Share the Vision is committed to helping develop and champion services that deliver accessible reading.

We hope the Reading Sight guide increases confidence in dealing with enquiries and inspires people working in libraries to play their part.

Don't forget to highlight the fantastic activities and events that take place in libraries too, especially during Hi Vis Fortnight each year (@ReadingSight / #HiVis). Also, please register to receive our regular newsletter via the website www.readingsight.org.uk.

Thank you.

Mark McCree
Chair, Share the Vision

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INTRODUCTION

The Reading Sight Guide has been developed to support all those working in library services to develop their knowledge and understanding of how best to support people with visual impairment and sight loss in their communities.

The guide contains an overview of the Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise, the framework through which support should be delivered, and an introduction to the organisations and resources that will help libraries do this. After reading this guide, we suggest library staff visit the [Reading Sight website](#) for further information and complete the **Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise training module** accessible via Libraries Connected [Learning Pool site](#).

Please note, all links to websites mentioned throughout this guide can be found in the directory at the end of the document.

Did you know?

More than two million people in the UK are living with sight loss that is severe enough to have a significant impact on their daily lives, such as not being able to drive. This includes:

- People who are registered blind or partially-sighted
- People whose vision is better than the levels that qualify for registration
- People who are awaiting or having treatment such as eye injections, laser treatment or surgery that may improve their sight
- People whose sight loss could be improved by wearing correctly prescribed glasses or contact lenses.

'I've had to change things or give up things but reading keeps me in touch with who I think I am and that's why it's so important to me really.'

Assessing the Impact of Reading for Blind and Partially Sighted Adults, RNIB

Public libraries are a vital link for people with visual impairment and sight loss and we must work together to make them as accessible as we can.

Libraries Connected developed the Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise with Share the Vision to ensure libraries can effectively support people with reduced vision.

HOW SHOULD I BE SUPPORTING VISUALLY IMPAIRED LIBRARY USERS?

The [Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise](#) sets out the experience that people with blindness, sight loss and other print disabilities should have through public library services.

We think that everyone visiting a public library should be:

- Inspired by an exciting accessible environment which makes reading and seeking information a pleasure
- Have the opportunity to engage with libraries and reading through imaginative digital opportunities with support to build their skills, knowledge and creativity
- Have access to a range of inclusive and diverse books and other information resources in accessible formats that allow them to engage with reading both for pleasure and for daily living
- Able to take part in a wide range of reading and cultural experiences, including book-based and digital activities, which are accessible to all
- Actively involved in decisions about service developments
- Supported through library services and activities taking place both in library buildings and in the community to improve their independence, health and wellbeing.

The Promise

To achieve this, all public library services should:

1. Ensure that all blind and partially sighted customers are connected to the most appropriate service for their reading needs and that they are able to make full use of an accessible public library service
2. Use [Reading Sight](#), the free website supporting blind and partially sighted people to access reading and reading services

3. Provide local collections of accessible reading materials and information in physical or digital formats, and be able to signpost customers to a wider range of resources
4. Plan your digital and physical access strategies in consultation with blind and partially sighted people
5. Designate a champion for the reading needs of blind and partially sighted people, who has familiarised themselves with the specialist resources and services available
6. Support and promote Hi Vis Fortnight run by Share the Vision, which is an annual celebration to encourage accessibility and inclusivity for all blind and partially sighted people in local libraries.

Embedding the aims of the Promise across your library will help ensure key areas of service as described in Libraries Connected's Universal Library Offers are accessible to all.

Further information about the Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise is provided on the Reading Sight website. You can also access the [Learning Pool](#) training module, and read more about the [Universal Library Offers](#) on the Libraries Connected website.

Who can help?

The good news is there are brilliant organisations who can help you meet the aims of the Promise, so that you can more effectively support library users. Read on to discover more.



ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

People with a visual and/or print impairment can access alternative formats to make reading accessible for free from the following organisations in the UK:

Calibre Audio is a charity that provides a completely free for life audiobook service to everyone with a disability that makes reading print difficult or impossible. Members enjoy 13,000+ unabridged audiobooks with unlimited borrowing through digital streaming, download, or on memory stick.

ClearVision is a postal lending library of children's books designed to be shared by people with and without sight. All their books have braille, print and pictures, and there are over 14,000 books in the collection, catering for children from birth until they're independent readers. Public libraries can subscribe and borrow a collection of up to 20 books at a time, which they can change six times a year, allowing a highly cost-effective way of providing braille-reading children (or parents/grandparents with sighted children) to select from the shelf. ClearVision also loans a collection of tactile image books through schools and sensory support services, in which all the illustrations have realistic textures and are designed to be explored by touch.

