

April 2021 Eye-to-Eye Report: “A Day Through My Eyes”

This month’s Eye-to-Eye brought together 3 speakers all of whom are living with varying degrees of sight loss & shared with us a day in their life.

Wayne Chapman, a SeeAbility Eye Care Champion, spends his working days helping & supporting people with sight problems. Aged 5, his education began at boarding school, being taught in Braille. Wayne quickly discovered an aptitude for languages & in addition to his native English he speaks French, German, Italian & Spanish. Wayne trained as a switchboard operator & worked both in the UK & France – of course in French – before returning to the UK.



[caption: image of Wayne Chapman talking on screen]

Wayne started the evening off by talking us through a typical day for him - from the talking alarm clock that wakes him up in the morning to going to bed in the evening. Wayne shared with us the many & different ‘bits of kit’ and technology he uses to make his life a little easier. He takes notes and manages interaction via email and Zoom using braille. His portable devices weigh less than a standard laptop.

It is perhaps not surprising that in the last 10-15 years technology has flooded the market for us all – and devices designed for general use like Google Mini and Alexa provide extra help for those with a vision impairment, in conducting daily tasks & chores. He noted that perhaps people who see clearly do not always use their other senses to the full – such as feeling the level of water in a bath or touching skin to check the effectiveness of a morning shave. Wayne also shared with us that, for after shave, he likes using the French brand L’Occitane– no doubt to remind him of the years he spent living & working there – but also because since 1997 the brand has incorporated Braille into its packaging.

Wayne also noted that during lockdown he has been able to use his home technology to stream an online church service & share it with his aunt via various devices, from his own home to hers – something which he was not able to do before & a highlight of both their weeks – a positive experience of lockdown!

Our second speaker, Dan Mitchell, works with the charity Blind in Business & is responsible for Fundraising & Training. Blind in Business have received several grants from our own Spectacle Makers’ Charity in the past. They primarily work with vision impaired teenagers & young adults, equipping & enabling them to enter professional careers, particularly in the City of London.

Vision-impaired himself, Dan explained the importance of building confidence so young people can believe and know that the world is their oyster.

Blind in Business programmes promote that confidence building, from taking candidates white water rafting to practising job applications and interview preparation on Zoom.



[caption: image shows an inflatable boat with vision impaired young adults equipped with life jackets, helmets and oars, ready to try white-water rafting]

Dan has helped train many young people from the charity's London office in Carter Lane, just around the corner from Apothecaries' Hall, though of course for the last year or so much of the focus has had to switch to online training and promotion on social media, something Dan had to learn quickly himself in order to help candidates improve their own skills.

Dan told us how he very much enjoys being in the heart of the City & the huge support the Charity receives from the City & Livery Companies. Empowering people to enter the workplace & make a meaningful contribution is in no small way due to the support, knowledge & diligence of the training they receive from Dan & his colleagues.

Living & working in London for Dan has not posed any great problems – he has never lived anywhere else & getting around during the pandemic has in many ways been easier due to the reduced numbers of people travelling. He also makes use of general Apps like the Trainline, which tells him if his train is on time and which platform it is leaving from – if this fails, Dan said that he just asks someone to point him in the right direction and most people are very helpful – but confidence is key in this, as well as in taking on a new job role.

For almost 20 years he has also been involved in advice and delivery of training to employers on how to hire, retain & support employees with impaired vision. Dan has raised over £1.3 million for the charity and is also a qualified Life Coach.

The final speaker, Keith Valentine is a Liveryman of the Spectacle Makers Company and is currently the Director of Development for RNIB – one of the UK's leading sight loss charities.

Keith has Retinitis Pigmentosa, a genetic, degenerative condition which caused him to lose his vision in his early 30's. Prior to joining RNIB Keith in his early working life ran his own successful business in the Urban Renewal Sector until his vision loss started to impact on his day-to-day life. Counting himself as fortunate to be able to sell his business Keith had to take the mammoth step of moving from being his own boss to working for someone else. Keith has held several senior board positions prior to joining RNIB & is a passionate advocate & ambassador for RNIB.

Keith gave a very personal account of how his life has changed living with a degenerative eye condition. Keith was in his 30's when he really began to notice the change in his sight and even although he knew it was going to get progressively worse & he had warning of this, it still didn't really prepare him for the inevitable.

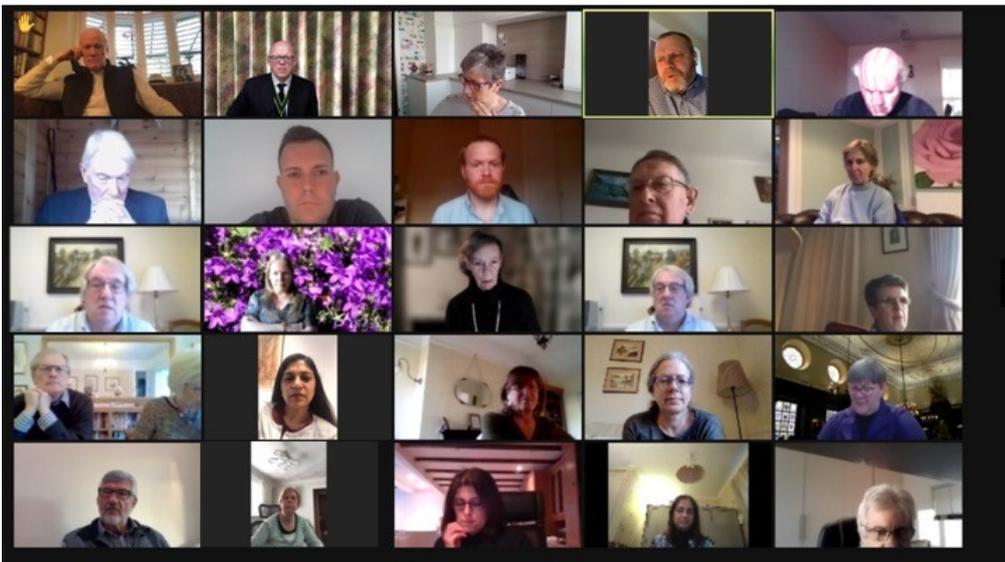


[caption: image shows Keith Valentine dressed in a smart blue shirt]

He told us of his very pragmatic approach – he says he just learned to get up & get on with it! Together with Moorfields, he has worked out that RP has been in his family since the 1850's. He shared some very funny anecdotes about family members with the same inherited condition – one of whom was a butcher by trade – a visually impaired butcher, well.....he was all fingers & thumbs!

Keith also shared that for him, selling his business & being employed rather than self-employed, working in a sight loss charity, was something he had not expected and was still trying to reconcile – he never envisaged changing career and taking on new roles – but he has done so with great success.

In terms of differences between those born with impaired vision and those who lose their vision, Keith says he remains amazed by the skills acquired by his blind colleagues – from Braille and technology to different languages, sporting achievements and becoming expert in so many fields. There was discussion too about what the future might hold, not just in terms of technology but also the research ongoing to understand conditions like RP and the work to develop genetic therapies and possible treatments for loss of vision and major eye disease.



After a very lively Q & A session with one of our largest Eye-to-Eye audiences to date, the Master thanked Wayne, Dan & Keith for their awe-inspiring talks.

The Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers is the oldest optical professional body in the world. Founded in 1629, its mission is to support the prevention and treatment of vision impairment. Open to all optical and ophthalmological professionals, and those who support our aims, details of our activities and membership can be found at www.spectaclemakers.com and on Twitter @spectaclemakers.