

BRITISH WIRELESS FOR THE BLIND FUND

KEEPING BLIND PEOPLE IN
TOUCH WITH THE WORLD

Unlocking a world of audio Our impact in 2022



This report is
available in
other formats



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What we do

At British Wireless for the Blind Fund (BWBF), we believe access to audio entertainment and information can be life-changing for someone living with sight loss. Our radios are a lifelong support to people in financial need. And our easy-to-use apps and skills open a world of audio content on the internet for people who might otherwise struggle to access it.

Sight loss shouldn't close the door to the experiences most people take for granted. But, sadly, too many people living with sight loss still face loneliness and social exclusion. Our radios, apps and skills provide comfort and companionship, and keep people connected with their communities, their passions, and the wider world.



Our mission

We provide audio solutions, services and support to enhance the lives of people living with sight loss and reduce loneliness and isolation.



Our vision

To consolidate our position as the 'go to' organisation by developing innovative, inclusive and trustworthy audio solutions and information services and support for people living with sight loss.



Our values

Inclusivity

We value our differences and believe all people should be represented fairly.

Innovative

We adapt our solutions and services based on valuable beneficiary feedback and knowledge.

Integrity

We deliver with integrity and compassion, drawn from our rich history and experience.

Empathy

We care greatly about keeping people connected to their communities, their passions and the wider world.

Supportive

We work together with our supporters, partners and beneficiaries to help in any way we can.

Ambitious

We are determined to do more to unlock a world of audio content for people living with sight loss.

WELCOME

From Margaret Grainger, Chief Executive

People living with sight loss shouldn't miss out on the experiences that others take for granted. It's this simple conviction that drove our founder to start raising funds for braille-dial radios 95 years ago. And that same conviction continues to underpin everything we do today.

2022 will live in our collective memories as a time of change. We faced the aftershocks of a pandemic that redefined our understanding of 'normal life'; a cost-of-living crisis unprecedented in recent memory; and the loss of our much-loved monarch, Queen Elizabeth II.

Against this backdrop of deep uncertainty, I'm immensely proud of how the British Wireless for the Blind Fund (BWBF) team and you, our supporters, have pulled together to continue to bring the joy of audio to people with sight loss.



**"Today we are
'a voice in the
room' in more than
30,000 homes
across the UK."**

A year to be proud of

Last year, we gave out nearly 2,500 free radios, more than 2,100 people downloaded our apps, and our smart speaker skills were used more than 70,000 times.

Today we are 'a voice in the room' in more than 30,000 homes across the UK.

But 2022 also saw us set out bold new ambitions for the future.

Doing more and better for people living with sight loss

Our developers are working on expanding the apps and skills we offer, with podcasts, talking books, internet browsing apps



and smart speaker skills in the making. As technology continues to change at pace, we've forged new partnerships with IT and business consulting giants CGI and Glasgow Caledonian University to evolve new audio solutions to ensure that people with sight loss aren't left behind.

For those who prefer a traditional listening experience, our new Concerto 3 – the latest in a line of devices designed in collaboration with Roberts Radio – has proven immensely popular since we launched it last summer. This firm favourite is part of an expanded range of devices offering greater choice than ever for those we support.



“We will build on our tradition and look to a future where BWBF truly is the ‘go-to’ place for audio content for people with sight loss.”

* Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB). https://www.rnib.org.uk/documents/1080/Cost_of_living_-_Final_-_1_Aug_22.pdf

Facing the cost-of-living crisis

While there's lots to celebrate, like other charities, we face new challenges as the cost-of-living crisis takes hold. We know that people with sight loss are more likely to be harder hit by rising costs*. For those at the sharp end of the crisis, our services are a lifeline.

In this context, we have redoubled our efforts to reach those who need us and to work with partners who can help us to extend our service into more homes in the coming years.

95 years of comfort, companionship and connection

2023 will mark our 95th year. For BWBF, this will be a year of innovation and ambition.

We will build on our tradition and look to a future where BWBF truly is the 'go-to' place for audio content for people with sight loss.

But this special anniversary will also be about celebrating all of you who have made our work possible. Thank you for being part of our history. Together, we can build a better future for people living with sight loss.

Margaret Grainger

The gift of independence

"It began 15 years ago," recalls Norma - one of nearly half a million people in the UK living with age-related macular degeneration.

