



Volunteer Handbook



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A warm welcome to Guide Dogs

Thank you for joining our
amazing community of

**over 15,000
volunteers**

who support Guide Dogs
across the UK.

We can't wait for you to get started – and will be here to support you throughout your volunteering journey with us.

At Guide Dogs, we're fully invested in volunteering. That's why we want you to have the best possible experience during your time with us – feeling involved, connected and informed about the difference you are making to the lives of people with sight loss.

Our charity was proudly awarded the 'Investing in Volunteers' quality standard in 2021. This was a recognition of the Guide Dogs commitment to best practice in volunteering, and the support provided by our volunteer managers.

This handbook is designed to be a handy reference throughout your time as a Guide Dogs volunteer. Inside you'll find everything from 'need to know first' information to signposts to further useful material. Many of the links included in the document will take you through to our online

Volunteer Information Point (known as 'VIP'), where you can find the latest Guide Dogs news and resources related to your role. If you need any documentation provided in an alternative format, or do not have access to the internet, please do let us know.

As a new starter volunteer, you'll take part in an induction programme to learn more about what to expect in the first few months. We'll also give you the training you need to ensure that you feel confident and well equipped in your new role. If, at any point, you have questions or feel like you'd benefit from further information, training or support, please just ask your volunteer manager.

Finally, if you have any access requirements you'd like us to be aware of, so that we can make any relevant adjustments to ensure you can best perform your role, please speak with your volunteer manager.

Thank you so much again for joining us. We hope you'll have an amazing time volunteering with Guide Dogs!

Who we are

Guide Dogs exists to help people with sight loss lead the life they choose.

We have been supporting people with sight loss since 1931 and are here to help them:

Live actively

Our people and dogs can help people with sight loss get out and about with confidence and knowing that their vision impairment won't hold them back.

Live independently

The advice and skills we provide give people with sight loss the freedom to live life on their own terms to achieve their hopes and ambitions.



Live well

Our experience and understanding can help people through the emotional challenges of sight loss as well as the practical ones, introducing them to an inspiring community of people with similar experiences and giving them support they need to be their best selves.

In recent years, Guide Dogs has expanded our services beyond our dogs to help thousands more people with different needs lead confident, independent and fulfilling lives.

In the '**One Voice**' booklet, available to download on the VIP, you can find all key information, facts and figures about Guide Dogs, who we are and what we do.

Our behaviours

Our work is aligned to our six behaviours. All Guide Dogs people – both staff and volunteers – are:

Person Centred

We are a group of people working to help each person affected by sight loss. We listen, and recognise that every individual is different in where they've come from and where they're going. We are open, empathetic and inclusive. We place the person at the centre of every decision.

Expert

We are specialists in what we do. We are committed to excellence and will never stop innovating. We respect our history, but seek out ways to adapt and improve, and are always willing to learn.

Optimistic

We are relentless in our belief that people with vision impairment can lead the life they choose. We are passionate about helping each person, committed to challenging barriers, and proud of who we are and what we achieve.

Partner

We only change lives when we collaborate. We build valued relationships with donors. We work together with our service users and colleagues, volunteers and partners – and our dogs, of course – to deliver great outcomes. We support and develop each other.

Lead by example

We can all be a guide. We take the lead and then hand it over, empowering people to make progress independently. We gain trust by having faith in others, and influence by example. We do what we say we will.

Engage

We cannot change lives if we look on from the side-lines. We get involved, take ownership, and feel responsible for all we do, think and say. We celebrate wins big and small, and we hold ourselves and each other to account.



Our work

We run many different services at Guide Dogs. You'll find out more about each of them at the Welcome Event, which you'll be invited to as part of your induction. In the meantime, here's a quick summary with links to find out more.



Guide dogs

You can find lots of general information about our guide dog service on our website. To learn more, you can also watch the documentary series about **the journey of our guide dogs**. From breeding through training and fostering, this explains what it takes to establish a guide dog partnership for a person with sight loss.



Children and young people's services

We provide a range of services to support children with sight loss, as well as their families. These include support services to equip children with the skills they need to live an independent and active life. You can find out more about our **children and young people's services on our website**.



My Sighted Guide

My Sighted Guide is our free service that helps people with sight loss get out and about and do more of the things they love by partnering them with one of our trained, local My Sighted Guide volunteers.



Campaigning

Our **campaigning work** champions the rights of children and adults with sight loss to live actively, independently and well. We work to remove barriers and champion best practice when we see it.



