

**RADIO READING  
RESOURCES FOR  
STATIONS**



# **Accessibility shopping list**

Readying your station for  
volunteers with disabilities



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RPH Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands on which we work and live and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. We embrace diversity in working to build inclusive and connected communities.

These resources have been created by [Kim Stewart](#) for RPH Australia utilising original materials developed by the Community Media Training Organisation (CMTO). Produced with the assistance of the [Department of Communications and the Arts](#) through the [Community Broadcasting Foundation](#).

We also thank our project partners: [Tagged PDF](#) and the [CMTO](#).

## What next after deciding to go accessible?

Congratulations! You've made the decision to make it easier for people with disabilities to be involved in your station. What now?

The first thing you can do is upskill yourself and your volunteers to understand the different ways of doing things that people may use. You can talk to people with disabilities who already volunteer to find what works for them, or you can approach organisations that assist people with disabilities for information or training.

If you are targeting people on the autism spectrum, you can talk to service organisations about what to expect and how you can make their involvement easier. If your new volunteers are likely to have mobility issues, such as people from older age groups, you can get advice from senior citizens organisations about what you will need to make it easier for them to get about in your station and use your technology. If you expect that you may have some new volunteers with intellectual or learning differences, there are organisations that can advise and train you.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.visionaustralia.org>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bca.org.au/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://guidedogsaustralia.com/>

If your target group is people with a vision impairment or blindness, talk to [Vision Australia](#)<sup>1</sup>, [Blind Citizens Australia](#)<sup>2</sup>, [Guide Dogs](#)<sup>3</sup> or any local service organisation you know. These organisations are helpful for learning about skills you might need to work with people who are vision impaired or blind, as well as technology that could help them.

Bear in mind that changes you make to be more accessible to people with disabilities make things easier for other volunteers too!

**Picture Below:** 4RPH has purchased technology that maximises the accessibility for all their volunteers. They have on-air scheduling software that is simple to use and can be read with a screen reader in their studio.



## Improving communication skills

One of the first things to upskill your volunteers with is language and communication.

The way you listen and talk to people is key to successful collaborations. Respect and kindness is welcome in every situation and it's a good idea to choose a volunteer with these skills to coordinate your volunteer inductions with new volunteers.

In this section we look at communication adaptations you can practice with people with specific communication needs, including those on the autism spectrum, those with cognitive issues or learning disability and people who are blind or vision impaired.

These tips for good communication can also apply to other volunteers and form the basis of improving communication in a lot of everyday situations.

There is a long history of poor language used to describe people with disabilities. As media organisations, we have the opportunity to correct false assumptions and disabling language in our productions and everyday practice.

Many media organisations, including the [Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance](#)<sup>4</sup>, specify care with language, saying journalists should not “place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.”

### What is “person-first” language?

**Everyone wants to be seen as persons with inherent worth, regardless of their race, class, gender, sexuality or disability.**

That's why person-first language is appropriate.

For example: “Person with a vision impairment or blindness” instead of “blind person”.

But this is not a rule for everyone and when in doubt always ask how a person prefers to be called.

For instance [Autism Awareness Australia](#)<sup>1</sup> (AAA) say that many autistic people favour “identity-first” language because, it “reflects the belief that being autistic is a core part of a person's identity”.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.meaa.org/meaa-media/code-of-ethics/>

Good communication is a skill that can be learned and disability groups offer advice on language and communication. Some markers of good and respectful communication are:

- Speaking in a normal tone of voice
- Being polite and tolerant if things take a little longer
- Speak directly to the person, not to support workers or other people without a disability nearby
- Always ask the person what will help them with communication. Some people use devices, some can read braille.
- Never pretend to understand. It can be frustrating for the person talking to you. Try repeating what you think is being communicated in your own words
- Only refer to the person's disability if necessary or relevant
- Ask if a person needs assistance (for instance a person with vision impairment might like help with stairs or in a new environment)

**Picture right and above:** Radio 4RPH Producer, Steven Sparrow, who is blind, shows sighted trainees how the equipment is used. Steven is also a musician and music producer and has his own home studio.



