

# Youth Workers' Toolkit



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## Project partners



**Slovenian Association of Students with Disabilities (DŠIS)** is a voluntary nonprofit and independent organisation of students with special needs. It mainly focuses on the development of equal opportunities and inclusive higher and university education for disabled students and on their support in active social, cultural and sporting activities. Moreover, the staff provides the complex counselling in the areas of study, transportation and personal assistance. [More information available at Slovenian Association of Students with Disabilities website.](#)



**The Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organizations (PDCO)** was established in August 2011 as the result of activities carried out within the European Year of Volunteering 2011 and informal networking activities of volunteer centres which started in Slovakia in 2009. The main goal of the platform is to support the creation of environment favourable for the development of volunteering in all areas and its forms. The platform unites volunteer centres and organizations working with volunteers in Slovakia. [Further information available at The Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organizations website.](#)



**Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union (UNSS)** is a civic association that organizes blind and partially sighted people, their supporters, friends and family members. It focuses on advocacy of rights and interests of people with visual impairment. The organisation provides services (social counselling, social rehabilitation and other activities) aimed at independence improvement of blind and

partially sighted people. At present, the organisation has more than 4000 members. It provides its services in all Slovakia regions. [More information available at Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union website.](#)

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# Introduction

Is it possible to think up a perfect activity or game for all? Can we achieve universal human satisfaction? Of course, whatever we try we cannot satisfy everyone in the world. It is mainly due to the fact that we are people with different personalities, tempers and worldviews. On the other hand, due to the characteristics such as creativity, flexibility and openness, we are able to design programs and activities sufficiently inclusive and interesting to the widest possible group.

Through this toolkit we want to outline several options for youth workers how to involve blind and partially sighted young people in social, civic, sports and cultural events and activities. In order to be successful with such an involvement, it is certainly good to get acquainted with some of the particularities related to the support of inclusive groups – i.e. those ones in which, for example, young people with visual impairment, but also without it can be found. This is also a reason why we offer a summary of basic knowledge of the characteristics of visual impairment and its consequences for life, of the possibilities of appropriate assistance and communication with the blind and partially sighted in this toolkit. Last but not least, we also summarize a lot of helpful hints related to adjusting the environment in order to facilitate independent mobility and orientation of persons with visual impairment, or making electronic or printed information accessible. Since we often engage volunteers or young people with a completely different type of disability in inclusive groups, we can also find useful information from the area of mentoring and volunteer management in the toolkit.

All chapters represent a summary of theoretical and practical knowledge gained during the activities in the international project of the Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union titled YALTA – Youth Activation – Long Term Ambition.

## What is YALTA?

This exotic-sounding title is not only a destination recognized by tourists, but also the name of an international project funded by the Erasmus+ Program, which the Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union launched in September 2015. Its ambition is to primarily motivate blind and partially sighted young people to their own activity and civic engagement while, at the same time, to begin their systematic support.

In addition to the Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union (ÚNSS), the project has also been joined by the Slovenian Association of Disabled Students (DSIS) and the Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organizations (PDCO). All the three organizations have certain know-how, namely in the field of the specifics of supporting the blind and partially sighted (ÚNSS), the work with mixed youth groups (DSIS), and the coordination and management of volunteers (PDCO). Because of this wide-ranging partnership, a lot of useful knowledge is summarized in individual chapters of the toolkit.

## **Why YALTA?**

In our conditions, young people with visual impairment are mostly clustered in schools for the blind and partially sighted in Bratislava and Levoča. Today, however, several of them are also integrated within their schools, and stay in their regions. Although school is an excellent opportunity for the formation of new friendships and gaining experience, after leaving it, young visually-impaired people have often reduced opportunities to get actively involved in a variety of informal activities and some also adopt the role of passive reception of care. Thus, the gradual strengthening of the dependence on the help of others only increases the fear of being rejected by “sighted” peers, naturally prevents any own civic engagement and leads to isolation and feelings of loneliness.

## **What next?**

To prevent the aforementioned isolation and passivity, through a cycle of educational activities within the YALTA project, we attempted to familiarize selected young people with visual impairment as well as without it with various topical issues. These issues included, for example, project management, leadership skills, working with peer groups and the like. On the other hand, we also focused on social workers of the UNSS, who frequently come into contact with a young blind or partially sighted person, also for example through the provision of social services. Social workers of UNSS were thus acquiring methods of youth work focused on mixed groups, mentoring skills and knowledge in the field of coordinating volunteers.

Since all knowledge from these training courses is captured in this toolkit (as well as in the toolkit for young leaders), we expect that even after the completion of the project, high-quality support of inclusive groups will continue, not only by the workers of the involved project partners, but also by any youth worker.

We wish you a successful “starting up” of yourselves as well as of the others!

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# 1 Specific image of visual impairment

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To talk about the way how visually impaired people can see is not easy. When trying to understand the different ways of how they see or live in general, we will probably not avoid general patterns. Two peers with the same eye diagnosis and the same value of visual acuity can be very different in everyday functioning – in what they do, what aids they use, how they handle situations and what their interactions in the environment are. Someone will focus on living with their close people; someone ventures to penetrate into the virtual world and communicates with people from all over the world via the Internet. Someone goes regularly to work using well-known routes exposing themselves to confrontations with (sighted) classmates, colleagues. And there are those, who come out into an (unknown) street, into an unknown country, travel (together, by themselves) and rely that... there will be people, who will be willing to help, that GPS with route description reaches everywhere, that the world must also work for them. None of these evaluates and condemns any level of (independent) functioning. In an ideally functioning (wider) society as well as close family, every person (with visual impairment) would determine the degree of their involvement, functioning, and social life by themselves.



Look at the picture and think about what the problems for visually-impaired persons are if they want to move safely in such an environment.

I've noted a blending, grey environment. Even if a person with visual impairment knew the route, they would probably often hit changing chairs around tables and would laboriously search for an exit to get to the way on the left. Rods from concrete umbrella stands sticking to a height of 30 centimetres may directly jeopardize – they are as grey as the paving and are not at waist height, so visually-impaired people can notice them only after they stumble over them.

**What can cause discomfort or, on the other hand, be helpful in the following demonstrations of dining?**



For partially sighted people with various disorders it is very useful and necessary to think about a good contrast, for example, if we want to enable them the smoothest possible functioning – in this case dining. A white cup on a white background will be hardly recognizable and can easily be overlooked. It is enough to change the colour of the pad and the edge of the plate appears immediately helping orientate oneself on the plate in front of them. Visually impaired people are able to perform many common daily activities (cooking, cleaning, shopping, child care, etc.) by themselves if they have favourable conditions.

Using these examples we seek to explain to people, who live, work, or make decisions concerning accessible environments in offices, railways, hospitals and so on, or who come into contact with visually impaired people, what kind of problems these people can have with the perception of the situation. It often happens that enabling the accessibility of certain environment is ultimately beneficial for them as well.

## 1.1 Basic characteristics

When we talk about loss of vision or visual impairment, we mean a person, who cannot see sharply even with the best possible correction (glasses, lenses).

Depending on the degree of visual acuity, visually impaired people can be divided into partially sighted, legally blind or completely blind.

- The partially sighted have problems to carry out visual work, but have residual vision that can be used well. Their ability of visual perception is reduced in speed and accuracy. In their visual work there occur inaccuracies, ambiguities, distortions, they get tired more quickly. [1]
- The legally blind have residual vision, they can perceive light, contours, shapes of objects, but they cannot use vision as the dominant and the only analyser when working, navigating or obtaining information. [2] As a result, they have limited or distorted perceptions and visions. [1]
- The blind cannot receive information from the outside world by visual means. They are dependent on the use of other senses. The blind also include those, who are at least able to distinguish light and darkness - they have retained light perception. [1]
- The visually impaired also include people with impaired binocular vision, who have a disturbed functional balance and cooperation of the left and right eye. [2] In their visual perception, equal images on the retinas of both eyes are not merged causing problems especially in the perception of space and depth. [1]

## 1.2 Functions of sight

To better understand how differently visually impaired people can see, we need to know more technical terms and functions of the sight.

- **Visual acuity** (near and far) refers to the ability of the eye to see details sharply. The place of the sharpest vision on the retina is the yellow spot – macula.
- **Visual field** is all the space that we see using the eye looking ahead motionlessly. With healthy eyes we perceive space in the range of 180°. The central field of vision is used for sharp seeing of details and colours. We need the peripheral field of vision for orientation in space and in the dark.

- **Binocular vision** – stereopsis is the ability of spatial vision with both eyes. In case of damage to one eye, we lose our ability to perceive the depth, perspective.
- **Colour perception** is the ability of the eye to distinguish different colours and shades.
- **Contrast sensitivity** talks about the ability of the eye to distinguish between two surfaces – e.g. of an object and its surroundings. Grey writing on a white paper is a poor contrast. Black text on a white background gives the greatest contrast and some people need it to be able to read.
- **Adaptation to light and dark** talks about the ability of the eye to adapt to different levels of ambient light. [3].
- **Visual perception** is the brain's ability to process visual information.

**In general, people are able to better empathize with the needs of a person who sees nothing than to perceive differences in vision in people with residual vision and respond accordingly.**

## **1.3 How can they live when...? (Consequences)**

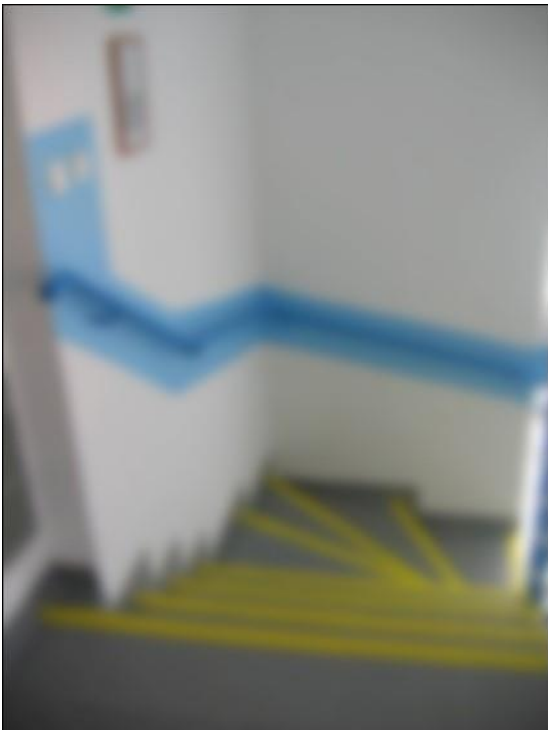
### **1.3.1 Reduced visual acuity**

Reduced visual acuity results in blurred image, one sees blurry, fuzzy images, or as through a fog. Not even glasses help. Nearly all eye damages are accompanied by decreased visual acuity and can also be associated with reduced colour perception.

For such people it is easier to function in an environment contrasting enough for them – light rug on a dark floor sets the way across the hall for them, a contrasting mat in the bathroom helps them visually separate the sanitary ware from the floor. Labelling the first step in the staircase enables to move more safely on the staircase, or find a curb. The above-mentioned colour-contrasting placemats increase comfort while dining. To read it is advisable to increase the text size (at least 14), in a font without serif (Arial, Tahoma) or use a magnifying device (magnifying glass). To take notes they use a pen with better-marked print or black markers.



**Demonstrations how a good contrast can help.**



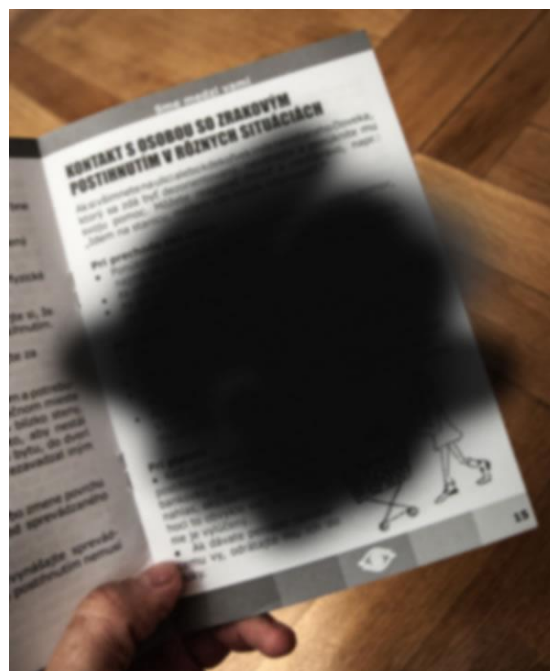
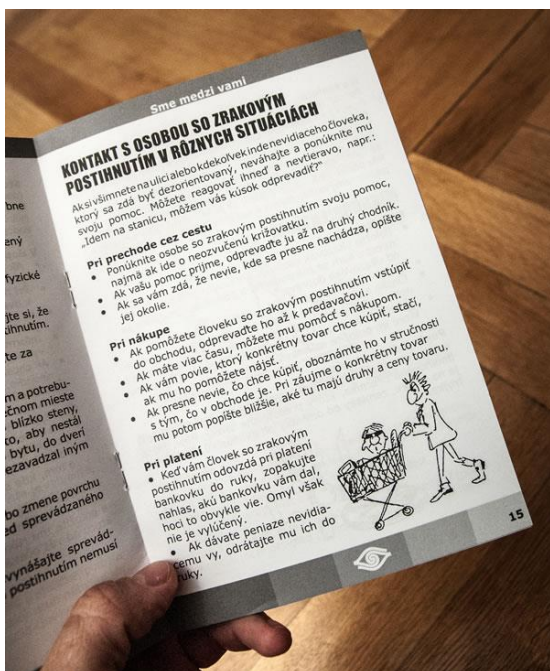
### **1.3.2 Damage to the visual field**

Visual field damage can occur at various degrees and in different areas of the visual field.

