





## Working with Blind and Visually Impaired Volunteers

A toolkit for organisations supporting volunteers with sight disabilities

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### Who are we referring to?

Volunteers with sight disabilities in this context include:

People who are blind (complete or near-complete loss of vision)

People who are partially sighted (reduced vision affecting clarity, depth perception or field of view)

People who use assistive tools such as:

Canes

Guide dogs

Screen readers

Magnifiers

Braille devices

People with sight disabilities have diverse experiences, abilities and support needs. It is important not to make assumptions.

Involving blind and visually impaired volunteers strengthens organisations through lived experience, resilience, adaptability and valuable insight. At the same time, volunteering provides meaningful opportunities for contribution, confidence-building and community connection.

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### What do we need to consider when involving blind and visually impaired volunteers?

When planning to involve volunteers with sight disabilities, organisations should ensure that volunteering opportunities are accessible, safe, empowering and inclusive.

The following areas should be carefully considered:

#### Accessibility of Environment

Keep walkways clear of clutter and obstacles.

Avoid frequent rearrangement of furniture or equipment.

## **Volunteering Resources – Supporting Inclusive Volunteering**

Provide consistent room layouts.

Ensure good, even lighting for those with partial sight.

Use high contrast signage and large print materials.

Provide tactile or Braille signage where appropriate.

### **Communication**

Introduce yourself clearly by name and role.

Use clear, descriptive language (avoid gestures such as “over there”).

Always ask before offering assistance.

Provide information in accessible formats:

- Large print
- Braille
- Audio
- Screen-reader compatible digital documents

Ensure meeting materials are shared in advance in accessible formats.

### **Assistive Technology & Tools**

Ensure compatibility with screen readers.

Provide digital rather than scanned documents where possible.

Allow use of personal assistive technology.

Provide Wi-Fi access if required for assistive apps.

### **Role Design & Adaptation**

Match tasks to individual strengths, interests and confidence levels.

Offer flexible volunteering roles such as:

- Telephone support
- Mentoring
- Advocacy
- Administration
- Advisory roles

Provide orientation to the building and key facilities.

## **Volunteering Resources – Supporting Inclusive Volunteering**

Deliver training in accessible formats.

### **Guide Dogs**

Do not pet, distract or feed guide dogs while they are working.

Ensure guide dogs have space to rest.

Provide access to water.

Ensure evacuation procedures include guide dog considerations.

### **Health & Safety**

Complete an accessibility-focused risk assessment.

Ensure volunteers understand emergency and evacuation procedures.

Offer orientation to fire exits and safe routes.

Avoid lone working unless risk assessed and agreed.

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### **What can blind and visually impaired volunteers offer your organisation?**

Volunteers with sight disabilities bring significant value to organisations and communities.

They can offer:

Lived experience and insight into accessibility

Advocacy and awareness-raising skills

Problem-solving and adaptability

Strong listening and communication skills

Resilience and independence

A unique perspective that strengthens inclusive service design

Improved organisational understanding of accessibility needs

Volunteers with sight disabilities are not “receiving support” — they are contributing skills, experience and leadership.

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### **What support may be needed?**

Some volunteers may require reasonable adjustments to thrive in their roles.

Organisations should consider providing:

## **Volunteering Resources – Supporting Inclusive Volunteering**

### **Accessible Recruitment**

Application forms in alternative formats

Clear role descriptions

Verbal or audio application options

Flexible interview formats

Extra time where needed

### **Induction & Orientation**

A thorough building orientation

Clear explanation of layouts and facilities

Introduction to key staff and volunteers

Accessible induction materials

### **Ongoing Support**

Named supervisor or key contact

Regular check-ins

Open communication about support needs

A collaborative approach to reviewing adjustments

Buddy systems (where helpful)

### **Inclusive Culture**

Staff training on visual awareness and disability confidence

A respectful and person-centred approach

Recognition and celebration of contributions

Embedding accessibility into everyday practice — not as an afterthought

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### **What are the common barriers?**

Blind and visually impaired volunteers may face barriers including:

Inaccessible recruitment processes

## **Volunteering Resources – Supporting Inclusive Volunteering**

Poorly designed physical environments

Information not available in accessible formats

Assumptions about capability

Lack of staff confidence in supporting disability

Inflexible role design

Limited awareness of assistive technology

These barriers are usually environmental — not capability-based.

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### **How can organisations address these barriers?**

To create an inclusive volunteering programme for blind and visually impaired people:

Audit physical and digital accessibility

Consult directly with volunteers about what works for them

Embed accessibility into policies and procedures

Provide disability awareness training

Ensure materials are accessible by default

Promote a culture of openness and collaboration

Review risk assessments regularly

Celebrate inclusive practice publicly

A culture that asks, “What adjustments would help you succeed?” creates empowerment and trust.

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### **Local Contacts & Resources**

For further advice and specialist support:

[Teesside & District Society for the Blind | Middlesbrough](#)

[Sensory Support Service | Middlesbrough Council](#)

[Guidance on supporting colleagues with Visual Impairments - GOV.UK](#)

Local sight disability organisations and volunteer centres

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### **Final considerations**

Inclusive volunteering requires thoughtful planning, openness and a willingness to adapt.

When done well, involving blind and visually impaired volunteers:

Strengthens accessibility across your organisation

## Volunteering Resources – Supporting Inclusive Volunteering

Improves service design

Builds confidence and community cohesion

Demonstrates genuine commitment to inclusion

Creates meaningful opportunities for contribution

A proactive, collaborative and respectful approach ensures that both your organisation and your volunteer's benefit.

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*This information sheet is part of a toolkit of resources for involving volunteers. For further advice and support on developing youth volunteering opportunities, please contact your local Volunteer Centre or volunteering support organisation.*



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