

**Client:** England Athletics  
**Source:** Women's Running (UK)  
**Date:** 01/05/2021  
**Page:** 47  
**Reach:** 15000  
**Value:** 4724.0000

---

**OUR RUNNING**

## Putting your trust in your run buddy

Gill Jackson, registered as severely sight impaired, and her guide runner Suzanne Nelson are planning to run London Marathon together this October to raise money for the Royal National Institute of Blind People



**Suzanne and I run** recreationally together. We mostly run in local parks and along tow paths, but we also enter charity runs from 5Ks to half marathons. We are attached by a short tether looped in our hands and Suzanne is great at describing everything to me. She talks me through gradients, obstacles and changes of terrain underfoot. She identifies these ahead of time and counts me down towards them. She also has to be aware of taller obstacles which I can run into, like tree branches, hedges and wall-mounted protrusions. It's a big responsibility for her but she takes it in her stride. To run with speed or confidence, I have to put my trust in her.

"Having lost the majority of my sight overnight, my life changed radically. I was a primary school teacher for 30 years and lived a very active life. The loss of my independence was very challenging, and it was so important for me to find something that gave me some degree of normality in what had become a very scary world. Suzanne was able to give me that opportunity by becoming my running guide. In what was a very daunting time, she gave me the opportunity to get out in the fresh air, clear my head, stay fit and get a sense of achievement by setting goals. Suzanne is a full time teacher and has three children so I'm always aware that her time is very precious,

but she has always made me feel like being my guide is as special for her as it is for me.

"We have a place in the London Marathon which we are running to support RNIB. We had trained for last year's marathon, but due to Covid, it ended up being run virtually in our own neighbourhood, but we still managed to raise just under £11,500. Running the marathon in London is something I've always wanted to do and completing it with Suzanne would be a dream come true.

"Suzanne and I run at a very similar pace even though Suzanne is considerably younger and fitter than me (I used to teach Suzanne as a pupil in primary school). She has endless energy and is always encouraging and talking round our routes. We didn't hook up together as guide and visually impaired runner in the typical way. I knew Suzanne ran and I asked her if she'd consider being my guide. Suzanne and I then went to a guide running training morning together and we took it from there.

"Typically, visually impaired runners are teamed up with a trained guide in their area. To begin with, I felt safer and happier just running alone with Suzanne but over time, I became more confident and was invited to join Suzanne's group of friends who run together (Team SlowMo) and all the women have been so supportive and encouraging to me. We all ended up running the virtual London Marathon together last year. It's a great way to be part of a bigger picture with the security of your guide."

**Suzanne's story**  
"Being a guide runner is a privilege and I was honoured that Gill asked me. While doing our guide runners course with Tony Barclay, a partially sighted runner, and his guide Vivien Davidson, I was blindfolded and guided round by a guide runner. This gave me an insight into how scary it can be being a partially sighted person. It's important to describe everything, even things sighted runners take for granted. I always like company when running, so I enjoy our runs while helping Gill to achieve her goal of raising money for the RNIB.

"Knowing how difficult it is to get a place in the London Marathon, I was honoured and excited when Gill asked if I would like to be her guide runner. Having completed the marathon virtually in October 2020 and raising such a massive amount for RNIB, getting to complete it in London is the icing on the cake. Hopefully we will be able to enter a few races as part of our training plan like we did last year.

"The key is communication. It's important to count these changes so the partially sighted runner is prepared for them. It's also important to scan the ground for any tree roots or holes. Vivien also made us aware of a database of guide runners in Northern Ireland that partially sighted runners can use whenever they require a guide runner.

"We've found race providers to be very accommodating, only charging one entry fee for both of us. Most races are accessible, as long as the terrain is not too challenging. We have completed parkruns, 10Ks and a half marathon around Shane's Castle in Antrim. So once you have been out running together a few times the world really is your oyster"



Client: England Athletics  
 Source: Women's Running (UK)  
 Date: 01/05/2021  
 Page: 47  
 Reach: 15000  
 Value: 4724.0000

COACH // Assisted running

**// We know from participants of our challenge events that guide running is crucial for running to be a safe and inclusive experience for blind and partially sighted people //**

It's a good idea to get in touch with the race organiser first. Our greatest race in the UK, London Marathon, welcomes blind runners and their guides and wheelchair users in racing wheelchairs, but those using handcycles – where your hands are used to turn a chain for propulsion – are not permitted. London Marathon also does not allow wheelchair users to be pushed; you must be able to self-propel. Check on cut-off times too, to decide whether you are able to achieve them.