Research

Our **research programme** enables us to gather the evidence we need to ensure that our services remain relevant to people with sight loss and allow them to get out and about on their own terms.

You can also find out more about **what we do** on our website.

A person-centred organisation

At Guide Dogs, we recognise that every individual is different, and have adopted a person-centred approach into our culture and the way we conduct ourselves.

In practice, that means we promote wellbeing, align with the wider health and social care sector, and work with the people we support – and one another – to explore what’s important to us and how we can achieve our aspirations.

The fundamental values of a person-centred approach are:

- Everything begins with a conversation.
- The person is at the centre of every decision relating to their life
- People choose the support they want, in a way that works for them.
- Active listening and reflective conversations identify aspirations and ways to achieve them.



“

‘Nothing about us, without us’, sums up our person-centred approach perfectly. Living with a disability can be tough, it’s important more barriers aren’t put in your way by people assuming they know what you need.”

Amanda Bennett, Head of DEI

Our people

At Guide Dogs, our work is overseen by Trustees (who are volunteers themselves). They've been invited to join Guide Dogs thanks to their specific skills or experiences.

Guide Dogs operates services nationally from regional centres. Our main presence around the UK is in local teams.

These run key aspects of our work within their community and act as a base for many of our staff working in areas such as:

- community fundraising
- developing volunteering
- working with people of all ages with sight loss to help identify their mobility needs and solutions (both within and beyond Guide Dogs)
- developing our services, including guide dogs, and other forms of support.

Many of our central teams work at our Guide Dogs Reading Hub, (often referred to as "Head Office" or "Hillfields") in Burghfield, just outside Reading. This includes our People Services, Finance, Fundraising and Marketing teams.

If you'd like to know more about our people, please follow the links below:

- [Our Trustees](#)
- [Our Executive Directors](#)
- [Volunteering with Guide Dogs](#)

Our Guide Dogs community is made up of:



Over 1,800 staff



15,000 volunteers



More than 1,000 pups born with us each year

Diversity and inclusion

Guide Dogs is an organisation that celebrates the diversity of all staff, volunteers and service users. We're committed to ensuring an inclusive and accessible environment for everyone.

We are creating an environment where you can feel like you can belong, contribute and thrive – whoever you are, whatever your lived experience. A place where you can bring your whole self to your work: your perspective and personality, your influences and inspirations. Everything that makes you...you.

This is how we'll make Guide Dogs the most innovative and creative organisation it can be. Different ideas, perspectives and life experiences will give us new ways to approach questions, make decisions and solve problems. And apart from anything else, they'll bring us closer to the people we support, giving us more of a shared understanding than ever before.

But we know it won't happen through our good intentions alone. We need to act.

So in 2022, Guide Dogs launched its first **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy** which was co-produced with all our people. It sets out the clear, measurable steps that are going to help us build that environment. From the big initiatives like interview mentoring for applicants with a disability or neurodiversity, to the small but vital behaviour changes like saying our names before we speak at a meeting – whether or not there's anyone with sight loss in the room.

This isn't just about treating everyone the same. Because we're all different – and that's the point. This is about becoming an organisation that is inspired by difference. And we're getting closer every day.

You can contact the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team at dei@guidedogs.org.uk



How we talk

At Guide Dogs, we think carefully about the words we use. That's why, for example, we use the term 'sight loss'. Although this may not technically mean exactly the same thing as 'vision impairment', in reality it's understood in the same way and it's how people talk.

The exception to this is when we're talking to or about children or young people who may have been born without sight. In this case, we would say that a person is 'vision impaired',

has a 'vision impairment', is 'partially sighted', or 'blind or partially sighted'.

We always speak about sight loss with empathy, not sympathy; and we always put the person first – so we'd refer to someone as 'a person with a vision impairment', not 'a vision impaired person' or a 'visually impaired person'.

If you'd like to find out more about our brand and tone of voice, please contact our Content team: ContentTeam@guidedogs.org.uk

“

I believe that sight loss shouldn't stop you from doing what you want, there is always a way. If you are not afraid of falling and willing to try doing it even if in a different way then anything is possible.”

Karishma, guide dog owner



Starting your volunteering journey



Volunteer manager

As a Guide Dogs volunteer you will have a dedicated volunteer manager – we'll tell you who this is when you start volunteering.

Your volunteer manager is your go-to person for any questions and support you need. Please note: many of our staff support volunteers as part of their job and your volunteer manager may not have the word 'volunteer' in their job title. You may also be in touch with different members of staff for different aspects of your role, and they may also provide support for and answer questions for those specific areas.

