



Hard-working holiday helpers!

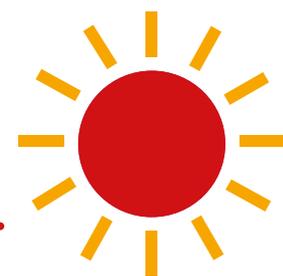


Many of you will have heard of Torch's Holiday and Retreat Centre, but what you may not know much about is the hard work our incredible volunteers put in to make it all possible.

Amy Mulholland had heard of Torch before. Her husband Kyle has sight loss and over the years people had mentioned Torch to the couple. But it wasn't until earlier this year that the couple felt God pulling them towards Torch: 'We didn't look into Torch until, in God's sovereignty, an opportunity came up for Kyle to do a placement at the Torch HRC as part of his training for ordained ministry in the Church of England. I was really keen to volunteer alongside him at the HRC and to find out more about ministry to people who have sight loss,' explained Amy.

Amy eagerly applied to join the team of volunteers, saying that she found the process nice and straightforward: 'There was a written application form, a criminal records checking process, and a cup of tea and a chat with Suzanne at Torch House!' After joining the team, volunteers all receive training – such as sight loss awareness and guiding skills – from our staff members, ensuring they are comfortable with what they'll be doing.

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This summer, Amy had her first experience of volunteering on a holiday, helping the guests to make the most of their week away. When asked what her favourite part of her time there was she explained that 'it was seeing the HRC staff showing the love of Christ to the guests. They were such a good example to us of Christian service, when we're only just starting out in ministry and when we have a lot to learn! It was such a joy to be there for a week.' Amy really enjoyed the environment, saying that 'it was important to me to volunteer for a Christian organisation where you are encouraged to share your Christian faith, in practical ways and when chatting with people.'



I would say just go for it! I was quite nervous about guiding people with sight loss as I hadn't done it before, but I found it got easier as the week went on. I'm glad I just had a go and met some wonderful people along the way!



When asked what difference Amy felt she had made, her response was very reflective of the humble, honest approach she showed at the Centre: 'I think the guests made more of a difference to me! I hadn't met anyone with sight loss before, except Kyle, so it was great to get to know a diverse group of people, all with different experiences, wisdom, and challenges. I hope that being keen to chat with the guests, alongside doing more practical jobs, made some difference to their holiday.'

For Amy, that holiday was just the beginning as she is planning to continue volunteering, and she and Kyle have further plans for their journey with Torch: 'I'm looking forward to getting more involved with the Sight Loss Friendly Church initiative. Kyle and I have been to Torch House for a training session and it sounds really exciting!

Amy is eager to encourage others who might be thinking about taking the plunge as a Torch volunteer: 'I would say just go for it! I was quite nervous about guiding people with sight loss as I hadn't done it before, but I found it got easier as the week went on. I'm glad I just had a go and met some wonderful people along the way!'

Torch Holiday and Retreat Centre is run by Kasia Tymbarska and her team of dedicated staff members. Their hard work is hugely important and highly valued, but as Kasia says: 'We are so privileged to have our volunteers helping us on our holidays.'

Without their willing hearts and compassion towards our guests it would not be even possible for us to run the holidays.

It is not just setting up the tables or washing up that they help us with but also spending time with our guests, praying for them, listening to them and all the pastoral aspects of serving.

Guests are usually encouraged by us having time to meet their individual needs. It is an individual and holistic approach to the person that is practiced in the Torch environment and because it requires a lot of one to one time with the guests, we always have our hands full.

Therefore we are most delighted to receive any extra help from willing-to-serve volunteers.'

JOIN US!



If reading about the amazing work done by our holiday volunteers has inspired you to join the team, then please do get in touch! We're always on the look-out for more people to get involved and use their gifting to help our holiday-makers have the very best breaks. You can visit the volunteers page on our website for more information, or give Client Services a ring on 01858 438260. And if you know someone you think might be interested in volunteering with Torch, then do please pass this message on!



Looking forward to



Torch's CEO Julia Hyde looks back over the year at Torch, and forward at what's still to come.

As I write this, I can't help but reflect on the passing of another year – a year that has certainly been eventful for Torch and for me! A number of 'big moments' spring to my mind – my appointment as CEO, the steady growth of our Sight Loss Friendly Church campaign (which you can read more about later in this issue!) – but perhaps none sum Torch up more than our Thanksgiving event, held this past September at Torch House.

