


BRITISH WIRELESS FOR THE BLIND FUND

KEEPING BLIND PEOPLE IN
TOUCH WITH THE WORLD



**Embracing
change,
empowering
lives.**

**Our impact
in 2024**

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A message from our Chief Executive and Chair

Every day, people with sight loss tell us how access to audio content and entertainment has transformed their lives. They tell us how our services have helped them feel connected, independent, mentally healthy and empowered.

Last year, the number of people we supported shot up by 65 per cent. That's hundreds more people who've turned to us for free and new ways to access entertainment, news, and practical daily help.

The growth we've seen is down to changes we've made to our services. This ongoing transformation will be critical if we are to keep meeting the needs of people with sight loss which—in a world that doesn't stand still—are ever evolving.



Mike Brace, CBE, DL
Chair

Transforming for today's world

When we embarked on a new *Three-year transformation strategy* in 2024, our priority was clear: to modernise and expand our services for the people we exist to support.

We've long provided something special and unique. For nearly a century, our specially adapted audio devices have given independence and joy to thousands of blind and partially sighted people. But new mainstream technology, like smart speakers, has changed what's possible for people living with sight loss when it comes to accessing audio.

Despite the obvious benefits of this technology, we know that costs and digital confidence remain huge barriers for many.

So, in June 2024, we began offering free Alexa devices to people who needed financial support accessing this technology. We offered the devices alongside support and help, including through our partnership with AbilityNet.

The response was overwhelming. More than 1,700 people accessed our new Alexa services in the first six months.

One size doesn't fit all

While this move to offer smart technology has been transformative for many of those we support, we know that it's not right for everyone. Last year our wider range of easy-to-use radios, mobile phone apps, USB players, and other devices, continued to provide a lifeline to news, entertainment, talking books, and treasured music collections. These might seem like simple pleasures, but they amount to so much more for a person's quality of life.

A better start for children

The benefits of audio technology start in the early years, and we believe that no child should be left behind. That's why, last year, we removed the lower age limit preventing younger children from accessing our support.

Parents tell us how our new range of free children's smart speakers, audiobook readers and calming sleep devices has helped with learning and wellbeing, while easing the financial pressure of caring for their disabled child.

Understanding need

The change we've gone through has been enormous, but our transformation has only just begun.

Our new research project with nfpResearch combines in-depth interviews and surveys to gain a deeper understanding of what

people with sight loss need from us. The results will shape our service for the future.

Meanwhile we have begun to overhaul our digital platforms—starting with the launch of our redesigned website, which now meets internationally-recognised accessibility criteria.

These are critical steps—ones that ensure people living with sight loss are empowered and in control when they use our services.

Powered by your support

We're proud that the changes we've made have driven a huge increase in the number of people turning to us. But, as demand for our services grows, we need your support more than ever.

Thank you for standing with us—and with the thousands of people living with sight loss across the UK.

Sophie Jones
Chief Executive Officer



Who we are

We believe easy access to audio can be life-changing for someone living with sight loss.

We give audio devices for free and for life to blind and partially sighted people in the greatest financial need.

Sight loss shouldn't close the door to the experiences most people take for granted. We provide comfort and companionship, and keep people connected with their communities, their passions and the wider world.

The life-changing impact of audio

We provide more than access to audio. We touch people's lives in countless ways. These might seem like simple things—things many of us might take for granted. But, for those we support, they can be transformative.

We open up a world of reading and learning

"The best part is seeing her face light up when she talks about the books she's listening to. It's like a whole new world has opened up."

We ease financial pressures on families

"Everything for children with additional needs comes at a hefty price. That's why BWBF's support is so vital."

We take the anxiety out of parenting

"She finds mealtimes quite stressful because of her visual impairment. We put on her favourite songs and we dance and sing and it just makes it more fun and relaxing."

We unlock language skills

"My Little Morphée is great for Harry's development in terms of vocabulary."

We help young people feel 'normal'

"It takes away the feeling of isolation or feeling different."

We bring families together

"To sit down as a family and listen to the radio together is a wonderful, healing, beautiful thing."

We keep minds active

"Mentally she's fine but physically her options are so limited. But with this radio she can keep her mind occupied."

We help people stay safe

"A couple of years ago Mum fell. It was a concern. How could we give Mum the ability to contact me easily? I thought if I could get her an Alexa device I could get it set up so she can call us through that."

We keep hobbies alive

"I can replace the reading, which I can't do anymore, with listening to audiobooks. I love it."

We unleash joy

"It has brought so much joy to her life, we have lots of impromptu dance parties now!"

We provide independence

"I spend my life having to ask people to help me to do things. But I can use the radio myself."

We give companionship

"Alexa has made all the difference to my mother. She even says goodnight to her and likes the way it replies."

We support people to feel less alone

"It has absolutely made a big difference to Dad's life. It has really reduced the loneliness he was feeling."

We provide practical information

"I use it for reminders, to turn my lights on and off with the smart plugs, I use it to listen to music, I've even made phone calls through it!"

Our audio devices

Our audio devices help people with sight loss feel independent, safe, connected, informed, and in touch with their pleasures and passions.

Last year, we gave out more audio devices than in any other year in the last decade. No two people living with sight loss are the same, and our range of support suits different needs and tastes. From speech-powered Alexa devices to USB players designed for people with sight loss, and radios with easy, tactile interfaces—our devices unlock a world of audio.



Launching our Alexa scheme

The benefits of voice-activated smart technology for people living with sight loss are clear. Last year, for the first time, we started offering Alexa devices for free to people living with sight loss. The response was resounding, with hundreds of new people coming to us to take advantage of the scheme in its first six months.

We knew that, despite Alexa's obvious benefits, we needed to provide support. By pairing up with AbilityNet, we've been able to offer people new to this technology support as they grow familiar with it.

Working in partnership to extend our reach

There is an incredible community of support organisations that exist to help people living with sight loss. We have forged new partnerships with organisations like Macular Society and Retina UK to reach more people living with sight loss.

We attended these charities' forums to ensure their audiences know how they can benefit from what we have to offer. And, by giving devices to people with sight loss via our partners, we have been able to better direct our service to the communities that most need it.

We gave out

4,237

audio devices to people living with sight loss



We gave

1,728 Alexa

devices in the first six months of our new scheme



We gave

27 Concerto

devices to groups run by partner charities Macular Society and Retina UK

Doreen's story

With a little bit of help, it really is never too late to try out new technology.

At nearly 95 years old and despite her extensive age-related macular degeneration (AMD), Doreen continues to live independently in her second-floor flat in London.

Doreen is one of hundreds who benefitted from our free Amazon Echo smart speaker scheme, launched last year. Today she embraces her new speaker and marvels at the practical help and entertainment it has unlocked.

"I can replace the reading, which I can't do anymore, with listening to audiobooks. I love it."

A new way to stay connected

"Now I have 'you know who'... I don't call it by her name as she comes on!" Doreen laughs. "I can listen to so many more stations, so many programmes, and I can replace the reading, which I can't do anymore, with listening to audiobooks. I love it."

Although she has been a lifelong radio listener, Alexa offers more variety. "My radio only has four stations on it. Now I have access to so much more."



"I often think, what would my grandmother make of it—me talking to a tennis ball on the shelf."

BWBF's life-changing service

Losing the ability to watch TV and read books was a huge adjustment for Doreen, but BWBF's support has opened new opportunities for her. "I think the device is brilliant. I'm looking forward to getting better at using it and finding more entertainment."

For Doreen, the Alexa device has brought convenience, entertainment, and a renewed sense of independence. "I often think, what would my grandmother make of it—me talking to a tennis ball on the shelf," she laughs. "It's amazing!"

Finding independence through audio

Since her husband passed away, and without family living locally, being able to manage independently has been particularly important.

