



GUIDE  
DOGS



# Guide Dogs volunteering strategy

**Inspiring connections; the crucial role  
of volunteers in delivering By My Side**

**2019 – 2023**



Volunteering strategy 2019 - 2023

Inspiring connections



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## Foreword from Tom Wright, Chief Executive Officer



At Guide Dogs we could not provide the life changing services we do without the remarkable dedication of our volunteers. **Guide Dogs volunteers give 6 million hours per year, a figure that trebles to**

**18.5 million when the 24/7 element of some roles is considered.** From raising our puppies to being a sighted guide, and from generating funds to supporting and directly delivering our services, every volunteer is fundamental to the work we do.

'By My Side' is our organisational strategy that sets out how we will achieve our plans to increase our services so that we reach and help more people with sight loss, as well as their friends and family. With services growing and developing, we will need more of people's time and generosity to achieve our ambitions. In fact, we predict we will need 6000 more volunteers by 2023, taking us from 16,000 to 22,000 volunteers.

### **Volunteers are an integral part of our present and our future.**

During my time at Guide Dogs it has been such a privilege to meet many of our amazing volunteers; their enthusiasm and commitment to our cause is infectious. No matter how much time our volunteers give, their efforts make such a difference to the lives of people with sight loss.

### **I truly am humbled and inspired by each and every person that gives their time to Guide Dogs.**

As a Puppy Walker myself, I know just what a commitment it can be as a 24-hour, 7 day a week undertaking. However, the personal reward and satisfaction we feel from knowing we are making such a difference and changing lives, makes it all worth it. I want all Guide Dogs volunteers to feel like this.

### **Our volunteers must have the best possible experience from start to finish, feeling connected, inspired and understanding how they personally make a difference.**

Guide Dogs staff and Lead Volunteers should also have the resources and skills to support their volunteers' journey.

This volunteering strategy is timely for us as an organisation, as we turn a corner into an exciting five years ahead. Now is the time to look at how we can inspire more volunteers to join our cause. I am extremely excited to see how the development and growth of volunteering will support Guide Dogs ambitions.

## Introduction

**Guide Dogs' ambition is a future where every person with sight loss has the confidence and support to live their lives to the full.**

**We cannot achieve this ambition without working in partnership with volunteers.**

**We want everyone to feel able to contribute to Guide Dogs as a volunteer and to ensure every volunteer is effectively welcomed, inspired and supported to make a difference for people with sight loss.**

### Lara Rivans, Head of Volunteering

The dedication and pure joy that Guide Dogs volunteers bring amazes me every day. It is brilliant to be the Head of Volunteering for an organisation full of incredible people that do such life-changing things for people with sight loss and their friends and family. Put simply Guide Dogs wouldn't be where it is today without volunteers and we would not be able to support the 200,000 people that we support.

As an organisation we are already very successful at involving volunteers, but as society changes, competition for volunteers increases and volunteers of the future have different expectations. We will need to work even harder to ensure we can meet those expectations.

### Welcoming and supporting all volunteers

We must ensure our opportunities are of interest to people from all walks of life; our volunteers should reflect the communities where we provide our services and we must do more to ensure we attract and retain a more diverse range of volunteers. We also need to work in partnership with volunteers, co-creating new roles and increasing opportunities for volunteers to take the lead. We must invest in our infrastructure, particularly the technology needed to efficiently and effectively support volunteer recruitment and engagement, and we need to ensure all Guide Dogs people understand the unique value volunteers bring.



### Growing volunteer involvement

As an organisation we must get better at tapping into new markets for volunteering, such as corporate volunteering and the growing youth volunteering market. We must also respond to evidence that suggests volunteers of the future may expect more flexible opportunities. At the same time, we need to continue to grow volunteer involvement in core areas such as fundraising and the delivery of front-line services, where there is an urgent need to dramatically increase the scale of our work. In all of this, the safety and well-being of our volunteers and people with sight loss will remain a priority.

To deliver this strategy, which is crucial to the success of By My Side, we will need everyone in Guide Dogs to invest in the development of volunteering across the organisation and we are asking everyone to consider how they can help us achieve this. We all have a role to play to ensure we succeed.



