

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Visual Impairment charities stand together in partnership at Vision 2005 conference

Action for Blind People, The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and RNIB stood in partnership at the Vision 2005 conference to reduce the impact of blindness and sight loss in the UK. Vision 2005 - the world's largest ever conference on sight loss – was hosted by the three visual impairment charities which took place last week at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Westminster, London.

Over 1,200 experts and professionals from 70 countries came together at Vision 2005 to discuss sight loss in the UK and worldwide. The conference looked at every aspect of sight loss and ways of helping people live with it – from prevention to rehabilitation and from the psychological effects of sight loss to the latest technological developments.

Employment was one of the six themes of the conference, highlighting the fact that 75% of blind and partially sighted people of working age are unemployed and those who are working, are concentrated in unskilled and lower paid jobs.

Stephen Remington, Chief Executive at Action for Blind People said, "We feel our partnership with RNIB and Guide Dogs helps us to raise awareness of sight loss and tackle employment and other key issues for blind and partially sighted people."

Lesley-Anne Alexander, RNIB's Chief Executive said: "RNIB is incredibly proud to have brought the Vision conference and so many of the world's leading experts on

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sight loss to the UK. Vision 2005 and working in partnership with Action for Blind People and Guide Dogs, has helped us to raise awareness of the needs of the UK's 2 million people with sight problems and push for sight loss and eye health to be further up the political and health agendas."

Bridget Warr, Chief Executive of Guide Dogs: "Vision 2005 gave us all an insight into the major issues facing blind and partially sighted people. As Guide Dogs comes into its 75th year of service in 2006, it is increasingly clear that tackling these issues in partnership can be more effective, immediate and lead to a greater positive impact for blind and partially sighted people in our community."

Action for Blind People's Mobile Sight Loss Information Service was parked by the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre to offer advice and support to those affected by sight loss and members of the public.

Alongside this, Guide Dogs trialled the prototype of their virtual reality simulation specs to critical acclaim. The specs allow sighted people to experience several different eye conditions from myopia to macular degeneration and glaucoma in what feels like a busy street environment. Guide Dogs hopes to develop these further as a powerful educational and awareness raising tool.

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For further information please contact May Ho or Debbie Flatley, Press Office on 020 7635 4898/4921.

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Notes for Editors

- 1) Action for Blind People supports over 20,000 blind and partially sighted people in the UK every year.
- 2) Action works to inspire change and create opportunities to enable blind and partially sighted people to have equal voice and equal choice and to live a full and valuable life.
- 3) Action provides visually impaired people with opportunities through employment, housing, leisure and information and support. For information and advice please call 0800 915 4666 or visit our website www.afbp.org
- 4) Vision 2005 took place between Monday 4 to Thursday 7 April at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Westminster. The conference was hosted by RNIB and co-hosted by Action for Blind People and Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. Held under the auspices of the International Society for Low Vision Research and Rehabilitation (ISLRR), Vision takes place in a different country every three years. This year is the first time it has been held in the UK. Vision 2002 took place in Sweden and Vision 2008 will be held in Montreal. Vision 2005 London was the largest and broadest conference ever held on sight loss and low vision.

Every day another 100 people in the UK will start to lose their sight. There are around two million people in the UK with sight problems. RNIB is the leading charity working in the UK offering practical support, advice and information for anyone with sight difficulties. If you, or someone you know, has a sight problem RNIB can help. Call the RNIB Helpline on 0845 766 9999 or visit www.rnib.org.uk.