



Article

Surveying guided sports– Understanding practices and experiences of blind, partially sighted and deafblind sportspeople, and sighted guides

Marit Hiemstra^{1*} and Christopher R. Matthews¹

Received: 12th December 2024; Accepted: 29th May 2025; Published: 27th October 2026

Abstract: To date, the practices and experiences of participants in guided sports– physical activities involving people with sight loss and sighted guides – have been predominantly researched in small-scale, ethnographic studies. While these studies offer an important first step in detailing often powerful, compelling and personal stories, they are also limited by the potential for producing findings that only reflect ‘part of the broader story’. As a second step to build on these accounts, this paper explores practices and experiences of a wider group of guided sport participants (n=56) through an online qualitative survey. The findings offer insights into why people engage in such activities, how they typically connect with one another and what their experiences are like when practicing sports together. The data contains numerical and open-ended responses, which were analysed descriptively and thematically. Based on this, we suggest future steps for research which extends this work and will help those involved in organising and promoting guided sports and enhance their efforts to make such activities more enjoyable, inclusive and accessible.

Keywords: sporting partnerships; collaborative sports; sight loss; qualitative

Introduction

Social scientific research describing and theorising the place of sport in the lives of people with sight loss is reasonably well-developed in terms of its volume, variety and quality (for examples see, Alcaraz-Rodríguez et al., 2021; Green & Miyahara, 2007; Hall et al., 2026; Ilhan et al., 2021; Jaarsma et al., 2014; Lieberman, 2002, Lieberman et al., 2023; Macbeth & Powis, 2023; Powis & Macbeth, 2020; Powis & Macbeth, 2023; Saulynas et al., 2022; Strongman et al., 2023). A subsection of this work which focuses on guided sports or co-sports, that is, forms of cooperative sporting interactions between blind, partially sighted or deafblind sportspersons, and sighted guides, is relatively immature in comparison. Within the last 20 years, there has been a more sustained focus on the shared practices and experiences of these sportspeople. There are now studies in recreational sports focusing on tandem cycling (Hammer, 2015, 2017), climbing (Simone & Galatolo, 2019, 2021), hiking (Macpherson, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2016), and running (Alcaraz-Rodríguez et al., 2018; Allen-Collinson et al., 2023; Barbareschi et al., 2024; Hall et al. 2022; Hiemstra & Rana, 2023; Hiemstra et al., 2026). One publication focuses specifically on high-performance para-alpine skiing, para-athletics, para-cycling, and para-triathlon (Manella & Bundon, 2023), while another is an autoethnographic account where the authors reflect on their experiences as a Paralympic skier and a skiing guide (Bundon & Manella, 2022).

These works were the first to explore the joint practices and relationships between sportspeople with sight loss and sighted guides. The scholars typically relied on methods such as (auto)ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, or in-depth narrative interviews focused on a single sport (with the exception of Manella & Bundon, 2023). There is much commendable scholarship across this work. This is especially the case in the use of phenomenologically informed social theory, which has helped ‘pick out’ details of the experiences of those involved in such activities, and those of the researcher as ‘apprentice’, cultural ‘insider’, or immersed participant. While these studies provide rich qualitative insights and often deliver powerful, compelling and personal stories, they are also limited by the potential for producing findings that only reflect ‘part of the broader story’.

Due to such similar methodological designs and the focus on micro-sociological interactions, less is known about common characteristics, similarities, differences, opportunities and barriers that these sportspeople may share as a group and across sports. In other words, the above studies present an important first step in the exploration of guided sport practices and experiences, but their relatively small study groups leave several key questions about broader structures and experiences unaddressed. For example, we do not know, in broad terms, who takes part, who does not, what different sports people practice, how they commence or when and how they drop out. We also know little about wider structures that support or prevent participation, whether there are prevailing ideas about good or bad practices, or what might be common experiences within different sports.

Against this background, we develop three key points in this paper: 1) A brief overview of the key empirical findings in the literature on guided sport partnerships and practices – *the first step* in the scholarship. 2) An empirical contribution of various practices and experiences from a broader group of guided sport practitioners – *a second step*. And 3) we build on these contributions to suggest *future steps* for research, policy and practice, which extend this work. After reviewing the key findings from the literature, we describe how the current project aimed to advance that work. We then detail the qualitative survey methodology developed and discuss our empirical contributions.

The important first steps in understanding guided sports

The existing research on guided sports repeatedly draws out overarching themes. One key finding is the important role of effective communication between the sportsperson with sight loss and the sighted guide in ensuring safe and enjoyable experiences. This communication includes both verbal and nonverbal (using physical cues or sporting equipment) methods, which work in concert. Barbareschi et al. (2024) illustrate this with a guided running example, where the guide signals a right turn with the verbal cue ‘right turn in 5 meters,’ followed by a gentle pull on a tether to indicate the sharpness of the turn. Similarly, in tandem cycling, Hammer (2015) describes how directions can be given verbally or through the lean of the bike. For communication to be effective, it must be co-ordinated. This means they are learnt, shaped, negotiated, and refined over time by building shared understandings and techniques (Allen-Collinson et al., 2023; Barbareschi et al., 2024; Hall et al., 2022; Hammer, 2015, 2017; Hiemstra & Rana, 2023; Hiemstra et al., 2026; Simone & Galatolo, 2019, 2021).

Such communication, and the understanding it develops, overlaps with a second key theme in the literature: partnership and teamwork. Simone and Galatolo (2019) demonstrated the importance of collaborative efforts and shared responsibility in guided climbing, where a sighted trainer remains on the ground, providing verbal instructions to guide a climber with sight loss toward footholds and handholds. The trainer observes the overall route and the climber’s movements, while the climber orients towards tactile feedback from the wall and verbal cues from the trainer. The climb, therefore, involves a

series of teamwork-moments wherein both persons contribute sensory input and effort. In the context of guided walking, Macpherson (2009, 2012) shows how the hiker and guide develop a shared understanding of navigating the route through an interplay of sensory perceptions. She illustrates this with a situation in which the walker with sight loss holds the guide's upper arm. Walking in this position can help amplify nonverbal, physical communication, as the hiker senses upcoming hazards by feeling tension in the guide's movements. Conversely, the guide can understand something of the hiker's experience of the walk by interpreting shifts in their grip and body posture. This highlights that navigating an environment is not solely the guide's responsibility. Rather, these studies and other scholarship emphasise that this is a joint effort; key to guided sport partnerships and the sense of teamwork.

A third, and again connected, finding from the studies is the development of camaraderie, friendship and a sense of belonging. Hall et al. (2022) find that supportive relationships in guided running help the development of deep friendships between participants. Similarly, Hiemstra and Rana (2023) describe how running partners can develop a close friendship and a sense of inclusion through spending time together and building mutual trusting relationships. Hammer (2015, 2017) also describes that involvement in tandem cycling groups enhances participants' mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing, and their sense of community and belonging. When considered as a whole, a prevailing message from the current literature is that involvement in guided sports is largely experienced as positive by both sportspeople with sight loss and sighted guides.

A final theme in the literature fits into 'traditional' disability studies, which seek to emphasise how societies and structures can 'disable' certain (groups of) people. This theoretical and political starting point moves away from the understanding of disability as a medical or individual issue. In guided sport literature, such ideas are evident in the focus on persistent barriers to participation – one significant challenge is finding available and suitable guides (Hall et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2026; Jaarsma et al., 2014; Mannella & Bundon, 2023). This results in it being common that sportspeople with sight loss cannot participate in events or training because of guide scarcity. Even after securing a guide, further challenges may arise. Hall et al. (2022) note that guides need to have the necessary skills and athleticism to match or exceed the sportsperson with sight loss' performance level. This is particularly crucial in long-distance and high-intensity sports like ultramarathons, mountain climbing, or triathlons, where finding a guide with the appropriate expertise can be especially difficult (Barbareschi et al., 2024; Jaarsma et al., 2014; Manella & Bundon, 2023; Saulynas et al., 2022; Simone & Galatolo, 2019).

