

journeying *with*

Coordinating a *Journeying With* Scheme in partnership with Torch Trust



Coming alongside people losing sight,
at their times of greatest need

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1. Introduction

This is a guide for a person, or group of people, who are taking on the role of coordinating a local *Journeying With* scheme in partnership with Torch Trust. The guide covers setting up the scheme, and its early operation. A 'Handbook for Churches' covering the long-term operation of a scheme is available on the *Journeying With* website: with.torchtrust.org

The process of setting up a *Journeying With* scheme will be different in each area. Each local scheme will be unique - according to the local area, the church(es) and the people running it. This guide is intended to be a practical resource rather than a step-by-step instruction book.

Please do remember:

- Torch Trust is here to support you throughout the whole process. Through the initial stages, raising awareness, training, linking with local sight professionals, and as the scheme grows - Torch will work with you. Please keep in touch with your Torch contact who will endeavour to help with any questions you may have.
- In whatever way an individual scheme develops, the aim will always be the same - this is pastoral care with a mission, the expression of our Christian faith through coming alongside individuals as they struggle with sight loss. *Journeying With* is open to clients of all faiths or none, but it is not to be seen as an opportunity to impose our faith on anyone. We do what we do as an expression of the love of Christ. We may offer prayer and we will always respond to clients' questions about our faith, about church, about Jesus and about what we are doing.

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."[1 Peter 3:15-16]

Please be assured that we at Torch Trust will be praying for you regularly. We look forward to working with you as your scheme progresses and seeing the difference it makes to people's lives - which it undoubtedly will.

May God bless you and your team throughout this process and in all that you do as your *Journeying With* scheme develops.

2. Ground Work

Involve the church leadership

A Journeying With scheme should be very much part of the ministry of your local church. It is supported by Torch Trust, but having good support from your church, or group of churches, is essential from the start. Your Torch Trust contact will be very happy to come to speak with your church leadership and others at your church, or group of churches, to explain how the scheme will work.

In some areas the scheme will be run by one individual church, whilst in other areas it may be a joint venture between several churches. Torch will provide guidance according to what seems to be the best approach for your particular area.

Gather interested people to pray for your *Journeying With* scheme

A backing of prayer for the whole scheme is vital. At the earliest possible stage, try to gather a group of people who will be committed to praying for all aspects of the scheme. Involve as many different people from the church as possible - including those who may have sight loss themselves, as they will bring their own understanding.

Recruit a leader or leadership team

The leader/leadership team of a scheme will vary according to your own church situation.

In smaller churches, this may be one or two people who coordinate a small group of volunteers.

Larger churches, or a group of churches working together, may have a team with different people taking on various responsibilities.

Some churches may already have a pastoral team. If so, it is good to link into this existing set-up.

Often a personal approach from you works best, to encourage someone to join the team, though a general invitation in the church notices can 'spread the word' too.

Think about any practical or resource implications

It should not be costly to set up a Journeying With scheme. Many of the things which are needed can be provided at no extra cost by the church, or group of churches, running the scheme. For example, the church will usually be able to provide the venue for the training to take place, and for ongoing meetings with volunteers and the leadership team. Churches also often have an existing set up for publicity such as a newsletter, website, etc. which can help towards promoting the scheme.

There may be additional expenditure involved such as refreshments, publicity, volunteer expenses and any additional training. When the scheme is being set up, there will need to be a decision made about any arrangements for paying volunteers expenses. This is up to the discretion of the church involved and may be affected by whether there is specific funding available, and also possibly the individual situations of volunteers.

If there are any additional costs, it will help to set a budget for any expenditure, and to record any spending, ensuring that it is within the planned amount.

Insurance for the volunteers and safeguarding procedures for the scheme should be covered by the existing church arrangements. More information is available in the 'Handbook for Churches' available on with.torchtrust.org

3. Getting Ready

Finding your volunteers

You will know your own local situation better than anyone, so take the approach which you think will work best in your area for recruiting a team of volunteers. Suggestions include:

- Personal approach to people you think may be interested
- Liaise with existing pastoral visitors/team
- Invite a Torch Trust representative to come to speak at your church
- Approach existing groups such as Ladies' meetings, etc.
- Articles in church newsletters
- Church website or social media
- Link with other churches as appropriate

Checking the suitability of volunteers

For an individual to be officially be accepted as a volunteer on a *Journeying With* scheme, the church leadership will need to be satisfied that the individual is a mature Christian and suitable for this role. References need to be requested if the individual is not well known to the leadership of the church. In this case, the potential volunteer should fill in an application form giving the names of two referees. References should then be taken up and the individual should be interviewed. (Torch can provide guidance for this process)

If the person is well known to the leadership of the church and the leader(s) are happy to endorse the application, there may be no need to request written references. This decision is left with the church.

If there is doubt that the volunteer will be suitable for the befriending role, this should be a matter for prayer, and should then be discussed with the volunteer themselves. It may be possible to route the volunteer to a different volunteering activity if it is felt that befriending is not one of the individual's gifts.

