



# The Torch



Edition 17

## The inspiring story of Ford Africa's visually-impaired IT guy

Ford employee Gary Redmond heads up the carmaker's IT departments for Africa and South America

Due to his lack of clear vision, descriptiveness in verbal communication has become his strength

Redmond uses smartphone-based apps like text and text-to-speech and AI

In times like these we need inspiring stories. On the fourth of January, it was World Braille Day and this inspiring story focus on Gary Redmond.

Redmond is the Director of Ford Motor Company of South Africa's Information Technology department. He has visually impaired vision and has overcome many obstacles to manage IT aspects of the brands international business.



## Background

Gary was born in England and arrived in South Africa when his parents immigrated in 1971. He was educated in Gauteng, focussing on his academics to further his qualifications with a BCom in accounting at Stellenbosch University.

At the age of 21, Gary realised that his sight was deteriorating – the problem was diagnosed as internal bleeding due to tumours in both eyes. It was not realised until later that Gary's weekend hobbies of surfing and high speed endure were countering the eye specialist's progress.

“The time came when I realised that I could no longer drive safely and that other aspects of my life were being affected,” says Gary. “Following a visit to one of our country's best specialist, I regained some of my sight but was warned that the situation was going to get worse. Around this time, I had to look for employment that I could manage with greatly reduced sight.”

The Rotary Club sponsored Gary for an aptitude test as a computer programmer. He passes the test, wearing high magnification glasses, and unknowingly took the first step on a remarkable career.

In the early 1980s Gary worked in a government military organisation. During this period, he was also spending his leisure time building customised Ford Transit vans – which came as a great coincidence when the company offered him a job as a system analyst in the IT department, despite his vision impairment.

Redmond has made extensive use of modern technologies now available to visually-challenged people, many of which are smartphone-based and readily available.

“ I make use of apps such as text-to-speech and AI as well as a variety of GPS-based systems to help find my way around. In addition to these tools, I rely on heightened senses such as touch and smell to help me understand my surroundings and even to pursue hobbies such as cooking and woodwork,” he says.

Gary's career has taken some extraordinary steps within Ford Motor Company of Southern Africa, including international travel and his responsibilities towards factories operating in various languages. He is currently responsible for Ford's entire manufacturing IT operations for Africa and South America.

Source: [News24](#)

## LEGO Braille Bricks Help Blind Children Learn to Read

The new educational toy will be available in twenty countries by the end of 2021

LEGO is rolling out a new toy to increase literacy in blind and partially sighted children: Braille Bricks. More than just a construction game, each of these colorful blocks is molded into a letter, number, or punctuation mark of the braille writing system.



A boy with short brown hair runs his left hand over a set of colorful Braille Bricks attached to a square panel.

Source: LEGO Foundation

LEGOs and braille are, in many ways, a match made in heaven. A basic LEGO block is a rectangle topped with six raised dots in a 3 x 2 pattern. A braille letter is formed from an arrangement of up to six raised dots in a 3 x 2 pattern.

Braille Bricks, which spent two years in testing, were dreamed up by the blind community itself. The Danish Association of the Blind pitched the idea to the LEGO Foundation (the charitable arm of the LEGO Group) in 2011, and the Dorina Nowill Foundation for the Blind in Brazil made their own prototype in 2017.

Click [here](#) for the Youtube video

Braille literacy has declined as technologies like audio books and screen-readers, which recite the text displayed on a computer or smartphone screen, have become more common. Advocates, though, say that auditory reading methods like these should complement braille, not replace it.

“For blind people, braille is literacy,” says Sean Randall, an IT instructor at New College Worcester, a school for the blind in the UK. Randall is himself blind. “The only other real option for someone who’s got no sight is to listen, and by listening you lose a lot of spelling, grammar, punctuation.”



LEGO bricks printed with braille letters are strewn across a yellow surface.  
Source: LEGO Foundation

Research suggests that guided play is [an effective teaching tool for primary-aged students](#) because most children learn best when they are actively engaged, interacting with others, and see meaning in what they're doing. LEGO's Braille Bricks can be used for play-based [education](#) in phonetics, spelling, and mathematics. For younger children who aren't yet ready to read, the blocks encourage the development of motor coordination and tactile skills.

Each brick is marked with the corresponding printed letter, number, or symbol so that blind and sighted children can enjoy them together. They're also fully compatible with LEGO's standard bricks, creating even more opportunities for imaginative play.

