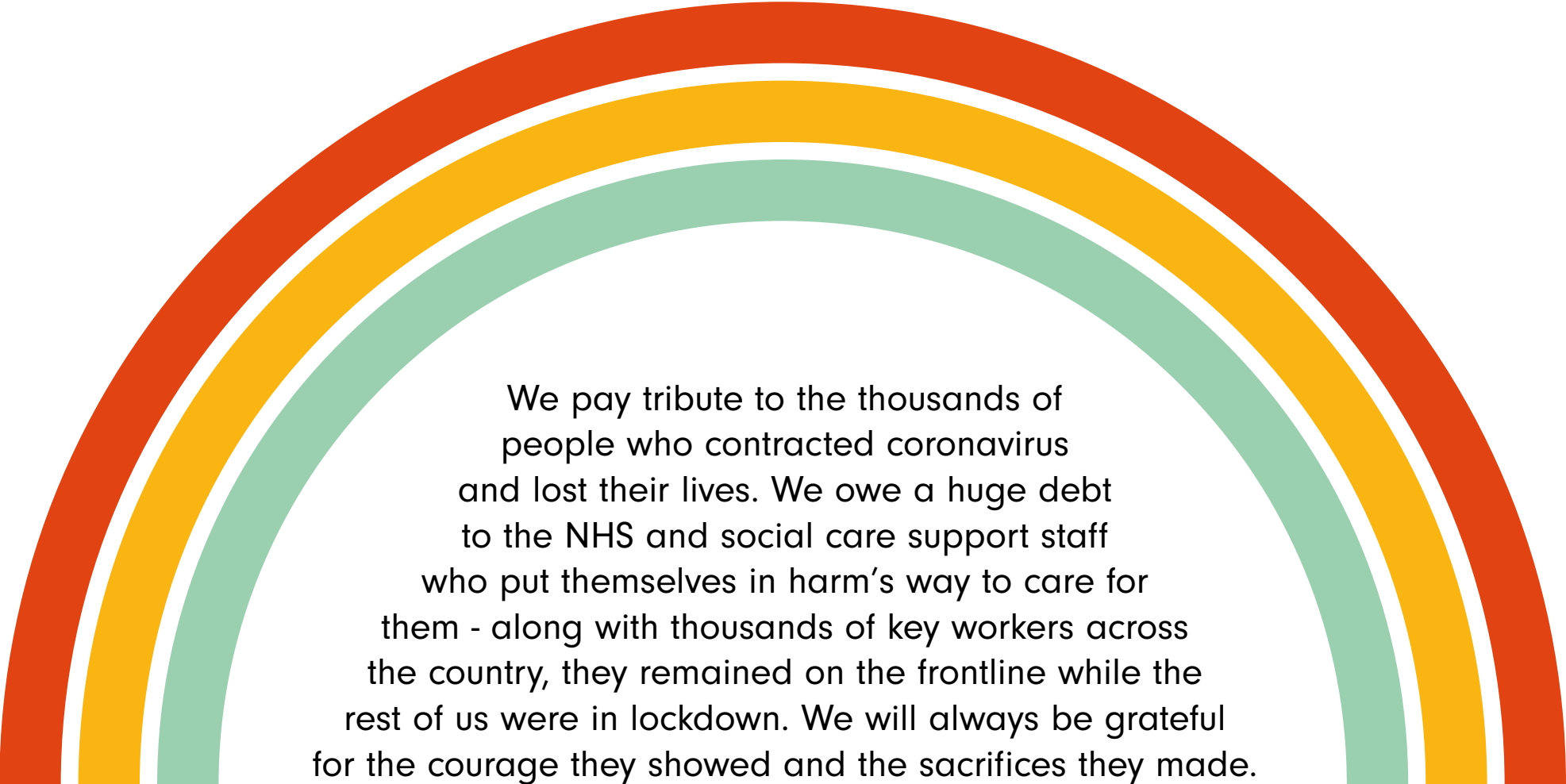




We See Ability

Impact Report 2021



We pay tribute to the thousands of people who contracted coronavirus and lost their lives. We owe a huge debt to the NHS and social care support staff who put themselves in harm's way to care for them - along with thousands of key workers across the country, they remained on the frontline while the rest of us were in lockdown. We will always be grateful for the courage they showed and the sacrifices they made.

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CEO statement

“The future belongs to those of us who refuse to give up on a world that needs to change.”

I was recently told a lovely story about a man we're about to support who's been living in an Assessment and Treatment Unit (secure hospital) for more than 10 years and uses sign language to communicate. He's finally coming home, and his new neighbour asked if we could teach her sign language so she could help him be part of his new neighbourhood. For me this story isn't just about someone starting a new life. This is about the power of connection and community, it's about living and really thriving, and illustrates how truly inclusive communities bring out the best in all of us.

