

# STEP UP



Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme



## BOOK OF SIMPLE STEPS

SIMPLE STEPS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF KEY  
SKILLS FOR ORIENTATION, MOBILITY AND INDEPENDENCE.

GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS AND THOSE WORKING WITH  
YOUNG CHILDREN WITH A VISUAL IMPAIRMENT.



[www.step-up-comenius.eu](http://www.step-up-comenius.eu)





**Ekeskolan / Resource Center Vision Örebro**  
Sweden  
<http://www.spsm.se>



**Gymnazium pro zrakové postizene a Stredni odborna skola pro zrakové postizene**  
Czech Republic  
<http://www.goa.brailnet.cz>



**Institut pour Déficients visuels**  
Luxembourg  
<http://www.idv.lu>



**Jordanstown**  
the Northern Ireland  
school and  
centre of excellence  
for children  
who are deaf or  
visually impaired

**Jordantown School**  
Northern Ireland  
<http://www.jordanstownschool.org>



**Childvision**  
**National Education Centre for Blind Children**  
Ireland  
<http://www.childvision.ie>



**Royal Blind School**  
Scotland  
<http://www.royalblind.org/royalblindschool>



**Onerva Centre for Learning and Consulting**  
Finland  
<http://www.onerva.fi>



**Zavod za slepo in slabovidno mladino Ljubljana**  
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<http://www.zssm.si>

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ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY (O&M) SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN TO BECOME AS INDEPENDENT AS POSSIBLE. THEY HELP DEVELOP SELF-CONFIDENCE, ESTEEM AND FREEDOM OF ACTION.

O&M SKILLS WILL ENABLE YOUR CHILD TO SOCIALISE AND BE AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN HIS/HER COMMUNITY.

BY ENCOURAGING YOUR CHILD TO PRACTICE SKILLS IN AN EVERYDAY CONTEXT WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS YOU WILL IMPROVE THEIR MOTIVATION AND CONFIDENCE.

THE FOLLOWING SIMPLE STEPS ARE DESIGNED TO HELP YOUR CHILD DEVELOP THE IMPORTANT FOUNDATION SKILLS WHICH CAN BE BUILT UPON BY FORMAL O&M TRAINING. THESE ARE INTENDED TO FOSTER THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTS AND SKILLS SUCH AS

1. ME AND MY BODY
2. SENSORY DEVELOPMENT
3. SPATIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS
4. CURIOSITY AND EXPLORATION
5. MOVEMENT: SMALL AND SIMPLE, LARGE AND DYNAMIC
6. COMMUNICATION SKILLS
7. EARLY SELF CARE AND DAILY LIVING SKILLS.

## PROTECT YES! OVERPROTECT NO!



It is not felt that the child with a visual impairment need be given special opportunities, only to be enabled to participate in the same ones as their sighted peers, whenever possible. This might seem that risks need to be taken, but when managed properly these need not place the child in jeopardy.

However, it is vital that an understanding of the difference between danger and safety be

taught. Though the primary role of a parent is to protect their young child from dangers so that they are safe this should not be taken to an extreme. Recognising danger for themselves and understanding how risk can be managed is part of the process of learning to live life to the full. It is a human and an understandable reaction of any care-giver of a child who has a serious disability to want to be more protective. However, by being so, the impact of the disability can be magnified, thereby reducing the life chances and experiences of the child. To overcome this will mean that the care-giver of a child with visual impairment will have to be prepared to work to support the development of skills which develop incidentally and independently as in children without a disability. (For the remainder of this document the term care-giver will include parent, guardian and professionals, including educators.)

## LEARNING BY DOING

Knowledge of body parts and how they relate to each other, though seemingly a natural thing to develop, does require teaching, as do the skills of using the remaining senses. These include the use of any remaining vision, fine motor tactile skills and effective listening. The child should also be supported in their development of spatial awareness and independent movement. All children do.



Care-givers should support the development of self-care skills as well. Too often it is easier and quicker for the care-giver to help or do it for the child rather than to make the time and allow the child to do it for him/herself. Allow the child to solve problems for themselves through practical activities such as cooking, cleaning, dressing and undressing. Try not to step in and take over if a task is taking too long or it is going wrong. Encourage the child to practice skills with family and friends to build confidence, motivation and

curiosity. Tasks should be broken down into small achievable goals which can be built on, do not underestimate the abilities of a child with a visual impairment.

