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Evaluating the effectiveness of the Macular Society Eccentric Viewing Rehabilitation Training

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The Macular Society have provided Eccentric Viewing (EV) training across the UK since 2006, by training volunteers to deliver a community based model. Trainers deliver free one-to-one training during 1-3, 1 hour sessions over a 2–3 month period, usually in learners' homes.

The Evaluation Study was conducted by independent researchers on behalf of the Macular Society, to assess the effectiveness of the programme. A total of 58 trainers and 200 learners participated in the study between October 2012 and April 2014, and 121 learners completed all stages of the study. The researchers used telephone interviews to gather detailed information from learners and trainers spread across the UK.

The organisation of the programme was in general very well received by the learners. The best feature of the training was perceived to be the trainers themselves: they were felt to be knowledgeable, well-trained and friendly. 75% of learners felt that the trainer had given them helpful advice in addition to the EV training. The learners welcomed the fact that the training could be conducted in their own home.

Learners usually have the goal of improving their reading, or seeing better in general. Around 65% of them feel they have achieved a positive effect at the end of the programme.

In addition to the interviews, each trainer also recorded their learner reading some sample print of various sizes, before and after the training. When these recordings were analysed, no improvement in reading speed was found, on average. It seems that many of the learners already had good reading speed, so

there was not much scope for improvement. After the training, the learners could, on average, read print which was slightly smaller, and equivalent to the size of large print, but the frequency and duration of reading did not increase.

There was a borderline significant increase in “life satisfaction” following the training, and this did seem to be linked to those individuals who had an improvement in their reading speed. However, there was no change in health- or vision-related quality of life, or in the difficulty experienced in performing everyday tasks.

The Macular Society will now be able to use these findings to decide whether any changes need to be made to the EV training programme to make sure that it is as effective as possible.