For Doreen, her new Alexa has been key to maintaining her independence. Beyond entertainment, she also uses the device to check the time and date, set reminders for medical appointments, and even get cooking instructions.

New services for children and young people

The benefits of technology for a child with sight loss begin in the formative years. But meeting a child's technological needs can be hard for families already facing the extra expenses that come with caring for a disabled child.

In 2024, we removed the lower age limit for people accessing our audio devices, unlocking a world of learning and entertainment for young people. We also teamed up with charities and schools to ensure our support reaches the broadest possible community of children and young people.

Reaching families with VICTA

Our new partnership with young people's sight loss charity VICTA helps ensure our support reaches the children who need it most. We work alongside the charity to provide devices that help children and young adults with their daily lives, education, and social development.

The technology we have given children through the partnership includes Alexa smart speakers, Voxblock audiobook players, and even sleep aids.

Audio-powered learning at St Vincent's School

Last year we provided free Alexa devices to St Vincent's, a specialist school for children with sensory impairments. The project is part of a wider drive to bring the benefits of smart audio technology into the educational lives of young people living with sight loss.

"The Alexa devices have had a profound and positive impact," said Steve Irvine, a teacher at the school. "They've helped the children develop communication and digital literacy skills, while encouraging independence and confidence with everyday tech."

Piloting a new scheme for children with iPads

Last year, we set up a pilot project, giving iPads to children living with sight loss. The impact was greater than we could have imagined—it unlocked independence, joy, and new skills.

We are determined to find funding to support more people who could benefit from this technology in the future.



We gave out more than **100** children's devices in the first three months of offering our new children's services



Pupils at St Vincent's school now benefit from **10** in-setting Alexa devices supplied by BWBF



We gave **10 iPads** to children and young people as part of our pilot project

Ryder's story

Nine-year-old Ryder was born with severe sight loss. Last year, he received a free iPad as part of our pilot project.

Today, he uses his device daily for schoolwork, listening to books, drawing, photography, and practical tasks.

Sharing experiences with peers

"It's been a game-changer for Ryder," his mum, Kirsty, says.

While he is learning to read braille, technology plays an increasing role in Ryder's daily life.

"He loves reading, and now he can enjoy the same books as his friends through audiobooks and downloads." With limited vision, Ryder struggles with details, "but the iPad provides access to the same learning and activities as his peers, which is invaluable." One of its most useful features is the magnifier app. "If he has a schoolbook in standard print, he can use the magnifier to read it," Kirsty explains.

"We want all our children to have the opportunity to develop interests and live a full life. Different does not mean less."

Independence through technology

The device's portability is another key advantage. "He can use it on the go—on holidays, in the car, wherever he is."

Independence is important to the family. "If we're out shopping, Ryder can use the iPad to check prices. Having tools on the move is so important."

The iPad also opens up entertainment Ryder wouldn't otherwise have easy access to. "TV isn't accessible, but with the iPad, he can watch videos."