## People with low vision, vision impairment or blindness

[Blind Citizens Australia](#)'s<sup>5</sup> Emma Bennison says that non-disabled people need to be aware that people who are blind are not “defined” by their condition and are people first. Don't restrict yourself to conversations about blindness, people who are blind or have vision impairments have interests just like you. At the station, good communication can help you avoid falls or bumps on the head:

- Communicating with a person with vision impairment may include describing or explaining visual elements, obstacles or actions for them. This is called “sighted guiding”. Vision Australia has some more advice about [sighted guiding](#)<sup>6</sup>
- Take the lead in offering an elbow to assist a person with blindness or low vision in a new environment or one with obstacles, respect their decision if they say no.
- In the studio, good communication can be reminding all colleagues while off-air what is happening next and when to be silent or speak. For instance, Kim, who co-hosts 'Only Human' with Steve Kerridge says “mics on” a second before turning them on, and clarifies pronunciation and turn taking in between speaking segments.

- Ask the new volunteer what help they might need from others, or what technology they have of their own to help them with electronic or written communications

Many people with low vision, vision impairment or blindness may have other conditions, including mobility issues or learning disability.

People on the autism spectrum have preferences about the names used to describe autism, including Autism, “on the spectrum”, ASD, or Asperger's.

Communicating with new volunteers with learning or intellectual disability or on the autism spectrum may involve some awareness of what works for them, and once again, asking each individual is helpful. Some things known to help clear communication include:

- Using concrete rather than abstract language and checking for understanding
- giving clear instructions, step by step if necessary
- having flexible and tolerant acceptance of differing levels of ability, learning speed and need for social chit-chat
- and knowing what situations over-stimulate or trigger anxiety reactions (eg. loud or crowded environments can be difficult).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bca.org.au/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.visionaustralia.org/information/family-friends-carers/guiding>

## What about accessible technology?

Adaptive technology is used by many people with vision impairments and blindness. Acquiring a screen reader on at least one of your computers is a useful improvement in access for volunteers with vision issues. Most people who are blind already use adaptive technology on their own devices and may be able to do program research or even editing on their own machines.



**Radio 4RPH  
Manager,  
Scott Black,  
says:**

“A lot of the implementation that we take considers the needs of our vision impaired and blind volunteers. Any changes to our technology have to work with systems they know. It might be braille labelling on certain things...we also include large print lettering, and we have screen reading software that can be set to any speed of listening. It’s also about instruments that have a lot of tactile buttons and physical knobs and switches as opposed to digital ones..for instance the VU meters have a physical needle and you can actually hear the click if it gets too loud”

## Can flexible timetabling help?

Some volunteers, with a disability or not, may have trouble working at a regular time every week for the same hours. This is an important question to ask new volunteers to determine how best to accommodate their needs and get the best out of their skills.

On-air timetabling obviously requires reliable weekly timeslots to be filled. A new volunteer who may find health issues or appointments challenge their regular appearance, can be encouraged to become part of a team, who support each other and decide on who delivers weekly programming. This configuration of team members of varying abilities and time commitments works well for the production team of Only Human at 4ZZZ.

Pre-production is also an option for new volunteers who want to contribute to on-air programming and have a voice, but are unable to fit into a regularly scheduled volunteering timetable. In that case, production training is a necessity. You can advise them to join your production team to learn on the job, or provide training in production that takes in their specific needs.

The [Community Media Training Organisation](#)<sup>7</sup> is developing training for volunteers with vision impairments or blindness with the help of veteran audio producers Steve Richardson and Paul Price from 4RPH.

Many activities at the station are not on-air and can be more flexible. Once again, the team configuration can work for off-air station duties that can accommodate the changing needs of all volunteers.

## What about changes to our building?

The notion that major renovations are required to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities is not often the case. Change can happen incrementally, over a number of years, and be focused on the particular needs of current volunteers with a view to new ones who may present themselves.



