Focus
Your magazine from Sightsavers Autumn 2022

Equal chances
With your help, we’re striving for a fairer, more inclusive world
Welcome

In an equal world, everyone would enjoy the same chances in life – not be held back by things they can’t change. That’s the world we’re aiming for.

With your support, we promote equal opportunities for people with visual impairments and other disabilities. This issue of Focus celebrates the lives and achievements of some of the people you’ve helped. It also shows how many of them are shattering the misconceptions and barriers people with disabilities face.

On page 4, you can meet Soule, one of the inclusive education teachers helping children such as Aminata to shine at school. And, on page 6, you can read about Jannatul who has completed her education and is setting up her own business.

Feeling you belong, having a voice and being valued and respected in society – everyone deserves these things. I hope you’ll enjoy all the positive stories you read today, because you helped make them happen. Thank you.

My very best wishes,

Ella Pierce
Global Director of Fundraising

All included

Our vision is of a world in which no one is blind or visually impaired from avoidable causes, and everyone has equal access to healthcare, education, employment and society. With our partners and supporters, we’re determined to make this vision a reality.

Championing disability rights

Many people with disabilities are denied access to their basic human rights of education, healthcare, employment and political participation – and the COVID-19 pandemic has made things worse. We promote the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities through our programmes, research and influencing work. This includes supporting inclusive education to ensure children with disabilities can learn alongside their peers. Find out more on page 4.

Around 240 million children are estimated to have disabilities, of whom 28.9 million live in eastern and southern Africa.

Saving and protecting sight

1 billion people globally are estimated to have a visual impairment that is unaddressed or could have been prevented.

Good vision plays a crucial role in every part of life. Yet too many people still face barriers to obtaining high-quality, affordable eye care. We support the delivery of accessible, effective eye health services to help tackle cataracts and refractive errors – the world’s biggest cause of visual impairment. You can read about our work in Pakistan on page 8.

Fighting neglected tropical diseases

1 billion people globally are estimated to have a visual impairment that is unaddressed or could have been prevented.

After generations of needless suffering, now is the time to say goodbye to debilitating NTDs such as river blindness, trachoma, lymphatic filariasis, intestinal worms and schistosomiasis. We work with governments, partners and communities to deliver treatments, strengthen health systems and ensure no one is left behind.

Sightsavers-supported NTD programmes reach one sixth of the world’s population.
Learning together

In Senegal, you're enabling teachers like Soulé to educate children with disabilities in mainstream schools

Gaining insight
Training teachers in inclusive education is key to unlocking the door to equal learning. Through our pilot programme in Senegal, Soulé has been trained to read and write in braille as well as a host of other inclusive teaching skills. He’s also seen how learning and thriving alongside their peers can improve the confidence of children with disabilities, and dramatically change people’s negative misconceptions about their capabilities.

“These are students who are often stigmatized by society,” explains Soulé. “They are usually the victims of mockery from their own peers, but also from the population in general. With inclusion, we can feel that there is a significant change. A change in mindset that is starting to emerge. At the beginning, these children were a bit shy, but as the weeks and years go by, we notice that they have changed radically. They are children who have become fulfilled.”

Living her best life
Aminata loves attending mainstream school and being with her friends every day.

When her eyesight deteriorated, Aminata (above and right) was very upset. She couldn’t see the writing on the board and was worried she’d have to stop going to school. But then her teacher, Madame Khady Ndiaye, taught her how to use braille.

That was in first grade, and since then Aminata hasn’t looked back. “I really like the French lessons and there is a good atmosphere in the class,” she tells us. “I sit at the first table in the third row, and teaching assistant Mariama Diallo dictates the lessons to me.”

Aminata’s classmates also give her support. “Ndiambé and Fatou are my friends,” she explains. “There is also Bitey, Awa, Seynabou, Moustapha and the others who are in the class. When I need to go somewhere I ask them to come with me and they don’t hesitate to accompany me – they all help me at school and in class too!”

Having an education means Aminata can look forward to the future, and she wants to help children like herself. “I will advise them to work well,” she says. “They are as good as the other students. They can succeed.”

