NESS NEWS



[Image caption: group photo of seventeen YPSS members of different ages, staff and volunteers wearing wet suits and life vests standing in front of the lake at Monikie Park in Angus. In the background the inflatable structures of Aqua Splash can be seen.]

north east
sensory services
achieving independence for blind & deaf people

WINTER 2026

North East Sensory Services' Newsletter

www.nesensoryservices.org

CONTENTS

Did You Know? 3
NESS supports Kevin to adjust to life with RP 3
Sonia achieves university success 5
Taxi consultation 6
Police Scotland establish remote BSL interpreting app 7
Thank you to our fantastic fundraisers! 7
Digital access to NESS News 8
Correction from the Summer NESS News 9
European Deaf Darts Championship success 9
More success for our Blind Bowlers 10
The NESS Golden Ticket – a Christmas cracker for Dons fans 11
Snap up your NESS Christmas raffles, cards and calendars! 11
Support NESS through our £1-a-week Lottery! 12
YPSS – what we did this summer! 12

Moray News 13
Elgin Kraft Klub enjoy willow weaving 13

NESS Closing over the Festive Period 14

NESS Contact Information 15
ABERDEEN 15
DUNDEE 15
MORAY 15
ANGUS 15

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DID YOU KNOW?

NESS supports Kevin to adjust to life with RP

Kevin Shaw shares his experiences of living with Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) and how he came to terms with his sight loss with NESS's support.

Kevin first noticed there was something wrong with his vision over 20 years ago when in his forties and travelling in a car. He describes, "I'm looking out the windows, and the windows are awful steamed up or needing cleaned. And gradually, I started walking into things."

Kevin eventually went to his GP, who referred him to Specsavers, who referred him to the Eye Clinic after detecting cataracts and something else. The Eye Clinic eventually diagnosed Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP), a genetic condition that causes a reduction in peripheral vision.

Kevin continued to work, despite the diagnosis, for 12 years. He says, "People wouldn't know I had a problem because I knew where everything was. Although I was comfortable in my work environment, other people at work were noticing things, and would say, "watch where you're going!", or "you just bumped into that thing again!", or "haven't you had your eyes tested?"."

Kevin continues, "Some days are better than others. My sight can change with the weather. On a winter's morning when it's pitch-black outside, I could walk into a dustbin, because I can't see it."

Eventually, Kevin was made redundant, and started working for the Council in their stores. Kevin says, "Because everything was so different, I walked right into things. I realised that I was a risk to myself and other people and decided I couldn't do this type of work anymore and left."

Up until that point, Kevin had been managing at home and at work, even though his sight was slowly deteriorating. Kevin says, "I was in denial. I didn't want to think about what was going to happen eventually."

Kevin was signposted to NESS from the JobCentre. He says, "The people [at NESS] have been great, really helpful, really supportive." The Hospital Information Officer helped Kevin to get the certificate saying he was severely sight impaired.

Kevin also got in touch with the Vision Rehabilitation Specialist (or Rehab Worker), who introduced him for the first time to a cane.

Kevin continues, “To start with, I was saying “No, I’m not ready for this”, but slowly, surely, she encouraged me, supported me, and reassured me that people wouldmove out of my way, and most of them do. Now, I wouldn’t be without the cane. It’s made a big difference, given me a lot of confidence. I go out to see lots of theatre shows with a friend. The reception staff told me about the Access Card, which allows you to bring a companion with you for support for free.”

Kevin continues, “When I go out, I mentally prepare my journey, and I avoid crowded places unless someone's with me. I plan the route, the bus I’m getting, the shops I’m going to and the route back home again.”

Kevin continues to visit NESS regularly, to get support to handle correspondence. Kevin says, “If I get letters that I don’t understand, I take it to see the duty staff and they help me. A lot of letters want you to go online but I can’t go online. I’ve tried learning but I can’t see the cursor or work the mouse.”

Kevin reflects on how his RP has changed over time. “When I was first diagnosed with RP, it was just a bit of fuzziness, a bit of a blur. I know my sight is worse than what it was 2 - 3 years ago. When I was first diagnosed, I struggled with the idea that I was a burden to others. I would worry that when I was invited out, I would just get in people’s way, and I didn’t want to be a burden. NESS has helped me to understand my situation, and given me the confidence to soldier on.”