"I can still hear the doctor saying to me: 'I'm very sorry, at the moment there is no treatment!'"

For Norma, losing her sight was life-changing.

"I could be walking in the street and walk straight past someone I know. You learn to adapt, but it can be embarrassing."

Reconnecting with lost passions

For years, Norma found pleasure in her eclectic music collection.

"I like everything from Billy Joel to Queen," she says. "My son's girlfriend once said: 'I can't believe your mother plays Lily Allen records'. But I'll play anything if I like it."

But Norma's worsening sight meant she struggled to use the very thing she once took for granted - her radio.



"My CDs used to give me real joy. I was seriously thinking of getting rid of them. But no, I've got my life back now!"

"I kept pressing the wrong buttons and having to say: 'Help! I've messed it up again.' For two years I wasn't able to play my CDs."

For someone like Norma, BWBF's new Concerto 3 was the perfect solution: a specially adapted device she could use independently to reconnect with a beloved CD collection that had been gathering dust.

"My CDs used to give me real joy. I was seriously thinking of getting rid of them. But no, I've got my life back now!"

"And all the yellow buttons make such a difference. I do value the independence of having something I can do for myself. I couldn't live without my radio. It's on all the time - all day. It's like company."

Spreading the word

Norma was so happy with her radio she turned her attention to making sure more people know about BWBF's service.

"There are lots of things out there for partially sighted people," Norma explains, "but this radio has really helped. It's changed my life."

"If more people knew about what BWBF does," she says, "it could benefit so many."




**Click here
to listen to
Norma's story**

A voice in the room for people with sight loss

It might seem like a simple thing, but a radio can be life-changing for someone living with sight loss. Since BWBF was born in 1928, our devices have brought comfort and companionship, and kept people in touch with their passions, interests and the wider world.

The right radio for the right person

People living with sight loss are no different to other consumers – they want choice, quality and products that satisfy their needs. That's why we're proud to have expanded our range of radios in 2022 to offer the greatest ever choice.

Today, our sets range from our small portable devices to our brand-new

Concerto 3; offering CD, tape, USB and radio functionality, with a purpose-designed, sight-loss-friendly interface. All are chosen because they're adapted or easy to use for people living with sight loss.

Roberts Radio partnership goes from strength to strength

Our longstanding partnership with Roberts Radio has continued to be crucial, allowing us to deliver high-quality equipment designed to meet the specific needs of people living with sight loss.



The number of people who got a face-to-face introduction to their radio increased by 26%

And we had 7,860 interactions with people we support



The people we support often tell us they value both the tailored equipment we provide and the quality that is synonymous with the Roberts brand.

The personal touch

BWBF is about so much more than the boxes we ship. Every person we supply with a radio will have a one-to-one conversation to help them feel confident with their new device. As Covid restrictions recede, we have increased the number of face-to-face visits that our staff, volunteers and partners make. Over the coming year, we will expand our volunteer network so that everyone who wants a face-to-face delivery and introduction to their radio can get it.



We now offer 9 different devices, our biggest ever range

2,480 radios were provided on our free lifetime loan scheme



July 2022 Concerto 3 launches

Our new Concerto 3 is released, the latest in a long line of specially adapted devices, designed in collaboration with Roberts Radio.



October 2022 Free smart speakers for people with sight loss in North East trial

BWBF launches 'adopt an Alexa', a new trial exploring the benefits of smart speakers for people with sight loss. If successful, the charity hopes to offer people this option in years to come.



Fighting on with the help of a simple radio

"My message to anyone living with sight loss is that they should have the courage to live on," says Krishna, who started to lose his vision 20 years ago. "And once they have the courage to live on, there are a lot of things that are available to them to make their life better. And one of those things is probably a simple radio."

Krishna's determination to get the most from life hasn't faltered since he was diagnosed with a debilitating and gradually deteriorating eye condition.

"I thought: 'I'm not going to allow this to get control of me. I'm going to carry on and fight.'"

One radio – endless possibilities

Krishna discovered BWBF when his social worker mentioned the charity. His BWBF radio has helped him keep his mind active and stay in touch with his interests.

"When my office work started to diminish," he explains, "I had to think about how I



"People might say: 'It's just a radio'. Not at all! For me, it's almost like a living companion."

was going to manage my life in a useful way."