These four key themes capture important elements of guided sport experiences that are repeatedly presented in the academic literature. However, due in part to methodological similarities, they necessarily tell a partial story. This might have two distinct but interrelated reasons. First, the researchers predominantly used methods like (auto)ethnographic fieldwork or in-depth narrative interviews. We tentatively suggest that such methods rely in part on finding, and researching, relatively successful and sustainable relationships. We therefore tentatively suggest that the 'failed' or unsustainable of such relationships may not have the constancy or longevity needed for them to being the basis for long-term or even short-term observations. As such, some of the above findings, especially those on the predominantly positive experiences, teamwork and camaraderie, might be patterned by the chosen methodology. Second, such qualitative approaches are typically employed in small-scale study groups with the aim of acquiring rich, detailed descriptions and personal accounts. An associated limitation of such approaches is that they potentially produce findings that are idiosyncratic. This means scholars correctly avoid making claims about how such findings can be considered as representative of groups outside of the research sample.

As such, certain accounts offer minimal information about commonalities, distinctions, opportunities, challenges and other characteristics, if any, these sportspeople share as a group across different sports.

In an attempt to advance this first step, and in some ways addressing these two limitations, we used a qualitative online survey. This approach helped us to take a second step in guided sport scholarship which is to further the current literature by documenting practices and experiences of a broader group of practitioners than has been researched before. The survey data resulted in three main findings addressing the following questions: 1) What motivates people to participate in guided sports? 2) How do people involved in guided sports connect with one another? 3) what can be documented about people's experiences of guided sports from a wider sample? This survey complements, challenges, and expands existing findings, while simultaneously provide the groundwork for research.

Materials and Methods

Participants

Blind, partially sighted, deafblind, and sighted practitioners of guided sports were recruited for this study. Participants could come from any sporting level or geographical location, but they had to be at least 18 years old to provide informed consent. With the scarce research on the wider landscape of guided sports that could direct us to a specific community, group or organisation, we decided to distribute the questionnaire through as many pathways as possible in order to reach a wide range of people, perspectives, and experiences (Braun et al., 2021). We did so via flyers with information and a QR code to make the questionnaire 'findable' online. The survey was shared across social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, and Instagram, and through organisations that support blind, partially sighted and deafblind people such as *Zichtbaar Sportief*, *Stichting Running Blind*, *Moet je Horen* audio-magazine, and *Koninklijke Visio* in the Netherlands, and in the UK through My Sight Notts, England Athletics, and Guide Dogs UK. Additionally, MH circulated the survey amongst her personal and professional network of guided sport practitioners.

Questionnaire

Institutional ethics was granted by Nottingham Trent University. After obtaining informed consent, the participants were presented with a 32-point questionnaire available in Dutch and English. It consisted of 11 questions about basic demographics (e.g. Which description suits your involvement in guiding or guided sports best? What best describes your gender?), 11 questions about the participant's sporting background (e.g. How long have you been involved in your guided sport or sports? Please provide details) and, in order to pick up on some of the extant themes in the literature, seven questions about their experiences of being part of a guided sport pair (e.g. How does it make you feel to practise your sport or sports together?). The remaining three questions were about participation in future studies. The majority of the demographic questions were closed-response or 'click-box', with an 'other – please specify' option. The remaining questions were formulated to elicit open-ended responses.

In aiming for linguistic consistency between Dutch and English, the questions were formulated with careful consideration given to cultural and linguistic nuances. For example, the term 'guide' posed a challenge in translation, as there is no appropriate equivalent in Dutch. While translations of 'guide' such as *gids* (which is often used in context of a 'tour guide') or *begeleider* (closer to the term 'assistant' or 'helper') exist, they carry different connotations and are not commonly used in the context of guided sports. Given that *buddy* is widely recognised and used in the Netherlands within such contexts, we used this term to

refer to sporting guides in the Dutch survey. Despite these efforts, we accept there may be certain differences in how the surveys were presented and interpreted. To minimise this, we provided an introduction outlining the study's purpose and focus, and included a photo of the first author (MH), who is an active guide runner, in a guide top with ALT text and supportive clip-art images of activities such as guided climbing and tandem cycling.

Most questions were the same for sportspersons with sight loss and sighted guides; the exception came for the 11 questions regarding their sports-specific profile. The wording of these questions was revised following feedback from a sportsperson with sight loss who pre-read the survey. For example, sportspersons with sight loss were asked, "in which sport(s) are you guided or have you been guided?". Conversely, sporting guides were presented the question "in which sport are you guiding or have you been guiding?" The questions, in this wording, specifically addressed participants' roles in guided sports.

Once participants reached the webpage, they were provided with a participant information sheet and were requested their consent via a consent form. Participants could complete the questionnaire at a time and place that was convenient for them. We explicitly mentioned that they were free to stop at any time without consequences by closing the tab. They were also free to skip questions they did not wish to answer. The questionnaire was accessible from 26 September 2023 until we removed the link on 30 July 2024, after two further calls for participation and the observation that no further responses were received.

Data analysis

MH analysed the numeric data to capture broad frequencies and patterns in the sample. By counting the frequency of different values and answers, MH gained descriptive insights into the basic distribution and characteristics of the data, which helped tentatively identify patterns and relationships within it. In particular, counting occurrences related to participants' characteristics was helpful to understand important elements of their demographic makeup and sports-specific profile. While the sample is the largest to date to explore the experiences of both sportspersons with sight loss and guides, the qualitative nature of the survey means that it was not designed to deliver generalisable claims via statistical analysis.

The main focus of this study was around the qualitative findings. MH analysed the content of the qualitative data by translating all Dutch data into English and she familiarised herself with the dataset through several readings of the responses. Following Bryman (2016), she sought out reoccurring themes, issues and ideas, highlighted them, and examined where they connected to key findings in literature around guided sports. This approach allowed her to identify common understandings and experiences and find 'new' ones raised by participants. An example of how MH analysed the qualitative data:

Q - Is verbal communication important in your guiding sport or sports? If so, why and in what ways?

A - Yes, both for building trust and a good rapport and for quickly passing on key information, especially if running amongst others or in more challenging circumstances.

'Building trust', 'building a good rapport', and 'passing on key information' are key empirical details in this particular response. These, then, according to MH's interpretation, link to concepts, such as 'trust', 'familiarity', and 'communication', which prompted reading about these themes. This reading further informed her understanding of the data and its subsequent analysis. This work provided the foundation upon which the second author (CRM) offered feedback and insights aimed at refining, developing and documenting the analysis that is presented below. All identifying details have been altered or removed, and

pseudonyms are used in the analysis. Table 1 provides basic demographic and sport-specific information of the participants we quote in the discussion.