Kevin explains how difficult it can be to access services as someone who is visually impaired. He explains, “When you walk into a service someone will say, “How can I help you?". You explain you’ve got to see someone in a specific place for example on the first floor, so the person says something like, “The lift is over there”, but I can’t see over there. When you enter a big reception area, someone will say, “Just have a seat”, but I can’t see where the seats are. Then someone will shout my name, but I can’t see who it is, and they start to get impatient. I’ve got my white cane with me, so it’s clear I have a visual impairment. I need people to approach me directly to call me to the appointment.”

Kevin continues, “It's much easier if they show me where to take a seat so I’m facing the person that I am due to see, and then they don’t need to shout my name.”

With NESS’s support, Kevin has felt more able to deal with interactions like these. Kevin says, “I’m quite a strong-willed person, but these kinds of interactions do knock me. A lot of it is common sense - don’t approach me from behind, or the side, I can’t see anything to my side. I can only see things that are right in front of me.”



Kevin decided to show his appreciation of the support he gets from NESS. He organised a "Guess how much is in the jar competition," with a prize fund and the rest and ticket sales going to NESS. It was so successful, that Kevin is doing this again, but is saving 10ps, 20ps, and 50ps.

Thank you, Kevin, for sharing your experiences, and for your generous fundraising for NESS – we really appreciate both.

[Image caption: Kevin sits in the NESS audio book library, holding his symbol cane]

Sonia achieves university success

Congratulations to Sonia Seivwright, who graduated this summer with a BA (Hons) in Business with Marketing at Robert Gordon University, and who is going on to study an MSc in International Marketing.

Sonia says, "When I began studying at Robert Gordon University, I was excited to start a new chapter. As someone with hearing loss and a physical disability, I knew I would need the right support to help me succeed. From the very beginning, NESS was there to support me." NESS supported Sonia to access tools to help her hear lectures and take notes, among other things.

Sonia describes some of the difficulties she experienced at university because of her hearing loss. "I found it difficult to follow class discussions, contribute to group work, and take part in conversations with the same confidence as my classmates. At times, it made me feel excluded from the classroom experience and less connected to those around me. While others were naturally building friendships and connections, I often felt like I was on the outside looking in."

Sonia reflects on her experiences at university, and says, "It reminded me that accessibility isn't just about being able to hear a lecture - it affects confidence, mental well-being, relationships, and the ability to participate in everyday life fully. Having NESS raise my concerns meant my voice was heard and taken seriously.

"NESS continued to check in with me throughout my studies, asking how I was getting on and whether I needed any further support. Knowing someone genuinely cared about my progress made a real difference. It reminded me that I wasn't facing these challenges alone and gave me the confidence to continue working towards my goals.



[Image caption: Sonia Sievwright in her graduation gown and mortar]

“Looking back, I realise that support is about much more than providing equipment or completing paperwork. It is about having someone who listens, understands, and is willing to stand beside you when challenges arise. The Disabled Students' Award gave me valuable tools to support my learning, but NESS gave me something just as important: someone to listen, someone to advocate for me, and someone to remind me that my voice mattered.

“Achieving this has taken hard work, determination, resilience, and many late nights, but I also know I didn't have to face every challenge on my own. NESS played an important part in my journey by providing practical guidance, ongoing encouragement, and the confidence to keep believing in myself.

“My journey has shown me that support is about much more than solving problems. Sometimes the greatest difference isn't removing every barrier; it's ensuring that no one has to face those barriers alone.”

Sonia has shown great determination in achieving her goals, and we wish her continued success with the next stage of her education – thank you for sharing your success with us!

Taxi consultation

NESS is working with Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans, who are campaigning for a new kind of accessibility measure on Scotland's roads: a passenger assistance permit that would allow taxi and private hire drivers to briefly leave their vehicle to help a blind or partially sighted passenger reach their destination, without being penalised under parking rules.