In case of **the loss of central vision**, one does not see the thing they are looking at. In their visual field when looking straight they may perceive an opaque black smudge or stain. Peripheral vision remains preserved, but it does not allow see details, it cannot be used to read normal text (they can read text written in marker, large print). Peripheral vision is sufficient for moving in space. A person with the loss of central vision has a problem to recognize people in the street; they can recognize them by

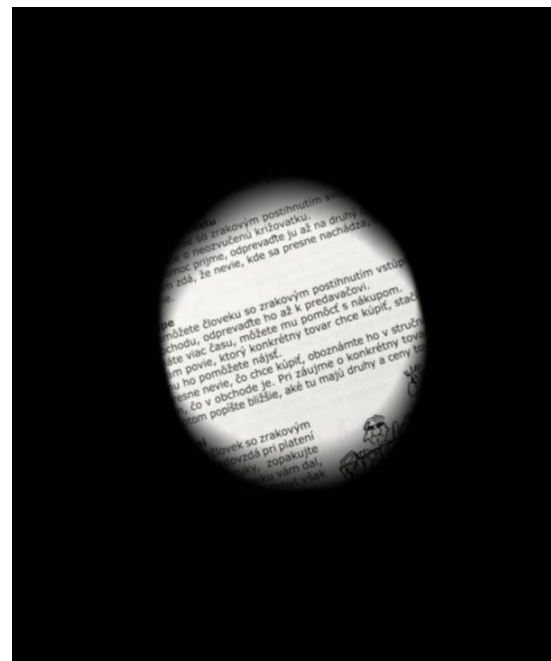
the colour of a distinct piece of clothing if they meet frequently, or according to a specific style of walking or a characteristic height. But mostly they are fully focused on safe walking and perceive people around only as moving obstacles to be circumvented.

People with the loss of central vision can learn to look at what they want to see peripherally without help or during visual therapy training. A face-to-face contact with them often seems to be not very natural because they do not look directly to their partner's eyes as we are normally accustomed in conversation, but "away".



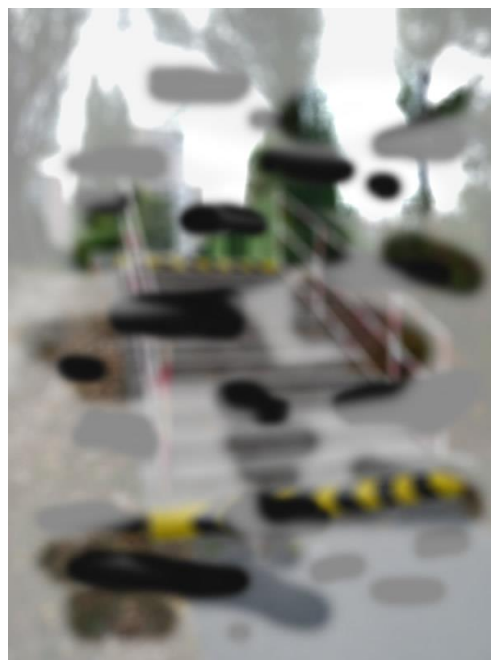
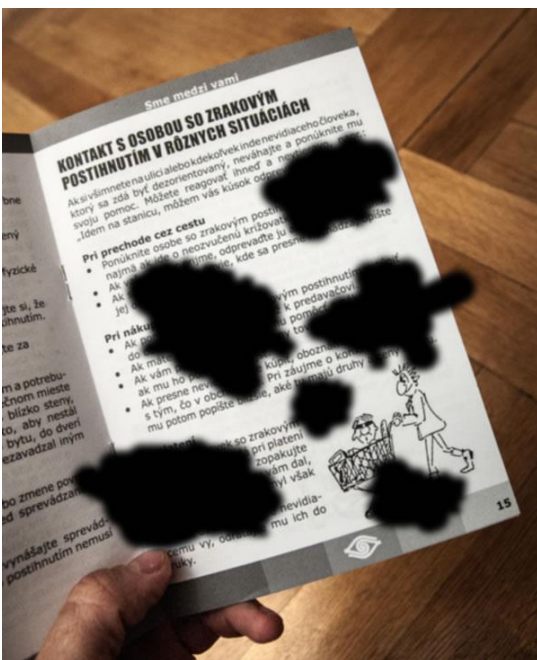
In case of **loss of peripheral vision**, so-called tunnel vision, one sees as if through a black tube. These people have much deteriorated spatial perception and orientation. They can see space only partially, which may result in large deviations from reality. If they do not know exactly where they should see something, they can have a major problem to find a specific item, or it can be easily overlooked.

On the other hand, central vision may remain very sharp and they may, for example, be able to read a text message. This condition can be confusing – “Why he pretends he is blind when he is now reading the newspaper for me?” These people have a big problem with safe walking – they cannot see their feet, do not register the threat coming from the side, so they often use a white cane. The problem with the movement itself worsens at dusk and at that time they get to the level of blindness.



The **loss** can also appear **in different locations (spots)** and can have various shapes and sizes. Depending on the diagnosis, the loss does not have to occur in a fixed location, it may also change during the day. Some people may perceive only what is above, others only what is on their right, for example. This is the reason why they very often have a problem with hitting objects (opening a cabinet door, a door, a sign, pedestrians...). They see objects better if they move or move their eyes.

Despite the loss, they may well be able to use the residual vision, so they really can give the impression that they can see better than in reality.



The loss of one half, in this case of the left half of the visual field can affect, for example, safety in independent walking because it can happen easily the visually impaired person does not notice a person entering their path soon enough.





### 1.3.3 Problem with adaptation to light and dark

Visually impaired people need more time for their eye to adapt to the changed light conditions (e.g. the transition from a dark room to an illuminated space or vice versa), and it is important to give them this time.

In some types of visual impairment a high sensitivity to light – **photophobia** – can be characteristic. In summer when the sun shines intensely or in winter when snow reflects sunlight, they cannot see and go outside only in the early evening or when it is cloudy. The problem can be partially solved using dark glasses with or glasses with colour filters. They can also be dazzled by powerful backlight on the mobile phone display or glossy paper. When they are inside, they need to draw curtains or sit with their back to the window.

People with **night blindness** are able to move independently during the day and do not need a white cane for walking, but may seem to be blind under low light conditions. They need even light inside and may require extra light for reading.

### 1.3.4 The Blind

There can be big differences among blind people in the use of other senses. The degree of their independence might vary. They perceive the way how they are treated by people around differently as well.

In general, we could say that if a blind person goes alone anywhere, they are mostly familiar with the route. However, they may need help if they somehow lose themselves or there is a change on the route (dug up roads).

The blind use a white cane (a guide dog and/or a guide) for independent orientation and mobility. They use the cane to check the space in front of them to safely step into it. They try to distinguish the dividing lines of various surfaces with it (e.g. lawn and paving stone, paving stone and asphalt), which thereby create a guiding line and help them orientate. This is the **tactile** use. While orientating, they also use the reflection of the sound of the cane from various surfaces (**echolocation**), which helps, for example, when estimating the distance from a fixed obstacle or differentiating space near buildings (the sound is conducted differently along the wall than when space or subway, etc. opens for them).

In order to achieve good independent mobility and orientation, it is also important to learn to go along an **acoustic** guiding line – for example, to be guided along a flow of cars. Other senses are used as well – smell to recognize different characteristic aromas on the route confirming that a person is on a correct way – the **smell** of a bakery, drugstore and the like. Also, the use of **proprioception** – i.e. perception through the skin –there is always draft here in this passage and the **equilibrium** system – I feel descending, ascending on the route and so on. All of these senses are not “better” automatically with the loss of vision. It is necessary to train the perception of information using them with a rehabilitation instructor during mobility and orientation training.

It is important to know that when a person walks alone with a white cane, they need to fully concentrate on safe walking, on the perception and recognition of all the information from the environment. Therefore, if they should hold a conversation while walking, it is better to offer guiding. [4, 5, 6].

All the differences from the abovementioned general characteristics of visually impaired people can be a basis for mutual clarification of how a particular person with impaired vision perceives, functions and thinks. We wish you mutually beneficial clarification.

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## 2 Effective communication and guiding visually impaired persons

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How to ask them anything? Can we say good bye to blind young people like this: “See you next time”? How to effectively help and not to be too helpful with our assistance?

If we have no direct experience with visually impaired people, such questions can automatically occur. It can be said that in every situation it is especially important to behave naturally. It is certainly not artificially constantly draw attention of the blind or partially sighted person to their disadvantage. We offer a few tips that can make the communication between the “seeing” and the “unseeing” person as well as the help more pleasant for both sides.

### 2.1 How to communicate?

Observing the principles of the correct communication relates to blind people in particular and partially to legally blind people. Of course, we assume that a youth worker knows these principles and uses them.

In order to integrate the blind, we also recommend teaching them the principles of communication of sighted members of the group. From the point of view of the sighted, it is especially important to observe the following principles of communication with the blind:

- It is necessary to always introduce oneself so that the blind person knows who they are communicating with. Of course, sometime later the blind will recognize by voice who they are talking to, so this principle needs to particularly be observed during first meetings.
- We always have to address the blind person so that they know we want to talk with them. This is particularly important in a group of people when the blind person cannot identify that the speaker wants to make contact with them or

that they are asked the question. For the blind it is in fact very difficult and exhausting to constantly monitor the general conversation and conclude what applies to them personally and what to someone else in the group.

- When communicating, we always talk directly to the blind person.
- As a matter of principle, in the presence of an accompanying person we communicate with and ask the blind person, not the assistant.
- In the conversation we do not have to be afraid of using illustrative words and words related to vision, for example, take a look.
- In descriptions or in instructions for moving or searching it is necessary to consistently use directional terms (i.e. left, right, down), not vague clarifications, such as there, this way. They do not say anything to the blind.
- Whenever within the communication, we always inform the blind person we want to move away or leave. It is not pleasant for them to find out they are talking to nobody.
- The sighted must remember that the blind cannot respond to their nonverbal expressions in communication, unless they are accompanied by a verbal or audible expression.

In terms of communication of a blind person, especially blind from birth, we should at least try to correct what the blind person could not have learned by observation. In an appropriate way we draw their attention to, for example, such a natural thing that they should “look at” the talking person, or to always turn to the one who speaks.

## **2.2 How to help?**

In mixed groups it is often necessary for a blind person to be accompanied by a sighted person. Most blind people are able to quickly teach their guide how to behave when guiding. The basic techniques for guiding include:

- Walking in a “blind – guide” pair: the blind person holds their guide over the elbow. The blind person walks half a step behind the guide, never in front of him/her.
- Walking through narrowed space – the guide moves his/her arm, which the blind holds, slightly backwards, behind their back. This movement is an instruction for the blind person to go behind the guide.

- Walking up and down the stairs – when going up and down the stairs (this also applies to curbs) the guide by moving his/her arm up or down indicates the blind person the direction of the movement (descending or ascending; in case of new pairs it is desirable to also notify the blind person verbally of the beginning and the ending of the stairs or of the edge of the curb and add the direction of the movement).
- Passing through the door – in principle it is possible to say that the guide opens the door, goes through the door as the first and after passing through the door it is closed by the blind person.

## 2.3 Good advice is better than gold

We describe a few situations below in which you can be helped by the following guidelines:

- Seating on a chair, behind the table – the guide puts his/her hand, held by the blind, to the backrest of a chair, the blind with his/her hand easily goes down the guide's arm and finds the back of the chair. The blind person then manages the seating by their own without any problems.