Table 1. Demographic and sport specific information of participants

Jan	Late 40s, hobbyist runner and rower with Usher syndrome. Has nine years in running, two years in rowing. Based in the Netherlands.
Hugo	Early 70s, hobbyist guide runner with seven years of experience. Based in the Netherlands.
Jill	Early 60s, amateur runner with sight loss, occasionally goes climbing, sailing, paddleboarding, and water skiing. Based in the UK.
Sarah	Late 30s, blind runner who has been competing for 18 years. Occasionally involved in skiing. Based in the UK.
Julie	Late 50s, amateur guide runner with two years of experience. Based in the UK.
Adam	Mid 50s, hobbyist tandem pilot with five years of cycling experience. Based in the UK.
Grace	Early 50s, amateur guide runner with seven years of experience. Based in Ireland.
Alexis	Late 20s, hobbyist guide runner with two years of experience. Based in the UK.
Paul	Mid 60s, runner and archer with severe sight loss, 10 years of experience in running, two years in archery. Partakes on amateur level in both sports. Based in Northern Ireland.
Roza	Late 20s, amateur competitor runner with severe sight loss. Has eight years of running experience and occasionally goes climbing, cycling, swimming, kayaking, and horse riding. Based in the UK.
Jamie	Early 30s, former professional guide in triathlon and hiking for 11 years, now a hobbyist. Based in the UK.
Sophie	Late 40s, hobbyist guide runner with 10 years of experience. Based in the UK.
Sonia	Late 40s, amateur runner and cyclist with sight loss, three years of experience in both sports. Based in the UK.
Hannah	Early 20s, semi-pro sailor, climber, and skier with sight loss. Competing for three years, with eight years of total experience. Based in the UK.
Lyla	Late 30s, professional cyclist with sight loss competing for seven years. Based in the UK.
Jack	Late 40s, hobbyist guide runner and tandem pilot with one year of experience. Based in the UK.

Given this brief insight into our work, our analytical techniques are characterised by their interactive, interpretative and reflexive nature, meaning that we continuously went back and forth between the data, existing literature and empirical themes. In other words, this type of analysis represents an iterative, reflexive process, wherein concepts are sensitised to data (see Blumer, 1969 and Matthews, 2025, for broad discussions around this point). Below, we present the results of the frequency and content analysis, which we compiled into a broad analytical frame that provides insights into the participants’ practices and experiences, and the extant literature. In that regard, some of the findings confirm elements of the four broad themes described in the literature review above, and others show complexities and tensions.

Results

Participants

The sample consists of 56 sports practitioners, including 15 sportspeople with sight loss and 41 sighted guides, aged between 26 and 73 years ($M = 49.6$, $SD = 12.6$; average age based on responses from 53 participants, as three answers were missing). A basic descriptive statistical analysis showed that 30 are self-identified females, 25 are self-identified males, and one person preferred not to disclose their gender. Among the 55 participants who disclosed their gender, all identified as cisgender. 37 respondents self-reported British nationality, followed by 11 Dutch, 4 Irish, 1 Polish, 1 British-Polish, 1 American and 1 Lithuanian. The analysis revealed a relatively homogeneous group in terms of race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation and geographical location. More specifically, the majority of the respondents identified as white ($n=47$), heterosexual ($n=52$),

secular (n=38), and all of them stated that they live in a country commonly classified as part of the 'Global North'. See Appendix Table 1 for further details about their basic demographic profile.

A sport-specific profile of the participants highlighted their commitment to guided sports. Basic descriptive statistical analysis showed that respondents participate in 23 different forms of guided sport. The analyses revealed that the vast majority engaged in running (n=44) and at a hobbyist, amateur, or amateur-competitive level (n=47). Precisely half of the participants are involved in a single activity (n=28), while the other half are engaged in two or more (n=28). The majority of the practitioners is affiliated with an organisation or sporting club (n=41). A content analysis of the open-ended responses regarding the duration of involvement showed participation from less than a year to over two decades, with frequencies ranging from daily practices to occasionally (a few times per year). See Appendix Table 2 for further details about their activity specific profile.

While the survey produced various insights, there were three key areas which could be well evidenced and thus used to develop or extend the existing literature on guided sports. As such, the following analysis is a second step which builds on the foundation laid in the literature review. We address the following three questions. 1) What motivates people to participate in guided sports? 2) How do people involved in guided sports connect with one another? And 3) what can be documented about their experiences of guided sports from a wider sample? We will now discuss these in detail.

What motivates people to participate in guided sports?

Participants cited a range of motivations for engaging in guided sports – some were shared between guides and sportspeople with sight loss, and others were unique. Both guides and sportspeople with sight loss mentioned opportunities to meet new people, building social networks, and developing friendships, as well as maintaining and improving physical fitness as key motivations to be engaged. For instance, Jan, a runner and rower with Usher-syndrome (affecting both hearing and vision) said: "I was no longer able to work and wanted a way to stay fit and maintain social connections". Similarly, buddy Hugo stated he began running as a guide after retirement: "to meet people and run with a group".

Other motivations shared by practitioners included a sense of belonging and community, and the desire to build and maintain mental wellbeing. Sarah, a runner with sight loss, illustrated these various motivations, stating that she started running: "to lose weight, build self-esteem and confidence, make friends, and overcome depression".

Sportspersons with sight loss frequently reported being motivated to engage in guided sports because it provides the opportunity to access and enjoy sporting activities. Jill illustrated this point, explaining that she was invited to a sailing session with a guide and subsequently continued participating because she had "fallen in love with it [sailing]".

Sighted guides most often described a desire to help sports enthusiasts with sight loss access and enjoy sports. They also stressed motivations such as sharing a meaningful sporting experience with others, alongside finding 'guiding' both enjoyable and rewarding. The experiences of guide runner Julie and tandem pilot Adam are illustrative:

We had a VI [visually impaired] girl doing our local parkrun but she was walking with her mum. Her mum said that her daughter wanted to run but she herself wasn't fast enough to run with her. Four of us, from our running club, opted to do the EA [England Athletics] training course so that we could support her. That got us all into guiding.

I am passionate about cycling and would like more people to be offered opportunities to cycle, especially those who are unable to ride alone because of sight loss.

In addition to these motivations, a small number of guides reported being drawn to guided sports because it provides an opportunity to volunteer. Guide runner Grace explained:

I saw a request for a sighted guide on Facebook. I'm an optometrist who runs so I thought it would be something that I could do. Nobody else was responding to the request so I decided to respond. I enjoy volunteering anyway so this was a way to volunteer, run and use my skills as an optometrist.

Besides helping others and sharing sporting experiences, a handful of guides mentioned being inspired by their sporting partners' determination and athletic achievements. This then motivated them to stay involved while also improving their own performances. Speaking about her running partner, guide Alexis shared a personal account:

I found myself inspired by his determination and perspective on the world and was keen to support him achieve his dreams. Training for my first marathon myself at the time too meant I was already committed to putting the miles in and guiding brought a new level of responsibility, enjoyment and achievement to my training.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate the various ways in which people are motivated to engage in guided sports. Participants shared motivations ranging from maintaining physical fitness and expanding social networks to supporting others, volunteering and sharing meaningful sporting experiences. For many guides, participation also gave them inspiration, feelings of personal fulfilment and opportunities for improving their athletic performances.

How do people involved in guided sports connect with one another?

Most of the participants reported difficulties finding suitable and available guides. Paul, a runner and archer with sight loss, stated that: "when I started running, finding a guide was impossible. In archery, VI [visually impaired] participation is still niche, a boundary we are working to change".

Participants identified several reasons for the shortage of guides participants experience. A reoccurring theme was the belief that guiding is viewed as specialised or highly technical, which may discourage sighted sportspeople to try out guided sports. Roza, a runner with sight loss, reflected:

I think guiding is seen as something too difficult or technical and people are hesitant to try – therefore it is left to those seen as 'experts'. I would love for the understanding of visual impairment to grow to such an extent that anyone, for example at parkrun, could run with a VI [visually impaired] individual and be safe.