Your volunteer manager will:

- Go through the induction programme with you – they should make sure you have the right information to feel positive and confident in your volunteering role.

- Clarify with you what activities and training need to be completed, how and by when.
- Answer any questions you may have, and help if you need any support.
- Be in regular contact with you and make sure you are continuously supported throughout your volunteering journey. (Some volunteering roles will need regular check-ins.)
- Provide you with continuous feedback on how you are getting on, both when things are going well but also if any changes are needed.
- Sign off any pre-agreed volunteer expense claims.

Good communication is a vital part of making your volunteering experience with us the best it can be.

So please speak to your volunteer manager if you have any questions at any time. While they will be your primary go-to person, you can also find out who your other local contacts are on the **'Talk to Us'** page on the **VIP**.

If you need to speak to someone about an emergency query outside of office hours (including bank holidays) please contact the Guide Dogs emergency helpline on **0345 143 0217**.

It's important that we have up-to-date contact details for you, so please let your volunteer manager and the Volunteering Office know if you move house, change email address, get a new mobile phone number, etc.

Induction

After you start you'll be invited to attend a Welcome Event, which will give you a more holistic view of Guide Dogs – and show how your volunteer role helps us achieve our aims.

The Welcome Events are run regularly throughout the year, and the local volunteering coordinator will book a place for you to attend, either virtually or face-to-face.

Your volunteer manager will cover all the key aspects of our induction programme within your settling in period, so that you feel comfortable and well equipped for your role.

Training and development

You may need some training to ensure you can start volunteering successfully and safely.

If that's the case, your role description will outline what training you'll need to complete as part of your induction. This will include any refresher training as required.

During your time with us, you'll also receive ongoing training and informal learning, and some roles can offer you the opportunity to develop into another volunteering role. For more information about what is available to you, speak to your volunteer manager. Training and development will be part of your regular check-ins.



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). For information about some of these conditions, and to understand some of the basics around how vision works, you can read the **“Common sight loss conditions”** document on the VIP.

Our website also has some useful information about **common eye conditions in adults and children**, including their symptoms, treatments and how best to live with them.

Sighted guiding

Sighted guiding is a technique used to assist a person who has vision impairment in an efficient way, giving them the feeling of moving in a safe and secure manner.

While My Sighted Guide and People Driver volunteers already receive comprehensive sighted guide training as part of their role, we also encourage all other volunteers, regardless of their role, to sign up to our ‘Introduction to Sighted Guide’ training. We run virtual sessions open to anyone over the age of 18, which cover everything you need to know to confidently guide an adult with sight loss. **You can sign up on our website**, or speak with your volunteer manager for more information.

A basic introduction to sighted guiding techniques is also available on the VIP.

Volunteer ID card

If you volunteer with Guide Dogs on a regular basis you will be provided with a photo-ID card.

Please wear your ID card whenever you are volunteering with Guide Dogs: as well as a way of showing that you belong to the Guide Dogs community of volunteers, it also shows our service users and members of the public that they are speaking to a legitimate member of Guide Dogs. It’s important for our insurance requirements too.



Policies and procedures

Guide Dogs' policies and procedures set out our commitment to you and the practical steps we'll take to implement this.

They provide guidance and direction to both staff and volunteers, and share a strong message to all that Guide Dogs is committed to excellence in volunteering.

All policies are available online on the **VIP**. If you need them in an alternative format, please just ask your volunteer manager.

Health and safety

Preventing accidents and ill health caused by our work and volunteering activities is a key priority for Guide Dogs.

To do this there are robust health and safety policies, risk assessments, procedures and best practice guidance which we expect staff and volunteers to use in their day-to-day activities. Your volunteer manager will ensure you receive the appropriate health and safety training for the role you are undertaking.



You're responsible for acting in a safe manner whilst undertaking your volunteering role and ensuring that any activities you carry out are done safely.

As a Guide Dogs volunteer your responsibilities are to:

- Carry out your activities without endangering the health, safety or wellbeing of yourself or others.
- Read any relevant documentation and communications.
- Raise any issue which you consider to be unsafe or detrimental to health.
- Comply with policies and practices.
- Undertake all relevant health, safety and wellbeing training.
- Report any incident which has, or could result in illness, injury or damage to property.

Volunteers fall under all the same regulations and safety guidelines as paid members of staff and are covered by Guide Dogs' employer's liability insurance.

By accepting the volunteer agreement, you are agreeing to adhere to the Volunteering Policy and relevant health and safety related policies, risk assessments, procedures, best practice guidance and to undertake required training.

Specific subject matter health and safety good practice guidelines/factsheets are available on the **Safety and Wellbeing** section of the VIP.

Vehicle insurance

If you use your own vehicle for volunteering activities, you must inform your insurance provider to ensure you are covered by your motor insurance policy whilst undertaking them. Volunteering is usually covered under "social, domestic, and pleasure" policies and the majority of companies do not charge an additional premium if the vehicle is used for volunteering purposes. However, requirements may differ depending on each insurer; more information can be found on **The Association of British Insurers'** website.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is about promoting the welfare, and protecting from harm, anyone who comes into contact with our organisation. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility at Guide Dogs, including volunteers.

The 4 Rs of safeguarding are:

- 1. Recognise**
- 2. Report**
- 3. Record**
- 4. Respond**

Please familiarise yourself with these so that you know what to do should you have a concern for someone. **Further information on them can be found here.**

If you ever have a Safeguarding concern – whether it's about a person affected by sight loss, a child, a member of staff, a fellow volunteer, a supporter, or a member of the public – you should speak to your volunteer manager or any other member of Guide Dogs staff as soon as possible.

If you cannot contact anyone locally, call the Guide Dogs Safeguarding team on **0345 143 0199** or email **safeguarding@guidedogs.org.uk**

Even if you're uncertain about what you have heard or seen, please 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.

If your volunteer role involves direct contact with vulnerable people, you'll receive safeguarding training so that you feel more confident in spotting signs of abuse and neglect, and to ensure we meet our legal obligations. If you're in a relevant role – which includes People Drivers, Dog Exercisers and My Sighted Guides – 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 of what will be covered.

The Safeguarding section on the VIP provides more information to support you.



Data protection

You will be sent the Data Protection Essential Guidance Sheet as part of your welcome information.

This will help you understand Guide Dogs' approach to data protection responsibilities and how its legislation applies to your volunteering role with us.

Some volunteer roles, which involve dealing with personal details of other volunteers or service users, require you to complete specific data protection training. Your volunteer manager will explain what training is required for your role.

Additionally, there are several key important **Data Protection policies and procedures** that you can access on the VIP.



Problem solving

If you have any problems or concerns, please raise them with your volunteer manager as soon as they arise.

Likewise, your volunteer manager should also inform you if they have any concerns about your volunteering. We want to help you get the most out of your volunteering and also ensure that we get the full benefit of what you have to offer us. Tell your volunteer manager what happened, and how it affected you. They will do their best to resolve the problem.

If a concern can't be resolved informally – or you believe it is too serious to be dealt with informally – please see the volunteer complaints procedure which can be found on the **resources section** of the VIP. Similarly, if there are concerns about your behaviour while volunteering that we can't resolve informally, we will follow the relevant procedure which is also hosted on the VIP.



Wellbeing

We're an organisation committed to supporting the wellbeing of our staff and volunteers. You can find a range of resources on the **VIP**, and join our **Wellbeing group** on our volunteer Facebook page.

A range of external support services you can access are also listed on the '**Keeping you safe and well**' section on the VIP.



Expenses

Guide Dogs believes that volunteers should not be out of pocket as a result of their volunteering.

We commit to reimbursing any reasonable, pre-agreed expenses incurred as part of your volunteering.

Please keep your receipts and submit your expense claims to your volunteer manager promptly. The volunteer expense form and guidance note for volunteers are available on the VIP. If you do not have access to the internet, please ask for a hard copy of the form; your volunteer manager will go through how to submit an expenses claim as part of your induction.

Clothing and dress code

We issue all volunteers with a Guide Dogs branded polo shirt to be worn when undertaking your volunteering role, should you wish to do so.

An additional range of Guide Dogs branded clothing is available for volunteers to purchase at cost price. You can find more information on the **Volunteer clothing page** on VIP.

We kindly ask that you only wear branded clothing when you're actively undertaking your volunteering (e.g. attending a collection, delivering a talk, or walking a dog). Please note: to protect our brand reputation, the production of homemade, unofficial Guide Dogs clothing is not permitted.

Whatever you choose to wear, please bear in mind that when volunteering you will be acting as a representative of Guide Dogs. So, to help us maintain our reputation among the general public, please ensure your appearance is always appropriate to the aims, objectives and behaviours of the organisation.

If you're given any safety clothing or equipment, please ensure you wear it or use it as directed and let your volunteer manager know if you experience any issues with it.

Everyone should feel comfortable to wear items of clothing which are worn for cultural and religious purposes, providing they do not breach any health and safety requirements. Our Dress Code policy can be found on the **policies section** of the VIP.



