

BOWLED OVER BY FRIENDSHIP

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Each week Foresight, a Grimsby charity for the visually impaired, arranges a visit to the Cleethorpes Bowling Alley.

Despite devastating effects on their lives, the group - which make up several teams - refuse to let being registered as blind or partially sighted stop them from enjoying a game just like any other person.

Laughing and joking, they take to the alley like everyone else, with the same verve and vigour as the other bowling enthusiasts.

It's only when I sit and talk to them I realise the personal battles they have overcome to get this far, and make the most of a simple pleasure we take for granted.

Volunteer Denise Woollard (57), from Cleethorpes, said her eyesight is limited to the centre of the pupil of one eye. Something which had huge consequences for the rest of her life: "It happened virtually overnight when I was in my 30s.

"The first thoughts you have is that you can't do anything any more. You can't get a job or do any of the things you used to enjoy doing.

"I had to change my entire life. I used to work round my family life by doing jobs in shops, working here and there. That had to come to an end."

However, she began to find she was not alone. Through the then Grimsby College she began to find her new lease of life. "I was asked to run starter courses in IT.

"My role was to teach people the basics on how to use a computer so they can continue in their education.

"It gave me a bit more confidence in myself, about what I can actually do and the things I can get into."

Since the official launch of Foresight, Denise has been involved as a volunteer. She said: "We do a range of activities, including IT, tenpin bowling and archery.

"We meet up every Monday at the Cleethorpes bowling alley, and our group includes disabled people as well as those with visual difficulties.

"We have our own league to include those people, as well as those with visual impairments.

"The only difference in the set-up is we have the barriers up to stop the ball from falling into the side - like a lot of people do.

"We also have volunteers to help take some of the bowlers up to the lane, and hand them the ball."

She said the effect on people's lives has been impressive: "Most of these people didn't think they would be able to do it, but came along to give it a go.

"It's a very happy group - everyone enjoys themselves.

"Afterwards, we all head to the pub and have some lunch to make a day of it."

Liz Stephenson (55), also from Cleethorpes, is a member of the Beauty And The Beast team, just one of several that come together to bowl, thanks to Foresight.

In the recent Winter Independent Tenpin Bowling League Championships, they won the four-in-a-team cup. She said: "The team is called Beauty And The Beast because there used to be three women and one man! We have balanced out since then to two men, but we have kept the name."

Other winners included The Three Rounders, who came 11th, Sugarbabes, who came eighth, and Gary Rowntree, who won the individual knockout final.

Liz described the condition which took her sight: "I have always had problems with my vision. The worst happened when I had macular degeneration. I was registered as blind three years ago.

"Now I can't read unless it's in large type.

"I can't recognise people by their faces, and I don't tend to go anywhere unfamiliar on my own. It can be unsettling going into a room full of people."

She said joining the bowling team was the key to a great social life: "That's what I like about bowling - it's a good excuse to have a get together, and you make a lot of good friends."

Debbie Pleasants (44), from Humberston, is in a wheelchair because of spina bifida, a condition which affects a person from birth, and results in an incomplete spinal cord. Debbie also has visual impairments. She said she didn't let it stop her having a great time at the bowling alley: "I wheel up to the line, move the arm of the wheelchair up and throw the ball.

"It's a nice, friendly place to be. I go to Foresight and get involved in a range of games. I also do archery at North Kelsey."

Denise said: "Anyone who is interested should not hesitate to call us and get involved."

Get in touch

If you or someone you know could benefit from getting involved, call Foresight on (01472) 269666.