

BRITISH WIRELESS FOR THE BLIND FUND

KEEPING BLIND PEOPLE IN
TOUCH WITH THE WORLD

Working to alleviate
loneliness and
isolation since 1928.



This report is available in other formats

Foreword

Margaret Grainger
CEO



It is difficult to know where to start when reflecting on last year and, as I sit and write this to you, I am overwhelmed by all

we have achieved together despite the difficulties of 2020. In my 35 years with British Wireless, last year will be the one I look back on like no other. The Covid-19 pandemic affected us all and charities were no exception.

In March last year we followed government guidelines and safely moved our team to remote working, many adjusting their home life to cope whilst also dealing with the personal challenges we all faced. This team have made me prouder than I thought possible.

With the well-being of staff and volunteers at the forefront of my mind, yet conscious that our beneficiaries would need us more than ever, we adapted our service and developed BWBFconnect. Alongside

our trusted couriers, this doorstep delivery service - with follow-up phone support - meant we continued to be there for hundreds of people with visual impairments. You can read more about the reach of this service on page 4.

The list of people to thank this year is endless – from our team, our volunteers, our couriers, and our partners at Roberts Radio; to the beneficiaries who have supported our work by sharing their personal experiences.

More than ever I want to say a very special thank you to our funders and supporters without whom none of this would be possible.

I hope you enjoy reading more about our activities from 2020 and I hope you remain safe and well as these difficult times pass.

Margaret Grainger

From our Chairman

Daniel Smith

Chairman of BWBF's Board of Trustees



Despite the stark reality that 2020 presented us with more - and much greater - challenges than anyone could have predicted, I have felt

an even deeper sense of satisfaction and gratitude than I have experienced before during my many years of association with the charitable sector. I could not be more proud of the way in which the staff and volunteers of British Wireless have pulled together to ensure that our much-valued service has been able to continue. Their dedication to British Wireless and its aims has been demonstrated by their commitment and determination to serve our beneficiaries and in the level of compassion they have all shown.

Above all I could not be more grateful to you, our supporters.

Thanks to your unfailing support, the members of our team have never felt that they are on their own while battling the difficulties throughout 2020. They have all drawn strength from recognising your continuing commitment to British Wireless

and our beneficiaries. While, of course, we acknowledge and celebrate the hard work and determination of the BWBF team, it is *you* who keep us going.

It is *you* helping thousands of people living with sight loss through a challenging time. *You* provide that comforting voice in the home and *you* help to combat that deep sense of isolation, the emotional impact of which many people have never before had to face.

Together we have persevered. It is that togetherness which makes the future seem positive and our aspirations to improve our service achievable.

Please accept our sincere heartfelt thanks, not only from me personally as the chair of this great organisation, but also from my fellow trustees, our team, our volunteers and, of course, our many beneficiaries – those whose days have been made appreciably brighter thanks to you.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Daniel Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

BWBFconnect

British Wireless pride ourselves not only on providing adapted technology on free loan to people who are visually impaired, but also on being a social lifeline for so many experiencing isolation. For those living with sight loss the world can already be a lonely, and often scary, place. Lockdown was to make this worse.

March 2020 marked a turning point for us all. For British Wireless, it presented challenges never faced before. As a service delivered for so many years through face-to-face support we quickly realised we would need to review our processes in order to continue providing support. The safety of our vulnerable beneficiaries, as well as our volunteers and staff, was paramount.

Just days after lockdown was announced we launched a revised service – BWBFconnect. Through doorstep delivery and remote telephone support radios could be safely provided, delivered using a trusted courier service with installation carried out over the telephone by our experienced Regional Development Managers (RDMs) and an army of volunteers.

Our RDMs worked tirelessly from their own homes ensuring radios were sent out across the UK. Each recipient was talked through setting up their device, and remote

follow-up support was provided. There was always someone at the end of the phone.