"Children dislike making mistakes," says Sue Lock, a mathematics teacher at New College Worcester. "If you're using a braille machine, your mistakes are there, written large. Children love being able to make something, unmake it if it's wrong, and make it again, and that is the important thing that Braille Bricks does."



A child's hand reaches out to pick up a block from a pile of Braille Bricks on a table.  
Source: LEGO Foundation

"It's ridiculous that all it does for us, really, is give us convenient access to moving letters around," Randall adds. "But that opens up so many doors, and that's a wonderful thing."

Source: [Psychologytoday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com)

## Stress Can't Actually Kill You — but How You Deal (or Don't) Matters

Life can be full of stressful situations, whether it's worrying about your work or [personal relationships](#), or struggling to cope with the restrictions imposed by the current global [pandemic](#).

No matter how small or severe the stressor, your body responds in the same way.

This response doesn't directly result in death, but it can have serious health consequences over a length of time.

Thankfully, there are plenty of ways to help you stay on top of events in your life.

So, if you're finding it difficult to work remotely or are [nervous about your future](#), read on to learn how to recognize [stress](#) and manage it in your everyday life.



### Why do people say that stress can do you in?

Firstly, it's important to understand there are two different types of stress: the good kind and the bad kind.

Both result in a [fight-or-flight response](#) that sends hormonal signals around your body, causing an increase in [cortisol](#) and adrenaline.

This leads to a rise in heart rate and blood pressure and, in turn, changes to almost every bodily system. This includes the immune system, digestive system, and brain.

Cortisol “can be beneficial in some circumstances, such as when it motivates you to complete your work on time,” notes [Dr. Patricia Celan](#), a psychiatry resident at Canada’s Dalhousie University.

Similarly, a [2013 animal study](#) found a short-term, moderate level of stress improved memory and increased alertness and performance in rats.

Researchers [believe](#) the same effect occurs in humans, though this requires further examination.

But long-term — also known as chronic — stress doesn’t have the same motivational effects.

“Cortisol gets toxic in high doses over a chronic period of time,” Celan explains, adding that this is what leads to serious health issues.

## If not stress, then what?

Stress itself can’t kill you.

But, “over time, [it] can cause damage that leads to premature death,” Celan says.

This damage can be anything from cardiovascular issues to encouraging unhealthy habits, like smoking and alcohol misuse.

“You could live longer if you had less stress in your life,” Celan says. “That’s why taking control over your stress is important.”

## How do you know when it’s starting to take a toll?

As stress can affect your physical, mental, and emotional health, it can show up in [a number of ways](#).

Physical signs include:

- [headaches](#)
- muscle aches
- chest pain

You may also experience digestive issues ranging from simple stomach discomfort to [indigestion](#) and diarrhea.

Some people who feel stressed also notice an impact on their sex life, whether it's [a lack of libido](#) or a tendency to get distracted in the moment.

Behavioral changes are common, too. You may find it hard to concentrate or make decisions in your day-to-day life.

You may become irritable [with those around you](#), and find yourself constantly worrying or feeling depressed.

People who smoke or drink may find themselves turning to cigarettes or alcohol more often than usual.

And, of course, stress can affect your bedtime routine. That can mean [struggling to sleep](#) at night, or finding that you're sleeping too much.

### What should you do?

It may be impossible to change the situation that's causing you to feel stressed. But you can learn to manage the effects stress has.

Whether you're looking for a way to immediately calm your mind or a more long-term plan, here are a few coping strategies to try.

### In the moment

- **Deep breathing.** One of the easiest ways to manage stress, no matter where you are or what time it is. [Breathe in deeply](#) through your nose and out through your mouth, holding each inward and outward breath for 5 seconds. Repeat for 3 to 5 minutes.
- **Listen to a mindfulness routine.** There are so many [apps](#) and videos to guide you. Try [Calm](#) or [The Mindfulness App](#) to start.

## Over time, if it's something you have a say in

- **Try meditation or breathing techniques.** Set achievable goals, whether it's 5 minutes of meditation morning and night, or deep breathing three times a day.
- **Exercise at your own pace.** Thirty minutes of exercise a day is [good for mood](#) and overall health. If that feels like too much right now, aim to go for a walk every other day, or [stretch for a few minutes](#) each morning.
- **Get into positive journaling.** Each evening, [write down](#) three positive things that happened over the course of the day.
- **Use your support network.** Communicating with partners, friends, or family can help you stay on track.

