

Helpful Hints from Margaret Snyder
From
Vision Australia Squares (Australia)

You asked for helpful hints for calling to Handicapable Dancers. The biggest hint I can offer is for the caller and the helpers in particular to understand the disability. This may sound rather obvious. But on many occasions I have been asked to combine my Sight Impaired Dancers with Wheel Chair Dancers. This even happened at a national convention!!! Can you imagine a blind person trying to negotiate around a wheel chair that comes towards them on soundless wheels? Whoops some one goes head over....

I have found the best way for a caller and helpers to overcome the difficulties a blind dancer experiences is to experience the handicap themselves. This can be achieved by coming together before meeting with their new sight impaired dancers and dance to very simple singing calls with two or three people wearing blind folds. The future caller needs to be on the floor dancing too and preferable as one of the blindfolded dancers. He or she will then find out very plainly how important it is to use calls that have hand contact, or can easily be substituted for a contact movement e.g. Grand Right and Left instead of Weave the Ring. Sighted dancers will also realize the necessity of talking to the blind person so that he or she can use their voice to locate their position. The new sighted learner sees a smiling face coming his way and knows he is heading in the right direction, but the blind dancer does not see the smiling reward that tells him he is facing the correct way. So the voice cue is very important. It is also important to restrict help only to the person next to you, and to keep the set square, no sloppy dancing. Many blind people can orientate themselves to their position in the hall by the placement of the speakers. Some cannot. If two blind people are promenading together the man in the couple behind them can easily put his hand on the blind man in front's shoulder removing it when he is in the home position. Again this is a good time to use the voice and say 'home'. I am not suggesting that you hold great conversations as you dance just the simple one word is all that is needed.

Main points are

1. The caller understands blindness
2. Sighted Dancers use voice cues
3. Calls with physical contact are best.
4. At the end of the tip don't leave the dancer in the middle of the floor.
5. Most important is to have fun

I must finish with a little tale about one of my very clever totally blind dancers experienced at a National Convention in Australia. We were both in the same set, and were dancing very well. But my friend at the end of each dance in the bracket wanted me to replace her with some one else, as she was alarmed at the number of mistakes she thought she was making. At the conclusion of the tip she started apologizing to the group. She could not make out why she was not progressing around the set, corner, opposite, right hand man etc. She explained to us that she knew her partner very well he had a finger missing so she knew the rotation of the girls was wrong. But what she did not know and nobody else realized was that her opposite was once a carpenter and had the same finger missing!!!

Hope to hear from somebody that decides to start a club for vision-impaired dancers. It's FUN for all.