

# Volunteer Handbook



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# A warm welcome to the Guide Dogs Family

We are so pleased and excited to have you with us. We understand that the first few months in a new role can be exciting, challenging, and perhaps also a bit daunting. Don't worry, we'll be there to support you and make sure it all goes smoothly. You have already impressed us with your enthusiasm, knowledge and passion and we're looking forward to getting you involved in our work to help people with sight loss live the life they choose.

It's normal to feel nervous and have lots of questions when you start something new - and that's the same for volunteering. This handbook is your reference throughout your time as a volunteer, covering the 'need to know first' information along with signposting to further material which you may want to come back and refer to throughout your volunteer journey. Many of the links in this handbook will take you through to our online [Volunteer Information Point](#) (known as VIP). This is a place where you can find the latest Guide Dogs news, locate resources related to your roles and find out how to get in touch.

Your volunteer manager will go through the induction checklist with you to let you know a bit more about what to expect in your first few months and ensure you have everything you need to start in your role. If at any point you have questions or would like to highlight any areas you would like further information, training or support, please just ask your volunteer manager.

If you do not have access to the internet and can't access the further information provided via the links in the Handbook, please speak to your volunteer manager who can print information off for you to read as a hard copy.

## About Guide Dogs

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

Guide Dogs works closely with many other organisations and charities to provide services, access and mobility to people of all ages with sight loss. You can read more about [our services](#) on our website.

We are a person-centred organisation, recognising that every individual is different. By adopting a person-centred approach into our culture

and the way we conduct ourselves, we promote wellbeing, align with the wider health and social care sector and work with our customers, and each other, 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 that they want, and in a way that works for them
- Active listening and reflective conversations identify aspirations and ways to achieve them

## **Our ambition, purpose and behaviours**

**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.

If you would like to know more...

You can read our 2018 - 2023 strategy ambitions [‘Guide Dogs: By My Side’](#) and find out about how we plan to provide more life-changing services for people with sight loss.

## **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 brand**

Our brand is about making ourselves more relevant to more people by:

- improving accessibility for people with sight loss
- ensuring our design works on digital platforms (for increasing numbers who find us online)
- reflecting our breadth of services

We want to talk about sight loss with empathy rather than sympathy, to find out more information on how we have done this and to hear our new sonic identity (a first for a UK charity!) please follow this [link](#).

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

Guide Dogs are committed to becoming an organisation which celebrates the diversity of our staff, volunteers and service users whilst fostering an inclusive environment for all.

We are only at the beginning of our journey to become more diverse, equitable and inclusive but we are committed to positive change

and are taking actions to progress this journey - more details on this will be shared during your Welcome Event. The most important thing each of us can do is to continue conversations about diversity & inclusion. We must educate and hold ourselves and each other accountable to grow into the organisation that we can and should be. The biggest barrier we face in becoming an inclusive organisation for everyone is in our own fear of having frank, open discussions about issues we may find difficult to discuss, like race, sexuality and oppression. You can contact the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team at [dei@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:dei@guidedogs.org.uk)

## **Our trustees**

The work of the organisation is overseen by [trustees](#) (who are also volunteers) who have been invited to join us due to the specific skills and/or experience they bring.

## **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 other forms of support such as My Guide. Our Guide Dogs family is made up of approximately 1,600 staff and 17,000 volunteers, with more than 1,000 pups born with us each year.

Our newborn pups are found at our National Centre in Leamington. At eight weeks they join our volunteer Puppy Raisers. As they get older (typically around 14 months old) they will either move onto our four Guide Dog training schools in Atherton, Forfar, Leamington, and Redbridge or to one of our [community offices](#).

Many of our overarching functions are completed at our Central Office (often referred to as “Head Office” or “Hillfields”) in Burghfield, just outside Reading.

If you would like to know more please follow the below links:

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

## **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). You can read further information about some of the common sight loss conditions and the impacts they can have on [VIP](#).

## **An introduction to sighted guiding**

Sighted guiding 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 sighted guiding training when it is run. Speak to your volunteer manager about booking onto the next available session. A basic introduction to sighted guiding techniques is also available on [VIP](#).

## **Our work and how we fund it**

We have many services and elements to our work - more than you may realise! You'll be introduced to our services at your Welcome Event, but below is a short snippet with links where you can find out more.

### **Our guide dogs**

Our main website has general information on our [guide dog service](#) including who can benefit from it, and [information on the cost of providing our guide dog service](#).

### **Children and young people's services**

Sighted children learn by watching others; children with vision impairment often need to be specifically taught skills and concepts they would not otherwise pick up. Our [children and young people's services](#) support not only the child with sight loss, but the whole family.

