

Sight charity to explore stories of soldiers blinded in First World War

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Casualties from the British 55th Division taken in April 1918

Sight Support Derbyshire (formerly Derbyshire Association of the Blind) was established in 1914 and soon became a vital source of support for returning soldiers readjusting to life with sight problems or permanent blindness. A century later, the organisation is still working to improve the lives of people with sight loss throughout Derbyshire.

The '100 years and still serving' project will mark both the centenary of the organisation and the War. Visually impaired children and older people will explore the stories of the returning soldiers through museum visits and by using audio books and tactile objects.

The project will culminate with the creation of a piece of art or sculpture which will tour around Derbyshire.

Claire Winfield, CEO at Sight Support Derbyshire, said: "We are delighted to have been awarded the grant in this, our centenary year. The original idea behind the charity was to support blind and visually impaired children who were missing out on education, but the First World War changed the emphasis because of the need to help returning injured soldiers.

“The project is a great opportunity for our older and younger members to come together and record our history and the impact of the War on our organisation’s development. We are looking forward to working with local museums and community groups to ensure that blind and visually impaired people can access World War One collections and use that information in their research.”

The announcement comes as groups across the UK examine the links between war and impairment as part of Disability History Month (22 November – 22 December). The annual event this year looks at the impact and treatment of newly disabled people following the First World War and other conflicts since.

Vanessa Harbar, Head of HLF East Midlands, said: “This is a fascinating project which will shed light on the unexplored story of how soldiers readjusted to living with visual impairments after the War. The changes in society’s understanding of sight problems, and the creation of support networks such as Sight Support, are just some of the ways that the War still impacts on us today.”

The project is set to begin in January 2015.