Krishna uses the full range of functions on his Concerto 3, from listening to the radio, to enjoying audio books using the CD and USB players. He credits the sight-loss-friendly design with making it easy for him to access all the content he wants.

"This system gives me so many different options during a typical day. It connects me with the outside world and allows me to interact and I get such a wealth of information through the radio.

"People might say: 'It's just a radio'. Not at all! For me, it's almost like a living companion."

When something works, share it

Krishna, who spends his spare time mentoring other people living with sight loss, always tells the people he meets about BWBF.

"Without the radio, I'd be missing something which I'm almost not able to explain in words. A big part of life would be missing. This radio has given me another powerful tool to overcome my limitations caused by my blindness.

"When I know something good is happening for a blind person, if I see another blind person, I'm going to tell them!"




**Click here
to listen to
Krishna's story**

Volunteers helping to reach every corner of the UK



"I don't think people appreciate just how much of a lifeline having the radio is," reflects John who has been volunteering with BWBF in some of the most remote parts of Scotland for five years. "The Highland

County is bigger than Belgium and social exclusion is one of the big problems.

"More than half the people I meet are living on their own."

When John retired from his career working with people living with sight loss, he wanted to keep making a difference.

Today, he helps BWBF keep people connected through the joy of radio.



"When you're installing the radio, you can almost see the light coming on in their life."

A personal service

"The one thing that the people I meet have in common is a huge amount of frustration that they're losing their sight. I try and get an idea of what they're going to use the radio for and that helps me decide which model to give them."

The result, he says, can be awe-inspiring.

"When you're installing the radio, you can almost see the light coming on in their life."

Life-enhancing, life-changing

John's volunteering hasn't just changed the lives of the people he meets, it's also been a huge source of fulfilment in his own life.

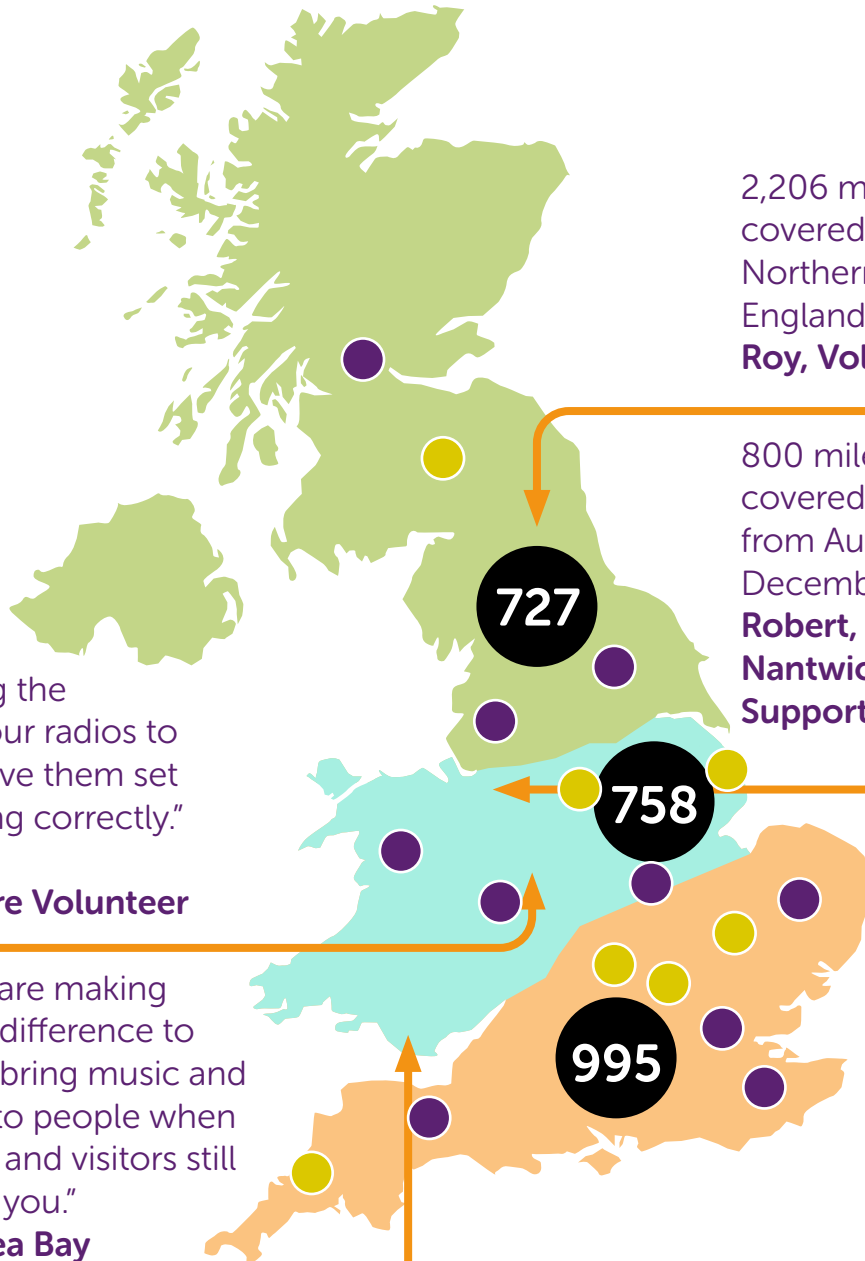
"When someone starts to lose their sight, their whole world starts to close in on them. To be able to open that up by putting a radio in their hand and putting them in control of that radio is a very empowering and enlightening thing.