- Getting in the car – the guide puts his/her hand on the door handle or the upper edge of the open door, the blind person finds the door handle or the upper edge of the door and manages to get in by himself/herself.
- Getting acquainted with the environment – this of course applies to the blind and the legally blind. A youth worker or sighted members of the group should familiarize the blind person with the environment in which they will move during the activity in detail, namely for two reasons:
  - so that the blind person could move independently in the environment as far as possible and was not always dependent on others;
  - so that the blind person could avoid “dangerous” locations for them where they could be injured in extreme cases.
- When describing the room it is necessary to get acquainted the blind person not only with where individual items are located, but also draw their attention to places where they could be injured (e.g. a TV set placed at the height of the head in hotel rooms) as well as to things they could throw down unintentionally, or to remove such items out of their reach.

## Literature

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# 3 Reasonable accommodation and adjustments in engaging blind and partially sighted young leaders and volunteers

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Consequences of visual impairment are very different and vary depending on the particular diagnosis. However, it is sometimes difficult to understand, or we do not know it. Therefore, it is important to know that there are many simple ways and adjustments which help the blind and partially sighted live their everyday lives at work or in other environments. It should also be said that these adjustments are useful for everyone and do not limit people without disabilities at all.

When involving blind and partially sighted young people in activities of an organization, it is almost essential for a youth worker (mentor) at the very beginning of cooperation to discuss mutual expectations and the range of tasks (activities) which a visually impaired person should perform in the organization. We also recommend to clarify together the possibilities and limits on both sides.

A person with visual impairment may need more time to carry out certain tasks. It is therefore more appropriate to shift tasks which a person with visual impairment cannot perform due to their disability (or it would be very difficult for them) to another person in the organization. However, do not do this automatically, but only after mutual communication. Blind and partially sighted people are able to perform many tasks, but their abilities and skills are not the same, similarly as it is with all people. A blind and visually impaired young person would be able to manage many of the tasks by themselves if you allow them use personal assistant, for example.

**Example:** A person with visual impairment can work on a computer with a text editor or email, but they may have a problem to copy data to a computer from a difficult to read printed material (e.g. faded cash receipt).



In the following sections we will summarize the principles of reasonable accommodation and adjustments, and we will also present the basic philosophy of personal assistance. Both of these concepts lead a person with visual impairment to independence and, at the same time, motivate to own activation and engagement.

### **3.1 Adjustment of the environment**

The adjustment of the environment depends on the degree of visual impairment of a particular person. Below we offer some simple advice.

#### **Blind and legally blind**

The blind in principle do not require special modifications of the physical environment. It is essential for them to:

- familiarize themselves with the environment (premises of the organization, classroom, and the like) where they will carry out activities and move;
- arrange the space to their liking (the layout of tables and chairs, placing the material necessary for the performance of activities, and the like); this will allow them when carrying out activities to be self-reliant as much as possible and to need assistance only for those activities which they cannot perform because of the blindness;
- remove from unnecessary items the physical environment that could hinder the movement of a blind person, or could cause an injury; potentially dangerous objects are particularly those protruding into space at the level of the head;
- maintain the free passage areas intended for the movement of clients, employees, volunteers and other personnel clean;
- do not forget to notify a visually-impaired person when changing the arrangement of the organization's premises (e.g. after transferring the kettle or creating a temporary barrier made of accumulated presentation material in the corridor, etc.).

The blind usually move without a white cane inside and the following obstacles are dangerous for them:

- at the height of the head (e.g. extended shelves, open cabinets);

- up to the waist level and on the ground (unattached or wrinkled carpets, coffee tables, but also e.g. bags, which one can stumble over),
- obstacles along the guiding line, for example, along the wall (flowerpots, billboards, door ajar).

### **Partially sighted**

In case of people with residual vision it helps streamline the implementation of activities with a wider range of adjustments. They could be summarized into three areas:

#### **contrast – enlargement – lighting.**

It may seem difficult at first glance so at the beginning we present some really simple and practical tips:

- Beware of devices that are controlled solely using a touch screen; they may be completely inaccessible for a visually impaired person.
- Ensure that, for example the place for making calls is well lit.
- Write the most frequently used phone numbers (of colleagues or customers and clients) with a big thick marker or print them in a large font and hang out near the telephone, for example on a bulletin board.
- Microwave oven marked with tactile stickers or a contrasting colour (e.g. nail polish with a distinct colour) will help in finding by touch the right buttons or program settings.
- Use contrasts in the workplace and in the common premises of the organization (e.g. if light switches are white and are placed on a white wall, they are less visible. You can stick a darker colour foil on them or paint the place under the switches with a dark colour).
- Signs on doors should be made in large font.
- Clear print – also for communication within the organization, it is suitable for all.

[More information on the principles of “clear print” for visually impaired people is available at the following link.](#)

## 1. Contrast

It is the use of colours to adapt of the environment – light colours are used on a dark background and vice versa. Use bright, not pastel colours.

The most suitable contrasts include:

**black on yellow**

**green on white**

**red on white**

**blue on white**

**black on white**

**yellow on black**

Examples for using contrasts:

- dark doorposts – light doors;
- white or yellow cups for serving coffee;
- a blue mat under a white plate;
- a rug (or mat) of a dark colour on a light floor;
- rail near a white wall painted in dark blue;
- edges of steps marked with yellow-black contrast stripes;
- liquid soap in the bathroom in a dark bottle on a white sink;
- red towel hook on a white wall.

## 2. Magnification

Use enlarged signs or labels wherever possible and appropriate.

## 3. Lighting

The need for lighting is very individual; each visually impaired person needs a different level and type of lighting while accomplishing various tasks. On the contrary, improper lighting can lead to fatigue, headaches, or burning eyes, and of course limits the possibilities in visual work.

However, there are general rules, observance of which increases the visual comfort at work and movement in space. The basic rule is that light mustn't dazzle, but perfectly illuminate. Lighting should be balanced in order to avoid too dark and light

areas next to each other in a room or a building. The position of lighting towards a person should not create unwanted shadows (e.g. right-handers should have their desktop illuminated from the left when writing).

If a room is glared, you can use curtains, blinds or shutters.

Lighting also depends on the wall colour: white and light colours reflect light better.

It is more preferable to illuminate the room using more lamps than just one big.

**Example:** the room is illuminated with ceiling lamps, the desk with an additional reading lamp, under the cabinets in the kitchen there are lights to illuminate the worktop.

### **Other measures**

In addition to the adjustment of the environment we suggest youth workers:

- to allow a visually impaired person to use adaptive and optical aids to meet their needs (e.g. a computer with a screen reader or magnifier software, a mobile phone with a voice output, optical or electronic magnifying glass, etc. (more information is available in the chapter on adaptive aids);
- to allow a visually impaired person to use services of a personal assistant.

## **3.2 Personal assistance**

As we have mentioned in this chapter, a person with visual impairment can perform many activities completely independently. Independence of the blind and partially sighted is also significantly increased by appropriate measures and adjustments which are even universally applicable for all. On the other hand, a blind or partially sighted person may be confronted with activities, with the implementation of which they require a certain degree of help (assistance). This is the very reason for the existence of personal assistance – to enable visually impaired people to fully prove successful in working and personal life and engage in society. In essence, this means the opportunity to study, start a family, and engage in volunteer or any other leisure activities. The most important principles include self-reliance and independence of a person with a disability. They are manifested primarily in the possibility to make decisions about one's life and take responsibility for it. This tool

has already been known in several European countries, including the Slovak Republic for some time.

How can a personal assistant help a young person with visual impairment?

In case of blind and partially sighted persons, taking into account the target readers of this toolkit (which is youth), help of a personal assistant is possible particularly in the following activities:

- shopping,
- help with housework,
- reading,
- reading out to the blind,
- help during vacation,
- transport or transfer in working, educational, civil, family and leisure activities.



Photo: DSIS employees are training guiding techniques. An incorrect technique is the picture. A guide should walk first, not a blind person.

In Slovak conditions, a personal assistant carries out personal assistance based on a contract on the performance of personal assistance concluded between a person with disability and a personal assistant. A financial allowance for personal assistance

is then paid by the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family every month on the basis of a submitted statement on hours of personal assistance performed in the previous calendar month.

To be granted the personal assistance allowance, the most decisive is the ability of a person with severe disability to defend the required range of hours of personal assistance for activities for which they need help of a personal assistant when social consequences of their severe disability are assessed. And here is the opportunity for a youth worker to help the applicant clarify their real needs and find effective arguments to defend them. Moreover, it is good self-advocacy training.

Personal assistants are usually searched for and selected by a person with disability. Blind and partially sighted people with a severe disability cannot receive personal assistance from family members – close relatives.

In this regard it is important for a youth worker that a young blind or partially sighted person may (but also does not have to) have their own personal assistant.

The involvement of a personal assistant into the implementation of tasks or activities for a specific organization is decided by the young person with visual impairment as only they have information on the range of hours granted for the purpose of personal assistance as well as on their own limits or restrictions.

Youth workers should not automatically assume that personal assistance will be a kind of “compensation” for not carrying out appropriate arrangements and adjustments. The aim of any organization should be that young people, regardless their disability, were able to act as independently as possible without having to overcome various physical, social or psychological barriers.

If a young visually impaired person is engaged in the organization receiving also help from their personal assistant, the youth worker (mentor) should in no way direct the communication relating to the blind or partially sighted youngsters (tasks or activities performed by them or their person) only to a personal assistant. On the contrary, it is absolutely suitable to ask questions or talk directly with the young visually impaired person (maybe your volunteer, animator).

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# **4 Creating a barrier-free environment for the blind and the partially sighted**

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## **4.1 What are architectural barriers?**

Architectural barriers are situations and elements in which human health is endangered, but spatial disorientation and a situation in which free and safe access is physically impossible is also a barrier. Therefore for visually impaired people a barrier is also a situation when the environment does not offer enough understandable elements for them, which would enable orientation and which would thus ensure safe and independent access.

Most barrier-free adaptations for the blind and partially sighted do not demand structural changes. These measures can often be carried out on a completed construction. If the principles of accessibility for people with visual impairment are integrated into the project documentation of the construction from early stages of the solution, the measures do not have to pose any significant financial demands or unaesthetic modifications.

## **4.2 Principles for creating barrier-free environment for people with visual impairment**

When pushing through measures to remove barriers for persons with reduced orientation, security measures are preferred to the orientation ones. In security measures, it is firstly necessary to implement obstruction measures and then warning ones.

Determining appropriate measures facilitating orientation is more challenging due to their great diversity and considerable dependence on abilities of the person given, the degree of their visual impairment, experience and knowledge of the environment.

Orientation measures should not overload persons for whom they are intended, and



should not unduly overload other people.

Properly arranged natural environment making it easier to solve measures to remove barriers is the primary thing that needs to be ensured for mobility and orientation of persons with visual impairment. The proper arrangement of furniture, interior furnishings and various items then completes the spatial situation in such a way that the blind or partially sighted person feels good and safe in the given environment.

the use of contrasting materials, arrangement of furniture and accessories so as not to hinder, the proper use of lighting and colours, central location of functions and services so that it is possible to find them intuitively, rectangular arrangement of sidewalks, corridors, dividing large spaces into smaller functional units using natural boundaries (furniture, colour distinction) could serve good examples.

**Orientation points**, sets of orientation points (lines and surfaces) and orientation signs represent important determination of space for the blind or the partially sighted.

Orientation points are physical objects recognizable by touch and easily detectable by white cane and underfoot. They are clearly distinguished from the surrounding environment (shape, surface structure, characteristic perception in the contact with the pad, vibration, resistance to movement depending on the properties of the contact surface) [1].

**Orientation signs** are realities that complete the situation created by orientation points and are perceptible by senses of the blind or the partially sighted. They include, for example, the surface quality, the rustle in an alley of trees, the typical traffic noise, the gurgle of a stream or fountain, and the like.

The following measures serve to improve the conditions for independent and safe mobility and orientation of the blind and the partially sighted:

- technical measures,
- organizational measures,
- combination of technical and organizational measures.

Where the natural arrangement of the environment is insufficient for the orientation of persons with visual impairment, we use technical measures – tactile paving, artificial tactile and acoustic elements. However, at least partial tactile guidance (inside –

along walls, railings; outside – along greenery, curbs or artificial guiding line) is a condition for sound guidance. Tactile elements should be placed in locations where the blind person intuitively finds them without specifically looking for them.

