

# How the Sensory Impaired Support Group in Ayrshire developed sensory helps packs to reduce social isolation and loneliness during COVID-19

"I am delighted and overwhelmed by the positive response we have received from both our clients and local authority staff from this practical response to COVID-19 and beyond".

Denise McClung, Project Manager,  
Sensory Impaired Support Group,  
Ayrshire



## What was the emerging need?

The COVID-19 lockdown led to the suspension of the majority of the Sensory Impaired Support Group's (SISG) sensory stations. These are places where people can get support with hearing loss as well as help with hearing aids. This meant that people who would have previously received help with their hearing aids at the stations, were no longer able to do so. SISG have in-depth knowledge of the need for support with hearing aids in the community from their work in Ayrshire and knew that this had to be sustained throughout lockdown.

This need included:

- guidance on how to maintain and clean hearing aids, and
- getting the tools and equipment needed, e.g. batteries, tools to keep hearing aids in good working order.

Without this support SISG knew that the social isolation and loneliness, that many people with hearing impairments experience, could get worse during COVID-19 should they be unable to keep their hearing aids in good working order.

## Background to the response

The SISG in Ayrshire has three staff, 45 volunteers and 15 sensory stations across the area. At the sensory stations people can get support with:

- hearing aid batteries
- cleaning hearing aids
- renewing tubing
- advice and assistance on sight and/or hearing loss, and
- signposting and onward referral.

In 2019, SISG carried out a total of 5,103 visits to 1,895 older people with sensory loss. These visits took place within seven care homes, seven sheltered housing complexes, 33 homes and four hospitals.



Sensory Impaired Support Group

Insights into how health and wellbeing needs are being met in an equitable way during COVID-19



## How are things different?

With many of the sensory centres unable to open due to social distancing, there was a need to provide as close to the same service for people who experiencing hearing loss as possible during COVID-19. This led SISG to use Lottery Funding to develop sensory help packs to send out to people who use hearing aids.

These packs include:

- hearing aid cleaning/maintenance tools: puffer, 3-in-1 cleaning tool, alcohol cleaning wipes, silica gel sachets and two packs of batteries
- sight loss tools: hand held magnifier and bump-ons, and
- support and guidance documents which include a list of local contacts.

Links with local community groups have been forged. The sensory help packs have been sent out with food packages where a need for both food and help with hearing aids has been identified. SISG have also created videos to help people maintain their hearing aids themselves. They also now offer support calls to those who need it in the Ayrshire area.

SISG have received positive feedback from people who have received the sensory help packs and another sensory support group in Scotland is interested in adopting a similar service for people with hearing impairments in their area.

## Key insights: Denise McClung, Project Manager, Sensory Impaired Support Group, Ayrshire

“What prompted the development of the new service was that our clients were telling us that they weren’t able to access audiology or their local opticians during the lockdown for a regular appointment due to COVID-19.

Our response was enabled through funding from the National Lottery to purchase the equipment required to make up these packs and distribute them.

In terms of the barriers we experienced, postage could be expensive. So our local partners, Voluntary Action South Ayrshire and the North, South and East Ayrshire Sensory Impairment Teams offered to distribute some packs too.

The impact on inequalities and inclusion has been tremendous. There was no way of individuals - older people with sensory loss - getting the tools to clean or maintain their hearing aids or have bump-ons or magnifiers to help them see when they are unable to access a new prescription for their glasses without the sensory help packs being issued to them.

Getting the guidance and tools they need has not only met their needs in relation to hearing loss, but it has also prevented many people from experiencing frustration and the social isolation and loneliness they are at risk of.”

If you are interested in exploring something similar in your area  
or to find out more, please get in touch.

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