The day began with a joyful, lively service during which we were able to praise the Lord through song, prayer and reflection. It was followed by a wonderful time of fellowship and friendship (and plenty of cream teas!) I met friends of Torch both new and old, all of whom were there to share together. It was a day that really captured the spirit of Torch. If you were unable to attend, a video of the service is available on Facebook. To watch it,

just visit [facebook.com/torchtrust](https://www.facebook.com/torchtrust) and click on 'videos'.

As recent as 2018's Thanksgiving seems, it's already time for us at Torch to be thinking about the next one! As some of you may know, 2019 is rather a landmark year for Torch: it will be our 60th anniversary in June and we want to celebrate. With that in mind, we have decided to hold 2019's Thanksgiving Celebration on Saturday 22nd June. The planning is underway and we would love to have as many of you joining in as possible. More details will follow in the new year, for now please save the date to celebrate!

When I think about Torch's future I am filled with excitement. So much has been done already but I know there is much more still to be achieved. We know that blind and partially sighted people have a right to the tools they need for a fulfilling life, and the purpose of Torch is to facilitate that. This work is ongoing.

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I am reminded of Jeremiah chapter 29 verse 11: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” It is with this hope that we look forward into the New Year, excited to discover what our 60th year will bring for Torch. And as we look forward, we remember that without you, our supporters, none of this would be possible. So from the bottom of our hearts we say thank you all, and wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

The joy of giving and receiving?

Torch's Chief Operating Officer Rev Michael Heaney gives thanks for all that we receive.

Christmas, at some point I suspect, challenges us to be joyful in the exchanging of gifts. For me personally, I have sadly long passed the time of being excited on waking on Christmas morning about what I might be receiving by way of gifts, my excitement now is about watching grandchildren opening their gifts, especially the ones from me. But just giving can be one of the most thrilling aspects of our lives, even when we hear or see no reaction or get nothing in return. I suspect however that I do also need to love receiving more? The Christmas story is the one which celebrates God's greatest Gift, but loving to receive it afresh is also a celebration. For the ministry and work of Torch we are so blessed to be in a place where we are both able to give and to receive.

Again this year we offered a free gift as we partnered with Lifewords, Livability and Biblica to produce large print, braille and audio versions of their popular Christmas booklet 'OUTSIDE/IN'. The story is told from the perspective of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and sages: outsiders who find themselves included at the very heart of the story. The Christmas story is full of unlikely characters. Those on the edges are drawn to the heart of the action. Everyone is invited in. So by giving this our prayer is it might welcome people in to the good news of the Christmas story. We would love that!



And in receiving can I say on behalf of all who we serve in Torch thank you for your gifts of prayer and finances over this past year, it has consistently driven us to our knees in celebrating God's love to us through you.

May the joy of giving and receiving in the context of God's kingdom be cause for celebration this Christmas and every day. 'Your gifts meet the needs of the Lord's people. And that's not all. Your gifts also cause many people to thank God.' 2 Corinthians 9 vs 12

DONATIONS



For various ways of supporting Torch in prayer and financially do visit our website or call Client Services – we would love to hear from you.

Many people are using online banking and find it easy to set up payments in that way to Torch Trust for the Blind, Sort Code: 40-52-40, Account Number: 00017072.

Cheques should always be made payable to Torch Trust for the Blind.

Talking Tech!



Calling all would-be techies! We're starting a great new TorchTalk telephone group for anyone who wants to learn more about technology, and use it for spiritual encouragement in their journey with Jesus. If your friends mention how they discover inspirational material on the internet, and you would like to know how you can do it yourself, then this group may interest you. Steph Sergeant will facilitate the group, helping to discover what participants are interested in doing. Steph says 'We will have time to get to know one another. We will be sharing our knowledge, so those who have already discovered useful things on the internet for themselves are very welcome to come and share their knowledge.'

The group will meet on the first Monday of each month at 7.30 pm. The first few sessions will take place by phone, then the group will be switching to Skype.

TorchTalk is a free service which aims to bring people with sight loss together in fellowship. The groups provide Christian friendship, discussion, prayer, encouragement and fun via telephone conference calls. The groups are open to anyone with sight loss of all faiths or none. A particularly popular group takes place every first Sunday of the month: it's a Sunday Service Group, aimed at people who may not be able to get to church. To find out about this and the other groups we have available, visit our website or call Client Services.

Sight Loss Friendly Church is picking up steam!

We're very happy to tell you about our preparations for our new campaign Sight Loss Friendly Church.



If you've not heard of it yet, let us tell you more: it's an exciting initiative from Torch that supports churches to become more welcoming and accessible to people with sight loss. This can take many different shapes and forms – just as every person with sight loss is unique, so is every church and congregation.

As part of our preparation we are already working with a number of churches to enable them to become more sight loss friendly. You may have read in a previous Torch News about St Thomas the Baptist in Exeter. One of our clients Emma Major has also been working with Torch encouraging her church to become a SLFC. Emma lost her sight three years ago, and since then has done a lot of work in her church and community to raise awareness of sight loss. Emma says her church has made many positive changes already: 'We now provide all our weekly sheets, monthly newsletters and hymns in large print and electronically (if requested). We have also designed our new church centre with all disabilities in mind including those with a visual impairment; I'm trying to get a tactile map arranged as the last part of this process.'

Through Emma's amazing work, her church has been able to take their approach to being accessible even further, helping her church think differently about disability and being welcoming: 'Having done this, and worked hard on culture change around disability in the church, I feel we can honestly say we are a sight loss friendly church.'

The changes made by this church are truly fantastic – but that's not to say this is a template for all churches. 'Sight

Loss Friendly Church is a state of mind, in a way. It's an open-armed welcome to people who may previously have felt excluded or uncomfortable within the church', says Paul Rhodes, Torch's Presence Manager, 'It's as simple as asking people "what do you need?"'

We know that lots of churches are listed buildings which may not be able to make big physical changes, many simply don't have the resources to devote to a full overhaul. But that is no barrier to being a Sight Loss Friendly Church. Our campaign is for any church and any congregation. The desire to be welcoming is all you need to start with.

We are planning to launch our campaign in our 60th anniversary year, 2019. Once churches have joined Sight Loss Friendly Church they'll gain access to expert advice and guidance from Torch! We have resources and booklets as well as our training for churches in the form of a Sight Loss Friendly Church workshop. We'll also be adding a map to the website where you can find details of all the churches who have signed up to become more sight loss friendly.



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SLFC is about making a connection, and inviting people in. Emma says that part of her reason for signing up to SLFC was to help other churches who might want to take up some of the same ideas, 'I am hoping that other local churches will be able to learn from our example and I'm talking to other leaders locally about the importance of being sight loss friendly.'

FIND OUT MORE



Go to our website torchtrust.org/slfc, watch our short video and learn more about how important it is to be sight loss friendly.



Fellowship from far and wide

News from our partners Torch Trust Malawi

Torch Malawi's administrator, Stanley Moyo, reports on his recent visit to local Torch Fellowship Groups.



It was a very cool day in September when I, fellow staff member Blessings, and our new driver Simon started off to Chikwawa. In our beloved Land Rover we travelled for 45 minutes down the hills to arrive at our first visit for the day. What a good welcome we had from the members of the groups, and I could see how eager they were for the word of God. Truly it was a good start.

We were meeting with two groups here, Domasi and Umodzi. I shared the word of God from the book of John: 4:1-10 "The meeting of Jesus and a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob". My theme of the teaching was 'receive from the Lord things that shall forever satisfy your body and soul'. I said that to God, blind or not blind, is not an issue. God wants us all to repent and follow what He wants so that we become saved. Later that day we went to Mitekete Fellowship Group. I encouraged the leaders of the fellowship group, the Chairman of which is blind himself, to continue visiting the blind people and help them.

On the following day we started off at 7:30am to the eastern side of Chikwawa which is almost 60 kilometers away. We travelled along an earth road with a lot of pot holes and, although tarmac construction has begun, it was a long journey.

This visit was to Nkadyamwanu and Nsingano Fellowship Groups. Here we found that there was a funeral close to the place where we gathered and according to Malawian culture, we could not sing and dance while others are mourning. Instead we had a quiet fellowship, sitting down and updating them about things happening at Torch Malawi and UK.

Our next destination was Matimati Fellowship Group. This group is one of the oldest, and the coordinator, a cheerful, hardworking man called Mr Njerwa, is also one of the first members of Torch Malawi. Here I shared the word from the book of John 13:1-10 where Jesus washed the Disciples feet to demonstrate His love, anointment and passion towards them though He knew that one of the Disciples would betray Him. The Jesus we serve today is the Jesus of love and mercy.

