



Sensing the Wild - Connecting visually impaired people to nature



Checklist for running walks in a natural environment

Going For Independence CIC (GFI)

Practical Guidance for making green spaces more accessible

Overview - To 'open up' green centres to blind and partially sighted people:-

- Involve local VIP organisations – contact local blind and partially sighted people – ask them to visit and do a recce – be open to criticism and listen to suggestions
- Co-produce a programme of engagement with local VI People
- Strong partnership working and skilled practitioners
- At the centre, find committed people who are practical in approach and who are enthusiastic about being inclusive.
- Have a Sighted Guide Training Session for staff and volunteers.
- Lunches are vital - having a social lunch together (before or after the walk) with the VI visitors and volunteers allowed everyone to chat more about the centre and the wildlife.
- With the local VI participants draw up a health and safety checklist/ risk assessment
- Arrange a timetable well in advance for the VI groups to advertise in their networks
- Allow plenty of time to liaise with peer group partners, agreeing walk routes, booking venues, arranging transport where applicable, organising and liaising over lunches
- In discussion with local groups draw up a list of criteria for future locations

The skills and approaches that are needed include:

- Good logistics planning
- excellent communication, and flexibility
- the importance of having good contact with peer groups
- careful selection of the outdoor site
- Persistence, empathy and patience
- Willingness to learn about the needs of people as people and to problem solve
- Awareness of the communication needs of VI participants- large print, email, audio messaging and the need for telephone calls and in person contact

Checklist for Your Project

1 Carry out Local Research

- Demographics/stats to demonstrate need
- Consider scope and size of project- one group or more
- workshops and walks? How many/ how often?
- ID Local nature reserve(s) walk sites/ centres and check facilities – consult with groups and ask people where they would like to go
- Make contact with potential walk leaders- you may know someone
- ID Local support organisations
- Find and talk to relevant Volunteer groups about sighted guide training – this is really necessary to maximise benefits for the walkers
- Consultation- you will need to evidence that people want to do this
- Stress potential benefits for all involved –e.g. making sites more accessible, welcoming more visitors, updating / improving literature and site information, using audio options, disability awareness, training for staff and volunteers, new promo opportunities, wider benefits to families etc.etc.

2 Identifying the people to take on the walks

- Contact local support groups – meet and discuss what you are planning
- Survey – you need some basic information about ages, mobility, if they are interested etc.
- explain clearly how the walks work
- Determine numbers so know size of walking group(s) – max 12 - any more would be too big and people will not be able to hear the leader
- Will need a person to lead and do audio descriptions, and a person at the back of the group so no-one gets left behind!

3 Programming and planning walks and workshops

- Discuss with the sites/centres in advance what you are wanting – multi sensory experiences, audio descriptions of wildlife and surrounds
- Smells, tastes, sounds as well as sights in workshops
- Pre-walk Site visit to check for safety and identify any hazards– ID venue for workshops/ lunches / refreshments/ toilets (space should be provided free but may need to negotiate?)
- where to purchase lunches locally etc. and costs per head

- Travel arrangements
- Accessibility
- How walk leaders can make themselves heard by all- check
- Covid restrictions?
- Workshops – accommodation, what will be covered in any talks
- How to record – pictures, feedback, videos, sounds etc-
- Get permissions from participants to use the above

4 Working with volunteers

- Make contact with existing volunteers at centres and see if they would be interested in supporting walkers who are visually impaired. They should have proper training if going to do this.
- If so GFI can arrange and provide specialist Sighted Guide training for them – includes disability awareness -contact GFI to find out more
- This training can also be offered to family members of blind people

5 Working out estimates of cost for a pilot project

- Make contract with the centres you are using if they are to lead walks – also may do a short talk or workshop as well – two separate sessions? – ideally commission under 10 K so you do not need to go out to tender
- Treat as a pilot project- hopefully will lead to more
- Cost for a Project coordinator part time salary
- Project management costs
- Office overheads – insurance etc
- recruitment costs – staff and volunteers
- Volunteer expenses
- Sighted Guide training costs
- Transport and travel – if included
- Refreshments and Lunches if provided
- Equipment – might need to provide a wheelchair, walker, umbrellas, loudspeaker, blankets, wet proofs, guider arm bands etc

6 Contacting potential funders

- Find potential funders – HLF for natural heritage, Awards for All for small grant
- Others ? locally for sponsorship for lunches or transport contributions?

- Eligibility check- do you meet their criteria?
 - Their expectations/ reporting/evaluation etc
 - Update policies and procedures in readiness- Equal Ops, Safeguarding , DBS etc
- 7 Start drafting funding application – offline!**
- May need to apply with an expression of interest first
- 8 Source letters of support**
- From centre / nature reserve
 - From local visual support organisations
- 9 Finalise funding application**
- Include detailed project plan **with lead in time**
- 10 Prepare the ground- you might be successful!**
- What to do first! – recruitment planned
 - Press release
 - Social media
- 11 Once funding agreed:-**
- Let everyone know – plus media
 - Appoint project coordinator asap and train/induct
 - Meet with Wetland Centre/ nature reserve/ Park volunteers to determine potential safe walk route(s) and timetable
 - Set and agree dates and prepare literature/letters/ adverts- once funding agreed
 - Confirm participants /contact details– **keep data safe re GDPR**
 - **Audit of participants**, their levels of sight, mobility, guide dogs and hearing levels too, if they would have carers walking with them...also dietary needs- for Health and Safety. This will determine how many sighted guiders you might need.
 - Prepare and deliver guider training for volunteers
 - Meet with Centre walk leader and train/cover blind awareness.

Other ideas to add to enhance peoples' experiences

With permission, take voice recordings during the activities and conversations with participants.

Also take photographs for use in promotion and communication with participants who may like copies – always ask for their permission

Introducing subject areas that are often inaccessible to blind or partially sighted people such as:

- different bird calls and song in different seasons and being able to identify birds from their song
- trees by being able to feel their bark and the leaves of different species
- Other flora and fauna- including the feel of lichen, fungus, herbs and flowers, and information about animals and insects and their sounds

And take with you:-

- Take a small container to capture an insect so that it can be passed round for listening to its sound or for close-up viewing
- Take magnifiers to pass round for all to use
- Take black and white paper to hold behind a leaf or flower so it shows up for those with partial sight

Consider offering tours that are at different speeds - some of the younger and more physically able participants may be motivated to extend their experiences with a faster, more challenging outdoor experience.

Offer hands-on workshops to complement the walks

In workshops previously, there have been tasting exercises, for example, Herb sessions – the smell, texture, taste and feel of herbs (washed of course)

The reading of nature poetry was also used as an interpretive tool in the GFI workshops.