Give the gift of education
It costs £160 to provide a year’s inclusive education for a child with disabilities and £26.92 for a universal braille kit to help them read, write and learn basic mathematics. A gift today could help more children like Aminata receive the education they need. Thank you.
Joining the workforce

With your support, we can help break down the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from working

Jannatul was born with a physical disability affecting her legs and has faced many challenges throughout her life. They include lack of accessible transport and living in a flood-prone part of Bangladesh, which further limits her mobility.

Despite the barriers, Jannatul’s personal dedication and support from her parents and friends have helped her continue her education. She is now in the last year of her master’s degree and is setting up her own tailoring business. She also dreams of supporting other people with disabilities.

“We disabled persons, we face many difficulties every day,” says Jannatul. “That’s why I want [the government to] develop a system for disabled persons, so that they can travel and get an education and prosper in life – and also get proper health services and get access to the COVID-19 vaccine. I want the government to preserve the rights of people with disabilities. Our right to access food, transport, education; these things need to be ensured.”

Employing innovation

Our multi-partner Inclusive Futures programme challenged the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from finding jobs and running businesses.

The programme, which ran in Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda, also piloted new ways to create job opportunities. For example, by making practical changes to the way companies employ people with disabilities, such as offering training initiatives and internships.

Just as importantly, Inclusive Futures generated evidence about how people with disabilities can be supported to find employment. This is helping disability organisations in each country develop their own knowledge and resources, so they can continue the work the programme started.

“I have tried for jobs but faced many difficulties, maybe because of my disability,” Jannatul explains. “That’s why I decided to start a business instead of looking for a job. I got training from Sightsavers under the Inclusive Futures programme at Access Bangladesh Foundation – I learned a lot from that.”

In addition to her training, Jannatul also received a tricycle through the programme, to help her get around. Plus, she’ll have ongoing support as she establishes her new business.
Accessing healthcare

You’re helping hard-to-reach and marginalised communities receive the healthcare services they need

Having access to health and eye care is fundamental to people’s wellbeing, wherever they live. Yet the costs of travel and treatment, inaccessible buildings, lack of braille signage or sign language translators, and exclusion or discrimination on the grounds of disability, gender, income or ethnicity are just some of the obstacles people face.

Our Right to Health programme aimed to break down the barriers to eye health. Delivered in partnership with eye care hospitals and ministries of health at national and district levels, it reached out to the most marginalised groups in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

As part of the programme, inclusive eye health screening camps and targeted treatments were held in collaboration with local disabled people’s organisations, community-based health organisations and self-help groups. They offered a lifeline to people such as Zamurrad (above) and Sardar (right), who might otherwise have lost their sight.

“I am fine now and can see everything”

Sardar was the main breadwinner in his family, until cataracts threatened to take away his sight and his income.

“I work making bricks at Brick Kiln,” Sardar explains. “It is very difficult work — all professions are difficult, but clay work is really tough. We start early in the morning, then come home for a while, then go back to work again in the afternoon. My two sons, daughter-in-law and grandchildren live with me — I am the main breadwinner.”

Like many workers at the kiln, Sardar is hired on a daily basis and receives low wages. When his eyesight began to worsen he couldn’t afford treatment, and he had no choice but to continue working to support his family. Thankfully, Sightsavers was able to help him.

Through Right to Health, Sardar received free cataract surgery at a Sightsavers-supported hospital. With his sight restored, he’s more determined than ever to lift his family out of poverty. “I am very happy,” he told us. “Like the flower blossoms, I have blossomed. Thank God I am fine now and can see everything.”

“Thank you for taking me to the hospital. You have brought back my eye. I’m very happy. I didn’t have anything, now I can make good money and improve my family’s livelihood.”

Sardar

Before cataract surgery, Zamurrad struggled to do anything. Now she can care for her family again.

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“I am fine now and can see everything”

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“Thank you for taking me to the hospital. You have brought back my eye. I’m very happy. I didn’t have anything, now I can make good money and improve my family’s livelihood.”

Sardar

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Leaving no one behind

Our Right to Health programme supported transgender and hijra people who can often feel excluded from healthcare

“Transgender people do not go to hospitals, either government or private hospitals, because people make fun of them,” says Rabi, the president of the transgender community in Quetta, Pakistan.