## LEARNING iS FUN

Working with the child to develop these skills should be fun for all involved, we learn best when we are enjoying ourselves. For example the child with a visual impairment should be allowed to play in all weathers, to experience the rain, wind and even snow. You can also discover things together in the park – take the time to experience different surfaces, textural and directional changes on paths and walks. You can make use of all the equipment found in play parks – seesaws, swings, slides, obstacle courses and so on. Pay attention to the sounds, smells and sights that surround you and the learning potential these may have for a child. Use sensory games which include listening, touch, taste and smell. Auditory games which encourage the use of effective hearing will build important skills which will later become part of formal O&M training.



## BEING ACTIVE AND HAVING A GO



Identifying a child's interests and facilitating their hobbies can be a full-time role for many care-givers and it will be the same for the parent of a child with visual impairment. The child should be given opportunities to participate in a wide range of activities and sports just as others do. Sports and group activities require a child to develop important skills such as turn-taking; these can also be built on through thematic games such as playing shop, doctor, teacher or builder. Finding things for a child to do need not be expensive, children with visual impairment can make use of mainstream toys such as Lego, beads, sand and water trays. There are a wealth of

games and resources available for computers and tablets in the form of specialist apps, many of which



are free or fairly inexpensive. There are also resources especially created for children with visual impairment such as tactile books, haptic pictures, sensory boards etc. As the child grows up, the type of resources used should change and be age-appropriate.

## I CAN BE iNDEPENDENT



In time, it is vital that the child receives specialist advice with regard to orientation and mobility, care-givers are crucial in helping to reinforce the skills taught. This support will ensure that a child is helped to become more independent in school, to gain in confidence and increase in self-esteem. With these skills in place, a visually impaired child will be able to participate in a range of activities, encountering new experiences and people. By being

independent the child and not the disability is seen first, thus increasing the life-chances of an individual.

## REMEMBER iT iS NEVER TOO EARLY

This all starts in the early years and it is the role of the care-giver to take the lead. If a child has reduced mobility, it is even more important to motivate the child to engage in movement. Play here is crucial, together with praise and encouragement. Remove physical barriers limiting movement, use objects of interest to the child, build on what the child can already do and understand that patience and time is required. Toys which make use of sound are often helpful. Break tasks down into small achievable goals which complement the child's skills and interests. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Look to special schools/resource centres, national organisations for the visually impaired, parent support groups as well as the internet for advice and guidance.



## 1. ME AND MY BODY

The ability to name and locate body parts on yourself and on somebody else is essential. An awareness of the wider concepts of how such knowledge can be used to help understand the function of each body part and how they move is crucial. Such awareness provides an essential foundation for O&M work and positively assists in developing good posture in relation to walking and gait. With these skills in place the ability to move around confidently will be enhanced.

### Terminology

Body awareness: the naming and locating of body parts.

Body concept/image: how body parts move and function and their relationship to each other

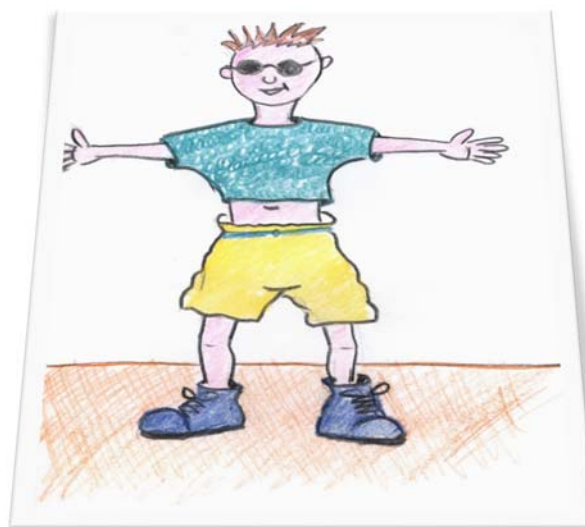
Body planes: How the body is divided into halves such as left/right, top/bottom, front/back, etc.

