# **White Cane Awareness**

## **About White Canes**

* If you see a person using a white cane, this usually signifies that they have some level of sight loss. White canes assist someone in navigating their environment through tactile feedback.
* Blindness is a spectrum. When you come across a person with a white cane, do not assume that they can or cannot see you, as everyone experiences sight loss differently and to varying degrees.
* If someone is using a white cane, they have received specialized training to navigate safely and independently. Do not tell someone that it’s not safe for them to be out alone, or offer advice about other wayfinding and navigation aids such as guide dogs.
* A white cane is a sign of independence and empowerment, not charity or pity. The correct term is white cane.

## **What you can do**

* When you see someone traveling with a white cane, avoid obstructing that person’s path - provide a safe path of travel for them by stepping to one side when they approach. If someone taps your foot or lower leg with their cane while navigating, assume it was unintentional and not personal.
* Do not assume a person using a cane needs help. If they do seem lost or confused, introduce yourself and ask if they would like any assistance. If they say no, respect that they know best and move on.
* Speak normally, the way you would with anyone else. There is no need to raise your voice or speak slowly.
* If you’re trying to get someone’s attention, remember that they may not be able to tell you’re speaking to them and not someone behind them or next to them. It’s okay to say something like, “Sir with the white cane.”
* It is never acceptable to grab or touch someone’s cane to lead them. If the person requires assistance, they will normally let you know how you can best support (i.e. they will take your arm (sighted guide technique), or if they have some sight, they might ask you to walk closely and directly in front of them and they will follow.) Always ask how you can assist, never assume.
* If you are a driver, a pedestrian with a white cane might not see you waving them across and honking your horn can be unclear. Many people who are blind are trained to listen to the traffic and wait until it has come to a complete stop before crossing.