



Empowering people to share God's love



“
My passion is for the people who find life so hard and don't know that God loves them. I want to reassure them that God is there for them and they are loved and absolutely valued.
”

James Hassell first came into contact with Torch at a Christian conference: 'Prior to that I wasn't aware that you were able to get Christian material in an accessible format for visually impaired people!' James became a library user and received daily reading notes, but he was interested in more:

I'm a House Group leader, so I was constantly phoning Torch up to see if they had materials transcribed in an accessible format that I could use when leading groups.' He later attended the annual Thanksgiving celebration at Torch House and decided to sign up as a Sight Loss Friendly Church volunteer.

Being a Torch volunteer is a true labour of love for James, he explains that as someone with sight loss, he is 'really passionate about people who are visually impaired empowering other visually impaired people. In the process I want

to be able to worship our Saviour. I want to be fully involved in what goes on at my local church. In doing that, I want to empower others to be able to experience God fully and not just sit there and think: "I'm here but I'm being left out, forgotten. They talk about stuff on the projector and I can't see it. They sing songs and I can't see the words." I wanted to be involved in actually making a difference that empowers individuals who want to worship God.'

Continued on page 2



...Continued from page 1

James also wants to empower the church to be prepared to accept and welcome people with sight loss into the church family, a desire that prompted him to encourage his church to sign up for SLFC. Explaining how they came to take the plunge with the initiative, James laughed and said 'I kept nagging them to sign up! As a member of the Church Council, I kept asking the question "Is this accessible?" I think it made them realise that actually I wasn't the only person in the congregation who could be struggling to access things.' James is very happy to report that the church have turned their whole perspective around and are actively striving to be more sight loss friendly. Positive changes include 'having members of staff, whether it's the welcome team or people who do the drinks after the service, being more aware of visually impaired people and how best to accommodate them and facilitate them as part of the family of the church.'

Excitingly, as an SLFC volunteer, James was able to be very involved in the virtual training for his church: 'We got people to think about different scenarios. Like, what's it like for someone with sight loss walking into a church with glass doors? How people are welcomed, how we greet people and offer guidance to seats, service sheets and materials.' James was keen to stress the importance of finding out what is the best format for the individual and not treating everyone with sight loss as the same. James went on to say 'I think the key thing put across to them was: "Don't be afraid to ask." We looked at very practical issues such as how there are some very nice inch and a half raised areas around the font! If you aren't used to them, you will probably trip up it or find it awkward to negotiate! A great solution is to allow people an opportunity to wander around the church when it's empty with someone guiding them. They can then become familiar with the layout and mentally map what's around them.'

Another key part of the SLFC session was discussing the need for online services and materials to be as accessible as possible. 'That's a big thing at the moment when we can't meet physically,' explained James, 'I have to say, they're doing a very good job! I lead one of the House Groups which has many of the more mature congregation and so the first couple of weeks was basically phoning them up and talking them through how to connect. If they didn't have access to the internet, we made sure they knew how to phone into the meetings so they still felt part of the group.'

James discussed how great it was to see different people's skills being used as part of this: 'People who are very I.T. literate can actually help those who struggle at times. We're exploring everyone's talents and using them to build other people up. We as a church are very conscious of our responsibility to build people up, we aren't to exclude them and stop them being part of the community. It's important that we use all possible means of communicating and sharing the Gospel and doing it in a way that embraces where people are as individuals.'

As a result of this work, the church have also been looking at accessibility in a wider sense. 'We looked not only at how we can support those who are visually impaired,' explained James, 'but those who have hearing loss, learning disabilities, mental illnesses so we can incorporate them even more as part of the family.'

When asked about the difference he felt initiatives such as SLFC make, James replied 'It gives people more independence but also more of a feeling of being part of something. We want to encourage people to use their spiritual gifts, although it may not necessarily be in a style that we're used to with the church. We must empower people to reach out, make a difference, share the Gospel and worship our Lord in that very special, unique way that we each can.'

Going forward as a Sight Loss Friendly Church, James hopes that his church will continue to build on what they're doing at the moment to make it more friendly:



James Hassell

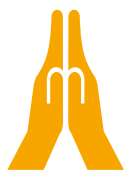




‘We’re aware of so many people in the community who have sight loss that actually don’t have that living relationship with Jesus Christ, and it’s how we now use these extra giftings to reach out into our community. Lockdown, in a lot of ways, has brought about an excellent opportunity for outreach and to build friendships. People are very isolated, very scared, and they do need contact.’

