



Welcome to Guide Dogs

A dedicated introduction for volunteers



Part one of three:

Sight loss; our people; and keeping in touch

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1. The purpose of the welcome packs

Welcome to Guide Dogs.

You are vital in helping us to provide freedom of movement to people with a vision impairment. Without volunteers, the volume and range of support we offer would be significantly reduced.

The welcome packs (and a local introduction to your team or office) give you an overview of Guide Dogs and welcome you to the team.

You do not need to have read all this information before you start volunteering.

There is a lot of information included in the pack based on what our existing volunteers have said they wanted to know when they joined. We have produced it in this style so you can read it at your own pace, and re-read sections if you choose.

Across the packs you will find information on:

- what we do
- who we help
- how we organise ourselves
- and much more.

We have added internet links to additional information.

Any questions about your role or Guide Dogs?

Speak with your volunteer manager and/or main Guide Dogs contact.

One of the suggestions from the feedback in 2015 (there's a survey at the end of pack two) was that we split the pack into three parts. If you have not received them all, please tell us. The packs are:

1. Sight loss; our people; and keeping in touch
2. Our work and how we fund it
3. Volunteering policies.

2. You are now a key Guide Dogs ambassador

As a volunteer, for many you will be their main Guide Dogs contact – they will form their opinion of the charity from you. This opinion will influence whether they access our services or choose to donate to us.

Don't be put off by this, you will probably do everything right instinctively. You can always ask a member of Guide Dogs staff if you are ever unsure how you should be reacting or representing Guide Dogs.

3. Our ambition, purpose and values

Our ambition: a future where every person with sight loss has the confidence and support to live their lives to the full.

Our purpose: to provide life-changing services for the independence of people living with sight loss and their friends and family.

Our values: are rooted in the needs of people with sight loss. We aspire to be:



Open

We listen to and work with others, and we are inclusive in everything we do. We share our expertise and experience with anyone who can benefit from it and always seek to learn from others.



Passionate

We are positive and passionate about our life-changing work and will challenge everything that prevents people with sight loss living full and rewarding lives.



Innovative

We strive to continuously improve the services we provide and will never stop innovating. The only way we can change the world

for even more people with sight loss is by embracing new technologies and new ways of working.

If you want to know more...

You can read our 2018 - 2023 strategy 'Guide Dogs: By My Side' and find out about how we plan to provide more life-changing services for people with sight loss.

https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/media/6010/9893-8pp-strategy-overview-document_accessible.pdf

4. An overview of common sight loss conditions

Vision impairments result from conditions ranging from the presence of some usable vision (low vision) to the absence of any vision (total blindness). Lots of us have mild vision impairments, but for most of us this will not become severe enough for us to fit any of these categories.

- Low vision: describes a person with a vision impairment that cannot be improved by correction but has some usable vision remaining.
- Legal blindness: defined as 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best possible correction.

Many people with sight loss have some residual vision. **This can sometimes confuse the public as they will meet a guide dog owner who appears to be able to see.**

Many people with sight loss will have more than one vision impairment. The severity of each condition differs between people.

Around 50% of children and young people with sight loss have additional or complex needs.

We will be using images to represent the impact of different forms of sight loss. The “full vision” version of this picture follows.



Common errors of refraction

Myopia (nearsightedness): close objects look clear while distant objects appear blurred.

Hyperopia (farsightedness): the ability to see objects clearly at a distance while close objects appear blurry.

Astigmatism: due to the irregular curvature of the cornea, vision is blurry for both near and far objects.

Presbyopia: the eye lens becomes less elastic (associated with aging) and produces blurred vision when focusing on near objects.

Common diseases of the eye

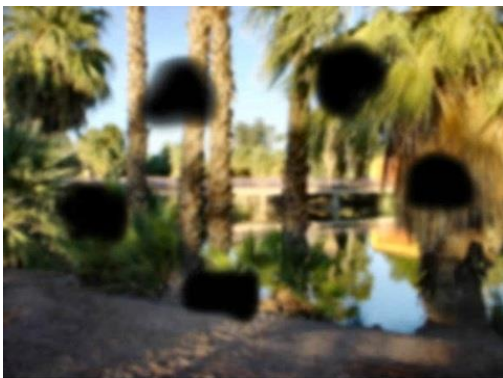
Cataracts: clouding of the eye's lens that causes loss of vision (first picture on the next page).