The campaign grew out of the experiences of Sight Scotland Policy Forum members, who have found that most drivers are willing to help passengers from the taxi to the door. Understandably, though, many taxi drivers are worried about getting a parking fine if they leave the vehicle unattended to do so. Since 2022, drivers have had a legal duty to provide this assistance, and it's time parking policy caught up too, so that drivers can help with confidence and passengers can rely on getting the support they're entitled to.

Our proposed solution is modelled on the temporary visitor parking permits that many Scottish councils already offer to residents for their guests. Something similar could work well for taxi drivers assisting disabled passengers: a simple, visible permit that supports the driver while making journeys smoother and more dignified for the passenger.

NESS has become an important partner in bringing this campaign to Aberdeen, and we're looking forward to finding out what working together with the local community can achieve.

We want to hear from blind and partially sighted people about their own experiences of taxis, good and bad, as this evidence is what makes the case for change. If you've got a few minutes, please fill in our short Taxi Accessibility Survey available via this link **https://bit.ly/taxivi** or use the QR code right, and help us understand what's working and what needs to improve.



Police Scotland establish remote BSL interpreting app



Police Scotland have introduced a BSL video remote interpreting app which is available for all police staff on their handheld devices. The app will provide immediate access to an online interpreter when out and about. To find out how it works, watch the BSL video at **www.scotland.police.uk/what-s-happening/news/2026/june/officers-pilot-video-remote-interpreting-app-to-support-communication-with-bsl-communities**.

You will still be able to use a face-to-face interpreter once the situation makes this possible, and certainly for formal communication with the police, for example if giving a statement.

Thank you to our fantastic fundraisers!

A huge thank you to everyone who has taken part in a fundraising challenge to raise vital funds for NESS. Our Dundee Kiltwalk team stepped out on the 15th August and raised a wonderful £627.45! Teammates Liana Bastianelli, Amy Bastianelli and Mairita Reinholde all have children who are supported by our Young People's Sensory Service (YPSS). Patricia Hadden completed the Wee Wander, having previously used our services. All were keen to "give back" and support NESS while having a great time on the day.

On the 13th September friend and supporter of NESS, Craig Muncie, and his colleague, Erin Richmond also donned their walking boots and completed the Edinburgh Kiltwalk, raising a combined, estimated £500!

Also on 15th August, Bri Wignall completed the Speyside Way 100k Ultramarathon – an amazing achievement! This "ultra" trail race starts in Aviemore, runs through the Cairngorms National Park and along the River Spey, and finishes in Buckie. Bri signed up for the challenge after seeing the difference our YPSS has made to her son, Ruairidh, helping him grow in confidence and build friendships. At the time of writing Bri has raised an awesome £968.69!

Back in July our own Pam Smith completed the Big Red 50 Day 5k Challenge, having covered a minimum of 5k every day for 50 consecutive days. Pam, along with fellow fundraiser Scott Keith, split their fundraising evenly between NESS and Aberdeen FC Community Trust - resulting in an amazing £637.50 donation for NESS. We are in awe of all our fantastic fundraisers' commitment and resilience - and extremely grateful for their support of NESS. Well done everyone!







[Image Captions: (left to right), proud Kiltwalkers Liana Bastianelli, Mairita Reinholde, Amy Bastianelli and Patricia Hadden; Bri Wignall on the Speyside Way 100k Ultramarathon.]

Digital access to NESS News

As we continue to try and manage the costs of producing and distributing the NESS News, we have made the difficult decision to stop sending out audio versions and BSL versions on CDs and DVDs, starting in Spring 2027. We will send CDs and DVDs out only if you get in touch and request us to do so.

Audio and BSL versions will still be available on our website, where we now host all the digitally accessible versions of the NESS News: **www.nesensoryservices.org/newsletter**. The BSL videos are also available via our YouTube channel **www.youtube.com/@BSLNESS/playlists**.

Please follow our Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn pages, where we will announce the publication of the next NESS News and share a link to the digital versions. If you are able to switch to receiving a digital version, please let us know. If you would like to switch over, but are unsure how to do it, please get in touch. We can support you to make this changeover.