James’ final words on the matter speak for themselves: ‘Sight Loss Friendly Church has opened a door for me to give back as a volunteer to God’s family. It’s a privilege to serve Him in such a unique way that allows for eyes to be opened to the potential of praising God in everything that we find ourselves going through. Why not ask to join the team of volunteers at Torch and unlock the gift that God has given you to share? Why not promote the Sight Loss Friendly Church initiative to your local church and surrounding churches?’

PRAYER POINTS



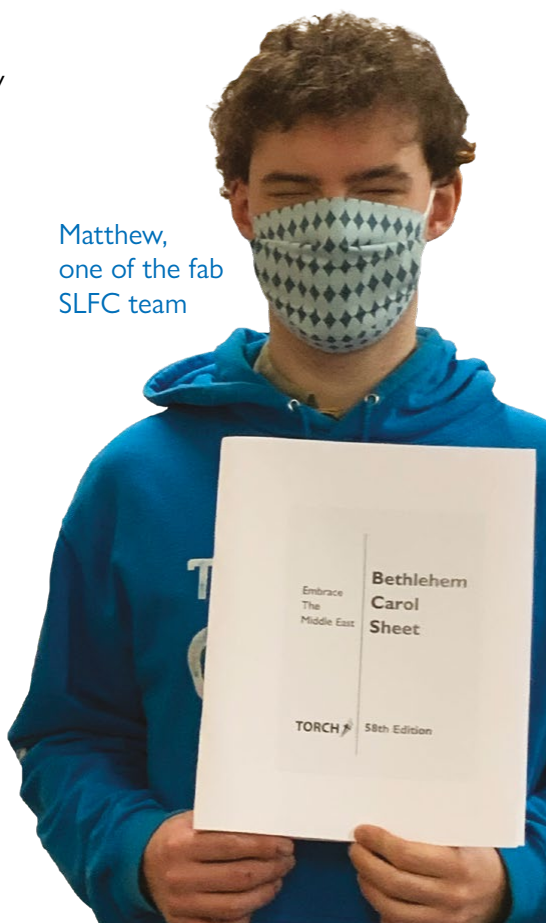
- Give thanks for James and our other passionate volunteers for being so dedicated and willing to give their time.
- Give thanks for everyone on the SLFC team for the incredible work they do.
- Pray for more and more churches to take up SLFC and reach more people with sight loss.

“
Lockdown, in a lot of ways, has brought about an excellent opportunity for outreach and to build friendships. People are very isolated, very scared, and they do need contact.
”

To find out more about signing up as an SLFC volunteer or getting your church involved, please contact us using the information at the end of this newsletter.

Visit torchtrust.org/tn-video-jhassell to see and hear the full interview.

Matthew,
one of the fab
SLFC team



THE GIFT OF YEARS



We’re very pleased to share that The Gift of Years has registered for Sight Loss Friendly Church. The Gift of Years are a Rugby-based team of Christians who aim to support residents, relatives and staff in residential care homes for older people by sharing God’s love through pastoral and spiritual care. The organisation supports nine care homes currently, all of which have several residents with sight loss. The chaplaincy team feel they will really benefit from a Zoom SLFC Training Session to help them increase sight loss friendliness in their church services and other support. We’ll be reporting back on how they got on in a future issue of Torch News!

We’ve had some great feedback from the training sessions we’ve held so far, including this encouraging comment from Steve Harvey, Associate Rector of Emmanuel Church which James attends: ‘Thank you so much for the training – I found it very helpful and thought-provoking in terms of what practical steps we might be able to take to make church more accessible before, during and after services. I was struck by the fact that while videos and slide shows can be a great asset, if too much weight is built upon them (without some form of audio description), it can feel quite exclusive of those with sight loss issues.’

If you know of an organisation which would benefit from SLFC training, then please do get in touch – our contact information is at the end of this newsletter.

PRAYER POINTS



- Pray for The Gift of Years team as they undertake this mission to become more sight loss friendly.
- Pray that more organisations will be inspired to join SLFC and improve sight loss friendliness everywhere.