During unsettling times, it became clear that the companionship of radio was needed like never before. A voice of comfort. A vital source of information. A friendly port of call when the days seemed long, or lonely.

Access to news and information and the ability to escape into a book or enjoy music became vital lifelines for us all during 2020. As we faced the unknown, and experienced separation from loved ones and support networks, music or a comforting voice made the world of difference. BWBF was determined to ensure that people living with sight loss continued to have access to this variety of entertainment.

From the Highlands of Scotland down to the most southerly reaches of England, BWBFconnect has provided a lifeline to hundreds of blind and partially sighted people. In 2020 this service reached over 1,300 people across the UK; alleviating loneliness and providing the companionship of a friendly voice during an uncertain and frightening time.

Our adapted sets gave hours of entertainment -simply at the touch of a button.



Photo: Sally Ashworth Photography

Jan's Story

Jan Fraser says that her new adapted radio from British Wireless has opened up her world.

Having searched for the right radio to help her read books and access entertainment for a long time Mrs Fraser, 77, was finding lockdown particularly tough.

But now, thanks to British Wireless and the "wonderful" BWBFconnect service, she says life has taken a turn for the better.

"Apart from visits to hospital, I've been housebound since last March. I'm stuck in the house," she said.

"This radio makes a difference to the feeling of isolation.

"I've got a dog to walk round the garden and two cats – that keeps me going. But my family live 40 miles away.

"I can sit here and look out of the window – but come 4pm I used to go to bed and just want to sleep.

"Once I got your 'Boogie Box' I couldn't wait to put it on and I stay up. You've no idea – I can take myself anywhere I want to be."

Mrs Fraser was directed to British Wireless by the RNIB, and she says she couldn't be more grateful for the doorstep delivery and remote support service she was able to access.



"Oh my goodness me, it's fantastic. I can't thank you enough."

"They put me through to Steven, who was fantastic. He gave me a Concerto 2 – it does everything. It practically makes my breakfast," she joked.

"I can't believe it, it's so good.

"When I lost my eyesight I had to give up driving - I sit 8 inches away from the TV but I can't see anything, and I have had to give up reading.

"Now I'm able to get my films and stories and it feels like I'm acting normal again.

"This made all the difference in the world, and still does. It's changed my life after not being able to read a book."

Mrs Fraser says she is so happy with the service provided by BWBF that she plans to shout about it from the rooftops.

"You're just fantastic," she said.

"I want other people to know that too.

"I will be letting people know how much my 'Boogie Box' has done for me."

What was going on in your area?

As a national charity British Wireless is proud to support people who are visually impaired across the whole of the UK. We are also proud to take a local approach in all areas and, as such, there were plenty of different activities taking place everywhere.

Reaching out

While Regional Development Manager for the North, Steven Poole, is more used to hitting the road and travelling vast distances to visit our beneficiaries, 2020 remained a busy time. Steven, based in **Liverpool**, dealt with all the orders for BWBFconnect and organised sets to be delivered to places such as **Belfast**, **Inverness** and **Thurso**.

Regional Development Manager Simon Parsons continued to interact with our agents and their members during the 2020 lockdown. He joined live Facebook chats including **Dorset** Association for the Blind, Support 4 Sight in **Essex** and Cam Sight our agent in **Cambridge**.

BWBFconnect

The idea for the new BWBFconnect delivery service all started in **Staffordshire**, in the living room of Regional Development Manager Sophie Wheldon. It was developed to ensure an uninterrupted service for all our beneficiaries both old and new. In 2020 over 1,300 people received support thanks to this scheme.

Simon was also invited to talk about the work of British Wireless during a live interview with Thurrock Business Radio in **Essex**. But it wasn't all business – he shared his favourite music with the listeners and talked through some of his personal choices.

Joining forces

Since providing a large number of sets on free loan to recipients at the McCarthy and Stone Retirement Development in Worle, **Somerset**, we started working in partnership with the McCarthy and Stone Foundation, who generously provided a grant to supply equipment across the Clevedon area in **Bristol**.

