

Including people with sight loss in church

Torch Trust

Audio file

[Torch Trust audio.mp3](#)

Transcript

00:00:05

Wonderful thank you. Good morning. My name is Matthew Horspool. I'm the sightless friendly church advisor at Torch trust. Becky Davies is here and she's been very helpful and making slides for me over the past few days.

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But one in five people will live with sight loss in their lifetime. That translates to 20% of people.

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Will live with sight loss in their lifetime, UM.

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Old age is quite a big contributor to this, and so since church is kind of biased towards the altar towards the older age, and you might find that actually more than 20% of people in your church have sight loss.

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But at least 20% will have some degree of sight loss, and if you're sat here thinking yes but no one in my church has.

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Got sight loss. They probably have you. Probably haven't noticed it. A lot of people with sight loss don't want to tell you that they've got sight loss because it might feel like they're going to be a burden on you.

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And they might not even realise themselves that they have sight loss because.

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You know it, it's happened so slowly and so gradually, but eventually it will come out. Eventually they'll say something like, oh, I'm sure I used to be.

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We used to be.

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Able to see that a bit more clearly than I can now, or something like that, you know, or you'll you'll find that one day they're holding their hymnbook upside down, and they haven't quite noticed, and those are some telltale signs.

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Or they they they sort of discreetly stick picking things up because they don't need them all and not taking in what they used to take in from the notice sheet. And things like that.

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Next slide, please has the torch logo on it. We couldn't think of anything exciting to put up on this slide, but essentially torch grew out of this problem of there's there's people in church who are blind or who are partially sighted or who have sight loss who need to access the word of God. It was formed.

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About 60 years ago, just over 60 years ago, about 62 years ago now by Ron and Stella Heath as part of a Home group.

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And out of these home groups emerged torch fellowship groups, which is still going on. So we have local torch fellowship groups that exist in various parts of the UK hosted by churches.

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To encourage people with sight loss to meet together and share.

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The ship we also run torch together, which is our holiday programme that's going to be going to four places in the UK in 2022 and offering blind and partially sighted people the opportunity to share in fellowship with one another, and we produce a programme called REFLECTIONS which goes out on our Web Connect radio. It used to go out.

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On premiere, but we we lost that slot. We're looking for other radio stations where that can go out. So if you have contacts with radio stations and want to put us in touch that be really good. But it's a half an hour programme.

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About faith and site loss and we we produce all of that next slide, please.

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Oh, maybe we don't need the next slide yet, but never mind we can move on anyway. Iaccessible Christian literature is actually a core strand of what we do, so this is large print and Braille Bibles. Hymnbooks Bible reading notes uhm?

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Magazines devotionals periodicals Christian fiction theology philosophy. All of that sort of thing.

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Our large print is very large. It starts at sort of 17 and goes right the way up to 30, whereas large print in the book shops caps out at 16.

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So if you've got someone who says I can't read large print, then please try our large print and please don't worry about that bankrupting you. We don't charge.

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Any more than the recommended retail price for our large print? Or Braille, or indeed our audio? We also produce audiobooks in house and audio magazines in house for people who need.

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That our audio comes on a USB memory stick and we have memory stick players that are specially designed for people with sight loss and the reason why we do this is because a memory stick can hold much more information than a CD and it can be reused so they it gets it. It it turns up in a wallet and you flip the label over and you post it.

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When you're done with it, if there's a book that we don't have, we can transcribe it on demand because we have very good relationships with lots of Christian publishers and things like that, so we can do that if the best thing to do is to call us, and if we have it, we'll do it.

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We'll send it out and if.

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We don't, then we'll make it for you now it's the next slide.

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But the it's it's.

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Slide four with the sightless friendly church logo on it. Sight loss. Friendly church was launched fairly recently in 2019 and we have over 300 churches who are sight loss friendly.

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Torch actually grew out of sort of an evangelical movement, but actually a lot of our sight loss. Friendly churches are Anglican, which.

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Is absolutely brilliant.

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And and what site last friendly church is is essentially a church making a commitment to.

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Uhm, including people with sight loss. It's not a church saying we are perfect. We do everything right because it's impossible to do everything right because if everybody is different than every person with sight loss is also diff.

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You know, some people need Braille. Some people need large print. Some people can't read at all, and they need somebody to sit next to them and describe everything that's going on.