Glaucoma: pressure inside the eye is elevated and can cause damage to the optic nerve, which results in damage to peripheral vision (second picture).

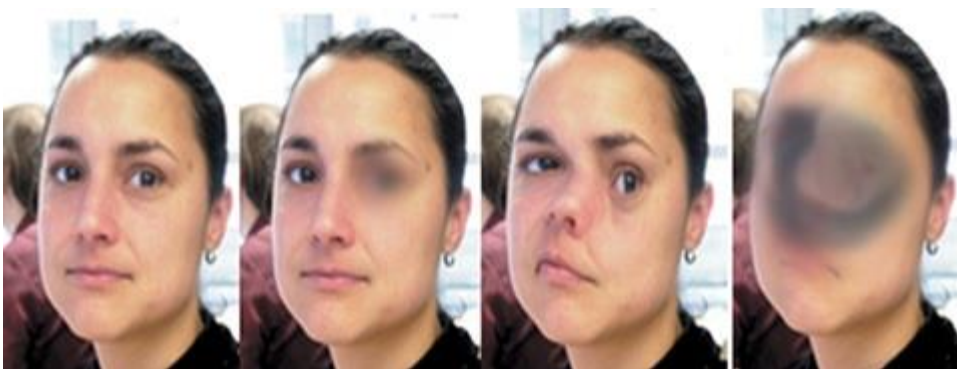


Retinopathy (due to Diabetes): retinopathy typically affects the blood circulation of the retina, which causes blotchy vision (first picture below).

Macular Degeneration: there is a disturbance of blood vessels in the eye resulting in progressive loss of central vision (second picture below).



You can see how **macular degeneration** progresses in the following picture.



Retinitis Pigmentosa: there is a degeneration of pigment in the eye that is needed to absorb light and create visual images, leading to “tunnel vision” and night blindness.

Other Vision Related Conditions

Night Blindness: night blindness results from pigmentary degeneration of the retina, which leads to difficulty seeing in low light.

Colour Vision Deficiency: a colour vision deficiency occurs when cone cells of the retina, which provide daylight and colour vision, are affected and there is difficulty distinguishing among colours. Typically, this only involves certain hues, for example a red–green deficiency; total colour blindness (achromatic vision) is rare.

Lack of Depth Perception: a lack of depth perception is often caused by the loss of sight in one eye, resulting in difficulty with foreground/background discrimination.

Floater: floaters are small specks or clouds moving in the field of vision.

The impact of sight loss

Sight loss (a major barrier to independence) affects different people in different ways and at different times.

All our work, from our dogs, campaigning, My Guide service etc. (all described later in this pack) is designed to return independence to people with a vision impairment.

Loss of independence can happen in all manner of ways such as:

- I can no longer drive
- How will I do my job? Will I have less money?
- I'll be unable to apply make-up
- How will I look after my children?
- I used to be chatty but lack of eye contact changes that.

Some frequent responses to this are:

- Isolation / loneliness
- Depression
- Feeling cut off from friends and family
- Low confidence / self-esteem
- Changed relationships if family are also carers
- The world becomes smaller

These are natural initial responses to loss which most people work through over time, many accessing our range of services.

Additionally, sight loss in children and young people can often result in bullying, intensifying their sense of social isolation. Without specialist support, they may not develop the full range of skills required to interact fully in the 'adult world'.

5. An introduction to sighted guiding

Sighted guiding is not specific to Guide Dogs; it is a way of escorting a person who has vision impairment in an efficient way, giving this person the feeling of moving in a safe and secure manner.

We encourage all volunteers to sign up to local My Guide training (training in sighted guiding) when it is run. Speak to your volunteer manager and/or main contact who can find out what courses are running in your area. The sighted guiding techniques shown here are part of what you will learn and practice on the course.

Approaching someone, and setting off

Introduce yourself, and offer help. If your offer is accepted, ask the person where they want to go, and if they would like to take your arm. Stand by their side, and let them hold your arm just above the elbow. Start walking, and they will follow about half a step behind.

If the person has a guide dog, approach from the side opposite the dog so they can use their free arm to take your left arm. Do not distract the guide dog from its work.

In a narrow space or busy area

Walk in single file. Straighten your guiding arm and move it to the middle of your back, and the person you're guiding will step in behind you. Walk more slowly.



Crossing a road

Say whether the kerb is a step up or step down, and pause before stepping so the person you're guiding can get ready. Once you have safely crossed, if you are parting from the person, describe to them where they are.



