



The Torch



Edition #30

Long Cane Rally 2023

After a 4-year hiatus we came back. Over the past few years, a combination of Covid and weather not playing ball, we returned en-mass to Worcester. Everyone was super excited to have one of their favourite events back: The John and Esther Ellerman Memorial Trust (JEEMT) Long Cane Rally.

The trust was founded in 1974 by St Dunstan's South Africa to perpetuate the memory of the late Sir John Reeves Ellerman, who was a great benefactor and friend of St Dunstan's and a Member of the Board.



John Reeves Ellerman always believed that to be able to enjoy a full working and social life, mobility was of vital importance to a blind or visually impaired person.

The JEEMT supports 25 Orientation and Mobility Practitioners and over the years this support has assisted those in need to access the relevant skills and training to live empowered and independent lives.

The LCR gives our participants the opportunity to show off their long cane skills on the day of the event. We had participants from various organisations and schools for the blind i.e., Athlone School for the Blind, Pioneer School for the Blind, Madrassa Tu Lil Muaaqeen (institute for visual impaired), Innovation for the Blind, Beacon Social Club for the Blind, Cape Town Society for the Blind and Guide dogs. Let's not forget the important role a guidedog plays in mobility and independence.



We usually have the LCR in October for eye awareness month, but this year we decided to have the event in March as we waited so long for lockdown to be over. Mountain Mill Shopping Centre in Worcester kindly offered their outdoor arena to host our event. What a beautiful venue. The outdoor arena overlooks the lake and has a stage and enough tables and chairs to seat our participants while they had their lunch.

JEEMT transported those organisations who did not have the resources to transport their participants to Worcester. We didn't want anyone to be left behind.

The participants started off their 3km walk from the outdoor arena, into the park and back. One of the young participants finished off saying with a big smile 'shooo that now was a walk and a half It was not just a walk in the park". The walk tested their skills, navigating unknown pathways and forcing participants to rely on their canes and guide dogs to get them there and back safely. The Marshalls along the route, ensured that everyone was safe and were ready to offer any support if needed.

Worcester being well known to get really hot, offered some cooling off showers of rain during the day eliciting shrieks, laughter and fun. Cooling those walking their route and sending those sitting at the tables scattering off for cover while others embraced the rain with sheer delight.

As participants reached their finished line, they were rewarded with a gift for participating and goody bags with fruit, bottled water and snacks from the Worcester community, all packed with love. We even had Pioneer's own DJ Quinton, broadcasting live and playing great tunes which got some peoples feet moving to the beat while Chantelle, also from Pioneer School was taking photos and capturing those memorable moments for us.

As everyone settled in their organisations followed by receiving their Steers double King Steer burgers thankfully sponsored by Steers, the lucky draw names were drawn. There were a whopping number of gifts to be won. It just warmed your heart to see the excitement and delight on the faces of the prize winners when they came up to collect their prizes. These delightful prizes had various items in the bags such as puma caps and socks sponsored by Puma; bottles of olive oil sponsored by Greenleaf, some kitchen items from Guide Dogs' cute little buckets with a face cloth from Nadeema and shower gel, bags of sweets, water bottles and more sponsored by JEEMT.

The Two Ocean's Aquarium also generously donated 4 tickets for 2 well deserving children and an accompanying adult from Athlone and Pioneer schools for the Blind.

The day was full of laughter and excitement but did not go without its challenges. Besides the rain, how can a day go by without loadshedding stepping in to cause its own ripples. As true South Africans so used to loadshedding by now, we did not let this stop our fun and continued the day through organised chaos. Everyone went home nicely cooled off by the rain and warmed up after a tasty burger to warm and fill their bellies.

We thank everyone again for joining us and making it a fun filled day. See you all next year.

Wow! Off with the old and on with the new!

By Garth Long

Guys, Greetings. This is for real.

Your Gmail Account is going to change.

