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Sense Impact Report 2019/20

How we made a difference in 2019/20

# Meeting the moment

14,000 people benefitted from support from Sense last year.

Sense is here for everyone living with complex disabilities. For everyone who is deafblind.

Everything we do supports individuals to express themselves, to develop their skills and confidence, to make choices and to live a full life.

Everyone is different and our skilled support reflects this in all our services – from supported accommodation to day opportunities, holidays to buddying schemes, and so much more.

Every small step is worth celebrating – whether it’s making a first cup of tea, experiencing the joy of dance, keeping in touch with a friend online, or moving into a home of your own.

* We fight loneliness. Young people enjoyed 5,195 hours of friendship and fun with their Sense buddies.
* We help children and families to get the best start. Last year 1,347 children and families received our specialist support.
* We support adults to live and learn at every stage of life. 96% of Sense services were rated good or above last year.
* We inspire people to take action. 50,000 people signed up to our Sense Sign School campaign.

# Our work makes breakthrough moments possible

When I meet the people we support – and their families and carers – I hear about the challenges but also their achievements and joys. Like a child learning to communicate with their parents, an adult making their own breakfast, or being supported to live in their own home.

Our work makes these breakthrough moments possible.

We’re driven by four priorities – support for children and families, offering lifelong opportunities, reducing isolation and spreading awareness. This report shares examples of Sense’s impact on the lives of people with complex disabilities and their families.

Last year, more than 14,000 people benefited from our range of services. This might be an early intervention project or a family get-together; a buddying scheme or a short break programme for young people; one of our supported living schemes helping adults to live independently or influencing government through our campaigning.

It’s estimated 433,000 people in the UK live with significant sight and hearing loss

Sense is passionate about ensuring every child and adult with complex disabilities gets the help they deserve. But there’s so much more we want to do. For every person we help fulfil their potential, many more remain isolated. For every family we support, many others are overwhelmed.

**We’re determined to provide a place where everyone belongs, where difference is valued and no-one is left out.**

We strive to bring people together and to make connections. Through sharing, learning and working together we achieve so much more.  
We could not do what we do without you.  
With my heartfelt thanks  
Richard Kramer, Chief Executive

# Meeting the coronavirus challenge

I’ve been humbled by the resilience and creativity of Sense staff and volunteers in the face of Covid-19. We have continued to be here for people living with complex disabilities, with a focus on keeping people safe and supported across Sense. We’ve learned new behaviours, new ways of working and new ways of communicating. And our specialist skills have continued to shine through.

Everyone has responded with professionalism, creativity and care

Our accommodation services remained open and when other services closed temporarily, we developed innovative ways to keep in touch and offer support. Like setting up video meetings so young people can keep in touch with their buddies. Like giving guidance to families on how to continue to give children sensory stimulation.

There will be new challenges of course, but I’m confident that the Sense family and our generous supporters will to rise to meet them – just like they always do.

## Keeping in touch with families virtually

These have been tough times for families, and we have done everything we can to support them. We’ve run video ‘visits’ to families, virtual pre-school groups, and called or emailed families regularly with activity ideas and useful links. We’ve also been planning with professionals to make sure that, when the time comes, young people can return to school or college safely and with the right support.

# Our priority: children and families get the best possible start

Children who are born deafblind or with other complex disabilities have a tough start. It can be immensely difficult to explore the world around them, to find ways to communicate and to learn to trust people.

It’s vital children like Jessica get help really early. Sense specialists have the expertise to understand a child’s ways of communicating. In partnership with parents or carers, we support each and every child to learn and grow in confidence.

The right support, at the right time, can make all the difference in a child’s development. It also strengthens and supports families, helping them to feel less isolated and to accept and embrace their future lives.

73,000 school-aged children in England alone are estimated to have complex needs

## Meet Jessica

“She’s laughing so much!”

When she was two years old, Jessica’s parents found out she had a very rare condition called Tetrasomy 18p. “It affects everyone differently”, said Louise, Jessica’s mum. “Jessica has problems with her muscle tone, so we weren’t sure if she’d ever walk. Her sight is also really poor. I’m thankful she doesn’t mind wearing her very strong glasses – without them she can see almost nothing.”

“I could tell from very early on that she couldn’t see very well. Then she was diagnosed with glue ear, which causes temporary hearing loss. Though Jessica’s hearing is mostly OK now, at the time I remember going home to cry. I thought, on top of everything else, now she can’t hear. How would she do simple things like making friends and reading stories together?

