

NEWS RELEASE

11/01/08

For immediate release

Blind people in Cumbria get free computer classes

There are nearly 9,000 blind and partially sighted adults living in Cumbria.* Many are struggling to do the daily tasks that sighted people often take for granted; like reading their post, finding out about local events or managing their finances. Modern technology can help, and **Action for Blind People Cumbria**, in partnership with **Carlisle Society for the Blind** and **Eden Voluntary Society for the Blind and Partially Sighted**, is offering visually impaired people the chance to get technology savvy at free sessions between 28 January and July 2008.

Blind and partially sighted people in Cumbria are invited to learn how to use a range of technology specially designed for people with visual impairments. There will be computers that talk using speech software, as well as computers that magnify text in emails and on websites. Specialist computer keyboards and large screen monitors will also be available to try out. Visually impaired people can learn how to use technology which magnifies household bills and letters – or even reads them out. For those who read Braille, training can be given to use a Braille typewriter. By trying out the various technologies, visually impaired people can discover which technology would benefit them in their everyday lives. Some may choose to take their new skills and apply for further training, education or even employment.

Over the six months there will be three sessions a week, each lasting two hours. People can come and see if it is for them, before committing to a number of classes.

14 - 16 Verney Road London SE16 3DZ Tel 020 7635 4800 Fax 020 7635 4899

Website www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Patron HRH Princess Alexandra, the Hon. Lady Ogilvy, GCVO

Registered Charity no: 205913

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Each week, one session will be at Action for Blind People's office in Carlisle, one at Carlisle Society for the Blind and one at Eden Voluntary Society in Penrith. The schedule is as follows:

Mondays, 1.30-3.30pm at Eden Voluntary Society

Wednesdays, 1-3pm at Action for Blind People

Fridays, 1-3pm at Carlisle Society for the Blind

The sessions start on Monday 28 January and are free thanks to funding from the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) fund through Cumbria CVS. Gill Curwen, Assistive Technology Coordinator at Action for Blind People Cumbria, says: "Specialist computers and other assistive technology is critical in promoting independence and combating social isolation amongst blind and partially sighted people. By gaining the basic skills required to use the technology available, a visually impaired person's life can change dramatically.

"We are specifically looking for blind and partially sighted people who have never tried using assistive technology. Perhaps in the past they have been put off by the idea that it might be too difficult, told that they are too old to learn, or feel that their sight is too bad. Whatever a person's level of visual impairment, age or background, these classes are a great starting point."

For more information, visually impaired people, their friends and family can call Action for Blind People Cumbria on tel:01228 595 121 or email:

gill.curwen@actionforblindpeople.org.uk

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-Ends-

For further media information please contact name, press office on 020 7635 4898/ 07739 819954 or email: zoe.patel@actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Notes to editors:

* 2,975 people in Cumbria are registered as blind or partially sighted. Source: Registered Blind and Partially Sighted People Year ending 31st March 2006, published by The Information Centre Part of the Government Statistical Service. It is commonly accepted that the 'true' size of the visually impaired community in any given geographical area is at least three times the registered population i.e. 8,925.

Action for Blind People

Action for Blind People is an expert national organisation, ensuring blind and partially sighted people get practical support in all aspects of their lives. Contact Action for Blind People's National Freephone Helpline on 0800 915 4666 or www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk Action for Blind People Cumbria is based at Suite 2, 2nd Floor, English Gate Plaza, Botchergate, Carlisle, CA1 1RP, Tel: 01228 595121, email: Cumbria@actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Carlisle Society for the Blind

The society is a local registered charity offering social events, a home support service and visual awareness training. They also have a selection of specialised equipment at their office for people to try out and a children's room equipped with special toys. The society is open Weds, Thurs and Fri, 11am-3pm. **Contact:** Mrs A Robson, 9 Brunswick Street, Carlisle, CA1 1PB, Tel: 01228 593104 or email: info@carlisesb.f9.co.uk

Eden Voluntary Society for the Blind and Partially Sighted

The Society aims to assist and support visually impaired people in the Eden district by raising awareness, providing information, offering leisure activities, and helping with grants, equipment and transport. The society has a number of sighted and visually impaired volunteers who can provide advice and demonstrations of specialised and every day equipment for visually impaired people. The society also

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offers letter writing assistance. The Society is open every Tues 11-3pm. Contact: Peter Bardsley, 1 Mostyn Hall, Friargate, Penrith, Cumbria, CA11 7XR, Tel: 01768 891724

NLDC

The Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Fund (NLDC) is part of the Government's wider Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, with a particular focus on involving more community and voluntary groups in delivering learning to hard-to-reach learners. The NDLC Fund is routed through the Cumbria Learning and Skills Council, and is managed on its behalf by the Cumbria CVS Learning Links.