

Insight

Spring 2024



Must-read updates from the year so far:

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News from around our community

Registered charity numbers:

Vision Foundation: 1074958

Fight for Sight: 1111438



Welcome

A very warm welcome to the spring 2024 edition of Insight, keeping you updated on how we're continuing to drive scientific discoveries and support projects that build a brighter future.

Your kindness is what makes all this possible. Without your regular support, we wouldn't have been able to invest £15 million in the crucial research that's bringing us ever closer to new drugs and therapies, or approximately £1.5m in societal projects. Every day, we work with purpose for you, our valued supporters.

While these may seem like large numbers, they are a drop in the ocean of our desired ambition to save sight, and change lives. Only 1.5 percent of public research funding is allocated to eye research* in the UK, which makes it imperative we do all we can to plug the funding gap. Together, we can do more to secure a future more of us will see. Our team is already working harder, establishing more partnerships, and influencing policymakers.

By the time you read this, spring – with all the hope it brings – will be in full swing, but these are worrying times of instability across the world. Yet we must not lose sight of our long-term mission, and we thank you for staying with us and donating what you can.

This will be our last newsletter with this branding. As you'll read on page three, we're working hard to create a brand that is inclusive and relevant while carrying an urgent message about sight loss to the UK. I do hope you will continue on this journey with us as we build to bigger investments in research and societal improvements.

Thank you for always being by our sides – it means so much.



Ranjeet

Ranjeet Kharé, BEM
Director of Development Fight for Sight / Vision Foundation

**Time to focus report, 2018*

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Registered charity numbers:
Vision Foundation: 1074958
Fight for Sight: 1111438

New brand, continued commitment

We're united around a single mission: Save sight. Change lives.

It's now a year since Fight for Sight and Vision Foundation merged. The merger was born of a recognition that people who are blind and vision impaired face two questions at the point of diagnosis:

- Can this be stopped?
- How do I live my life?

We're funding the brilliant minds and bright ideas that bring change and hope a step closer for everyone impacted by vision loss. Specifically, we're backing science that's bringing prevention, treatment and cures within reach. We're also funding sustainable projects that deliver equity.

We're the only charity in our sector to combine the two with such clarity. To reflect our shared purpose, we'll soon be unveiling a new identity.

This will mean a new look and feel for things like this newsletter, our website and our logo. We created the core of this new brand with input from accessibility expert Gareth Ford Williams.

Gareth brings a wealth of passion and expertise as the driving force behind the BBC's accessible font and baked-in accessibility of BBC iPlayer.

Our font, National, was chosen with accessibility in mind. For example, close attention was paid to how we present 'i' and 'l', hard to distinguish in some fonts.

Gareth says, "There's an enormous amount of flex within the design, plus it's appropriate for everything the charity is about. It hits the right tone. It is playful without being silly, so it looks like a serious organisation. It combines the spirit of research and community."

There'll be a new logo and fresh colour palette. How we sound is as important as how we look, so we're also developing a sonic logo and new tone of voice that's informed by our values. These values are a North Star guiding how we'll behave as a charity and workplace, and how we'll achieve our vision to Save sight. Change lives.

So, while we'll soon look and sound a little different, our commitment to our cause will remain resolutely the same. And we couldn't deliver this without supporters like you.

To sign up for monthly e-news updates, please visit visionfoundation.org.uk or scan the QR code.



Research in action

Understanding and preventing glaucoma

Professor Paul Foster is heading up a Fight for Sight / Vision Foundation funded study that's investigating the effect of lifestyle factors on how glaucoma develops. These include alcohol, smoking, exercise and diet. He's carrying out his research, over three years, based at the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology.

A chronic disease that's a leading cause of irreversible blindness, glaucoma affects an estimated 76 million people worldwide. Many of us, including some of you, our supporters, are among them.

Glaucoma is characterised by progressive damage to the optic nerve – the nerve that transmits signals from the eye to the brain. Damage to the optic nerve is strongly linked to elevated pressure in the eyes (intraocular pressure) and the development of the condition.



Despite this connection, the precise reasons for how glaucoma leads to damage to the optic nerve are unclear. However, it's thought a combination of genetic and environmental factors are likely to play a role.





Raise or lower eye pressure?

Through his research, Professor Foster aims to precisely describe whether lifestyle factors raise or lower intraocular pressure, and to what extent, and whether they play a protective or detrimental role in glaucoma's development. He's specifically looking at primary open angle glaucoma, the most common form of the condition.

A unique database called the UK Biobank plays a key role in this work. Since 2005, over half a million people between the ages of 40 and 69 have given blood, urine and saliva samples to the ongoing study, together with details of their lifestyle. More than 68,000 participants have also had digital pictures taken of the retinas in both their eyes.