To improve the conditions for independent and safe mobility and orientation of visually impaired persons there are also organizational measures. Their essence is to organize specific services to make them accessible to people with visual impairment without somebody else's assistance. This also includes informing staff in services, trade, public buildings and transport about how to communicate with blind and partially sighted people and teach them how to provide qualified assistance.

The combination of a suitable arrangement of the natural environment, organizational and technical measures should be the basic way to achieve a solution as the technical solution without the organizational one and vice versa is seldom entirely satisfactory. An example of a combination of measures may be installing a phone or another signalling device in an accessible place in public buildings (store, airport authorities) by using of which a person with disabilities can require assistance or information. It is essential the individual measures be connected and form an integrated whole together with the natural environment. Isolated, artificially and forcibly installed elements are purposeless for persons with visual impairment, they will likely not find them, or it may be overly burdensome for them to return from a special element back to the use of other elements in the natural environment.

### **4.3 Technical measures**

**Guiding lines** for the blind and the partially sighted consist of orientation points with clear characteristic features that are identical along the entire line. Guiding lines for independent mobility and orientation are the basic and most important element. With the guiding line, the blind person needs to maintain not only continuous contact using the white cane but they must also keep some distance from it and continuously monitor it [1].

Obstacles of permanent character mustn't interfere in the guiding line, and the interference of temporary obstacles needs to be kept to a minimum.

**A natural guiding line** is formed by natural orientation points with typical orientation signs, i.e. mostly buildings and their parts. Such a line is most often formed by the contact line between the wall and the sidewalk. It can be also the sidewalk curb on the boundary with lawn. The sidewalk curb next to the road is not considered a guiding line. In the interior, it can be formed by the boundary between tactilely different surfaces (smooth paving – carpet).



Photo: A car parked on signal strips is a barrier for blind people. They cannot use guiding elements.

The layout of natural guiding lines, especially in large areas and wide roads, has to have logic that can be derived from tactilely obtained information.

Natural guiding lines should include complete routes, sections and whole clusters of buildings.

**Artificial guiding lines** should be created in places where there is no natural guiding line or the transition distance between two orientation points is too long. Artificial lines must also be established where operation excludes the use of natural guiding lines, for example, pedestrian zones where in front of shops and department stores near the walls there are goods on racks and counters [1].

The draft of any artificial guiding line is very individual based on the conditions of a specific construction, and therefore it is necessary to consult it with a specialist for mobility and orientation of visually impaired persons.

The surface structure of guiding lines should have significantly lower resistance in the longitudinal direction than in the transverse direction. A cross-section can be wavy or with grooves. The white cane uses grooves as a guide. In cane sweeping technique the tactilely distinct relief of the guiding line is useful and, at the same time, the transverse movement of the cane creates a clear and unmistakable sound effect.

**Tactile warning strips** are used to indicate entry to dangerous places. They have to be clearly and unmistakably identified by touch using the white cane and the underfoot. A tactile warning strip is made of a relief surface with truncated domes.

Examples of using a tactile warning strip:

- in locations where the height difference between the sidewalk and the road is less than 50 mm,
- in front of the entry to the road at a zebra crossing,
- along the edge of public transport and railway platforms,
- along the bike path to separate it from the surface of the sidewalk for pedestrians,
- near steps - in front of the first step both upwards and downwards.

**Signal strips** mark an important orientation point for the blind or the partially sighted, which they need to identify accurately. A signal strip consists of a relief surface combining warning relief (with truncated domes) and guidance relief (with grooves). On edges there is warning relief and in the middle there is a guidance relief.

Examples where the signal strip is used:

- at crosswalks where it indicates the direction of passing,
- in places where it leads to the entrance of an important building,
- at public transport platforms where it leads to the boarding point to the first door.

In **acoustic elements** we use the fact that in addition to touch, the blind and the partially sighted also use hearing for orientation.

Basic types of acoustic elements for orientation, signalling and information include:

- natural acoustic orientation points and lines of orientation (gurgling water in a fountain, sound of an escalator, rustling of leaves, distinctive sound near some buildings, e.g. railroad, factory, etc.),
- in urban areas – information voice columns, panels and boards, orientation sound beacons at intersections in subways (including common crosswalk signalling),
- at public transport stops, systems provide spoken information about the current timetable,
- in public, commuter and rail transport a system announces the line number, direction of travelling and an announcement for the driver about the fact that a blind person entered the vehicle, and so on.

Artificial elements which are used for acoustic guidance are **acoustic beacons**. An acoustic beacon is a device which plays the recording from a radio at a command. An advantage of acoustic beacons is that they do not issue the sound constantly, only on request from a radio signal, and thus they do not bother their surroundings.

Using acoustic beacons it is possible to create whole orientation systems in large free spaces. However, it is always necessary to be careful to consider optimal combination of audible and tactile elements.

Acoustic beacons can fulfil two basic functions. Via a sound signal they indicate a site significant in terms of orientation and identify and help keep the direction of movement to these places. Through recorded information they provide visually impaired people with additional orientation or operational information.

## 4.4 Additional adaptations of environment

**Marking of obstacles** perceptible by touch has to ensure safe and unambiguous identification of an obstacle in its full scope when using a long white cane [1]. In general, a barrier has to be marked so that a person with visual impairment perceived its entire ground plan. Therefore the obstacle has to be firmly marked near the ground up to a height of 100 millimetres with a rim and at a height of 1,100 millimetres with firm, tangible and marking contrasting compared with the surroundings [2].

Obstacles must not interfere with guide lines and their number should be kept to a minimum because each detour represents a psychological burden and can lead to disorientation. We divide them into permanent and temporary barriers.

Permanent barriers are mainly composed of street furniture (shelters, billboards, trash cans, mailboxes, flower pots, benches, etc.)

Temporary obstacles include placards in front of shops, mobile sales counters, seasonal restaurant seating, vehicles extending into the sidewalk, fences of construction sites, excavation and the like. For labelling these obstacles the same rules apply as to permanent obstacles labelling.

Sufficient attention has also to be paid to doors and walls, which are made of glass. This applies to cases when glazing is lower than 800 mm above the floor. These should be approximately at the eye level (1400 – 1600 mm above the floor) marked with a distinct belt with a width of at least 50 mm or a strip of labels with dimensions of 50 mm x 50 mm, spaced not more than 150 mm, clearly visible against the background [2].

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# 5 Making information accessible to visually impaired people

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## 5.1 Why to deal with the accessibility of information?

At present, we live in information society. As a consequence there is a big “pressure” of information, which floods us on a daily basis from a variety of sources. We perceive it, process it and subsequently make decisions based on it.

For a person with a disability it is often very difficult, sometimes even impossible, to perceive the information provided, for example, a blind person cannot embrace a city skyline, a high-flying airplane, the content of a shop window, a deaf person will not capture screeching of seagulls by the sea, hooting sirens in the distance, rustling trees, and so on.

However, there are a number of cases when the information is inaccessible because it is presented inappropriately. In this case, a removable information barrier is at stake and by removing it we can achieve a number of positive effects.

Positives of removing information barriers:

- Disabled people are able to perceive the information independently.
- The information is accessible to a wider range of people.
- The information can also be processed better by older people.
- It is easier to modify the information later.
- The information provided has a uniform format.

In our context, it is necessary to take into account that in information area, there are certain barriers for people with any kind of disability. But what is considered a barrier by the blind, doesn't have to restrict access to the information for the deaf, etc.

## 5.2 What does accessibility apply to?

Making information accessible should be addressed from the following aspects:

- Providing information in an accessible format.
- Developing skills of people with disabilities so that they would be able to perceive this accessible form independently or using assistive technologies.
- Developing assistive technologies to keep pace in accessing information provided by still new technologies.

Developing skills of people with disabilities and developing assistive technologies are interconnected categories created by constant requirements on groups of people with disabilities and technologies they use. These need to be constantly improved and evolved to keep pace with the development in presenting information as well as with various forms of its presentation.

It is true that the development of assistive technologies always lags behind technological progress as such. This fact together with the non-observance of standards of accessibility results in the reality that there is still a group of information, which is unjustifiably inaccessible to people using assistive technologies.

## 5.3 Providing information in accessible form

We are normally surrounded by several types of information presented in various forms. We encounter text, audio and graphic information that is printed, electronic or in another form.

To provide information in an accessible form means to provide it so that a disabled person could independently perceive it using an assistive technology. Information content makers do not have (and no one requires this) knowledge of all types of disabilities, special claims arising therefrom, or of assistive technologies. For them, there are standards for creating accessible content which define how documents with different content should be created and how to present them in individual formats. Assistive technologies then rely on the compliance with these standards.

In the following sections we will show how to create a document and present information in a form accessible for people with visual impairment.



### 5.3.1 Printed document

We adhere to the following rules in printed documents:

- Use sans-serif fonts (e.g. Calibri, Arial, Helvetica, Verdana or Tahoma). Avoid italics, simulation of handwriting and ornate fonts.

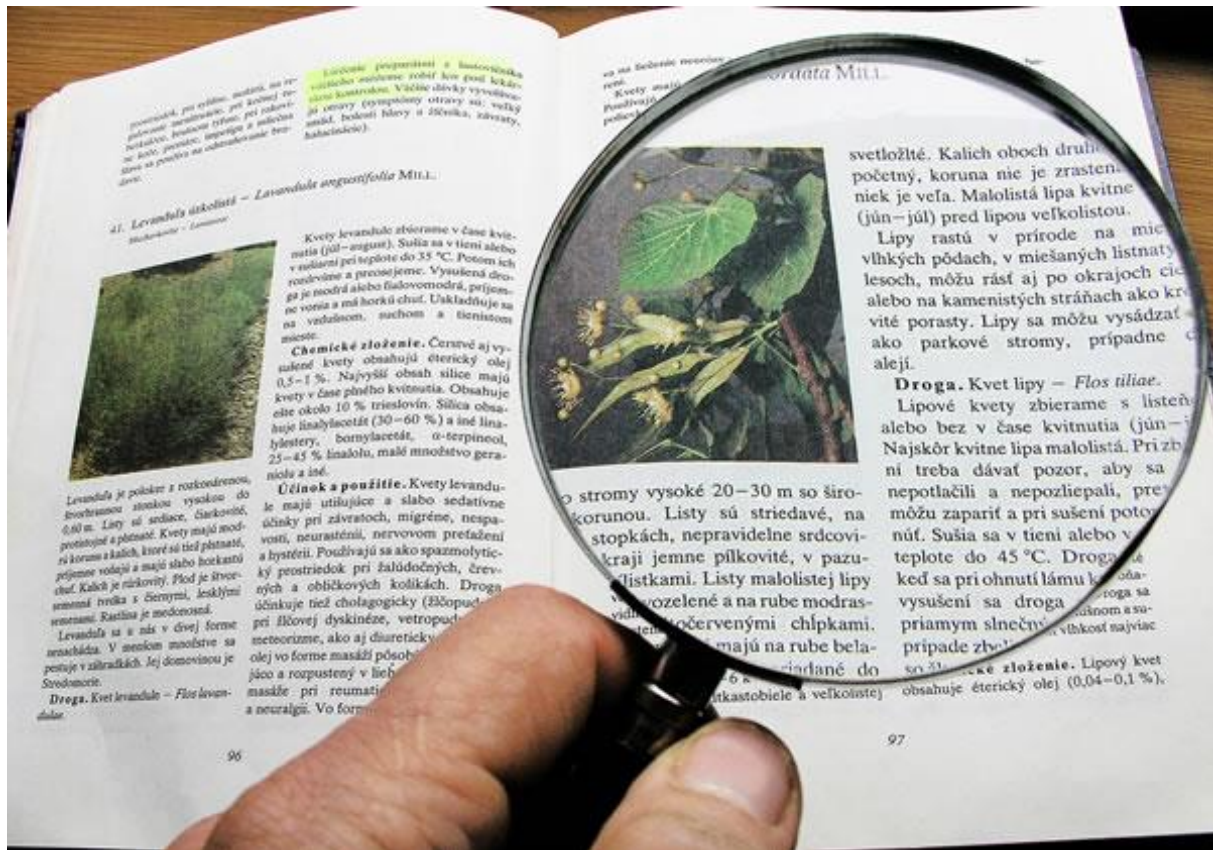


Photo: An example of text inaccessible for partially sighted people.

- The font size is at least 12 points.
- Pay attention to colour contrast, while the best one is a black font on a white background.
- Divide the text in the document into chapters according to their logic affiliation.
- Distinguish the names of the chapters with font size and position them on a separate line. Avoid using capitals.
- Align the text to the left margin without useless gaps.
- Separate paragraphs more distinctively.
- When using columns use a maximum of two columns on A4-size paper.
- Embedded graphics do not disrupt the fluency of the text. Do not use images overlapping multiple rows with wrapped text.