## Where we are now?

**200,000** people supported by Guide Dogs  
Through **24,500** volunteer roles  
Carried out by **16,000** volunteers

**18.5 million**  
volunteer hours

Value of time gifted in 2018 equivalent to **£144 million**

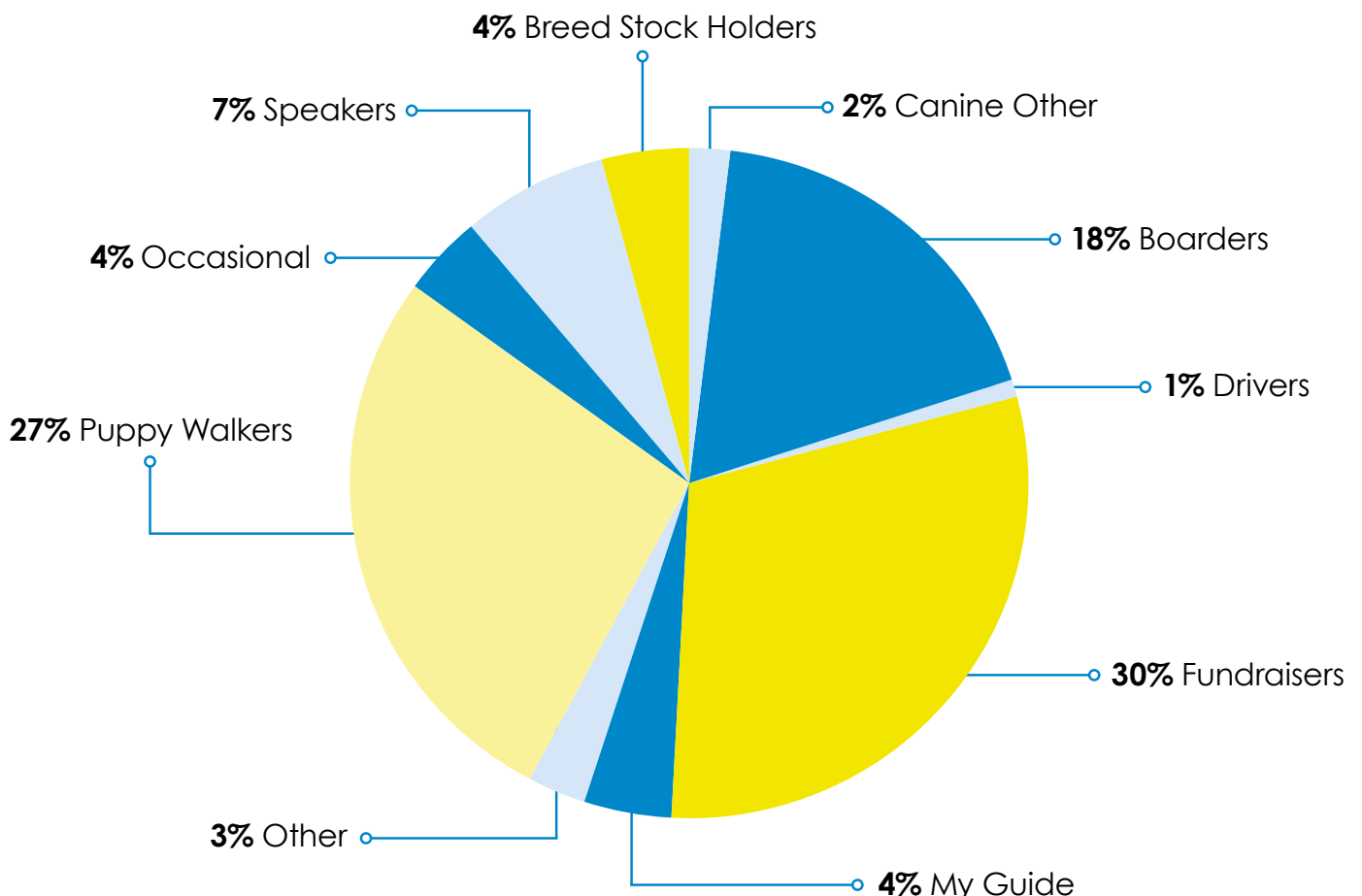
**67%** of our volunteers would **strongly recommend** Guide Dogs as a good place to volunteer

