

Specialist support for blind or partially sighted people on the Isle of Wight

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Blind and partially sighted people in the Isle of Wight offered specialist support at point of diagnosis

A new service providing emotional and practical support to people who have just found out they're losing their sight has been set up by sight loss charity Action for Blind People, in partnership with the Isle of Wight NHS Trust.

Blind and partially sighted patients will be offered the specialist support through the newly appointed Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO), Laura Gardiner. Laura has been appointed to the Ophthalmology Department at St. Mary's Hospital for 12 months to support patients who have recently been diagnosed or have existing sight loss.

ECLOs, also known as Sight Loss Advisers, work alongside health professionals, offering help and advice on a range of areas including independent living, returning to work, benefit entitlements, offering advice on coping at home, and emotional support.

Laura Gardiner, Eye Clinic Liaison Officer for Action for Blind People, said: "I lost my sight five years ago and understand the importance of having that dedicated support. Being based in the eye clinic gives me the ability to spend time with people, talking through their diagnosis and supporting them to maintain their independence."

Lorraine Brown, Team Leader for Action for Blind People said: "It can be an overwhelming experience to be told you are going to lose your sight. That feeling is compounded if people have to deal with it alone. ECLOs provide much needed information, advice and guidance and we are pleased to be working with Isle of Wight NHS Trust to provide the ECLO service."

Kathryn Taylor, Isle of Wight NHS Trust Operational Manager, said: "This dedicated support is especially important as the number of people with sight loss is set to increase significantly over the next 20 years. NHS England has launched a national call to action to change how we deliver eye services in the NHS and we are really pleased to be working with Action for Blind People to improve support services for patients on the Island."

RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) and Action for Blind People are calling for every eye department in the UK to have access to an ECLO.