



INFORMATION SHEET

REHABILITATION OFFICER' ROLE

Rehabilitation Officers who work with visually impaired people are normally employed by the Local Authority Social Services or those who work specifically with visually impaired children are usually joint funded by Education and Health, and are often called Inclusion Officers. Some Rehabilitation Officers work for Voluntary Organisations for blind and partially sighted people.

The Rehabilitation Officer normally work with individuals, who are newly blind or visually impaired, the majority of which are elderly, Rehabilitation Officers working with children are called ROVIC, Rehabilitation Officer Visually Impaired Children. A small number specialise and work with visually impaired children and young people and those individuals who have learning difficulties, or who are deaf or hard of hearing, or have complex needs.

The work undertaken by Rehabilitation Officers varies from one authority to another, but generally, their role, is to provide specialist assessment, practical training and advice, to all types of visually impaired people.

Rehabilitation Officers provide training and support in relation to:

- Teaching how to cross roads, independent travel, guiding skills, formal mobility training. Advise about the right type of white cane and help decide if a guide dog would be suitable.
- Demonstrate a range of special equipment, telephone skills, communication aids and skills.

- Instruct in safe cooking methods, labelling and highlighting switches, cookers and microwaves to make them useable by those with little or no sight.
- Advice and training on living skills pouring hot and cold drinks, food preparation, serving, eating out, diet, laundry, cleaning the home, washing, bathing, hair, nails, make-up, clothes, dressing.
- Provide advice about the use of magnifiers and low vision aids. Explain the value of good task lighting and positioning.
- Advise about design and modifications to specific environments to make them more accessible to those with visual impairment.
- Provide support and advice to parents of visually impaired children including support groups, societies, clubs, benefits, travel concessions, car badge schemes, talking newspapers etc.

Rehabilitation Officers visit client in their own homes, although some are based in specially resourced centres. Programmes of rehabilitation for individuals are usually developed in discussion with clients and are based on an agreed assessment of needs.

People do not usually need to be registered blind or partially sighted to receive help from specialist workers for visually impaired people.

Listening

Individuals experience feelings of loss, caused directly or indirectly by a visual impairment. Some Rehabilitation Workers will be able to offer informal counselling, while others will refer people to Social Workers or counselling services.

Providing information on the benefits and concessions available

Rehabilitation Officers can provide information regarding other services and networks for visually impaired individuals, including low vision services, Department of Social Security benefits, voluntary organisations, telephones for the blind etc.

Specialist Assessment

Advice can be provided to enable the visually impaired individual to overcome practical and environmental difficulties, establishing how someone uses his/her vision and making recommendations to help the individual to use his/her sight more effectively. Advice can be offered on adapting a person's environment by improved lighting, colour contrasts and low vision techniques (which often cost very little).

Teaching Guiding Skills

Sighted Guide techniques can be taught by the Rehabilitation Officer to help staff and carers guide visually impaired people who can walk or use a wheelchair.

Providing Training

Rehabilitation Officers can facilitate training for blind and partially sighted people covering:

- **Mobility:** Independence training indoors and outdoors. Including hints and tips on moving about safely, with or without white sticks (red/white sticks for deaf blind people), and other mobility issues (Guide dog training is provided by Guide Dogs for the Blind Association). Children with severe visual impairment should receive mobility training, this is normally provided within an education setting.
- **Daily living skills:** helping people to learn or re-learn skills, such as cooking, cleaning, care of clothes, etc.
- **Communication:** Braille, Moon, deaf blind manual, keyboard skills, use of cassette recorders, telephone etc.

Some Rehabilitation Officers, will teach staff working with adults with learning difficulties, how to work with a particular person.

Recommending Equipment And Teaching People How To Use It

Providing advice on equipment to enhance an individual's independence:

Daily living equipment, clocks, watches, liquid level indicators, raised markings for appliances and other household gadgets.

Leisure activity advice, talking books, talking newspapers, games and toys, etc.

Disclaimer: Information sheets have been produced to provide information and advice for the parents of visually impaired children. Changes may occur in theories and legislation, however, the information sheets have been written in good faith, as a general guidance tool. If you have any questions with regard to issues raised by the information sheet, please contact the National Blind Children's Society, National Family Support and Information Manager.