**Often changes are not structural, but involve technical or behavioural changes, and can often be low tech.**

For instance, at 3CR in Melbourne, a doorbell was installed at the accessible door so that other volunteers could assist people with mobility issues needing access and decisions about the locations of meetings take into consideration the needs of station participants who cannot easily access via stairs.

That said, decisions about structural changes can be made on a case by case basis. 4ZZZ in Brisbane purchased a small, movable ramp to accommodate the three steps that presented an access issue at studio level. A specialist volunteer was chosen to facilitate the work experience and volunteering needs of people with disabilities who presented themselves for participation, and a committee was set up to address grant needs for accessibility changes to the station building.

Melbourne's Syn Media decided to move their station from an old inaccessible building to an accessible location within a new Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology building, after concerns raised by volunteers.

<sup>7</sup> <http://cmtto.org.au/>



## What training do we all need?

Training your volunteers adds value to their volunteering experience, improving their skills and providing them with experiences transferrable to other environments.

Some of the training that will help your staff and volunteers adapt to a new volunteer group includes:

### Disability awareness training

Including some of the communication skills mentioned in this guide, local disability organisations may be able to provide you with a trainer to come to your station and present to your volunteers. The Australian Government's [Disability Awareness](#)<sup>8</sup> website provide free online training for people working with others with disabilities. The [Community Media Training Organisation](#)<sup>9</sup> can provide a webinar tailored to your station's needs, informed by the experiences of people with disabilities already working in community radio throughout Australia.

### First aid certificate

Always useful to have on hand someone with these skills for the benefit of all volunteers. If you have current volunteers who are unemployed, they may be able to

access subsidised first aid training via their job network provider

**Web accessibility training.** Useful for your station web developer or someone who is good with computers. This is a growth area and likely to provide employment opportunities for volunteers who undertake to learn web accessibility. Many are provided by universities. [GitHub has a comprehensive list](#)<sup>10</sup> of online accessibility courses, both free and paid.



<sup>8</sup> <https://disabilityawareness.com.au/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://cmta.org.au/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://github.com/mgifford/a11y-courses>

**Picture below:** 3CR's first all-day broadcast celebrating International Day of People with Disability included a live outside broadcast from Federation Square with Wheelchair Sports Victoria.

**From left to right:** Michael Smith, Rob Anderson, CEO Wheelchair Sports Victoria, Jodie Willmer, CEO Travellers Aid, Helen Gwilliam and Kon Kiryakudya, President, Wheelchair Handball Victoria.



**Picture above:** The Hackets have been the in-house rock band for several Disability Day broadcasts, and many a raucous performance at 3CR.



## Inclusion and accessibility at 3CR

Helen Gwilliam has volunteered at 3CR for close to two decades, is on their board, and is also General Manager at [Women with Disabilities Victoria](#).

Since 2009, Helen and others have organised an annual [Disability Day](#) broadcast, including an open-station event, to celebrate the International Day of People with a Disability.

She says accessibility changes to the station have been incremental. Some changes were as simple as installing doorbells, or braille on studio panels.

The station's culture of inclusion has been really important. Helen notes the presence of people with disabilities in every facet of the station's operation, from broadcasters to the board.

## About this resource

You can find more [Radio Reading Resources for stations](#) and for [volunteers](#) on our website.

We developed these community media training resources to support the Regional Development project, which aims to broaden the national reach of Radio Reading services to reach people with a print disability living in regional and remote areas.

RPH Australia is supporting stations, outside the current Radio Reading Network, to produce new, diverse, quality local programming made by and for people with a print disability in their community. [Contact us](#) to find out more.

## About us

RPH Australia is the peak body for the Radio Reading Network; community radio services dedicated to providing access to information for the estimated 5 million Australians with a print disability. We champion the rights of all people to access printed material, empowering equal participation in cultural, political and social life.

Radio Reading programming aims to meet the information needs of people with a print disability (those who are unable to effectively access printed material due to visual, physical or cognitive impairment, age or low literacy).

It provides a voice for people in our community with a print disability and caters directly to their information needs and interests.

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Turning print into sound



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