Having joined forces with a number of organisations in 2020 we are also looking forward to a joint project with AbilityNet in **Scotland**. AbilityNet supports people of any age, living with any disability or impairment, to use technology to achieve their goals. We're delighted to be connecting with their large network of volunteers to further support British Wireless beneficiaries. We look forward to telling you more about this collaboration in the future.

Fundraising

The fundraising effort also continued and we must say a big thank you to Waitrose stores across the South East including Havant in **Hampshire**, Caterham in **Surrey**, Uckfield in **East Sussex** and Sevenoaks in **Kent** to name a few. A number of stores across **London** helped raise nearly £7,000 during 2020 for new equipment in their local store areas.

The pandemic did not stop us having opportunities to raise awareness of our services and a number of interactive web talks took place with our friends at the Macular Society. The support groups who benefitted from this included some in **Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Buckinghamshire** and both the London Bridge and Hammersmith and Fulham groups in **London**. Supported by our wonderful volunteers we were also able to take part in discussions covering **Dundee, Lancashire, Cumbria** and **Dumfries and Galloway**.

Support through lockdown

Beacon Centre for the Blind, a sight loss charity in **Wolverhampton** often refer people in need of support to our service and in 2020 told us: "We have a member who is 99 years old and gets great enjoyment from his radio - he plays it every day. This has helped to support him with the isolation he has felt and the loneliness over the past 12 months. When we call we hear his radio blaring away and have discussions on what he's been listening to."

Our volunteers



Our volunteers continued to be a vital part of our operation, with many still supporting our work from their homes. A team of volunteers set to work making follow-up phone calls to beneficiaries all over the country from **Cornwall** to **Cardiff** to **Manchester**. These calls ensured recipients were fully supported in navigating the functions of their new sets. Phone volunteer David said: "It is so uplifting when a recipient completes the challenge and you can feel the smile on their face by their tone of voice." In other areas such as **County Durham** and **Ayrshire** volunteers were contacting care homes in their regions to offer support.

The Companionship of Radio

The comfort and support of friends and family is vital during hard times.

But lockdown has been an isolating time for so many people living alone, at a time when support has been needed more than ever.

Residents of care homes have felt the impact of the pandemic acutely, with visits from loved ones no longer allowed, and many social activities provided from the outside world on hold.

At Fussells Court Retirement Development, residents saw life change dramatically during lockdown – and House Manager Sharon Bird says it hit them hard.

“Residents here are very sociable usually and they live for their entertainment and social events – all of which ceased due to the Covid-19 pandemic,” she said.

“We have a high number of individuals living alone. Some don’t have families at all and others have families who live far away.

“You may well imagine how lonely and isolating life can be for someone living alone.

“No visits from family, friends or neighbours - only looking forward to the carers and nurses calling in throughout the day.”

But it was during an afternoon of researching safe entertainment for the residents that Sharon came across



British Wireless for the Blind Fund – and everything began to change.

“We have 45 residents all at varying levels of independence and, whilst there are the common age related conditions, the most hindering and frustrating for people here is their failing eyesight,” she said.

“One Monday afternoon I had been pondering through a list of possible ‘virtual’ quizzes, games, and bingo - everyone involved would be in their separate apartments - and it dawned on me how the most in need could not join in because of their eye conditions.

“I know several ladies enjoy stories and story-telling, and often their only activity is

“They are incredibly well used, and give hours of entertainment to the residents.”



listening to programmes on TV.

“It got me thinking about what services might be available for the elderly, disabled and blind or partially sighted.

“I came across the website for British Wireless for the Blind Fund.

“Talking books on CD could open another world to my residents who were already disadvantaged visually - and isolated because of their need to stay safe.”

Sharon decided to reach out to British Wireless, and says residents were thrilled to be offered our Concerto 2 Radio/CD players free of charge.

