

## VisionPK's Garry Ritchie: The Importance of Specialist Vision Rehabilitation



Garry Ritchie is a knowledgeable and experienced board member of VisionPK, being part of the senior management structure which oversees all the work of the registered charity as it delivers support for those with sight and hearing loss across the population of Perth and Kinross.

Garry has a condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa (also known as RP) and brings valuable lived experience of sight loss to the board, able to influence and shape key decisions.

He served in the RAF for 22 years and currently works as a project engineer. He also has a wonderful guide dog (*pictured, left, with Garry*).

At just the age of 40, Garry was diagnosed with RP and subsequently registered severely sight impaired, so working full time as an Engineering Project Manager could have become a challenge.

“Rehabilitation ensured I kept my independence and continued my employment. After an initial vision assessment, the rehabilitation I required was mapped out and agreed.

“The main thing for my personal independence was to receive long cane training. I did this over several weeks, initially learning my common routes, and how to safely board the train for my commute to and from work. Being able to commute safely to and from work not only gave me independence but also confidence back in public spaces.”

Garry also received advice about his domestic environment, an integral part of much-needed support for those on their own personal visual rehabilitation journey.

“I received advice about things like cooking. Utilizing aids such as a fluid level monitor and coloured chopping boards have allowed me to continue cooking safely.”

A further issue with RP is ensuring lighting is adequate in different environments while also minimizing any glare. As part of his rehabilitation, having access to equipment which could help him with this problem was key. Garry tried out several lights and magnifiers to enable him to both continue working and maintain his passion for cooking at home.

“Vision loss, in my opinion, is not just physical; it has a huge effect on mental health. After diagnosis there is a grieving process for what you had. While rehabilitation played an enormous part in navigating this whole process, the emotional support was just as important as the practical help I received, and both have enhanced my quality of life.”