Correction from the Summer NESS News

In the summer edition of the NESS News, we shared an article about the Deaf Darts team. We included the wrong name alongside the image which was shared. We said it was Margaret Campbell, but it was Ilona Virgina. Please accept our apologies for this mistake.

European Deaf Darts Championship success

The European Deaf Darts championships took place in Edinburgh on 27th and 28th August, with representatives from Scotland and many other European countries. Daniel Morrison from Aberdeen got as far as the Singles semi-finals, losing out to Jose Latigo from Spain, who went on to win the Men's Singles.

Daniel Morrison and Colin Davidson from Aberdeen lost their semi-final in the Men's Doubles, losing out to teams from Lithuania.

Mairita Reinholde and Sharon McGeogh, from Scotland, won the Women's Pairs competition, and Mairita went on to win the Women's Singles competition.

Congratulations to everyone who took part and those who won Bronze, Silver and Gold medals.



[Image caption: From left to right: Colin Davidson and Daniel Morrison, who came third in the European Deaf Darts Championships, holding a Scottish Saltire flag.]



[Image caption: Group photograph of all the competitors who took part in the European Deaf Darts Championships in Edinburgh in August.]

More success for our Blind Bowlers

You may have seen our Blind Bowlers in the press recently and on STV, promoting the sport and aiming to recruit more volunteers to support the participants. They are also looking for more players to join the club. Whether you are interested in joining as a player or a volunteer to support the players, training and support will be provided. The team plays every Friday from 12 noon to 2pm at Summerhill Bowling Club in Aberdeen.

For more information, please contact David Cox on 07999 380477.

Alongside this awareness raising, our Blind Bowlers have also been celebrating successes at the Perth and Kinross Disability Sport Fair City Singles Bowling, which took place in Blackford in August. Melanie Finch, Muriel Milne and David Cox all came home with Silver medals. All three also won silver medals at the Grampian Disability Sports outdoor bowling event held at Balgownie Bowling Club, with Dundee's Graham Newton and Catriona Black also winning medals.

Congratulations to everyone who took part, and to everyone who won a medal.



[Image caption: From left to right: Ian Riach, David Cox, Melanie Finch, Muriel Milne and Manson McLeod standing underneath the sign for Balgownie Bowling Club, which says Grampian Disability Sports.]



[Image caption: group photo of the Aberdeen Blind Bowlers group in their Summerhill Bowling Club home.

All are wearing white or blue and white club t-shirts.]

The NESS Golden Ticket – a Christmas cracker for Dons fans

We're giving one lucky winner the chance to get their hands on a very special piece of Dons memorabilia – a framed replica 1983 Aberdeen FC Shirt, signed by members of the legendary squad. Even better, the prize will be personally presented by Aberdeen and Scotland legend Jim Leighton with a photo opportunity to capture the moment! (* please see note below).

Golden Tickets are on sale now at just £10 each, with numbers limited – so don't miss your chance to be in the draw. Every ticket purchased will help support the work of North East Sensory Services. To buy yours, simply email **emma.welsh@nesensoryservices.org** or call the NESS office and we'll be happy to help. Online ticket sales are also available so keep an eye on our website and social media for details. The winning Golden Ticket will be drawn on Friday 20th November. Good luck!



Note: *The prize will be personally presented by Jim Leighton at a mutually convenient location in Aberdeen or the surrounding area. Travel or delivery arrangements outside this area will be considered at NESS's discretion and cannot be guaranteed.

Image Caption: NESS CEO Alan Bell (left) and Jim Leighton holding the signed AFC shirt.]

Snap up your NESS Christmas raffles, cards and calendars!

Christmas is just around the corner … and we're pleased to enclose two books of festive raffle tickets plus the order form for our Christmas cards and 2027 calendars.