Nicky, a Sense Children and Family Support Worker, introduced us to the Mini Magpies group. They do really good things: the children enjoy all sorts of sensory play activities. Jessica has lots and lots of sensory needs. When she was little, she didn’t like to touch things, so it’s really good for her.

She loves the sensory story time – if it’s windy in the story a big fan blows, if it’s cold the children explore ice cubes, if it is rainy there`s a water spray. Jessica just loves spraying water on her face and gets dripping wet, but I’m not going to stop her because she’s laughing so much!”

## Last year

* 1591 people, including professionals and families, joined our awareness-raising sessions.
* 439 families came to 58 Sense events for information, support and fun.
* 210 Sense pre-school group sessions took place across the country.

## With your help

£70 could pay for a child to go to a Sense pre-school group with their parents.

# Our priority: adults are supported to live and learn at every stage of their lives

Everyone deserves the chance to live a rich and meaningful life. So Sense helps people living with complex disabilities open doors that would otherwise be closed to them. We’ll never give up on a person’s potential to learn and make life choices.

Naturally, everybody we help has a different path through life. For some, it may be working towards future goals like living more independently in supported housing. For others, finding joy in the here and now may be enough. That could be something as powerfully simple as feeling the rhythm of music or the grass beneath your feet.

Only four in 10 disabled people feel they have opportunities to be as active as they would like to be

## Meet Andrew

“We need to be treated like equal people – I like being who I am”

Andrew always loved football but was never encouraged to play. “People said that I’m disabled and I can’t do anything,” says Andrew. “They laughed at me and I got bullied. But I have a walking stick and a wheelchair to help me.”

Not taking exercise wasn’t good for his physical health or his confidence – and when the Sense Sports team set up football sessions in his local area, he was initially reluctant to join. At first, he tried a few simple games and took breaks when he needed to. Gradually he really got into it. His coach noticed and slowly made the games more intense – and Andrew’s passion grew and grew.

“I have been eating healthier foods like lettuce and that,” he says. “I stopped eating biscuits and did a 12-week healthy eating class.”

As his confidence grew, Andrew started taking more of a leadership role, helping the coach with the sessions for a number of different organisations. He was finding fitness, purpose and confidence all under one roof. “I tell other people it’s OK to be disabled,” he says. “Keep active and don’t let your disability put you down. We need to be treated like equal people – I like being who I am.”

## Last year

* 2090 disabled people attended over 1,000 sports and physical activity sessions.
* 336 adults benefitted from our Sense Day Opportunities.
* 248 young people enjoyed a specialist education at one of our nine\* Sense Colleges.

\* Includes the recent acquisition of RNIB College Loughborough

## With your help

£15 could pay for a person to take part in a Sense Sport session, such as climbing, yoga, Tai Chi or dance.

# Some 2019/20 highlights

## Mr Tyrese’s class of 50,000

Our Sense Sign School campaign gives the public insight into the challenges faced by people with complex disabilities. The 50,000 who joined learned simple signs from ‘Mr Tyrese’ through emailed videos.

“I liked being the centre of attention! It was nice my ideas and knowledge of BSL were listened to.”

Born with CHARGE, Tyrese relies on British Sign Language (BSL), gesture and written communication. Sense has supported 15-year-old Tyrese and his family since he was a baby.

## George’s happy holiday

Our team of leaders and volunteers gave 104 holidaymakers of all ages the chance to do lots of exciting activities, meet new people and create lasting memories.

George learned to abseil. He remembered: “We kept crashing into each other, funny, funny, happy, happy, happy – I love holidays!”

Sense Holidays and Short Breaks also give parents and carers a much-needed break knowing their loved one is safe and having an amazing time.

## Lydia gets out there

Last year, 139 children and young people with complex disabilities came together at our Get Out There (GOT) groups to have fun, make friends and grow in confidence.

Lydia joined the Cornwall GOT group. “It was a place where I could freely express and challenge myself. I joined the drama group and the possibilities seemed endless. I am very different from the nervous child who first joined. Now I try to shine a light on everyone around me.”

## Laely and Jenny are best buddies

Sense Buddying brings together young disabled people – who all too often feel left out – with volunteer buddies. Together they share hobbies, develop skills and, well, have fun!

