



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

The professional voice of the UK Fire & Rescue Service

Fire Health Case Study: Optimeyes

Aims

To introduce a screening service and onwards referral to the Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind.

Context

This is all about making every contact we have with local people count. We believe the fire service can play a much wider role in terms of tackling some of the big health challenges our country faces in the future. This scheme is the perfect illustration of that aspiration, where the fire service's contact with some of the most vulnerable people in our local areas is being used to do more than just prevent house fires

Solution

The scheme has trained dozens of fire service staff in delivering a simple, five minute sight screening tool to assess sight problems. The assessment is now built into the fire service's established programme of home safety visits. 'Optimeyes' was created which was a two year partnership between South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue (SYFR) and Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB).

Outcomes

More than 7,000 people have been given sight loss information by the fire service in South Yorkshire and offered a specially developed screening tool if required, with at least 55 people referred to local charity Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind (SRSB) for further interventions. SRSB are also signed up to our Safe & Well Referral partnership scheme referral partner to enable their staff to identify any patients who may be at an increased risk of dwelling fires and ensure that SYFR can complete a Home Safety Check.

What's next?

Although the two year Optimeyes project has come to an end, fire staff will continue to refer people with sight loss issues to Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind providing a lasting benefit for local people.

Fire service scheme praised for transforming life of Sheffield sight loss patient

A Sheffield woman has hailed the life changing impact of a fire service referral scheme which saw her given vital help with her eyesight after suffering a blaze in her home.

Dawn Caney, aged 60, from Sheffield was referred for specialist sight loss support from Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind after fire service staff noticed cataracts may have contributed to the incident.

She was referred for help thanks to 'Optimeyes'- a new lottery funded partnership between South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue (SYFR), Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and local charity Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind (SRSB).

The scheme has trained dozens of fire service staff in delivering a simple, five minute sight screening tool to assess sight problems. The assessment is built into the fire service's established programme of home safety visits.

Nearly 5,000 people have now been offered the assessment by the fire service in South Yorkshire, with at least 40 people referred to SRSB for further interventions, including Dawn.

Dawn has now spoken to a hospital consultant about undergoing surgery on her cataracts, is visited by a physiotherapist to help her walking and referred to a care agency who help her with day-to-day tasks.

Dawn said: "I noticed that my eyes were getting bad about three years ago when things started to look blurred and I got a lot of headaches. I used to go out to the local shops every day but it got too difficult for me to manage the steps down from my first floor flat, I just couldn't see the rubbish. I was frightened of slipping, so I stopped going out, except to the rubbish chute. I was also frightened because I didn't know why I couldn't see clearly anymore. I thought it was because I smoked and that was what was causing everything to be blurred. Now I know it's also because I have got cataracts so that's a bit of a relief in some ways.

“I had an incident at my flat and the fire service came out. They sent a home safety officer out to visit me after that to check that my flat was well protected with smoke alarms and that I knew how to avoid the risks of having another incident. The home safety officer noticed that I couldn’t see clearly and referred me to Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind who I had heard of, but didn’t know how to get in touch with. I also didn’t know that they helped people like me who weren’t totally blind. “Since then my life has changed a lot, all for the better. A Community Advice Officer from SRSB came to my flat and has arranged appointments and support for me. I’ve been able to tell her all my problems and she always listens and asks me what I want and what I prefer. She gives me time to think about things first so I don’t feel pressured into making decisions. It feels like I have some say in my life again.”

“My support worker is helping me to trust people again and I now get out of my flat at least once a week. I would say there have been lots of positive changes in my life since February thanks to being referred to SRSB by the South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue.”

The fire service said the partnership is all part of its efforts to extend the benefits of the work it does with some of the county’s most vulnerable residents.

SYFR Area Manager Steve Helps, said: “In the last decade, the fire service has helped to make South Yorkshire safer than it has been at any time in its history in terms of house fires and fire related deaths and injuries.

“But we believe we can play a much wider role in terms of tackling some of the big health challenges our country faces in the future. This scheme is the perfect illustration of that aspiration, where the fire service’s contact with some of the most vulnerable people in society is being used to do more than just prevent house fires.”