



Information for volunteers



Getting 'Back on Track'

Our COVID-19 roadmap for restarting all activities

On 22 February, Boris Johnson announced the government's roadmap to ease lockdown restrictions in England. Similar plans for getting back to normal have recently been shared by the governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. So, what does this mean for recommencing our services? We are urgently needed. We know that the visually impaired community has been hugely impacted by the pandemic, and that there is a pent up demand for the services we provide, whether that's for a guide or buddy dog, for habilitation work, or indeed for My Sighted Guide, which we know has been enormously missed during lockdown.

Our COVID-19 roadmap is the blueprint for how and when all our services and volunteering activities will – in phases – return to normal. We can't go into all the details in a single communication as it's far reaching, dependent upon the UK government's roadmap and tailored to individual circumstances, volunteering roles and geography. However, we can share with you that it's our intention to fully **recommence all services and volunteering by around mid-June**.

Before then, we expect to move to an **interim phase in mid-April** where most services and volunteering activities can resume within indoor environments whilst following government guidance and our standard COVID-19 protocols. This includes services such as My Sighted Guide, habilitation in non-education settings, and training for individuals and groups (excluding residential training).

For many of our volunteers who were able to continue or adapt their volunteering activities throughout the pandemic (e.g. raising puppies, virtual fundraising, fostering, making keeping in touch calls with service users etc), this will be important information to know as the phases within our roadmap will result in a gradual easing of our COVID-19 protocols on some of your current volunteering activities.

As we've all experienced last year, the pandemic is unpredictable so our plans – like the government's roadmap – will be subject to change if COVID-19 cases begin to increase or restrictions are reintroduced. However, our top-level plan is to get back to normal as soon as possible.

We'll update volunteers as and when circumstances relating to your role(s) changes. In the meantime, please refer to our **'role readiness' guidance** which has been shared in earlier communications and/or by your volunteer manager. It contains all the information and guidance you need to know when considering your return to volunteering at Guide Dogs. For more information, including our protocols and role readiness guidance, please visit: guidedogs.org.uk/vip/news/covid19.

COVID-19 updates

As a reminder, we'll continue to publish COVID-19 updates on the 'News' section of the Volunteer Information Point. If you have access to the internet, you should check for updates on a regular basis - usually shortly after the government has made a major announcement. We will contact you directly by email, if an announcement impacts upon your volunteering or where you live. For the latest COVID-19 updates and Guide Dogs news, please visit the 'News' section on the Volunteer Information Point: guidedogs.org.uk/vip/news.

How to receive email updates from us

As we mentioned above, urgent information will be sent primarily by email. This is absolutely critical if you live in an area which experiences localised or increased restrictions. It's also important if we need to inform you about the progress of our roadmap activities in your country or area. For us, it's the fastest and most cost-effective way for us to communicate to large groups of people at speed. Please note that we will always call our volunteers who are unable to use or access email, but this won't be as quick as sending everyone an email at the same time. If you do have an email address and are not receiving emails from us, please email the Volunteering Office urgently on volunteer@guidedogs.org.uk to update your contact preferences so we can email you.

Communications and feedback

Volunteer Information Point (VIP)

The Volunteer Information Point is our intranet or internal website for volunteers. It's where you'll find the latest Guide Dogs news, COVID-19 updates, projects, information, FAQs, resources and publications (e.g. One Voice) to support you in your role. If something is missing, please let us know as we're continually making improvements to its structure, functionality and content. Over time, this will create a better online experience for volunteers. To find out what's there now and what's coming up, please visit the Volunteer Information Point homepage: guidedogs.org.uk/vip.

E-newsletters

We have a range of e-newsletters that we send to volunteers on a regular basis. We know from your feedback that you don't always receive them. In future, if you don't receive one of your regular e-newsletters from us, please visit the e-newsletter page on the Volunteer Information Point: guidedogs.org.uk/vip/resources.

Virtual events: live and on-demand

Our virtual events and webinars are a good place to learn about the latest developments at Guide Dogs. Covering a range of national and role specific topics, these easy to attend events provide an opportunity for the volunteering community to come together online and ask questions/feedback to us. To attend a future virtual event or to watch a past recording, please visit: guidedogs.org.uk/vip/resources.