This year's Christmas Raffle draw date is Tuesday 1st December, and our top prizes are: **1st Prize: £100; 2nd Prize: £50; 3rd Prize: £25** - with many more prizes to be won. Tickets are still only £1 each, with all funds raised directly supporting our local services. There is no obligation to buy tickets; if you choose not to, please just pop them into your recycling. If you prefer, you can purchase books of five raffle tickets on our website (minimum order one book for £5) at **https://www.nesensoryservices.org/events/ness-festive-raffle**

As you can see, our lovely Christmas cards are now ready to buy, with a great choice of designs to suit all tastes. The price remains at only £3.75 per pack of 10, or three packs for £9.50 … a real bargain! We also have our popular and very useful large print 2027 NESS calendars, which are available to buy in either a "week to a page" or "month to a page" format. To order, simply return the order form with your payment; **please make cheques payable to 'North East Sensory Services'**. Cards and calendars are also available to purchase from our Resource Centres – please get in touch in any of the usual ways.

Support NESS through our £1-a-week Lottery!

Play the NESS Lottery for the chance to win £25,000 and other great prizes, while helping NESS provide vital support and services for people living with sensory loss across the North East of Scotland.

To find out more and buy a ticket, you can scan the QR code, or visit: **www.nesensoryservices.org/support-ness/ness-weekly-lottery**

YPSS – what we did this summer!

The youngsters from our Young People's Sensory Service (YPSS) had a great time taking part in a wide range of exciting activities during the summer holidays. All our groups love horse riding – and our Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire group even got to "colour in" their horses using safe, washable chalks! Other highlights included meeting up with our Angus and Dundee groups to enjoy an inflatable water obstacle course, and with our Moray group for trampolining. Dolphin spotting trips are always popular, while our Angus & Dundee groups also tried gorge walking and paddleboarding.



[Image Caption: a group of young people and adults wearing hard hats and buoyancy aids smile broadly while standing in water. They are gorge walking during the YPSS residential trip to Cromdale.]

Our Moray youngsters love being in or beside the water too, enjoying canoeing, rowing and beach games. They also had a day trip to Inverness for more rowing and a fun ride on the miniature railway at Whin Park. Youngsters from across all our areas got together for our annual residential activity trip to Cromdale where they were able to participate in canoeing, gorge walking, arts and crafts and team games.

We love seeing our children and young people grow in confidence as they try new activities, become more independent, and make friendships that last beyond the holidays – all while having lots of fun! As one young person said, “I just would have been sitting at home if it wasn’t for the summer activities”.

MORAY NEWS

Elgin Kraft Klub enjoy willow weaving

The members of our Elgin-based craft club enjoy making a wide variety of attractive items while catching up for a cuppa and a chat – then sell them at local fairs to raise money for craft materials. They recently laid down their knitting and sewing needles and headed out to the tranquil setting of ‘Naturally Useful’ at Rafford, near Forres. Here, from the wide range of courses on offer, our members learned how to willow weave a swallow. Well done everyone!



[Image Caption: Elgin Kraft Klub members seated around a table, learning how to willow weave.]



[Image Caption: the end result – a willow woven swallow.]

NESS Closing over the Festive Period

We will be closing on Thursday 24th December 2026 at 1pm and will reopen at 9am on Tuesday 5th January 2027.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy festive period and we send good wishes for the New Year.

Emergency social work provision during the festive break:

Aberdeen City Council

Tel: **0800 7315 520**
Email: **OOHS@aberdeencity.gov.uk**

Aberdeenshire Council

Tel: **0345 608 1206**

Angus Council

Email: **outof.hoursservice@dundeecity.gov.uk**
Tel: **01382 307964**

Dundee Council

Tel: **01382 307964**
Email: **outof.hoursservice@dundeecity.gov.uk**

Moray Council

Tel: **03457 565656**

NESS CONTACT INFORMATION

www.nesensoryservices.org

www.facebook.com/northeastsensoryservices

Duty workers can be contacted by telephone, SMS, or email. Deaf BSL users can contact us using ContactScotland BSL.