With our partners, we set out to gain the trust of marginalised communities, by taking eye health services to them. This was essential, as many transgender people shared stories of being treated unfairly when accessing medical care, causing some to neglect their health.

Once communities were identified, we set up screening camps where transgender people could have their eyes examined and receive free treatment without discrimination. People were also given information on how to prevent eye problems.

Some camps also offered patients the opportunity to have their blood sugar levels tested, their blood and eye pressure checked, and to receive their free COVID-19 vaccination.

“We can get the help we need”

Chandana’s new glasses and eye drops have improved her sight and cured her painful headaches

Like many transgender people, Chandana’s previous healthcare experiences have been far from positive. But she was really happy about the care and support she received at the free eye screening camp near her home in Kurigram district, Bangladesh.

“All the third gender and hijra (eunuchs, intersex and transgender) people living here received very good eye care,” Chandana (below) told us. “I myself received medical treatment for my eyes. I used to have severe headaches and couldn’t see properly at night. The doctor gave me some medicine and advised me to wear these glasses.”

“The eye screening camp was free of cost. That helped us a lot because without the free services we could not have afforded it.”

Chandana

Strengthening eye health

You’re helping to train desperately needed eye health professionals, so more people can access eye care

Priscilla’s huge workload shows just how much her skills are needed. Yet currently, there are fewer than 12 trainees in Malawi, when there should be at least 70 or 80. “I think the lack of human resources is one of the reasons why we can’t reach more people,” says Priscilla. “It would be nice if maybe we got three of four trainees a year and then at least we’d have continuity.”

How you’re helping

In 2021, Sightsavers supported the inclusive education training of 41,520 teachers and teaching assistants, 7,278 education personnel and 54 social workers. We also supported the training of four ophthalmologists, one optometrist, 39,612 primary health care workers, nine ophthalmic nurses, 774 community volunteers. We couldn’t have done it without you. Thank you.

As well as needing more inclusive education teachers such as Soulé (page 4), many countries where we work face a severe lack of trained eye health professionals such as Dr Priscilla Mhango (above).

Making her mark

Priscilla recently graduated as a general ophthalmologist and is now qualified to perform sight-saving surgeries, such as corneal repairs, on children. She is passionate about the difference eye care can make to a child with cataracts or other eye conditions.

“When you treat a child who was bumping into things or who couldn’t go to school because of their poor vision and you see how their lives improve, it’s really something,” she explains.

“Seeing the transformation in someone who has had surgery is really nice. They can’t wait to get out of hospital to start their lives again!”

Dr Priscilla
Leave a lasting legacy

By remembering Sightsavers in your will, you can keep helping to save sight and support people with disabilities.

Two ways to make your will
Sightsavers has partnered with online will writing service Farewill, to enable you to create a will for *free, which would usually cost around £90.

You can make your will online in just four steps, with support from Farewill specialists. It takes about 15 minutes, and it won’t cost you a penny. Just visit www.sightsavers.org/farewill and enter the voucher code SIGHTSAVERS.

During November, you can also make your will through Will Aid, which works with a network of participating solicitors who offer their services without charge.

Instead of paying a fee, you are encouraged to make a voluntary donation to Will Aid, which supports nine charities, including Sightsavers. The suggested gift is £100 for a basic will or £180 for a basic joint will. Visit www.sightsavers.org/willaid to find out more.

Your gift can change lives
A gift in your will could help train more teachers like Soulé and Emma, so more children with disabilities can go to school

Peter was born with hydrocephalus, a potentially fatal condition which causes a build-up of fluid on the brain. Following surgery and ongoing treatment he’s now at primary school, where teacher Emma Magaso is a huge support.

Emma makes sure that all learning and physical activities are adapted to include Peter and the other children with disabilities in her class. She says that formal training is the key to considering their needs. When the children run races in the playground, Peter loves taking part. He’s only recently learned to run and is clearly proud to be able to do so.

*Creating your will is free when you use our code, and a year of free updates is included. After a year, you will automatically be opted into an annual charge of £10 to continue to be able to update your will. You can opt out of this cost through Farewill before being charged.*