Sharing and responding to your feedback

Volunteer pulse survey results and our actions

In December 2020, we asked volunteers to complete a short pulse survey to let us know how we're doing in key areas, including communications and support. Responses showed that we were good at sharing national news and most volunteers found this useful, and that volunteers understood the connection between their role and Guide Dogs' aims. In contrast, we've seen more volunteers feeling that we're not communicating information to do with their role nor meeting needs for information about other departments and fewer volunteers feel they are making a useful contribution.

Qualitative feedback suggests these changes are understandably related to the impact of the pandemic — volunteer managers being on furlough and not all volunteering being available due to services being suspended because of COVID-19 restrictions. In response, we're putting a number of actions in place. For example, we've begun to raise awareness internally of the importance of keeping in touch locally along with equipping staff with the information and support they need, alongside our 'Back on Track' roadmap. Detailed research due in April will help identify where improvements are being made and give volunteers a chance to feedback in greater depth. We'll share our progress with you throughout the year.

Investing in Volunteers

To demonstrate Guide Dogs continued appreciation of our dedicated volunteers and our commitment to a positive volunteering experience, we're currently working towards achieving the renewal of the Investing in Volunteers quality standard. Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for organisations which involve volunteers in their work. Achieving Investing in Volunteers benefits Guide Dogs in many ways, including enabling us to demonstrate our commitment to effective volunteer management and increasing our volunteers' motivation and enhancing their experience. As part of the assessment process an assessor from Investing in Volunteers will interview a number of staff, volunteers and trustees. We will keep volunteers updated as we go throughout the process.

Volunteer Voices

Volunteer Voices is a collaborative network of local and online volunteer groups which participate in conversations on volunteering, and the co-creation of ideas and solutions. Following a review, the new Volunteer Voices model aims to make it easier for the wider volunteering community to give feedback to their local rep and shape the future of volunteering at Guide Dogs, including getting involved in specific and exciting Guide Dogs development projects, campaigns and more. For further information, including how to get in touch with your local Volunteer Voices representative, please visit: guidedogs.org.uk/vip/resources/volunteer-voices.



New publications

Guide Dogs Glossary

At the start of the year, we made important changes to some of our staff job titles, volunteer role names and the language we use. Over the last few years, Guide Dogs has evolved as a charity but our language and the terms we use haven't evolved at the same pace. This includes some of our volunteer titles that haven't changed in decades and no longer reflect the essential role they play in helping our dogs become confident, secure guide dogs. In addition, we've made some changes to the names of a few of our locations. To find out more, please read the 'Guide Dogs Glossary': guidedogs.org.uk/vip/news/glossary.

The way we work at Guide Dogs


Our locations

Work has continued at pace within our Property Services team during 2020. Teams in Southampton and Exeter both moved into new premises, providing more space to support Standardised Training for Excellent Partnerships (STEP), Puppy Raising for Excellent Partnerships (PREP) and Skills, Information and Support services. Guide Dogs purchased the existing Leeds site, with planning and design work underway to modernise the building to create our North East Regional Centre.

The Reading team relocated from Winnersh, to our existing site on the outskirts of Reading in Burghfield Common. In the south west, our new Regional Centre in Bristol opened in March 2021 for staff. The south west regional team and dogs are continuing to move in whilst following COVID-19 protocols. Once settled in, we'll be in a stronger position to increase our capacity and help more people with sight loss. We're looking forward to celebrating and sharing these new centres with volunteers when we can safely do so.

Our cars and vans

Guide Dogs continues to work alongside its vehicle provider, Peugeot, to roll out our new standard range of commercial vehicles. Our aim in 2021 is to replace over 100 of our cars, with the new vans. These provide improved space for our dogs in transit, better ventilation and more space for equipment and training essentials. We're also planning to trial a small number of electric vehicles within the fleet during 2021.



