**PRESS RELEASE**

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**“He will be my eyes” - 24 mountain peaks in 24 hours - how a blind London lawyer and his sighted boss are aiming to raise tens of thousands of pounds for 225 year old disability charity SeeAbility**

A high-flying London lawyer, who is registered blind, and his sighted boss are to summit 24 mountain peaks in 24 hours (September 7-8) to raise vital funds and awareness for SeeAbility and celebrate the disability charity’s 225th anniversary.

Michael Smith, 33, who lives in North London, has only around 10% vision. At just 19, he and his twin brother, Dan, both lost the majority of their sight very quickly because of a rare disease called Leber’s Optic Neuropathy, an inherited condition that affects the optic nerve and causes sight loss in the centre of the field of vision.

Jack Stacy, 38, who lives in London Bridge, works with Michael as a Senior Vice President at Revantage Real Estate, a real estate affiliate of the private equity giant, Blackstone.

Throughout the challenge, through which they hope to raise £150,000 for SeeAbility, Michael and Jack will be tethered together, with Jack providing sighted guiding and support the whole way. They will have to work in complete unison to complete the gruelling challenge which is officially graded ‘extreme’.

Michael says: “I don’t have much usable vision and haven’t got any depth perception, so Jack will be planting his feet on the ground and then telling me where to plant mine. He will be my eyes. I will be reliant on him every step of the way.”

For Jack, who became Chair of SeeAbility a year ago, the challenge is also deeply personal. His brother, Matty, was born prematurely and spent the first four months of his life in an incubator. The oxygen treatment that saved his life caused him to lose his sight, and he also has complex learning disabilities and has never been able to speak. Matty lives in Wellington, Somerset, where he has been supported by SeeAbility for 24 years.

Michael and Jack will summit 24 mountain peaks in the Lake District, including Scafell Pike, the highest mountain in England. They will cover at least 28 miles, while ascending a total of 12,000ft. It’s 12 hours of hiking a day, over two arduous days.Day one covers the first nine peaks and day two, the other 15 peaks.

Jack says: “We believe passionately that this isn’t just about scaling mountains. This is about challenging what we expect from life. For many people with learning disabilities, autism or sight loss, society expects very little. SeeAbility challenges those expectations and supports hundreds of people like my brother Matty to live in their own homes, lead a life of independence and choice, have ambitions and realise their dreams.

“Crucially, they pave the way for a more inclusive society through their awareness raising work. We’re setting ourselves this challenge to reflect and highlight SeeAbility’s ambitious and life-changing work for the last 225 years.”

With just weeks to go before they set off, they are training hard together and have developed a set of verbal commands to communicate the terrain around them, so Michael can picture it in his head.

Michael says: “When we stand at the foot of the first mountain, I think it will bring back some memories for both of us about what it was like at the start of our own personal journeys, when sight loss hit our families, and the guide rails were taken away. The experience was so frightening and all-encompassing and that’s how I imagine this challenge will feel.

“Ultimately, organisations such as SeeAbility make all the difference when individuals like me are rehabilitating from the trauma of sight loss. Through their support they have allowed me to lead a very normal life. We are very grateful to everyone who is sponsoring us and supporting the vital work of SeeAbility.”

He adds: “Jack and I have a symbiotic relationship, we’re used to working in tandem with one another, and I trust him wholeheartedly. What am bringing to the party? I’m bringing morale, as Jack can be quite grumpy. I’ll be like a 24 hour podcast. We’re a bit like Shrek and Donkey.”

Michael, who has recently joined the Board of SeeAbility, has decided to share his sight loss story to inspire others and help challenge perceptions about living with sight loss. His dramatic sight loss forced him to change careers and undergo intensive rehabilitation with support from charities like SeeAbility.

Even those who know Michael might be surprised to learn how little usable vision he actually has. Michael now uses innovative accessible technologies in the workplace to support him to succeed in his role as Principal Legal Counsel at Revantage Real Estate.

Michael and Jack have already raised over £100,000 of their ambitious £150,000 target. Among the companies generously sponsoring them so far are: Revantage Real Estate, Thirdway, Knight Frank and Arthur Cox.

SeeAbility CEO, Lisa Hopkins, says: “We are in awe of Michael and Jack for taking on this extraordinary challenge for SeeAbility to mark our 225th anniversary. The money they are raising will help our work enormously and we thank everyone who is so generously sponsoring them.”

If you’d like to help Jack and Michael reach their staggering £150,000 fundraising goal, and make a tangible impact on the lives of people with learning disabilities, autism and sight loss, please show your support by donating at: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/jackandmichael>

To find out more about SeeAbility, please visit: <https://www.seeability.org/>

Ends

Media contact: media@seeability.org or 07719047129

**Note to editors:**

**About SeeAbility:**

* For 225 years, SeeAbility has pushed towards an inclusive society, where people with learning disabilities, autism and sight loss can fulfil their ambitions, big or small.
* In the last year, **22,000** lives were changed through our expertise in eye care for people with learning disabilities, our social care support for people with learning disabilities and autism, our library of accessible information, and our campaigning and advocacy work to raise the voices of people with lived experience.
* **261** people with learning disabilities and autism were supported in homes and supported living services, some being supported to move out of long stays in hospital.
* **3,254** children were supported with eye care in special schools.
* People supported into paid employment worked **4,223** hours, enabling them to have the independence to save and spend their own money.