

**VOLUNTEER**

**HANDBOOK**

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## **A Brief History of Vision Support**

Vision Support is a Registered Charity and a Charitable Company limited by guarantee and has been operating for over 130 years.

Founded in 1876 and known then as “The Chester Society for Supplying Home Teaching for the Blind”, the Society’s priority was to visit blind adults and children and teach them practical and useful skills. Eventually the Society developed and opened workshops where we started to manufacture knitted garments, brushes, willow and cane baskets, employing up to 60 people with a visual impairment.

In 1955 the Society moved to 67 Liverpool Road, Chester. In August 2005 Vision Support moved to new premises off Whipcord Lane, Chester.

The Society’s current president is Mr David Briggs, Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire.

We offer training courses to people in the statutory, voluntary and private sector to raise awareness of the needs of visually impaired people. We can complete access audits for companies and/or public bodies enabling them to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Vision Support also has a trading arm, who have contracts with many companies to transcribe information into large print, Braille and audio. This includes gas and electricity bills, bank statements and telephone bills. Providing information in alternative formats is required under the Disability Discrimination Act.

## **Aim**

The Charity exists to enhance the quality of life and to promote the continuing independence of people of all ages with a visual impairment and to raise awareness of their needs throughout the community.

## **Resource Centres**

Vision Support has two Resource Centres. In North Wales there is one in Rhyl. In Cheshire, there is a Resource Centre in Runcorn. Attached to each Resource Centre are a team of Staff and Volunteers. In addition there are offices at AVOW in Wrexham.

## **Mobile Information Units**

In 2001/2 Vision Support launched a new 'mobile' Information Unit. The Mobile currently covers the counties of Denbighshire and Conwy, also visiting Anglesey and Gwynedd. Volunteers provide daily support to the staff to deliver information on services and equipment.

In the late summer/early autumn of 2005 a second Mobile Information Unit was launched which covers Chester & Cheshire West, Halton, Cheshire East and in North Wales Wrexham and Flintshire.

## **Regarding Visual Impairment**

### **Key Points**

The majority of people registered blind retain some sight. Only approximately 4 out of every 100 are totally blind and approximately 10 out of every 100 can only tell the difference between light and dark. 80-85 out of every 100 will retain some useful vision.

The majority of people who are newly registered as blind/partially sighted are over 60 years of age.

Visual loss does usually have an effect emotionally, similar to someone who has lost a loved one. This may involve depression / sleeplessness / anxiety etc.

Because most people are older people, there may be additional health problems such as bronchitis / arthritis / heart conditions etc., which they may regard as more of a problem than sight.

People's ability to cope and do things visually, may fluctuate during the course of the day or from day to day to varying light conditions / their state of health / the visual environment, etc.

There may be severe problems in coping with bright light. Also difficulties may be encountered in going from dark to light or light into dark rooms – longer time to adapt.

A loss at the edges – peripheral field may mean problems in the dark or poorly lighted situations.

A loss of central field will mean inability to read, see detail e.g. peoples faces, T.V. and colour vision may also be affected.

## **Things you should know about.....**

### **Training**

Vision Support will ensure that volunteers are trained and prepared for tasks they will be asked to do.

Training will be on-going and could include:

- ◆ Increasing awareness of visual impairment
- ◆ Basic sighted guide training
- ◆ Improved listening skills
- ◆ First Aid
- ◆ Giving Information – a look at resources

We hope that volunteers will identify other areas where they feel some training will be useful to them.

### **Expenses**

Expenses will be paid at the following rate:

45p per mile (using own car)

Bus / train fares as appropriate

Parking where this is payable (on production of ticket)

### **Insurance**

Volunteers are covered by the Vision Support Public Liability Policy whilst carrying out pre-authorized duties.

Any accidents or incidents should be reported to the Volunteer Co-ordinator immediately.

Volunteers are responsible for notifying their own insurers if they are using their own vehicle for voluntary work. Most companies do not charge any extra for this.

The Volunteer Co-ordinator is required for insurance purposes to check that volunteers have a current insurance certificate and drivers licence.

### **Acceptance of Gifts**

You may not accept any gift or favour of whatever kind from any service user or supplier of Vision Support or any prospective service user or supplier of Vision Support.

## **Health and Safety**

It is the policy of Vision Support to ensure that, so far as it possibly can, all conditions in which its voluntary staff are in, are both healthy and safe.

Vision Support will make the maximum effort to see that all health and safety policy matters are adhered to by its voluntary workers.

Vision Support will undertake to anticipate and identify situations that may arise in the cause of volunteering, that are potentially dangerous and provide appropriate information and training to prevent problems arising.