**31%** of volunteers involved in more than one role



**Together:** Volunteers give **6 million** hours of time to Guide Dogs (18.5 million if you include 24/7 roles like Puppy Walking). Employees give **2.6 million** hours of time to Guide Dogs

The pie chart below shows the proportion of roles in 2018: **30%** of our volunteers are Fundraisers, **4%** My Guide, **27%** Puppy Walkers (including Puppy Boarders), **7%** Speakers, **4%** Breed Stock Holders, **18%** Boarders, **1%** Drivers, **2%** Canine 'other', **4%** occasional and **3%** 'other'.



## Our vision for volunteering

Guide Dogs is already a very successful volunteering organisation, but we can do even better. And we need to do better if we are to fully play our part in achieving our strategic goals. As a result, we have bold ambitions for every aspect of volunteering:

### Our vision is that by 2023:

- Volunteers will be involved in every area of our work, and will recognise the essential role they play in keeping Guide Dogs relevant in the communities we serve.
- Staff and Lead Volunteers will have the knowledge, skills and tools to ensure all volunteers are inspired, supported and valued.
- A diverse range of people will be gifting their time, expertise and energy.
- Guide Dogs will be recognised internally and externally as an exceptional place to volunteer, providing high quality and safe experiences.

### Our plans and priorities:

To achieve our vision for volunteering will require an organisation wide effort. Everyone in Guide Dogs has a role to play in delivering the volunteering strategy, which is organised into five related workstreams:

