Knowledge Gateway

Practice Guidance and Information

Inclusion of Volunteers with Vision Impairment

Top Tips for Inclusion of Volunteers with Vision Impairment

These Top Tips were produced by Volunteer Scotland and the National Inclusion in Volunteering Group.

Our mission is to reach everyone in Scotland with sight loss – where and when they need us. Sight Scotland provides specialist care, education and support that empowers people affected by sight loss in Scotland, and their families and carers.

Sight Scotland campaigns for equal opportunities for people with sight loss to participate fully in society. The charity also provides supported employment, and funds research into cures and treatments for blindness and sight loss.
Sight Scotland Veterans works across Scotland to support ex-servicemen and women affected by sight loss. The charity supports veterans in regaining their confidence, restoring their independence, and making new connections.

Sight Scotland Veterans has two established activity centres, and its experienced outreach and rehabilitation teams offer home visits to help veterans adjust to living with sight loss and support veterans by giving advice on low vision equipment.

By reflecting on the following we would hope that these points would help you make your volunteering offer more inclusive:

Part One: Michael
Michael provides the perspective of a volunteer with visual impairment. He is an art tutor within Sight Scotland Veterans' Hawkhead Centre in Paisley, where he helps veterans with sight loss to express themselves through a range of artistic skills. He was a finalist in the Charity Champions category of the Scottish Charity Awards 2020.

Michael's Top Tips

1. You may be surprised by how much I can do for myself. I do not always need help and I try to be as independent as possible. If I look like I am struggling with a task such as getting around, locating objects, or making a cup of tea; please ask me first before jumping in to help.

2. Contrary to popular belief, most vision impaired people are not completely blind. I will use my residual vision to the best of my abilities to perform my duties and engage with colleagues. This can be hard work for me though and can lead to fatigue towards the end of the day.

3. I can mistake people during very brief encounters. Please do not take offence if I mistake you for someone else or do not notice you at all. To counter this, say things like “Good morning Michael, it’s Debbie here.”

4. Please let me know who you are when you are approaching me, and then tell me when you are leaving me (even if you are just popping out of the room for a minute or two).

5. When you want to talk to me in the company of others, please just mention your name so that I know who and where you are.

6. Make introductions when someone joins our conversation, so that I know they are there and can talk to them.

7. Though my vision is limited, I will most likely be able to hear you without any bother. Unless I ask you to, there is no need to speak particularly loudly or slowly.

8. When you talk to me, I may have trouble with keeping eye contact or facing you. You might also find that I present fewer facial expressions and other non-verbal responses than you are used to. Please be assured that I am engaged in the conversation.

9. When performing a visually taxing task such as reading, typing, or note-taking, I need to focus all my energy on the work. If you want to talk with me then please do but allow me a moment to reacclimatise my vision to my environment.
10. When navigating the workspace with or without a mobility aid, I may find it difficult to judge the distance between people and objects.

11. I may have a support worker to assist me in settling into my new volunteering role. If you have a question to ask, please speak to me directly rather than addressing the support worker. They are not my P.A.

12. I am keen to fit in and socialise with my fellow colleagues. During conversations however, I may have difficulty in making and keeping eye contact. If I am finding it difficult to chime-in during a conversation, please do not leave me out.

13. If you are giving me something, please communicate with me and tell me where it is. For example, “your coffee is on the table, near your right hand”. Please do not grab my hand and put something in it, as this can be unsettling.

14. Large groups and crowded rooms can be overwhelming to me, as can other noisy environments such as busy roads and rooms with loud music.

15. Ask me about my hobbies. We might have something in common. People with a visual impairment are not limited to reading Braille or listening to talking books for fun. There are vision impaired movie buffs, gamers, crafters, painters, athletes etc.

Need some more help?

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this guide, please contact us:

- **Sight Scotland** website
- Telephone: **Volunteer Scotland** 01786 479593
- Email: **knowledgegateway@volunteerscotland.org.uk**

Knowledge Gateway

The Knowledge Gateway is created and led by **Volunteer Scotland**

Volunteer Scotland

This is a regularly reviewed resource. If you have any suggested updates, please email Volunteer Scotland at **hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk**