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## Training to help the blind

Health trainers in Sunderland have successfully completed some training of their own – as sighted guides for the blind and partially sighted.

The trainers, who are employed by South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust to support people in the local community to develop healthier behaviours and lifestyles, were presented with certificates by Sunderland and North Durham Royal Society for the Blind.

Health trainer lead Steve Ruffell said: “Our role is to encourage people to adopt healthier lifestyles, which can include stopping smoking, increasing physical activity, eating more healthily and drinking sensibly. We aim to work with as many groups as possible and our purpose in doing this training was to equip us with skills to enable us to help local blind people to achieve their choices and goals.

“As part of the training, we each accompanied a blind person on a walk. It was nerve-wracking to start with because, as the guide, it’s your responsibility to describe all the obstacles in their way, from potholes to over-hanging branches. However, it was very rewarding to be able to provide such practical support.”

Richard Wood, Executive Officer for Sunderland and North Durham Royal Society for the Blind, said: “I think it is wonderful that they have taken the time to do the ‘My Guide’ training, which we run in conjunction with Guide Dogs UK.

“Only a small percentage of blind people have a guide dog so sighted guides are very important. By doing the training, the health trainers were able to get an idea of the problems blind people face and potential barriers to them taking part in activities to promote a healthy lifestyle.”

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust’s health trainer service in Sunderland operates citywide and receives referrals directly from individuals, businesses, agencies or health professionals. If you would like further information about the service call 0191 5027163 or email [SunderlandHealthTrainerService@stft.nhs.uk](mailto:SunderlandHealthTrainerService@stft.nhs.uk)

To find out more about becoming a sighted guide, contact Sunderland and North Durham Royal Society for the Blind by telephoning 0191 5673939.

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*Pictured above: The photograph shows Sunderland health trainers with their sighted guide certificates, Richard Wood of Sunderland and North Durham Royal Society for the Blind and Society volunteers Chris and Harry Ellis and their guide dogs Faith and Urma.*

Issued on behalf of South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust by Kay Jordan

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