"When I walk down the path after installing a radio, I get quite a nice buzz knowing that I've made a difference to somebody's life."

2,480
Radio sets
issued

29
New Talking
Newspaper
partnerships

33
Regional
volunteers



2,206 miles
covered in
Northern
England in 2022.
Roy, Volunteer

800 miles
covered, 26 visits
from August to
December.
**Robert,
Nantwich Radio
Supporter**

"I enjoy calling the recipients of our radios to check they have them set up and working correctly."
**Maurice,
Worcestershire Volunteer**

"BWBF radios are making an enormous difference to patients; they bring music and conversation to people when days are long, and visitors still scarce. Thank you."
**Betsy, Swansea Bay
University Health Board**

OUR APPS & SKILLS*

Unlocking a world of online audio

Accessing audio content on the internet can be riddled with challenges if you're living with sight loss.

Over the last year technology has continued to change, with bespoke internet players favoured by some of the people we support fast becoming unviable. Meanwhile, too often mainstream websites and apps continue to be hard-to-navigate – they simply aren't designed for people living with sight loss.

In this context, we continue to focus on developing and adapting our easy-to-use audio apps and skills.

Our easy-to-use apps & skills

This year thousands of new users benefited from our free-to-download apps and skills. Through our partnership with Talking News Federation, we continued to grow our range of publications available,

with 33 new publications joining our Talking Newspaper app and smart speaker skill. Meanwhile our Speech Radio app users had access to over 10,000 radio stations – all via a simple, sight-loss-friendly interface.

Supporting people through change

The generational digital divide is even more acute when it comes to people living with sight loss. Although younger people are likely to embrace smart technology, some of our older service users tell us that they struggle to adjust.

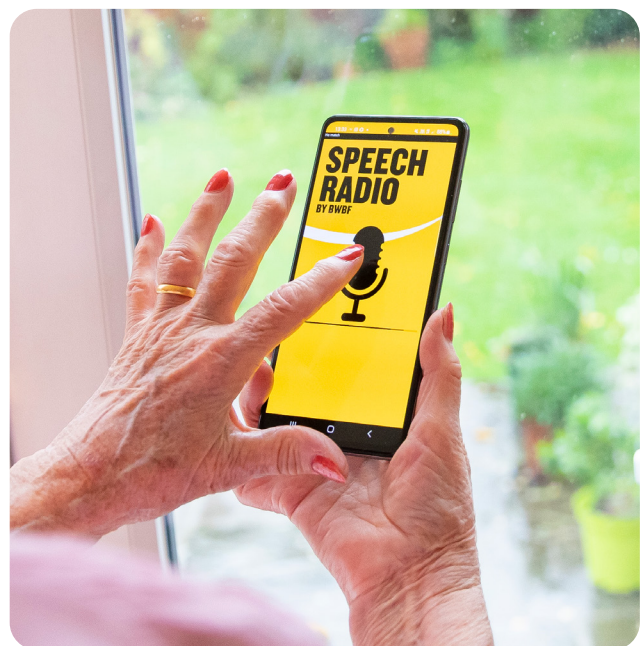
This year our team spoke to over a hundred people offering bespoke one-to-one support to move onto our apps and skills.