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So you know we we really do. Just think site last friendly is the way to go because you sign up to be site last friendly.

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You take on board all of the advice that that we give you and and the training that we offer and we offer.

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Quite a lot of very, very varied training programme. We have an introductory training offer that lasts 90 minutes or so and then we have some monthly focus on sessions which do sort of deep dive webinar type. You know, hour long sessions into various things that we do.

00:06:00

And so you know, take what you need. Don't take what you don't need, you know but you know and come to us.

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We have a a tailored advice service, which means that if a blind person turns up in your church and you're a sight loss for any church and you don't know what to do, give us a ring. We will tell you what to do, will or will give you some advice about what you could potentially do based on what we know about.

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The person and what we know about the church, and hopefully we'll make it all work out for you.

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We also offer networking opportunities for site last friendly churches via our site. Last friendly church, catch up sessions and they're very good because you can get lots of cycles for any churches in the same room and rather than taking advice from torch, they can take advice from each other and that's.

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That's really valuable to our site. Last friendly churches. Absolutely no entry requirement whatsoever, just as long as you're prepared to be site last friendly. That's all we really ask for.

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On the next slide, UM site last Sunday is happening on Sunday, so so this takes site loss. Friendly church to the next level.

00:07:07

We're doing site loss for any doing site last Sunday on Sunday because it's world Sight Day tomorrow and we thought it would fit in quite nicely. But this takes it to the next level, this says.

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OK, we've been. We've welcomed our blind and partially sighted people in. We've we've included them as best we can.

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But now that person wants to read the readings or lead the worship band or preach the sermon. Or you know any of the other jobs lead a Home group.

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Any of the other things lead prayers help out with children, groups, anything that a sighted person might want to do a blind or partially sighted person might also want to do. Site last Sunday is about equipping.

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People to do that. So we've made readings available in Braille. We we actually suggested our own readings rather than going with the lectionary provision.

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Because different churches use different lectionaries, and we're trying our best to be as multi denominational as possible. So we've we've set some readings that churches of England can use because it's in ordinary time and you can deviate from the lectionary provision if you need to.

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And we've made those readings available free of charge in Braille and large print, so if that's a barrier, if a church.

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Would love to include people with sight loss, but they can't because they don't have the facilities to produce. The Braille torch will produce the Braille for them at foresight last Sunday, and so that will you know there might be a blind person who's never had the opportunity to read in church.

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Or who has the opportunity on site last Sunday? I realise it's a bit late now, but if you want to do site last Sunday on a date other than the 17th of October, please do that because.

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You know you're welcome to do it anytime, really.

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On the next slide, you can see, think, ask, act. This is what we tell people to do. Never make assumptions.

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Think about something that's happening in your church. Think, OK, we've got a video here. There's no description on that video.

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Maybe a person with sight loss isn't going to be able to access this video very well. Go over and see the person with sight.

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And say this is going to.

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Happen, what would you like me to do? Sometimes they'll say you know what I'll I'll just manage I'll be fine.

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Sometimes I'll say, can you describe it afterwards so that I can listen to the video and not be distracted by somebody whispering in my ears and not be embarrassed by them?

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Sometimes they will just not care and want somebody to whisper in their ear. Ask them what we want and then.

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If at all possible, do it, and if it's not possible for some reason, then well, that's fine. But let's try and make it possible for next time, and that's where contacting Torch comes into its own.

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So on the last slide slide seven, you can see our contact details. Thanks very much once again for having us we'll we'll have questions in just a second, but as you can see, if you want more information about what torch has to offer over 1858438260 is our phone number slecht.

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Torchtrust.org is our email address.

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And www.sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk is our website address and we run regular taster sessions about sight loss friendly church.

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So if you add slash taster to the end of that website address, you'll be able to find out more. These are free, half an hour sessions designed for church leaders.

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For people who are interested, insight loss for any church where you can find out a bit more and meet the two of us and ask any questions you've got and we can help you to sign up to be a sight loss for any church if that's what you want to do. But I'll stop talking there and open it up for questions.

00:10:39

Thank you Matthew. I'm just waiting for my video to be highlighted, spotlighted. I don't know what the question, what the right phrase is, but those behind the scenes putting me big on screen.

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So just bear with me. There we go for those who can see me, wish they couldn't, I'm I'm back.

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On the spotlight. Matthew so thank you so much for sharing with us I had, but I was a vicar in Sheffield. I had a curate which is like an apprentice vicar who came to me with quite significant.

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Lars and the people in my church were fabulous 'cause they said that's great. What can we do to help the system?

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Uhm, was was very much saying to me always going to be problematic. Are you ready for this? Is it gonna be OK?

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And I thought, well, I don't see why it wouldn't be OK. I'll just ask Neil what he needs and then we'll just get on and do it. Things like the morning prayers that we said together in church.

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I said, how big do you need the fonts and what colour paper do?

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You need front 20 yellow paper.

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Thank you very much so and he actually cried when he first saw it because he said I've been able to see the prayers of the church for the first time in about 5-6 seven years.

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It's something about agency, again, isn't it? It's about people actually asking the question, what does it be unique?

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What have you found has been for you personally, Matthew, helpful in in terms of when when sighted people have met, you realised that you have most side.

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What have you found helpful in their approach and what have you found deeply unhelpful?

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I mean actually, what's deeply unhelpful quite often.

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Is when somebody comes up to me.

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And goes ah yes yes yes yes.

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You're blind, I know about blind people. My dad was blind and and he needed me to do this and he needed me to do that and he and you get yes yes yes, alright, that's that's that's very good, but I don't actually need you to do that and actually sometimes trying to undo what people think that I might need based on what somebody else might have needed. Because inevitably Dad probably wasn't as blind.

00:12:49

As me dad probably had some sight, Dad was probably older than me and therefore probably had some dexterity and some motor issues going on. So actually yes, I mean, you know Dad might not have been able to pour his own cup.

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See, but I can. I mean, if you want to get me a cup of tea anyway, that's fine. 'cause I'm a naturally lazy person and I'm quite happy for you to do that, but that's not because I'm blind. You know, that's just because I quite like it. If someone else did something for me. But yeah.

00:13:16

Really like I said in the in the presentation, the best thing you can do is come up and introduce yourself and be normal and then if you see me struggling with something, ask if I need help and if I say that I don't need help, could you please respect the fact that I don't need it the number of times I've been walking, not necessarily in the church context, but walking down the road and somebody has been telling me that I need to go.

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Left and you think? Well, that's very helpful, but actually you don't know where I'm going. So how do you know that I need to turn left?

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You know someone will try and help me cross the road when I don't need to cross the road. I'm waiting for the bus.

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So yeah, ask me what I want and if I you know if I say that I don't need help.

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I mean, unless I'm just about to be hit by a car, in which case it's a slightly different issue. You know, let me let me get on with it and do it my own.

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And a final question that's come up a, uh, a number of threads from a number of speakers and people talking about the amount of effort it takes that when you are left your own devices, you're quite functional and you can get on with things and it takes a minimal amount of effort and doesn't tie you out when people try to be helpful or when there are stumbling blocks.

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In the way someone blocks, you know, an analogy, not literal or maybe literal.

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Two that actually thysa day that takes far more effort and energy because you're having to work round the sighted world that doesn't ask the question and doesn't make allowances.

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Do you find that Matthew that there are some days that are just tiring because it just hasn't worked?

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I mean, I'm, I'm very glad that I don't find whole days.

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Tiring because of it. Uhm, there are certainly hours in the day that are more tiring than others. There are certainly events in the day, you know.

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Uhm, getting a bus on a Saturday afternoon is much more tiring than getting a bus on a Sunday evening after evensong, you know?



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And you know, because people want to help you out. But yeah, uh, I think frustrating more than tiring for me.

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Somebody will say look, do you need help and I'll say no. But in the in, in, in, in the context of that conversation, I've now lost where I am.

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So actually, I've then got to reset where I am and carry on and that makes me look like I need help, so it's.

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Kind of a self fulfilling prophecy, really. If somebody tries to help and and it's and it's not helpful then then well I need their help because they've they've made a situation worse than it actually was.

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Matthew, thank you for presenting. I know it's only a snippet of what the torch trust do and are about, but we've made those details available in the chat and this will be on our YouTube channel on our website afterwards so people can head over to talk to trust.

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Find out a little bit more about what you guys do and then work in collaboration with you to make church.

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Life better so thank you for your time.