

CHARITY OF THE YEAR FOR THE BLIND & PARTIALLY SIGHTED

Charity Of The Year

THE TORCH TRUST

The Directors of the Birmingham Telegraph take great pleasure in announcing the deserving recipient of the much acclaimed Charity of the Year Award for 2008 as Leicestershire-based organisation, The Torch Trust. The award reflects the services that the organisation provides in making a difference to the lives of blind and partially sighted people worldwide. The Christian resources and services that Torch Trust offer respond to both spiritual and practical needs of its users.

IN Britain, the RNIB puts the number of people living with incapacitating sight loss at 2 million. That's 1 in 30. Even across the UK support services are variable. Many lead isolated and lonely lives. And it's getting worse. With an ageing population the number of people with sight loss is set to double over the next 20 years.

How does the Torch Trust help? Torch was founded in 1959, almost 50 years ago, by Christians responding to

the spiritual needs of young blind people, and particularly to the lack of Christian books and other literature in a form that blind and partially sighted people can read e.g. Braille, large (or giant) print and audio formats like cassette and more recently CD.

The Trust took its name from Braille Christian magazine called The Torch that had been running since 1931. Today that magazine has a total circulation in a mix of formats of 10,000 -- including 5,000 in Braille alone, making it the world's largest circulation regular production in this format. It is sent from Market Harborough to readers in 100 countries and is now one of 7 magazines published by Torch.

Torch also produces a range of Christian resources for blind and partially sighted people including Bibles, books, booklets, calendars, daily readings, which are either free or priced comparable to the standard print editions.

Library services are really important to people with sight loss. Seldom can they find anything they can read in bookshops, many of which find it impractical to stock large quantities of bulky Braille or giant print books. Therefore, to meet this need, Torch runs a postal library service offering

3,500 titles in a mix of audio, Braille and giant print.

As well as providing Christian literature, Torch relates to the social isolation of those who have lost, or are losing their sight, through a network of local groups. Torch Fellowship Groups meet monthly at 130 locations right across the UK, from Inverness in Scotland to Coleraine in Northern Ireland, and with food and refreshments always available, these groups bring community and companionship with a Christian ethos.

As holidays can be a real challenge for anyone living with sight loss, Torch runs around 25 holidays each year, covering all sorts of interests, from gardening to adventure-style. Some are run at the Torch Holiday and Retreat Centre in Sussex, whilst others are organised at interesting venues across the UK. Wherever they take place, all Torch holidays provide a friendly family atmosphere in which those who live alone can make new friends. Many that come on holiday struggling to cope with their failing sight, leave having found new hope and confidence to cope with their life.

Internationally Torch works directly or with local partners in many countries including Spain and Malawi, one of the world's poorest countries. Producing

Braille Bibles in 8 African languages, Torch's local operation supports a network of 80 Torch Fellowship Groups, many of whom meet in mud hut villages. Here the survival needs of blind people confront the regular visitors from Torch's UK team, who are able to respond to both the physical and spiritual hunger of those who are all too often victims of a natural disaster.

Torch's philosophy can be underpinned by the 4-D Mission, which is strongly featured in the organisation's Spring 2008 'Torch Family News' magazine:

'We used to talk of the two arms of Torch: Literature and Fellowship. But Torch's development is such that it's now more appropriate to recognise 4 dimensions to the mission. In each of the four areas we have appointed a leader with a mandate for the development of the work. And there's plenty to do in the year ahead ...

Literature : As well as continuing to the produce audio cassettes preferred by many blind people, 2008 sees the introduction of more CD-based options for magazines and other literature, alongside continued growth in the special DAISY CD audio library. Recent investment in new technology allows more "on demand" transcription of Christian resources enabling blind and partially sighted people to participate in church life.

Regional : A number of new Fellowship Groups, including Coventry, Southwark and Nottingham, have recently been established across Britain. This is extremely encouraging and a sign of what is to come in the year ahead. This year Torch will also launch a campaign to churches to raise awareness of blind and partially sighted people's needs.

Holidays : This year, as well as over 20 holidays and retreats at our own Sussex centre, Torch has introduced some new holidays at other venues. There will be 4 new holidays in 2008 in Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and we plan a much larger Christmas house-party with High Leigh in Hertfordshire as the venue.

International : The emphasis is the development of ministry to blind and partially sighted people around the world through building partnerships with other locally-based organisations. The work in Malawi continues to grow and we are seeing networks of Fellowship Groups developing with our partners in other countries too.'

The work of the Torch Trust is almost entirely supported by donations and legacies.

For further information about the award winning Torch Trust, please visit www.torchtrust.org or alternatively call 01858 438 260.

TORCH
vision for people
with sight loss

Christian resources in audio, braille and giant print to 100 countries. A nationwide network of local Fellowship Groups. Friendly holidays tailor-made for blind and partially sighted people.

Call: 01858 438260, Email: info@torchtrust.org
Web: www.torchtrust.org

The Torch Trust for the Blind, Registered Charity no. 1095904



Photo by Andrew Carpenter