



LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

Welcome New AchillesLA Volunteer!

AchillesLA - a local chapter of Achilles International, is incredibly grateful for your interest, time and willingness to empower athletes with disabilities. The mission of Achilles International, and our new **Los Angeles** chapter, is to enable people with all types of disabilities to participate in mainstream running workouts and events in order to promote personal achievement. For everyone, our goals are to be active, improve health and fitness, and have FUN!

AchillesLA Workouts:

Initial Workout Launch Date: **March 25, 2018**
Weekly Workout Day: **Every Sunday, year round**
Weekly Workout Time: **9:00am (RAIN OR SHINE!)**

Location: Workouts will be held at the Santa Monica Boardwalk, beginning from Dorothy Green Park at 2701 Barnard Way in Santa Monica. There is both metered parking (Lot 5 South) and all day beach parking at the adjacent parking lots. Achilles representatives can be identified by bright yellow shirts. For directions, please visit: <https://www.achillesla.org/weekly-workouts>

RSVP: As we begin building a critical mass of both athletes and volunteer guides, we will need to follow an RSVP system to ensure proper athlete-guide matches. Our goal is to eventually eliminate the RSVP system entirely....and just show up! But for now, please RSVP through our website - <https://www.achillesla.org/weekly-workouts> - or send an e-mail to peter@achillesla.org by the end of day Friday.

During your first workout, you will be introduced to our AchillesLA team, and during every workout, you (and possibly others) will be matched with an athlete with a disability to serve as their workout guide.

NOTE: This is not a formal commitment by you to attend each and every weekly workout. We are happy to have you whenever your schedule allows!

Achilles Races:

AchillesLA is just getting started, so weekly workouts will be our main activity for now. However, our goal is to develop a race calendar, and we invite you to join us as guides for AchillesLA athletes. We believe races can be effective when working towards short and long-term goals, but please note there is NO obligation at any time to participate in any races.

Achilles Volunteer Guide:

An AchillesLA volunteer functions as an athlete's eyes, ears, guide, and sometimes motivator. Guides will help us welcome AchillesLA athletes to the wonderful world of exercise and running; and at the same time, promote camaraderie and self-confidence. Safety and fun should always be of paramount concern.

How can AchillesLA volunteers help?:

- Participate in weekly workouts (as your schedule allows); providing guidance, running advice, companionship, and encouragement.
- Help with race-day logistics (should you act as a guide during future races).
- Help AchillesLA runners become familiar and proficient with special workout equipment.

Weekly Workout - Guide Responsibilities:

AchillesLA athletes have a wide range of disabilities so it is critical that volunteers and athletes have open communication about the type of assistance an athlete may need.

When you are assigned/paired to an AchillesLA athlete, don't be afraid to ask the following questions prior to starting any workout:

- Do you have any specific challenges?
- Have you been exercising/walking/running? What is your exercise experience?
- Do you use any special equipment? If yes, what do you use? (eg., tethers, cane, braces, crutches, prostheses, wheelchairs)
- Do you have any exercise/running guide assistance preferences?
- What are your workout goals? How can we best help you meet those goals?

Weekly Workout Logistics:

- Weekly workouts will typically start with a meet-and-greet, and group stretch/warm-up before we hit the road!
- AchillesLA will do our best to assign you to athletes that run a pace similar to, or slower, than your own.
- AchillesLA will likely assign two, or more, volunteer guides to each athlete but the ratio of guides to athletes may vary each week.
- Once assigned to an athlete, please stay with him/her for the duration of the workout and ask if the athlete needs further assistance at the end of the session (ie: to the restroom). Guides should also confirm that an athlete is able to safely depart to their desired destination after the workout.

General Volunteer Guide Tips:

- Your primary job is not to help the Achilles disabled athlete increase endurance or speed; it is to ensure that he/she remains safe and has a positive experience.
- Please provide continual encouragement and positive feedback. If your athlete becomes tired, encourage him/her to walk or take a short break. Also encourage athletes to remain hydrated.
- Guides are not expected to provide anything beyond workout assistance and workout companionship. If other assistance is requested, please bring it to the attention of your AchillesLA leaders.

Running with a Blind Athlete:

- Prior to starting any workout, discuss with your athlete what their guide preferences are.
- It is incredibly important that you remain focused and aware throughout the entire workout. Even social conversation while running can distract you from being fully aware of your blind athlete's surroundings.
- Always be alert for pathway hazards or obstacles (e.g., cracks in the pavement, curbs, light poles, runner in front of you, etc.) and be very vocal about them. Give your blind athlete very specific descriptions and instructions. Your job is to always be on the lookout for anything that could cause your blind athlete to trip and fall.
- Many times you will face on-coming runners or cyclists. DO NOT assume others will be courteous, and/or that they know you are guiding a blind runner and intend to get out of the way. You need to be very vocal that you are guiding a blind runner and make a firm request about which side you prefer the on-coming runner or cyclist to move (e.g., "Guiding a blind runner. Please move to your right.") Do this well in advance in order to avoid a potential collision.

- It is typically best to run *beside* your blind athlete. If you are in front, the athlete can trip on your feet.
- When guiding on crowded routes, it may help to have an extra volunteer guide run out in front (at a safe distance so as not to trip the blind athlete) and request slower runners ahead to move to the side in order to make room to pass.
- A blind athlete will likely run with a tether, which is simply a shoestring/rope with a loop on either end. The guide and athlete each holds one end of the loop in his/her hand. Do not tie tethers around anyone's wrist as this could be dangerous if either runner were to fall.
 - Along with verbal direction, a slight or firm tug of the tether will signal when an athlete should turn.
 - A slight push on the upper arm may sometimes be used to signal a turn in the other direction. Again, communicate with your blind athlete what their guide preferences are.
- In the beginning, either have your athlete hold your elbow, or you should hold the tether closely to the blind athlete's hand. As you get more comfortable with your blind athlete, you may loosen up, allowing more distance between you.
- Key phrases/thoughts:
 - "GENTLE LEFT/RIGHT" to indicate a gentle curve in the path
 - "90 DEGREES" or "SHARP LEFT/RIGHT"
 - "TIGHTEN UP" tells the blind athlete to get close, and/or hold your elbow as you navigate a narrow or congested passage (e.g., bridges, runner traffic, etc.)
 - "STOP" when both guide and blind athlete need to stop quickly (e.g., a dog/car/obstacle darts in front of your path)
 - Give an estimated distance to the top or bottom of a hill, bridge, curb, etc.
 - Some blind athletes like to know what pace they are running and/or the distance to certain mile markers (if you have a watch with that capability)
 - Otherwise, just look at the entire landscape, and tell your athlete what you see! (e.g., bridges, other runners or cyclists, sunset, etc.)

Running with a Wheelchair or Handcrank Athlete

- Most wheelchair and/or handcrank athletes tend to workout by themselves, but they may initially attend an Achilles workout gathering for the camaraderie.
- If you happen to be assigned a wheelchair or handcrank athlete, we will ensure you will be able to keep up the pace.
- A flag on wheelchair or cycle, at standing eye level height, is recommended
- Safety helmets must be worn by all Achilles athletes on wheels.

Thank you very much for your time and willingness to assist athletes with disabilities. We are confident it will be an extremely rewarding experience for you. Please spread the word to anyone else you think might be interested in joining us and we are extremely excited to have you as part of our AchillesLA team. Any questions, you can reach us at peter@achillesla.org. Go Achilles!

Peter Sheehy & Ed Gargiulo
Chapter Co-Presidents, Achilles International – Los Angeles
www.achillesla.org