

It Seems Almost Impossible – Target Shooting Done By People Who are Blind!
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In my job I am always learning about recreational possibilities for people with different disabilities. And I have learned along the way not to be surprised when someone suggests a sport like target shooting. However, I was a little unsure how people who are blind or visually impaired would be successful loading, aiming and firing a gun with the goal of hitting a target.

My investigation into how this would be possible started with Al Smith at Wheelin' Sportsmen. Wheelin' Sportsmen is an outreach effort of the National Wildlife Turkey Federation (www.nwtf.org) and Al has experience teaching people with disabilities how to hunt. After talking with Al, and reading some articles he referred me to, I began to believe that having someone who is blind shooting a gun was possible – and entirely safe too! Al works in Missouri, and I needed to organize an event locally, so I thanked Al for sharing his resources and told him I would let him know how things worked out.

My next contact was with Al Neu from Adaptive Sportsmen (www.adaptivesportsmen.org) which is a local outfit for people with disabilities to join and participate in activities like hunting, ATV rides, snow-mobile rides and fishing. Through Al's organization he was able to connect with a few people who are blind and find out from them how they successfully work with firearms. Adaptive Sportsmen has laser devices that attach to the barrel of the gun and when the gun is pointed to the target a red laser light appears, allowing a sighted guide to see where the blind person is aiming. The guide then tells the person up/down/left/right until the red dot is on the target and then the person who is blind pulls the trigger.

In this process of planning this event I now had the knowledge that this is possible, safe, and successful. I have access to the adaptive equipment needed to assist a blind person with target shooting. And I have 3 blind adults who are interested in trying target shooting. I met these adults through the Bader Association for The Blind and Visually Impaired, and these folks had never shot a gun before, have never been to a shooting range, and are very interested in taking advantage of the chance to try target shooting.

Fortunately, Al Neu is a member of a wonderfully supportive gun club – the Menomonee Falls Rod and Gun Club and he was able to get permission for us to have the event at the club. Several club members were even willing to volunteer and help be the sighted guides for our participants. When I spoke with Fred H. from the gun club he remarked that he loves the sport of hunting, and he loves getting people interested and involved in it. He was excited to help our participants experience something for the first time and to help make it happen!

The result of all of our planning and contributions combined and came together on a beautiful Sunday afternoon when Howard, Frenchie and Selena arrived at the Menomonee Falls Rod and Gun Club to work with Al Neu and volunteers Fred, Jim and Ken who are fellow members in the club. After our introductions, talking safety for the range, and rules about handling firearms each volunteer was paired with a participant. The pairs then went over the different

guns we were going to be using. Howard, Frenchie and Selena were given the opportunity to feel the parts of the gun, get an idea of the weight of it, feel the ammunition that we were going to use, and they learned the names for some of the different parts of each gun: the barrel, the action, the trigger and the safety! Lots of emphasis on the safety!

Now off to the range! The volunteers were awesome with leading the participants to the range, getting everyone seated on the benches, getting our equipment organized – and then an alarm began to ring – it sounded like a siren! Oh yeah, it was explained then how the alarm rings to alert everyone not to handle the guns and that people are out in the range setting up and adjusting targets. The targets are set, the laser sights are ready, our ear plugs are in and everyone was ready!

Frenchie, Howard and Selena were guided through-out the afternoon by our volunteers. The laser sights worked great after we shaded the target with cardboard. Everyone was able to load, aim and fire and hit the targets with several shots. After sounding the alarm, it was fun for Frenchie and Selena to be led into the range to feel their targets, and the holes they shot in them!

The afternoon was a huge success thanks to everyone involved to make it happen!