Gmail is getting a facelift

Your Gmail account will soon look a little bit different as the company finally rolls out its long-expected makeover to all users.

In a bid to offer users a more complete Google Workspace experience, the updated Gmail will now provide not just email services, but video conferencing and chat options, all in a single location.

Users won't have to do anything to activate the new-look Gmail, which will be updated by default over the next few days to users across the world in a bid to help modernize the platform.

the company has confirmed that the new look "will become the standard experience for Gmail, with no option to revert to the original UI".

News of the facelift was first announced in February 2022, as part of a move to bring other Google Workspace services such as Chat and Meet closer to Gmail.

Most Gmail users were able to try out the new look service in November 2022, but retained the option to revert back to the "original view" at any time.

From today, this will no longer be possible, with users fixed to the new design - although Google does note that users can change their Gmail theme, inbox type, and more through the quick settings menu.



The change may seem quite drastic to some Gmail users, who will still see emails displayed front and centre, but shifted significantly over to the right-hand side of the display to make way for a new sidebar on the left side that contains quick links to Chat, Spaces and Meet, shifting your email folders and label options over slightly.

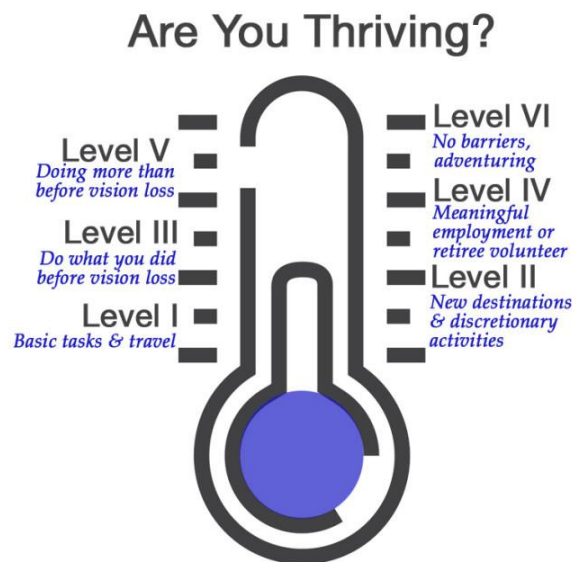
Thriving with blindness: surviving really isn't enough

Loss of sight later in life is quite common and can be devastating. Perhaps someone worked hard for decades and recently retired, ready to travel and enjoy the fruits of their labor. Life suddenly throws the person a curveball, and the person loses his or her sight. All too often, the person becomes homebound, afraid or unwilling to venture out. The person who is now visually-impaired will need some time to adjust to the loss but the long-term goal should be thriving with blindness. Without this goal, life may spiral downhill for the person, thinking life is not worth living.

Losing your sight during your working years can be incredibly hard. There are myriad enabling and assistive technology solutions which allow someone to return to the workplace. Unfortunately, the unemployment rate for people who are blind or visually-impaired hovers near 70%. One person I know was a neurosurgeon when he lost his sight in his mid-40's. He might still be able to teach but he won't be conducting any more surgery. That means a person who loses sight in their working years will have to learn new job skills while also learning new skills associated with vision loss. This would be a daunting task at any age. If that person has a family, then a certain level of helplessness and depression is almost inevitable. The person may go from primary wage earner to unemployed.

As with many things in life, it is important to set a goal or even a series of goals when you or someone you love is losing vision. The choice is yours, but it is my hope that you will set a minimum goal of restoring your independence. Anything less cheats all involved and I firmly believe you can succeed without sight.

I would propose six levels of thriving.



The Surviving Levels:

Level I Thriving with blindness: This occurs when you are comfortable traveling independently to familiar locations and completing activities for daily living such as cooking, laundry and the like.

Level II Thriving with blindness: In addition to Level I activities, you are now comfortable traveling to new locations, using unfamiliar means of transportation, and accomplishing discretionary activities. Did you know that there's a Blind Golf Association?