Laterality: A child should learn how to move different parts related to the left and right. E.g. I can lift my left hand

Midline: Recognising there is an imaginary middle line that separates what is on the right of a person and on the left

Proprioception: Is how a body uses the skeletal system to give information about where your body parts are in space. E.g. I'm standing on one leg. I'm scratching my ear.

Activities that may enhance its development include the use of: Play gyms, Activity mats, movement songs, E.g. Simon says; Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes; sensory boards, toys producing different sounds attached to the parts of a child's body, the act of dressing/undressing etc.



## 2. SENSORY DEVELOPMENT

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Encourage the use of remaining senses to help your child learn about, and make sense of, the world around them. Play is a key element here, let your child explore, touch, feel and smell e.g. water and sand play.

### *Encouraging listening skills*

Many children with a visual impairment will be aware of “sound” but that does not mean they are actually listening or understanding what they are hearing. The child needs to understand, identify and locate sounds. It is important therefore that those supporting a child with a visual impairment help them by giving particular sounds ‘meaning’, such as by describing the source of the sound and its purpose or, where possible, physically allowing the child to explore the source of the sound.

### *Encouraging sound discrimination*

Young children with a visual impairment are often bombarded with sound and they need to learn how to discriminate between background noise and sound that has relevance to them. This is known as “selective listening” i.e. using only the sounds you need.

### *Use of sound for orientation*

From infancy to adulthood, children will rely enormously on sound to assist orientation. An infant lying in their cot, for example, will be able to identify someone moving towards them by the sound of feet. Similarly, a toddler will be able to identify a car on hearing an engine start up. A primary school-aged child with a visual impairment will be able to determine direction and position in a corridor using audible landmarks.

Here are examples of games and activities which help a child to learn about their world and encourage them to be active in it:

**Auditory:** hearing/listening skills: Tracking sounds, locating sounds, listening to CDs with different sounds, sound books, songs, toys that make sounds when moved such as bell balls, musical instruments and playing auditory memory games.

**Touch:** In relation to mobility and orientation, tactile stimuli have a number of key roles and uses. Tactile skills through exploration using, for example hands, feet & face, should be encouraged. Differences in shape, size, texture and temperature need to be determined and emphasis given to the fact that these differences matter. The whole body can be used for tactile discrimination.

Tactile information may also be gathered from small everyday items used in daily living e.g. a toothbrush, a cheese grater. Toys and tactile memory games e.g. dominoes, puzzles, board games together with objects of reference such as leaves, foam, textured paints can all stimulate tactile interest.



**Smell:** Awareness can be heightened by different kinds of food smells, herbs, spices, or particular fragrances. Some shops e.g. bakeries, pharmacies, and florists have distinctive aromas which provide interest and information.



**Sight:** The use of remaining sight can be encouraged through computers and tablets with large text and a large screen. Also toys with strong colour contrast attract interest.

Sensory games can also be used and these include hearing, smelling and tactile games.

Auditory/listening games can include listening to a variety of songs, nursery rhymes and fairy tales, these can also

require the use of auditory memory. Exposure to environmental sounds is important so that the child gets to hear a variety of different sounds and becomes able to identify and discriminate between them e.g. differing traffic sounds.

Auditory toys are also a good resource, such as games using balls with bells, so that the directional movement of sound is experienced. Rattles and mobiles can also be used for younger children. The playing of musical instruments can also be incorporated to develop auditory skills. Sensory stories combine listening to audio books with tactile or sensory resources such as smells and tastes that are associated with the story.

Tactile toys and games can be used, such as objects of different shape, colour and contrast placed within a reachable distance and within the line of sight of the child. Objects such as dominoes can be used to promote fine motor skills. Messy games can be fun such as play dough modelling.

It should not be assumed that all children enjoy using their hands freely to explore. Some may be very resistant to certain tactile stimuli. This is known as tactile defensiveness or tactile selectiveness. Adverse reactions to sticky or gooey substances, furry or slimy items or even maintaining contact with a guide can occur. It is important that all those working with the child are aware of their particular sensitivities so that they are prepared for unexpected responses or behaviours.

