



sense
for deafblind people

VST Volunteer Information Pages

About Sense

Sense is the leading national charity that supports and campaigns for children and adults who are deafblind. We provide expert advice and information as well as specialist services to deafblind people, their families, carers and the professionals who work with them. We also support people who have sensory impairments with additional disabilities.

Our services include on-going support for deafblind people and families. These range from day services where deafblind people have the opportunity to learn new skills and Sense-run houses in the community – where people are supported to live as independently as possible. We also provide leading specialist advice, for example on education options and assistive technology.

What is deafblindness?

Deafblindness is a combination of both sight and hearing difficulties. Most of what we learn about the world comes through our ears and eyes, so deafblind people face major problems with communication, accessing information and mobility.

There are many causes of deafblindness. These include premature birth, birth trauma and rubella during pregnancy, which can cause babies to be born deafblind. Some genetic conditions also result in deafblindness. And any of us can become deafblind at any time through illness, accident or as we grow older. People who are born deafblind often have additional disabilities, including learning and physical disabilities.

If you would like more information about Sense and deafblindness, visit our website www.sense.org.uk

Who are the Voluntary Services Team (VST)?

The VST are a nationally focused division of Sense that provides support, information and services to deafblind people and their families. Our focus areas are the holidays programme, events and membership scheme.

Volunteering on a Sense Holiday

What are Sense Holidays?

Sense Holidays are an opportunity for holidaymakers to meet new people, gain new experiences, and have fun! Every year, around 120 holidaymakers go on one of 25 week-long holidays. Holiday groups vary in size, but include holidaymakers, leaders and volunteers. The holidays are for people of all ages who are deafblind or who have either a visual or hearing impairment plus additional difficulties, like a physical or learning disability.

To make this happen we rely on the support of excellent volunteers! As a volunteer on a Sense holiday you can make a real difference to the life of a deafblind person. We know from what holidaymakers and their families tell us, that holidays have a huge impact! holidaymakers are enabled to form new relationships, “the chance to mix with people other than my family gave me independence. Lots of activities, fantastic!” and try new things, and carers can have a well-earned break. “I could relax, as Sense and your volunteers are the only people I can leave my son with and feel confident 100%. Thanks!” Each holiday is individually planned around the needs and interests of the holidaymakers, but activities could include swimming, horse-riding, visits to local attractions, canoeing, dry-slope skiing, meals out, nights in the pub – the possibilities are endless!

The holidays take place throughout the summer in England and Wales. Accommodation ranges from outdoor activity centres, to cottages, farms and barns, yurts, sailing boats, villas and even barges! Holidays are residential and have either a Friday or Saturday start.

We also organise two week-long Holiday Plus every Spring for around twelve older deafblind people. This holiday is an opportunity for holidaymakers to have a break, meet new people and get out and about in a supportive environment, overcoming some of the difficulties accessing social and leisure opportunities that can come with deafblindness later in life.

How are volunteers involved?

Every holiday is managed by one or more skilled and experienced leader(s) and the ratio of volunteers to holidaymakers is at least one to one. Volunteers are often ‘linked’ with a particular holidaymaker, but there are usually opportunities to spend time with others. As a group, everyone is on holiday together – although Sense holidays may not be as relaxing as holidays you’ve had in the past!

The holiday volunteer role might include:

- Enabling holidaymakers to take part in the holiday’s activities

- Developing good communication and understanding with holidaymakers, ensuring they have choice and dignity in all areas of the holiday
- Supporting holidaymakers in all aspects of their daily routines for example, eating, or more intimate routines such as going to the toilet
- Helping with domestic duties
- Being responsible for holidaymakers' personal belongings
- Supporting the leader and other volunteers

Sense will provide accommodation and food during the holiday, though you might like to bring a small amount of money for your personal use. We will pay travel expenses to volunteers who are students, unwaged or would be otherwise prevented from volunteering on a holiday.

The Holiday Preparation Day, Volunteer manual and support from your leader in advance of and during the holiday will ensure you are fully prepared for your holiday. The Holidays Team are here to support you however we can!

Volunteering at a Sense Event

In addition to the Sense holiday programme, the Voluntary Services Team organise an annual programme of weekend and day events. These events take place throughout England and Wales. All events that we hold require a strong bank of volunteers who are willing to get stuck in, provide an extra pair of hands and help enable deafblind people and their families to enjoy their day.

What is a leisure club?