Criminal Records Checks

Once a volunteer is agreed to be suitable as a *Journeying With* befriender, then a criminal record check will need to be completed. Torch recommends carrying out an enhanced check through:

- England and Wales - Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)
- Scotland - Disclosure Scotland
- Northern Ireland - AccessNI

This will usually be done through the existing safeguarding set-up at the church, in conjunction with the church's safeguarding officer. If there is any problem with arranging criminal records checks then please get in touch with Torch. This is an important part of the scheme as it helps to ensure the safety of the client and shows that the scheme is taking safeguarding seriously.

Appoint your scheme leader, or 'Volunteer Coordinator'

The appointment of a scheme leader, or 'Volunteer Coordinator' is a joint agreement between the church and Torch Trust. This role is central to the local scheme. In schemes with over six volunteers, there would need to be more than one 'Volunteer Coordinator' so that good support can be given to the volunteers. Larger schemes will therefore need to work out how to structure the team best to be able to make sure that everyone has the support they need, and that there is a clear route for referrals, etc.

Whatever the size of your team, please talk with your contact at Torch Trust to think through what might be a good structure for your local scheme. You may find that it begins with one structure, and then grows - at which point you can re-think how the team is organised to suit the new situation. Please don't worry if you only have a small number of volunteers. It is far more important to make a start, then there is always an opportunity for others to join once the scheme is up and running.

Training your volunteers

The initial training for you and your volunteers is provided by Torch and will be arranged with you when you feel that you are ready and have some volunteers in a position to attend training. The Torch training will cover aspects such as:

- Sight loss awareness
- Safe guiding techniques
- The impact of loss
- Christian response
- Listening skills
- Good practice for befriending
- Case studies

This training will usually be delivered locally - but if appropriate it can take place at Torch House in Market Harborough or the Torch Holiday and Retreat Centre in West Sussex. Your Torch contact will talk to you about what seems to be the best way to arrange the training for your scheme. There may be a local agency, such as a sight loss charity, which might like to be involved in some way, perhaps providing some elements of the training. We would certainly encourage contact with local organisations as this can really help the scheme to grow.

If there is a local resource centre or display of equipment for people with sight loss it would be really good to arrange for your volunteers to visit to find out what is available. These centres are often run by sight loss charities, but vary from area to area. It is useful for your volunteers to be aware of what is available and they may also like to assist their clients in the future to visit the centre to try equipment for themselves.

4. Launching the scheme

Commission the volunteers and the scheme

Once the volunteers are trained and the scheme is ready to be launched, it is good for the volunteers and the whole scheme to be recognised through a commissioning at a service in front of the whole church. It is a new ministry which is being launched, so it is right that these volunteers are being sent out by the church - and also right that the congregation is aware of this so that they are able to pray for and support the volunteers in what they are doing.

The commissioning can also be used as the start of publicity about the new scheme - perhaps through local newsletters, press, etc, to let the local community know about what the volunteers are offering.

Link up with local health and social care professionals

Most referrals of clients to the scheme will usually come from local health and social care professionals. Torch will make initial contact with many of these agencies in your area and will assist you to develop ongoing relationships so that people with sight loss who would benefit from *Journeying With* are put in touch with your scheme.

The most useful contacts to bring future referrals to the scheme are usually:

- Eye clinics in local hospitals
- Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (if there is one)
- Staff within sensory impairment teams of health and social service departments
- Local sight loss charities
- Local opticians
- GP surgeries
- Local Chaplains and Parish Nurses (if you have one)

It is usually best to make personal contact with these agencies rather than relying solely on leaflets and printed publicity. By keeping in touch personally with these contacts it will help to maintain a good working relationship and they are much more likely to refer people to the scheme. Take along your printed information with your scheme's contact information

and referral forms, but always try to keep that personal contact if at all possible.

Promote the scheme locally

Take a look at the geographical area you have decided your scheme will cover and think about opportunities to promote the scheme in different ways. For example:

- Local churches and church networks
- Local groups such as Age UK and U3A, etc.
- Social groups in your area
- Local radio and newspapers
- Newsletters
- Church websites
- Think about holding a 'launch' event to gain publicity

Torch has guidance on creating publicity material, and ensuring that all your information is available in accessible formats such as large print.

Publicity Material and referral forms

Torch has standard leaflets explaining the *Journeying With* scheme which can be adapted for local use through the use of a sticker with the local scheme contact details.

There is also a standard referral form which can be produced with your local contact details. This is useful for giving to local health and social care professionals or anyone who is likely to refer clients to the scheme. The form can also be sent out as an electronic document which some professionals find easier than having the paper forms.

Methods of referral

Most schemes will be happy to accept referrals by post, email or by telephone. Often these will be from professionals, but they may also be from clients themselves or family members, etc. It is important to allow the possibility of clients referring themselves, so remember that they may not be able to see well enough to fill in a form - a telephone call may be a much better option.

5. Up and Running!

Once everything is in place and the scheme is launched, you will be ready for your first clients to be referred. This is the point at which you can begin the important work of befriending those on the sight loss journey and to journey with them.

Who can be referred?

Journeying With is for people over 18 who are experiencing sight loss and living in a scheme area. The aim is to reach people at an early stage in their sight loss journey if possible, as a little support at an early stage can make a big difference.