The use of smell can be incorporated into games such as a treasure hunt which can use the sense of smell to identify specific shops or areas in a house. Different kinds of herbs and spices can be used in games as they have strong, identifiable smells and can be used to encourage the memory of smells.

All of these sensory skills can be combined and used to promote the use of residual vision in games such as hide and seek with objects and people. They can also be used in conjunction with lighting and fibre optic resources and mirrors.

All of this is applicable for children with additional needs bearing in mind the importance of high motivation, building on what the child can already do, their interests, allowing reaction time, breaking activities into small steps and allowing the child to be the “driver”.

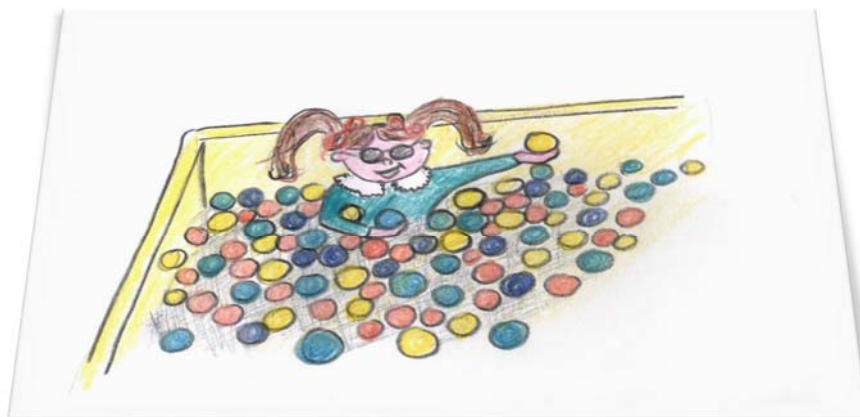
Resources which can be used

Through the play process, verbal praise can be used when confirming what the child has done.

AROUND 2 YEARS			
• Real objects in a box	• Leaves and trees	• Snow and Water	• Clothes to dress in
• Symbolic objects (signifiers)	• Vacuum cleaner	• Toilet	• Doors; hinges, door, saddle
• Animals	• Big cars	• Water and Sand	
<i>Approaches: keep it immediate, understandable and safe. Take time to experience. Be responsive. Have fun.</i>			



AROUND 4 YEARS			
• Bath	• Dolls	• Rain	• Windows
• Roof	• Dripping sink	• Sponge	• Farm
• Animals	• Cars	• Toilet	• Rain pipes
• Gutters	• Puddles	• Ball pool	• Snowmen
• Birds			
<i>Approaches to be used: Incorporate more language with concrete objects, how things work. Role play using dolls clothes etc. Use everyday language. Interact with objects and be responsive to the child's questioning. Challenge and motivate the child with new experiences. Repetition, encouragement and support.</i>			



## AROUND 7 YEARS AND OLDER

• Sandwich	• Car	• Forest	• Shore of a lake; the lake
• Outdoor fire	• Christmas tree	• Sledging	• Floors, Stairs, Lift, Lego model
• Stuffed animals	• Curbs	• Pavement	• Tactile exhibitions
• Bus depot	• Train station	• Running track	• Pot holes
• Frozen roads	• Slippery ice		

*Approaches: use of social stories. Use examples as they occur naturally. Learning by doing. Plan for more independence. Go to places that are fun and exciting.*



### 3. SPATIAL AWARENESS AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Spatial Awareness: Where am I? What is around me? Where are things in relation to me?

Environmental Awareness: understanding the immediate environment through the use of cues, clues, features and landmarks that provide information.

Environmental concepts :The knowledge of environmental features, such as the size, shape, colour, and texture of everyday objects and of the spatial regularities of features in built environments.

The environment is arranged in reasonably predictable patterns. For example, houses are divided into rooms, and a room usually has four walls, a ceiling and a floor. Beyond the house is the garden, the street, the shops, the town ...

The young child with a visual impairment needs practical exposure to a wide variety of environments and experiences within them. This is because, unlike sighted children, they will not have had access to the largely visual, incidentally acquired, understanding of how their environment is organised. Such understanding underpins sighted movement through personal space.

*Objects – purpose; properties; function:*

For the child to develop a clear understanding of their environment it is vital that they are able to identify the purpose, properties and function of an object.