Listening Books is a postal and online audiobook lending charity for those that find their illness, mental health, physical or learning disability affects their ability to read the printed word or hold a book. They support children from age 7+ and adults.

Living Paintings is a charity who design, create and publish tactile books, with audio for blind and partially sighted people, i.e. 'Touch to See' books. They have titles suitable for anyone from pre-school to adults, and distribute these through their FREE postal library.

RNIB Library offers members access to books via a number of options. Books can be provided in audio format (CD, USB online) and braille. This service can also be accessed via the Amazon Alexa device too, an important recent change to the service for braille readers. Each item now ordered is printed to order and can be retained by the reader or recycled; there is no need to return these items to RNIB.

Keeping up to date with information from these and other organisations is important to ensure you know what is available to vision and print impaired library users. Sign up to the Reading Sight newsletter and visit the organisations' websites to find out more.

For details of how to contact these organisations, please refer to the directory at the end of this guide.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology has enabled almost any printed material to be accessible through a variety of means including audio, braille or electronic from books to barcodes and in some cases, images and even handwriting. The advent of specialist and non-specialist technology means that users can access all kinds of information anytime, anywhere via any device.

Audio

Libraries will be very familiar with audio content and no doubt hold this in their collections already either online or via CD, memory or bespoke devices. It can be referred to simply as Audio, Talking Books, Spoken Word or Audiobooks.

Organisations such as RNIB, Calibre Audio and Listening Books produce audio material in a range of formats such as CD or memory stick, or online to be downloaded or played on smartphones, tablets and computers.

Depending on the service or organisation you are using, books can be accessed by [digital download](#), or through an [Alexa enabled device](#) such as a smart speaker, tablet or phone.

Screen readers

Screen readers provide audio feedback from smart phones, tablets and computers. They provide voice feedback from both the screen and keyboard and can even be downloaded as apps on mobile devices. In the library, documents can be scanned into the computer and with the appropriate screen reader software, users can access the parts of the screen they need for information or the whole screen.

Top tip

There are many types of screen reading software that can connect to library computers – it is worth investigating the options thoroughly before investing. Once you select a package, make sure your colleagues are aware of how it works and that users are aware they can access information in this way, to make your investment really worthwhile.

Braille

Hard copy braille is a bulky medium with the average paperback book taking up around six to seven heavy volumes. Printers, or embossers, are now available for the home or office user, so hardcopy braille is less expensive to produce than in previous times. If libraries do have a braille collection it would be through a specialist provider, or via loan collection services such as ClearVision.

The RNIB Library also has over 4,000 electronic braille books available. Qualifying readers can access these at <https://readingservices.rnib.org.uk/>, for download and also on SD cards. These books can be enjoyed using a refreshable braille display, such as the Orbit Reader 20.

RNIB also has a print on demand braille service. General braille collections, due to their size, can be prohibitively expensive, but RNIB's braille books are now in A4 format, smaller and slimmer in volume, so they can fit through letterboxes, making them easier to store or read on the go.

Top Tip

Some public libraries have collections of Shared Reading books. These are ordinary children's picture books with added braille on clear plastic pages, so that sighted and braille-reading families can enjoy stories together.

Access2books is a charity that produces and publishes high quality early years' books in dual format - giant print (75pt) and braille - with illustrations; albeit these are only available to buy, rather than borrow. A selection of shared reading books are also available for sale from RNIB: <https://shop.rnib.org.uk/reading/books/children-s-print-and-braille-books>.

Devices

Many people with vision impairment do have some level of sight; each individual's needs will vary. Technology in the form of particular devices or apps can be a useful way to support, providing flexibility around things such as font size, magnification and audio.

Providing at least one computer, with a large monitor, keyboard with contract colour keys and appropriate software pre-loaded can be an excellent way of support library users with sight loss, for both reading and information purpose.