- Use quality non-glossy paper. The text from the other side of the sheet mustn't show through.

By observing these principles we facilitate reading not only for visually impaired readers, but we also simplify the processing of the printed information for the blind using a scanner and OCR technology.

### **5.3.2 Information in electronic form**

This information is provided as:

- text,
- graphics – picture diagram, map, etc.,
- sound,
- video.

The form is a special case. Here the user is required to properly understand the information provided, fill in data and submit the form.

#### **Text**

It defines the language of the document. If the document is multilingual, define a language for each section.

The language is important for assistive technology so that the application knew what reading rules it should apply.

In MS Word:

1. Select the entire document in the case of a monolingual document or an entire section in the case of a multilingual document.
2. In the status bar click the "Language" icon and select language in the drop-down box.
3. For html documents define the "lang" attribute in the header of the document. Define the attribute for the main page as well as for all sub-pages.

#### **Structure**

When creating any new document, its structuring and segmentation are crucial. For this purpose we use styles through which we can determine headings, lists, tables or charts. For a blind person, it is then easier to navigate through the document

because up-to-date screen readers allow rapid movement, for example, by headings or tables and lists. When creating structured and accessible documents, we can use the help of templates within which we define different styles which we can reuse without the need for further adjustment. It is therefore recommended to have document templates in an organization, such as an invitation to events, an article, an attendance list, and so on.

The ability to quickly adjust the document design is one of the benefits of using styles. It is enough to make a change in one place and it is immediately reflected in all places where the style is used. For example, when we decide to change the font size from 14 to 16 points within a heading style 1, it will be made throughout the document.

We recommend defining headings exclusively using respective styles. Enlarged and bold fonts to highlight headings without using styles should be avoided. This will facilitate blind users to better orientate in the document, namely by using a list of headings created by the screen reader.

For individual heading levels we use correct styles – “Heading 1” style for chapter headings and “Heading 2” for subchapters. We proceed correspondingly in further levels.

In a document with embedded chapters we apply the “multilevel list” when creating headings, which ensures numbering of chapters.

The content of the document is generated with a function, we do not write it manually. The generated content can be easily updated with changes.

We proceed similarly when creating tables. For data displayed in a table we use the appropriate functions to generate a table. We do not use spaces, tabs and new lines in order to achieve the desired appearance of the data because such an arrangement won't work in future revisions of the document, conversion to other formats and in increasing the size.

## **Colour**

Using colours to mark individual information is effective and for sighted users often preferable to the text display. An example of such a display can be a class schedule,

a service month schedule for volunteers, occupation in ticket sale, share of products in sale, and the like.

Colour is commonly used to mark mandatory form fields.

However, for the blind, the partially sighted or the colour-blind, using colour-marking only is obviously insufficient. It is therefore necessary to ensure (e.g. through explanatory notes) sufficient text descriptions of information mediated through colours, for example, red labels weekdays and green volunteers available on that day.

### **Picture**

Certain information can be demonstrated using a variety of illustrations or images. However, information provided this way, similarly as in case of colours, remains totally inaccessible for the blind. It is therefore important to use apt descriptions. In case of pictures we define the so-called alternative text and for more complex charts or maps we provide a description full of information in the form of text below the image. Moreover, it is important to place the image into the text on a separate line and avoid using text wrap or floating/moving and flashing images.

An example of an appropriately used picture:



**Únia nevidiacich a slabozrakých Slovenska**

How can we define an alternative text in MS Word?

1. Select a picture and from the context menu (display it by pressing the right mouse button or the appropriate key on the keyboard) we choose the “Format Picture” option.
2. Go to the “Layout and Properties” tab/section.
3. Define the “Name” and “Description” fields in the “Alternative Text” section. The reader will read the content of these fields when you position the cursor on the image.

When using images in HTML documents, fill in “title” and “alt” attributes to define the image.

When using information as a chart from data, it is necessary to give an alternative text describing the meaning and scope of the displayed data.

**For example:** The chart shows the evolution of unemployment in individual quarters of 2015. The first quarter 10.2%, the second 10.31%, the third 10.19%, the fourth quarter 10.42%.

At present screen readers aim to mediate information directly from the chart. It is important, however, to insert a chart generated from data in Excel, it is then more understandable even for blind PC users.

## **Multimedia**

We present videos and audio recordings on the web in a way that also allows perceiving the content with a screen reader. We recommend keeping in mind the following:

- Introducing the media file – a short text before the object that follows.
- An alternative description of the content.
- In HTML, the insertion of an element to play the content so that it could also be used through assistive technology and the keyboard, for example, as in YouTube.

In case of more extensive recordings we also present a text transcript of the content.

## **Form**

Form is an electronic document requiring the user to fill in individual fields and send it for processing. In organizations we usually use such forms, for example, when registering participants for various events and trainings, getting feedback and satisfaction evaluation of participants, volunteers or colleagues, and so on. In offline as well as online forms, again, it is a good idea to remember the fact that our questionnaire can get to a blind user. To ensure wide accessibility of our applications or questionnaires prepared as forms as possible, it is certainly useful to keep the following in mind:

1. Forms in MS Word are useless if they are created using elements designed for the creation of forms. Only versions when the form is made up of normal text characters, such as space, period, underscore, and the like are accessible.
2. Although forms in MS Excel are accessible, they are used less frequently.
3. An accessible form can be created, for example, in Adobe Acrobat, which can be then be filled in by Acrobat Reader.
4. It is also possible to create an accessible form on a website (a person with visual impairment fills it in online). However, in forms, it is important that individual form fields have correctly matched descriptions (“label” assigned to a form element). Systems that could be used pretty well include, for example, Google Forms.
5. If possible, we also enable the blind and the partially sighted to fill in the form offline and subsequently send it via email.

## Table

When presenting information in tables, we use respective features; spatial depiction imitating a table is not sufficient. It is important to give a description and alternative text. We mark appropriately the cells representing headers of columns or rows. Readers use this marking and report it before the actual piece of data in the cell. If possible, merging cells, their filling with colour without text labels and nested tables have to be avoided.

An example of an appropriately designed table:

Table 1: List of students with their physical data

Name	Weight (kg)	Age	Height (cm)
Peter	80	25	190
Jana	50	30	172

Description to the table is inserted as follows:

1. Select entire table. On the “Table tools” tab under “Layout” press the “Select” button and choose “Entire table”.

2. From the context menu select “Insert description” and define the text.

Set a table row as header as follows:

1. Select a row.
2. Select “Table properties” from the context menu and choose “Repeat row as header on each new page” on the Row tab.
3. For HTML documents use “th” label for header cells in the respective row and column.
4. In an Excel document mark the relevant cells in the row or column as headers.

### **MS Word document**

When creating an accessible document in MS Word, the aforementioned general rules apply. They can be summarized as follows:

- The document has a defined language.
- Structuring is carried out using styles.
- Pictures have alternative texts.
- Colour coding has alternative text label.

More rules for MS Word:

- MS Word is not used to create forms.
- When editing and checking text for another author use track changes function. Do not label changes with colours.
- Texts given in pictures and fields are repeated as text.
- Do not use floating texts and images.
- If important information is in the header or footer, it is necessary to draw attention to it in the text.
- To check accessibility, use Accessibility Checker in MS Word menu.

### **Conversion of MS Word document to PDF**

PDF (portable document format) is widespread particularly because it ensures a uniform appearance of the document in different applications designed for its display. It additionally prevents unwanted modifications in the document without author’s consent.

In order to have an accessible pdf file, it has to contain accessibility tags. We get these to the document if we create an accessible Word document.

The conversion is carried out as follows:

1. In “Save As” dialog select the PDF format and click the “Options” button.
2. Check the “Document structure tags for the accessibility” box.
3. Do not check the “Bitmap text when fonts may not be embedded” option.

Published and distributed accessible PDF documents have to be in the unprotected mode. Screen readers are unable to make a protected document accessible to users with visual impairment.

### **OpenOffice**

Documents created and published in the odt format (OpenDocument) are currently easily accessible to users who use assistive technologies. At present, however, they do not provide such a comfort compared to MS Office. The situation is rapidly improving, though.

OpenOffice org and LibreOffice, particularly word processors and spreadsheets, i.e. applications for processing text and tables, can be considered easily accessible products.

After creating an accessible document (similarly as in MS Word), it is possible to convert it into the PDF format.

When creating an accessible document, the same general principles apply as listed above for MS Word documents.

### **Export of an odt document into pdf**

Accessible odt can be exported into PDF as follows:

1. Select “Export to PDF” in the “File” section on the main panel.
2. Check “Tagged PDF” and “Export bookmarks” in the dialog that appears.
3. Confirm the saving.

### **Websites**

Websites on the Internet are one of the most common sources of information in electronic form. They can contain information as text, graphics, sound and images. It



is not rare to encounter links to documents that can be saved to computer and read offline.

The issue of accessibility of websites is described in The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), prepared by the World Wide Web Consortium. WCAG 2.0 version is used at present. The standard is based on the following principles:

- Content has to be perceivable.
- Elements in the interface have to be controllable.
- Content and controllable elements have to be understandable.
- Content has to be robust enough to be able to work with current and future technologies, including assistance.

The proper use of HTML tags for structured content and CSS for the arrangement of the content on the page is the key to accessible web pages.

When creating an HTML document we observe the aforementioned general principles and use the following rules:

- Headings are defined with <h1> to <h6> tags according to the degree of structuring.
- <p> tag defines paragraphs.
- <ul>, <ol> and <li> tags define lists.
- <th> tag defines a header cell in a table.
- To describe objects use caption attribute.
- Form elements are assigned a description with <label> tag and it is bound with a respective form element.
- Groups of form fields are grouped with <fieldset> tag.
- Required fields are also identified with a text tag, for example, asterisk in the appropriate label.
- Avoid using Captcha (twisted letters in an image) to verify access – it cannot be read by not only readers, but also many non-disabled people.
- Clearly announce that the form has been properly processed and delivered.
- If there is a mistake in the form, notify it and set the cursor into the field with the error. Retain other filled in data.

- Introduce audio and video recordings with a description. Provide subtitles for the video recording and a text description of the video (The description can also be a separate page).
- All controls must be controllable from the keyboard.
- Texts of links have full meaning. Do not use “Click here”.
- Visually distinguish the text in the link, for example, by underlining it.

## **Spreadsheets**

Spreadsheets are easily accessible for users with assistive technologies. Reading charts remains to be a problem, however, the situation is gradually improving in this area as well. Screen readers are able to communicate descriptions of axes as well as displayed values.

When creating spreadsheets, observe the following rules:

- Do not use needlessly too much free/empty space between particular pieces of data (columns, rows or more tables on a sheet).
- In larger documents state where particular data groups start.
- Avoid purely coloured marking of values in cells.
- To describe the meaning in more detail use a comment (it is inserted from the context menu, readers will note of its occurrence).
- Mark appropriately cell headers (readers will use them when changing between columns and rows).
- Do not use locked cells. Blind users are not able to obtain information from such a cell using a reader.
- If the workbook contains multiple sheets, announce it.
- Give meaningful names to sheets.

An accessible spreadsheet can be exported to PDF. The procedure is identical as in text documents.

## **Presentations**

Presentations usually represent support for a lecture in front of an audience. If a blind or a partially sighted person is in the auditorium, higher demands are laid on the speaker.

It is recommended:

- To provide the presentation in an electronic form beforehand.
- When giving the lecture, to describe parts of the presentation which the sighted see and which the lecture refers to, for example: “The chart represents the development of the declining trend of sales in the months of the second quarter of 2015. The numbers of the decline are listed in the table.”
- To comply with the general principles for creating documents. We achieve that even blind people are be able to perceive almost entire content of the presentation.

### **5.3.3 Information in alternative formats**

There are situations when it is preferable to have information accessible in a non-electronic format, for example, a restaurant menu, a timetable at a bus stop, the number of an arriving public transport connection, a doorplate, and the like.

Alternative provision of information includes:

- Large print – providing print in large font having 16 or more points. Since documents are printed from their electronic form, it is not a problem to generate them directly this way. It is recommended to print all materials for the elderly in large fonts. It is very probable that an older person will have problems with their vision.
- Braille – information provided this way is the fastest method for blind people, who have mastered it, to familiarize with, for example, drugs, musical notation, grammar rules, mathematical notation, foreign language words, and so on. It is often not appropriate to provide information, for example, as sound, or the information is so short that to transform it using a scanner and OCR is unrealistic. To print in Braille one needs to have a braille printer and an application to transform electronic documents into a printable form.
- Audio version of information – it is suitable not only for people with visual impairment, but also for people with learning disabilities. For example, DAISY format is used for these purposes. It is an international format for recording text in audio. In recordings synthetic voice is used, which doesn't have to suit everyone and it is not available for all languages. It is also possible to use

commercial voices installed on computer. To convert them, it is required to install add-ons in applications for creating documents.