### **My Sighted Guide**

Many people with sight loss become isolated if they are unable to get out and about. [My Sighted Guide](#) is our free service that helps people with a vision impairment get out of their homes and into the community with a volunteer as their sighted guide.



## **Campaigning**

We believe that no one should be held back by a vision impairment. Our [campaigns work](#) champions the rights of people with a vision impairment to have the same freedom of movement as everyone else.

## **Research**

Our [research programme](#) enables us to gather the evidence we need to ensure that our policies, campaigns and services remain relevant to people with sight loss and allow them to get out and about on their own terms.

## **Our money**

### **Ways you can help us raise funds to provide these services**

We wouldn't be able to provide the range and volume of these services without the time donated and money raised by our volunteers and staff. Below is further information about how you can help us fund our services.

### **Community Fundraising - your local link**

As a volunteer, you might fancy:

- Holding an event (e.g. a tea party, fashion show, jumble sale etc.)
- Managing a collection box
- Becoming a speaker or
- Joining one of our volunteer fundraising groups.

Speak to your volunteer manager to find out who your local Community Fundraiser is.

### **Challenge events**

By taking part in a [challenge event](#), you can help us ensure that when someone loses their sight, they don't lose their freedom as well. You can organise your own event or join an existing one. Options include running, cycling, triathlons, swimming, and even skydiving!

### **Guide Dogs Shop**

All profits from our [Guide Dogs Shop](#) go to the charity which features loads of items that make perfect gifts.

### **Sponsor a Puppy**

By [sponsoring a puppy](#) from just £1 a week, you can follow a puppy's journey to become a life-changing companion for a person with a vision



impairment. We'll keep you up-to-date with regular 'Pupdates', following your puppy's journey.

### Leaving a legacy

[Gifts left to us in wills](#) are vital to Guide Dogs, as nearly two out of three guide dogs are funded in this special way.

### Donating in memory of a loved one

Deciding to make a [donation to Guide Dogs in memory of a loved one](#) can provide great comfort at a very difficult time. We can sensitively help with a range of options such as:

- Collection envelopes for friends and family to make a donation to Guide Dogs, in lieu of flowers
- A Tribute Fund set up by Guide Dogs in the name and memory of a loved one
- Name a Guide Dogs puppy

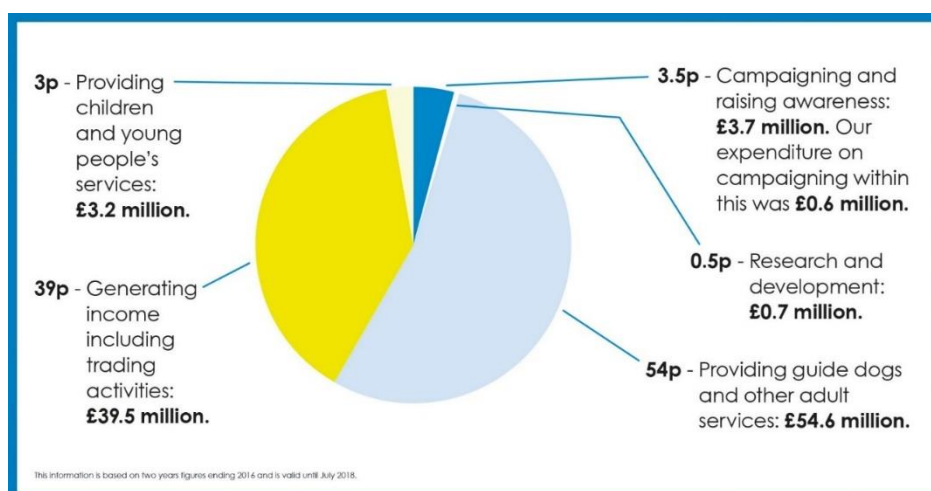
### Guide Dogs raffles and lotteries

Supporting Guide Dogs through raffles and lotteries is a fun and rewarding way to fund our life-changing work.

- [The Guide Dogs Lucky Lottery](#) is a weekly draw which costs just £1 a week per entry. There are 100 cash prizes up for grabs each week, with a top prize of £1,000. Every quarter, you also get the chance to win our top prize of £3,000.
- We also run regular [raffles](#). Every ticket sold will help us change a life.

### How we spend the money raised

Depending on your volunteer role, you might get asked how we spend our money. For each pound we raise at Guide Dogs, this is how much we spend on what.



See the '[how your money is helping](#)' section of our website for more detailed information.

## **What volunteering with us involves, what you can expect from us and what we expect from you**

As a volunteer you are an integral part of our present and our future, crucial in meeting the needs of our customers and in achieving our ambitions. We want you and all other volunteers to have the best possible experience during your time with us; feeling connected, inspired and understanding how you personally make a difference.