When objects / rooms / places are given a name, or label, it is important that all those supporting the child are consistent and in using the same terms.

The child also needs to understand that objects may not always be present in their environment. Objects can be:

- permanent e.g. a bus shelter
- stationary e.g. a parked car
- moving e.g. an escalator
- moveable e.g. a chair

What resources do you use to encourage the following concepts to be developed for young children with VI:

## IMMEDIATE:

- Give an opportunity for concrete objects to be used rather than abstract representations.

## WIDER:

• Playground or play park	• Sensory gardens/rooms	• Soft play area	• Local community and events
• Environmental sounds both expected and unexpected e.g. transport, animals, weather etc.	• Natural environment	• Manmade features – walls, steps, gates	



The detection of changes in the surface (e.g., texture, rough or smooth) and changes of level(e.g. stairs or kerbs) can be used to identify one's location / position. They may also indicate the activity which goes on in the area or is supported by that particular environment. Variations in temperature can also be used for orientation, even subtle changes can be used to determine position e.g. near an open door.

Discover different surroundings together for example take a walk in the park, climb a climbing frame or swing in a playground. Experience surface and textural changes, directional changes and allow a child to enjoy themselves.

**Interacting with the environment, both immediate and wider**

Outdoor/ Indoor	
<b>Activities:</b>  Walking in nature.  Visiting unfamiliar places: paying attention to the sights, sounds, feel, lighting, and smells found there.  Exploring surroundings: identify and locate landmarks such as friends' houses, playgrounds etc.	<b>Play:</b>  - Hide and seek.  - Playgrounds and parks.  - Sensory gardens  - Water and sand play.



## 4. CURIOSITY AND EXPLORATION

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Stimulating curiosity in children helps them to understand their environment. When a child feels interested, safe and secure, he/she will want to explore. Work to encourage the child's curiosity.

Pre-cane skills - These skills when performed and applied correctly give an individual maximum protection without the use of a mobility aid. They include:

- Squaring off  
Placing one's back against a flat solid object (e.g. a wall) in order to walk in a straight line to a known location.
- Trailing  
The use of one's hand to lightly follow along a surface (e.g. a wall) to move from one point to another.
- Lower Body Protection  
Using an arm held diagonally across and in front of the body to protect the waist, hip, and upper leg areas.
- Upper body protection  
Using an arm held diagonally across and in front of the body and face to protect the head.
- Barrier Technique  
Using both arms together, with hands overlapped, to form a protective 'circle' in front of the body
- Taking-a-Line  
Is the use of a combination of trailing and upper body protection to cross a break in the surface being followed.

Believe in their potential and ability; do not underestimate your child.

Take things step-by-step, let the child try for him/herself.

Avoid overprotecting the child and preventing him/her from exploring.

Let the child do what he/she can for him/herself and allow them time.

Play games to stimulate curiosity and exploration:

Verbal games connected with concrete objects e.g. Simon says, hide and seek to encourage movement, the use of obstacle courses and treasure hunts will help the child to understand concepts such as over/under/in front/behind etc.

Objects of reference can help the child to gain knowledge from several senses: touch, vision (if they have some useful sight), smell, taste, and sound (e.g. if they bang the object against a surface ).

### *Other considerations*

A good starting point would be to have a quiet, clutter-free area in which to work. You can then attract the child's attention with sounds, smells, movement or vibrations that stimulate them and interest them.

It is important when trying to motivate the child to put objects with their reach, so that they can sense them with any part their body.



## 5. MOVEMENT: SMALL AND SIMPLE, LARGE AND DYNAMIC

Outdoor Activities: Encourage a desire for the pleasure of movement by going for a familiar walk and telling fun stories about that specific journey. Let the child experience playing out in all weather conditions.