- E-books – they represent an appropriate form of making literature accessible to the blind and visually impaired. This is not a traditional printed book, but a digital document, which can be read, for example, on a computer. Such a book is often created by scanning a conventional printed document, while from the perspective of a person with visual impairment, recognition (OCR) and structured text is important, too.

#### **5.3.4 Audio description**

It is a way to make theatre performance, television program and so on accessible through a verbal description of the happening on a stage, the scene in a movie, TV news.

To use this service it is necessary to set up the position of a “commentator” in theatres and make their comment to visitors available through technical means.

In TV broadcasting, program makers create a separate audio track that carries a pre-recorded audio description for programs prepared or online created commentary, for example, in the news and live broadcasts. This track is transmitted by TV signal distributors to end users. They need to have technical means to receive it with equipment supporting the selection of the audio track. After enabling this feature, the description is reproduced if it is included in the broadcast. Otherwise, the original sound is reproduced without description.

When using low-quality hardware, a variety of problems with the reproduction of the description can occur. These may give the impression of a poorly functioning service among users.

To ensure audiodescription (this category also includes subtitles for the deaf); a legislative framework is created in the Slovak Republic. Makers are required to produce it, and distributors to carry it to the end user.

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# 6 Adaptive aids for visually impaired people

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## 6.1 Basic characteristics of adaptive aids

The loss or serious damage of the sight is manifested through negative consequences in all areas of human life. This is caused by the fact that humans receive most information using their sight and an increasing portion of information has been presented in a visual form. Given the fact that there is no functional substitute of vision, we make attempts to compensate its loss or deficiency in different ways in relation to a specific activity. This leads to a great variety of compensation means and the need to optimize their selection for a particular situation and a person. Technical means which help mitigate the impact of the visual impairment are generally called adaptive aids. We also use the term assistive technologies, which denotes adaptive aids making information and communication technology accessible to persons with disabilities.

Due to the cost of adaptive aids a visually impaired person cannot obtain all the necessary equipment from their own resources. The cost of adaptive aids also means increased costs, which people without visual impairment do not have. Therefore, it is possible to get an allowance on selected aids from the state, or to get some of them only for a top-up payment, or even free of charge. The information about existing devices and methods of their use is provided by UNSS regional centres which also help when ensuring applications for contributions, and also provide training for working with more demanding aids.

The compensation of the visual impairment impacts by using technical means is implemented as follows:

- by supporting remaining visual capabilities,
- by using other senses, especially hearing and touch,
- by reducing the need for sensory control, especially by mechanization and automation of activities.

The support of the preserved visual functions is carried out through optical devices – electronic reading magnifiers and magnifying computer programs. Optimal use of optical aids and training to work with them is the subject of vision re-education.

In cases where it is no longer possible to use the remaining visual capabilities, we use technical means, which present visual information using the senses of hearing or touch. These are, for example, level indicators informing through sound that the desired level of the liquid poured into a container has been achieved, colour indicators informing the blind or the colour-blind about the colour of textiles and other materials, talking thermometers, scales and clocks, computers with voice or tactile output, braille printers.

Mechanization or automation of activities is increasingly used also for the widest user community. It reduces the need for sensory control and any control of the human. The advantage of this method is that it is a part of the design for all, not a special precaution. For people with visual impairments these include, for example, washing machines, dishwashers, and microwave ovens. Even with the use of mechanization and automation it is, however, necessary to perform certain control operations which must be accessible to visually impaired persons through contrast and magnified display, relief marks and scales, beeper or synthetic speech.

## **6.2 Types of adaptive aids**

In terms of the origin of adaptive aids we can divide them into the following groups:

- Standard equipment designed for the widest possible public – these devices can be used directly, or using a recommended procedure for users with visual impairment. These include, for example, radio receivers, some kitchen utensils, such as slicers and measuring glass, or appliances, for instance, microwave oven with mechanical control.
- Modified standard devices supplemented with systems enabling their control and use by people with visual impairments, such as tactile label (mechanical egg timer, washing machine programmer) or voice output (kitchen and bathroom scales).

- Devices specifically designed as adaptive aids (e.g. level indicator, colour indicator, white cane, and software enabling work on a PC using synthesized speech or magnified view).



Photo: An example of adaptive aids use – the white cane and talking smart phone.

This categorization of aids is important to determine the most appropriate method of compensation in a given situation also from the point of view of the price and availability. Their order is not accidental. It expresses the principle of a universal design, which takes special needs of people with disabilities into account. We start with standard devices. If they do not solve the given problem, we try to apply modified standard equipment and eventually we seek specially designed adaptive aids. The aim of the universal design – design for all – is to maximize the use of standard means and minimize the need for special equipment while optimizing the user load, especially additional load on residual visual functions, or hearing and touch. Such an approach reduces the cost of compensation, expands the range of activities without a need or with a limited need for compensation and reduces the group of people reliant on adaptive aids in the given activity. The possibility to use standard equipment also reduces the segregation of people with visual disabilities by allowing them to consult and exchange experience of using the same devices with



users without visual impairment. However, there are still few universal devices which already take into account needs of the visually impaired during their development. Special aids are necessary even in cases in which the use of standard equipment would mean an inappropriate burden for users with visual impairments (difficult, lengthy, and hard to remember procedure).

The compensation of the impacts of visual impairment is always only relative. The provision of a white cane and training of mobility and orientation and independent movement with it increases, above all, the safety of the independent movement, but it will not replace the assistance of sighted people in an unfamiliar or changed environment.

Mastering the work on a PC with assistive technologies will not make accessible all types of information and processes of its processing, especially graphical information and more complex data structures are made accessible mainly by text information. Innovated and new applications often require searching for new ways of working. In addition to this, the way a visually impaired person communicates with the computer is much slower and more demanding on memory and imagination than in case of a person without visual impairment.

The level and need for compensation changes along with the development of the health status, experience, and physical and social environment of a person. The usability and functionality of adaptive means changes along with the technological development, some aids become out-of-date very quickly and become non-functional in relation to devices from the external environment they are supposed to cooperate with. This is especially strongly manifested in the field of information and communication technologies, architectural and traffic environment, education and employment. Therefore, the process of compensation for the consequences of visual impairment of a particular person has a permanent nature which cannot be terminated by selecting adaptive aids at a certain time.

The participation of visually impaired people in the process of designing and selecting the aids is also an important condition for optimal compensation. Seemingly excellent and technically demanding solutions often prove ineffective and their potential users refuse them. In case of tactile labelling it is necessary to take the characteristics of touch and the level of required tactile skills into account. In sound

signalling, signal parameters are important in terms of hearing abilities of the user and ambient noise. The aid mustn't lay excessive mental and physical load on the user, thus excessively tiring them and reducing their capacity to carry out other activities as compared to a sighted person.

Even the simplest devices have to meet often demanding technical requirements. For example, in case of the white cane the following parameters are important: position of its centre of gravity and moment of inertia; strength in joints of the folding cane; shape, size and material of the tip that is in contact with the ground; conduct of sound and vibrations arising from the contact with the ground; ergonomic handle; resistance of the surface finish, etc. Therefore, "any white cane" is not enough.

### **6.3 New trends in adaptive aids**

The development of science and technology constantly brings new and more effective ways of compensation, enables to construct devices that can be used by people with visual impairment directly or with minor modifications. An important role is played, however, by quality training and its role is increasing. To achieve comparable performance with a sighted person, a person with visual impairment needs to know more. For example, in case of computers they have to be at least able to control assistive technologies. It is also necessary to have deeper knowledge of standard processes due to the more difficult and slow accessibility of auxiliary messages displayed in parallel for the sighted.

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# 7 Mentoring for youth

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For young people to do the work for your organization effectively they in most cases need some support and guidance at least at the beginning. They need to learn about your organization, its goals, values, work methods, programmes and projects. You must consider who in your organization is suitable and has the time and energy to provide this kind of support to young people. It is also advisable to get to know the young people who wish to participate in your organization, to get to know their knowledge, interests, motivation and persistence. You will learn how much support each individual needs, who would be a suitable mentor if you have more people available for mentoring and what work tasks would be suitable for each person. This way you will get the best out of your mentees and mentors.

## 7.1 What is mentoring

There is no definite definition of mentoring. It is mostly described as a relationship, process or professional activity within which a more experienced person offers different kinds of support to a person or a group of people. In practice, we can find many different types of mentoring such as:

- Formal – it is organized and structured, mentors and mentees are carefully selected and paired together, their roles are defined and so is the goal of mentoring.
- Informal – it evolves naturally when there is a need for guidance, support, knowledge, wisdom etc. and some other person is able to provide these.
- Group – a mentor mentors a group of people.
- Peer – when peers work together. It does not mean they have to be the same age but they have to have much in common for example work in the same branch of a business.
- Reverse – younger person shares experience with a senior person (usually about modern technologies etc.).

- Situational – a person receives advice and support when needed from a person who is available at the time.
- Virtual – mentoring is conducted through means of modern technology such as e-mailing, video conferencing etc.

It is advisable to think about which types of mentoring are suitable for your organization. Before an organization commits to mentoring it should be clear whether it has the means and the capacities to do it. You can also prepare a mentoring strategy for your organization where you specify the purpose and goals of mentoring, as well as obligations and roles of your staff, what you expect from youth who will get involved with your organization and what you expect from your employees who will provide advice and support for youth, rights and obligations of mentors and mentees, etc. If you want a strong commitment from youth, prepare mentorship agreements and make it clear to them how they will benefit from mentoring.

Each organization should also think about which member of their staff is suitable for providing mentoring. Persons who provide support and knowledge should be patient, sympathetic, accessible to mentees, good listeners, positive role models and should know organizations' structure, its aims and programmes well to explain them to mentees.

## **7.2 Benefits of mentoring young people**

Young people are the future of our society so we need to offer them the knowledge and skills which will allow them to be the best they can be. They need opportunities for good education but they also need access to informal and practical learning. Mentoring is one of the ways to gain new competences in a practical and useful way.

Mentoring is beneficial for all involved in the process not just for young people because it provides learning opportunities for all involved during the process. However, if you want to connect to youth population and get them involved with your organization through mentoring, you need to make it attractive and useful for them. You need to learn what is important to them, what they want to work on and value their opinion. Through mentoring youth should:

- gain working experience

- improve social and communication skills
- become more independent and empowered
- increase their self-esteem
- get a chance to try new ideas
- expand their sources and knowledge; etc.

So through mentoring youth thrive in all aspects of their life and that is why it is important to give them the opportunity to be active and useful to themselves and to others. NGOs are very valuable in providing mentoring for youth because they can offer a lot of unique and valuable experiences and methods.



Photo: The facilitator is giving leaders and volunteers much priceless advice.

### 7.3 Mentoring strategy

To prepare a good mentoring strategy, you have to think about different aspects:

- First, you need to think what the purpose and objectives of mentoring are from the point of view of organization, mentors and potential mentees. Maybe your organization would like to gain some fresh perspectives, new ways of working or new work force etc. Objectives should be specific and measurable (for

example, how many mentors and mentees will be included, for how long, etc.) You should also estimate which resources you need for realization of the strategy. Everybody participating in mentoring must be aware of what the purpose and objectives are to be able to do their best to achieve them.

- When you are clear about the purpose and objectives, you can start to prepare the implementation of the strategy. At this stage, define the actions you need to take to develop and implement the mentoring strategy which are suitable for your organization. Determine due dates and the person responsible for each activity. You can define resources for each of them and think about funding.
- You might prepare an evaluation of the strategy. If you want to know whether the strategy is fulfilling its purpose and goals, you need to follow its implementation in practice. You therefore need to set periods of strategy evaluation.

### **7.3.1 Example of a mentoring strategy for NGO's**

**Note:** These are some guiding questions and exemplary answers to help you get started in drafting your own mentoring strategy. It is by no means a complete strategy as a form to be used. Please adapt it to the situation in your own organization.

- I. **The purpose of the strategy** (think why do you need/want mentoring)
  - To get new ideas, get to know potential employees
  - Provide new possibilities for youth to gain new competences
  - To understand youth more and design programmes for them etc.
- II. **The aims of the strategy** (what specific aims you want to achieve with mentoring)
  - 2 months to 1 year mentoring where youth will learn about the structure and work of the organization, gain new competences and experiences
  - 5 new mentees who will be able to conduct some kind of programmes for their peers
  - 3 staff available for mentoring etc.