Level III Thriving with blindness: In addition to Level II activities, you have now fully restored quality of life and you're doing everything you did before vision loss. As our clients at the blind association used to say, "I don't want to do things with a bunch of blind people I don't know. I want to do things with my friends!"

The Thriving Levels:

Level IV Thriving with blindness: In addition to Level III activities, you have now returned to meaningful employment. While I guess it could occur before Level III, my belief is you'll find a better job if you've returned to a confident, happy state. If you are already retired, perhaps you can volunteer somewhere?

Level V Thriving with blindness: In addition to Level IV activities, you're now doing better than before you lost your sight. Perhaps you've taken on new challenges, overcome previous fears (e.g. become a public speaker), or could say you're happier than you were before vision loss. How is this possible, you might ask? Do you know people who are going through life on auto-pilot? Perhaps they're not happy or maybe each day seems the same as the one before. If we're open to the possibility, losing something may re-engage us in life and help us better appreciate the wonders of life.

Level VI Thriving with blindness: You could enjoy a completely marvelous life without achieving this level but I think it's fun to consider the possibilities. In addition to Level V activities, you have now entered the "adventuring" level of mountain climbing and other extreme activities

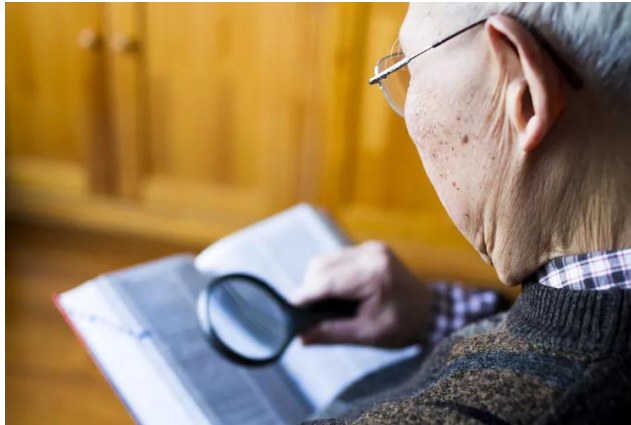
Source: [The Blind Guide](#)

A Caregiver's Guide to Coping With Vision Loss

Losing one's vision can be frightening, and losing the ability to care for yourself is something none of us want to ever think about. Many of us don't realize how much we rely on visual cues to accomplish all that we do in a single day. Vision loss—even mild vision loss—can be devastating and life-changing.

Some conditions that cause slow vision loss include:

Whether it happens to you or someone you love, all sorts of emotions may be experienced. The effects can be both physical and emotional, affecting not only the person suffering the loss but also their family and other loved ones around them. Normal, everyday tasks such as dressing in the morning or cooking a favorite meal can become quite difficult, even impossible, causing a loss of independence and severe anxiety.⁴ Caring for someone with vision loss can also be physically and emotionally draining. Learning ways to help others cope with vision loss can greatly ease the fears and emotional turmoil that it causes.



Vision Loss and Grief

Some doctors compare the initial reaction to vision loss to the Kubler-Ross different stages of grief after the loss of a loved one.⁵

The person experiencing vision loss often goes through the same process. Grieving is a natural response to a significant loss. The stages of grief include denial, depression, anger, and then finally acceptance. Understanding the feelings that go along with these stages can greatly help to ease fears.

- **Denial:** When someone receives news about a significant loss, a feeling of disbelief overtakes them. Even after some time has passed, these feelings of disbelief can occur again and again.
- **Depression:** Feelings of sadness and isolation are hard to overcome. A person will feel alone, thinking that no one else could possibly understand the impact of their loss. These feelings of sadness tend to make people withdraw from their usual social lives, leaving them with feelings of hopelessness.
- **Anger:** A person with vision loss may ask "why me?" As feelings of depression start to lessen, extra energy is available to express feelings of anger. Anger helps people to move forward and direct their grief and depression outward.
- **Acceptance:** During the final stage of grief, a sense of hope starts to return. One begins to experience periods of optimism for the future. With this hope comes the acquiring of new skills that enable a return to normal activities.

