At this time lockdown restrictions will be officially ending in the UK. With so many people looking forward to reuniting with family and friends, Glaucoma Awareness Week will focus on the fact that glaucoma can be hereditary and the importance of loved ones in the lives of people with the disease. Over 700,000 people in the UK are living with glaucoma, and their close blood relatives are four times more likely to develop the disease. Glaucoma is the term used for a group of diseases that irreversibly damage the optic nerve, leading to sight loss and, if untreated, blindness. There are no early symptoms of glaucoma, so up to 40% of the peripheral vision can be lost without even noticing. Between 2015 and 2035, the number of people living with glaucoma in the UK is expected to increase by 44%. During Glaucoma Awareness Week, Glaucoma UK aims to encourage families to openly talk about glaucoma and urge relatives to have regular eye tests every two years. The charity also aims to highlight the help that they can offer families and friends to support a loved one with the disease. Twenty-seven-year-old Jessica Sydenham from Cardiff was born with congenital glaucoma, a common form of childhood glaucoma. “My family and friends are really supportive and I’m able to talk to them about any issues I may be having” says Jessica. “It’s important for people to be aware of what you’re experiencing, especially as the disease can be invisible. If you don’t tell them, they won’t understand.

Having that support bubble around you is so important.” Jessica is aware that glaucoma can be hereditary. “My partner and I often talk about the chances of our future children inheriting glaucoma” she says. “I remain optimistic that if my child does have the disease, then it won’t be a problem at all. Glaucoma has never stopped me from having a normal life, and I will be there as a pillar to lean on when our child needs my support”. Karen Osborn, Chief Executive of Glaucoma UK, says: “This year we’re raising awareness of the family link with glaucoma. If you’ve got the disease, your close relatives are at higher risk of developing glaucoma and encouraging them to have regular eye tests could save their sight. We’re also starting a conversation about how we can support loved ones who are caring for someone with the disease. Glaucoma UK runs regular digital glaucoma support groups which are free to attend and cover a large range of topics on the disease. We also have a helpline, website and free leaflets for anyone needing advice about glaucoma, as well as an online community which provides a welcome space to discuss common issues and share coping strategies.” Glaucoma UK is encouraging everyone to get involved in Glaucoma Awareness Week by displaying posters for the campaign and sharing social media posts, to spread the word and show their support for people living with the disease. All of the resources needed to make this happen are available to download on the charity’s website. Glaucoma UK is also urging people with glaucoma to start the conversation with relatives about the importance of regular eye tests. Family and friends can get involved too by brushing up on their knowledge of the disease, using Glaucoma UK’s many services including information booklets, digital support groups and community forum, with the aim of better supporting their loved ones.

For more information about this year’s Glaucoma Awareness Week, visit www.glaucoma.uk/glaucoma-**glaucoma.uk** awareness-week or join the conversation on social media using #GlaucomaAwarenessWeek

**About Glaucoma UK:** Glaucoma UK is the charity for people with glaucoma. We’re here for people with glaucoma and their loved ones. We campaign to raise awareness so glaucoma is detected early and can be treated, we support people to live well with glaucoma and we fund sight-saving research. For more information, please visit our website glaucoma.uk Glaucoma helpline: 01233 64 81 70 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am–5.00pm).