

# Charity Campaign of the Year

**Perry Thakrar** speaks to *Optician* Charity of the Year Award winner 4 Sight on the progress it has made on its health centre expansion programme



Last year, 4 Sight, a charity which supports more than 5,000 blind and partially sighted people living in West Sussex, had ambitious plans to build the first 'multiple health centre' in the area.

The ambitious plan was to purchase a new property just minutes away from the town centre of Bognor Regis with excellent transport links and equipped with a large resource centre, audio library, rehabilitation-training kitchen, conference and training room, counselling service, transcription studio, indoor hydrotherapy pool and exercise and therapy rooms. Users would also be given access to holistic therapy and counselling.

Established in 1921, the charity already had deep seated roots in the community. It currently operates a network of more than 50 specialist clubs for blind and partially sighted people to ensure they have access to a support network and are not isolated from the community.

By the time the charity entered *Optician's* Charity Campaign of the Year Award 2007, sponsored by the Outside Clinic, it had raised a staggering £600,000 in just seven months towards the cost of building the new centre. The swift execution and follow-through of the project, especially taking into account 4 Sight's limited resources, had impressed the judges. In awarding the top placing to 4 Sight, the judging panel heaped high



**Martin Pearson, chief executive of 4 Sight, collects the trophy for the Charity Campaign of the Year Award from Nick Wingate, head of professional services at sponsor The Outside Clinic**

praise on the charity for identifying a need in its local community, addressing it and for its successful fund-raising abilities. Moreover, the charity was applauded for its ability to maintain existing volunteer levels, as well as increasing numbers at a time when this can prove difficult for charities.

Now, 12 months on, the centre is up and running and even bigger than first planned, explains Martin Pearson, chief executive of 4 Sight. 'As the work on the project progressed we realised that the building offered us more scope for expansion than we initially envisaged and therefore we raised further funds to accommodate this change in our plans,' he says.

According to Pearson, the final cost of the project was £720,000 and the new facilities have the potential to

make an enormous difference to those suffering from vision loss.

'We have been able to extend and improve the services we offer local people with sight loss because of the additional space gained as a result of this project. The new premises enable us to be more efficient as we can accommodate more services under one roof,' he says.

Winning the prestigious award has also benefited the charity in several ways, explains Pearson. 'It is very important internally for people to get formal recognition and a morale boost – winning the award certainly did that.'

'It has also been advantageous for us when it comes to dealing with people working in the health and social community or even optometrists, because winning the award signified that we are a serious organisation and have had formal recognition that we are very successful at what we do.'

He adds: 'It's has also generated a lot of goodwill from the people that we want to support.'

Looking ahead, Pearson says: 'We are wholly dependent on grants and donations and we are always looking for ways to improve or extend our services. Our main priority is to help people to optimise the use of their remaining sight.' ●

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