### Together, we will:



1. **Strengthen** our volunteering infrastructure



2. **Build** a volunteer positive culture



3. **Enhance** the volunteer experience



4. **Develop** new ways to get involved



5. **Grow** our Lead Volunteer programme



## Vision for 2023

**500,000** people supported by Guide Dogs  
Through **33,000** volunteer roles  
Carried out by **22,000** volunteers

A clear corporate volunteering offer

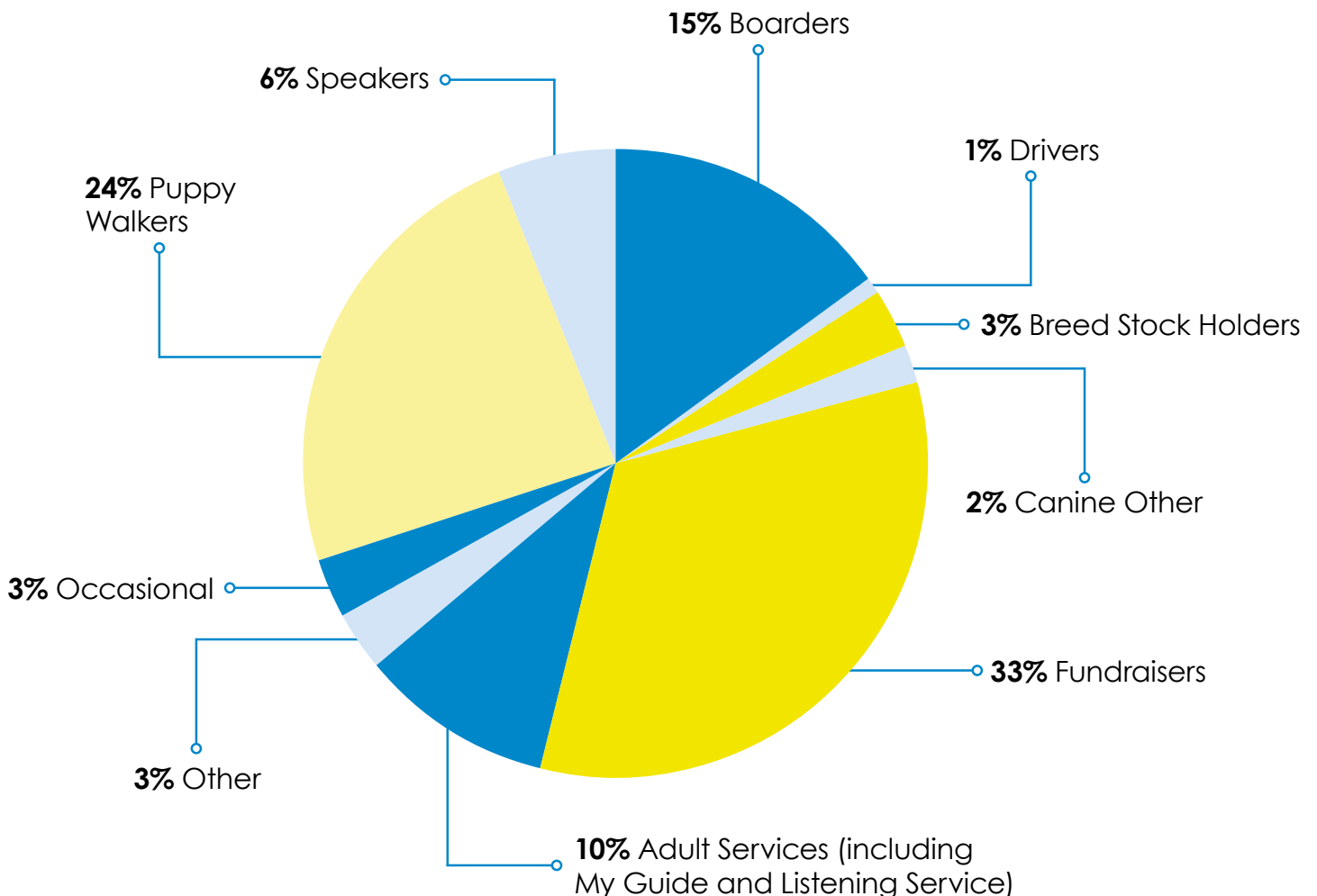
Opportunities for family volunteering



**80%** of our volunteers will **strongly recommend** Guide Dogs as a good place to volunteer

Volunteers will be carrying out over **33,000** roles including:  
**11,000** Fundraising roles  
**3,000** My Guide roles

The pie chart below shows: **33%** of our volunteers are Fundraisers, **10%** are within Adult Services (including My Guide and Listening Service), **24%** Puppy Walkers (including Puppy Boarders), **15%** Boarders, **3%** Breed Stock Holders, **3%** are occasional volunteers, **2%** Canine 'other', **1%** Drivers and **3%** non-canine 'other'.



## From good to great

Over the next five years we will focus on these five key areas, aiming for transformational improvement in each one:



### 1. Strengthening our infrastructure

#### From

- Volunteers and key contacts/volunteer line managers working hard to make the best of patchy systems and processes.
- A lack of clarity on volunteer management roles and responsibilities, leading to inconsistent and inefficient management.
- Inconsistent experiences for volunteers.



#### To

- Clear, consistent, well understood and used systems, processes and practices.
- Delivering consistently high-quality experiences for volunteers and efficient ways of working for staff.



### 2. Building a volunteer positive culture

#### From

- Variable levels of commitment to involving volunteers.
- Some unhelpful self-limiting views of what volunteers can and should do and a tradition of restricting volunteer involvement to particular parts of the organisation.
- Lack of ongoing professional development for key contacts/volunteer line managers and volunteering professionals.



#### To

- An organisational commitment and practice that maximises volunteer involvement.
- Working in partnership to co-create and deliver exceptional experiences for volunteers and people with sight loss.
- Supported by high quality training for key contacts/volunteer line managers and volunteering professionals.



### 3. Enhancing the volunteer experience

#### From

- Inconsistencies in approaches to managing the volunteer experience.
- Confusing communications and missed opportunities to gather and respond to volunteer feedback.
- Varying approaches to award and recognition.



#### To

- Consistently high-quality volunteer experiences, optimising the use of new technologies to support communications, training and recognition.
- Regular partnership working, with volunteers actively involved in shaping the future of the organisation.





## 4. New ways to get involved

### From

- A reliance on regular, routine volunteer involvement through traditionally organised roles.
- A lack of diversity in our volunteer base.