Similarly, triathlon guide Jamie suggested that misconceptions about the experience required to guide can create unnecessary barriers to involvement:

I think that it is sometimes overthought how much experience is needed to start guiding so that in itself can be a barrier to having enough guides to support athletes with visual impairments.

In contrast, about a quarter of the participants reported having access to a sufficient pool of guides. Guide runner Sophie shared an example from her local parkrun, where an abundance of guides made her question whether the real challenge is not a lack of guides, but finding the right match:

At my local parkrun we have more guides than VI [visually impaired] athletes and are able to offer a range of paces. So we have more than we need. Outside

parkrun I think it is harder to find people. But I'm not sure if it is a lack of guides or a problem with being able to get the right people together. In addition to finding someone the right pace, you ideally want to find someone who you click with and work well together to be able to achieve the VI athletes goals – that might be to run as fast as possible, or it might be to jog round and have a chat – or both or anything in between.

Sophie highlighted the importance of place and in-person encounters in connecting with sporting partners, using parkrun as an example. For the runners in this study, parkrun, a community-led running event typically held in public green spaces on Saturday mornings, was frequently identified as a setting where guides and runners with sight loss could meet and establish relationships.

Over half the participants in this study highlighted the importance of such face-to-face introductions in establishing guided sport partnerships. They mentioned locations such as organisations supporting guided sports, sports clubs and events like parkrun, as key sites for developing partnerships. The importance of such places is confirmed by another finding: participants involved in local sports clubs generally reported access to a larger pool of potential partners, whereas those without these connections often described greater difficulties in finding guides or sportspeople with sight loss. For example, all Dutch runners in this study are affiliated with the Running Blind foundation, who partners with local road and track running clubs to set up running groups across the country. Club members are frequently recruited and trained as guides, likely providing a steadier and larger pool of potential guide runners, compared to people searching independently without such resources available. Similarly, several participants highlighted the role of England Athletics' guide running course and database in introducing and connecting people. Jill, a runner with sight loss, described how such a programme created an opportunity that led her to take up running:

The opportunity came up where I live, because a group of runners completed a guide training course. They then came in search of some blind people to guide. I had always been interested in sport, but there was never the opportunity and here it was being presented to me! At the age of 55, I took up running.

These organisations and training opportunities offer an infrastructure of support systems that not only introduces people to guided sports, but they also seem to help establish a sustainable local network of sporting partners, which could potentially lead to the development of a 'critical mass' of practitioners, or even 'a culture of guided sports'.

Outside of these resources, nearly a third of all the participants turned to social media platforms like Facebook to find guides. Others shared that they rely more on word-of-mouth or personal referrals. Out of all 56 respondents, a dozen most frequently used a multi-channel approach, combining these methods to broaden and strengthen their networks of guided sport partners.

This section outlined the ways through which guided sports partnerships are formed, including face-to-face encounters, clubs, training programmes, social media and personal networks. Some participants reported a sufficient pool of guides, others continued to experience challenges in finding suitable sporting partners. The findings suggest that participation in guided sport is shaped by the availability of guides, opportunities to connect with compatible partners, the presence of local infrastructures that facilitate these connections, and, potentially, the extent to which misconceptions about guided sport are challenged.

What can be documented about the experiences of guided sports from a wider sample?

This section explores participants' experiences of the practices and relationships in guided sports. We framed this around the following themes: the emotional experience of being part of a guided sport partnership; successful guided sport partnerships, and unsuccessful guided sport partnerships.

The emotional experience of being part of a guided sport partnership

The majority of the participants described feeling joy and fulfilment associated with practicing sports together. Roza provided an account in which such positive sentiments were captured. She stated that she has had:

so very many positive experiences; I have lived a far more free, exciting, adventurous life thanks to guide running. I am so very grateful for this. It is the life I always wanted or dreamed of. The marathon I have run stand out: the way people not only show up for me in races but also in training. But perhaps the stand out memory is my first triathlon, which I did with no training, with a friend. It was a very, very happy day. We didn't stop smiling and worked as an amazing team.

In addition to feeling joyful and having fun while engaging in guided sports, the practitioners expressed a sense of equal partnership and teamwork. Guide runner Grace shared another personal account when asked how she felt during a guided run: "the sum of the parts is more than the individual parts. When you achieve something together there is an immense feeling of joy and satisfaction. It's the partnership that makes that extra difference, and the shared experience".

The feelings that emerged from engaging in sports together are closely tied to the participants' motivations for involvement in guided sports (previous section). Participants mentioned friendship and companionship, building mental and physical fitness together, and belonging to a group or community as key feelings emerging from guided sports, which then also motivated their continuing participation.

Sportspeople with sight loss also described feelings of freedom and independence. Climber, sailor and skier Hannah articulated these sentiments: "When I am on a boat and sailing I feel independent and free. It is lovely to have willing volunteers who later become friends to enable me to do what I love". Similarly, cyclist Lyla shared: "To get out on the tandem and train is massive for me. Otherwise, I'm confined to my garage all the time. It's something to look forward to and doesn't even feel like training."

Guides likewise described a range of positive emotional experiences associated with guided sports. These included feeling good because of them helping others, gaining new perspectives on life and their own sporting experiences, and feeling proud of their partners' performances. An illustrative excerpt came from guide runner Jack, "it is one of the best things I have done in my life and I am 47 years old. To help someone with no sight have the freedom of running is an amazing thing. And to learn about the life they lead, and what it is like to live with no sight, is also a lovely thing".

In contrast to predominantly positive sentiments, a small number of participants reported occasional negative feelings about their guided sport partnerships. One sportsperson with sight loss explicitly described feeling anxious and insecure when running with a particular guide. Two guides shared that guided sports can be stressful: both in relation to the guiding activity itself and the commitment to the partnership.

Successful guided sport partnerships

Sportspeople identified several key factors contributing to a successful partnership, with effective communication standing out. Nearly two-third emphasised the importance of attuned communication in fostering positive, productive, and enjoyable partnerships. They

distinguish verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. Verbal communication, on the one hand, seems to be key to practical aspects, such as arranging the activities, guiding during the activity (e.g., alerting to surface changes or hazards, and providing route commentary), and understanding each other's preferences and needs.

On the other hand, participants also emphasised the importance of nonverbal communication—such as holding hands or arms, using sporting aids like tethers or supportive frames, and interpreting sounds or physical cues—to understand the other person's physical and emotional experience and develop strong partnerships. This dynamic in a positive partnership was captured by guide runner Sophie:

Communication is important — most importantly to have a chat and understand what the runner is wanting to achieve, and for me to honestly say if I can provide what they want. Most days I can; some days she has to slow down for me! At London marathon, I was aware that my runner needed to eat more because the chat changed — you need to know your runner when doing longer distances. It was her first marathon, so I needed to be looking out for the signs that she might not even be aware of. At one point, I simply told her to eat and drink. But usually, our verbal communication is about how's work going, how are the kids etc — normal everyday chat just like everyone else! I also point out any steps or changes in surface. You work with your runner to know what they need and want. But it depends on the individual VI [visually impaired] runner.

This shows that effective communication between the partners involves a certain understanding of each other's needs, providing appropriate guidance and route details based on verbal and nonverbal communication, and engaging in casual conversation to build rapport.

In addition to communication, nearly half of the participants mentioned other key contributors to successful partnerships, and these overlap in part with their emotional experiences in guided sports, such as mutual trust and a sense of connection, familiarity or 'click'. The experiences of Roza were illustrative, arguing that:

guiding is very subtle; trust either is there or is not. It is important for trust to be between the two people but also the guide to trust themselves that they are safe and doing a good job. A good understanding on a personal level and a good base of communication need to exist.