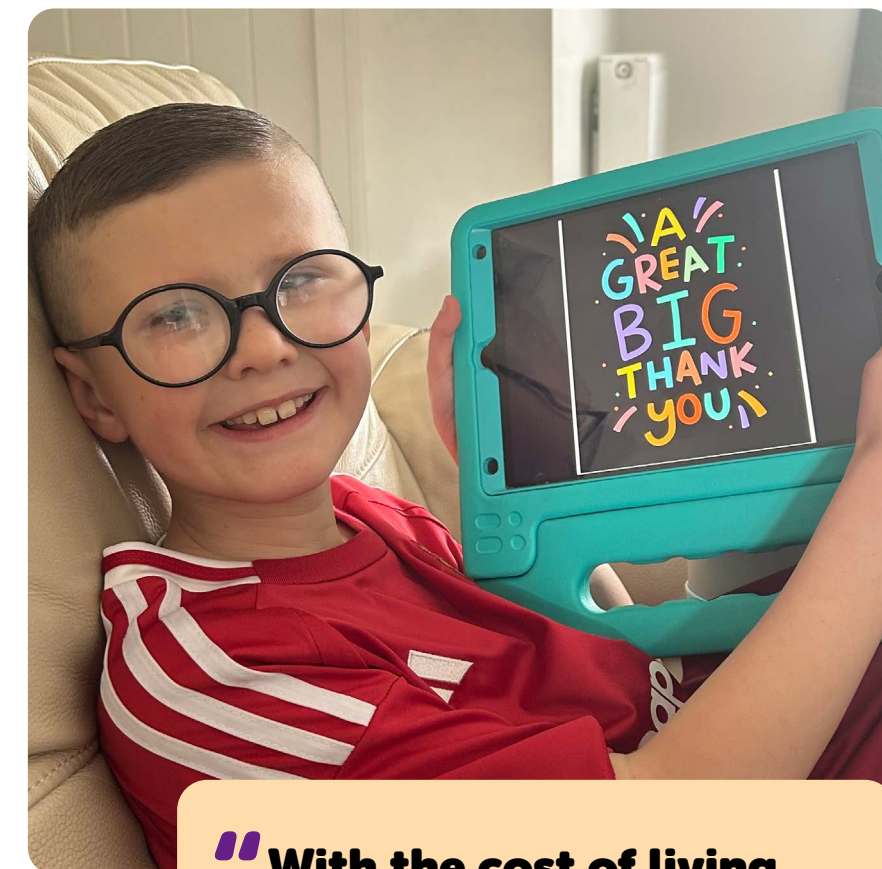
Different doesn't mean less

When Ryder's diagnosis was first confirmed, the family was devastated. But, Kirsty explains, "we were determined he'd have the same experiences as his older brother."

That determination has paid off. "Ryder is fantastic. He loves football, cycling, and so many other things. Nothing stops him. We want all our children to have the opportunity to develop interests and live a full life. Different does not mean less."

The key to inclusion

Technology plays a big role in making that possible. "It's hard when you can't just pick up and read a book like other



"With the cost of living today, everything for children with additional needs comes at a hefty price. That's why BWBF's support is so vital."

kids. That's where technology is life-changing."

Kirsty passionately advocates for families affected by sight loss. "Technology is crucial for every child, but even more so for those with disabilities, so they can learn and participate like their friends.

"With the cost of living today, everything for children with additional needs comes at a hefty price. That's why BWBF's support is so vital. It makes an incredible impact for both the child and their family."

Our audio apps

Our apps and Alexa skill open up a whole world of radio and news. Designed for people with sight loss, they remove the adverts, pop-ups, and platform-specific challenges that can make other platforms so inaccessible to people living with sight loss.

Last year our Speech Radio app grew to offer its most diverse listening experience yet. Meanwhile our Speech Talking Newspaper app and Alexa skill unlocked audio versions of hundreds of local newspapers.



Unlocking a diverse listening experience with airable

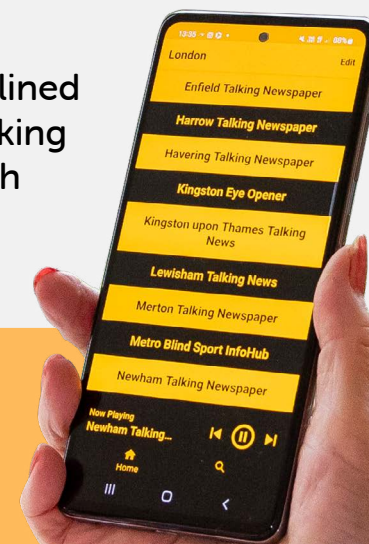
Our catalogue of radio stations on our sight loss friendly Speech Radio app grew sevenfold, thanks to our partnership with audio content aggregator airable. The partnership shows that by working together with organisations that share our values, we can achieve more for our community.

"Our passion for audio aligns perfectly with BWBF's determination to ensure everyone can enjoy the joy and connection that radio brings," says David Litt, VP Product Management at airable.