Laely and Jenny were just two of the 77 individuals and 78 volunteer Sense buddies who linked up last year. Thanks to Jenny, Laely’s confidence to communicate, connect with the world and make choices has grown: she now uses picture symbols to show what she wants to do.

1,800+ volunteers gave their time for Sense across England, Wales and Northern Ireland

# Our priority: individuals are less lonely and more connected with their communities

We know that many disabled people feel lonely and that this is a very common experience among the people we support.

Sense services help people to build confidence, access new environments, play their part in their community, and find a route out of loneliness.

77% of young disabled people report feeling lonely

## Meet Darran

“Without someone like Vicky it would be unbearable”

“My sight suddenly got worse 12 years ago. I lost the sight in one eye and have much reduced central vision in the other.

My life changed completely. I had to give up my driving licence, couldn’t work anymore and my relationship broke down. I moved back near my mum and sister. My independence was shot.

It was very tough – it’s taken me a long time to adjust. There are still difficult times, and things I can’t do any more. I’ve always been very independent, so having to rely on someone else is the worse part.

My Sense Communicator Guide, Vicky, comes for six hours every week. It doesn’t sound a lot, but she makes a big difference. Sometimes we split the hours, for example if I need to go to the doctors. Sometimes we have a whole day so I can plan something – like going to the theatre, which I love.

We get on really well and trust each other. If I’m in a place I know, I’m happy to try to find my way on my own; if I feel nervous, Vicky guides me. She always lets me decide what I want to do.

Now I’m far more confident. I know I’ve got these hours that are mine. It’s where I want to go, what I want to do, instead of having to rely on friends and family. That’s so important for me.”

## Last year

* 78 volunteers trained as Sense Buddies and gave a total of 5,195 hours.
* Almost 2,000 people benefitted from our Sense Arts and Wellbeing activities.
* 346 people received support from our Sense Community Support services.

## With your help

£25 could pay for a sensory disco kit - disco light, glowsticks, sensory toys - so young people with complex disabilities can experience the lights, sounds and vibrations.

# Our priority: society has a better understanding and awareness of the people we support

We want to bring about the day when no one with complex disabilities is left out of life – but we can’t do this on our own.

Society as a whole needs to understand what stops people taking part in life.

We want everyone – people who are deafblind or have complex disabilities, their families, friends, neighbours, employers, colleagues, volunteers and policymakers - to understand the challenges – and to be inspired to act.

We’re committed to spreading the word about our vital work and to ensuring those who are deafblind or living with complex disabilities are heard about what matters to them.

50,000 signed up to Sense Sign School to learn BSL

Over half of MPs believe Sense is influential

## Meet Catherine

“I felt passionate about showcasing the work of Sense”

Catherine met MPs and Peers in February to tell them what it’s like to live with sensory impairments.

Politicians and policymakers have often never met anyone who is deafblind or has other complex disabilities. Sense knows the most powerful way to address this and break down barriers is for them to spend time chatting with people who live with sensory impairments.

At our `Say hello to Sense’ event in the House of Commons, parliamentarians met Catherine and Tony, Maria and Daniel, who all have sensory impairments.

“It was a fantastic day and I thoroughly enjoyed interacting with everyone,” said Catherine. “I felt confident about explaining how important it is to match deafblind people’s varying communication needs, and how Sense works to do just that.”

“I had a fabulous time mixing with everyone, including Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson. She’s won gold and silver Paralympic medals and inspired me to demonstrate my belief in the importance of British Sign Language hands-on signing. She encouraged me to continue promoting awareness of this type of communication too!”

## Last year

* Our campaign for joined-up policymaking succeeded: a new Cabinet Office unit is now working on a cross-government disability policy.
* Sense featured in the BBC One Lifeline Appeal, reaching 2.5 million people and raising over £20,000.
* Half a million people visited the Sense website to learn how they can receive support from us, or to offer their support.
* We answered nearly 3,800 enquiries, providing vital specialist information, guidance and signposting to individuals, families, carers and professionals.

# More 2019/20 highlights

## “I got my own place now”

Sense opened seven more supported living schemes, including the first ones in Wales and Northern Ireland. Sense Supported Living comes in all shapes and sizes so people can live independently: they choose where they live, what support they want and who they live with.

Tracey is proud of her new home: “My mam and I decorated my room and I’ve got all my photos. I like sitting in there watching telly. I make cups of tea and cook; I go food shopping and get my hair done.”