Orbit Reader 20

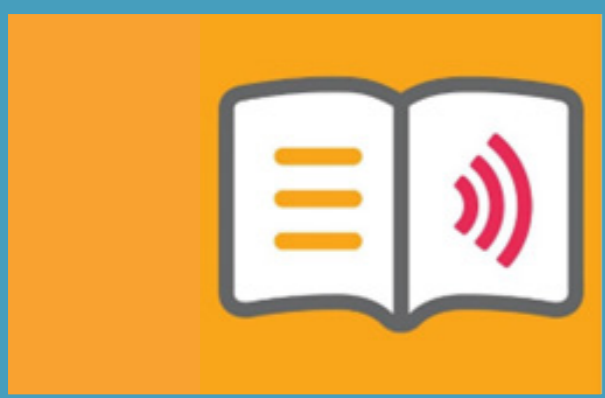
The Orbit Reader 20 is portable and features 20 refreshable eight-dot braille cells. It offers reading books via SD card, simple note-taking, Bluetooth and USB connectivity. As a stand-alone device, you can read content stored on an SD card that simply inserts into the back of the unit. It is possible therefore to read in braille anything that can be spoken on a computer screen or smart device.



Dolphin EasyReader app

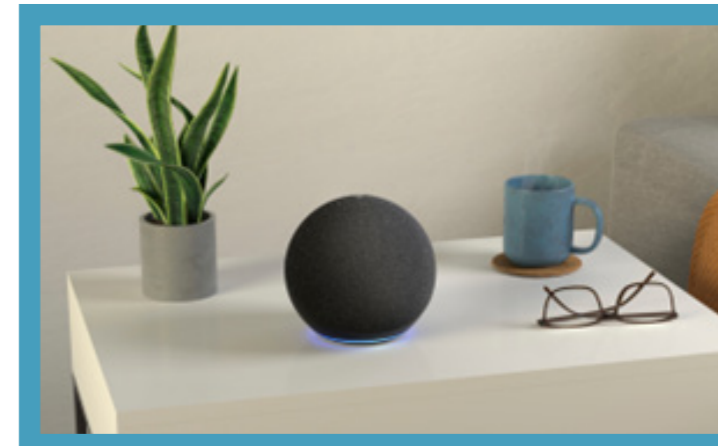
Dolphin EasyReader is a free app which makes reading more accessible for readers who are visually impaired, have a neurodiverse condition such as dyslexia or any other print impairment. With the app,

you can customise your reading experience: adjust and magnify text, change colour schemes, synchronise text with speech or use the speech settings alone to listen to books.



Amazon Echo Talking Book skill

RNIB Talking Books are now available through Alexa-enabled devices, such as Amazon smart speakers using an Alexa skill. Books can be accessed instantly through simple voice commands.



Calibre Books on RealSAM Pocket and Hub

Calibre members who also have a RealSAM Pocket smartphone can use this to listen to our collection. RealSAM Pocket is a fully voice controlled smartphone that requires a monthly subscription to RealSAM.

You can also subscribe to RealSAM Hub to listen to Calibre audiobooks on an Alexa speaker. Membership of Calibre is free, but to listen to content in this way does require a monthly subscription to RealSAM.



eBooks

Library eBook services are another way for blind and partially sighted people to access reading, and can be read using an eBook reader (eg. Kindle) or using an eBook app on computers, mobile phones or tablets (eg. iBooks on an iPad). Depending on the device or app being used you can:

- Enlarge the print size
- Zoom in on a particular passage or phrase
- Change the colour of the screen, so that print is either black on a white background or white on a black background
- Use text-to-speech to have the book read aloud.

Large print

Books with large print are available from a variety of organisations and suppliers. These can be purchased and added to collections, or users can access them direct from organisations.

Video magnifiers can take any printed material and enlarge it onto a screen. The original can be blown up to many times its original size and the use of such technology can often enable people to read print that would otherwise be too small to read. Video magnifiers range from desktop devices with flat screens to handheld devices through to apps on smartphones and tablets, with some able to read the print magnified aloud.

Top tip

Technology evolves so quickly, it can be daunting knowing where to start with so many products available. It is worth spending some time reviewing the options to discover what is available and see what might work best for library users in your community.

Use the directory at the end of the guide to support your research and find out more about what each organisation offers.

BORROWING ON BEHALF OF CUSTOMERS

People with a vision impairment may wish to borrow 'external' reading material via their local public library (i.e. content not generally held in the library itself), to have that connection and experience that visiting a library brings. The simplest way for a local library to 'borrow' material on behalf of such customers is to contact the RNIB Reading Services to check their holdings and then arrange for the loan of the material direct, or for collection via the library setting. As with all inter-library loan requests, you should provide as much information as you can including title, author, format (audio or large print) and note that the customer is a blind or partially sighted person. This provision should be free to access.

Top tip

Alternative format material (including large print and audio) may be sent via the Royal Mail free of charge, using the Articles for the Blind (AFB) service. To comply with Royal Mail regulations the customer's name and 'Articles for the Blind' must be on the parcel.



INCLUSIVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

What else can I do?

In addition to providing information and advice about the various organisations who can support vision and print impaired readers, there are steps you can take to ensure the service you provide is as inclusive as possible.

Did you know?

The Equality Act 2010 requires that you take reasonable steps to ensure that your premises are accessible to disabled customers. This means you need to ensure your library space is supportive of all disabled library users including those who are visually impaired.

Top tips

Awareness- make sure all library staff know what support your library service can offer, and what supporting organisations can offer so you can all provide necessary advice if asked. Use the posters provided by Reading Sight to share information about what support is available and any events you may be running in the library.

Visiting the library. Make sure you know the bus routes and links to local transport services including taxi services who welcome customers with a range of disabilities. Make sure signage outside the library is clean and visible.

Browsing the library. Think about internal signage, providing large print floor plans to act as a guide and designated desk space for visually impaired users to seek help if they need it.

Lighting. Avoid glare which can be painful for those with visual impairments, making sure circulation areas and displays are well lit.

Signposting. Use your knowledge of organisations who support vision and print impaired library users to help them access everything the library offers, just like other members of the community.

Events. You may not have come across a vision and print impaired library user in your service yet. This does not mean you don't have any! In the same way you might reach out to other user groups, think about what events and activities you can offer to engage with the vision and print impaired community and their families.

Library audits

A full audit of your library space and service offer can help identify gaps in provision and changes that need to be made to your library environment to more effectively support the vision and print impaired community. Professional audits require an investment, but as a useful starting point Share the Vision have created four useful guides available on the Reading Sight website, which can help you start the process.



HOME LIBRARY SERVICES

If your library services offers a Home Library service, make sure the person responsible for running this is up to date with information about how to support vision and print impaired library users. They can use the resources provided with the Reading Sight pack to signpost services and help home library service users access support.

SUPPORT IN ACTION: CASE STUDIES

The following case studies demonstrate just some of the work that library services are doing to support the vision and print impaired community in their areas.

Derbyshire Libraries

Winner of the inaugural Libraries Connected Vision and Print Impaired People's Award, Helen Cunningham transformed Buxton Library Listening Group for people with sight loss to an online listening group accessible to people anywhere in the county. Lockdown meant that the listening group was unable to meet up in the library.

Helen maintained telephone contact with members, but some were really missing the group dynamic and social contact. Helen initially provided one to one telephone support to help group members download Borrowbox onto their devices and start successfully borrowing e-audio. She then moved on to providing further support to help members set up Microsoft Teams on their own devices.

The group now enjoy meeting up every six weeks to discuss their reading, share relevant information about living with sight loss and chat about life in general. The online nature of the group has allowed people from across the county to join the meetings, break down geographical barriers and make new friends. It has been an important means of maintaining social contact for members, some of whom were shielding.

Buckinghamshire Libraries

Buckinghamshire Libraries have been working with their local visually impaired charity Bucks Vision since 2017, when they followed up on an opportunity provided through RNIB to have staff receive training on working with the vision and print impaired community, and on accessibility features and apps available on digital devices to support visually impaired readers.

Since then, they have offered digital inclusion sessions and welcomed Bucks Vision into libraries during Hi Vis Fortnight (formerly Make a Noise in Libraries) and National Eye Health Week. These visits enable customers to discover the support available from Bucks Vision, and for staff to learn more and be able to signpost customers to the charity.

Covid halted these activities, but in June 2021, they invested time in promoting their resources and support for the vision and print impaired community. This included celebrating the diversity of reading with displays in libraries, a blog and social media posts and a carousel of books on the library catalogue – with vision and print impaired characters, by vision and print impaired authors, in braille, audio and large print.

In Autumn 2021, the library service was delighted to welcome Bucks Vision back into libraries for National Eye Health Week. For Buckinghamshire Libraries, it is not so much the numbers engaged with on the day, but the quality of the conversations that makes these events so important.

One customer had been told by the hospital that there was nothing more they could do for him – he spoke to Bucks Vision at the library and realised that help was there.

Cambridgeshire Libraries

In response to Hi Vis Fortnight 2021, Cambridgeshire Libraries created a new webpage that brings together their services, those of their partners in Cambridgeshire, and national organisations in one place. Designed for maximum accessibility, each organisation featured has its contact and website details listed. This has the approval of Huntingdon Society for the Blind, and Camsight, and the library service tested it with their users before launch.