Vision Loss and Isolation

One of the most important ways to help someone with vision loss is to let them know they are not alone. Nearly 12 million U.S. adults over the age of 40 are visually impaired including one million who are blind.⁶

It is important to let loved ones know they can reach out to others experiencing vision loss, as well as professionals such as their eye doctor, low-vision specialists, or someone specializing in occupational therapy. In modern-day society, there are numerous resources that can be accessed to ease the challenges of adjustment.

VisionAware is a website sponsored by the American Foundation for the Blind and Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation. It offers a state-by-state directory of services for the visually impaired.

A Return to Normal

As a caregiver, assure your patient or loved one that if they are willing to make adjustments, it is possible for them to continue to enjoy their favorite hobbies and activities. The more they are willing to continue to participate in society, the easier it will be for them to continue their favorite activities. Let them know they don't have to stop working, either. Although there are exceptions for certain jobs, many people who develop vision loss continue in their current professions. You've probably come into contact with people every day with low vision and didn't realize it because they are functioning at a very high level, even with decreased vision.

Reaching Out for Help

When they are ready, you may consider enrolling your loved one in a class to learn new skills for regaining independence. Classes are taught by vision-mobility specialists who help teach alternative techniques to maintain independence. Occupational therapists also teach the mobility and motor skills that are required to function with low vision.⁷

There are also mental health professionals that specialize in vision loss or disabilities.

Solutions and tools are available to assist in cooking a favorite meal in the kitchen safely, getting around efficiently in the home, paying bills alone, and performing other tasks that are essential to everyday living. Technology has advanced to assist with these activities. Computers and appliances can be adapted to better suit someone with decreased vision.

The Lighthouse Guild offers many resources for those dealing with vision loss.

Tips for Coping

Those with significant vision loss can be taught how to continue living a productive life. The following is a list of hints and tips for helping someone with reduced vision learn how to cope with everyday activities:

- High-powered eyeglass lenses can magnify reading material. High-powered magnifying lenses with built-in lighting can be used for reading and other small items that need to be seen clearly.⁸
- Digital magnifying devices use video or pictures to enlarge certain items for viewing.⁹
- Many books, newspapers, and magazines are available in a large-print format.
- Audiobooks allow enjoyment of books that are more difficult to read.
- Removing clutter and repositioning furniture can make it easier to walk between rooms or up stairwells.

- Increasing the number and the brightness of the lights and lamps around the house can aid in vision.¹⁰ Installing better task lighting under kitchen cabinets and stoves will aid in cooking and preparing meals.
- Keeping regular visits to the optometrist or ophthalmologist will keep a check on your eye and vision health. Correcting vision problems in addition to using low-vision devices will better utilize your remaining vision.

A Word From Verywell

If a loved one has suffered vision loss, there are some things you can do and say that will be very helpful. A family member or friend of someone who has experienced vision loss becomes an important partner in the process of vision rehabilitation. They may be experiencing great stress and anxiety when they begin to find it difficult or impossible to write, read, or drive. Here are some tips to help your loved one better cope with their vision loss:

- Avoid being overprotective.
- Help build self-confidence.
- Recognize progress being made.
- Encourage self-reliance.
- Don't be afraid. Ask directly how you can assist.
- Ask before helping to encourage independence.
- Let them know you are available and always there if they need help with something specific.
- Talk about their issues, and don't be afraid to work on finding solutions together.

Source: [Very Well Health](#)

Birthday Wishes



Keagan Roberts and Dad, Archie



Michael Roberts and Dad, Archie

Happy Birthday to Keagan and Michael Roberts who recently celebrated their 18th and 16th birthdays respectively.



Dave and Veronica Mitchell

Happy birthday to our Chairman, Dave and his beautiful wife, Veronica who both will be celebrating their special birthdays in April.