Leisure clubs enable parents / carers to take part in events which have been organised for them (or to have a break.) by providing a programme of activities for their children and anyone else who they need to bring along. Each leisure club is supported by one or more skilled and experienced leader(s) and a team of volunteers.

Those using the leisure club have an opportunity to take part in activities they don't always get the chance to do, to interact with their peers, and to have fun. Each leisure club is planned around the needs and interests of the users and the resources available, but activities could include swimming, horse riding, art and craft, or relaxing in a sensory room.

Where and when they happen depends on the event they are linked with. They take place either over one day (often a Saturday) or over a weekend. Although weekend events are residential, the leisure club only takes place during the day.

How are volunteers involved in a leisure club?

The ratio of volunteers to leisure club users is at least one to one, and often more. Volunteers are often 'linked' with a particular leisure club user, but there are opportunities to spend time with others in the leisure club.

The role of leisure club volunteer might include:

- Enabling leisure club users to have a safe and fun event
- Developing good communication and understanding with leisure club users, and empowering them to make choices
- Supporting leisure club users in all aspects of their daily routines
- Supporting the leader and other volunteers

What is a Family Day?

Family Days are for people of all ages who are deafblind and their families. They offer opportunities to come together, meet other families and take part in fun activities as a family unit. Often, the families who attend them have strong, and sometimes exclusive, involvement in organising them.

Some Family Days are focussed around one activity, such as a visit to a local attraction. Some offer families an opportunity to access a range of activities at their own pace, such as swimming or art & crafts. Others have an information-giving aim, and function more like a leisure club.

How are volunteers involved in a family day?

The role of volunteers might include:

- Enabling families to enjoy all aspects of the day, taking the lead from the families themselves
- Working with parents and carers to enable their children to access activities
- Providing an extra pair of hands to families when they need it for example, when changing for the swimming pool or eating lunch.
- Helping with domestic duties for example, preparing lunch, washing up.

Why volunteer on a Sense Holiday or at a Sense Event?

Because you will have the opportunity to....

- Meet new people
- Visit new places and try new activities
- Explore different ways of communicating
- Have fun - even while working hard!
- Face new challenges
- Learn new skills
- Have a unique time
- Be part of a team

- Enable a deafblind person to have fun

In the words of some of our past volunteers...

“I have had a life changing experience, can't wait for next time!”

“There are no words to express how it made me feel - amazing, rewarding, fulfilling just do not come close to the experience achieved.”

“So good to be able to give deafblind people a chance to do things they might not ordinarily do, and to not let their disability get in the way”

Who can volunteer on VST Holidays or Events?

Anyone can volunteer on a Sense Holiday or at an Event, as long as you are 18 years of age. Sense volunteers come from all sorts of backgrounds and you don't need to have done anything similar before. As a volunteer, you'll have an opportunity to attend a preparation day which will equip you with skills for communication, guiding and Safeguarding People – plus it's an opportunity to meet the rest of the team. A Volunteer manual will provide you with guidelines outlining what Sense expects of you, and information on Sense, deafblindness and the skills you will need.

Our volunteers come from all walks of life, with all levels of experience

What kind of person do I need to be?

We are looking for volunteers who are committed, with enthusiasm and drive. All sorts of skills and qualities are important on Sense holidays and events.

We are looking for people who are...

Able to work well in a team, Open minded, Willing to learn new skills,
Able to respect everyone's differences, Caring,
Patient and tolerant, Responsible

And people with...

Plenty of stamina, Good interpersonal skills
Good sense of humour, Respect

If this sounds like you then you have all the qualities needed - so apply!

More specific skills...

An ability to cook, First aid skills
Experience of driving a minibus, Life saving skills, Sign Language Skills
These skills are a bonus and will be particularly valuable on specific holidays and events!

So why not apply today?

Before you volunteer

You will need to fill in a volunteer application form and complete a series of security checks. These include a CRB check, 5 year history check and reference checks. When these are complete we will contact you to confirm what volunteering opportunities we can offer you. For more information see the timeline enclosed.

If you have any questions about any of the volunteering opportunities on offer, please do not hesitate to contact the Voluntary Services Team or check out our website.

E mail

If you are interested in holidays email: Holiday@sense.org.uk

If you are interested in events email: genevieve.buckley@sense.org.uk

Phone 0845 127 0060 **Text:** 0845 127 0062 **Fax:** 0845 127 0061

Sense 101 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9LG

If you would like a copy of this leaflet in any other format, for example, Braille, audio tape or disc then please contact us.