Reaching out
Thanks to you, we’re taking crucial eye health services to marginalised people like Rebecca
Sight-saving success

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You’re supporting accessible eye health care for all

Everyone has the right to learn, earn a living and be happy. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic has really highlighted the challenges people with disabilities face. Protective masks for example, can prevent people with limited hearing from being able to lip read.

As you can read on page 4, you’re supporting a whole range of projects to make sure people with disabilities stay included in every aspect of life. You can meet Marie, who’s receiving support to keep up with her lessons, and Ahmed who is learning how to grow his small business and keep it open safely.

This issue of Focus is all about reaching out to people - including those who’ve been forced to flee their homes and are living in urban settlements and refugee camps. On page 6, you can see how our pop-up eye health camps are taking crucial eye health services to displaced people. Then there’s Rebecca, featured on the cover, who was in excruciating pain from trachoma, until one of the mobile eye health teams you support visited her refugee camp. Read more on page 11.

There are so many inspiring stories to share with you, and I really hope you enjoy reading them. One thing’s for sure; they couldn’t have happened without you.

My very best wishes,

Ella Pierce
Global Director of Fundraising

Trachoma in Words
Our moving new film see page 10

My Sightsavers
Get the latest on life-changing work you support, share your fantastic fundraising stories, join our community of like-minded sight-savers and much more. Whatever you want to see, say or share, stay connected your way:

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Thanks for your support!
Breaking down barriers

Thanks to you, we’re working with our partners to help people with disabilities through the pandemic and beyond

Supporting education

In Sierra Leone, students with visual impairments like Marie have continued learning at home

Marie carefully types Braille notes while listening to the national radio education programme. Her school may be closed due to the pandemic, but this determined 16-year-old has big aspirations.

“I want to become a lawyer in the future,” she explains. “As this will help me to advocate and fight for an equal world where everyone is considered.”

Through our Education for All programme, Marie is receiving the tools she needs to keep studying, including the typewriter she’s using, the paper she’s typing on and the radio she’s listening to. The programme works to ensure children with disabilities – particularly girls – can attend school and achieve their full potential. Sadly, girls are more often excluded from education and experience different societal pressures and barriers.

As well as crucial learning materials, Marie also receives personal necessities such as soap, toothpaste, antiperspirant, sanitary towels and hand sanitiser. This reduces financial pressure on her family, ensuring her education can continue. As an extra health precaution during COVID-19, we’re also providing hand-washing stations for children with disabilities and their schools – offering an additional layer of protection.

“Going to school is something I like doing because I strongly believe that education is the key to success” Marie

432 girls and 394 boys in Sierra Leone are supported through Education for All, exceeding our target of 350 children

Backing businesses

In Kenya, we’re training and mentoring small business owners like Ahmed, so they can continue trading safely

Ahmed (pictured above, left), is a refugee from Somalia, who suffers complications from having had polio. He now lives in Kakuma refugee camp with his family, where he runs a shop selling basic items. COVID-19-related travel restrictions mean the products he used to source from suppliers in Nairobi now have to be bought locally at a higher price, which has affected his income. This is typical of the issues many shopkeepers face as they struggle to make a living in the pandemic. But help was at hand.

Our Inclusive Futures programme is supporting Ahmed and other entrepreneurs like him to grow their businesses and keep them safely open – by installing customer hand washing facilities for example. Ahmed is also receiving rehabilitation care and equipment to treat his post-polio paralysis.

Enhancing communication

Through our Inclusive Futures partner, BBC Media Action, we’re ensuring people with disabilities are reached and included in Nigeria’s public health broadcasts – especially those with visual or hearing impairments. The initiative also involves people with disabilities in programmes about COVID-19, so they can take part in discussions as equal members of society.
Eye care for all

In February 2020, Sightsavers’ Kirsty Bridger visited Bangladesh, to see our eye screening camps in action

I know our eye screening camps are extremely effective. But it wasn’t until I experienced the welcoming atmosphere and thoughtfulness of our staff and local partners that I really appreciated why. They’re all working together to screen and treat as many people as they can, and they’re determined no one misses out.

The pop-up camp I visited was in Rangpur, where the displaced Bihari community live in a sprawling urban settlement. With our partners, OBAT Helpers, we set up the eye camp in the local school courtyard, just five minutes’ walk from people’s homes. Easy access is crucial, because many people in the area can’t afford or don’t have access to transport.

Spreading the word
While the camp was being constructed, OBAT’S intrepid team put up welcome banners. Prior to this, volunteers from OBAT drove around the settlements in tuk-tuks, using loudspeakers to tell everyone when and where to go for treatment. The next morning, when the eye camp was ready, people started queuing up to be seen. After registering, everyone received an initial sight test from ophthalmic assistant Assaduzzaman Babu. They were then directed to a second room, where ophthalmologist Dr Azizul Islam carefully examined their eyes. People diagnosed with cataracts were directed back to the registration desk to be referred for free surgery at Sightsavers’ local partner hospital. Some went to hospital that day, others the following morning, with free transport to take them there and back.

By the end of the day, 321 people had been screened, with 57 referred for cataract surgery. The care, efficiency and dedication of everyone involved was incredible.

Of the 321 adults and children who attended the eye camp in Rangpur...

75 were given eye drops
57 needed cataract operations
52 had their glasses checked
29 received pairs of glasses

Double the impact
The Rangpur eye screening camp was supported by the UK government, through UK Aid Match. And that’s not all...

Our Christmas 2019 Aid Match appeal raised an amazing £4,028,445, including £2 million of match funding from the UK government. This gives a huge boost to our eye care services, particularly for marginalised groups such as women and people living with disabilities.