Information for volunteers in dog handling roles

How we're 'PREParing' to raise puppies in 2021

Puppy Raising for Excellent Partnerships or PREP for short, is our new standard way to raise our pups, which prepares them for their adult training and their future roles as life-changers. If you didn't already know, PREP treats every pup as an individual and helps us support their physical, behavioural and emotional development and gives them the important life skills they need to become confident and well-adjusted adult dogs. This work requires us to invest in our puppies and volunteers. We're planning to make greater use of technology via an online learning platform to provide more online content, resources and support for volunteers who are raising our pups. For more information, please visit: guidedogs.org.uk/vip/resources/prep.

Introducing 'Ethos'

Ethos is the new bespoke monitoring system for recording dog behaviour and temperament. Since February 2021, it has become the primary tool for collecting data on our puppies and dogs throughout their lifetime. From now on, Puppy Raisers will receive an additional Puppy Behaviour Questionnaire when their puppy is five months old. Fosterers and Breeding Dog Holders will also receive a Dog Behaviour Questionnaire around 4 weeks and 12 weeks post placement. An additional questionnaire will be sent to Breeding Dog Holders when the dog reaches 18 months of age. This data will underpin our work to better inform our breeding programme, how we raise puppies and support our dogs throughout their training and eventual partnerships/matches with service users. For more information, please visit: guidedogs.org.uk/vip/resources/ethos.

Born to Guide

Born to Guide is a pioneering project launched by Guide Dogs to help us better understand our dogs' genes. We aim to build the most comprehensive picture to date of the link between dog genetics, health and behaviour. The project involves gathering genome data from thousands of our dogs. In future, Puppy Raisers will be asked to take a saliva swab when their puppy is five months or older. We'll send you a kit with the instructions on how to do this. The data will be used to create a large database which will be examined alongside extensive information we have on our dogs' health and behaviour using Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies and machine learning. Ultimately, this will help boost success rates in puppies becoming future life-changers. Find out more information, please visit: guidedogs.org.uk/born-to-guide. If you have any questions, please contact us at borntoguide@guidedogs.org.uk.

Change in our neutering policy

In consultation with our Veterinary Advisory Committee and Research Team, we have amended our neutering policy to ensure that our dog health policies are in line with the most current information available. Research studies have clearly demonstrated a correlation between age of neutering, particularly males, with an increased risk of certain health disorders. From 1 April 2021, the minimum age for spay or castration will now become 12 months or closer to 14 months for certain breeds, to support joint growth and reduce risks of other health conditions. Puppy Development Advisors will consider the dog as an individual when thinking about the timing of neutering and will provide you with specific advice for your puppy. If you would like more information or have any questions, please speak to your Puppy Development Advisor.

Blue Cross pet bereavement service

Volunteers within our Canine Assisted Services may already know of the hugely supportive services of the charity Blue Cross. Our dog owners and dog volunteers can contact the Blue Cross for support with the retirement, loss or death of a loved animal. You can call the Blue Cross on **0800 096 6606** if you'd like to talk. Alternatively, email them at pbssmail@bluecross.org.uk and they will respond within 48 hours. In addition, Blue Cross have recently created a podcast in partnership with us to support with retirement, bereavement and loss. To receive the podcast, please email your local community team who will be able to send you a copy: guidedogs.org.uk/contact-us/local-community-teams.

Pet Passports: post Brexit travel arrangements for Northern Ireland

As most of the UK is now no longer part of the Pet Passport scheme, assistance dog owners face new challenges when travelling from the UK to EU, and also between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Guide dog owners looking to travel should give more time to prepare in advance and gain advice from either an Official Veterinarian or through the information provided by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in Great Britain or the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland. Due to the changing nature of the situation we are not able to give specific advice on making travel arrangements. We remain extremely disappointed that guide and assistance dog owners now face new barriers to travel between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We are continuing to lobby governments on their behalf, but whatever the outcome, we will continue to provide life-changing guide dogs to people with sight loss in Northern Ireland.



How to contact us

To speak to your local Volunteering Coordinator, please visit: guidedogs.org.uk/vip/talk-to-us.

Call our Guide Line on **0800 78 11 444** if you have any concern about your dog's health and wellbeing or for any questions Guide Dogs services. The line opens 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday.

If you would like help with your volunteering application, would like to know more about our wide range of volunteer roles, or have a general volunteering enquiry or feedback, please contact the Volunteering Office: volunteer@guidedogs.org.uk or **0345 143 0191**.



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