Over a period of more than 10 years, the database has followed up participants to see whether they've developed any health outcomes, including glaucoma. Professor Foster and his team are analysing this data to work out whether links exist between lifestyle factors and developing high or low eye pressure and glaucoma.

So far, the project has characterised the relationship between several lifestyle factors and glaucoma. It has provided large-scale population-based evidence for factors that may be detrimental (notably alcohol and salt intake) and others that may be less important (smoking and physical activity) in disease risk. Other modifiable risk factors that may be particularly pertinent to people with glaucoma (including serum lipid levels and calcium-channel blocker use) have also been identified and better characterised.

Future impact

Results from the study could provide new insight into glaucoma's risk factors and underlying causes, and help shape future, targeted treatments. These might include interventions such as tailored lifestyle advice that could help reduce the risk of people developing high eye pressure and glaucoma. In turn, this could prevent sight loss from glaucoma for many people.

Spotlight on social impact

Groundbreaking report inspires powerful audio drama

A new audio drama, *The Unseen*, is shining a spotlight on the unique experiences of domestic abuse survivors who are blind and vision impaired.

Funded by Fight for Sight and Vision Foundation, this unsettling drama was co-created by victims and survivors. Made by Extant, the UK's leading professional performing arts company of vision impaired artists, the result is as powerful as it is important.

In October 2022, Vision Foundation launched *The Unseen*, a report about domestic abuse for blind and vision impaired people with the charity SafeLives. The report unearthed the scale and nature of domestic abuse among blind and vision impaired people.

To tackle the issue, we invested almost £200,000 in projects that saw us working with a range of organisations. This included Extant, whose brilliantly crafted audio drama intersperses statistics with moving monologues and narrative.

Co-designed by victims and survivors

Empowering vision impaired survivors has been at the root of this project from the outset. To help devise the plot, Extant writers met with Unseen contributors and vision impaired survivors. The drama was conceptualised, written, performed and sound designed by a vision impaired creative team.

Director Ben Wilson says, "Extant seeks to tell nuanced stories of vision impaired people. Each performer has poured heart and soul into making sure we honour the stories of the victims and survivors who contributed to *The Unseen* report."

The play portrays two cases – one family abuse, the other partner – and masterfully conveys the subtle and insidious effect of domestic abuse for blind and vision impaired people.



Audience reaction

The drama's preview attracted an appreciative response from a specially invited audience, with a panel discussion following the performance.

This included Eleanor Southwood, our Director of Impact, and Saliha Rashid, a disability activist. It was a rare opportunity for a discussion between audience and panel members that was both poignant and thought provoking.

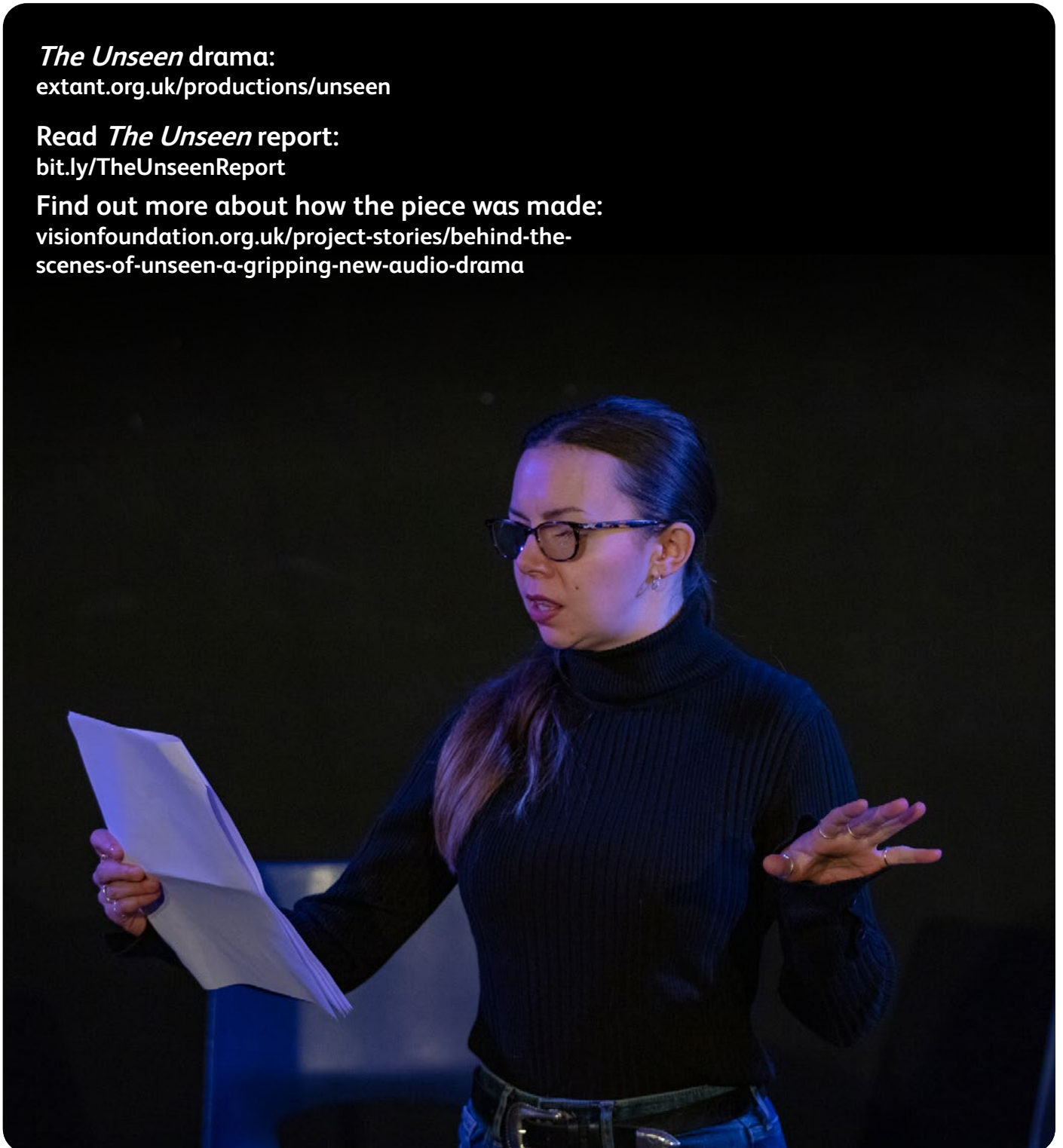
Many people felt the medium of audio drama was a particularly accessible and engaging way to explore the issues raised in *The Unseen* report, and likely to reach more people.