We feel very privileged to have your invaluable skills, passion, time and knowledge. So, what else do you need to know? Let's start with the practical information...

### **Volunteer manager**

You hopefully by now are aware of who your volunteer manager is - they are your go-to person for any questions and support you need whilst volunteering with us.

Your volunteer manager will:

- Go through the induction checklist with you to ensure you have all relevant information needed to do your role happily and effectively.
- Clarify with you what activities and training need to be completed, how and by when.
- Answer any questions you may have and assist you if you get stuck.
- Support you through the trial period during the first three months of your volunteering.
- Have regular contact with you and make sure you continue to feel supported in the role. (For some roles regular check-ins may be scheduled in, whilst others will be more ad-hoc)
- 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 expense claims.

Good communication is vital throughout your time with us, so please speak to your volunteer manager if you have any concerns at any time.

## New volunteer paperwork & procedures

The following should be completed prior to you starting your voluntary activity with us. Take the time to check that these points have been covered off:

- **Volunteer Handbook** - read through this Handbook carefully, including the health and safety information and relevant policies and procedures it signposts.
- **Volunteer Agreement** - you will receive this when you have completed the recruitment process. It sets out the expectations that we have of you and lets you know what you can expect from us too. Please read it, sign and return by email to [volunteer@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@guidedogs.org.uk).
- **Induction checklist** - complete the volunteer induction checklist with your volunteer manager, they will go through this with you during your induction. All elements relevant to your role should be completed by the end of the three-month trial period so that you feel comfortable in role.

## Volunteer ID card

All our regular volunteers are provided with an ID card. Your volunteer manager will be happy to take the photo if you need. If you have sent in your photo but not yet received your badge, either contact the Volunteering Office on 0345 143 0191 or speak to your volunteer manager.

Wear your ID card with pride whenever you are volunteering for Guide Dogs. As well as a way of showing that you belong to the Guide Dogs family, it also shows our clients and the public know they are speaking to a legitimate member of Guide Dogs. It's also important for our insurance requirements too.

## Volunteer clothing & dress code

You do not have to wear branded clothing when volunteering with us, but should you wish to do so a range of Guide Dogs branded clothing is available for you to purchase. All clothing is available at cost price to volunteers. To order, please contact our Volunteering Office on 0345 143 0191 or [volunteer@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@guidedogs.org.uk)

Where possible, we ask that you only wear branded clothing when you are actively undertaking your volunteering (e.g. attending a collection, delivering a talk, or walking a dog). Please note, that in order 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 amongst the general public, please ensure your appearance is always appropriate to the aims, objectives and behaviours of the organisation.

If you are provided with 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. If you would like to see the Dress Code policy, please ask your volunteer manager for a copy.

## **Induction**

You are warmly invited to attend one of our Welcome Events which will give you a more holistic view of Guide Dogs and where your volunteer role fits in. These events are run regularly throughout the year - get in touch with your local Volunteer Coordinator to book a place.

You can also watch a short induction message from our Chief Executive Officer Tom Wright on the [resources page on VIP](#).

## **Familiarisation**

You will be shown the nearest toilets and facilities as part of your induction. There is usually a fridge, kettle and water facilities on all Guide Dogs sites.

## **Opening hours**

Guide Dogs sites are open to the public from 9-5pm, but for your own safety we ask that you are not on site without a member of staff present. Your volunteer manager will outline any expectations about your voluntary activity and will discuss what days / times suit your circumstances best. We aim to be as flexible as possible to make the

role work for you, so please maintain an ongoing conversation with your volunteer manager about this.

## **Useful contacts**

Your volunteer manager will be your primary go-to person about your volunteering, but you can find out who your other local contacts are on the '[Talk to Us](#)' page on VIP.

## **Volunteer Voices**

Volunteer Voices are local consultative groups for Guide Dogs volunteers. It's 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 rep, please contact your [Volunteer Coordinator](#).

## **Contact information**

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

## **Running late? Unable to come in?**

If you are running late, please call your volunteer manager to let them know. We fully understand that on occasion you will not be able to volunteer when you have planned to do so due to illness or personal circumstances. If this happens, please let your volunteer manager know as soon as you can.

## **Feeling unwell?**

If you start to feel unwell while you are volunteering please let your volunteer manager or a colleague know straight away.

## **Problem solving**

Please raise any problems or concerns 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.

If a concern can't be resolved informally then please see the volunteer complaints procedure which can be found on the [resources section of VIP](#).

## **Making the most of your time**

We really hope you'll enjoy your experience as a volunteer and that you will take time to tell us about your experiences and the new skills and knowledge you have gained. We will positively encourage you to get involved in Guide Dogs life throughout your time with us.