Aberdeen

21 John Street, Aberdeen AB25 1BT

Duty Worker available Monday to Friday from 2-4pm

Tel. 0345 271 2345
SMS: 07593 102004
E-mail: aberdeenduty@nesensoryservices.org

Dundee

Number Ten, 10 Constitution Road, Dundee DD1 1LL

Duty Worker available from Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 2-4pm

Tel. 01382 721455
SMS: 07713 711772
Email: dundeeduty@nesensoryservices.org

Angus

No office-based appointments available but please get in touch Tuesday 2-4pm and Thursday 2-4pm

Tel. 0345 271 2345
SMS: 07593 102004

Email: angusduty@nesensoryservices.org

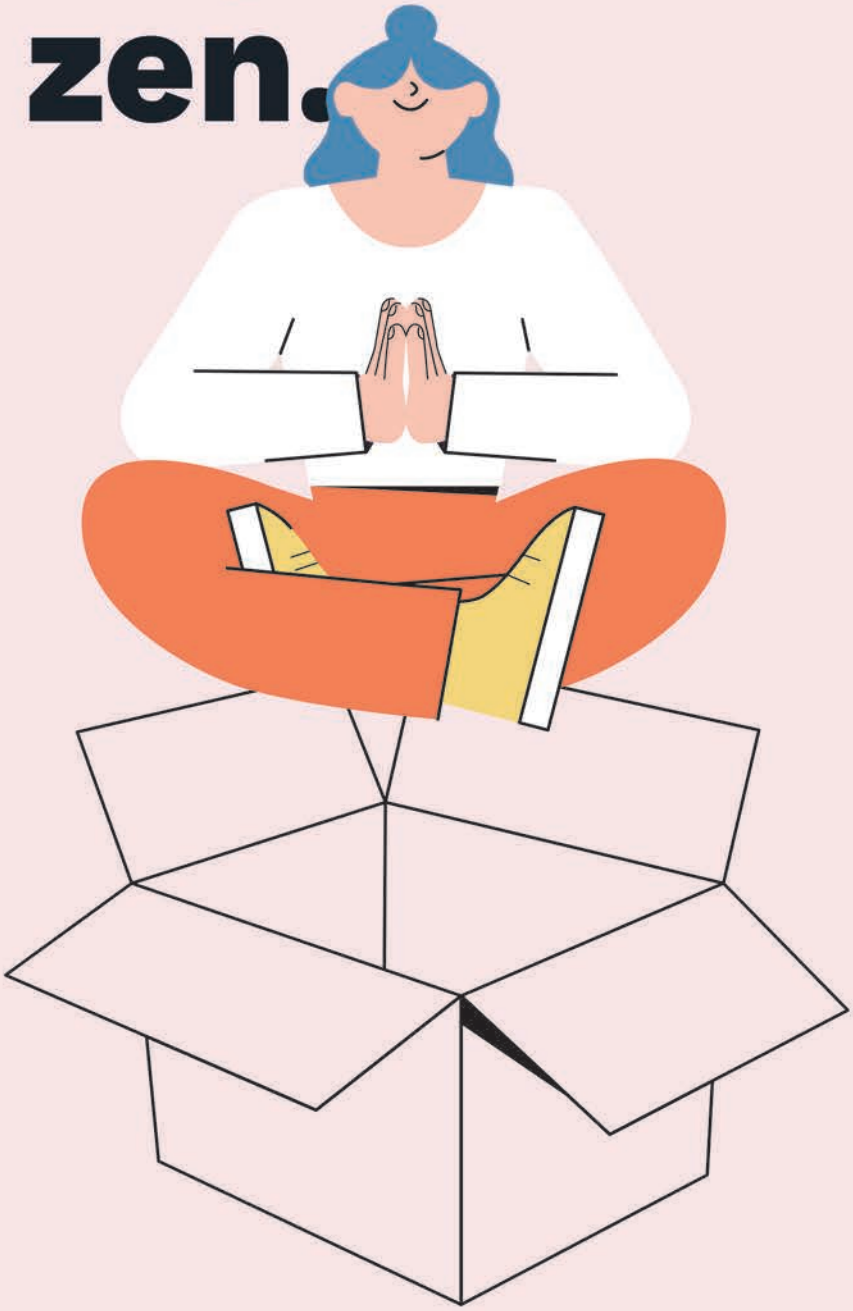
Moray

For Moray based services, please contact the Aberdeen Office

Tel. 0345 271 2345
SMS: 07593 102004
Email: info@nesensoryservices.org

making property move
aspc.co.uk

Namaste. Our property agents' wisdom will leave you feeling zen.



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