Going up or down stairs and steps

Say whether the steps go up or down. The person's free hand should be on the side with the handrail. Going up, pause to allow them to locate the bottom step, then proceed – they will be one step below you.



When you reach the top step, say so, and stop to let them find it with their foot.

Going down, make sure the person you're guiding has located the handrail and the edge of the top step. Stop and let them find the first step down with their foot before moving off. Walk one step ahead, and say when you reach the bottom.

Getting through doorways

Say whether the door opens towards or away from you, and to the right or left. Open the door with your guiding arm – as you walk through, the person you're guiding should hold it open, before following you through.

If they have a guide dog it may be best to open the door, let them go through, and join them on the other side.

Taking a seat

Describe what sort of chair it is, if it has arms, and whether there's a table in front. Place your guiding hand on the back of the chair, and allow the person you're guiding to slide their hand down to locate the back. They can then sit down.



With a row of seats, side step along together until the person is in front of their seat with the backs of their knees touching it. They will then sit.

Getting into a car

Place your guiding hand on the door handle and say if the car is facing left or right. The person you're guiding will slide their hand down your arm to find the handle. Use your guiding hand to indicate where the top of the door frame is, as they get in.



Getting on or off a bus or train

Tell the person you are guiding how high any steps are, and if there is a gap between the train and platform. Then guide the person as you step on or off, walking in front. Walk down aisles in single file.



General tips

- Warn of obstacles or hazards
- Describe surroundings – including changes in ground surface
- Don't overload the person you're guiding with information
- Remember to say "left" or "straight ahead", not "over there"
- Leave enough room around obstacles, and watch for those at head height as well as ground level.
- Never push or pull the person you're guiding.
- Say when you're leaving, so the person isn't left speaking to an empty space.
- A guide dog owner will indicate the need for assistance by letting the harness-handle lie on the dog's back.
- Never distract a guide dog, as this might put its owner in danger. And never take the lead or harness, or tell the dog what to do – only the owner should control it.
- Never feed a guide dog – they have a perfectly balanced diet and should only be fed by their owners.

If you want to know more...

Go to www.youtube.com and, in the search box, type 'guide dogs UK sighted guiding'.

6. Top tips for accessible information

In your volunteer role, you may need to create information for people with a vision impairment. The top tips below will usually be sufficient but, if you want to know more, your volunteer manager and/or main contact can locate this for you on our staff intranet at <http://www.gdba.internal/woof/719>

- Keep Word documents simple
- Use Word Styles for headings and subheadings
- Text should be left aligned and not justified.
- Use Arial font, at a minimum point size of 12 (though 14 is recommended)
- Only use underlining and italics when absolutely necessary
- Excel documents can be difficult to for screen-reading software to interpret
- If a document needs to be translated into Braille, be aware of the problems that could be created by hyperlinks, tables, table of contents etc.
- When emailing, use plain text rather than HTML
- At the beginning of a meeting, ensure each person in the group introduces themselves so that everyone knows who is there. Everyone should state their name each time they contribute
- When providing hard copy, find out the preferred format or formats of people with a vision impairment – Braille, large print, audio or plain text Word document.

7. Our people

Our volunteers

At Guide Dogs, we have over 16,000 volunteers across the UK. There are more than 50 different roles that volunteers can get involved in, here are just a few...

Fundraisers

- Each year our fundraising and supporter group volunteers raise millions of pounds for Guide Dogs through events, collections, and activities in their local community.



Working with our dogs

There are many ways our volunteers help rear our life changing dogs, including:

- Puppy walkers provide the first stage of training for new guide dog pups
- Brood bitch and stud dog holders provide homes for guide dog mums and dads

- Boarders look after guide dogs that are being trained or who need a temporary home
- Kennel assistants help our Dog Care and Welfare staff care for dogs at our training schools
- Drivers in one year drove enough miles to travel around the earth – twice!

My Guide

As part of our My Guide service, volunteers are trained to guide people with a vision impairment to help them get out and about safely.

Volunteer roles in my area

Some volunteer roles are UK wide, others specific to particular areas for example:

- You only find the following roles at limited locations: Dog Exerciser; Environmental Enrichment (who help provide additional stimulus to our dogs); Kennel Assistant; Puppy Socialiser; Brood Bitch Holder; Stud Dog Holder; and Centre Guide.
- Roles you will find in most areas include Puppy Walkers, My Guides, e-campaigners, and fundraising roles such as Collection Box Co-ordinators,



Speakers, and various roles within our local fundraising groups.

