

# VISUALLY IMPAIRED

## INCLUSIVENESS

“ The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.”

- Helen Keller

The Aim of Scouting is to promote the development of individuals, enabling them to grow and take their place in society as active citizens. As we move forward with the Canadian Path we are much more aware of each individual's personal progression, inclusive of their varying abilities. This inclusiveness within Scouting uniquely positions us to play an important role in modifying community attitudes and behaviour toward individuals with disabilities; it starts with Scouts.

Please use this guide for a better understanding of youth with Visual Impairments; how as Scouters, we can make a difference through simple interventions, program modifications and knowing where to get help when needed.

## DESCRIPTION

Visual Impaired can describe anything from someone who would not be able to read standard print/recognise a friend across the street all the way through to people who are registered as blind. Along with the range of sight impairments there are also a range of causes, for example, some people have blindness or partial sight from birth, some develop it as part of another condition and some through illness. Accidents can also result in loss of sight.

Being partially sighted can mean distorted vision, an inability to distinguish between shapes or colours and blurred sight. Here are some common examples of the several forms of visual impairment:

- Long or short sighted
- Blurred vision
- Astigmatism
- Tunnel vision
- Peripheral vision

- Colour blindness
- Night blindness
- Partial or total blindness

## CHARACTERISTICS/BEHAVIORS

### Tunnel Vision

- Youth may sit in the middle because things are seen best when directly in front
- Things that are on the sides can be missed or are hazy and fuzzy
- Should be very cautious when going over uneven ground or down stairs
- Youth may miss parts of pictures or written instructions

### Short Sighted

- Youth need to sit close up, at the front, to see things better
- Things in the distance are hazy and fuzzy
- Usually wear glasses
- May have trouble going down stairs or crossing creek banks

### Long Sighted

- Youth need to sit at the back to see things better from a distance
- Things close up are hazy and fuzzy
- Need help with larger type or writing for instruction
- Usually wear glasses

### Blind

- Usually have acute hearing
- May be very perceptive and intelligent
- May be able to see colourless shapes or outlines in brightly lit surroundings
- Can often be anxious in unfamiliar surroundings

## IN A SCOUTING SITUATION

An individual with a visual impairment relies heavily on their memory and mental images of their surroundings. You will need to inform them of any changes of position of large objects at your meeting place, and to arrange a guided walk around new venues for those with severe visual loss.



- Ensure the youth member knows and is able to access all parts of the Scout Hall
- Provide points of orientation to the youth as to what is taking place with the group, e.g. standing, changing places, sitting, etc.
- Provide large signs at appropriate locations in the Scout Hall if necessary
- Provide points of reference in the meeting room layout
- Use the youth member's name and advise them of Scouter locations during activities
- Have a Scouter to assist whenever needed to complete tasks
- There should always be an in charge, close proximity support person
- Make sure the youth has positive role modelling
- Speak in a clear audible voice
- Inform the youth when you are departing
- During many activities, verbal clues and a 'running commentary' from a 'buddy' may be necessary; this will include important information such as directions and obstacles, e.g. steps and slopes
- Insure that any written work for the group is read/shared with the youth that is visually impaired
- Inform the youth member in advance when there is a change in activity/program
- Assist the youth to refocus after times of loud noise and busy activity
- Always acknowledge the youth's efforts to do their best
- Get to know the youth
- If a guide dog is in use, it must be known to all the youth that the dog is working
- When food is being served, use the clock method of pointing out the location of various meal portions
- You will have to consider a range of ways of explaining activities or giving instructions.
- Explain rules simply
- Use precise language when giving instructions, e.g., under, behind, on top etc.
- Give one instruction at a time - don't overload on instructions
- Have the youth member repeat rules so you know they understand
- Allow time to complete tasks
- There are a variety of aids available, such as magnifying lenses, large print publications, Braille transcriptions, audio descriptions, electronic reading aids and screen readers
- Experiment with games and activities that focus on auditory clues
- Occasionally, consider a blindfold type game be played to give the youth that is visually impaired, a feeling of inclusion
- Provide additional auditory and tactile (touch) information where applicable
- Run games that don't have a winner
- Offer games that will assist with co-ordination and motor skills
- Don't allow activities to drag on too long; keep things on the move
- Producing aids as a part of your programme will ensure that they are not only available but also relevant to the particular individual and their needs

## Other Considerations:

- Emergency Plan
- Access for guide dogs
- Caution around automatic doors
- Access to door knobs and light switches
- Is there a plan for awareness of hazardous items in the environment, e.g., Could the youth walk into an obstacle?
- Particular attention needs to be paid to safety wherever you are. Remember that any simple obstacle at ground level can be dangerous if you fall over it. The tidiness of your meeting place is very important.

## FURTHER ASSISTANCE

This Info Sheet is a resource guide only and is not intended to be therapeutic, diagnostic, medical, or legal advice. Our best source of assistance for youth with identified needs is the youth's parents or caregivers; the information provided is designed to support the relationship that exists between a youth and his/her parents or healthcare providers and the Scouters involved with the youth.

## SOURCES

The CNIB and material adapted and used by permission of The Scout Association (UK), Scouts Australia, and Scouting Ireland.

## PROGRAM MODIFICATION SUGGESTIONS

- Use encouragement and brightly coloured ropes when learning knotting skills
- Use large brightly coloured soft balls for games
- Consider appropriate games and activities for youth members wearing glasses