Our mission in Malawi

One of Torch's closest partnerships is with our friends at Torch Malawi. We maintain strong ties with them and commit over £26,000 per year to fund their work. We wanted to share with you a little about how that money is used to serve the blind and partially sighted people of Malawi throughout the year so we talked with Stanley Moyo, the Administrator of Torch Malawi.



Torch Malawi's main activities are twofold. Firstly, visits to blind people in resource centres, schools and Fellowship Groups across the country. 'The people in the Fellowship Groups walk long distances to come together and worship God. We go there and preach the way as well as supplying braille literature, white canes and much more,' explains Stanley. 'We also have children with sight loss who are taught Bible studies at school. We go and give them braille literature. We find that when they read it they become spiritually calmed down – they don't give trouble to their teachers! So we encourage that they should always share Bible stories and become good citizens and good students.'

Stanley reports that currently Torch Malawi reaches 960 of the estimated 1,300 blind people in the southern region alone: 'Through those 960 we share the word of God but still there are more in the central and northern regions. It is our plan to scale up our activities next year to reach as many as we can!'

These vital visits are made in the organisation's elderly Land Rover: 'Our vehicle has now been running for 23 years. We thank God because it is still operational but the cost of wear and tear is becoming more and more. We hope future funds will enable us to buy a vehicle that could run for some 20 years

ahead of us, these are the vehicles that we need in Malawi with the rough roads.'

The second arm of activities is the production of braille literature. 'There's a lot happening with production here in Malawi!' explains Stanley. 'We produce a lot of books on demand which are delivered immediately, but we have various Bible volumes in stock ready as soon as a blind person wants them. We also have a library of 840 books from the UK, for people to borrow.'

Torch Malawi has also produced braille leaflets giving vital information to people with sight loss: 'During the Covid-19 pandemic we have produced 470 booklets explaining about it. They are all delivered but we haven't reached the northern and central region so there is a challenge there. We are producing "Living in Hope" for people who are suffering from or affected by HIV and AIDs. So far we have produced and delivered 1000 copies. So we are really working!'

Stanley goes on to say: 'We are greatly challenged by having only one machine in operation, the other two aren't working. Here in Malawi we don't have many people who can maintain them, we are currently looking for someone who could do this. Ideally we'd wish to have a bigger machine for mass production, as the one we have is designed for small scale work. As we are planning to scale out to the

"I would like to say thank you. The terrible flooding last year was met with resources from our friends in the UK. We were able to buy supplies and deliver them to blind people. This past year we have also built two houses for blind people which was very great!"

northern and central regions, the demand will be very high.'

Torch Malawi have also produced braille Bibles in local languages for other African nations. However they are currently facing a new challenge: 'We used to send them by air to the countries for free, the Malawian government paid for that, but they have stopped. Currently we have a lot of Bibles in the Igala language for Nigeria which we can't send because we don't have money to pay the Post Office. That's a big, big challenge. We feel like someone who has cooked a meal that no one can come and eat – it makes us unhappy. We have 'cooked the food' but we cannot even bring it to the table. We wish to see these braille Bibles go to the countries who need them. Then we will be happy. Our effort is already there, it is done, but we cannot send because we don't have resources.'

Stanley appreciates the support given so far: 'I would like to say thank you. The terrible flooding last year was met with resources from our friends in the UK. We were able to buy supplies and deliver them to blind people. This past year we have also built two houses for blind people which was very great!'

Another ongoing project which has so much potential to help the blind people of Malawi is the supplying of goats to blind people. Stanley talks excitedly of the progress so far: 'This project has started bearing fruits! We supplied 50 goats and 15 of them have already delivered kids, with three more expectant. Once the goat produces two or three times the blind person will be able to sell and support their family. We wish to scale the project out to each and every blind person, along with provision for training people and communities to care for the goats.'

Yet another simple but effective use of the funds committed by Torch UK is the improvement of housing: 'Most houses in Malawi are grass thatched which leak when rains come. We provide blind people with plastic sheets which we put over the grass. They are happy because they know then when rains come, they sleep in a good house which doesn't leak. We would love to build them all houses but we don't have the resources, however improvising something so simple really improves their lives.'

Asked about further needs faced by the blind people of Malawi, Stanley answers: 'Blind people urgently require white canes for mobility. If anyone has any, please do send them through Torch UK and they will reach us. We also need Chichewa and



English MegaVoices. People who can't read braille rely on a MegaVoice, particularly if they are alone, they can find a friend in hearing the Bible on MegaVoice. We need Perkins brailers which help people to plan their activities, whether that is schoolwork, church leadership or students at university. We face a great many needs, so this is my plea to the world, please let them help Malawi.'