The profoundly isolating impact of the Covid-19 lockdowns has, I'm sure, affected all of us this past year, but for those with learning disabilities it's

been particularly difficult to understand the sudden change in freedom, routine and contact with loved ones. This was a year when social care became prominent in people's minds, but also a year when the inequalities experienced by people with learning disabilities were sadly exposed, as evidenced by data from Public Health England, which shows people with a learning disability in England died from Covid-19 at **six times** the rate of the general population.

As often happens with adversity though, there were remarkable acts of kindness, bravery and creativity, with colleagues working tirelessly to keep people safe and well. Our teams worked quickly to adapt and evolve - they drew on close relationships with family members, our network of corporate partners and funders, our volunteers and friends, to ensure the people we support were connected to the communities in which they live.

I'm incredibly proud of my colleagues - not only because of their passion and commitment - but because they lived and breathed our values in order to keep people safe during one of the most extraordinary periods in SeeAbility's history. Our colleagues showed extraordinary creativity, ensuring the people they support were stimulated, connected and had fun, despite the lockdowns. In fact, I received heartwarming feedback from family and friends thanking our teams for keeping their loved ones safe - in one case even saying their family member was thriving more than ever!

Looking back on the past year, it's also incredible to think how SeeAbility's programmes have maintained momentum. Although lockdown restrictions fundamentally changed the delivery of our eye care programmes, we worked creatively to provide support in new and agile ways.



I'm immensely proud of how successfully – and quickly – our Eye Care Champions adapted, developing resources for online training and disseminating public health messages digitally to ensure people with learning disabilities remained 'eye care aware'. And, in September 2020, when our special schools programme with NHS England re-commenced, our expert team was ready to advise both the national and regional NHS England teams on service design, roll out and implementation.

Our profile has also continued to grow and this work has been led by our Associates, a team of people we support with lived experience of disability. The Associates' influencing work thrived despite lockdown and, along with Scott Watkin BEM, our Head of Engagement, they added their voice to the successful campaign calling for people with learning disabilities to be



Our fabulous team of Associates

prioritised in the vaccine rollout. We owe a huge debt of thanks to all our partners who offered their time and resources to build the team's skills and confidence so that SeeAbility's voice truly reflects that of people we support.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 opens with: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and

should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." At SeeAbility we're absolutely committed to this, and our primary goal throughout the pandemic was to keep the people we support and our colleagues safe. I am so proud of the response shown by everyone across SeeAbility – their creativity, resilience and determination has been humbling and inspiring.

Lisa Hopkins CEO

Our values:

We are brave

We believe in being different: we seek out new ideas as well as ways of working and thinking. We want to be extraordinary.

The pandemic began just before the start of the financial year with the first national lockdown in March 2020. Like many organisations in the sector, SeeAbility adapted and responded to a rapidly changing situation as the pandemic evolved.

The year proved to be an immensely difficult one for our sector and the whole country - but SeeAbility not only survived, we thrived.

Much of our ability to cope was due to the fantastic relationships we've built with our supporters, many of whom personally offered their help in a multitude of creative ways,

including helping us to raise over £27,000 through virtual and other events. For example, the pianist Bryan Edery hosted over 30 fabulous weekly online concerts, including our virtual Christmas Concert, and countless individual supporters took part in virtual fundraising challenges like the 2.6 Challenge, Step Up for SeeAbility and Virtual London Marathon.

It's a huge testament to everyone at SeeAbility that when we asked friends and family of people we support for their thoughts about the past year, overall satisfaction with SeeAbility's support during this extraordinary year was resoundingly positive. This is a huge credit to frontline managers and support teams, as well as our volunteers and everyone who pulled together to help us keep people safe, raise funds and maintain morale.



of family and friends said we'd done
a great job at keeping their loved
ones safe from coronavirus



staff delivered **850,000 hours**
of incredible support



Top right: Maintaining appearances and keeping up morale
Bottom left: The fantastic Bryan Edery

Putting people first

The beating heart of SeeAbility is its people and our primary goal throughout the pandemic was to keep both people we support and our colleagues safe.

Across SeeAbility, people demonstrated extraordinary commitment, collaboration and resilience to achieve great things in unprecedented times. Many colleagues went above and beyond their normal duties to keep people we support safe. Jade, one of our senior support workers, made an incredible sacrifice to do what it takes to stand by the people she supports.

"I knew if I couldn't come into work, people wouldn't be surrounded by familiar faces, which might have added to their distress and feelings of isolation. I'm a single mum and while it was a difficult decision, I decided to send my daughter to live with my sister who lives 60 miles away. I knew she would be happy and safe there, but it was still really hard. The thing is, it's really important to me that I keep the people we support as safe as possible and I wanted to minimise their risk of coming into contact with the virus..."



The simple beauty of the rainbow helped lift everyone's spirits

Positive feedback

From the people we support:

"The support I have had for 56 years including through the pandemic has been great."

"The staff helped me to cope more while being stuck indoors while Covid-19 virus is still around."

"I feel safe where I live and my wellbeing is well taken care of."