Whilst engaged in any business for Vision Support, volunteers are urged in their own interests and in the interests of service users and colleagues, to observe health and safety standards and in no way jeopardise others.

## **Confidentiality**

Persons working on behalf of Vision Support must respect a service users right to dignity and personal privacy. Remember that people are mostly very independent and do not readily accept help, so please do try to be understanding and tactful.

Do not divulge a service users private details to anyone other than your line manager, even if they are relatives. A service user may feel more able to discuss something with a volunteer that they would prefer not to discuss with family. It is important that you build up trust.

If you are concerned about anything that a service user has told you, you must contact the Volunteer Co-ordinator and they will decide what to do, and whether the rules of confidentiality can be overridden in that case.

Breaches of confidentiality are regarded as serious and could lead to disciplinary action.

I have read Vision Support Policy on confidentiality and agree to abide by it.

Signed..... Volunteer

## **Grievance / Disciplinary Procedure**

Disciplinary procedures exist to ensure that complaints about unsatisfactory work and conduct are resolved quickly and with as much fairness as possible.

Grievance procedures exist to ensure that any problems or issues a volunteer may wish to raise are dealt with as quickly and as effectively as possible.

### **Grievances**

Complaints may be made against a volunteer or a paid member of staff: they may be brought by a volunteer, paid member of staff or a member of the public.

If a complaint is made against a volunteer, the Volunteer Co-ordinator, after establishing the relevant facts, may give a volunteer an informal warning to improve conduct or performance.

The next step is for the Volunteer Co-ordinator to interview the volunteer, who must be made aware before the interview that a complaint has been made and the nature of the complaint.

Where the facts of the case appear to call for action other than instant dismissal, the volunteer will be informed that they are liable for an oral warning. That warning is part of the disciplinary process. The warning will be recorded and note of that warning made.

The volunteer has a right to appeal against any complaint.

Three such warnings will result in dismissal. In the event of three warnings the volunteer will be informed in writing that Vision Support is no longer to use his / her services

and the reasons stated. If, following any disciplinary procedure, a complaint against you is upheld, Vision Support reserves the right to impose dismissal with or without notice.

## **Volunteer Agreement**

The agreement is intended to show our commitment to do the best we can to make your volunteer experience with us an enjoyable and worthwhile one.

### **The Organisation**

We Vision Support agree to accept the service of beginning and commit to the following:

- ◆ To provide a thorough induction on our work, our staff, your volunteering roles and to provide any initial training you need to meet the responsibilities of your role. You will receive an Induction Pack containing relevant information, policies etc.
- ◆ To provide adequate and flexible supervision and support to you in your volunteering role.
- ◆ To explain the standards we expect for our services and to encourage and support you to achieve and maintain them.
- ◆ To provide a named person who will meet with you regularly to discuss your volunteering and any problems.
- ◆ To do our best to help you develop your volunteering role with us.
- ◆ To repay expenses incurred during your volunteering, following procedures in the Induction Pack and our expenses policy.
- ◆ To provide adequate insurance cover for volunteers whilst undertaking voluntary work approved and authorised by us.
- ◆ To ensure that all volunteers are dealt with in accordance with our equal opportunities

policy, a copy of which is set out in the Induction Pack.

- ◆ To try and resolve fairly any problems, grievances and difficulties you may have while you volunteer with us in accordance with our complaints policy.

## The Volunteer

- I agree;
- ◆ To respect the organisation's values and principles and to adhere to the organisation's rules and procedures.
  - ◆ To perform my volunteering role to the best of my ability.
  - ◆ To maintain the confidential information of the organisation and of its service users.
  - ◆ To meet time commitments and standards agreed to except in exceptional circumstances, and to give reasonable notice so other arrangements can be made.
  - ◆ To provide referees as agreed who may be contacted.

This agreement is binding in honour only, is not intended to be a legally binding contract between us and may be cancelled at any time at the discretion of either party. Neither of us intend any employment relationship to be created either now or at any time in the future.

This agreement will be reviewed on:

Signed (Volunteer Co-ordinator)

Date:

Signed (Volunteer)

Date:

## **Equal Opportunities Statement**

Vision Support wholeheartedly supports the principle of equal opportunities. We acknowledge the existence of discrimination and will strive to oppose it in all forms. We believe it is in our interests, the interests of our service users and those who work for us, both volunteers and paid staff, to ensure that individuals are treated fairly and that decisions on recruitment, selection, training and support are based solely on object and job related criteria.

It is the organisation's objective to ensure that no service user or volunteer shall receive less favourable treatment than another on the grounds of their colour, race, gender, age, disability, religion, ethnic origin, nationality, marital status, sexuality, responsibility for dependents, political belief or trade union activity.