## Over time, if it's something you don't have a say in

If the cause of your stress is something you can't easily alter — workplace issues, for example — there are still coping mechanisms you can put in place:

- **Accept that you can't change everything.** Instead, focus on the things you do have power over.
- **Prioritize the most important tasks.** Don't worry if you don't get around to finishing them all in one day. You can carry on tomorrow.
- **Make time for yourself.** That can be as simple as going for a walk during your lunch break or setting aside time to watch an episode of your favorite show each evening.
- **Plan ahead.** If you're approaching a difficult day or busy event, make a to-do list and organize a backup plan to help you feel more in control.

## If you're struggling with coronavirus anxiety in particular

The current pandemic is an example of another situation that you can't control.

But know that you can help move things in the right direction by sticking to government guidelines and by focusing on your physical and mental health.



For example:

- **Set a daily schedule.** Incorporate everything from meal plans to regular relaxation breaks.
- **Don't worry about being overly productive.** You don't have to use the time indoors to overhaul your life or learn a new hobby. Focus on the simple things, like getting fresh air or reading a book.
- **Socialize responsibly.** Schedule in some virtual dates with friends and family.
- **Consider volunteering.** Helping others is a positive way to put things in perspective.

## How can coping strategies like these make a difference?

“When the mind becomes focused on a creative task, worrisome thoughts tend to fade away,” explains clinical psychologist [Dr. Carla Marie Manly](#).

“Feel-good neurochemicals, such as serotonin and dopamine, activate positive feelings of wellness and serenity,” she says.

Exercise and meditation have a similar effect.

Whether you step outside or [work out in the comfort of your own home](#), you'll produce a boost in feel-good neurochemicals and [may improve](#) your sleeping pattern.

Not pushing yourself is also important.

“A reduction in adrenaline and cortisol occurs when an individual isn't trying to please everyone and accomplish too much,” Manly says.

## What can happen if stress is left unchecked?

Long-term stress can have a detrimental impact on both your physical and mental health.

The exact effects, though, can vary from person to person due to factors like [genetics and personality](#).

Celan explains that high levels of cortisol can damage the body in many ways over time.

“[It] affects our mental functions, such as memory, [and] weakens the immune system so that fighting off an infection is more difficult,” she says.

Plus, Celan adds, it can increase a person’s risk for mental illnesses like depression.

Chronic stress may even [contribute to heart disease](#), though more research is needed.

However, it can cause high blood pressure, which is a risk factor of the disease.

## What if self-help tools aren’t making an impact?

Sometimes, self-help strategies aren’t enough to control or significantly reduce your stress levels.

If that’s the case, there are several routes you can take.

If you have the means, schedule an appointment with a primary healthcare provider or mental health professional.

Tell them about the stress you’re experiencing and how it’s affecting your life.

They may recommend [a form of therapy](#) or prescribe medication to help relieve some of the symptoms you’ve described.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a [common recommendation](#).

It can help you understand exactly what causes you to feel stressed and works to reduce those feelings with new coping mechanisms.

If you’re experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression, or finding it difficult to sleep, your healthcare provider may prescribe medication to help.

They can also prescribe medication for high blood pressure and other physical symptoms of stress.

Alternative treatments designed to relax the mind, like acupuncture or massage, may also be recommended.

## How do you find a provider, and what do you do then?

If you're looking for a specialist in mental health or stress, a primary healthcare provider can point you in the right direction.

Alternatively, you can find a therapist [to suit your budget](#) with an online mental health directory like [Psychology Today](#) or [GoodTherapy](#).

Free options are available, too. Find your local community clinic via the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#).

If you'd rather chat to someone over the phone or through text, you can with a therapy app.

[Talkspace](#) and [Betterhelp](#) allow you to message or video chat a therapist.

Specialist apps exist, too. For example, [Pride Counseling](#) is designed to help members of the LGBTQ+ community.

When you've found the right provider or therapist, you may find it helpful to use the following template to ask for support:

- **I'm experiencing physical/emotional/behavioral symptoms.** Describe your exact symptoms, whether it's irritability, fatigue, or unwanted alcohol consumption.
- **This is how my symptoms are affecting my everyday life.** Are they affecting your ability to work or socialize, for example?
- **I believe they're caused by stress.** Detail stressful situations that you regularly experience, or events that have happened in the past.
- **Here's my medical information.** Include medications you're currently taking, including supplements and over-the-counter drugs, and previous medical history.
- **I have a few questions.** These could be about treatments your specialist has suggested, or your diagnosis.

