



VERSITI

Case Study: RNIB & Guide Dogs Trust

Understanding public attitudes towards blindness and blind people

RNIB

See differently



Background

RNIB and Guide Dogs have a shared ambition to create a world where people who are blind or have a vision impairment can thrive. However, they also face a common problem: the general public does not seem to know or care much about blindness.

Challenging ...

The brief

RNIB and the Guide Dogs Trust hired Versiti to help them understand, and better engage, the general public around their cause. Specifically, they tasked us with building an understanding of:

- public attitudes and beliefs about blindness and vision impairment
- public attitudes and beliefs about people who are blind or have vision impairment
- the reasons for lack of engagement





What we did

Our experience told us that simply asking people for their attitudes and beliefs would not be enough to unearth deep-seated ideas and feelings, especially controversial ones.

To overcome this, we combined two approaches:

Phase I: Online qualitative research

The first qualitative research phase involved an in-depth exploration of attitudes towards blindness and vision impairment among 42 people living in England, Scotland and Wales.

Over ten days, participants in the online community took part in 24 research activities, including discussions, drawings, projective techniques, surveys, diaries, sight loss simulation experiments, videos, etc.

Phase II: Implicit associations tests

We then conducted implicit association tests with a representative sample of 1,000 people, to reveal non-conscious, hidden attitudes and beliefs about blindness and blind people, based on insights from Phase I.



What we learned

Attitudes are largely based on ignorance. The public assume that blindness means a total loss of vision and is congenital. As a result, they seriously underestimate the prevalence of the conditions that can cause various degrees of sight loss, and they don't see its relevance to them.

Compared to six other serious conditions, blindness is the most feared. However, the public have no fear of blind people themselves.

Archetypes underpin attitudes

The public think of blind people in terms of five key archetypes, all of which elicit different emotions and behaviours:

- The 'Innocent' elicits paternalism
- The 'Victim' triggers pity
- The 'Hero' invites admiration
- The 'Sage' evokes respect and trust
- The 'Everyman' elicits empathy and inclusion





Social exclusion is rife

The public consider blind people to be incapable of work, except as musicians, politicians or senior managers. This shows the importance of role models such as Stevie Wonder and David Blunkett. Moreover, the public only assume that blind people are suitable for a handful of environments.

Despite these beliefs, however, we demonstrated that blind people are not considered to be fundamentally 'other': the public are not emotionally invested in rejecting blind people.

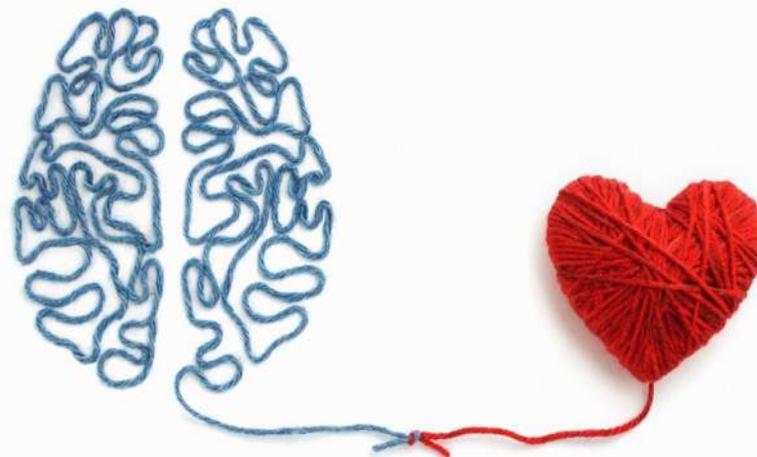
With the right approach, attitudes are open to change.

The outputs

We delivered an insights report, with detailed recommendations for changing the public's hearts and minds in relation to blind people.

In partnership with specialist agency RARE Design, Versiti produced a fully accessible multimedia report.

In addition to a formal research debrief, findings and recommendations were discussed at a 'fireside chat' event, to embed them in the ways of working of senior management at RNIB and the Guide Dogs Trust.





What the client said

“Working with Versiti has been absolutely brilliant! We felt supported from the first meeting. They brought innovative thinking, methodological rigour and creativity to the project. It has generated a wealth of actionable insights. Versiti’s commitment went well beyond contractual obligations and we feel they have been fantastic at combining the real depth of thinking that academics usually bring, the pace and practical mindset of business, and the values and passion more usual in the third sector. I recommend Versiti wholeheartedly and would be really enthused about working with them again.”

**Dr Catherine Dennison,
Senior Manager, Policy & Research, RNIB**



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Evidence to drive change

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