

**RSBC**

Royal Society for Blind Children



# Impact Report 2020

**Life  
Without  
Limits  
For Blind  
Children**



# Foreword

**Tom Pey,**  
RSBC Chief Executive

**Last year, despite the challenges we all faced, was a year when vision impaired children, young people, their families and RSBC achieved something very special.**

About three years ago we wanted a phrase that summed up the courage and ambition of those we serve. We felt that the phrase "In our dreams we see forever" captured the often-frustrated hopes and dreams of blind young people and their families.

Then came COVID. Overnight we were prevented from delivering our highly appreciated services face to face but we were determined to find new ways to continue to support our beneficiaries.

The young people themselves came together with our highly engaged staff and designed a comprehensive online programme of services. Within ten days it went live. A special shout out must go to the vision impaired young people themselves. Freed from the constraints of "normality" they dared to dream. And boy, did they dream big.

It was one of the most exciting times we have had as a charity. Our staff, inspired by the new way of working, met the challenge. We have supported more vision impaired young people and their families than ever before and satisfaction levels in our services have soared to an all-time high. Dreams can come true when we all work together as a team.

Because of this, you might notice some of the images in this report understandably reflect our year of working from home, with video call screenshots and mobile phone photos taking centre stage.

Thank you for your interest in and support for the work we do. Without you, none of our collective dreams could come true. I hope you enjoy reading this report about our achievements in 2020 as much as we have in delivering them.



**We have supported more vision impaired young people and their families than ever before.**



## **In 2020, RSBC...**

**Provided over**

**569**

**instances of advice and support**

**Delivered sessions to**

**3,172**

**children and young people**

**Had**

**8,100**

**contact hours with children, young people and their families**

# RSBC in brief

There are an estimated 44,000 blind and partially sighted children and young people in the UK. We believe they should live life without limits.



# Supporting blind children, young people and their families

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## What we do



Emotional support



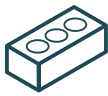
Tailored 1-to-1 sessions



Assistive Technology



Health & Wellbeing (activities)



Therapeutic interventions



Bridging gaps



Creative sessions



Employment support



Practical help



Social clubs



Advice



Interview preparation

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## Our impact



Confidence



Resilience



Independence



Life skills



Friendships



Paid jobs



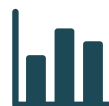
Happiness



Knowledge



Reassurance



Optimism



Empowerment



Mental Health

# Families First



## A Family Support Service across England and Wales

Our team of experienced Family Practitioners continued to offer support to vision impaired children and young people and their families. The emotional, practical, and therapeutic interventions particularly focus on the difficult moments in a child's sight loss journey - diagnosis, deterioration of vision, and life events like moving house or school.

With the majority of support being conducted online in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our team helped families:

- To be more knowledgeable about their child's eye condition
- Feel reassured that they have help there when they need it
- Build confidence, self-esteem, and happiness
- Increase resilience
- Feel optimistic about their child's future and what they can achieve

4942

people supported

240

new families reached

9.5/10

average satisfaction rating

88%

felt well supported throughout Covid-19

100%

would recommend Families First

# Sameer's story

## Sameer's family

Safina went to her local hospital looking for help. She had recently gone through a separation from a difficult relationship and her mental health was deteriorating.

Her priority was looking after her three children. But her 16-year old son, Sameer (pictured left), has a rare eye condition called Achromatopsia and was displaying behavioural issues. He was punching walls, starving himself and challenging his mum.

Add to that financial problems and the pressures of lockdown, and the family felt trapped. They were really struggling.

## Referred to RSBC

**"When we were introduced to RSBC it was almost like a click of a finger and our lives started to turn around,"** describes Safina.

"It started with some simple advice and it was a relief to have someone there who could just listen. I felt like I had people who finally understood me and I could talk about our situation and my feelings without being judged."



**It's saved our family.  
Our house now feels like a home.**



## Sameer's strides

Sameer also needed someone to talk to and, as Safina puts it, he is **"like any normal teenager! He didn't want to open up to his mum."**

RSBC's Family Practitioner helped Sameer to understand and face up to his eye condition. He also wanted - and needed - to be kinder to himself, so together they have introduced techniques to adjust his thought processes.

After several one-to-one sessions, Sameer says: **"I'm spending more time with my mum and siblings and feel a lot happier. I feel in a better place and can't wait to study for my GCSEs!"**

## A brighter future

**RSBC's Families First programme supports the whole family and Safina has seen the impact in her, Sameer and his two siblings.**

"I can't thank RSBC enough. Our Family Practitioner has really helped us in ways I couldn't have ever thought of."

"I really feel like we've turned it around. My mental health has improved and I now understand that things weren't my fault," she continues.

"As for my kids, I honestly never thought I'd see the day where Sameer would sit with his little sister, playing with her and braiding her hair."

# Live Life Go Further

## Groups and activities

**RSBC's Live Life Go Further programme continued to provide a range of activities to blind and partially sighted 8-25 year-olds, despite the challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.**

We delivered face-to-face sessions throughout January and February before quickly transitioning activities online.

The programme has helped hundreds of vision impaired children and young people with feelings of isolation, something exacerbated by many months of lockdown in 2020.

And we're confident that as we all logged in to Zoom and took part from home, we maintained friendships and learned life skills for the future.