Making our apps better with VOID

By teaming up with software developers VOID, we were able to ensure our apps deliver a better experience for people living with sight loss.

After agreeing to provide pro-bono support to BWBF in November 2024, VOID completed essential maintenance and comprehensive upgrades to both apps. They also streamlined the app sign up process, making it easier for people living with sight loss to get straight to the content.



We now offer more than

70,000

radio stations via our Speech Radio app

Janet's story

Janet lives with a rare hereditary sight loss condition called Best disease. She was registered blind six years ago, at the age of 65.

Over the years, Janet's world has become smaller as her central vision has progressively deteriorated. But she's found ways to adapt and continue enjoying the things that matter. The Relish radio we gave her has helped her find entertainment and mental stimulation.

Living with an invisible disability

"People often don't realise I have a disability," she says. "Even my friends forget—I manage so well they don't see the struggle underneath."

Janet began losing her sight slowly as she was growing up, but it wasn't something she talked about at the time. "In the 1960s there was still a lot of stigma around having a disability. You just got on with it and tried to hide it," she recalls.

Janet spent most of her life working as a teacher, but, as her vision worsened, it began to affect her career. "I felt I'd missed the boat with technology, and I couldn't read screens. That was when I had to take early retirement."

"Radio has become more important. It's my entertainment and it helps me stay connected to the world."

A simple solution with a big impact

As life became more restricted and with less time for herself while caring for her husband, who has Alzheimer's disease, radio has become a key part of her daily life.

When she heard about BWBF through her local sight loss charity in Cardiff, she was keen to get a simple device that she could easily control.

"I was fascinated. So, I applied and received this fantastic radio. It felt like receiving a Christmas present."

Janet appreciates the radio's simple controls and station presets.

As a former teacher and lifelong learner, listening to Radio 4 on her new device has been part of keeping Janet's mind active.

"With so many things no longer available to me, radio has become more important. It's my entertainment and it helps me stay connected to the world."

Finding beauty in sound

Although her vision is limited, Janet values how tuned in she feels to sound, and the joy she can find in it. "I'm grateful for nature. Birdsong is beautiful. I think a lot of people miss these things because they spend so much time looking at screens."