Visit torchtrust.org/tn-video-malawi to see and hear the full interview.

PRAYER POINTS



- Pray for the people of Malawi in this especially difficult time.
- Pray for the blind people of Malawi who face such hardship in their lives.
- Pray that the love of God can be shared to all the blind people of the country.
- Pray for chairperson Rose Chaponda and the Trustee board of Torch Malawi as they oversee the work.

The Torch Malawi Trustees, including Stanley, 4th from left



Our partnership

Torch UK and Torch Malawi share a faith-based partnership, a two-way covenant which expresses our commitment to fully trust God to enable us to work together in fulfilling the vision which Christ has given. The journey we undertake together is one of mutual prayer, interdependence, commitment and service through the power of Christ. The commitments made by Torch UK include prayer, leadership, I.T. support, financial resourcing and where possible the procurement of sight loss related aids. The commitments made by Torch Malawi include prayer support, braille production matters, and a programme of visits to Fellowship Groups. We will sustainably grow, flourish and serve God's kingdom together.



A message from Rose Chaponda, Chair of Torch Malawi

We praise the Lord that fellowship groups can meet again after a long break because of Covid-19. We have just given a braille Bible to a pastor who recently became blind. Challenges include sourcing audio Bibles for those who can't read braille and a lack of basic necessities such as food, clothes and houses. Although progress is slow, the goat project is developing well and some have borne children!

The Year Ahead for Torch

As a small charity operating during these difficult and unprecedented times, Torch is facing some particular challenges and changes. To help us navigate these in the most efficient and effective way possible, the board of Trustees have appointed Tim Jeffery as Interim CEO. Our interviewer Grace had a Zoom chat with Tim to find out more about his vision for Torch...

Grace: Could you explain what interim means in this context please?

Tim: Interim means that I am only with Torch for a set period of time: I have a contract for a year to help Torch through some current changes. Part of the role will include appointing a new CEO to replace me, later on next year.

Grace: How long have you been working with Torch now?

Tim: I was working with Torch over the summer – mostly by Zoom, which was an interesting experience! The Trustees asked me to come and help them through some of the challenges that they were facing. As folk may know, Julia Hyde, the previous CEO, left in March. The organisation has been facing some very difficult times, there had been some big changes going on. Torch was dealing with the start of coronavirus so there was lots happening, including concerns about finances. I worked with the Trustees to identify and explore the challenges Torch was facing, to talk to some members of staff and get their impressions. My aim was then to support them in working through the best ways to resolve the challenges in this very difficult situation.

Grace: What are your goals and visions for this next year?

Tim: I've got two words as I think about my work at Torch. The first one is stabilise and the second one is harmonise. With 'harmonise', in any organisation going through big changes and facing huge challenges, there are going to be differences of opinion about how things should work, how things should change and so on. Part of the role is to try to find new clarity and harmony together in the organisation so that we're really hearing where God is taking Torch in this season and can move forward together.

Then 'stabilise': like most charities at the moment, Torch is facing quite significant financial pressures. The question, therefore, is how do we deal with the fact that we may have less resources





Tim with the Torch Exec Team

available in the next few years? We need to look at how we structure ourselves, what we make sure we hold on to and protect at all costs, and what things maybe for a season need to be cut back or reduced a little bit. So there's a sense of finding stability for Torch in these new circumstances.

Grace: You've known Torch for a little while now, what are your impressions so far?

Tim: What a lovely family feel there is, a sense of such passion for people who are living with sight loss. There's a real sense of mission: this isn't just an organisation, this isn't just a charity, it's a mission. I certainly got a strong sense of a very committed group of staff, volunteers and trustees who desperately want to see this organisation thrive so that it can continue to serve people with sight loss in the years to come.



I'd like to thank the Library team for allowing me to have mountains of books during these times. Both they and the logistic team are doing a sterling job!

Ann, Torch client



There's a wonderful history in this organisation of such faithfulness from so many people and their generosity in giving their time, donations and prayers for the organisation. I love that Torch has the sense of 'this is a mission, with prayer and seeking God at its heart'.

Grace: Torch obviously has a lot of exciting different initiatives, some older, some newer, can you tell us anything you're particularly excited about?

