

## Dialogue in the Dark

### Keeping the dialogue going: An evaluation of the impact and outcomes for guides employed by Dialogue in the Dark – Summary

#### 1. Background

Dialogue in the Dark (DITD) approached SHM in April 2007 to undertake an evaluation of the impact of the DITD programme. The evaluation builds on earlier analyses of the impacts of participation in the programme on members of the public, and this time focuses on the impacts and outcomes on those blind guides involved in delivering the experience to sighted people.

SHM is a strategy and innovation consulting firm based in London, UK. Since 1996, SHM has been putting insights into people's motivations and mindsets at the heart of the world's largest and most important organisations, in both the public and private sectors. It does this by unlocking a deep understanding of why people behave as they do – as leaders, as colleagues, as consumers, as citizens – and translating this into concrete directions to drive impact and results.

#### 2. Process

SHM interviewed 44 past and present guides in 6 sites (Hamburg, Milan, Turin, Vienna, Mexico City, and London). The interviews sought to establish the positive and negative impacts on guides of participation in DITD and establish the aspects of DITD that are effective.

#### 3. Key findings

SHM's findings suggest that DITD delivers the following impacts, which can be categorized into three broad areas: *psychological*, *social*, and *practical/economic*.

##### **(i) Psychological (impact on guides' mindset)**

- Empowerment: confidence to challenge to socially-imposed limits through the acceptance of one's own limits
- Improved quality of life resulting from the confidence to try new things, take new risks, etc.

- Opportunity to mobilise skills and prior experience; DITD recognises capabilities and puts them to good use
- Enhanced sense of one's individuality—not just 'a blind person'
- Enhanced sense of security and stability resulting from presence of work routine
- Enhanced communication: enabling self-reflection as much as enabling interaction with the outside world (From blindness as a **handicap** (self-perception) - to blindness as a **fact** (self-acceptance) - to blindness as a **tool** (self-overcoming))

**(ii) Social (impact on relationships and community integration)**

- Changes the way guides feel about their blindness, and as a result changes their attitude towards people who ask questions about their blindness
- Enhanced relationships: DITD provides a context that fosters their family's and friends' understanding of, respect for, and interest in guides' blindness
- Enhanced peer support

**(iii) Practical/economic (impact on skills/employability/wider economy)**

- Enhanced self-belief—the essential pre-condition for the development of other skills
- Improved communication skills
- Guides' being able to put their blindness to use develops a sense that *blindness can itself be considered a skill*

**4. Conclusions**

SHM's overwhelming finding is that DITD is making a positive difference to the lives of the guides and should keep on doing what it is doing. However, SHM's review also identifies some challenges and opportunities for DITD to strengthen its offering to guides:

**(a) Consistency of offering**

DITD has to reflect and respond to local context. But DITD is not currently as good everywhere as it could be. It is therefore missing opportunities to deliver the outcomes we now know it can deliver. This inconsistency in delivery is probably due to lack of clearly articulated aims and objectives

### **(b) Transferability of guides' skills and experiences**

DITD provides meaningful experiences for blind guides in an environment in which their blindness is the critical feature of that experience. But does DITD do enough to prepare blind people to work in the sighted world, in which visual impairment is still by and large seen as a problem? There is no doubt that guides develop 'mainstream' skills that are transferable. However, DITD has an opportunity to do more to prepare guides for the experience of mainstream employment—developing their attitudes, expectations, and values as much as their skills. This could involve DITD offering accreditation for the skills guides develop whilst at DITD, and facilitating skills development and workplace familiarization workshops to prepare guides for the world of work.

### **(c) Support for guides' further progression into employment**

Helping guides to progress is not just about delivering transferable skills. It is also about providing infrastructure: careers advice, guidance and support—and potentially some follow-up after guides leave DITD. It is also about DITD leading cultural change in order to transform employers' attitudes to employing

### **(d) Democratization**

There is a desire on the part of the guides to be more involved in the local management of DITD. This is part of the set of opportunities that DITD could offer guides towards their individual career development: the opportunity to learn from being part of the decision-making process.

#### **5. For more information**

For more information about this evaluation, please contact:

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