### To

- A wider range of ways to get involved as a volunteer (including well established corporate, family and micro volunteering schemes).
- Attracting a broad range of people, so that our volunteer base reflects the communities we serve and of which we are a part.



## 5. Grow our lead volunteer programme

### From

- A small number of examples of excellent practice in working with Lead Volunteers.



### To

- An organisation wide Lead Volunteer programme, optimising opportunities for volunteers to take on leadership roles.



## 1. Strengthen our infrastructure



We must increase our volunteering roles from 24,500 in 2018 to 33,000 in 2023 to fulfil the ambitions of By My Side. To date volunteering at Guide Dogs has grown organically to meet the needs of teams and directorates, leading to a number of issues: volunteer data is incomplete and stored on different systems, communication processes are focused on roles rather than volunteering as a whole (causing confusion for the 31% of volunteers with multiple roles) and overall support for volunteers is inconsistent. This lack of consistency increases organisational risk, wastes staff and volunteer time and reduces the overall quality of the volunteer experience.

### How volunteers feel

Over a third of UK volunteers feel their volunteering could be better organised and around one quarter felt there was too

much bureaucracy. In addition, almost 25% of 18-34 year old volunteers expect the process of getting involved to be quicker than it was, compared to 9% of those aged over 55 (National Council for Voluntary Organisation (NCVO, 2019)<sup>4</sup>). Innovative ways of volunteering, such as micro-volunteering, will create quicker ways to get involved which will attract younger audiences who have higher expectations of volunteer involving organisations. In an increasingly competitive volunteering environment we must ensure we offer a professional and streamlined experience to our volunteers. Strengthening the infrastructure we use to support volunteering is also crucial to ensuring we remain a safe and trusted volunteering organisation of choice.

### We will:

- Restructure and invest in our volunteering workforce in order to improve the quality of the volunteering experience and scale to 33,000 volunteering roles.
- Overhaul our core processes, policies and standards for volunteering and invest in the use of technology and digital to support their use.
- Improve our volunteer data management by introducing a central management system that is easily accessible to staff and volunteers.
- Introduce new online resources for volunteers enabling them to access up to date information and learning resources, and communicate with other volunteers and the organisation and encourage further engagement.
- Develop and implement a communications strategy for volunteers and their key contacts/volunteer line managers.
- Remain committed to ensuring that volunteers and people with sight loss are protected from any physical, financial or emotional harm arising from volunteering.







“ With several different magazines, newsletters etc people often have to wade through so much information before they find what they need. Pulling it all together into one volunteer information point website with clear links to different areas would help a lot I think, as it will give people a definite first point of reference.

## Volunteer

The following measures will be used to evidence success in delivering this workflow:

Number of volunteer roles carried out	Baseline 24,500	2023 target 33,000
Percentage of volunteers we can contact by email who have told us they would like to be contacted in this way	Baseline 68%	2023 target 100%
Percentage of volunteers who rate communications from Guide Dogs as good or excellent	Baseline To be developed	2023 target To be developed
Percentage of volunteers using new online volunteer resources	Baseline To be developed	2023 target To be developed

## 2. Build a volunteer positive culture



### Developing skills and confidence

Everyone that supports and works with volunteers must have the knowledge, skills, desire and time to do so. We need to be ready for a future that holds an increase in volunteer numbers and new ways of working with volunteers. We will invest in developing the confidence and skills of staff and Lead Volunteers to ensure attitudes, behaviours and the overall culture for volunteering is consistently positive.

### Encouraging growth in volunteer involvement

We must continue to build trust and work in partnership across the organisation in order to challenge limiting perceptions of what volunteers are able to do. We must ensure volunteer involvement is at the forefront of people's minds and volunteers

are recognised as integral to the delivery of By My Side. We want both volunteers and staff to be proactive in generating ideas for volunteer involvement, as this will be key to supporting the growth and development of Guide Dogs services.

We must also ensure we respond to growing external evidence (for example the recent independent inquiry into the future of Civil Society (2018)<sup>1</sup>) of the need to increase opportunities for volunteers to play a bigger part in shaping the contribution they make. Traditional hierarchical structures and approaches are increasingly being shown to be ineffective in generating large scale participation (Timms and Heimans, 2018<sup>2</sup>) and we need to support key contacts/volunteer line managers to be confident to work in new ways.