From the relatives of people we support:

"The team really went the extra mile - Norma and Linda actually moved into the house... The dedication and hard work they and the team put in was exceptional. I'm truly grateful and will never forget how difficult it must have been to leave their families behind, to look after the adults at Ditton Road."

"Organising a tablet so we could FaceTime each day made a huge difference to both our lives. Excellent explanation about what is going on, which really reduced anxiety for my sister."



Our values:

We are passionate

We want to make a difference. We constantly strive to improve ourselves, not only for the people we support, but for our team and SeeAbility as a whole. We are completely committed to each others' successes.

Without doubt, the past year has proved our ability to be innovative and agile, and to find creative solutions to the challenges we face.

When lockdown arrived, our teams pulled together, collaborated, and acted quickly and decisively. And although the immediate focus was on crisis management to meet the most urgent needs of people we support, we also took time to understand the impact of Covid-19 on our colleagues' resilience and personal lives.

We introduced a new colleague recognition scheme to celebrate their heroic efforts, as well as a colleague loan scheme to support anyone facing hardship as a result of the pandemic. We also introduced a number of initiatives to support emotional wellbeing, including mental health training for managers, and wellbeing coaches for all homes and teams.

We continue to focus on creating a culture and working environment that supports people right across the organisation and is working to break down the stigma of talking about our mental health.



special 'one step beyond' awards were made to recognise colleagues who did extraordinary things during the pandemic



new wellbeing coaches qualified with Mental Health First Aid England certificates



managers received **mental health first aid training** and just under half of colleagues have also had mental health awareness training

Bringing my whole self to work

I've been working with SeeAbility as a support worker for almost 2 years and during the pandemic I was redeployed from the Millennium Centre to one of our residential homes in Leatherhead. Since then I've been working in a smaller team, but it's given me the opportunity to develop a much closer relationship with both people we support and my colleagues, which I think has been invaluable.

During the lockdown, events I'd been looking forward to were being cancelled and the absence of these was making me feel disconnected from the world around me. I knew I wasn't alone in this feeling and I felt a drive to change it.

So in May 2020, I approached SeeAbility's Head of People Experience. My initial hopes were to co-create something that could benefit a wide group of people across the

organisation, enabling others to communicate their own feelings about the pandemic and to feel less isolated as a result.

I'm incredibly proud of the outcome, which is that SeeAbility now has a team of wellbeing coaches who are there to support colleagues across the charity, providing them with a safe and reliable source of wellbeing advice and assistance. We have undergone extensive training and are all fully accredited by MHFA (Mental Health First Aid) England.

I've also been able to add value in another area of the work environment, which I'm equally passionate about. In the UK last year, over 100 Pride events were cancelled due to Covid-19, which led to the LGBTQI+ community feeling isolated and disconnected from their wider communities. So I approached our Chief Executive and our Executive

Director of People to talk to them about how we could develop diversity and inclusion within SeeAbility's workplace.

With their support I have now launched SeeAbility's first LGBTQI+ Network, just in time for Pride month 2021. Setting up this network has enabled me to bring #MyWholeSelf to work. I feel empowered to start conversations and excited to know that others feel positive and inspired too because they can truly be themselves at work.

Over the last year, I've seen living proof that SeeAbility's Senior Leadership Team truly value the voices of their workforce. I would urge anyone who also feels passionate about diversity at work to reach out with their ideas. I'm confident that they will be heard and that their input really can make a difference to their colleagues.

Jamie SeeAbility Support Worker



"It struck me during lockdown that events I'd been looking forward to were being cancelled and the absence of these was making me feel disconnected from the world around me. I knew I wasn't alone in this feeling and I felt a drive to change it."

Jamie's positive attitude made positive change happen

Our values:

We are creative

We are enablers. We create solutions by thinking and acting differently. We break down barriers. We don't see rules as boxing us in, but as norms that evolve with us on our way to being the best.

It was a sign of the times that we found ourselves living through as a community, that very quickly new situations became 'normal'. Our focus was on supporting people to continue as much of their routines and everyday life as possible.

Despite the limitations and restrictions of lockdown, teams across SeeAbility created solutions by thinking and acting differently in order to maintain wellbeing and a positive outlook.

In Eastleigh, Hampshire teams created a pop-up shop for people we support, as well as colleagues and their families.

By day 9, the shop had received in excess of 40 separate transactions! As Ben, Service Manager, said at the time: **"This is 40+ times we avoided trips to the shops and turbo charged social distancing!"**

To the delight of his parents, Andrew in Ashted, Surrey shared birthday celebrations on Facetime, with 25 guests. While in Aylesbury, colleagues set up Skype for Kirsten: **"Quarantine won't stop us! Kirsten is still able to have her music therapy thanks to Skype - listening to calm and relaxing music really does help!"**

And Kirsten gave us all good cheer when she responded: **"It's always good to keep dancing through these tough times!"**



of people we support said we are helping them **develop more skills**



of people we support said our support is **good or very good**



Top left: Kirsten kept on dancing and smiling
Bottom right: The simple genius of the pop-up shop

Creating a community

“During the first lockdown, the weather was on our side and as a team we became very creative with our outside space. Andrew in particular loves gardening because he finds it therapeutic and relaxing. He would actively encourage his support staff, **‘Come on! We need to water the garden, don’t you know!’** When things began to grow, Andrew would come running to staff, either with produce in his hands or to show you what was growing. His enthusiasm was contagious!