Reach out to local running clubs. Whether these are traditional UKA affiliated clubs or more relaxed RunTogether groups, your local running

group should be able to support you in your running. There are also County Sports Partnerships (CSP) with links to local disability groups and local disability organisations such as Actionaires, Metro, Trust, Mencap Gateway Active groups, and mental health groups that may be able to give guidance.



**Find a guide**

If you're 18 or over and visually impaired, you can search for a guide runner in your local area by going to [englandathletics.org/findaguide](http://englandathletics.org/findaguide). Guide runners will have attended a Sight Loss Awareness and Guide Running workshop, they will be

DBS checked, and they'll be passionate about running. Whether it's your first time running or you're a seasoned runner just looking for more support, you will be matched with a local guide. If you are interested in becoming a guide runner and supporting visually impaired people while they run, you can find out more at [englandathletics.org](http://englandathletics.org).

To become a licensed guide, you'll need to attend a Sight Loss Awareness and Guide Running workshop, undertake a DBS check and safeguarding training. Licensed guide runners can then join England Athletics' national database at [FindAGuide.co.uk](http://FindAGuide.co.uk).

Lizzi Wagner, senior challenge events manager at RNIB, says: "We know from participants of our challenge events that guide running is crucial for running to be a safe and inclusive experience for blind and partially sighted people. Two of our fundraising events, Marathon Mates and Double Dash, are based on how people with sight loss run with a guide runner, to educate people on what this experience can be like and create fully inclusive event experiences.

"At the moment we are challenging people to grab a mate to run a marathon (26.2 miles) between you during the month of May. Visit [marathonmates.rnib.org.uk](http://marathonmates.rnib.org.uk) to sign up."

RNIB provides advice and information for anyone who is interested in finding out more about becoming a guide runner, as well as tips for people with sight loss who are looking to start running with a guide.

**Guidance for run leaders**

All runners, disabled and non-disabled, will have their own needs and

GOING FURTHER

**Running for all**

There are many organisations which work to make assisted running more accessible. Whether runner, or wannabe guide, you can get involved

- British Blind Sport – [www.britishblindsport.org.uk](http://www.britishblindsport.org.uk)
- Royal National Institute of Blind People – [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)
- CP Sport – [www.cpsport.org](http://www.cpsport.org)
- Mind – [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- Dwarf Sports Association UK – [www.dsauk.org](http://www.dsauk.org)
- Mencap – [www.mencap.org.uk/sport](http://www.mencap.org.uk/sport)
- Special Olympics – [www.specialolympicsgb.org.uk](http://www.specialolympicsgb.org.uk)
- UK Deaf Sport – [www.ukdeafsport.org.uk](http://www.ukdeafsport.org.uk)
- WheelPower – [www.wheelpower.org.uk](http://www.wheelpower.org.uk)
- Limb Power – [www.limbpower.com](http://www.limbpower.com)
- Mental health charities – MIND, SANE, BeThink
- National Autistic Society – [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)
- English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) – [www.efds.co.uk](http://www.efds.co.uk)
- DoComUnity has a directory of disability services and organisations in each county



**Client:** England Athletics  
**Source:** Women's Running (UK)  
**Date:** 01/05/2021  
**Page:** 47  
**Reach:** 15000  
**Value:** 4724.0000

---



motivations, and it's up to the run leader or coach to adapt their running sessions to ensure these needs are fulfilled. Your runner will probably know best what they need, so speaking to them first will help you make the adjustments you need to support them. Don't make assumptions about specific needs; ask your runner or their support runner.

A welcoming approach is essential and, let's face it, that's something us runners are really good at. Consider your run route, local transport facilities, amenities such as parking and loos and provide as much detail as possible before a session as well as during it, if you are considering the needs of a disabled runner. No two people are the same, and people with ostensibly the 'same' impairment may have very different needs. If in doubt, ask your co-runner what support they need and prefer.

Anyone involved in a RunTogether group who wants to know more about including disabled people can attend an England Athletics' Disability Training Course at [englandathletics.org](http://englandathletics.org) 