Engagement and recognition



Awards and events

We appreciate the huge difference that you make as a volunteer – and we’re committed to giving you rewarding experiences during your time with us.

Each year we nominate volunteers for special awards, so be assured that your fantastic commitment and skills won’t go unnoticed. The local volunteering coordinator will update you about these awards annually.

As a volunteer we offer you:

- Invitation to local social events, such as coffee mornings and Christmas parties.
- Long Service Awards.
- Local Volunteer Awards and national People Awards.
- Participation in annual Volunteers’ Week celebrations.
- **Pat on the back** – our internal recognition scheme for all volunteers and staff.

Communication

As a volunteer, you’ll also receive various regular communications from us:

- A national newsletter called ‘The Guide’, which is sent monthly.
- The ‘Forward’ magazine.
- Access to a dedicated ‘**News**’ section on the VIP for the latest news in volunteering.
- Access to our many Facebook pages and groups.

Volunteer voices

Volunteer Voices are local consultative groups for Guide Dogs volunteers.

These are an opportunity for volunteers to come together to share learnings, experiences and to feedback on both strategic and local issues at a national level.

Volunteer Voices ensures that:

- Volunteers have a constructive influence on topics they have been consulted on.
- Volunteer Voices is a known and consistent forum for two-way conversations between volunteers and staff.
- Staff and volunteers are clear on how their involvement supports people with sight loss.
- Volunteers are ambassadors and advocates of all Guide Dogs services.

To submit a question or comment to your local Volunteer Voices representative, please contact the local **volunteering coordinator**.



“

Volunteering is a big part of my life now. I didn't realise we needed this, but it's been the missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle. I'm learning new things and it's an experience for me.”

Lisa, volunteer Puppy Raiser

Other ways to get involved

Other volunteer roles

Throughout your time with us, you might want to experience other volunteer roles in addition, or instead of, the one you initially signed up for.

The best way to monitor new and upcoming volunteer vacancies is via the **Guide Dogs website**. If you see something that interests you, or would just like to know more about other volunteering opportunities within Guide Dogs, please speak to your volunteer manager or volunteering coordinator. They can provide details on how to apply and information about what other volunteering roles involve.

Volunteer stories

On our website you can read some inspiring stories of people who, just like you, have decided to dedicate their time to support Guide Dogs through volunteering.

If you'd like to share your own volunteering experience with others, please speak with your volunteer manager. We'd love to hear from you.



Fundraising

As a charity, we wouldn't be able to provide the range and volume of our services without the time donated and money raised by our volunteers and staff.

As a volunteer, you might want to get involved in your local community to support or appeals, hold events, manage a collection box, become a speaker, or join one of our 385 volunteer fundraising groups across the UK. Please speak to your volunteer manager if you'd like to find out more. For these and many other ways you can further help and support, please visit the dedicated page on our website on **how you can help Guide Dogs**. A wide range of **Fundraising resources** and information are also available on the VIP.

Depending on your volunteer role, you might sometimes be asked how we spend our money. You can find detailed relevant information on the **'how your money is helping'** section of our website.

Moving on

We understand that things change and you might find yourself in the position to no longer being able to volunteer with us.

If you are considering moving on, please make sure you:

- Give your volunteer manager as much notice as you can, and inform them when your last day volunteering will be.
- Return your volunteer ID card and any other Guide Dogs equipment.
- Submit any outstanding volunteer expense claim forms.



Your feedback is really important to us, so we hope you will take the time to complete our moving on questionnaire - and thank you so much in advance for sharing your thoughts. You will receive the questionnaire via email after your last day volunteering with us.

Should you wish to request a reference for your time volunteering with Guide Dogs, please contact your volunteer manager.

And finally...

As a volunteer you're an integral part of Guide Dogs' present and future – without you we simply couldn't meet the needs of the people we support or achieve our ambitions.

Thank you so much for making a difference and giving your time, skills and dedication to Guide Dogs.



Get in touch

For more information, help and support, please contact us:

volunteer@guidedogs.org.uk

0345 143 0191

Guide Dogs is a working name of The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. Registered Office: Hillfields, Burghfield Common, Reading, Berkshire RG7 3YG. A company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (291646) and a charity registered in England and Wales (209617), Scotland (SC038979) and Isle of Man (1334). B718 06/23

“

Since being partnered with Sue I have positivity. After we meet on a Monday the week whizzes past. And now I don't have to lean on my family so much, I have my own time.”

Stella, My Sighted Guide service user



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