During 2020

1,195

children and young people took part in RSBC's sessions

96%

rated 8/10 or higher on whether they would recommend RSBC to others

Our sessions were rated:

9.5/10

Creative

9/10

Health and wellbeing

9.4/10

Social

## Sisterhood

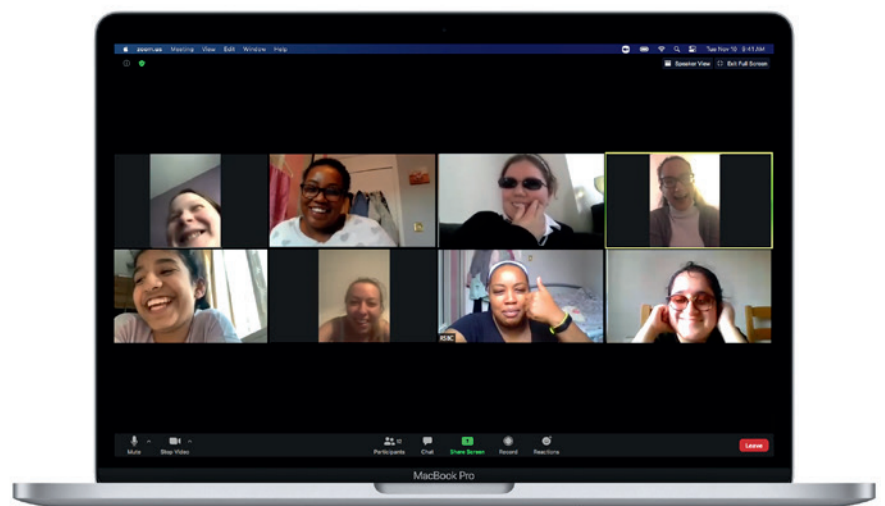
RSBC launched its new Sisterhood group in 2020, one of several new groups and activities.

It was important to give young vision impaired women a space to share experiences and discuss issues they all have.

They now meet every two weeks (pictured below) with 25-year-old Charlotte taking a lead. She began losing her sight at the age of 18 but with RSBC's support gained the confidence and skills to get a job, even securing a recent promotion.

"One of the main ways I learnt to do new things was through meeting other vision impaired young people and hearing their stories," says Charlotte.

"The sisterhood sessions are great and it's a way to help empower other young females. It's my way of helping others the way I was helped and encouraged. It's great that everyone feels confident to share their problems, worries and successes."



# Employment

**In a difficult year for finding work, RSBC eagerly supported vision impaired young people at every stage of the employment journey.**

Most blind people will never have a long-term job. We're fighting the statistics by helping to build young people's skills and confidence to allow them to compete in the job market.

Our goal is for blind and partially sighted young people to move into full-time paid jobs that enable them to live independent lives.

**183**

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**young people  
received  
employment  
support**

**10**

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**young people  
got paid jobs or  
apprenticeships**

**7**

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**young people  
entered into  
training or further  
education**

Over  
**1,000**

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**AQA  
accreditations**

# Tony's story

Like many young people in their early twenties, Tony is tech-savvy and enjoys being up-to-date with the latest gadgets.

Blind since birth, Tony's eye condition (ROP - Retinopathy of prematurity) has given him more challenges than most. Technology has helped him to overcome these as much as possible while also developing a passion in life, something he wants to take forward as a career.

## A clear plan

Tony attended Dorton College - RSBC's College of Further Education. There he began working with RSBC's Employment team, who support blind and partially sighted young people on their employment journey.

Speaking to Tony, it was clear there was one company he really wanted to work for.

"I got my first Apple iPhone in 2012 and within two minutes, I was whizzing around the device like it was the back of my hand!" says Tony.

"It was so brilliantly set up for blind people and voiceover was built into everything. The more I used their products, the more I wanted to show other people and that led me to check out Apple's career options."

## Determination to get there

Tony applied straight after college but initially found the interviews - which were mostly group exercises - a little overwhelming.

He worked with RSBC on interview preparation and made it to the second stage when he reapplied a year later. Even though he didn't get to a final interview stage, his confidence built and he was ready to try again in 2020.

## Achievement in 2020

Tony's hard work finally paid off when he applied once more.

"Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, all the interviews were online. It relaxed me a bit more and I was able to show my passion for helping people like me," says Tony.

"I met with the Store Leader and a few days later received the call saying I'd got the job."

"It was honestly the biggest achievement in my whole life, I was so happy! I had a lot of help along the way from my family and RSBC, but it was a huge honour."

While the pandemic halted an official start date, 2021 looks more promising and Tony is ready and waiting to welcome shoppers when the stores open.



# Partnerships

## Collaborating with like-minded organisations

RSBC increases its impact by working in partnership with other organisations across England and Wales.

We extended our partnership activities with charities that focus on vision impairment, as well as providers of mainstream services.

In this way, children, young people and families across the country benefit from a much broader range of activities, as well as increasing their local connections and networks.



Over

45

formal partnerships

Gained

15

new partnerships in 2020

Gave

120

people VI training

# Focus on the North West

RSBC continued its excellent partnership with the Manchester-based Henshaws charity in 2020. Henshaws delivers three sessions in the Greater Manchester and Merseyside areas.



**I can do it!**



**7' O'clock Youth Club**



**Social Saturday**

Together both organisations are ensuring more vision impaired young people have access to fun and engaging activities.

When the pandemic affected in-person sessions, our partners responded by going virtual, even being joined by children and young people from other areas of the country!

"We're thrilled with our partnership with RSBC," says Mel Cooke, Community Services Manager, Henshaws.

"So many vision impaired children and young people are developing new skills. We've provided a genuine escape from lockdown and homeschooling."

**96**

**partner-delivered sessions**

**502**

**children and young people participated**

**//**

**It's been so good to keep in touch as with no school I wasn't talking to anyone //**

**Jenny, 13, Liverpool**



**We aim to help every young person we work with to find and fulfil their own unique potential.**



# Our spending

**56.5%**

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**Families First**

**35.1%**

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**Live Life Go Further**

**8.4%**

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**Employment**

**Our aim is that  
vision impaired children  
and their families should  
have our support  
whenever they need it.**

**If you would like to help us,  
please get in touch.**

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