### We will:

- Introduce new quality standards for those leading and supporting volunteers, celebrating high quality volunteer support and ensuring that we continue to meet the Investing in Volunteers standard.
- Develop new online resources to ensure all our people understand the standards, procedures, policies and systems necessary to effectively work with volunteers.
- Introduce new learning and development programmes for key contacts/volunteer line managers to support them in understanding and fulfilling their responsibilities when working with volunteers, ensuring they have the skills, knowledge and confidence to ensure every volunteer has an engaging experience.
- Develop and introduce new resources focussed on ensuring all our staff and volunteers are able to effectively welcome and support a more diverse volunteering community.







“Being a volunteer manager is an opportunity to welcome someone in to the Guide Dogs family and enable them to share in the rewarding, life-changing work we do.

### Volunteer manager

The following measures will be used to evidence success in delivering this workstream:

Percentage of volunteers who rate the experience of registering as a volunteer (from initial enquiry to starting in the role) as very good	<b>Baseline</b> <b>64%</b>	<b>2023 target</b> <b>80%</b>
Percentage of volunteers who rate their key contact/volunteer line manager as good or excellent	<b>Baseline</b> <b>To be developed</b>	<b>2023 target</b> <b>Baseline + 10%</b>
Percentage of key contacts/volunteer line managers who describe their confidence to manage volunteers as good or excellent	<b>Baseline</b> <b>75%</b>	<b>2023 target</b> <b>87%</b>
Percentage of key contacts/volunteer line managers who describe themselves as confident to manage and lead diverse volunteer teams	<b>Baseline</b> <b>To be developed</b>	<b>2023 target</b> <b>To be developed</b>

### 3. Enhance the volunteer experience



Wherever they live, and whatever role they do, we want all our volunteers to have the best possible experience. One that is enjoyable and meaningful, right from their initial enquiry. By improving our use of traditional communication methods and increasing our use of technology we will ensure our volunteers feel supported, valued and connected to Guide Dogs.

#### Meeting volunteers' expectations

Evidence shows that volunteers most common negative experience is that their volunteering takes up too much time. And almost 20% of volunteers feel their experience has become too much like paid work (NCVO, 2019). Managing varying

levels of involvement, a wider range of volunteer roles and differing volunteer expectations requires an investment of time and appropriately skilled key contacts/volunteer line managers. Induction, training, award and recognition for volunteers must be tailored to meet the needs of a growing and changing volunteer population and delivered efficiently and effectively so as not to create an additional burden that detracts from the core volunteering experience. Working to create networks of support, put volunteers in the lead and avoid overly restrictive managerial approaches have all been identified as key to the continued success of civil society, of which volunteering is a core part (Civil Society Futures, 2018).

#### We will:

- Embed a consistent organisational induction for new volunteers, including occasional and micro-action volunteers through increased use of technologies.
- Introduce a range of new learning and development opportunities for volunteers, including digital opportunities.
- Work with volunteers to understand and develop a core Guide Dogs volunteer experience.
- Create a clear brand identity and experience for Guide Dogs volunteers, including exploring options for new branded clothing.
- Review and implement changes in the way we gather and respond to volunteer feedback and how we involve volunteers in influencing change.
- Increase opportunities for volunteers to contribute to organisational developments.
- Continue to develop our approach to award and recognition, ensuring it is equitable, fair and meets the needs of all our volunteers.







“ When I started volunteering it was because I wanted to do something worthwhile. I never thought that it would be me who would gain so much from it. I am now a more confident person and can look forward to the future.

