

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

Access to sports stadia



Moving forward together

Guide Dogs

Introduction

This leaflet aims to help stadium officials and match day staff have a greater understanding and awareness of the issues that face guide dog owners attending football and other major sporting events.

After many years of campaigning and various government-led reports into crowd safety, most football stadia in the country are now modern, all seated facilities. Further developments have improved commentary facilities for blind and partially-sighted people. Most have radio commentary systems that allow blind and partially-sighted people, whether accompanied by a guide dog or a sighted companion (or both), to sit anywhere within the stadium.

It is therefore important stadium staff and officials are aware of the following factors concerning both blind or partially-sighted supporters and their guide dog:

- The role of the guide dog
- Your legal duties
- Provision for the guide dog owner and their dog
- The location of the guide dog within the stadium
- Provision for blind or partially-sighted supporters
- Comfort and safety issues

The role of the guide dog

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (Guide Dogs) aims to enhance the mobility, independence and quality of life for blind and partially-sighted people by providing guide dogs and other services.

Guide dogs are not pets. They are working animals, and are relied upon by their owners for independence and mobility. They undergo up to two years of intensive training from professional staff before qualifying as guide dogs. In addition, all guide dog owners get advice and training in order to maintain the high standards of working and social obedience in their guide dogs that is essential for successful guide dog mobility.

Guide Dogs provides aftercare services throughout a dog's working life by supporting guide dog owners with advice on the dog's work behaviour, and with any training needs associated with changes in the owner's work or leisure activities which would include visiting football or other stadia.

Along with other assistance dogs, guide dogs are exempt from the rules that prevent other dogs from accessing premises and other areas where food is served, such as stadium restaurants/cafes etc.

'Because of their training and skills the Institute of Environmental Health Officers has stated that assistance dogs are exempt from the usual hygiene rules that apply to dogs including those that relate to areas where food is being served.'
(SP8, DRC 2003¹)

¹ Disability Rights Commission (DRC) publication SP8, 2003



In practical terms, guide dogs do not disrupt the everyday operation of businesses or premises. They are trained not to bother other people and not to climb on seats or other fittings.

Guide dogs provide an essential and effective mobility aid to their owners when travelling to and from football stadia. It should be recognised, however, that the internal environment within the stadium can be highly complex and confusing to both the dogs and owners. There can also be limitations to dogs working in the high density crowd situations associated with match days. Guide dog owners will at times require additional support from a companion or staff member but a dog does support confidence and safety with routine travel and emergency egress.

What are your legal duties?

The Disability Discrimination Act: duties on service providers

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 provides legislation to protect the rights of disabled people. Part 3 of the DDA places duties on all service providers not to discriminate against disabled people and to make reasonable adjustments to their services and premises to enable disabled people to access them.

Staff should not refuse to serve a disabled person, or provide them with a lower standard of service because of their disability. This means that a guide dog owner should not be refused service/access to services due to the fact that they are blind or partially-sighted, or that they have a guide dog with them. Staff may also need to make reasonable changes to the way in which they provide their services to make sure that they do not discriminate against a disabled spectator.

'Reasonable adjustments' is a phrase used within law to give some flexibility and allow different solutions in different situations. Staff at stadia should be able to:

- Provide a seating area for a guide dog owner with sufficient room for the dog to lie next to its owner. However a guide dog owner should not be placed in a lower standard area than any other spectator.
- Provide a sighted guide and assistance when required.
- Offer help with purchasing tickets.
- Be aware that additional time, effort and skills are sometimes needed when providing services to blind and partially-sighted people.
- Provide information in alternative formats for supporters/spectators, e.g. Braille and large print programmes and information leaflets.

It is good practice to provide a dedicated audio commentary of matches and other sporting events.



Provision for the guide dog owner and their dog

- Change policy and practice to amend 'no dogs' policy to allow guide dogs and other assistance dogs.
- Never distract a working guide dog. Check with the owner before any contact is made.
- Never feed the dog. Guide dogs are working animals and are fed a strict diet at regular times. Any additional food may cause the dog to be sick or affect its health.
- Provide a water bowl for the dog if asked.
- In seating areas make sure there is sufficient space for a guide dog and its owner.
- Provide information, and help if needed, on access points into the stadium which aren't turn-stiles which are too narrow for a guide dog owner and guide dog to access.
- Provide appropriate relief areas for guide dogs and other assistance dogs. Many new stadia incorporate relief areas in their design. If the facilities are located outside the stadium staff support will be needed to guide the owner to the area. Guide Dogs' district teams can advise on the provision of suitable relief facilities. (See contacts section).