Family members donated plants for the vegetable plot and ‘The Waterside House Veggie Plot’ as it soon became known, gave lots of people at Waterside a purpose when we didn’t have one. It created a community atmosphere and people who had never been overly interested in gardening were suddenly asking if they could do the watering or

the weeding or even just to see what was growing.

We grew amazing chillies, carrots, tomatoes and courgettes – people came and watched as a social activity and others were going down in the evening to pick what they wanted to eat for dinner. A lot of cooking happened and some of the best dishes were the spicy ones – we made some incredible dishes with home-grown chillies.

The best thing was that everyone was outside, out of the house in the fresh air. We even had waterfights and apple bobbing!”

Clair Service Manager at Waterside House in Aylesbury





Photos show smiles all round at Waterside House

Our values:

We do what is right

We lead by doing the right thing. We are dependable and believe in delivering on commitments, using sound judgement and common sense to determine what is right.

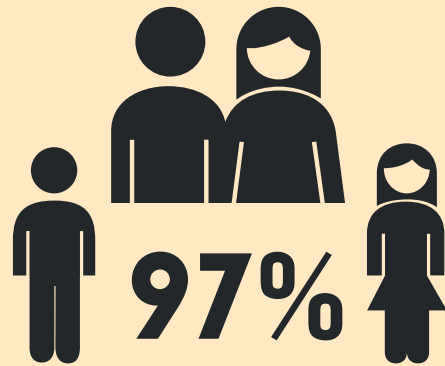
During the pandemic, many people we support found it difficult to understand the rapid changes in guidance, why routines were changing, why they couldn't take part in their favourite activities or see a loved one. **We were determined to provide constant reassurance and encouragement so that no-one felt isolated.**

To help with this, our teams endeavoured to explain the situation by sharing information in easy read format.

Teams at all of our homes were provided with guidelines to help them use social stories to explain why someone had a change in their routine, had to keep to social distancing guidelines or, on occasion, had to go into isolation.

"The pandemic has been a huge challenge for all the staff and they all been very professional and supportive and still are. Questions have been answered and reassurance given. Nothing has been too much trouble."

Family member of someone we support.



of family and friends said the support we gave their loved one was **very good** or **good** - a rise in satisfaction from last year



of people we support have a **Health Action Plan**



CQC rating **good** or **very good***

Exceeding expectations

“Every care provider talks about person centred care – and for Catherine, that is absolutely what she’s getting...”

“Catherine is very loving and she inspires love in other people. We’ve been amazed how happy she’s been during Covid-19 and it’s all down to the relationships she has with the other housemates and with the staff taking a real interest in her. We have great trust for her support workers - throughout the pandemic they have absolutely exceeded our expectations. She looks at them like she looks at us and at her brother; we know they love her and we believe she loves and trusts them.

“Catherine has severe cognitive impairment with a lot of underlying health conditions which the SeeAbility team manage very effectively. Her enjoyment comes through sensory experiences such as listening to music

and musical films. She enjoys relationships and just loves being part of a group, sitting around and listening to people talking. The way people communicate with her and with each other in a positive way is so important. She has no understanding of language or words but she picks up so much from tone of voice and gestures.

“Every care provider talks about person centred care – and for Catherine, that is absolutely what she’s getting at Bradbury Lodge. It is totally focused on her - the team know her well and they want her to be happy and healthy.

“She doesn’t always want to eat and her support team are completely committed to keeping her weight up - when we phone, they always know what her weight was at the beginning of the week. They really work as a team; Nickie, Emily and Suzanne who provide most of her care are so

committed to her, but all the staff at Bradbury Lodge make a fuss of her. They also take such pride in her appearance. She enjoys that so much, she has some lovely clothes and her support workers do her hair too. You can tell by the way Catherine responds to them that she is happy.

“It has been such a comfort to us particularly during this last year to know that Catherine is at Bradbury Lodge with people who love and care for her. The staff have worked hard to keep life interesting and stimulating for her throughout lockdown. We know she is happy within herself... she vocalises back strongly when we talk to her on the phone or over Zoom. Her brother says this past year is almost the happiest she has been in her life.”

With grateful thanks to Catherine’s parents for sharing their daughter’s story with us.



Catherine takes real pride in her appearance

"Catherine is very loving and she inspires love in other people. We've been amazed how happy she's been during Covid-19 and it's all down to the relationships she has with the other housemates and the staff really taking an interest in her."

Defining long term goals



Eye Care Champion Dave Spencer speaks with a self-advocacy group in Sheffield

Along with our membership and support of a number of influential coalitions such as Learning Disability England, Social Care Futures and Care England - the genuine lived experience and expertise of both our Eye Care Champions and our Associates team has been crucial, helping us influence significant change over the past year.