We want you to get the most out of volunteering with us so, if you think you have any untapped skills, interests, or would like to know about other volunteer roles available in your area, please discuss this with your local Volunteering Consultant.

Our trustees

- The work of the organisation is overseen by trustees who have been invited to join us due to the specific skills and/or experience they bring.
- They give their time to Guide Dogs and Blind Children UK for free so they are also volunteers.

Our staff and structure

Our main presence around the UK is in local teams running key aspects of our work within their community. They act as a base for many of our staff working in areas such as community fundraising, engaging with the community, developing volunteering, working with people of all ages with sight loss to help identify their mobility needs and identify solutions (both within and beyond Guide Dogs), and developing our services including guide

dogs, and a range of other forms of support such as My Guide.

Our new born pups can be found at our National Breeding Centre in Leamington (often referred to as “the NBC”). At eight weeks they join our volunteer Puppy Walkers. As they get older (typically 14 months) they will either move onto our four Guide Dog training schools in Atherton, Forfar, Leamington, and Redbridge or to one of the community offices.

Our overarching functions are completed at our Central Office in Burghfield, just outside Reading. You may hear people refer to it as “Head Office” or “Hillfields” (the name of the building).

If you want to know more...

- <http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/aboutus/guide-dogs-organisation/guide-dogs-trustees>
- <http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/aboutus/guide-dogs-organisation/executive-board>
- <https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/how-you-can-help/volunteering-for-guide-dogs/>

8. Our volunteer networks

Online Volunteering Resources

This is the section of our website dedicated to you which we will continue to develop. You can access it directly at the following web address

<https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/volunteer-information-point/>

Introduction to Volunteer Voices

If you are linked to a community team or the National Breeding Centre, Volunteer Voices is the way to share your views.

A team of volunteers have been selected to meet three times a year with the Volunteering Consultant to hear and comment on both local and national news within Guide Dogs.

If you haven't already received information about who your Volunteer Voices are, speak with your volunteer manager, main contact, or the Volunteering Consultant.

9. Keeping you and our customers safe

Health and safety top tips for volunteers

In this section, all the information that appears in quotes refers to one of a series of health and safety factsheets available from your manager and is being added to the Volunteer Information Point (link in section 8).

Keeping yourself safe whilst out and about

When you are out and about volunteering for Guide Dogs it is important that you consider your safety at all times. We have prepared 'A Guide to Your Personal Safety' to provide some top tips.

Driving

If you use your vehicle in connection with your volunteering activities, we recommend 'Top Tips for Drivers', containing best practice guidance.

What to do if you spot a hazard, something with the potential to cause harm:

- Remove the hazard or rectify the situation if safe to do so
- Stop doing the activity, using the equipment or leave the area if applicable
- Talk to your volunteer line manager

- Tell other relevant people about the problem so they are aware of it.

Use of computers

Many of our volunteers, as part of their role, use a computer (either in one of our offices or at home). If a user has not set up their equipment correctly this could result in them sustaining or aggravating an existing muscular skeletal problem. We recommend 'A Guide to Safe Computer Set Up and Use'.

Manual handling activities (including lifting dogs)

Before you undertake any manual handling you should first make sure that you are physically capable and the load is suitable to be moved. Do not undertake any manual handling if you have an existing muscular-skeletal problem i.e. bad back, shoulder, arm etc. Recommended reading: 'Safer Manual Handling and Lifting Dogs'.

Guide Dog stock at events

When a dog or puppy is at one of our fundraising/volunteering events, its welfare and that of others must be considered. Please ensure the following guidance is followed:

- Dogs are kept on a lead and under control by a responsible person at all times
- The person in control of the dog is aware of correct handling techniques
- The dog is taken to spend at regular intervals
- There is fresh drinking water for the dogs

- If a dog is excitable or showing signs of stress or discomfort it is removed from the area
- The location of the dog or its lead does not pose a tripping hazard and that the area provides shelter from weather conditions i.e. heat and rain
- All persons who have contact with Guide Dog stock are advised to wash their hands
- Any relief accident in the event area is cleared away appropriately

There may be occasions when Guide Dog stock is involved in a dog attack or fight. Do not put yourself in danger by trying to get between the dogs. Try to get your dog away by pulling its lead whilst calling for help. If relevant to your role, read 'A Guide to Dealing with Dog Attacks and Fights'.