Location of guide dog and owner within the venue

The design features of new and refurbished stadia and other sports arenas should allow the freedom of choice for a blind or partially-sighted person, accompanied by a guide dog and/or a sighted companion, to sit anywhere within the stadium and facilities should be developed to take into account their requirements.

The best place for a guide dog is with its owner, who will have both the skills and the relationship with their dog that ensures a high level of control.

The front row of a block on any tier of seats will usually provide more space and comfort for a guide dog. It should be noted that a guide dog is extremely adaptable and can utilise limited space to the best advantage as found in most theatres and cinemas.

Provision for the blind or partially-sighted supporter – how to communicate with and provide sighted guide for blind and partially-sighted supporters

Guide Dogs believes good communication is central to clubs' provision of an inclusive and accessible service to blind and partially-sighted supporters. To achieve this, commitment is needed to produce key information in alternative formats including an accessible club website.

Clubs should also provide disability and equality awareness training for all staff. The appointment of a Disability Liaison Officer to deal with disability issues, review and develop services is also recommended.



In particular staff should:

- Know how to communicate with blind and partially-sighted people and provide sighted guide support. This should be addressed through disability awareness training for all current and new staff.
- When addressing a person with a guide dog, speak to the person, not the dog, and tell them who they are and what their role is in the arena/facility.
- Ask the person what assistance is needed rather than making assumptions as to what might be required.
- If the person asks to be guided to another part of the stadium, stand by the person's side and allow them to take hold of their arm/elbow in order to guide them along. Staff should not take hold of the person and drag or push them in a particular direction.
- When guiding a person with a guide dog, stand by the person's right hand side (usually the guide dog will be on the left) and adopt the same procedure as above. Never take hold of the dog's lead or harness and if the owner tells the dog to do something do not interfere as this may confuse the guide dog.
- When guiding a blind or partially-sighted person through a building or outdoors, tell the person where they are going and what obstacles or hazards might be approaching. They need to be told in advance about doors opening towards or away from them and about steps, kerbs or slopes going up or down to allow them time to adjust to their surroundings. This should prevent accident and injury.

Good communication is vital for all supporters/spectators but even more so in the case of blind and partially-sighted people. Where possible information should be provided in the format requested so that blind and partially-sighted spectators are not excluded.

Comfort and safety issues

As previously stated it should be recognised that sports stadia can be highly complex and confusing environments and there are limitations for guide dogs working in the high density crowd environments associated with match days and other events. All routes in and out of the stadium should be accessible for the guide dog owner and guide dog without obstructions such as turn-stiles.

It should be respected that a sighted companion and/or staff support may also be required within the immediate internal and external stadium environment. A sighted companion can also enhance safety, relaxation and mobility and provide effective support in respect of emergency evacuation procedures.

Evacuation of venues/stadia

In the event of an emergency evacuation of the stadium, blind and partially-sighted supporters are expected to comply with the club's evacuation procedures. Past experience suggests that guide dog owners who have their dog with them are more likely to feel safer, remain calmer and as a consequence be able to respond more effectively to instructions.



Current legislation and standards state that everyone should be evacuated if there is a fire. There is no document which states that disabled people should be left to wait for the fire service to rescue or assist them. It is the responsibility of the management to ensure their safe escape by introducing suitable escape plans. Visit www.drc-gb.org/library/policy/other_issues/fire_evacuation_briefing.aspx for more information.

Some useful procedures:

- Ensure an escape strategy is in place.
- Ensure all fire exits are clearly signed and free of obstruction (internally and externally).
- Identify supporters/spectators with a visual impairment.
- Train staff to deal with emergency procedures.
- Make sure staff on duty are aware of the number of people who would require assistance.
- Explain the emergency procedure to blind and partially-sighted people on arrival, preferably making the information available in an alternative format.

Guide dog owners' responsibilities

To qualify as a guide dog owner a high level of competence and responsibility needs to be demonstrated when working with a dog in a variety of situations and built environments. The quality and standard of the guide dog's work is continually monitored by training staff and the guide dog owner throughout the dog's working life.

The culture and crowd behaviour that is associated with some football matches will require the guide dog owner to assess the likely situation on an individual match basis. In some situations Guide Dogs may advise owners to make alternative arrangements to attend the game and not subject their guide dog to unnecessary stress or risk of harm.

