

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Cumbria is still home sweet home for over 100 blind people

A fall down the stairs or a burn in the kitchen might be enough to make a visually impaired person feel like they can no longer cope living independently in their own home. Over the last two years, over 100 blind and partially sighted people living in Cumbria have turned to **Action for Blind People** for help with their housing. With funding from the **Big Lottery Fund**, the charity has been able to support these people to hold on to their independent lifestyles.

Action for Blind People's two-year housing project from April 2006 to March 2008 was awarded £59,196 by the Big Lottery Fund to support a minimum of 80 blind and partially sighted people in Cumbria to maintain their independence. Action employed Hazel Bowmaker as their Housing Coordinator and the charity, with the support of local housing associations and blind societies, has supported a total of 105 blind and partially sighted people to continue living independently. Some of these people were unsuitably housed, homeless or threatened with homelessness, or simply receiving the wrong housing related benefits. Hazel Bowmaker, explains:

“When someone tells us that they need to move to a specialist home because of their sight problem, our first question is always ‘why?’. Before assuming that moving is the only option, we investigate whether, with the right support and advise on possible adjustments, that person wishes and is able to continue living independently.

“It may be that the person's home needs to be adapted so they can move around the house more easily. Or technology might be the answer for example: a talking microwave to help with cooking. Of course, there are times when a visually

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impaired person's current home no longer meets their requirements. If this is the case, another option might be to help them move to a home where their particular needs can be met and they can continue to be independent."

George Marriott, aged 63 from Carlisle, was living in a first floor housing association flat. He knew the area well and had lived there for twelve years, but his poor vision was causing him difficulty with the stairs. George needed to move to a ground floor flat but the housing association was refusing to move him because he was in arrears with his rent due to mix up with his wages a few years previously. George was unable to pay the £200 minimum payment off his arrears that the association was demanding.

Action's Hazel Bowmaker challenged the decision on the grounds that George's medical needs should be put first. As soon as the association understood his situation more thoroughly they accepted him onto the transfer list and George was moved to a flat just four doors away. George says: "It happened quickly, much faster than I expected. Action helped to speed everything up. I feel much safer in my home now. I have my own front door now and I am in control again!"

Action for Blind People has also been supporting housing association staff to understand the needs of visually impaired tenants and perspective tenants, for example; the need to send out information in accessible formats.

Action for Blind People understands that independent living does not suit every person who has a visual impairment, and the charity also offers support and advice on the options available if a person chooses to move into a care home, sheltered accommodation or supported housing. For more information on the support Action offers with housing, people can call the National Freephone Helpline on 0800 915 4666 or email helpline@actionforblindpeople.org.uk

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

Notes to editors:

- 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 is breaking down barriers that prevent visually impaired people from achieving the same opportunities as sighted people.
- If abbreviating "Action for Blind People", please use "Action" rather than AFBP or ABP.

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