Underpinning all of this, is our Theory of Change impact framework (see opposite), which has been our guide as we've continued in our efforts to champion inclusion for people with disabilities, and to be the authoritative voice on the intersection between sight loss and learning disability. It has also guided us as we focus on new programmes delivering employment support and digital skills and confidence for people we support.



Your feedback

People are getting more ambitious and creative support

"There's a really good partnership between the family home and Fir Tree Lodge and an understanding of the need for family time too. There was excellent support during the pandemic and flexibility and inventiveness around how to manage the situation."

People are better able to benefit from preventative services

"After 3 years of planning, it is a thrilling time for everyone involved with the Special Schools Eye Care Service. SeeAbility continues to provide clinical expertise to support the training and development of new providers and promoting good eye care through the excellent work of their Eye Care Champions."

More people are contributing to society

"I am delighted that following on from Emily's voluntary role as an Associate, she was encouraged to apply for an Influencer role... The support she is given allows Emily to live independently from her family, and has prompted discussions as to the 'next steps' for her".

Specialist support

We have invested heavily in Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) and 87% of SeeAbility support staff have now had PBS training.

We're committed to the Transforming Care agenda and have increased our capacity to support people with high support needs. We were delighted to be chosen to support several young men and their families in Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Kent, where our investment in Positive Behaviour Support is enhancing our reputation for providing a high quality, personalised and specialist service to people who truly need it.

"All behaviour, including challenging behaviour, happens for a reason. In the specialist support team we work closely with colleagues and people we support to develop and build the skills of the person and of those who support them.

"It's about respecting the person as an individual and understanding their behaviour so that we can make proactive and positive approaches to improving the quality of their life.



Shane and the Kennington support team

"It's also all about communication – once we understand why someone is behaving a certain way, we can support them to access the things they need in other ways – for example by supporting them to learn a new skill.

"On a day to day basis we support teams so that they can ensure the people we support are able to access their environments more readily and more easily. The impact of this is enormous – even the 'every day', which in the past wasn't always achievable, means the person is having more control and choice in their lives, such as doing the gardening or walking to the shop and choosing something they want from the shop – because in the past behaviour that challenges could have been a barrier to that."

Nicola Positive Behaviour Support Consultant, Specialist Services Team

Feeling valued

"I feel so different now... I feel happy and excited about my life."

"I moved here last year, at the beginning of the pandemic. I was nervous to start with but I liked moving in with other people. There are four of us. At the moment we go out for walks, it is fantastic with them, we do lots of stuff together. They make me laugh and excited.

I am cheeky and kind and have lots of energy. It makes me happy to go to parks every day, I like being outdoors. Shopping makes me happy. I've bought a Manchester United duvet cover and pillowcase, a Man United football game for the Xbox, I've got the top, a football, poster, cup and a wallet. I want to go to Thorpe Park for my birthday and I want a Manchester United cake. I've supported them since I was a little kid.

This is the first time I've lived away from home – I was so happy and excited to get my freedom. The best things are that I can do shopping and I work on a farm every Friday and I collect the eggs. Learning to cook is a new thing that I am learning at the house with my support team, I make egg fried rice with the eggs and I put in sweetcorn and peas.

I feel healthier, I'm calmer and more relaxed. I'm getting lots of guidance from my support team – I'm starting to understand my finances, we get out a piece of paper and write down how much money I've got. Then we write what I have to spend on what like food, tobacco, savings... the help is good.

My life here is fantastic, I like it so much. I like cooking and being with all my friends. I'm playing football this afternoon. I also like Gemma [support worker], she is brilliant.



Shane loves working on the farm

The changes are stopping drinking, trying to cut out smoking, eating well. I feel different now, I feel happy and excited about my life."

Shane

Preventative services

In 2020, we saw real progress for the charity's work to address the inequality of access to eye care for children with learning disabilities, with our team working with NHS England to roll out a Special Schools Eye Care Service across England.

The new and fully funded NHS service, designed for children with learning disabilities or autism attending a special school, was the culmination of years of hard work and campaigns by SeeAbility and our supporters, and is a major achievement for the charity.

"SeeAbility has been a critical partner throughout the 3 years of planning [...] and they will remain an integral part of the implementation programme."

Richard Everitt Senior Programme Lead:
Optical Services Commissioning -
NHS England



Keiron is happy with his new glasses

Over the next few years the programme is expected to benefit more than 120,000 children and SeeAbility has now been asked to provide advice on the adoption of similar models in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The special schools team has reached 632 eye care professionals interested in undertaking this new programme of work, with dedicated training, webinars and podcasts.

"Every child whose vision we improve is a success story to improve their quality of life, education attainment and life chances. Working together we can truly model a seamless level of eye care for children with learning disabilities."