Guide dog owners who intend to regularly, or occasionally, attend matches at their chosen club are advised to make contact with the club well in advance to establish ticket availability and facilities, and also to notify the club of their intention to be accompanied by their guide dog. This also applies when visiting an away club or other unfamiliar venue. Guide dog owners accompanied by their dog are also encouraged to give consideration to their arrival and departure at the ground in order to avoid the crowd congestion that can occur at matches with high attendances.

Useful publications

Accessible stadia: a good practice guide to design of facilities to meet the needs of disabled spectators and other users (Football Stadia Improvement Fund (FSIF) and Football Licensing Authority (FLA) (SGSG1, 2003)

Know your rights! Assistance Dog Owners (DRC SP8, January 2003)

Making access to goods and services for disabled customers: a practical guide for small businesses and other service providers (DRC – Making rights a reality, 2004)



Contact details for Guide Dogs

For further information, please contact Guide Dogs' local district teams, of which there are 28 across the country. Details can be obtained from www.guidedogs.org.uk or by contacting the head office:

Guide Dogs

Hillfields
Burghfield Common
Reading
RG7 3YG

Tel: 0118 983 5555

Fax: 0118 983 5433

Further information is also available from **Guide Dogs' Information and Support Officer** on **0845 241 2178**.

Other useful contacts

Equality and Human Rights Commission Disability Helpline

www.equalityhumanrights.com

England

Telephone: 0845 604 6610

Textphone: 0845 604 6620

Fax: 0845 604 6630

Scotland

Telephone: 0845 604 5510

Textphone: 0845 604 5520

Fax: 0141 228 5912

Wales

Telephone: 0845 604 8810

Textphone: 0845 604 8820

Fax: 0845 604 8830

Northern Ireland

Telephone: 028 90 500600

Textphone: 028 90 500589

www.equalityni.org

Royal National Institute of Blind People – RNIB

DDA Legal Information Officer

Tel: 01733 375 308

Email: DDAEnquiries@rnib.org.uk

Helpline: 0845 766 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Royal National Institute of Blind People – RNIB

Soccer Sight project

Tel: 01792 366 756

Email: eleanor.ellison@rnib.org.uk

Law Centre

National Advice Line

Tel: 0207 791 9800

Minicom: 0207 791 9801

www.lcf-disabilityrights.org

Visual Impaired Spectators Association (VISA)

RNIB Wavertree House

Somerhill Road

Hove

East Sussex

BN3 1RN

Tel: 01273 262 221

Email: eleanor.ellison@rnib.org.uk



Guide Dogs

Contact details for assistance dog organisations

Assistance Dogs (UK)

C/o Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
The Grange
Wycombe Road
Saunderton
Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire
HP27 9NS

Tel: 01844 348 100

Fax: 01844 348 101

Canine Partners

Mill Lane
Heyshott
Midhurst
West Sussex
GU29 0ED

Tel: 08456 580 480

Fax: 08456 580 481

Email: info@caninepartners.co.uk

www.caninepartners.co.uk

Dogs for the Disabled

The Frances Hay Centre
Blacklocks Hill
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX17 2BS

Tel: 08700 776 600

Fax: 08700 776 601

Email: info@dogstothedisabled.org

www.dogstothedisabled.org

Hearing Dogs for Deaf People

The Grange
Wycombe Road
Saunderton
Princes Risborough
Buckinghamshire
HP27 9NS

Tel: 01844 348 100

Fax: 01844 348 101

Email: info@hearing-dogs.co.uk

www.hearing-dogs.co.uk

Support Dogs

21, Jessops Riverside
Brightside Lane
Sheffield
S9 2RX

Tel: 0870 609 3476

Fax: 0114 261 7555

Email: supportdogs@btconnect.com

www.support-dogs.org.uk/

This booklet was designed by the in-house design studio at Guide Dogs, and produced by Guide Dogs and RNIB and supported by VISA.

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Tel: 0845 241 2178

The text of this document is available on request in Braille, audio, large print and electronic formats.

The advice in this information booklet has been written by Guide Dogs, RNIB and VISA and is intended to help ensure that the needs of a guide dog and its owner are met. The information relates to football stadia and other sporting arenas. Information on access to other services can be obtained from Guide Dogs (see contacts page). The information given in this document was correct at the time of printing. This document provides basic information and is not legal advice.

The information provided in this booklet about access for guide dogs also applies to other assistance dogs.