Afterwards I reflected on the successes and challenges facing the groups. We were pleased to find the Chairmen and members of the committees are very much committed to the running of the groups. We also heard that most of the blind members are being utilised in their churches as leaders and that is so very encouraging. Blind people and their guides travel long distances to get to the groups which clearly shows that they trust God and commit themselves to the work of the Lord.

There are very serious challenges facing the people in the groups, including the fact that most of the blind people do

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not have enough clothes and blankets as they mostly rely upon their relatives and spouses, as well not much has been harvested this year and as I am reporting this, most of the blind have little or no food. The people who coordinate the groups travel long distances to communicate information from the office on foot and there is a need for bicycles for them. Additionally there are over 30 albino children in the groups who are affected with the hot weather we have in Malawi, and require skin ointment and shoes. Please pray with us for these serious challenges, and join us in giving thanks to the Lord for the successes.



A new “Smile” for Casa Torch Romania

Dr Mike Townsend, President of Dezna Torch reports on the changes to Casa Torch in Romania.



After ten years of inactivity, Edith and I were filled with fresh hope from God as we opened the door of Casa Torch on July 4th 2018 and welcomed a renovation team from the ‘Smiles Foundation’. The Romanian trustees had neglected Casa Torch despite numerous offers from partners. In December 2017 I was called to an “end of the line” meeting. I stated that there was no other option than to transfer the premises to an organisation with the ability, and God focused energy, to take them forward.

I had already been in discussions with Kevin Hoy of the ‘Smiles’ Foundation about possibilities. ‘Smiles’ runs excellent quality projects. Their facilities for disabled people are superb. Love for Jesus permeates all they do. I had no hesitation in recommending the transfer of Casa Torch to ‘Smiles’. The trustees handed the responsibility over to me as their new president. The legal processes are underway. Torch UK trustees fully support this move. I was so excited. The first activity at Casa Torch was a ‘Smile’ eye specialist medical team from the USA. 200 people had their eye health needs met in September. Many were thrilled to be able to read the Bible.

Casa Torch will be run as the ‘Dezna Outreach Centre’. A new roof has been installed at a cost of £13,000.

The total cost of bringing Casa Torch into operation is around £100,000. The key purpose of Casa Torch will be to bring God’s love mainly to disabled people with a particular emphasis on blind and partially sighted people. This will be done through various activities, hopefully to include life skill training for young people starting life after education, summer camps for children, a residential facility for the elderly plus hopes for a holiday/retreat centre.

“Give glory to God” John 9:24.

GET INVOLVED



Thank you for your support for the blind people of Romania over many years. Please join us in this new opportunity. The Torch UK trustees ask that you transfer your support and prayer interest to the ‘Smiles’ Foundation. Torch will no longer be responsible for gifts towards Casa Torch. Contact: The Smiles Foundation, 153 Beeston Road, Leeds LS11 6AW, 0113 276 5060. info@thesmilesfoundation.org www.thesmilesfoundation.org



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Torch scripture calendar available now

We are once again selling our popular large print and braille scripture calendar. Available for just £3, the calendars are printed in A4 size with hook for easy hanging. Every day features a different piece of scripture. The calendars are great for inspiring daily prayers or Bible readings and discussions and would be a lovely Christmas gift. To buy yours just contact Client Services.



Even more ways to volunteer

As well as volunteers at our Holiday Retreat Centre, as mentioned in our front page story, we have need of plenty more volunteers in a wide variety of roles. Perhaps you'd enjoy being an audio editor or a radio researcher? Maybe you'd like to be a driver for a fellowship? Those are just a few of the roles available and you can find the full list on our website torchtrust.org or phone us on **01858 438260** to have a chat about opportunities.



Lights, camera, action – watch our film now!

We are very excited to announce that Torch now has a short video all about Sight Loss Friendly Church! Shot over several days this autumn, the three and a half minute film showcases the campaign and explains why accessibility and being welcoming are so very important in our church communities. Please do watch and share the film, which is available with and without subtitles on our website torchtrust.org/slfc.



Click and connect

You can connect with Torch via our social media pages – we're on Twitter @TorchTrust and on Facebook, just search for Torch Trust. If you have sight loss you can also join our Digital Café on Facebook, a friendly, lively community of people discussing sight loss and faith matters. You can also always get in touch with us via email, at info@torchtrust.org.



TORCH

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Jonathan Lamb; Revd Roy Searle; Dr Elaine Storkey; Revd Dr Derek Tidball.

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