This was echoed by Julie:

it is important to listen to what they need you to do. Asking questions about what they need and how they want you to support them. Having time for a chat and a laugh. I am always in awe that they trust me to look after them. That trust grows.

Taken together, participants commonly linked a positive and successful relationship to effective and attuned communication, trust, a sense of connection, and mutual understanding.

Unsuccessful guided sport partnerships

When we asked participants to describe key features of partnerships, they found unsuccessful, unsafe, or unpleasant, many mentioned ableist attitudes, such as patronising remarks, assumptions about the visual impairment, or the feeling of the guide is 'sacrificing time.' Sonia, a runner and cyclist with sight loss, shared a personal account:

I remember going out to cycle with a local blind society. They put an event on at an outdoor place not far from here. I remember jumping on the bike with a very attractive guy, thinking "this is great". He opened his mouth and told me

how nice it must be for people like *me* to be able to cycle with people like *him*... That experience put me off for a very long time.

In addition to ableist comments, some mentioned poor or misaligned communication as well as ineffective guiding techniques, as key factors that make partnerships feel uncomfortable. Jan illustrated what he finds central to unsuccessful partnerships, “Too sudden pulls on the tether, which leads to making unexpected movements. Giving too much information; this unnecessarily costs a lot of energy”.

Beyond communication, participants mentioned misalignment or misunderstanding of the expectations around the relationship and the performance, as well as a lack of trust, impatience and feelings of anxiety as central to unsuccessful practices and partnerships. Guide runner Grace recounted a moment in a partnership that felt strained and unsafe, one that ultimately became unsustainable:

I've run with somebody who needed a guide but wanted to prove her independence from needing a guide on that day and would not listen to me. We were at a parkrun, on a narrow path, with other runners running past us. She was very resistant to any narrative advice and wanted to do what she wanted. I was so worried that we would have an incident. Although I usually run faster than her, I had to ask her to slow down as I was starting to feel very anxious. This made her more angry as she felt she was being held back. There was no partnership or trust or respect on her side for our partnership. After the run she made negative comments about being slower than she wanted and felt restricted by my guiding. I decided that I would never guide her again (I'd guided her quite a few times prior to that). It was quite a shock and very upsetting.

Participants commonly characterised unsuccessful partnerships in terms of misaligned communication, differing expectations, ineffective techniques, and a lack of rapport or trust. Notably, several participants reported never having experienced an unproductive or dysfunctional partnership.

Discussion

A body of in-depth, qualitative research has provided important insights into guided sport practices and partnerships. However, much remained unexplored in terms of the scope and breadth of the area. In this paper, we expanded this work by surveying a larger group of guided sport practitioners compared to previous research. We explored practitioners' motivations for participating in guided sports, how and where they connect, and how they identify and experience successful and unsuccessful partnerships and practices.

The first finding suggests that the motivation to participate in guided sport is shaped by a complex of physical, social and psychological dimensions. For both sportspersons with sight loss and guides, opportunities for social connection, friendship, belonging to a group or community, and physical and mental wellbeing are central motivations. These findings are consistent with previous research which identified social connectedness, community, and physical and mental 'fitness' as motivations to join or stay involved in guided sports (e.g. Hall et al., 2022; Hammer, 2015, 2017), and sports and outdoor activities for people with sight loss more broadly (e.g. Jaarsma et al., 2014; Lieberman et al., 2023). Participants with sight loss described guided sport as creating opportunities to discover, access and enjoy new sports; an observation also made in existing literature (Bruyneel & Nightingale, 2025; Fernández-Vivó & Cordero-Morales, 2015; Green & Miyahara, 2007; Hall et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2026; Macpherson, 2016; Seham & Yeo, 2015).

In turn, guides described being motivated to participate in guided sports in various ways: they want to help others access and enjoy sports, they enjoy sharing meaningful

sporting experience together with their partners with sight loss, and they find doing so enjoyable and rewarding. Volunteering appeared to be an important motivation for guides to become involved in guided sports. Although volunteering has received relatively little attention within the literature (with the exception of Gombás, 2013), participants described guided sports as a means of contributing to local communities while simultaneously combining personal, professional and sporting interests. These accounts then also challenge assumptions that guides are motivated primarily by altruism. The findings in this first area thus largely confirm existing research, emphasising that guided sport partnerships are mutually beneficial rather than one-directional exchanges of support, with two practitioners experiencing similar and different benefits (Hall et al., 2022; Hammer, 2015, 2017).

The second area provided further insight into how guided sport practitioners connect with one another. Consistent with previous research, the majority of participants reported difficulties finding suitable and available guides (Gombás, 2013; Hall et al., 2022, 2026; Hammer, 2017; Jaarsma et al., 2014; Lieberman et al., 2019; May-West et al., 2018; Rector et al., 2015, 2018). The findings suggest that guide availability remains a significant barrier to participation in guided sport. For many sportspeople with sight loss, access to sport and physical activity can rely, at least in part, on the presence of a guide, making this an important component when engaging with sports and physical activity. This finding confirms research on both recreational sporting pairs (Hall et al., 2026; Jaarsma et al., 2014; May-West et al., 2018; Rector et al., 2015; 2018) and elite sporting pairs (Alcaraz-Rodríguez et al., 2018; Bundon & Mannella, 2022; Mannella & Bundon, 2023).

Not all participants experienced a shortage of guides. Some described local contexts in which guides were readily available, redirecting the focus towards infrastructures and resources that can enable or constrain opportunities for participation (also see Jaarsma et al., 2014). Participants also highlighted misconceptions about guiding as a specialised or highly technical practice that may discourage guides from becoming involved. Taken together, these findings suggest that barriers to participation are shaped not only by the availability of guides, but also by perceptions of guided sports and the resources in place that can or cannot facilitate connections between guides and sportspeople with sight loss.

More broadly, the findings highlight the importance of local sporting infrastructures in enabling or constraining participation in guided sport. Participants mentioned sporting organisations, clubs, events, and training courses as places and spaces that bring people together. This confirms existing research on the importance of shared spaces and communities (Green & Miyahara, 2007; Hammer, 2015, 2017; Macpherson, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2016; Simone & Galatolo, 2019, 2021). Participants also described social media, personal networks and community connections as important channels through which partnerships are formed; something that extends extant literature around how people connect with one another. Given that, this area shows that participation in guided sport connects broader and local sporting infrastructures, and people managing to find each other and establish relationships. We have tentatively framed this as the development of a ‘culture of guided sport’ in which guides and sportspeople with sight loss can readily find and support one another (Hall et al., 2022). This seems from our study an important future focus (see suggestions for future research in conclusion).

The third area relates to the experience of guided sports partnerships, which we organised in three subareas: the emotional experience of guided sports partnerships, the experience of successful guided sports practices and partnerships and those that are experienced as unsuccessful. Participants overwhelmingly emphasised guided sport as a positive and rewarding experience, describing feelings of joy, fulfilment and satisfaction emerging from doing sports together. These findings support previous research demonstrating the enjoyment and positivity felt when doing guided sport (Hall et al., 2022;

Hammer, 2015, 2017; Hiemstra & Rana, 2023; Hiemstra et al., 2026). Participants also mentioned feelings of partnership, togetherness and teamwork. Similar feelings and emotions have been identified across a variety of guided sporting contexts, including walking, running and tandem cycling (Allen-Collinson et al., 2023; Green & Miyahara, 2007; Hammer, 2015, 2017; Macpherson, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2016).