## “I feel valued”

People we support influence all aspects of Sense at an individual, local and strategic level. In our Working Together for Change programme, 332 adults gave us feedback in individual review meetings, including:

* “I am supported by staff I trust, who understand my needs, and work together with me.”
* “I feel I have a choice. My independence is recognised and encouraged.”

Understanding their views - their needs, wishes and aspirations – shapes the way we work and the services we provide.

## “A dream come true”

Vivian, Scarlett’s mum, said: “I love Sense because it recognises the impact of having a disabled sister. Scarlett adores her sister but sometimes feels rejected. She finds it difficult to make friends and gets frustrated by the limitations we face.

Sense’s Young Sibling Holiday Weekends are a dream come true for her. Scarlett returned bursting with happiness and fizzing with news of wonderful adventures and new friends. These fun weekends also show Scarlett there are others like her, who understand what it’s like.”

Scarlett joined an activity weekend for 26 siblings of disabled brothers and sisters

## “I have something to share”

Through visual arts, music and performance, Sense Arts supports people with complex disabilities to express themselves and discover their creative spirit.

Last year, we delivered 1,933 arts and wellbeing workshops to 322 people, curated 10 visual arts exhibitions, opened a dedicated arts space at Sense TouchBase Pears - our pioneering multi-purpose centre in Birmingham – and welcomed 1,678 audience members to over 26 performances and events.

# Thank you!

## Your life-changing support makes a world of difference

* Trusts and statutory supporters gave funding to the tune of £830,000 to support some truly innovative work.
* 165 people left Sense a gift in their Will and raised 2.68 million.
* 73,136 people made a monthly donation or responded to one of our appeals, raising £3.7 million.
* 744 groups, companies and individuals raised funds and awareness in local communities across the country.
* More than 750 runners, walkers or cyclists took on a challenge, raising over £1 million.
* 2.8m shopping transactions happened, thanks to our enthusiastic and loyal Sense shoppers.
* 832,000 bags of pre-loved items were donated.
* Countless people got involved in our ‘Fun Weeks’ across our 115 shops, raising over £100,000.
* Over 13,000 people played the Sense Raffle, raising over £240,000.

## Phil’s special moment

“I’m the first to admit that my reasons for taking on Sense’s Ridgewalk weren’t entirely selfless. I’d seen it as a useful challenge to boost my fledgling career as a writer – but gradually the meaning of what I was doing hit home.

Five hours into the walk itself, as everyone was flopping down for a welcome lunch break, there was a particularly special moment. Laszlo, who has been supported by Sense for over ten years, and his mum Rachel, were just passing on a day out when they spotted a sea of Sense t-shirts and decided to say hello.

“We just thought we’d come to say thank you,” said Rachel – while Laszlo, who was obviously a bundle of energy, was shouting “Sense Holidaaaays!” with a big smile on his face.

It suddenly dawned on me. The amount I raised, £582, could buy three days of fun and new experiences for Laszlo – as well as three days of much-needed breathing space for his mum. Time to lace those boots up again – the Ridgewalk was completely real now and I had work to do.”

## Stuart’s legacy

We are so grateful to Stuart Willison whose generous legacy gift will support Sense Centre Streatley in Luton.

When he was sixteen Stuart lost an eye in a shooting accident. His niece, Mrs Doreen Anthony, says he always felt compassion for those without their sight.

This wonderful gift means we can build a new accessible training kitchen where the people we support can gain invaluable life skills and greater independence.

As soon as visits to the centre become possible again, Doreen is looking forward to seeing the impact of her uncle’s gift.

# How money comes in

Sense receives fees for some of our services, - in particular, supported living, community, day opportunities and specialist education - but we rely entirely on the generosity of our supporters to sustain and grow the full range of life-changing work we do.

**Pie chart showing the breakdown of the total income in 2019/20 of £69.9m:**

£44.7m - Statutory supported living, residential care, community and day opportunities

£2.2m - Statutory specialist education for 16-25 year olds

£0.8m - Holidays & short breaks, arts, sport & wellbeing, specialist services for children and young people

£0.8m – Sense International

£0.4m – Sense TouchBase Pears community hub

£10.2m – Fundraising and legacies

£10.6m – Sense Trading

£0.2m - Other

# How we spend money

For every pound Sense receives,78p is spent supporting people who are deafblind or have complex disabilities. The other 22p is put back to work to raise the next pound so we can do even more.