It has proven to be a valuable tool for residents, partners, and staff as it brings together the whole offer, demonstrating the support available. In addition, Cambridgeshire Libraries have a reading group for visually impaired readers who meet in person every month. It operates as a traditional group, with two sighted people providing technical input to assist with downloading content during the session.

DIRECTORY

Here you will find the website and contact information of the organisations mentioned throughout this guide.

Reading Sight

(www.readingsight.org.uk)

Reading Sight is a one-stop shop for people working in the libraries to find information that will help them to support visually and/or print impaired readers. This includes library managers, as well as front line staff, teachers and volunteers. Reading Sight promotes accessible reading and library services by providing information on:

- Accessible formats and the services that provide them
- How to join libraries and participate in reading groups and activities
- New developments in the world of accessible reading and reading technology
- Best practice for people working in libraries.

You can find detailed information about all the topics covered in this guide on our website www.readingsight.org.uk/.

Don't forget to sign up for the newsletter to help you stay up to date!

Calibre Audio

(www.calibreaudio.org.uk)

Calibre Audio is a charity that provides a completely free for life audiobook service to everyone with a disability that makes reading print difficult or impossible. Members enjoy 13,000+ unabridged audiobooks with unlimited borrowing through digital streaming, download, or on memory stick.

For more information contact our membership services team on 01296 432 339 or email enquiries@calibre.org.uk

ClearVision

(www.clearvisionproject.org)

ClearVision is a postal lending library of children's books designed to be shared by people with and without sight. All their books have braille, print and pictures, and there are over 14,000 books in the collection, catering for children from birth until they're independent readers.

Public libraries can subscribe and borrow a collection of up to 20 books at a time, which they can change six times a year. ClearVision also loans a collection of tactile image books through schools and sensory support services, in which all the illustrations have realistic textures and are designed to be explored by touch.

Find out more via info@clearvisionproject.org or you can call on 020 8789 9575

Hi Vis Fortnight

(formerly Make A Noise in Libraries)

Hi Vis Fortnight takes place annually, at the start of June, and highlights the importance of accessible libraries and reading. It encourages local and national services to raise the profile of provision, collections and engagement in this area.

Visit: www.readingsight.org.uk to access the free Hi Vis resources that are available each year; and join in and engage with Hi Vis via Twitter: @readingsight and using the tag #HiVis202X.

Libraries Connected

(www.librariesconnected.org.uk)

Libraries Connected are the sector support organisation for the public library service representing all the public library services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Maintaining and building on the power of libraries is the heart of their mission.

The Universal Library Offers are key to this and cover the key areas of service which their stakeholders see as essential to a 21st century library service: Culture & Creativity, Information & Digital, Health & Wellbeing, and Reading. Underpinning these offers are the Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise and the Children's Promise which aim to ensure that these offers remain accessible for all.

For access to Learning Pool and the Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise training module visit www.librariesconnected.org.uk/content/learning-pool.

Listening Books

(www.listening-books.org.uk)

Listening Books is a UK charity that provides an audiobook lending service for children and adults whose illness, mental health, physical or learning disability affects their ability to read the printed word or hold a book.

Members can choose from over 10,000 titles to either listen to online, borrow on CD, or download to a phone or tablet. Members also have access to thousands of audio newspapers and magazines through PressReader.

Contact the library team at support@listening-books.org.uk or call 020 7407 9417 for more information about membership.

Living Paintings

(www.livingpaintings.org)

Living Paintings is a charity who design, create and publish tactile books, with audio for blind and partially sighted people, i.e. 'Touch to See' books. They have titles suitable for anyone from pre-school to adults, and distribute these through their FREE postal library.

To register as a library member, please visit www.livingpaintings.org or speak to the Library team on 01635 299 771. You may also contact them via email library@livingpaintings.org

Royal National Institute of Blind People

(www.rniblibrary.com)

RNIB is one of the UK's leading sight loss charities and the largest community of blind and partially sighted people. They inspire people with sight loss to transform their own personal experience, their community and, ultimately, society as a whole. RNIB focuses on giving them the help, support and tools they need to realise their aspirations. They have a wealth of solutions, advice and resources for individuals, communities and businesses.

The RNIB Library has over 60,000 items for people to borrow, including audiobooks, braille and accessible music. Further information about the library is available via the RNIB Helpline on 0303 123 9999.

RNIB also have a directory for services aimed at helping blind or partially sighted people which can be found online at www.sightlinedirectory.org.uk