Sonal Rughani SeeAbility optometrist

The programme has had a significant impact in raising the profile of the charity, not just in the eye care and health sectors, but also more widely, as evidenced in June 2021, by the judges' decision at the annual Charity Awards - the longest-running and most prestigious awards scheme in the charity sector. As well as winning the top prize in the Healthcare category, SeeAbility was also chosen as the Overall Winner.



"We were humbled to receive not one but two unexpected awards for the work of our brilliant and totally dedicated special schools team. The awards also recognised the schools, parents and children who partnered with us and were a tribute to the many different funders, eye care professionals and their organisations, and the policymakers who supported the case for this model of care.

To make this possible, SeeAbility took the huge leap of faith to expand into direct clinical services, and I want to thank our Trustees and colleagues across the organisation, for their commitment to making this happen."

Lisa Hopkins SeeAbility Chief Executive

"Whether it's living, thriving, belonging or loving, ultimately what we want is greater inclusion and being able to make the best use of your vision is key to this."

Matt Broom Strategic Lead - Eye Care and Vision



Jodie and Gurvinder give their new glasses a thumbs up

Later in the year, we also announced an exciting collaboration between SeeAbility and Vision for Life, Essilor's Social Impact Fund. The funding is supporting a pioneering programme, which enables a team of SeeAbility Eye Care Champions to directly reach thousands of people with learning disabilities, ensuring they have the right information and support they need to get their eyes tested and



Grace is proud to be making a difference

vision corrected. Many of the team have lived experience of disabilities and are passionate about ensuring no-one misses out on essential eye care.

7

Eye Care Champions
reached 2,591 people

"...This is my first job and has filled me with confidence - I never dreamt that I would be standing up at conferences where I share my experiences of the reasonable adjustments that can be made in optical practices and eye clinics. I'm proud to be part of a programme that is transforming inclusion for people with learning disabilities in their communities."

Grace SeeAbility Eye Care Champion

1,636

subscribers to our eye care
news bulletins

Our profile continued to grow in the eye care sector despite the pandemic. Our Eye Care Champions quickly adapted the way they worked and, as well as learning new digital skills to deliver training sessions online, the team developed interactive content and films to help both professionals and people with learning disabilities or autism become 'eye care aware.'

950

children and their families were
supported with advice and
guidance remotely during the
Covid-19 lockdowns

Life changing intervention

Joanne, one of our Eye Care Champions in the North West, first met Tom* through a self-advocacy group. They quickly struck up a friendship and stayed in touch.

Tom is autistic and has some mental health difficulties that have made him unwell in the past. Tom is in his fifties and has spent the last four years living in an Assessment Treatment Unit. His links with the outside world are limited and were further reduced throughout the pandemic, so his regular video calls with Joanne have been a lifeline.

On one of these video calls, Tom opened up to Joanne about the problems he was having with his eyes, which were aching and very itchy. Because of her training as an Eye Care Champion, Joanne knew Tom would benefit from a sight test and encouraged him to seek help.

Joanne knew optometrists were allowed to visit ATUs during lockdown to do sight tests and after some encouragement, Tom spoke to staff and they agreed he could be tested at the hospital.

He was subsequently prescribed glasses for long distance and reading, and eye drops to combat his itchy eyes. Joanne explains: "People don't realise how much permanent damage you can do by rubbing your eyes. Tom's eye drops reduced the itchiness, so he didn't have to rub them to get relief."

Joanne's intervention was crucial at every stage of Tom's eye care journey – from supporting him to get a sight test in difficult conditions to teaching him how to take care of his glasses. Without her involvement, Tom almost certainly would not have got the critical eye care he needed.



Joanne's intervention was key to Tom getting the eye care help he needed

"The itchiness has completely gone and he can see a lot better with the glasses. He still needs support to make sure he doesn't get them mixed up, but he's come a long way. I'm so pleased I was able to help him, it means a lot to me that I can see the results of my eye care training. I'm so proud to be an Eye Care Champion."

Tom* name changed to protect his privacy

Creating connections

Through the difficult days of the pandemic, our teams worked quickly to adapt and evolve. In September 2020 we launched our rapid response initiative 'Creating Connections', with the aim of empowering people to gain digital skills and thereby the confidence to connect with others online.

The new technology programme is driven by the experiences of people with learning disabilities, autism and sight loss. With support from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport via the National Lottery Community Fund and delivered in partnership with Learning Disability England, it has grown into a member network of 24 organisations.

To date Creating Connections has reached nearly 1,500 people through contact-free peer connections, training, resources and volunteer support.

"People with learning disabilities, autism and sight loss can frequently experience loneliness as they have low rates of employment and can often have fewer chances to socialise and take part in leisure activities. Overwhelmingly, they told us that the pandemic exacerbated this situation."

Veronica Mulenga Creating Connections Programme Lead

As a result of the programme, **9 in 10 people** who took part say they now feel confident, or very confident, using technology. There has also been a 20% drop in people feeling they have no one to talk to for most of the time.

"My confidence has grown since I started using Zoom. I feel there is someone there to support me."

