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**SUPPORTING FAMILIES OF CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS WITH VISION IMPAIRMENT IN DEVON AND CORNWALL**

**Making activities for children with VI fully accessible for those with additional needs**

**Visionary Conference 2020**

**Group workshop notes**

Unit 4 The Watermark, Erme Court, Leonards Rd, Ivybridge, PL21 0SZ Tel: 01752 891934 • Mobile: 07581 566690 • Email: info@moorvision.org www.moorvision.org • Charity no. 1173939

**Canoeing**

Canoeing is a great activity for children and young people with VI.

To ensure it is fully accessible to CYP with additional physical, learning or behavioural needs the following guidelines are recommended:

* Wheelchair access – many canoe centres will offer a child who cannot transfer from a wheelchair or sit unaided a place on a ‘wheelie’ boat – a wheelchair accessible boat that travels alongside the canoes.
* Other more specialist centres may offer hoists to assist with moving the participant from their wheelchair into a specially adapted chair in the boat.
* Large beanbags in canoes can be very versatile
* Oars and paddles can be obtained that are lighter weight than the normal heavier ones and/or can be mounted so that the main weight of the oar or paddle is taken by the boat.
* CYP with behavioural and/or learning needs can be paired with a supervising adult in a double canoe or be part of a canoe for up to 8 – 10 people.
* Work with instructors prior to event to enhance their understanding of both VI and additional needs if necessary
* DBS checked volunteers to help.
* Accessible changing areas and toilets – check if any of your families need a changing table that can support the weight of an older child. If needed, you can hire these from <https://www.mobiloo.org.uk/>
* Blue badge parking – don’t be afraid to ask for more in advance – they can put up temporary signs

**Theatre**

Theatre trips can be a wonderful opportunity for not just for the child with VI in the family but for the entire family.

To ensure that theatre trips are fully accessible to CYP with additional physical, learning or behavioural needs the following guidelines are recommended.

* Seats as close to the front of the theatre as possible.
* Audio Described performances which will help all CYP with VI.
* Seating – most theatres will have wheelchair spaces with accompanying companion spaces that can be booked in advance for CYP who cannot transfer from their wheelchair to a seat.
* For CYP who can transfer, ask for aisle seats to assist with transfers.
* Touch Tours – many theatres that offer Audio Description, will also offer a Touch Tour. This is a fantastic opportunity for all CYP with VI with and without additional needs to touch, feel and see the costumes, props and sometimes cast up close. This can add a huge amount of value and enjoyment to a theatre production.
* Audio, tactile and large print flyers in advance
* Explain the story in advance if needed
* Living Paintings may have some relevant packs for the performance (we use their packs on many of our activities)
* Relaxed, Autism or Sensory friendly performances – many cinemas and theatres now offer these special performances in which:
* The lights are kept on at a low level
* Sound levels are lower than usual
* (No trailers or advertisements - just the film if in a cinema)
* Allowance for increased levels of movement and noise in the audience
* Hearing loops for CYP with Multi Sensory Impairments
* DBS checked volunteers to help
* Accessible toilets – check if any of your families need a changing table that can support the weight of an older child. If needed, you can hire these from <https://www.mobiloo.org.uk/>
* Blue badge parking – don’t be afraid to ask for more in advance – they can put up temporary signs

**Swimming**

The key to a successful swimming trip is choosing the correct venue – many swimming pools these days do have accessible pool entry but this varies from pool to pool.

To ensure that swimming trips are fully accessible to CYP with VI and with additional physical, learning or behavioural needs the following guidelines are recommended.

* Step free access to changing rooms and pool
* Fully accessible changing rooms and toilets (and this doesn’t mean simply a sit in shower – families may need a changing table that can support the weight of an older child). If needed, you can hire these from <https://www.mobiloo.org.uk/>
* Checking how many such accessible rooms there are and staggering entry time for families who need the room.
* Hoist entry to pool – again hoist entries to pool vary – some require that the person needs to be able to transfer from their wheelchair to a poolside hoist chair. Others may actually be able to lift a person directly from their chair into the pool.
* Special consideration needs to be given to CYP with MSI especially those who reliant on hearing aids that can’t be used in the water – particularly relevant to cochlear implant users. Ensure that at least one carer is able to communicate with the participant with on hand signing or whatever their preferred means of communication is.
* Supervision – most pools will already have their rules for adult to child ratios in pools – you may need to up this ratio considerably.
* Lifeguards – speak to your pool about supplying additional lifeguards to accommodate the number of CYP with both VI and additional needs in your group.
* Invite DBS checked volunteers to help.
* Blue badge parking – don’t be afraid to ask for more in advance – they can put up temporary signs

**Virtual and Zoom**

Virtual activities – find a topic … (files attached in separate emails for some of these)

* Rainbow cooking
* Arts and crafts
* Science and Nature
* Keeping fit
* Festival fun
* Halloween
* Christmas, Eid, Diwali and other festivals
* Music (all genres)
* Etc …

Ensure that the activities you suggest include choice and cover a wide range of both visual and other abilities or that they can be easily tailored to suit everyone.

**Zoom (in addition to all usual safeguarding/security measures)**

1. Small groups

2. Audio describe everything

3. Parent/carers or older siblings to assist

4. Ensure each child says who they are at the start of their contribution or someone says this for them

5. One at a time

6. Music and stories

7. Quizzes and jokes

8. Food

9. Laughter

10. Support groups for parent/carers of children with additional needs

11. Supporting families with accessing technology and zoom in the first place

12. Use a ‘spotter’ in addition to the person running the session to look out for CYP possibly struggling to take part and anyone who wishes to be heard

Expect things to go wrong!

**Theme park**

Theme park visits are often very popular with the whole family, so it is important to ensure that these trips are planned with the child with VI and additional needs in mind as well. The key to a successful theme park trip with is very much down to choice of venue and careful liaison with the venue staff in advance. To ensure that theme park trips are fully accessible to CYP with additional physical, learning or behavioural needs the following guidelines are recommended.

* Discuss with the theme park the accessibility arrangements for all rides and activities. It may be that one or two rides etc are less accessible but with advanced warning, parks will often set aside a time were ramps etc can be used to assist those who need it onto a ride.
* Animal barns – always popular – many parks offer ‘petting sessions’ – it is well worth booking a session like this solely for your group so your CYP can interact closely with the animals with less time constraints and without the noise and competition from other visiting children.
* Animal displays – ie. falconry display – again, discussed in advance, most staff who run displays will give a far more detailed audio description of the show and allow CYP to have some time to touch, feel or smell the animals up close.
* Hearing loops for CYP with Multi-Sensory Impairments for indoor activities
* Ensure that cafes, picnic areas etc are accessible. Ask for a room or area to be put aside for your group – this particularly helpful for CYP who may feel overwhelmed by large crowds of people.
* DBS checked volunteers to help.
* Book out of season – less expensive and less crowded.
* Accessible toilets – check if any of your families need a changing table that can support the weight of an older child. If needed, you can hire these from <https://www.mobiloo.org.uk/>
* Blue badge parking – don’t be afraid to ask for more in advance – they can put up temporary signs
* Relevant books borrowed from Living Paintings can really enhance a theme park experience for a child with VI and/or VI and additional needs.