**Ailsa, volunteer Puppy Walker and winner of Young Volunteer award 2018**

**The following measures will be used to evidence success in delivering this workstream:**

Percentage of volunteers who <b>strongly recommend</b> Guide Dogs as a place to volunteer	<b>Baseline</b> 67%	<b>2023 target</b> 80%
Percentage of volunteers who agree the organisation recognises their contribution as a volunteer	<b>Baseline</b> 80%	<b>2023 target</b> 86%
Percentage of volunteers who feel encouraged to share their ideas with senior leadership	<b>Baseline</b> 54%	<b>2023 target</b> 75%
Percentage of volunteers who feel their mental and physical health has improved as a result of volunteering with Guide Dogs	<b>Baseline</b> 56%	<b>2023 target</b> 80%



## 4. Develop new ways to get involved



### Evolving our volunteering offer

Over 60% of our current volunteer base is aged 55 and over which is reflected in the types of roles we offer. We want to continue to appeal to this group of volunteers but we also need to consider how we appeal to the next generation of volunteers.

There is increasing evidence that volunteers of the future may look to gift their time in different ways. Volunteers increasingly expect immediacy, choice and flexibility in their volunteering. We must continue to evolve our volunteer offer, so we remain an attractive place to volunteer. This will include working hard to appeal to a wider range of volunteers and focussing on increasing the diversity of our volunteers, in order to better reflect the communities we serve and meet the needs of Guide Dogs as our services grow. We particularly want to support more people with sight loss to become volunteers and to attract more younger volunteers.

### Diversity and inclusion

External evidence routinely highlights the under-representation in volunteering of people

from lower socio-economic backgrounds, those living with a disability, black, Asian and minority ethnic volunteers (BAME) and young people (Jump Projects, 2019<sup>23</sup>, NCVO, 2019). In launching their recent report into the experience of volunteers the NCVO CEO was clear, “those who stand to gain the most from volunteering are less likely to be involved”. As the make-up of the British population changes (e.g. the BAME population is expected to grow from current levels of 14% to 20-30% by 2031 (Sunak and Rajeswaran, 2014<sup>6</sup>)) and as a charity focussed on inclusion it is important, we lead the way in ensuring we attract and retain a diverse volunteer community.

Research also reveals that the average amount of time volunteers give is decreasing (Office for National Statistics, 2017<sup>5</sup>). Over a quarter of people who have never volunteered would be encouraged to do so if there was flexibility in how they gifted their time (NCVO, 2019). Increasing the focus on corporate volunteering, family volunteering and micro-volunteering are all recommended as areas of growth by NCVO.

### We will:

- Review our current volunteer roles to ensure relevancy for the next five years.
- Create new flexible, accessible and innovative roles that inspire new and existing volunteers to get involved in different ways. This will include:
  - developing our offer for young people
  - developing family and group volunteering
  - developing a micro-action strategy.
- Grow corporate volunteering, ensuring all opportunities are beneficial for both the corporate partner and Guide Dogs.
- Create a volunteer recruitment marketing strategy designed to attract a more diverse range of volunteers.
- Improve the volunteering content on the Guide Dogs website to enhance the experience for potential and current volunteers.
- Introduce a person-centred approach to recruitment, including options for groups of volunteers who are recruited at the same time.





**The following measures will be used to evidence success in delivering this workstream:**

Number of corporate volunteering products	<b>Baseline</b> 0	<b>2023 target</b> 10
Percentage of volunteering opportunities that can be done as a single micro-action	<b>Baseline</b> To be developed	<b>2023 target</b> To be developed
Number of family volunteering products	<b>Baseline</b> 0	<b>2023 target</b> 6
Number of families who take part in family volunteering each year	<b>Baseline</b> To be developed	<b>2023 target</b> 250
Percentage of volunteers aged 25 or under	<b>Baseline</b> 5%	<b>2023 target</b> 15%
Percentage of service users who volunteer	<b>Baseline</b> 21%	<b>2023 target</b> 26%



## 5. Grow our Lead Volunteer programme



### Volunteers supporting volunteers

Over the years we have seen an increasing number of staff supporting and working with our volunteers. At a time where we need to foster a culture of continuous improvement and do more with our limited resources, there is a significant opportunity to grow our Lead Volunteer programme, creating more opportunities for volunteers who are responsible for coaching, mentoring and supporting others.

### Lead Volunteer roles

To date the growth of lead roles across our teams has been patchy and organic. We

need a more strategic approach, working across all directorates, to enable us to develop high quality, mutually beneficial Lead Volunteer roles in areas where they can make the most organisational impact. This includes building the capacity and confidence of staff to develop and manage Lead Volunteer roles.