Creating Connections participant

"Through our services we're helping people to access other groups too, so that they can connect with more people and be part of a growing network."

Disability Sheffield Voices, member of Creating Connections network



Laura's Gaming Guru group she created through the Creating Connections programme

213 dedicated volunteers

Our loyal volunteers' time and generosity helps the people we support to live more independently and to get involved in their local community, and they are tremendously valued for the many and varied roles they take on. Before the pandemic they often supported people with friendship and companionship - and when it mattered most they continued to stay in touch.

Throughout lockdown they showed their kindness in many different ways, alleviating confusion, loneliness, anxiety, isolation and boredom, and taking to their phones, laptops and tablets to offer connection and companionship, so that their friends stayed well and emotionally resilient.

The power of friendship

One volunteer, **Vivien**, has a very close bond with a lady we support in Leatherhead called Joyce, and Vivien maintained their friendship during lockdown via telephone. "I missed my friend and the staff so much, they're all so friendly but I phoned every few days to speak to Joyce... I've been a voluntary friend, for over 8 years now, and found it SO hard not being able to visit..."

A total of 24 fabulous volunteers based in Leatherhead phoned weekly to have a chat, sing songs, discuss the news, and exercise with people we support. This regular contact kept everyone's spirits up and helped to reduce loneliness and boredom.

Another impressive volunteer was **Toan**, who is a professional chef. He cooked 28 shepherd pies and beef stews for everyone who lives



Joyce, on the phone to Vivien during lockdown

at the home where he volunteers, to raise everyone's spirits. The wonderful gesture helped everyone feel connected and part of the SeeAbility family.

Influencing

The challenges of last year created a unique opportunity to focus on the truly life changing nature of our work. SeeAbility belongs to several influential networks, including Learning Disability England, Voluntary Organisations Disability Group and Care England, and during lockdown we came together to campaign, showcase our work and amplify our voice.

Our influencing work was led by Scott Watkin BEM and our team of Associates, all people with lived experience of disabilities, who added their voices to the campaign calling for people with learning disabilities to be prioritised in the vaccine rollout. Over the lockdown, they self-authored articles and blogs, shared their views at a BBC roundtable on commissioning, gave guest lectures at universities and used their mini manifesto to ensure MPs and others were aware of the vital changes

needed to ensure communities prioritise inclusion as we build back better from the pandemic. We owe a huge thanks to all our partners who offered their time and resources to build the team's skills and confidence.



Emily is determined to influence change

Emily has been appointed SeeAbility's first ever 'Influencer'. Aged 34, this is her first paid job – an achievement she is incredibly proud of. She knows it proves to all those who never thought it was possible, including her mum, that with the right support and personal drive, living with disabilities does not have to reduce your horizons.

"I've always been determined. I don't like not doing something. If the brain says I'm going to do it, that's it. Some days it's a challenge. But you can either sit back and go oh no I can't do that or you can get up and go I might not be able to do it that way but I can do it this way. Or ask for someone to help you find a way."

Emily SeeAbility Influencer

Partnerships

Whilst we navigated the restrictions in programme delivery presented by the pandemic in its earliest and most challenging days, many of our valued trusts, foundations and corporate partners, including National Lottery Communities Fund, Vision Foundation, The Wolfson Foundation, The Carmen Butler-Charteris Charitable Trust, Essilor Social Impact and Tesco Bags of Help, showed tremendous and much needed, flexibility in their support.

We're also grateful to all the incredible partners and friends who responded by offering vital support in the form of emergency relief grants, donations of PPE and deliveries of vital supplies - including Family Building Society, Porter Novelli, Sovereign Capital Partners, Toyota GB and Waitrose & Partners – all of whom stood by SeeAbility's frontline colleagues and people we support during this difficult time.



Sarah, delighted at the delivery of vital supplies

Despite the challenging year, we were able to grow our support of people with learning disabilities, autism and sight loss through several new grants from City Bridge Trust, and Inspiring Futures – a joint funding programme between BBC Children in Need and the Youth Futures Foundation.

Thanks to the John Lewis Partnership and their Golden Jubilee Trust, we welcomed a team of secondees who offered their expertise to help us launch our supported employment programme, Ready, Willing and Able. Five talented secondees each offered 6 months of their time to help us set up the programme and begin a programme of personalised coaching and support.

Our long-standing friends at Candis Club matched donations made to our Big Give Christmas Challenge, enabling our supporters to make twice the impact with their gifts.

Our partners, friends and supporters all play an integral role in ensuring the people we support live, love, thrive and belong and have full lives, being included in their communities.

Looking ahead

As we look ahead to the remainder of this year and into 2022, it's incredibly important that we continue to build on lessons learnt about how best to support people to live the lives they want.

So much has been written and said about social care recently, but often the voices of people with genuine lived experience and expertise has been lacking in the debates. This is why the work of SeeAbility's Associates team, led by Scott Watkin BEM, and our Eye Care Champions is so crucial, as they influence policymakers and politicians and challenge the status quo on behalf of everyone with lived experience.