This subarea further shows the close relationship between motivations for participation and emotional experiences. Sportspeople with sight loss described feelings of freedom, independence and liberation as both motivations for engaging in guided sport and feelings emerging from the participation (Barbareschi et al., 2024; Holland et al., 2020; Powis & Macbeth, 2023). For guides, participation often felt as enrichment, personal growth and a source of inspiration, which in turn motivated them to remain involved (Hall et al., 2022; Hiemstra & Rana, 2023). At the same time, the findings draw attention to negative emotional experiences. Some participants reported anxiety, insecurity and stress associated directly from the practice or partnership. Existing research has documented a range of negative experiences and challenges, including no-shows, falls, accessibility issues, ableist and mean-spirited commentary, bullying, COVID-19 regulations, and uncertainties about the skills required (e.g. Alcaraz-Rodríguez et al., 2018; De Schipper et al., 2015; Hall et al., 2022; Macbeth & Powis, 2023; Macpherson, 2016; Paxton et al., 1993; Ryan, 2021). However, less attention has been given to how negative emotions emerge from the personal dynamics of guided sport partnerships themselves. This certainly warrants further investigation (see suggestions for future research in the conclusion).

The second subarea involves participants' understandings of successful guided sport partnerships. One of the clearest findings is the central role of effective and attuned communication. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of communicating needs, preferences, goals and environmental information, both verbally and non-verbally. Successful communication, therefore, means that it involves ongoing processes of negotiation and adaptation through which partners developed shared understandings of each other's needs and experiences. These findings confirm previous work that highlights the importance of communication across guided sporting contexts (Bundon & Mannella, 2022; Hall et al., 2022; Hammer, 2015, 2017; Macpherson, 2008, 2012, 2016; Simone & Galatolo, 2019, 2021).

Beyond communication, participants described trust, familiarity and personal connection as central to successful partnerships. While a small body of research has begun to explore these dimensions (Hall et al., 2022; Hammer, 2015, 2017; Hiemstra & Rana, 2023; Hiemstra et al., 2026; Macpherson, 2012), the processes through which trust and connection develop remain underexplored. Greater attention to these aspects may contribute to a better understanding of what sustains successful partnerships over time (see suggestions for further research in the conclusion).

Finally, the study provides new insights into an area that has received limited attention within the guided sport literature: unsuccessful practices and partnerships. Participants reported ableist attitudes, ineffective communication, mismatched expectations and a lack of trust and a click as key reasons for unsuccessful partnerships or even the breakdown of them. This finding resonates with Hall et al.'s (2022) discussion of disabling social interactions in running and broader scholarship examining ableism within sporting environments (Bundon & Mannella, 2022; Jaarsma et al., 2014; Oldörp et al., 2024). Importantly, given that most research on guided sport focuses on people who remain actively involved, experiences of partnership breakdown and other negative experiences may be underrepresented. We think that developing a methodological focus that recruits participants willing to share how past experiences may have felt unsafe or uncomfortable could reveal key aspects of guided sports, with the aim to inform or improve guided sports

training, safeguarding practices and the design of sporting programmes (see suggestions for future research in the conclusion).

Conclusions

Drawing on the findings of this study, we would like to propose a number of suggestions to enhance our and existing research with a focus on guided sports. Before outlining these, we first consider several limitations of the present study.

We appreciate that in the context of online surveys, the sample is modest ($n = 56$). We therefore suggest that future research aims to gather a much broader group of participants. However, this does not imply that the current sample is ‘too limited’. We point readers to three features of our work which help explain this and the associated meaningfulness of our contribution. Firstly, recruiting participants in any research population can be challenging – this is certainly the case in survey studies such as this one, where challenges in terms of readability and usability for people with sight loss might occur (Kaczmirek & Wolff, 2007). In aiming to mitigate those issues, we tested the survey for screen-reader accessibility and sought feedback from regular screen-reader users to identify areas for improvement.

Secondly, our work focused on what we expect to be a relatively small population in and of itself – that is, people involved in the relative niche practices of guided sport. Thirdly, we purposely conducted this work with no support from sport governing bodies who work in this area. We were interested to understand how people participate and experience the sports beyond the structural resources such as organisational and institutional channels. With hindsight, working closely with a selection of governing bodies or advocacy groups could have helped to produce a wider sample.

The findings are based on a study group that showed relatively homogeneous demographic characteristics. The sample largely represented people with a similar demographic profile in terms of race or ethnicity, geographical location, sexual orientation, educational attainment, and religious affiliation. We cannot assert whether this sample represents the larger population. Currently, there is no database, place, space or organisation where practitioners come together and where such information is collected (similar observations are made in the context of guided walking in Macpherson, 2016). Of course, there are sport-specific organisations (such as *Running Blind*) or charities that may have some information on the demographics of practitioners, but, as stated before, we chose to cast a net beyond specific organisations. Consequently, we cannot assert whether the study group is a product of the chosen methodological design and the practicalities of MH’s positionality – she is a white, middle-class, cisgendered guide runner residing in the Netherlands and UK. In study designs, such as this one, where such methodological artifacts cannot be excluded, we can be reasonably confident that the data offers a good overview of the sample, but we are not able to make statistical inferences relating to the population involved on a larger scale. We strongly encourage scholars with greater expertise in survey research to build on our work and further explore whether the study group reflects the broader population or whether underlying structural factors, potentially exclusionary in nature, are shaping who becomes part of the guided sport ‘community’.

The steps we present below are based on a careful consideration of the current literature and the findings of this paper. They intend to give colleagues actionable and achievable points for further empirical and theoretical focuses.

1. Future studies can build on our work by exploring whether the level of vision influences the experience of being part of a guided sport team. We expect that sportspeople with varying levels of vision may have different needs, wishes, and preferences, which could shape how they engage with and experience guided sport partnerships. This line of inquiry is also important for understanding the experiences of deafblind sports

enthusiasts, where the deterioration of both vision and hearing may further affect their experiences of the sport and their interactions with guides.

2. This study's sample reveals that people participate in a much broader range of guided sports than has previously been documented. This highlights the need for further research to explore the diversity of guided sports, focusing on their distinct characteristics, organisational structures, and practical implementations. For instance, are there very different experiences and expectations between practitioners of tandem cycling, where the bike is a key means of communication, compared to skiing, where the guide typically skis ahead or behind the skier with sight loss, having therefore less direct nonverbal contact? Additionally, the participants in this study often engage in multiple sports and at different sporting levels (e.g. amateur to professional), which suggests that cross-sectional research could offer insights into the interconnected social realities, sporting abilities and cross-sport experiences. Such studies could examine the structural resources, contexts, and frameworks within which guided sports are practised and how they may influence the experiences people have of doing their sports together. This type of work may identify strengths and weaknesses in current approaches, policies, and practices.
3. This study highlights the motivations people have to engage in guided sports. This offers a basis for further research to examine how organisations can leverage this information to enhance their programs and maximise the opportunities for people interested in these sports. One notable example of such strategies is parkrun's volunteer credit system for guide runners (Tobin, 2024). By aligning with the motivations of participants, such a system may not only offer those already motivated with a way to engage in guided sports but they may also attract more people. Future research could explore how similar incentive systems might be adapted across different sports and how these outreach initiatives can be tailored to meet the diverse motivations of participants.
4. There is some indication from the data that sporting infrastructure, such as clubs, events, and training programs, creates meaningful opportunities for connection and participation. The findings suggest that further research is needed to see how the expanding, optimising and structuring of these phenomena can help enhance accessibility and participation. In turn, future studies could investigate the potential for an overarching cross-sport platform, which may help sportspeople to connect across various activities. Such initiatives can be a step in the right direction to more structurally connect practitioners, and in this way, some barriers to participation might be mitigated.
5. Taking the two steps above together – integrating strategies that match motivations with popular sporting spaces while improving structural pathways for encounters – could also address misconceptions about guided sports. By embedding these activities as a visible and integral part of sporting 'cultures' more broadly, it may no longer be seen as the domain of 'experts' alone. Over time, this may help reduce the shortage of guides and create a 'critical mass' of practitioners.
6. Communication, trust, connection, having similar expectations, and building a good rapport were reported as being key to forming positive and productive collaborations. Conversely, when there was a misaligned or absence of such things, the participants suggested that this can lead to unsafe or unproductive experiences. Future research could investigate the processes through which these 'good' and 'bad' partnerships develop, with the aim to better understand how safe, healthy, and fulfilling guided sport practices could, should and might look like. Such research could help sportspeople and organisations in recognising when partnerships begin to falter and identifying strategies to prevent unsafe, unhealthy, or unproductive experiences.