Mobile messaging
You can see the mobile messaging team in action at: sightsavers.org/miking
Healthcare hero

In Nigeria’s Kogi State, Mr Alabi is working with communities to tackle debilitating neglected tropical diseases (NTDs)

Mr Alabi Albert has been the NTD co-ordinator in Kogi State for six years, and has played a huge role in the Ascend programme we help manage in Western and Central Africa. He and his team work tirelessly to protect more than four million people each year from river blindness, lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis, intestinal worms and trachoma.

Improving knowledge

Keeping people informed and ensuring everyone can access treatment is key to eliminating NTDs, and something Mr Alabi is passionate about. He’s reaching out to people in lots of different ways, such as through radio jingles and awareness raising programmes about symptoms, prevention and treatment. This caring and dedicated, yet extremely humble man is also a driving force in enabling local people to deliver health care and distribute medicine – including those with disabilities.

If he’s not in his office, you’ll find Mr Alabi out in the community, taking a hands-on role in training health workers and volunteers, and supervising all kinds of project activities, including planning mass drug administrations and home-based care for people with lymphatic filariasis. As well as building a strong and lasting health system in Kogi State, his efforts are helping reduce discrimination and stigma around people with disabilities, by highlighting the valuable role they can play in society. Mr Alabi is a true healthcare hero – and you are too, for helping to support his vital work.

Reaching new heights

Ascend is a three-year UK Aid-funded programme, aimed at making major progress in eliminating river blindness, lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis, intestinal worms and trachoma from 13 countries, including Nigeria. Thanks to people like Mr Alabi, Nigeria is making great strides towards eliminating NTDs and, in some areas, disease prevalence is below World Health Organization elimination thresholds.

In the first year of Ascend in Nigeria: over 115,000 community volunteers, 15,000 health workers, and 4,000 case finders were trained

Playing his part

When he heard people with disabilities were being included in Kogi State’s NTD programme, Joseph Uluko quickly volunteered.

Joseph has a disability and is a proud leader in his community. Following training, he now distributes NTD treatments and is extremely pleased to be involved. As he explains: “It gives me great joy to help my community and to look out for other people with disabilities. The first thing I did when I got the medicine was to give people treatment.”
Trachoma in Words

Our new short film highlights the experience of living with trachoma, in the words of those who know

Trachoma destroys millions of lives worldwide. Yet 84% of British people don’t know what it is. We’re using the words of people who’ve suffered from trachoma to show what it feels like, and explain how it can and must be eliminated.

Focusing attention
We created the poignant film as part of our End is in Sight campaign, which aims to eliminate trachoma in most of the countries where we work by 2025. We released it last November, as the World Health Organization and other global health leaders gathered to discuss targets to reduce the burden of trachoma and other neglected tropical diseases.

In the film, five names from the film and literary world read out people’s own compelling and often harrowing words on living with trachoma. We learn what the infection feels like, how it can affect daily life, and how people find ways to cope – including taking desperate measures to relieve the pain, such as pulling out their eyelashes with tweezers.

With over 137 million people still at risk of trachoma globally, it’s vital we keep fighting to eliminate it for good. We’re hoping the film will boost the brilliant support we get from sight-savers like you, and help us reach our crucial goal.

Enduring the pain
Rebecca knows how trachoma feels. As her eyelashes scratched against her eyes, every blink was agony

When war erupted in South Sudan, Rebecca became separated from her five children. In desperation, she made the long and difficult journey across the border to reach Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya. Thankfully, Rebecca’s children were there and the family was reunited. But then she faced another huge challenge.

Rebecca’s eyes were becoming increasingly painful, so she walked for several hours to reach the nearest clinic. She was diagnosed with trichiasis (advanced trachoma), yet with no functioning operating theatre, the ophthalmologist at the clinic couldn’t perform the surgery she urgently needed. Instead, he referred her to a Sightsavers-supported eye health team who were visiting the refugee camp.

The team set up a makeshift operating theatre, and performed Rebecca’s surgery, saving her sight and freeing her from pain. When her bandages were removed she smiled with joy and gave a big thumbs up. “Yes, I am good now.”

£44 is all it cost to save Rebecca’s sight. Your gift today could help protect more people like her, and help us eliminate blinding trachoma

See the film
You can watch Trachoma in Words and find out how you can get involved, at: www.sightsavers.org/words

The End is in Sight
Fundraising feats

Despite COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, you’ve continued to help save sight and transform lives

Bertie braves the waves

Our heartfelt thanks to Bertie Reynolds, age 6, who swam every day for a month in Scotland’s chilly North Sea – without a wet suit!

“I managed to swim on all 31 days and had LOTS of very cold and rainy ones,” Bertie told us. “I still managed to get my head under water and do proper strokes every time. On my last swim, lots of my friends from school came to swim with me and cheer me on. I raised £462 for Sightsavers and am going to have a rest from swimming now.”

Nigel’s marathon effort

Massive congratulations to Nigel Kingston, for achieving a personal first and raising £2,246 to help others

In 2006, after spending 12 years on crutches, Nigel had his leg amputated above the knee. Having a false leg fitted meant he rediscovered the joy of walking, and this year he took part in the virtual London Marathon to support our vital work. We can’t thank him enough, and Nigel wants to thank everyone for their generous donations.

“I have an NHS-funded state-of-the-art Ottobock C-leg 4 prosthetic knee, which copies my walking patterns using a mini computer,” explained Nigel. “As far as I know, I’m the first person who’s walked the London marathon using one.”

We need you!

If these stories have inspired you to help save and restore sight, empower people with disabilities and change lives around the world, we’d love to hear from you. Email events@sightsavers.org or find out more at www.sightsavers.org/fundraise

Sightsavers

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