We'll continue to support the great work of Social Care Futures – a coalition of people and organisations who want to change the negative narrative on social care so that society recognises just what a major, positive contribution social care can make to people's lives and wellbeing.

Throughout 2020, people with learning disabilities, autism and sight loss told SeeAbility the things that were most important to them. Four themes emerged: 'Live', 'Love', 'Thrive', and 'Belong' – which are so powerful that not only have we made them our new strapline, but we'll be weaving them through all our external communications over 2021/22. We'll also be encouraging a series of 'Big Conversations', which will look at wellbeing within the wider context of our society as we emerge from Covid-19, with a view to also examining issues around inclusion, diversity and equity for people with learning disabilities, including employment opportunities.

We remain committed to supporting colleagues with their professional development and we'll also be supporting national campaigns for better pay for frontline social care and support colleagues, to ensure that funding for social care properly values people's skills.

In our recruitment, we'll be increasing the diversity of our teams in order to better represent the community of people we support.

Our programmes will continue to focus on inclusion, with continued investment in our Creating Connections digital inclusion programme, so that along with care and support staff, even more people with learning disabilities, autism and sight loss get the best opportunities in a world now digitally transformed by the pandemic. Our Ready, Willing and Able supported employment programme has great plans to build on these new opportunities too, showcasing disabled people's talents and supporting people into employment.

There are exciting times ahead and we look forward to reporting on these in our next Impact Report!



Left to right: Eye Care Champions Grace, Wayne and Lance



Left to right: Eye Care Champions Rebecca, Dave, Joanne, Hamaira

"The genuine lived experience and expertise of our team of Eye Care Champions is crucial."

Stephen Kill

National Manager - Eye Care and Vision

Thank you

Individuals

Mr Haydn Abbott
Mr and Mrs M Barnes
Dame Kate Barker
Mr Andrew Brown
Mr and Mrs M Buckingham
Mr Paul Cutter and Ms Alyson Farrell
Mr and Mrs M Halsey
Mr E Herd
Mr and Mrs D Newlands
Mr Stephen Scott
Mr and Mrs A Waddingham
Mr and Mrs N Wagstaff
Sir William and Lady Wells
Miss A Boujenah
Mr B Edery

Trusts, foundations and community supporters

Childwick Trust
City Bridge Trust
Community Foundation Surrey
Devon County Council
Garfield Weston Foundation
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Foundation
Mary Alice Harris Charitable Trust
Mole Valley District Council
National Lottery Community Fund - Reaching Communities
NHS England and NHS Improvement
Percy Bilton Charity
P F Charitable Trust
Peter Harrison Foundation

Royal Warrant Holders Association Charity Fund
Sir Jeremiah Colman Gift Trust
The Carmen Butler-Charteris Charitable Trust
The Gerald Micklem Charitable Trust
The Ingram Trust
The O'Hea Charitable Trust
The Rumi Foundation
The Wolfson Foundation
The Zochonis Charitable Trust
Webb Family Charitable Trust
Vision Foundation

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Inspiring Futures, which is a joint funding programme between BBC Children in Need and the Youth Futures Foundation.



Funding from the Coronavirus Community Support Fund, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund, has helped us to support digital inclusion through Creating Connections. Thanks to the Government for making this possible.

Companies

Ascot Underwriting
Candis Club
Data Protection Consultancy Limited
Essilor
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Johnson & Johnson Vision Care
John Lewis Partnership Golden Jubilee Trust
Mid-Optic
Optix
Porter Novelli
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We'd also like to thank the following:

- SeeAbility supporters who generously left us a gift in their will, or gave gifts in memory of a loved one.
- The community groups and individuals who have collected, baked, performed and fundraised for SeeAbility.
- SeeAbility's challenge eventers who have walked, run, cycled and completed virtual challenges from home to support us.
- Our generous and loyal supporters who have kindly given donations. We also extend our most grateful thanks to those individuals, trusts and companies who have supported our work this year and who wish to remain anonymous.

A year in photos



Photos of people we support keeping busy, active and learning new skills during the pandemic

Support in numbers

13,000+

social media followers,
a **rise of 11%**

4

people we support are paid
induction trainers, training staff
who are new to SeeAbility

£1.3 million

donated by **individual supporters**,
funders and **corporate partners** in
an unprecedented year

53

local authorities and NHS bodies
commissioning us to deliver support
to people with learning disabilities
autism and sight loss

248,637

page views of our website



Live. Love. Thrive. Belong.

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01372 755 000 • www.seeability.org

Winner of the Overall Award for Excellence at the 2021 Charity Awards for our work to influence the NHS, resulting in their decision to roll out sight testing for all children in special schools across England.

"We can all appreciate what a huge difference being able to see clearly can make to anyone's ability to engage in everyday life. This is an outstanding project which, by influencing the NHS, will make a lasting difference to many people with a learning disability across the UK."

Su Sayer, Chair of the Charity Awards judges, 2021

www.seeability.org/charityawards