Perspectives

We hope that colleagues will recognise the significant contributions yet to be made in this academic area and in the lives of practitioners. Therefore, we suggest this paper as setting an agenda for future studies as well as a spark for conversations about new directions for inquiry. In this way, we, as academics, can help further progress knowledge of guided sports which can help contribute to impactful and meaningful change for the people involved or not yet involved in these activities.

Supplementary Materials: See Appendix section.

Author affiliations:

¹ School of Science and Technology, Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom.
m.c.j.hiemstra@gmail.com, dr.christopher.r.matthews@gmail.com

* Correspondence: m.c.j.hiemstra@gmail.com

Author Contributions: Conceptualization: MH. and CRM.; Methodology, MH. and CRM.; Data collection, MH.; Formal Analysis, MH.; Writing-Original Draft Preparation, MH. and CRM.; Writing-Review & Editing, MH. and CRM.

Funding: The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, or publication of this article. MH's research is supported by a Vice Chancellor's Scholarship provided by Nottingham Trent University.

Availability of data and materials: The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical reasons.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank all the sportspeople who took part in this research. We are grateful for your willingness to share your ideas, reflections, and experiences with us. A special thanks goes to Martijn, Iris, and Agata, whose expertise, experience, and friendship were central to the development of this work and in fleshing out the suggestions for policy, practice and future research. We also extend our thanks to Dr Katie Taylor and Dr Christopher Atkin for their support in the early stages of this paper.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Alcaraz-Rodríguez, V., Caballero-Blanco, P., Fernandez-Gavira, J., & Sáenz-Lopez-Buñuel, P. (2018). Perception of visually impaired athletes and trail running guides toward barriers in the organization of competitions. *Journal of Physical Education & Sport*, 18(Suppl 3), 1248-1255. <https://doi.org/10.7752/jpes.2018.s3186>
- Alcaraz-Rodríguez, V., Medina-Rebollo, D., Muñoz-Llerena, A., & Fernández-Gavira, J. (2021). Influence of physical activity and sport on the inclusion of people with visual impairment: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(1), 443. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19010443>
- Allen-Collinson, J., Hall, D. L., & Jackman, P. C. (2024). Intercorporeality in visually impaired running-together: Auditory attunement and somatic empathy. *The Sociological Review*, 72(1), 175-193. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261231163431>
- Barbareschi, G., Kumar, T., Kim, C. C., Chernyshov, G., & Kunze, K. (2024). "Speech is Silver, Silence is Golden " Analyzing Micro-communication Strategies between Visually Impaired Runners and their Guides. *Proceedings of the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3613904.3642388>
- Blumer H (1969) *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Boulton, E., Davey, L., & McEvoy, C. (2021). The online survey as a qualitative research tool. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(6), 641–654. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1805550>
- Bruyneel, A.-V., & Nightingale, L. (2025). Dance with the senses. A dance class with visual impaired and sighted children in a conservatory: One-year experience. *Arts & Health*, 17(3), 245–253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2024.2342990>
- Bundon, A., & Mannella, S. (2022). Seeing without sight: The athlete/guide partnership in disability sport. In *Researching Disability Sport* (pp. 143-156). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003153696-13>.
- De Schipper, T., Lieberman, L. J., & Moody, B. (2017). "Kids like me, we go lightly on the head": Experiences of children with a visual impairment on the physical self-concept.

- British Journal of Visual Impairment*, 35(1), 55–68.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0264619616678651>
- Fernández-Vivó, M., & Cordero-Morales, I. (2015). Stand up paddle board for people with visual impairments. *Palaestra*, 29(1).
- Gombás, J. (2013). Sighted volunteers' motivations to assist people with visual impairments in freetime sport activities. *Journal of Human Sport and Exercise*, 8(Proc2), 220–227. <https://doi.org/10.4100/jhse.2012.8.Proc2.25>
- Green, C., & Miyahara, M. (2007). Older Adults With Visual Impairment: Lived Experiences and a Walking Group. *RE:View*, 39(3), 91–112.
<https://doi.org/10.3200/REVU.39.3.91-112>
- Hall, D. L., Allen-Collinson, J., & Jackman, P. C. (2022). 'The agenda is to have fun': Exploring experiences of guided running in visually impaired and guide runners. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 15(1), 89–103.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2022.2092200>
- Hall, T. E. D., Hynes, N. J., Willmott, A. G., & Allen, P. M. (2026). 'I'm registered blind, but I can't play blind golf': Exploring the experiences of golfers with a visual field impairment. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 18(5), 574–587.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2025.2611398>
- Hammer, G. (2015). Pedaling in pairs toward a 'dialogical performance': Partnerships and the sensory body within a tandem cycling group. *Ethnography*, 16(4), 503–522.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138114552950>
- Hammer, G. (2017). Performing the sensory body in a tandem cycling group – Social dialogues between blindness and sight. In Sparkes, A. C. (Ed.). (2017). *Seeking the Senses in Physical Culture: Sensuous scholarship in action*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315657585>
- Hiemstra, M., & Rana, J. (2023). Sensing inclusion among visually impaired and guide runners. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 59(1), 22–37.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902231172919>
- Hiemstra, M., AlHashmi, R., Shepherd, J. & Matthews, C.R. (2026) Guiding, Sparring and Rolling- Sensing Consent in Cooperative Sporting Interactions. In W. Gibson, D., D. vom Lehn & N. Ruiz-Junco, N. (Eds.) *Sensing life: The social organisation of the senses in interaction*. (pp. 117-134). Routledge.
- Holland, K., Haegele, J. A., & Zhu, X. (2020). "My eyes have nothing to do with how my legs move": Individuals with visual impairments' experiences with learning to run. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 37(3), 253–269.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2019-0098>
- Ilhan, B., Idil, A., & Ilhan, I. (2021). Sports participation and quality of life in individuals with visual impairment. *Irish Journal of Medical Science*, 190(1), 429–436.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11845-020-02285-5>
- Jaarsma, E., Dekker, R., Koopmans, S., Dijkstra, P., & Geertzen, J. (2014). Barriers to and facilitators of sports participation in people with visual impairments. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 31(3), 240–264. <https://doi.org/10.1123/2013-0119>
- Kaczmirek, L., & Wolff, K. G. (2007). Survey design for visually impaired and blind people. In C. Stephanidis (Ed.), *Universal access in human computer interaction. Coping with diversity. UAHCI 2007*. Vol. 4554, pp. 374–381. Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-73279-2_41
- Lieberman, L. J. (2002). *Fitness for individuals who are visually impaired or deafblind*. *RE:View*. 34(1), 13–23.
- Lieberman, L. J., Haibach-Beach, P. S., Sherwood, J., & Trad, A. (2019). "We now fly": Perspectives of adults who are blind with guide dogs trained for running. *British Journal of Visual Impairment*, 37(3), 213–226.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0264619619842989>
- Lieberman, L. J., Haibach-Beach, P., Perreault, M., & Stribing, A. (2023). Outdoor recreation experiences in youth with visual impairments: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 23(2), 170–183.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2021.1984965>