## **Role description**

You should have received a full written description of your volunteer role when you applied for your role. This helps to make sure your role is of benefit to both you and Guide Dogs and that the expectations and commitments are clearly outlined from the beginning. If at any point you feel this has changed, please discuss with your volunteer manager.

## **Role specific training**

Your role description outlines the training you need to attend as part of your induction to ensure you are ready to perform your role successfully and safely. During your time with us you will also receive ongoing training and informal learning. For further details as to what is available to you, speak to your volunteer manager. Training and development should be part of your regular catch-up discussions.

## **Awards and recognition**

We appreciate your significant contribution as a volunteer and we are committed to providing rewarding experiences for you during your time with us.

We nominate volunteers for special awards each year, so be sure that your fantastic commitments and skills won't go unnoticed! Your Volunteering Coordinator will update you about these awards annually.

As a volunteer we offer you:

- a national newsletter 'The Guide' (sent monthly) and a local team newsletter sent bi-monthly
- 'Forward' magazine
- invitation to our Welcome Events
- invitation to local social events such as, coffee morning and Christmas parties
- local and long service awards
- participation in annual Volunteers' Week celebrations
- [pat on the back](#) - our internal recognition scheme for all volunteers and staff - nominations welcome!
- eligibility to apply for internal job vacancies

## Expenses

We don't want you to be out of pocket for any pre-agreed expenses you incur as part of your volunteering. Please keep your receipts, and submit your expense claims to your volunteer manager promptly. The volunteer expense form is available on [VIP](#). If you do not have access to the internet please ask your volunteer manager for a hard copy.

## Keeping up to date with Guide Dogs news

As a volunteer you will have access to our monthly volunteer newsletter 'The Guide' as well as your local team newsletter, sent bi-monthly. You can also check the [news section on VIP](#).

## Other opportunities

### Fancy a change or want to do something extra?

Throughout your time with us you will encounter lots of professionals in different fields, and it's quite likely you might wish to experience another department once you've experienced the role 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.



## **Paid work and internal vacancies**

Volunteering is one way in which to develop and increase your skills, learning and experience, and can sometimes be used as a springboard to employment, but please remember volunteering does not necessarily lead to paid work with Guide Dogs. However, as a volunteer you are welcome to apply for any internal vacancies you think you are suitable for. See our [internal vacancies job board](#) for details.

## **Moving on and feedback**

As and when the time comes for you to move on from your volunteer role, we'll of course be sorry to see you go. If you are considering moving on, please make sure you:

- give your volunteer manager as much notice as you can, and when your last day will be
- return your volunteer ID card
- complete any outstanding expense forms
- complete an exit questionnaire if you wish

Your feedback is really important to us, so we thank you in advance for sharing your thoughts, be it positive feedback or constructive criticism by completing an exit questionnaire. You will receive this via email after your last day with us.

## **Keeping you and our customers safe**

### **Health and safety tips for volunteers**

Please refer to the health and safety factsheets on the [‘Safety and Wellbeing’ section](#) of VIP. When you are out and about volunteering for Guide Dogs it is important that you consider your safety at all times.

### **Your safety and insurance**

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, use Guide Dogs tools and equipment in accordance with appropriate instructions and to wear protective clothing as required.

## **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.

If you ever have a Safeguarding concern 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 practicable 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.

Part of keeping people safe is to ensure that roles which work directly with vulnerable people receive safeguarding training. For volunteer roles who have a lot of contact with the public, such as Drivers, Dog Exercisers and My Sighted Guides, 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, 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 of what will be covered.

The [resources section on Volunteer Information Point](#) provides more information on Safeguarding to support you.

## **Wellbeing**

We are an organisation committed to supporting the wellbeing of everyone in our Guide Dogs family, including volunteers. A range of

resources are available on [VIP](#), or 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 [VIP](#).

## **Volunteering policies and procedures**

Guide Dogs' policies and procedures set out our commitment to you and the practical steps we will take to implement this. They provide guidance and direction to staff and volunteers alike and convey a strong message to all that Guide Dogs is committed to excellence in volunteering.

All policies are available on [VIP](#). If you would like hard copies of any of these policies then please just ask your volunteer manager and they can provide this for you.

## **And last but not least - thank you!**

We couldn't do what we do without each and every one of you, thank you for all that you do for us. Our volunteers can transform the lives of people living with sight loss, whether it is raising our puppies, sighted guiding, collecting funds or cheering on our event participants.

We know that without our volunteers, our charity could not continue its life changing work. You can read more [inspiring volunteer stories](#) on our website, and hope that you have the opportunity to have your own inspiring experience while volunteering with us..

If there is anything not clear from what you have read above or anything you feel you are missing, please get in touch with your volunteer manager. We'll do our best to support you in whatever way we can.



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