However, everyone's experience is unique and the progression of sight loss differs from person to person, so there is flexibility to respond to the individual situation. For example, someone's ability to cope with sight loss may be hugely affected by the loss of a spouse and having to face the difficulty of managing to do things alone.

When a client is referred

When you receive a referral of a new client, whether by post, email or telephone, you should have received contact details and a basic picture of the client's situation. This information should be kept safe and kept confidential.

Before a volunteer is matched with a new client it is good to find out as much background information as you can. Ideally the client should be visited by the Volunteer Coordinator first so that the situation can be assessed with a view to making sure this is a suitable referral, to check for any potential areas of risk, and particularly to build up a good picture on which to base the befriending relationship. (A 'Matching Assessment' form is available from Torch to help with this.)

Match clients and volunteers carefully

Finding a good match between a client and a volunteer will make an enormous difference to the success of the befriending relationship. Things to consider are:

- Find out a little about the client's interests/ background and try to match a volunteer who will share some of these interests
- Check out the geography - it is much easier if a volunteer lives within easy travelling distance
- Try to accompany the befriender on the first visit if possible - and talk through what the client would like to gain from the six month period
- Agree with the client and befriender when visits will take place - (usually one visit a week)

Make sure that both the client and befriender know who to contact should there be any problems.

Ongoing support for volunteers

Each befriending arrangement should be reviewed by the Volunteer Coordinator keeping in touch with the volunteer - at the beginning, after 6 weeks, 3 months and at the ending of the 6 month period. The Volunteer Coordinator should also contact the client at these times to check whether they have any concerns, and to see how the arrangement is working for them.

It is good for leaders/Volunteer Coordinators to aim to meet together with all the volunteers, about once every six weeks. This gives room to support each other, share good news and ideas, and also to share any difficulties. It is important to have time for the volunteers to raise any issues for prayer, and to pray together as a group.

Any confidential issues should be dealt with on an individual basis rather than in this group setting.

The focus of each befriending relationship

Almost from the beginning of a befriending relationship, it is important to start thinking about the ending of the relationship! The reason for this is to start to focus on how the client can be in a better position at the end of the six month period than at the beginning.

Journeying With befriending is aiming for the client to have the opportunity to talk through their concerns, begin to come to terms with some of the impact of sight loss and hopefully to be able to move towards a more positive position where they have access to the support, services and

contacts they need to be able to live life more fully. It is important that the client does not become dependent on the volunteer's visits, but that the visits are a way of enabling the client to move towards a position of greater independence and inclusion in community in whatever way suits that individual.

It is also important to remember that the whole process must be very much led by the client. The volunteer's role is to listen and not to impose their own ideas on the client. The client may need time to come to terms with their deteriorating eyesight, and may be struggling to cope with their loss. Each individual is different, so time and listening are key.

If, during the six-month befriending period, a client can be linked up with support within their own community, this will make a lasting difference to their ability to cope and to continue to be part of their community. The volunteer could help them to make contact with local groups such as church groups, services run by local sight loss charities, lunch clubs, Torch services, local transport schemes, telephone support, etc, and if possible to take the first steps of linking into these. It is really helpful to talk through these types of possibilities when the volunteers meet together as a team - to share ideas and information about what might be available locally.

Finally, *Journeying With* is an openly Christian scheme. Volunteers will have joined as an expression of their Christian faith. However, it is central to the scheme that all volunteers always respect two principles: firstly, that any discussions of faith must be in response to the leading of the client; secondly, this is not an opportunity to impose our faith on anyone! A Christian attitude and a willingness to respond to questions about faith, or to respond to a request for prayer, are central to the scheme.

The completion of each befriending relationship

The ending of each befriending relationship is important. To avoid possible difficulties and work towards a 'positive ending' try to:

- Make it clear from the start that the befriending is for a limited six month period
- Agree with the client some aims at the beginning so that they can look back and celebrate what has been achieved
- Try to avoid dependency on the volunteer - a good ending would involve the client now being involved with their community / church and ongoing networks of support

- If a client and volunteer have become friends and decide that they want to keep in touch in some way after the six month period is over, that is fine. However, to allow the volunteer to move on and be available to befriend a new client, it needs to be made clear that the actual befriending time is over and that this is now simply a personal friendship - not part of the *Journeying With* scheme.

The hope of *Journeying With* is that at the end of the befriending period, the individual will be better placed to face the future - in relationship with others, connected into a supportive community rather than the loneliness and isolation which too often accompanies sight loss.

The progress and outcome should be led by the individual client and responded to accordingly. We cannot impose our own views, we simply journey with the client through the difficulties, knowing that sharing that journey will make a difference.

And finally...

Hopefully this guide will help you through the stages of setting up and coordinating a *Journeying With* scheme. If you have any questions which are not covered here, please ask your Torch contact who will be happy to help.

Longer term guidance for running a scheme, and the role of the church is available in the 'Handbook for Churches' on with.torchtrust.org

Please always remember that you are being supported throughout this process by Torch so please get in touch at any time.

May God richly bless you in this important work you are doing.



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