The Extant team hopes the drama will help people recognise any abuse they may be experiencing in their own lives and take steps to report and escape it.

***The Unseen* drama:**
extant.org.uk/productions/unseen

Read *The Unseen* report:
bit.ly/TheUnseenReport

Find out more about how the piece was made:
visionfoundation.org.uk/project-stories/behind-the-scenes-of-unseen-a-gripping-new-audio-drama



Our community

Running towards a brighter future

Tommy Salisbury, 23, is the inspiration behind the Family Fund set up by his mum, Emma, when he was five years old. Years on, the Fund is celebrating raising over **£700,000** for the charity and shows no sign of slowing down. Nor does Tommy, who just ran his second London Marathon and the London Landmarks Half Marathon – both to raise funds for sight-saving research.

Tommy was diagnosed with choroideremia when he was four. The rare, inherited retinal condition affects one in 50,000 people worldwide. Tommy's family sprang into action, raising awareness and funds to help further research into the condition. His mum, Emma, was pivotal. "She just doesn't stop – she's one of the busiest people I know."

Thanks to Emma's efforts, being in the spotlight of the fundraising was just a part of Tommy's childhood. "I remember going into school and saying I'm going to be on TV tomorrow, then having everyone watch it in class."



Tommy now works as a junior clerk in barristers' chambers in the City of London. A few years ago, he was selected to be part of a clinical trial. He got the call in the middle of the working day in a moment he describes as one of the best of his life.

Since being included in the trial, Tommy hasn't experienced any deterioration in his treated eye. While he has difficulties with night vision and isn't allowed to drive, he says, "I don't let it define who I am or let it negatively affect me at all."

Already, 2024 has been a big year for Tommy, with two major running events under his belt. Of course, mum Emma was rooting for him all the way. "She had a route so she could support all the runners from Team Tommy!"

If you'd like to find out more information about taking part in an event or setting up a Family Fund, please get in touch at fundraising@visionfoundation.org.uk

Our community

Committee corner

The **Warwickshire Fight for Sight Committee** was set up in 1994 by Clive Stone, a previous Chair of Fight for Sight, and Debbie White. Debbie has the rare genetic condition, Usher syndrome II, which causes hearing impairment and progressive vision loss due to retinitis pigmentosa.

To date, the Committee has raised **£350,000** for pioneering eye research through activities including sky dives, night walks, cycles, raffles and gala dinners. But its piece de resistance is the annual Warwickshire golf day, with its best fundraising total yet a cool **£20,000**. 2025 will be the Committee's 30th golf day.

Members of the **Northamptonshire Supporter Group** are longstanding and committed fundraisers for Fight for Sight, organising several events throughout the year. These include coffee mornings, lunches, charity dinners and auctions. Working closely with their friends all over the county, this dedicated group has built a loyal base of companies and supporters who donate, attend and help out with events. Since forming in 2004, the Committee has raised more than **£70,000**, including **£11,000** over the past five years alone.