### **III. Importance of the strategy for organization, mentors, mentees and potential other population**

#### Organization

- Including youth into organization which will increase knowledge about their needs
- Bringing fresh, new ideas and ways of working
- Development of new activities for youth and perhaps for other target groups

#### Mentors

- Sharing their knowledge and experiences
- Learning about youth
- Learning about task delegation and how to offer support

#### Mentees

- Learning about organization structure and work methods
- Learning to follow directions and fulfil obligations
- Gaining new experiences and competences

### **IV. Tasks to achieve the purpose and aims of the strategy**

Determine types of mentoring you want to offer (formal, group, peer etc.) and its duration and how mentorships will be performed

- We will offer different kinds of mentorship according to the purpose and needs of everyone included in the process. It can last from minimum 1 month to maximum 6 months with possible extensions

#### Identify potential mentors

Who of the staff have suitable experiences, skills and are open and available to support mentees; how many mentors are we able to provide

- We have 3 staff members who showed an interest in mentoring. The first has good leadership skills and knows the structure of our organization very well, the second is very sensitive to the needs of youth and works very well with them, the third is very open and knows a lot about project work and finances.

Now you know what the strong points of your mentors are and what your organization can offer to mentees.

### Mentees

How will you find/connect potential mentees? Will you announce in public you are looking for mentees, or via e-mail, Facebook? Will you look for them among members of your organization? Determine who will be responsible to find and connect mentees with your organization.

- We will offer mentorship only to our members and will inform them about the possibility of mentorship through e-mails. Peter and Monica will be responsible for this task and will inform our members at least once a year about the possibilities for mentorship

### Mentorship

Define:

- where you will conduct mentorship, what resources will you offer to mentees, what possible trainings you can offer them: the mentees will work at our office twice a week. We can offer them an office with 2 computers and a phone.
- how will mentor and mentees collaborate according to the possibilities of your organization and mentors' capabilities: they will set their collaboration individually but it is advisable to meet at least once a week in person to talk about the work, potential problems, etc.
- possible partners who can help you with mentorship
- finances; how will you finance required resources which mentees need for their work, will mentees work voluntarily or will they be paid, will you provide some special awards for mentors etc.

## V. **Evaluation of the strategy**

Think of the most suitable way to evaluate the progress of the strategy and what works in practice. Since NGO's usually do not have resources for extensive mentoring, it is probably enough if you prepare questionnaires for mentors and mentees, to check every few months, what is working well and if there are any obstacles and problems.



- The evaluation of the strategy is foreseen once a year. Each individual mentoring relationship will also be evaluated. Frequency of evaluation of the mentoring relationship will depend on the length of the mentoring. First evaluation will take place after the first month of the mentoring relationship, second after 6 months and one at the end of the mentoring relationship. Alex and Frida are responsible for evaluation of the programme, Jane and Sarah will prepare evaluation questionnaires.

You need to determine the roles and responsibilities for each task, the person responsible and the period or due date for each task. It is advisable to prepare a timetable of implementation.

## VI. **Timetable**

January - March 2017: Identifying the need for mentorship, organizations resources and mentors (Andrew, Sarah and Frida)

April – June 2017: Identification of suitable ways of mentoring, and how we will find potential mentees (Peter and Monica); identifying potential partners who can cooperate (Frida); identification of finances and possible ways to gain new finances (Mark)

June – July 2017: Identification of responsibilities, obligations and rights for mentors and mentees, preparation of mentoring agreements (Andrew and Frida); preparation of evaluation questionnaires (Jane and Sarah)

September 2017: Call for mentees (Peter and Monica)

November 2017: Selection of suitable mentees for our mentorship (Andrew, Sarah and Frida)

January 2018: Start of mentorships

## **7.4 Relationship between mentor and mentee**

Successful mentoring depends on a good relationship between the mentor and the mentee. Organizations should think carefully about who is a suitable mentor for each of the mentees to find a matching pair who will work well together. The easiest way to find a match is to prepare questionnaires for mentors and mentees where you ask

them about their experiences, interests, strengths and weaknesses. From answers, you will be able to see their similarities and which mentors' strengths match mentees' weaknesses.

It is very important that the mentor and mentee get to know each other well at the beginning of mentoring. They should both have a clear idea about what they want from mentoring and what are both able to provide and contribute for mentoring to be successful. The mentor should therefore think about his motivation and reasons for becoming a mentor, his level of commitment to mentoring, what knowledge he can offer to the mentee, etc. The mentee should also think about why he decided to join the mentoring, what he wants to gain from the mentoring relationship, openly discuss his goals, his strong and weak points, the level of his commitment, etc. In the stage of getting to know each other, it is important to meet and discuss work in the organization, each other's expectations and work responsibilities and the best way to communicate (via telephone, e-mail, in person etc.).

You should also set boundaries early on and it is important that each person is clear about the purpose of mentoring, their level of commitment and what kind of support which is suitable for both. Everybody needs to be aware what he or she can expect from mentoring. The mentor and mentee should talk about availability, commitment and engagement towards each other. The mentee should respect mentors' time and resources so the mentor is not overwhelmed by mentoring duties and responsibilities. The role of the mentor is not to do everything for the mentee, but to offer support, knowledge and expertise, so that the mentee can learn how to work independently within an organization. It is hard to determine boundaries because it depends on an individual relationship and needs to be agreed between the mentor, mentee and in some cases also the organization. However, we have to bear in mind that the aim of mentoring is for the mentee to expand his knowledge and skills, and to become independent. The mentor therefore needs to challenge the knowledge and limits of the mentee occasionally, so they both become aware of the mentee's real capacities. Not clearly set boundaries can lead to disappointment because of unfulfilled expectations, over dependent mentee or burned out mentor.

Communication is also an important part of the mentoring relationship. Good communication comes from trust and active listening. Active listening means that a

person gives full attention to what the other person is saying and gives feedback with questions or paraphrasing because this minimizes confusion in communication and both parties have a clear idea what they talked about and agreed upon. Mentors should refrain from ordering, lecturing, moralizing, humiliating and judging in communication with mentees because it leads to poor communication and distrust.

## **7.5 How to become a good mentor**

Mentors need some skills and qualities to be able to perform their duties well. Some have already been mentioned in text above but here is a quick overview of attributes that make mentor a successful one.

A good mentor:

- needs to be able to accustom himself to mentee's situation
- thinks about the needs of mentee and how he can meet his needs
- guides the mentee and gives him support – in order to do this well he is getting to know mentee's strengths, weaknesses, what motivates him and his expectations
- is practical when offering support and offers personal experiences and insights
- considers which tasks are appropriate for the mentee when delegating work and gives clear instructions about what needs to be done
- trusts the mentee will do the best he can and gives him space and time to do the work his way
- has a positive, trusting and supportive relationship with the mentee
- helps the mentee to fulfil the goals of mentoring, to grow and expand his knowledge and social skills.

In return, the mentor will receive a self-confident, satisfied and successful mentee who will be able to enrich his home and working environment. And this is valuable not only for the organization but for society as a whole.

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# 8 Management of visually impaired volunteers

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## 8.1 Inclusive volunteering

This chapter is designed to give volunteer managers short guide about the importance of inclusive volunteering and about the effective volunteer management of volunteers with disabilities, specifically with visual impairment. We have to stress that the volunteer management of an organisation should have the same principles for involvement all volunteers without any limitations. The key message for volunteer organisations is: be open to volunteers with disabilities.

In order to define inclusive volunteering we have to start with the definition of volunteering and the definition of inclusion. Taking in mind the whole spectrum of volunteering definitions volunteering is activity willingly given in the free time without financial gain for the common good. According the Volunteering as a tool of inclusion project (VTI project) inclusion is the participation of a person who has a disability or any other difficulty that is limiting their opportunities to get involved within mainstream volunteering. Inclusive volunteering is defined as volunteering opportunities that are available to all people regardless of age, culture, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, social status or disability. (VTI Project, 2015) Inclusive volunteering is making volunteering accessible for everyone.

Volunteer Canada points out that when people from vulnerable groups are involved as volunteers, it is often assumed that they want to be involved in ‘their’ causes—for example, it might be taken for granted that a person with visual impairment would be likely to volunteer with an organization serving the blind community. For some people evidence suggests that they may be working on ‘their’ issues because they experience barriers to volunteering elsewhere. However, some people may prefer to work as volunteers outside of their community what leads into a desired inclusion. (Volunteer Canada, 2001)

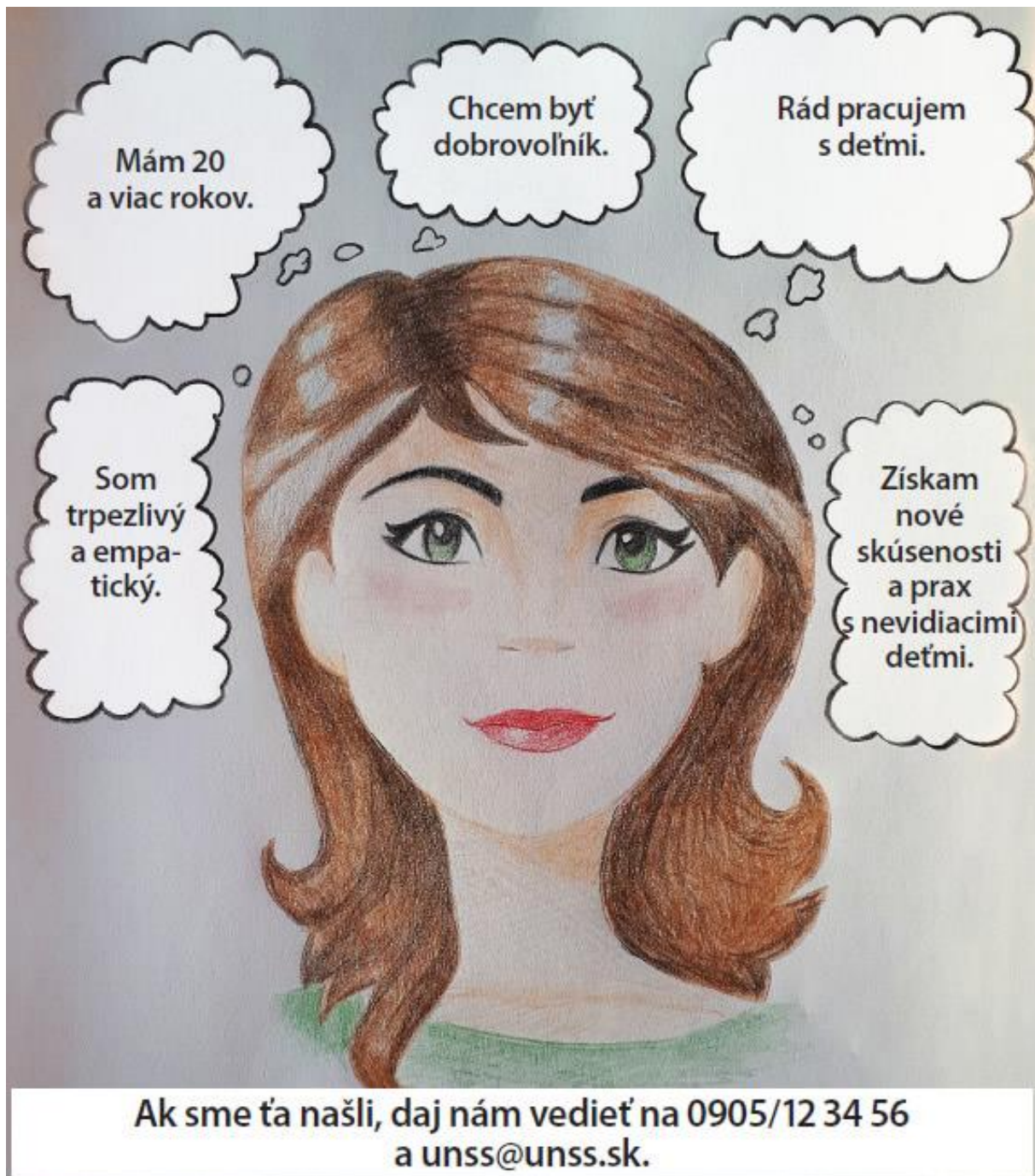
## 8.2 Benefits of inclusive volunteering

Volunteers say that they gain great benefits from volunteering, and feel they receive more than they give. This can be especially so in the case of volunteers with disabilities. Working with volunteers with disability can be very enriching and can bring many benefits to the volunteers and organisations, as well as to the wider society. Because persons with disabilities experience such barriers to full participation in society, they are motivated to be exceptionally committed to organizations that take the time and effort to involve them well. (Volunteer Canada, 2001)

The following lists from VTI project and Volunteer Scotland include the benefits that are common for different groups but once you start embracing inclusive volunteering in your organisation, you will discover other benefits.

