

Integrated working within visual impairment.
– A Sub-Regional Approach to the delivery of Integrated Low Vision Services

Milestone Report 1 20th January 2009

Background

Sight Service was lead partner during the Gateshead Integrated Low Vision Service national eye care pilot, and service users have benefited from a completely new approach to delivery of eye care services that historically were delivered from a regional eye hospital in Newcastle.

Benefits to the clients have been that where as previously less than 100 people a year were able to benefit from a low vision assessment, we are now providing that service locally to nearly 400 people a year. Added to that, those people also have a face to face meeting with a rehabilitation officer for the blind, and a home visit from the rehabilitation officer for the blind six weeks later. We also provide a bi annual check up, so ensuring that any changes in eye sight or personal circumstances are noted. This service benefits from the added value that the Sight Service is able to offer in the form of social, leisure and sports activities, employment skills training, benefits checks, counselling, and signposting to many other appropriate services.

Gateshead and South Tyneside Sight Service at present is constituted to provide services and support to visually impaired people living in Gateshead, South Tyneside and the surrounding area. It will be using this project as a means to undertake an initiative, driving through a sub-regional approach to workforce redesign and using the learning from the Low Vision Pilot. The Low Vision Pilot received a regional Health and Social Care Award and was highly recommended nationally.

We aim to achieve this through:

1. holding a range of information/learning exchange events, working with service users to identify gaps in services for visually impaired people
2. learning exchange sessions with service users across South of Tyne and the wider area
3. a regional event, sharing findings of the following - the Dept of Health General Ophthalmic Services Review, the commissioning toolkit that provides practical advice for primary care trusts and practice based commissioners on the commissioning of community based eye care services, the national Emotional Support Service being piloted in Gateshead, and the views of service users and a range of stakeholders
4. the establishment of a number of action learning sets to consider their own workforce redesign needs in the context of people working within visual impairment, and offering learning opportunities for stakeholders to achieve the workforce redesign required.

We will be looking for:

- improved quality of eye care services for visually impaired people with an integrated approach to service delivery and clear pathways.
- a reduction in waiting times and many more people receiving services.
- a more consistent approach to commissioning on a sub regional level.
- a more flexible, timely and local service for local people which places visually impaired people at the centre and delivering better outcomes for people who have recently lost their sight.

We would also aim to cement the role of the voluntary sector as critical to providing a preventative approach to people who are visually impaired. We would seek to do this by capacity building in local communities, together with a re-working of the roles of the rehabilitation officer for the blind (social care) and the optometrist (health)

We aim to take low vision services out of regional eye hospitals sub regionally and further afield and place them in the community

Work to date.

Over the past few months the Sight Service has, through its sub regional network of support groups, service user groups, and other activities, been working with services users to identify gaps and shortfalls in services. Sight Service has been working together with the Royal National Institute for the Blind who has sent out **Good Practice in Sight Guides** to all councils, and service users are encouraged to assess the services they receive against the 'standards' identified in the Guide. This information will be fed back to the sub regional councils through the existing planning process and any other means available.

Standards are:

1. emotional support
2. a flexible referral system
3. information and advice
4. assessment
5. equipment
6. training (rehabilitation and mobility)
7. user involvement
8. complaints procedures.
9. inter agency working

Services users involved include people of all ages, people who work and people who don't, people who are actively involved in their community and those who aren't, people who are registered as blind, as partially sighted or not registered but with significant sight loss.

What happens next.

Information gained from the work to date will be fed back to the local authorities and primary care trusts, together with the message that the effects of sight loss can be devastating, leading to loneliness, social and economic deprivation and poor health.

A regional event is planned to be held in the next few weeks to bring together commissioners and planners. The aim of this event will be to raise their awareness of the needs of visually impaired people, to have workshops that will enable people to discuss the issues as

they see them, especially looking at integrated service delivery and various options available.

This will then need follow ups at a more local level to set up action learning sets to consider workforce design.

Summary

Work to date has been very positive, and we have been able to benefit from other work being undertaken nationally by the Royal National Institute for the Blind, together with another national work lead by the UK Vision Strategy (a joint initiative involving all voluntary sector agencies working with visually impaired people). The benefits of joint working are very clear.