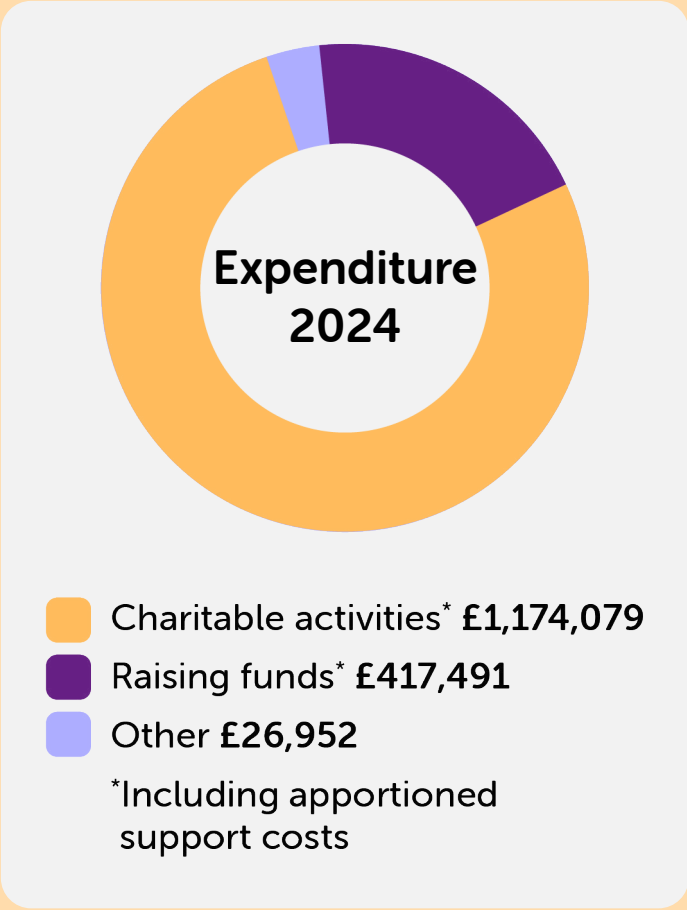
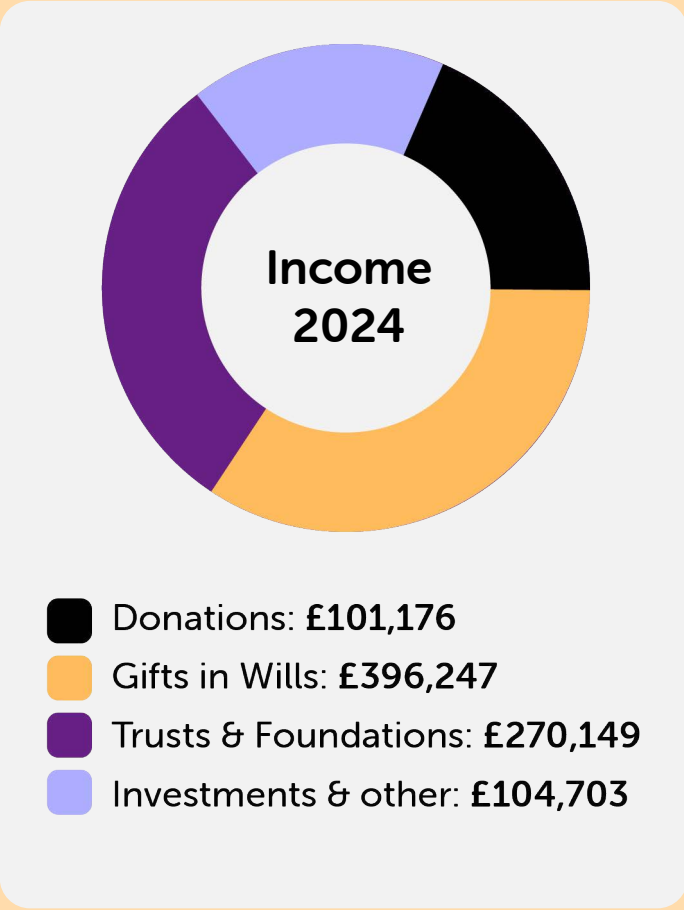
"I applied and received this fantastic radio. It felt like a Christmas present."



Our finances

We receive no government funding. Our work relies entirely on the generosity of the people and organisations that donate funds, time and skills because they share our belief in the transformative power of audio.

	2024	2023
Income	£872,275	£1,088,633
Expenditure	£1,618,522	£1,683,475
Net movement in funds (after gains on investments)	-£518,580	-£391,629
Total funds as at 31 December	£3,168,954	£3,687,534



Your support changes lives

The stories and work highlighted in this report are only possible thanks to your support.

Make a donation

Every donation we receive helps us to unlock the power of audio for blind and partially sighted people.

blind.org.uk/donate

Leave a gift in your Will

A gift in your Will, no matter the size, helps us provide future generations with connection and hours of enjoyment.

blind.org.uk/gifts-in-wills

Get your company involved

Partner with us and your business' energy and expertise can make a real difference.

blind.org.uk/partnerships

Thank you

Every donation, no matter how big, helps us change lives. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our donors, including:

- Loppylugs & Barbara Morrison Charitable Trust
- The R S MacDonald Charitable Trust
- Loseley & Guildway Charitable Trust
- Kathleen Beryl Sleigh Charitable Trust

We are stronger together. A huge thank you to all our service delivery partners who help us reach out to more people living with sight loss:

- AbilityNet
- VICTA
- Retina UK
- Macular Society
- St Vincent's School
- Talking News Federation



Your data

Our privacy policy sets out how we will use your information. To read our updated privacy policy or update your preferences about how we contact you, please visit **blind.org.uk/privacy-policy**

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