- Macbeth, J. L., & Powis, B. (2023). Navigating a sighted world: Visually impaired runners' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Disability & Society*, 40(1), 148–172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2275517>
- Macpherson, H. (2008). I don't know why they call it the Lake District they might as well call it the Rock District. The workings of humour and laughter in research with members of visually impaired walking groups. *EPD: Society and Space*, 26, 1080–1095. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d2708>
- Macpherson, H. (2009). The intercorporeal emergence of landscape: Negotiating sight, blindness, and ideas of landscape in the British countryside. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 41(5), 1042–1054. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a40365>
- Macpherson, H. (2012). 'Guiding visually impaired walking groups: Intercorporeal experience and ethical sensibilities' in Paterson, M., & Dodge, M. (Eds). *Touching Space, Placing Touch*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315550794>
- Macpherson, H. (2016). Walkers with visual-impairments in the British countryside: Picturesque legacies, collective enjoyments and well-being benefits. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 51, 251–258. <https://doi-org.ntu.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.10.001>
- Mannella, S., & Bundon, A. (2023). Building bridges: A Qualitative exploration of the athlete – guide partnership in high-performance parasport. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 16(2), 134–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2023.2260392>
- Matthews, C.R. (2025) *Doing good social science – Lessons from immersion, understanding social life and exploring the in-between*. Routledge.
- May-West, E. M., Craig, P. J., & Wilder, A. (2018). The meaning of cross-country skiing for persons with significant visual impairment: A phenomenological study. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 52(4), 349–373. <https://doi.org/10.18666/TRJ-2018-V52-I4-9033>
- Oldörp, F., Giese, M., & Grenier, M. (2024) The influence of blind tennis on subjective inclusion experiences—an ableism critical analysis. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 41(3), 420–439. <https://doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2023-0140>
- Paxton, S., Kilcoyne, A., & Mount, K. (1993). On the braille in the body: An account of the touchdown dance integrated workshops with the visually impaired and the sighted. *Dance Research*, 11(1), 3–51. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1290603>
- Powis, B., & Macbeth, J. L. (2020). “We know who is a cheat and who is not. But what can you do?”: Athletes' perspectives on classification in visually impaired sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 55(5), 588–602.
- Powis, B., & Macbeth, J. L. (2023). Running blind: The sensory practices of visually impaired runners. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 16(4), 244–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2023.2284704>
- Rector, K., Milne, L., Ladner, R. E., Friedman, B., & Kientz, J. A. (2015). Exploring the opportunities and challenges with exercise technologies for people who are blind or low-vision. *Proceedings of the 17th International ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers & Accessibility - ASSETS '15*, 203–214. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2700648.2809846>
- Rector, K., Bartlett, R., & Mullan, S. (2018). Exploring aural and haptic feedback for visually impaired people on a track: A Wizard of Oz study. *Proceedings of the 20th International ACM SIGACCESS Conference on Computers and Accessibility*, 295–306. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3234695.3236345>
- Ryan, J. (2021) “How the pandemic impacted vision impaired runners” <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2021/0705/1233118-vision-impaired-runners-parkrun-covid-pandemic-ireland/>, accessed July 2024.
- Saulynas, S., Vader, M.-L., Bendigeri, A., King, T., Nagraj, A., & Kuber, R. (2022). How and why we run: Investigating the experiences of blind and visually-impaired runners. *Proceedings of the 19th International Web for All Conference*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3493612.3520445>
- Seham, J., & Yeo, A. J. (2015). Extending our vision: Access to inclusive dance education for people with visual impairment. *Journal of Dance Education*, 15(3), 91–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2015.1059940>

- Simone, M., & Galatolo, R. (2019). Climbing as a pair: Instructions and instructed body movements in indoor climbing with visually impaired athletes. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 155, 286–302. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2019.09.008>
- Simone, M., & Galatolo, R. (2021). Timing and prosody of lexical repetition: How repeated instructions assist visually impaired athletes' navigation in sport climbing. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 54(4), 397–419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08351813.2021.1974742>
- Strongman, C., Lindsay, R. K., Riches, A., Cavallerio, F., Gordon, D., & Morrison, A. (2023). 'Sometimes I feel like dancing afterwards': Exploring experiences of Pilates as a 'return to sport' intervention after the COVID-19 lockdown in UK adults with visual impairment. *British Journal of Visual Impairment*, 43(1), 74-83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02646196231212738>
- Tobin, S. (2024) Parkrun blog- "Make a difference as a VI guide". <https://blog.parkrun.com/uk/2024/11/13/make-a-difference-as-a-vi-guide/> accessed, January 2025.

Appendix A

Appendix Table 1. Basic Demographic Profile of The Study Group. N= 56. Participants (Age range = 26y – 73y, M_{age}= 49.6 y, SD=12.6y).

Characteristics	n	%
Type of involvement		
Person with sight loss	15	26.8
Sighted guide	41	73.2
Gender		
Female	30	53.6
Male	25	44.6
Prefer not to say	1	1.8
Sexuality		
Heterosexual or straight	52	92.9
Gay woman or lesbian	2	3.6
Bi	1	1.8
Prefer not to say	1	1.8
Country of residence		
United Kingdom	41	73.2
The Netherlands	11	19.6
Ireland	2	3.6
United States of America	2	3.6
Nationality		
British	37	66.1
Dutch	11	19.6
Irish	4	7.1
Polish	1	1.8
British Polish	1	1.8
American	1	1.8
Lithuanian	1	1.8
Race or Ethnicity		
White	47	84.9
Irish	2	3.6
Mixed	2	3.6
Polish	1	1.8
British Asian	1	1.8
Black Caribbean	1	1.8
Welsh	1	1.8
Prefer not to say	1	1.8
Educational attainment		
Bachelor's/associate degree	23	41.1

Master's	12	21.4
Secondary School	5	8.9
Dutch hbo	5	8.9
Other	4	7.1
PhD	3	5.4
Dutch hbo	3	5.4
Prefer not to say	1	1.8
Religion		
Not religious	38	67.9
Christian	7	15.5
I don't know	3	5.4
Catholic	3	5.4
Prefer not to say	3	5.4
Muslim	1	1.8
Methodist	1	1.8

Appendix Table 2. Basic Activity-Specific Profile of The Study Group

Characteristics	n	%
Types of sports and physical activities		
Running	44	78.6
Tandem cycling	16	28.6
Walking	8	14.3
Skiing	6	10.7
Climbing	6	10.7
Triathlon	5	8.9
Pool swimming	4	7.1
Open water swimming	3	5.4
Hiking/trekking	3	5.4
Sailing	3	5.4
Caving/potholing	3	5.4
Kayaking	2	3.6
Canoeing	2	3.6
Paddle boarding	2	3.6
Rowing	2	3.6
Athletics	2	3.6
Archery	1	1.8
Boxing	1	1.8
Horse riding	1	1.8
Water skiing	1	1.8
Dance	1	1.8
Gym	1	1.8
Ice skating	1	1.8
Sporting level/ability		
Hobbyist/amateur/amateur competitor	47	83.9
Semi-professional	1	1.8
Professional	7	12.5
Not disclosed	1	1.8
Number of sports		
One main sport	28	50
Two sports or more	28	50
Affiliation to club/organisation		
Yes	41	73.2
No	15	26.8