• Confirm their initiative	• Reduce adult intervention	• Create tasks appropriate to a child's abilities
• Develop interest and awareness of the world outside	• Recognising where adult intervention is not needed	• Include the child in daily tasks and activities
• Patience, wait for results		

ENCOURAGING MOVEMENT AND EXPLORATION			
Let the child experience with use of indoor as well as outdoor environments where suitable. Everyday experiences such as:			
• Bathing	• Dressing/undressing	• Walking	• Running
• Singing games on CD with movements	• Musical games	• Using motivational toys of special interest	• Floor / Mat / Activity Games
• Wheeled toys	• Games e.g. Hide and seek, musical statues	• Baby gym / bouncers	
Going to the playground:			
• Balancing	• Seesaw	• Climbing	• Running
• Swinging	• Sliding	• Cycling	• Walking on different surfaces
• Finding ways around/along fences, trees, hedges, lamp posts, mailboxes and through gates		• Listening to sounds around e.g. traffic sounds	
• Orientation games like Simon says or follow the leader		• Obstacle courses/relay game activities to provide challenges	
Hobbies and sports			
• Yoga	• Aerobics	• Dance	• Trampolining
• Ball games	• Swimming	• Horse riding	• Gymnastics

ENCOURAGE MOVEMENT – ADULT ASSISTANCE		
• Remove barriers in physical space	• Joint attention	• Context to the movement
• Place objects of interest around the child	• Hand over/under hand	• Create tasks appropriate to child's abilities
• Recognising where adult intervention is needed	• Include in daily tasks and activities	• Patience, wait for results

ENCOURAGE MOVEMENT AND SELF-MOTIVATION			
<i>Gym and Sports equipment</i>			
• Trampoline	• Horse	• Climbing Frame	• Soft Play
• Movement / activity games	• Balls	• Ropes and bells	• Seesaw
• Balance beam			
<i>Sensory activity</i>			
• Baby gym	• Activity mat		
<i>Thematic games</i>			
• Shop	• Doctor	• House	• Builders
• Teacher			
<i>Expressive arts</i>			
• Dance	• Music	• Yoga	



## 6. COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Give clear instructions to your child and use consistent language.

Encourage the child to be confident enough to ask to do a task independently

Play games to teach turn-taking skills. These skills and attitudes are required to play effectively with peers.

Seek opportunities to meet other visually impaired children and their families.

Almost all social skills used by sighted children and adults have been learned by visually observing the environment and the people in it, and behaving in socially appropriate ways based on that information. Social interaction skills are not learned casually and incidentally by children with a visual impairment and therefore these must be carefully, consciously, and sequentially taught.

Good social skills can...

- Make it easier for the child to ask for help when needed.
- Enable the child to participate in events or visits and through these meet with other people and encounter new social situations.
- Help to present the person first and not the disability.
- Raise self-confidence and expectations for the child and adults involved in his/her life.
- Allow a child to independently participate in all school experiences whilst building on their social skills, self-esteem and confidence.
- Further develop their independence by allowing them to choose their peer group, participate in activities which they enjoy and give them the opportunity to learn from one another.





## 7. EARLY SELF CARE AND DAILY LIVING SKILLS

We want a child to be independent and socially acceptable in life. Successes in early self-care and daily tasks promote a child's self-confidence.

Give the child a chance to learn basic self-caring skills like: dressing, eating, personal hygiene, etc.

Encourage your child to join in with a variety of household activities such as baking, cooking, cleaning etc.

Give the child a chance to work out problems they encounter for themselves.

Keep in mind equality (rights and responsibilities) and offer the same opportunities to take part in activities in and outside the home. Not to forget the experience of being alone in a safe environment.



# Final Comments



Allow your child to make mistakes, minor mishaps are not dangerous. Trust the child and help them learn through play, trial and error. Overprotection can lead to learned helplessness. Some areas for consideration:

- Whose needs are being met by overprotection?
  - Learn to appreciate your child's achievements.
  - It is better to comfort than intervene too early.
  - do not do for the child.
  - do not transfer your own anxieties to the child.
- Provide all those involved with positive examples of success and successful outcomes for children and young people with a visual impairment.

More information about Orientation and Mobility Services for children and young people with a visual impairment is available from:

- Special schools for the VI in your country.
- National organisations for the Visually Impaired.
- Local authority health centres.
- Resource Centres for the Visually Impaired and their Outreach services
- Rehabilitation services for the VI.
- Parent Associations and support groups.
- Guide Dog (**or Seeing Dog**) Association(s)
- The Internet, specialist articles and other literature.
- Seminars and conferences.