## Support services

Here are some additional helplines to store in your phone book or pass onto a friend or relative who may need it:

### **Cipla SADAG Mental Health Line**

0800 4567 789 or WhatsApp 076 88 22 775

For a suicidal Emergency: 0800 567 567

[Cipla Mental Healthline](#)

### **Destiny Helpline for Youth & Students**

0800 41 42 43

### **ADHD Helpline**

0800 55 44 33

[Open Counseling](#)

[Sadag](#)

## What's the bottom line?

Stress can be a powerful thing. But with the right coping strategies, it's possible to manage.

Sometimes you can learn to cope by yourself — but you don't have to do it alone. If you feel that professional help could be beneficial, don't hesitate to reach out.

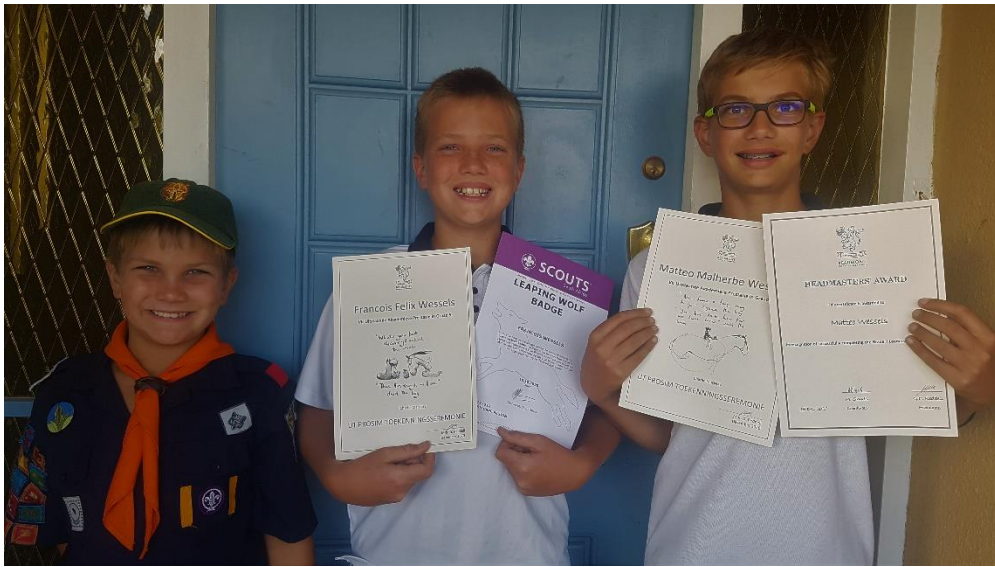
Source: Adapted from [Healthline](#)

## Beneficiary News

### St Dunstaner's Sons Excel in 2020

The sons of blind veteran, Don Wessels, excelled amidst the rigors of 2020. In the annual prize giving ceremony of Beaumont Primary in Somerset West, this year streamed live to parents and friends, Both Matteo (13) and Francois (11) received the prestigious 'Academic Achievement Award'. This for ending in the top 30 out of a group of near enough 180 learners in each grade.

Beaumont further bestowed the 'Headmaster's Award' on Matteo for showing initiative and leadership in a string of tasks set by the examiner.



Not to be outdone by his elder brother, Francois also received the venerable 'Leaping Wolf badge' at 1st Gordons Bay Sea Scouts. The Leaping Wolf is one of only two badges a Scout may wear into adulthood, the other being the Springbok Scout badge, a badge which all three Wessels brothers are aspiring to in the long term.

In the meantime, Youngest brother Gido (9) chipped in by showing his own dedication and leadership at 1st Gordons Bay Sea Scouts. At the end of 2020, he subsequently received the rank of 'Sixer', meaning a patrol leader.

In a year where school and Scouts were closed for months at end, resulting in children finding it difficult to keep being motivated, youngsters needed to show huge resolve in self-discipline to keep on studying, working and exercising from home.

By receiving these accolades, the Wessels brothers (tutored at home by blind dad Don), showed a lot of grit, determination and the ability to be pro-active. Congratulations, we salute you.

The Wessels family also thanks St Dunstan's for covering the lion's share of the brother's tuition costs. Without the financial assistance of St Dunstan's and the grace of God, the above achievements could not have taken place says dad Don.

# Announcements



**Mrs Naomi Cebisa**

We sadly had to say goodbye to Mrs Cebisa on 25 January 2021. St Dunstan's continued supporting her since the passing of her husband. She lived a full and happy life up until the age of 94.



**Mr Johan Gous**

It is with great sadness that we also had to say goodbye to a long-time associate of St Dunstan's, Mr Johan Gous. Mr Gous joined the organisation on 3 June 2003 and continuously donated to the cause. He passed away on 30 October 2020 at the age of 69.