4,792 app and skill downloads since we launched

2,154 app downloads

*A skill is an application specific to Alexa which enables the device to find what you are asking for.





Expanding our offer

We want to do more for people with sight loss. That's why in 2022 our development team turned its attention to unlocking more of the internet for people living with sight loss, with new podcast, talking books and internet browsing apps and skills in production.



153 one-to-one consultations to help people move to our apps and skills

Our smart speaker skills were used 73,550 times

October 2022

App development with CGI

Our new partnership with IT and business consulting giants CGI begins, with a focus on improving our range of apps and skills.

CGI's pro-bono support team is on hand to make the next phase of developments a reality.



October 2022

Smart speaker research with Glasgow Caledonian University

Our new research collaboration begins with Glasgow Caledonian University, exploring challenges people face when using devices like Alexa.

The project will lay the foundation for better smart speakers for people living with sight loss.



Much more than an app

"I'm no different than anyone else," says Jason who has never seen due to a life-changing error in the hospital when he was born.

"I've got the same needs, desires, wants, aspirations and fears that every other person on this planet has. It's just my eyes that don't work."

Jason won't let his sight loss stand in the way of pursuing the passions and hobbies most people take for granted. And BWBF's Speech Radio phone app has kept him connected to the things he loves.

"It's very user friendly and it's very blind friendly. It's a huge part of my life. I use it in the middle of the night to listen to sports. I use it to listen to radio drama. I use it to listen to music."

The app, says Jason, brings him closer to the world he lives in.

"If I haven't touched something, I don't have a picture in my mind. Listening to

something on the radio gives you that – it lets you touch something that you can't see."

Connecting with loved ones

But BWBF is about more than keeping Jason in touch with his hobbies. It's about bonding with those dearest to him: his two young daughters.

"They come every other weekend and we listen to radio dramas or sports.

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

A constant connection

Jason credits BWBF with helping his mental health.

"BWBF has helped me become the person that I am today," he says.

"When I have low days, the fact I can switch on BWBF any time of day or night, I can't think of anything more amazing."

"I've got the same needs, desires, wants, aspirations and fears that every other person on this planet has. It's just my eyes that don't work."





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

FORWARD LOOK

From Daniel Smith, Chairman of BWBF's Board of Trustees

If you speak to some of the many people who use BWBF's services, you'll most likely hear our radios and apps being described as 'a lifeline' or 'a friend'. Just read the personal stories in this report and you'll conclude that BWBF is about so much more than free provision of radios and apps.

This charity is about giving people independence and companionship, helping them to keep a firm hold of their sense of self. These are some of the very fundamentals of life – vital things that none of us should be living without.

BWBF is the only charity in the UK dedicated to providing free radios and audio apps for people living with sight loss. With the number of people experiencing sight loss expected to double to more than 4 million by 2050, we must direct all our efforts towards



"This charity is about giving people independence and companionship, helping them to keep a firm hold of their sense of self."



strengthening our offer so that we can do even greater things for more people in the future.

A hard road ahead for charities

As the cost-of-living crisis begins to bite, these have become challenging times for all charities not in receipt of continuing government support. Analysis from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) reveals a perfect storm, with running costs increasing at the same time as voluntary income is coming under pressure. All this, while many more people are turning to the third sector for essential help. We must still be there for those who need us.

Together we are stronger

BWBF is a small charity with big ambitions, punching well above its weight. Our challenge for the coming

year will be about stepping up to serve even more people living with sight loss.

If I could choose just one word to characterise our development plan for 2023, it would be 'partnership'.

There are countless companies, committed funders and passionate people out there who could help us raise the bar.

So, I will ask one thing. If you do know of a person or an organisation able and willing to help create our next app or deliver our radios to more people, please get in touch and become a vital part of our improved future provision for people living with sight loss.

A special thank you

As we enter our 95th year, we look to the future of BWBF with optimism and determination, resolving to enhance our service and to do more for the increasing numbers of people living with sight loss.

I want to say a big thank you to all our donors, patrons, funders, partners and volunteers for being a vibrant part of the rich and inspiring story that is BWBF. Your support is truly life changing. I am confident that, together, we will achieve even more success in the years to come.