**Pie chart showing the breakdown of the total money spent in 2019/20 of £69.5m:**

£44.7m - Statutory supported living, residential care, community and day opportunities

£2.2m - Statutory specialist education for 16-25 year olds

£2.8m - Holidays & short breaks, arts, sport & wellbeing, specialist services for children and young people

£2.1m – Sense International

£1.3m – Sense TouchBase Pears community hub

£0.3m – Quality and development of services

£1.0m – Campaigning and awareness-raising

£4.2m – Fundraising and legacies

£10.8m – Sense Trading

£0.1m - Other

# Thank you to our major supporters

Anne Hess

Arts Council England

Audrey Earle Charitable Trust

BBC Children In Need

Birkdale Trust for Hearing Impaired Ltd

Brian Callaway

Brian Lay

Cantiacorum Foundation

Catriona Guinness

Cecil Rosen Charitable Trust

Christian Purslow

Christopher Sharp

Dance Hub

David Brewer

Edgar Wilkins

Elizabeth Reis

Ernest Hecht Charitable Foundation

F R Choudhury

Fowler Smith and Jones Trust

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Gordon Garrett

Graham and Mary Stacy Trust

Gregory Fattorini

Grow Wild

Helen Robertson Charitable Trust

Jesus Hospital Charity

John and Diana Crabtree

John Buckenham

Joseph Strong Frazer Trust

Keith Codling

London Stock Exchange Group Foundation

Marion Morris

Merchant Taylors’ Company Trusts

Michael Heartley

Order of Red Cross of Constantine

Outdoors For All

Payne Gallwey 1989 Charitable Trust

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Peter Murray Smith

Peter Storrs Trust

Price Parry Charitable Trust

R Brewer

Richard Thomson

Roger Eaton

Rose Francis

Smith Charitable Trust

Sport England

The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust

The Annette Duvollet Trust

The Ballinger Charitable Trust

The Barbour Foundation

The Bartle Family Charitable Trust

The Beatrice Laing Trust

The Belsize Trust

The Blair Foundation

The Camelia Trust

The City Bridge Trust

The David Family Foundation

The D’Oyly Carte Charitable Trust

The E F Rathbone Charitable Trust

The Edward Cadbury Charitable Trust

The Essex Youth Trust

The Eveson Charitable Trust

The G M C Trust

The Gale Family Charity Trust

The Geoffrey Watling Charity

The Hadley Trust

The Hatfield Davis Trust

The Helen Jean Cope Trust

The J & M Britton Charitable Trust

The J S Trust

The John Pinto Foundation

The Levy Family Charitable Trust

The Michael Marsh Charitable Trust

The P F Charitable Trust

The Patrick and Helena Frost Foundation

The Pilkington Charities Fund

The Princess Anne’s Charities Trust

The R Farquhar Oliver Trust

The Roger & Douglas Turner Charitable Trust

The Roselands Trust

The Sheila Hasler Charitable Trust

The Sir John Eastwood Foundation

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The Strangward Trust

The Tanner Trust

The Thomas Farr Charity

The Thomas J Horne Memorial Trust

The Violet Helen Dixon Charitable Trust

The Vision Foundation for London

The William Kenneth Hutchings Charitable

Trust

The Wixamtree Trust

Williams Family Foundation

Winifred Eileen Kemp Trust

# About Sense

No one left out of life

For everyone living with complex disabilities. For everyone who is deafblind. Sense is here to help people communicate and experience the world.

We believe that no one, no matter how complex their disabilities, should be isolated, left out, or unable to fulfil their potential.

Our experts offer support that’s tailored to the individual needs of each person, whether that’s at our centres, through our holidays and short breaks, or in people’s own homes. In addition to practical support, we also provide information to families, and campaign for the rights of people with complex disabilities to take part in life.

If you, or someone you know, require this information in a different format, please contact Sense Supporter Services using the contact details below.

Sense, 101 Pentonville Road, London N1 9LG

Tel: 0300 330 9257 (voice) Text: 0300 330 9252

Email: [supporterservices@sense.org.uk](mailto:supporterservices@sense.org.uk) Website: [www.sense.org.uk](http://www.sense.org.uk)

Patron: HRH The Princess Royal

President: The Lord Levy

Registered charity number: 289868