“They could not have come at a better

time. So many of our residents struggle at night time with loneliness - coupled with lockdown, no visitors and added problems with vision issues,” she said.

“Many have had their eye operations and treatments either cancelled or greatly delayed as a result of Covid.

“We’ve not been without our share of people with anxiety, loneliness, isolation and depression.

“It would be true also that individuals have struggled with their mental health – particularly through the pandemic.”

Sharon says that the adapted Concerto 2s – with their bright yellow, raised buttons – are ideal for the residents, as they are so easy to use.

And she says the radios really have opened up a whole world of entertainment for residents at a difficult time.

“I have a number of story CDs and I had a local group donate others. The residents have been working their way through the stories, particularly on long, cold and dark evenings,” she said.

“They particularly like the radios because they have CD and cassette – so many of them can play their old recordings as well!

“Most recipients have their unit on centre stage as pride of ‘view’.”

How your gift will help

British Wireless receives no government funding so we are entirely reliant on the generosity of our supporters. We would not be able to provide our vital service without your help.

We are incredibly grateful for all the support we receive. Here are a few ways you can help us continue to provide greater independence and quality of life for people living with sight loss.

£225

The **Concerto 2** has always been a firm favourite as it has so many functions including DAB & FM radio, CD and cassette player and USB playback.

£100

We remain committed to the ongoing funding of our in-house technology development team, who continue to work on bringing the most up-to-date solutions to all our listeners.

£10

All our devices can come with a set of personal headphones, allowing people to sit in the same room as others while enjoying a book.

£223

The newest radio in our range, the **Opus**, has proved to be a huge success. It has Bluetooth audio streaming from a smart device, USB recording and playback.

£35

If someone's much-loved set develops a problem, it may just need a quick service or repair which we can easily arrange.

£5

All our beneficiaries receive a follow-up phone call after delivery of their set – as well as an accessible instruction manual and information leaflet.



Thank you for your support

Please note the above amounts reflect a return to our standard service. BWBFconnect costs may vary.

"I enjoy listening before going off to sleep. Whilst at home the radio is on all day. It stops isolation when I'm on my own." Julia Canham

Together we can help even more people who may be feeling separated from everyday life.

Please help us continue to reduce isolation by giving a gift to British Wireless.

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

or

If you would prefer to make a regular gift, you can request a Direct Debit form from Julie Hocking on 01622 754757 or by emailing julieh@blind.org.uk

Alternatively you can set up a Direct Debit via our website or simply download the form on the following page - 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 visually impaired people 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/

Technology for the Future

We live in an ever-changing world, one which is being driven by technology. British Wireless is committed to developing new ways to ensure those living with sight loss stay connected to the world around them.

In order to meet the diverse needs of our beneficiaries British Wireless continues to develop new technology to complement our range of radios. Much good has come from the advances in technology in the last 10 years. Our app-based products give the user the freedom and comfort of using their own device, with which they are more familiar.