This type of volunteer structure is well developed in a number of leading charities (for example Samaritans, Girlguiding UK and the Scouts Association) and there is much we can learn from existing good practice.

### We will:

- Actively learn from and build on existing internal and external good practice in working with Lead Volunteers.
- Develop a prioritised plan for the development of Lead Volunteers in Guide Dogs.
- Develop and introduce appropriate standards and consistency to the volunteer journey for Lead Volunteers.
- Support the organisation with the introduction of new lead roles and improvements to existing lead roles.
- Invest in developing the management and leadership skills and behaviours of Lead Volunteers.



“I enjoy introducing the new puppy to the new Puppy Walker and helping them to bring up the best puppy they can. I like to feel they have someone they can ask for support without feeling they are bothering somebody. I am always available for advice.

**Lead volunteer – Puppy Walking Mentor**





“ Our My Guide Partnership Support Volunteer has been a Lead Volunteer in the My Guide service for 2 years. In that time she has built a rapport with several partnerships and supported them to maximise the benefits of their My Guide match. Her volunteering has increased the capacity that My Guide staff have to create new matches and grow the service.

### Volunteering Consultant

The following measures will be used to evidence success in delivering this workstream:

Number of Lead Volunteers in the organisation	Baseline 471	2023 target 700
Percentage of volunteers who are supported by a Lead Volunteer	Baseline To be developed	2023 target To be developed
Percentage of Lead Volunteers who would strongly recommend volunteering with Guide Dogs	Baseline To be developed	2023 target To be developed



## How you can help



Where do you meet Guide Dogs volunteers? How can you help?

Every one of us – staff, volunteers, people with sight loss and their friends and family – will meet a Guide Dogs volunteer on our journey at Guide Dogs.

Every one of us has a role to play to help achieve these goals and therefore the goals of By My Side, reaching more people with sight loss.

“ It is brilliant watching someone else go on to achieve something with my encouragement.

The biggest thrill I have had since volunteering with Grace is hearing that she had popped to the shops for the first time on her own – it was just for a simple bag of crisps but it was a big milestone for me and for her!

Volunteering has been amazing for me, once you experience the difference you can make to someone, in really simple ways, you'll be changed forever.

**Volunteer**

## References

### Guide Dogs statistics and data sources

Volunteer Views Survey, 2017

Volunteer Impact Assessment, 2015

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### References

1. Civil Society Futures, 2018 The Independent Inquiry. The Story of Our Times: Power in Our Hands? **[Back]**
2. Jump Projects, 2019 A Bit Rich: Why is volunteering biased towards higher socio-economic groups **[Back]**
3. Jump Projects, 2019 The ABC or BAME: New research into black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and their motivations and barriers to volunteering **[Back]**
4. National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), 2019 Time Well Spent. A National Survey of the Volunteer Experience **[Back]**
5. ONS, 2017 Changes in the value and division of unpaid volunteering in the UK: 2000 to 2015 **[Back]**
6. Sunak, R. and Rajeswaran, S., 2014 A Portrait of Modern Britain **[Back]**
7. Henry Timms and Jeremy Heimans, 2018 New Power: How It's Changing the 21st Century and Why You Need to Know **[Back]**

### Further reading

Civil Society Futures – Report of the Independent Inquiry, 2018

Baby Boomers and the Big Society, 2012 Wally Harbert

The New Breed: Understanding and Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer, 2012 Tom McKee and Jonathan McKee

NfPSynergy, The New Alchemy How volunteering turns donations of time and talent into human gold, 2015





“ I never cease to be amazed at the kindness of volunteers, here are people giving up their time. I have enormous gratitude to the volunteer that supports me, it's really beyond words how kind he is. He came at a stage when I was really at the cusp of turning absolutely inward and he helped to stop that.

**My Guide Service User**

**Visit: [www.guidedogs.org.uk/volunteer](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/volunteer)**

**Email: [volunteer@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@guidedogs.org.uk)**

**Tel: 0345 143 0191**

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