Benefits for volunteer organisations:

- Opportunity to broaden and diversify the pool of volunteers;
- Way to provide other volunteers and employees with a possibility to learn new skills and broaden their perspectives;
- Opportunity for the volunteer coordinator to gain new skills and experience
- Way to become more open to volunteers from vulnerable groups;
- Opportunity to become a leader when it comes to inclusiveness;



- Staff and volunteers are more inclined to get involved and stay with an organisation that is inclusive and manages diversity well;
- Involving volunteers from socially excluded groups helps in better service delivery; service users who become volunteers may serve the clients better, as they understand their reality better;
- Involving volunteers who have experienced social exclusion provides the opportunity to live up to your organisational values. Involving these volunteers contributes to their personal development and therefore helps to reduce social

exclusion, which ultimately enables organisations that aim to reduce social exclusion to meet their objectives.

#### Benefits for volunteers:

- experience communication and life outside their usual circles;
- access new social networks and new opportunities;
- increase self-confidence and self-esteem;
- opportunity to gain new skills, knowledge and experience and enhance existing skills;
- opportunity to combat discrimination and demonstrate that they can be respected members of a team;
- become a positive example and inspiration for others;
- loneliness and exclusion are reduced – volunteers might connect to mainstream society;
- better employment perspectives are created;
- “giving something back” through volunteering enhances individual wellbeing.

#### Benefits for the society or community:

- opportunity to build a network between social services, state institution and VIOs in order to better serve people from vulnerable groups by broadening activities available to them;
- provide people from vulnerable groups with an opportunity to become fully-pledged members of society, particularly relevant in situations where they are not able to find a job;
- opportunity to get ‘extra hands’ for activities carried out at a local level and to improve the quality of life within that community.

(VTI project, 2015;

[http://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/685912/the\\_benefits\\_of\\_inclusive\\_volunteering.pdf](http://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/685912/the_benefits_of_inclusive_volunteering.pdf), pdf format, 285kB )



## 8.3 Barriers of inclusive volunteering

Despite the huge benefits there are many barriers on the sides of volunteer organisations and potential volunteers for inclusive volunteering identified by VTI Project.

Barriers on the side of volunteer managers/organisations may be:

- lack of experience of working with a specific target group and consequently being fearful of involving them in volunteering;
- concern that the management of volunteers with disability would be more difficult and time consuming;
- limited knowledge of which volunteer positions would be suitable for volunteers;
- fear of taking up the challenge and not knowing what to do if issues arise;
- stereotypes and preconceptions that exist within the organisation or society.

Barriers on the side of potential volunteers are such as:

- lack of awareness of what volunteering is;
- lack of awareness about available volunteer positions (they often do not know they can volunteer and if they do, they do not know where to start);
- feeling they would not be welcomed in an organisation as volunteers because of lack of self-esteem and confidence;
- previous negative experience of trying to become a volunteer or employee;
- image of volunteering as an activity for certain groups of people only, or based on a traditional 'helper and helped' model, whereby 'able' people are helping people with disabilities;
- fear of being asked to do too much;
- fear of prejudice;
- very formal recruitment process, perceived almost as a job application process;
- slow or no follow-up from the organisation;
- physical barriers and no access to volunteer places.

(VTI Project, 2015)

In order to overcome these barriers next pages will provide you with tips for being inclusive in volunteer management.

## **8.4 Basics of management of visually impaired volunteers**

### **8.4.1 Effective communication**

Effective communication with volunteers with visual impairments is one of the key issues for a good volunteer experience and volunteer management. According to Volunteer Canada it is important for volunteer manager to pay attention to the following:

- Learn what type of visual impairment volunteer has – understanding how someone’s vision is affected can help you think through how to communicate and cooperate with them effectively.
- Ask volunteers what their needs are and what supports they need. Do this before they start volunteering with you, so that you learn how you can support them.
- Before giving a volunteer with a visual impairment written information, check what format they would like it in. Some people may want the information electronically in advance so they can use special computer software to read it.
- Consider filling in an application form with someone during a discussion rather than asking them to complete it.
- During an induction/training, introduce a volunteer to other team members and give them time to talk to one another so the volunteer has a chance to recognise other voices. Make sure the volunteer knows who to ask if they have a question and where to go if they need support.
- Think about how you can help someone familiarise themselves with the volunteering environment. Try not to move things or leave unnecessary items lying around.
- When preparing events such as training, think about your methodology and how to best accommodate the needs of the visually impaired person (e.g. increasing the font size of a case study you are using, or asking another group member to read out the case study instead of asking individuals to read it by themselves).

(Volunteer Canada, 2001)

#### **8.4.2 Role of leaders, executives, personnel and volunteers**

One of the most important things it is to ensure that your board, executives, employees, and volunteers are supportive of your initiatives to involve people with disabilities. Involve them in making your organization's environment welcoming. Preparation of staff is extremely important, in order to ensure successful volunteering services for young people with physical disabilities. All the staff members, regardless whether they work directly with the volunteers, or not, must be aware of the presence of the volunteers in the organization, of their schedule, and specific needs.

Staff and volunteers may already be very knowledgeable about and comfortable with the area of disability. If not, determine what kind of education they require. Volunteer Canada brings several options:

- Contact one or more disability organizations in your area to provide you with information or provide a presentation for you. They could provide training to dispel stereotypes and stress the value of individual differences in order to ensure that each volunteer with special needs will be regarded as a productive individual with many skills and talents.
- Increase understanding of specific kinds of special needs and their implications for the volunteer workplace.
- Ask a person with a disability—whether an outsider or someone already involved with your organization to provide some information on the types of barriers and opportunities they may have encountered in volunteering.

(Volunteer Canada, 2001)

#### **8.4.3 Volunteering policy**

Volunteer Scotland is stressing out the role of organisation having a written volunteer policy on volunteer involvement focused also on inclusive volunteering. This should set out volunteer management steps, highlight the organisation values and include procedures for managing volunteers, based on principles of equality and diversity.

(Volunteer Scotland, 2013)

#### **8.4.4 Working environment and materials**

Knowhowprofit.org provides necessary information on accessibility for all volunteers. Ensuring accessibility for volunteer with visual impairment must also be taken in consideration at this point. The working environment must be extra safe and adapted to their special needs from the perspective of the space itself - accessible rooms, well organized furniture and materials.

Volunteer Manager has to take in mind:

- Is the venue or location where the volunteer role will be carried out accessible?
- Is the format of training or induction appropriate to the individual's needs?
- Is there appropriate transport for the individual been budgeted for?

Materials for volunteers should be made accessible to all and produced in a range of alternative formats. They should be clear and easy-to-read, in audio/video format, available in a larger font size, have background colours and pictures to support content/questions. This would also be relevant to any materials provided, such as:

- recruitment materials – posters, leaflets, etc.;
- the role description;
- application form;
- handbook;
- induction/training materials.

It is important to remember that not everyone has online access, so easy to read and audio/video formats are still important. However this kind of support is not free all the time. Providing a supported volunteering scheme may require additional resources and time. (<https://knowhownonprofit.org/how-to/how-to-develop-an-inclusive-supported-volunteering-scheme>)

### **8.5 Examples of volunteer positions performed by people with visual impairment**

As VTI project suggests people with visual impairments can be found in a wide variety of jobs. They are capable of fulfilling various tasks and roles, including

working in direct contact with people (e.g. volunteering as befrienders or helpline volunteers).

There are many devices for people with visual impairments, which enable them to carry out computer-based tasks (e.g. special magnifiers, dictaphones, Braille typewriters and computer software). However, this equipment can be expensive and many organisations might not be able to provide it. It is recommended to ask volunteers what they want to do and what they need in order to complete the tasks assigned to them. If volunteer manager is unable to meet the request for a special adaptive aid or device, if possible, he should find another role or task for the volunteer.

While the use of special aids and devices can help with many tasks, it may not be ideal to have visually impaired volunteers carry out jobs such as cleaning or painting, or tasks that involve a lot of moving around. (VTI project, 2015)

## **8.6 Recruitment of volunteers and recruitment materials**

The best way to recruit visually impaired volunteers is to go to organisations or institutions working with people with visual impairments or educating these people. It is possible to approach them directly, reaching out to potential volunteers and organisations working with visually impaired people.

Volunteer Canada recommends that while working on recruitment materials, organisation has to express the commitment to diversity among volunteers by:

- Including images of people with disabilities in brochures, flyers, application packets, videos and other recruitment tools.
- Asking local organizations that deal with disability to review your materials for accurate language use and positive portrayals of people with disabilities.
- Including a statement to indicate that you are willing to provide your materials in alternate formats.
- Preparing a statement to appear in all published materials. It could be something like this: “Organization X welcomes all members of the community, regardless of race, sex, national origin, colour, political affiliation, religion, age or disability”.

(Finisdore, 2000 in Volunteer Canada, 2001).

To proactively inform both potential volunteers and organizations working with clients with disabilities, Volunteer Canada advises to take the following steps:

- Contact self-help groups and organizations that work on behalf of people with disabilities and let them know of volunteer opportunities.
- Consider advertising volunteer opportunities in journals and newsletters specifically targeted towards readers with a disability.
- Provide disability organizations with a sample volunteer opportunity ad that could be placed in their newsletter, or ask if they will include your recruitment materials in an upcoming mailing to their clients.
- Notify local volunteer centre that you are willing to place volunteers with disabilities.
- Be sure to make materials available in alternative format, such as Braille, large print, digital text or audio recording.

(Volunteer Canada, 2001)

## **8.7 Interview**

Interviewing someone with a disability is not that different from a standard volunteer interview. The main goal is to share information about the volunteer position and learn about the volunteer, in order to match him/her with the suitable volunteer opportunity.

If the interviewer is not familiar with disability issues, he or she may feel or seem uncomfortable. It is fine to acknowledge this in the interview and stress that this is an open, learning environment. Volunteer Canada brings following list of some simple but important suggestions to help ease that sense of awkwardness:

- Make sure that you find out in advance what type of materials or environment are needed for the interview itself. Ask in advance whether there are any special requirements for the interview.
- While your questions must focus on the job, not the disability, questions pertaining to a person's limitation as it relates to their ability to do the job are appropriate and will not be presented by your potential volunteer, provided

they are asked in a respectful way. Remember not to make assumptions about limitations caused by the person's disability.

- Feel free to ask the person how you should communicate, if you have any doubts about the correctness of your actions. The disabled individual will understand that this may be your first encounter with someone with his or her condition, and will usually feel quite comfortable in letting you know what behaviours are needed or expected. Remember that volunteer interviews often make potential volunteers nervous as well, so you may both be uncomfortable.
- Give the person the opportunity to explain to you how they envision themselves doing the job. If they cannot do the entire job as you originally envisioned it, ask if they can envision a way to modify the job description to make it more accessible.
- If the volunteer is not a good match with the organization, provide clear and honest feedback to that effect. Remember that you should neither accept nor decline the person on the basis of their disability. As with any volunteer, your decision should be based on whether the person's volunteer involvement would further your organization's work.

(Pyle, 1997 in Volunteer Canada, 2001)

## **8.8 Training**

Training for the volunteer with a disability should be fundamentally the same as it would be for any other volunteer. The goal is for the volunteer to have all the information and tools they need to fulfil their role with your organization. Training materials should include information for volunteers with disabilities.

If the volunteer will be working with any kind of assistant such as a sign language interpreter, driver, or reader, it would be wise to include this person in training as well. If you work with visual materials, be sure to describe them aloud if you have volunteers who cannot see the materials. It may also be useful to distribute materials in advance so that they can be put into alternate format or read to the person if necessary. (Volunteer Canada, 2001)

In case you decide to distribute hand-outs make sure you prepare an electronic version using styles and proper fonts and colouring (for more details see chapter on accessing information).

## 8.9 Recognition

Support and recognition are extremely important when working with volunteers with visual impairment. Volunteer recognition aims to thank volunteers for the time and effort that they contribute to the organization. It is best not to single out persons with disabilities for special recognition. We recognize their work, not their disability.

It is recommended to produce volunteer newsletter in alternate formats, hold all recognition events in accessible locations, ensure that notices about upcoming recognition events are published in ways that are open to all and consider transportation needs and accessibility when choosing the location of the event. (Volunteer Canada, 2001)

## Literature

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