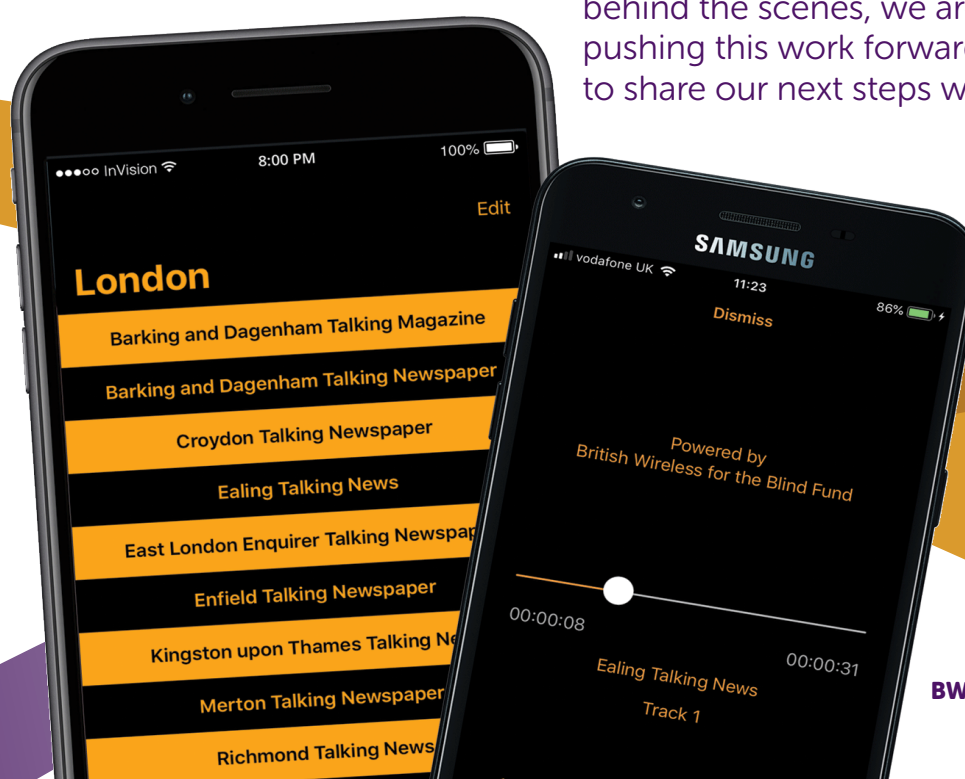
Back in 2019 we took our first step into app-based solutions. Our Talking Newspaper app – which we designed and developed in-house in partnership with the Talking News Federation – has gone from strength to strength with over 2,500 downloads so far.

Throughout 2020 we continued to build on this success. We have begun to break new boundaries, with our research and development focused on smart phone apps using full speech control.

As we turn our attention to content we are also working on a number of ideas around providing bespoke user experiences. Apps which recognise and remember each beneficiary, and therefore provide listening suggestions based on what they already engage with, is an area that we are particularly excited about.

As more and more of what we do in life – forms we need to complete, accessing the latest news and even communicating with friends and family – becomes online dependant, British Wireless has a clear aim: we will continue to push the limitations of the internet for people living with sight loss. And, of course, there is one thing that sets us apart – everything we produce will continue to be free of charge to those eligible.

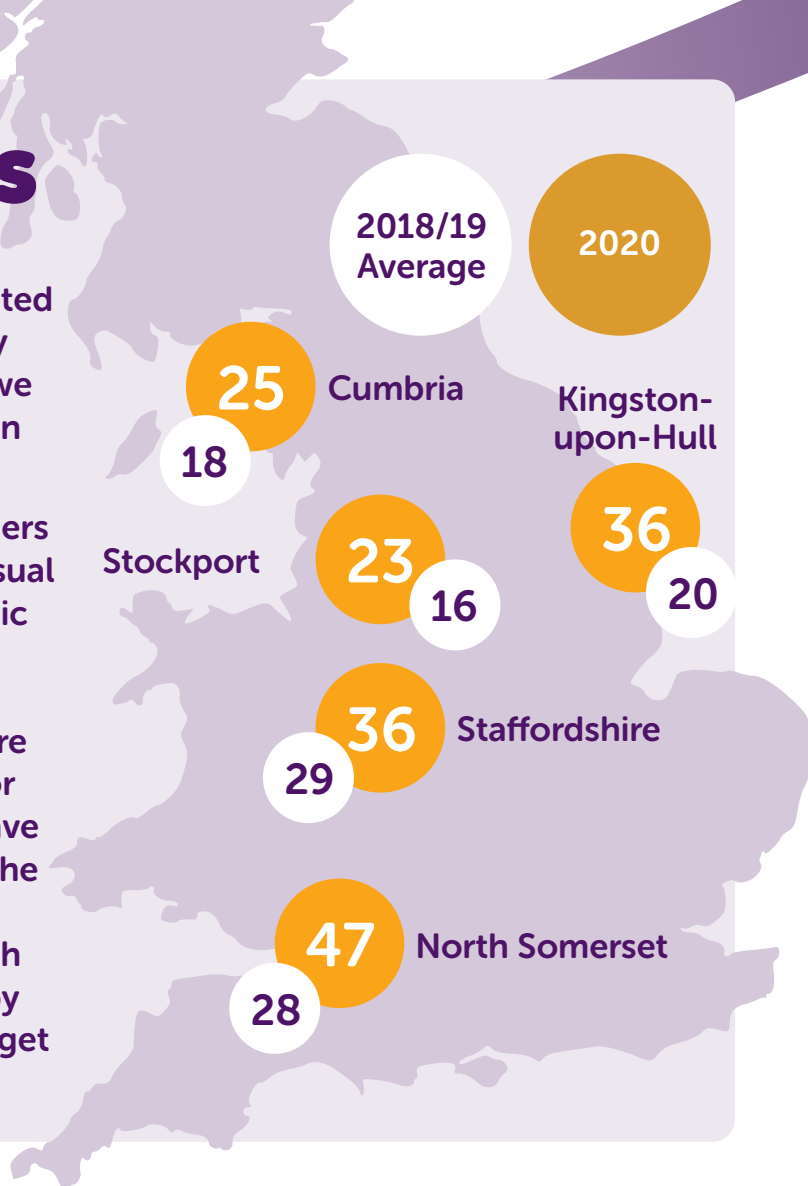
Whilst the hard work on these breakthroughs is currently very much behind the scenes, we are excited about pushing this work forward and being able to share our next steps with you very soon.