Emergency situations

Always think about where you are and what you would do/where you would go in the event of a fire, incident and other emergency situation.

Incident/accident investigation and first aid

Guide Dogs investigate accidents/incidents to find out what happened in order to avoid reoccurrences. You must advise your volunteer line manager immediately if you have an accident/incident whilst on Guide Dogs business, this includes motor vehicle incidents.

Good hygiene

When you have contact with a dog or its faeces you should ensure that you follow basic hygiene procedures. This includes hand washing, preferably with soap and water though hand gel sanitizer is a good substitute and disposal of faecal matter appropriately.

We ask that you also advise any other person who comes into contact with Guide Dog stock to clean their hands afterwards. Further information can be found in 'A Guide to General Hygiene Measures'.

Your health and safety training

You will receive health and safety information and/or training specific to your volunteering role if appropriate. If you have any queries about your training speak to your volunteer manager and/or main contact.

Who to contact regarding health and safety issues

Speak to your volunteer manager and/or main contact. Fundraising volunteers must take all necessary steps to ensure their own and the public's safety at any event they organise, seeking advice, if required, from the fundraising line manager.

Mental Health and volunteering

One in four people have mental health concerns. Most are able to manage this well and you are probably unaware of it. As with any difficult situation, sometimes all people need is to be able to chat without fear of judgement. However, **if your volunteering involves working with someone with more severe mental health concerns, talk this through with your main Guide Dogs contact.** If you or someone you know needs urgent help for a mental health concern you can find below information that will guide you towards the most appropriate service.

If you need urgent help for yourself

If you feel unable to keep yourself safe and need immediate help, use the emergency services. You can do this by calling 999 for an ambulance or by taking yourself to your nearest Accident & Emergency (A&E) department.

Other services available:

- Mind lists crisis services on their website: <https://www.mind.org.uk/need-urgent-help/finding-out-what-support-is-out-there/>
- Mind's urgent help tool provides activities and resources to help you understand and manage

your situation: <https://www.mind.org.uk/need-urgent-help/>

- Contact the Samaritans on **116 123** for free at any time and from any phone, or email them on jo@samaritans.org

If you're supporting someone else

Mind provide guidance an information on how you can help, depending on the situation at <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/seeking-help-for-a-mental-health-problem/helping-someone-else-see-help/> .

If you need mental health information

You can call Mind's Infoline on **0300 123 3393** 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (except for bank holidays). This is a confidential service that offers information on a range of topics. You can also text on **86463** or email **info@mind.org.uk**.



If you're looking for legal information about mental health

You can call Mind's Legal line on **0300 466 6463** 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (except for bank holidays). You can also email **legal@mind.org.uk**

If you need further assistance please visit Mind's website for more information and support (<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/>).

Safeguarding and how it affects volunteering

Staff and volunteers have a duty of care towards the children and “adults at risk of harm” they come into contact with during their work with Guide Dogs.

Safeguarding is not something to get concerned about and incidents are quite rare but if, as part of your work, you come into contact with the public in more than a passing way and your gut senses something is wrong you should speak with your volunteer manager, main Guide Dogs contact, or a local member of staff as soon as practicably possible.

If you cannot contact anyone locally, call the Guide Dogs Safeguarding team on 0345 143 0199. Even if you are uncertain about what you have heard or seen, don't worry. It is our role to make that decision but your role to tell us about it. We'll listen and take every report seriously and all information we receive is treated sensitively.

For volunteer roles who have a lot of contact with the public, such as Drivers, Dog Exercisers, My Guides and Service User Representatives, we have created additional training so that you feel more confident in spotting signs of abuse and neglect, and to ensure we meet our legal obligations. This

learning is usually delivered as a mix of e-learning and face to face training. The face to face training is regularly delivered across the UK. Both are key to ensuring we provide the best services and care to people with a vision impairment. No one can undertake any of the four roles listed above without receiving Safeguarding training.

If you are in a relevant role, you will be contacted in advance to tell you about training options as they become available in your area. If you have any questions about the content or concerns, please speak to the Safeguarding team to get a clear idea what will be covered.

That's the end of the first pack. One of the suggestions from the feedback in 2015 (there's a survey at the end of pack two) was that we split the pack into three parts. If you have not received them all, please tell us.

The packs are:

- 4.** Sight loss; our people; and keeping in touch
- 5.** Our work and how we fund it
- 6.** Volunteering policies.