If you'd like to form a fundraising committee in your area, or you're interested in joining an established group, please get in touch at fundraising@visionfoundation.org.uk



Northampton Supporter Group, from left to right: Inge Chandler, Nina Gill, Rosemary Swallow and Sally Stuart.

Fundraising spectacular

Seeing life through a lens

Back in March, we visited **A Vision of Asia** – a photographic exhibition and fundraiser by **Jean Bastien Durand** at London's Espacio Gallery. Jean, who is 21, has retinitis pigmentosa and doctors predict he'll lose his sight by the time he's 30. Before then, Jean intends to see and photograph the world.

The exhibition featured photos from Jean's travels across Asia. You can explore Jean's collection at vision-of-asia.org and order prints. All proceeds from his photograph sales are being donated to our charity.

Find out more about retinitis pigmentosa in our A to Z at fightforsight.org.uk/about-the-eye-conditions



In-memory

A gift to remember

For many people who have lost a loved one, making a gift in their memory is a special and significant way to remember them and support the causes they held close to their heart.

The act of giving in memory can provide a source of comfort, as well as a diversion or focus point and the feeling of making a positive, lasting difference.

At Vision Foundation, we're humbled to receive donations in memory of loved ones – these enable us to save sight and change lives. Remembering a loved one in this way means we can support transformative societal projects and fund groundbreaking medical research.

“My grandma lived with age-related macular degeneration for the last 10 years of her life. Donating in her memory would, I know, make her incredibly proud.”

Anonymous donor, in memory of her grandmother

Making a gift in memory

We're incredibly grateful if you choose to remember your loved one with a gift to Vision Foundation. We cherish this special gesture and are here to support you.

You can make a gift by:

- visiting our website at visionfoundation.enthuse.com/spring
- sending a cheque made out to **Vision Foundation** to 18 Mansell Street, London E1 8AA
- calling us on **020 7620 2066**
- setting up an online tribute fund as a permanent place of remembrance, which can be shared with family and friends.

Please visit muchloved.com to get started, or scan this QR code:



If you'd like to share your story of giving a gift in memory, we'd love to hear from you. Please email us at hello@visionfoundation.org.uk or call us on **020 7620 2066**.

Gifts in Wills

A lasting impact

The impact of a gift in a Will, however large or small, has far-reaching effects that stretch across the generations.

People choose to leave a gift in their Will to charity in different ways. These include a fixed amount (known as a pecuniary gift), and a percentage of their estate after they've looked after loved ones (called a residuary gift).

Gifts in Wills can help fund projects such as helplines and befriending services that support people who are feeling lonely or isolated. We know people affected by sight loss are more than twice as likely to have experienced unhappiness or depression than the UK average. Gifts in Wills can change this.

They can also impact future research, for example supporting a small grant of £15,000 or contributing towards a project grant that funds up to £250,000 over three years.

One of our recent research successes is a study analysing the effectiveness of a laser-based treatment on people recently diagnosed with glaucoma, compared with the current method of eye drops.

Professor Gus Gazzard, who led the study at University College London, is also Consultant Ophthalmologist and Glaucoma Service Director at Moorfields Eye Hospital. He says, "We have shown that a simple, safe, pain-free laser treatment not only works better than eye drops at preventing glaucoma from deteriorating, but also costs the NHS less."

In fact, the results could save the NHS up to £1.5 million a year in treatment costs and potentially improve the way glaucoma treated across the world.

After providing for your loved ones, remembering us in your Will could make a crucial difference to the lives of people affected by sight loss for years to come.



Professor Gus Gazzard in the lab

FREE!

We're offering all our supporters access to a free Will-writing service. Call us on **020 7620 2066**, email hello@visionfoundation.org.uk or scan the QR code to find out more.



Get involved and help save sight and change lives

Every day in the UK, 250 people start to lose their sight, with a profound impact on everyday life. Here are a few ways you can help transform the lives of people affected by sight loss.

Shop and find treasures

Visit your local Vision Foundation shop today, or shop online where you'll find a wide range of items. Every purchase helps transform lives by funding projects that inform, empower and include.

visionfoundation.org.uk/shops

Volunteer

Develop your skills, meet new people and engage with your local community. We have many roles available and would love to welcome you to our team. Find out more by calling us on **020 7620 2066** or emailing Beth, our Volunteer Manager, at BEvans@visionfoundation.org.uk

Fundraise

Whether it's a walk, cycle, garden party or anything else, we have tips and support to help you every step of your fundraising journey.

Get in touch at fundraising@visionfoundation.org.uk or call **020 7620 2066**.



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