Our Successes

Despite the challenges of 2020 British Wireless continued to provide free adapted radios to those in need giving out nearly 2,000 sets throughout the year. In fact we saw a significant up-take in our service in some areas of the UK.

As some of our agents and charity partners were no longer able to continue their usual support of our work during the pandemic British Wireless stepped in to ensure all beneficiaries still received a seamless service. It was heart-warming to be there not just for our beneficiaries, but also for the community of organisations who have been so important to our success over the years. A wide group of charities provide such integral support to those living with sight loss and we are determined that, by helping each other, together we will all get through these shared challenges.



Our Finances

Income

	2020	2019
Legacies	635,980	697,551
Marketing Sales	130,193	136,266
Trusts & Foundations	165,128	164,936
Investments & other income	80,227	96,750
Donations	117,715	80,777
Total Income	1,129,243	1,176,280

Expenditure

	2020	2019
Delivering charitable objectives	821,049	1,105,374
Support costs	456,703	499,531
Fundraising	197,391	273,864
Governance costs	23,208	33,718
Total Expenditure	1,498,351	1,912,487
Reserves	4,302,099	4,750,199

Thank You

Supporting people who are visually impaired, particularly in such trying times, remains a team effort. Despite the difficulties of 2020 so many of you have come together to help combat the isolation and loneliness so often experienced with sight loss.

Thank you to everyone who supported us. We look forward to many more years working with you and we cannot wait to be able to thank you in person in the not too distant future.

Our supporters in 2020 have included:

KIND.



Waitrose

The Loppylugs and Barbara Morrison Charitable Trust

The McCarthy Stone Foundation

The Plum Trust

All our dedicated volunteers across the country

This year we also want to say a big thank you to all the key workers who kept us going in 2020.



In particular, our sincere thanks goes to everyone in the NHS. You will have touched the lives of so many of our beneficiaries during their sight loss journey and your dedication throughout the pandemic is very much appreciated by us all.

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How to contact us:

British Wireless for the Blind Fund
10 Albion Place
Maidstone
Kent
ME14 5DZ

Tel: **01622 754757**

Email: **info@blind.org.uk**

Web: **www.blind.org.uk**

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Registered charity number: 1078287

Scottish charity number: SCO41582

Print and design by KIND Agency

Cover photo: Sally Ashworth Photography



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