

**June 2024**

## **Vision & Hearing Support Expands to Become SAM - Sense Ability Matters**

Local charity Vision & Hearing Support has announced two significant developments. First, a significant expansion of its services to cater to all adults in South Tyneside and Gateshead who are disabled or living with a long-term health condition. And second, the organisation has rebranded with a new name - Sense Ability Matters.

The charity has long been recognised for its support for individuals with sensory impairments, those with visual impairments and those who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Now, under the new name Sense Ability Matters, the charity extends its reach to provide tailored support to a broader spectrum of individuals, including those with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

"Sense Ability Matters' vision is for the region to have a disabled and sensory loss community that is informed, empowered and resilient," says Sarah French, Chief Executive at Sense Ability Matters. "Our expanded services reflect our commitment to realising this vision by providing essential support to all individuals in our community who need help."

The comprehensive support offered by Sense Ability Matters, or SAM, includes rehabilitation, enablement assessments, personalised support plans, information and advice, specialist counselling, community and peer support, employment support, and digital assistance. Each service is designed to address each individual's unique needs, empowering them to live independently and make positive decisions.

"Our name is new, but our team's dedication remains unchanged," French continues. "With a wealth of lived experience and expertise, our team members are equipped to

provide compassionate support to those in need, ensuring that everyone feels understood and valued."

In addition to expanding its services, Sense Ability Matters has taken steps to support individuals who previously accessed services through the local organisation Bliss=Ability, which closed its doors in March 2024. SAM aims to provide continuity of care for these individuals, offering services such as Community Voice sessions, which were previously held in collaboration with Bliss=Ability.

"We are committed to ensuring that everyone in our community has access to the support they need," French affirms. "By embracing inclusivity and fostering strong relationships with our stakeholders, we strive to create a more accessible and supportive environment for all."

Cheryl D'Or came to Sense Ability Matters from Bliss=Ability, as she attended the Community Voice Project which the two organisations set up together through funding from the National Lottery Community Fund. The social group has become an important part of Cheryl's life as she explains:

"Coming along to Community Voice has been brilliant - we've done all sorts of different activities, met lots of people from different backgrounds and made some great friends. It's fantastic that the service is widening to help even more people in the area. I'd urge anyone to come along and give it a try - it can make a huge difference to your life."

Gary McLachlan was referred to the organisation by Sunderland Eye Infirmary when it was known as Sight Service. Since then, Gary has been instrumental in the creation of the Men Shed at Lakeside Hall, a social group for men with a visual impairment:

"When I first considered going along to a social group, I thought 'I'm not going to like this'. I was so isolated, I couldn't drive, I

couldn't get public transport, I didn't know what to do. But the team from Sight Service helped me get there, and something clicked - I really enjoyed it.

Getting together at groups like the Men Shed is fantastic. We have something in common which bonds us, and we're able to open up in a way that we can't even with close family members. Over the years I've come to realise just how important mental health is, and these groups really help - it gives you purpose, and makes you feel part of something.

I'm excited that the organisation is moving onto even bigger and better things as they expand to help more people in the area - we look forward to welcoming anyone who wants to join our group. Not only do SAM support our group, but they can also help point you in the right direction for any other help you might need, from fixing your phone to getting a bus pass."

For more information about Sense Ability Matters and its services, please visit [www.weareSAM.co.uk](http://www.weareSAM.co.uk) or contact us at 0191 4785959 or [contactus@weareSAM.org.uk](mailto:contactus@weareSAM.org.uk)

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**Photos with caption**



The Sense Ability Matters (SAM) team, with Chief Executive Sarah French seventh from the left.



Sense Ability Matters staff member Doreen Hudson (L) and service user Cheryl D'Or (R)



Sense Ability Matters service user Gary McLachlan attending the Men Shed



Sense Ability Matters staff member Helen Mullen with participants at a Sense Ability Matters social group