Tim: I think that the resources that we produce to help people in their Christian walk are just fabulous. Talking with the folk in Client Services, who are in touch hour by hour with people ringing up with concerns, issues or wanting to talk to somebody, I've witnessed such lovely, compassionate, caring responses which is beautiful.

The other thing is, as folk may know, we had to make the really difficult decision at the end of last year to close the Holiday and Retreat Centre. It had been a wonderful provision for so many people but financially it just wasn't working. One of the things we're doing now is Torch Together. We recognise how important it is for people to be able to get away on a holiday, on a retreat where they feel safe, looked after, and have great Christian fellowship. So we're looking at how to do that in 2021, albeit not really knowing what Covid-19 is going to do! There's a new opportunity there to bring Torch closer to people, to make Torch breaks more accessible and available around the country. I think that's going to be really interesting.

Clearly too, things have changed so much with this new world of Zoom and home working and so on. We as an organisation want to make the best use of this modern technology, helping people to access things in new ways. We want to make the most of this God-given opportunity and help people along their journey of

increasing their technical ability. There are lots of younger people with sight loss who are more tech-savvy than many of our previous or current clients. We want to engage with them, explore how Torch can help them with their Christian walk. Some of this will be able to start in the year that I am with Torch, some will need setting up for the future when a new Chief Executive is appointed.



Visit torchtrust.org/tn-video-aceo to see and hear the full interview



A very big thank you for the USB book service you maintained during this serious time of lockdown. I really do appreciate the supply of listening material and use the prayer diary every day.

Eric, Torch client



PRAYER POINTS



- Pray for God's guidance on the road ahead for Torch.
- Pray for Tim in his work as Interim CEO.
- Give thanks for the exciting opportunities ahead.



Gift Malawi God's word this Christmas

Love never fails. Even when a pandemic strikes, love can build hope!

Can you begin to imagine the anguish and anxiety caused by having sight loss and feeling lonely in an isolated part of Malawi, unable to access God's word?

Now imagine the joy and excitement of being able to experience the love and compassion of the Lord's word speaking to you, transforming your life in your hours of deepest need. Torch Malawi shares this joy with the people of Malawi through accessible Christian Literature. In a time of fear and anxiety, we help bring

hope and support to children and adults affected by sight loss.

Every year, Torch commits over £26,000 to support and fund the invaluable work of Torch Malawi. Please consider giving to Torch Trust this Christmas so that we can continue to fund this vital work. Let's stand with our friends and neighbours in Malawi this Christmas.

With hope, we build foundations of love that will transform lives. Please continue to pray for Malawi during this season!

May God's blessing be yours this Christmas time.

Christmas 2020 and Torch Together



As you will know the Torch Together programme has been delayed by a year due to the Coronavirus pandemic, however we still do not know how the pandemic may affect the programme heading into 2021. We therefore ask for your ongoing and valued prayers as we look at how this programme may look in 2021 despite the uncertain times that lie ahead.

We do ask that you will hold the date the 16th December in your diaries as we are planning a Torch virtual Christmas celebration that hopefully will be a real blessing to all of those involved.



Torch Trust Torch House, Torch Way,
Market Harborough, Leicestershire LE16 9HL

01858 438260

info@torchtrust.org

torchtrust.org

facebook.com/torchtrust

@torchtrust

Torch Trust 2020

Chair: Dr Mike Townsend

Interim CEO: Tim Jeffery

Council of Reference members:

Revd Dr Steve Brady; Revd Dr David Coffey OBE; Revd Malcolm Duncan; Jonathan Lamb; Revd Roy Searle; Dr Elaine Storkey; Revd Dr Derek Tidball.

The Torch Trust for the Blind. A company limited by Guarantee
Registered in England number: 4616526 Registered Charity number: 1095904

USEFUL INFORMATION



Client Services

01858 438260



Prayer Line

01858 438277

Donations

Please send donations through to our bank account
The Torch Trust for the Blind, SORT CODE: 40-52-40,
Account Number: 00017072

Sight Loss Friendly Church
sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk

Reflections

for responses to our radio broadcasts: call 0333 123 1255

For more information or to hear the show visit:

torchtrust.org/reflections

Torch News

is also available in audio CD, braille, email and large print
(17pt, 20pt, 25pt and 30pt) and can be viewed online at:

torchtrust.org/downloads