OUR FINANCES

Income

	2022	2021
Legacies	1,210,947	656,564
Marketing sales	142,864	101,734
Trusts & foundations	117,390	191,889
Investments & other income	74,877	77,806
Donations	96,329	129,169
Total income	1,642,407	1,157,162

Expenditure

	2022	2021
Delivering charitable objectives	937,438	802,307
Support	352,099	467,621
Fundraising	245,094	188,374
Governance	15,967	14,640
Total Expenditure	1,550,598	1,472,942
Reserves	3,962,491	4,124,575

SUPPORT US

With your help, we can do more and better for people living with sight loss across the UK.

**Help us change lives.
Support BWBF today.**



Donate

Whatever you can give, know that your support will help us provide comfort, companionship and connection for people living with sight loss, via our radios and apps.

Simply use the form on the next page or visit blind.org.uk/donate.

Remember us in your will

Leaving a gift in your will is a wonderful way to ensure we can be there for the next generation of people living with sight loss. Once you've considered your loved ones, any gift you can give will make the world of difference.

Find out how at blind.org.uk/support-us.

Get your company involved

Could your company help us deliver our next big project? We've got big ambitions to reach more people living with sight loss via our apps, skills, and radios.

If you think you can help us, get in touch at corporates@blind.org.uk.

Other ways to give

From giving in memory of a loved one, to donating shares or giving as you earn or shop, there are lots more ways you can support us.

Discover more at blind.org.uk/support-us.

Your donation will help British Wireless for the Blind Fund to build a better future for people living with sight loss. **Thank you!**

I enclose a cheque for £

(made payable to British Wireless for the Blind Fund)

or

Please debit my: Mastercard Visa CAF Charity Card (Please tick)

For the amount of £

Card number

Start date / Expiry date /

ACCOUNT HOLDER DETAILS

Name

Address

Postcode

Email

Telephone

If you would prefer to make a regular gift

- request a Direct Debit form from Julie Hocking on **01622 754757** or by emailing **julieh@blind.org.uk**
- download the form from our website – **www.blind.org.uk/support-us**
- set up a Direct Debit via the following webpage – **www.blind.org.uk/donate**

Please turn over >

Make your gift worth even more

giftaid it

If you would like to make your donation go **25% further** through allowing us to claim Gift Aid, simply sign the declaration below. Using Gift Aid means that **for every pound you give, we get an extra 25 pence** from HM Revenue & Customs.

Simply complete and return this form and we'll do the rest!

I am a UK tax payer and would like to Gift Aid my donation and any donations I make in future or have made in the past four years.

I understand if I pay less income tax and/or capital gains tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Please notify BWBF if you want to cancel this declaration, change your name or home address or no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains. If you pay income tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Signature

Date

Our promise to you

BWBF values its supporters.

We would not be able to continue our work without you.

It's important to us that you feel informed about our news, future developments and fundraising. We want to share with you how your amazing support helps to change the lives of people living with sight loss across the UK.

If you do not wish to be contacted, or you would like to change how we contact you, let us know at any time using the following details –

mydata@blind.org.uk, 01622 754757, 10 Albion Place, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 5DZ, www.blind.org.uk/privacy-policy/

We respect your privacy and remain committed to ethical and responsible fundraising and communications. Your details will be stored securely and we will never sell them. However, from time to time we may need to share your details with trusted partners authorised to work on our behalf such as our printers or agents (e.g. your local blind association).

For further information please refer to our privacy policy – www.blind.org.uk/privacy-policy/

Thank you to our supporters and partners

WAITROSE
& PARTNERS



Roberts



Talking News Federation

CGI



The Lopylugs and
Barbara Morrison
Charitable Trust

The Plum Trust

Paul Easton

31st December 1953 – 16th February 2023

British Wireless for the Blind Fund would like to dedicate this report to our longstanding Board member and friend, who sadly passed away in February.

Paul was a firm supporter of BWBF for more than 20 years, during which time he served on BWBF's Board of Trustees, including a period as Vice Chair of the charity.

Paul generously lent us his experience, expertise and connections to ensure that people living with sight loss could enjoy the thing he was passionate about: the radio. He will be sorely missed by everyone.

8 The age of our
youngest radio
recipient



107 The age of our
oldest radio
recipient

BRITISH WIRELESS FOR THE BLIND FUND

KEEPING BLIND PEOPLE IN
TOUCH WITH THE WORLD

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