

60 ¹⁹⁵⁷/₂₀₁₇ YEARS

Sixty Tails for Sixty Years

A collection of tales gathered from the 60 year history of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT

While we have achieved so much in the past 60 years, there is so much more to do. Our warmest thanks to the many people who have contributed and supported the life-changing work of our organisation: Supporters, Donors, Volunteers, Clients and their families, Puppy Raisers, Staff, Board members and of course our Guide Dogs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Copyright © 2017 by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT 2-4 Thomas Street, Chatswood, NSW 2067, Australia
www.guidedogs.com.au

Editor: Kym Robins

Book design: Jenssen Design Associates Pty Limited

Printed: Printed and bound in Australia by Pegasus Print Group Pty Limited

Particular recognition to Dr Graeme White whose vision inspired this book and Ellie Biles who led the way on the first leg of its production.

Contributors

A special thank you to the many wonderful Donors, Puppy Raisers, Supporters, Volunteers, Clients, Staff and Board Members who have contributed information, stories and photographs for this book. Your support has been invaluable.

Photo credits

Christian Trinder, Pixabay support images on pages 12-13, 28-29, 64-65, 68, 81, 106, 112-113, 121, 122
All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means without the prior written permission of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. ABN 52 000 399 744
Guide Dogs NSW/ACT receives less than 2% of its funding from Government and is financially dependent on the generosity of the people of NSW and the ACT.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
INTRODUCTION	5
OUR HISTORY OF GUIDE DOGS	6
A GUIDE DOG'S JOURNEY	7
FINDING A WAY	9
A NEW WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD	10
MAKING A REAL CONTRIBUTION	11
TAKING BACK CONTROL	12
BRINGING GUIDE DOGS TO	13
NEW SOUTH WALES	13
GULLIVER'S TRAVELS	14
FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT GUIDE DOGS	15
BREEDING THE PERFECT GUIDE DOG	16
PUPPY RAISING VETERANS	17
COURAGE BEYOND MEASURE	18
60 YEARS OF LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCES	19
AN AMAZING ACHIEVEMENT	20
A LUCKY ESCAPE	21
A PLACE TO CALL HOME	22
A DEDICATED TEAM	23
A CRUCIAL MESSAGE	24
AN OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION	25
VERY DEAR FRIENDS	26
A BEAUTIFUL RELATIONSHIP	27
AN ELECTRIC CONNECTION	28
SOME KIND OF MAGIC	29
HUMBLE BEGINNINGS	30
THE RELIABLE MR DARCY	31
AN EXTRAORDINARY BOND	32
WITH US AT EVERY STEP	33
A SELFLESS TASK	34
SHARED JOURNEYS	35

THE RAINBOW BRIDGE	36
STRIVING FOR CHANGE	37
THE AGONY	38
AUSTRALIA'S FIRST GUIDE DOG	39
A HUMBLING EXPERIENCE	40
JUST PUPPIES BEING PUPPIES	41
HENRY THE SONG IN MY HEART	42
A GUIDE DOGS ICON	43
HEAVENLY INTERVENTION	44
THE BEST START IN LIFE	45
A VERY LONG JOURNEY	46
ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE	47
GRADUATION DAY	48
OUR SIGNATURE UNIFORM	49
THE MAGIC MOMENT	50
IN MEMORY OF JOSEPH PATRICK FINUCANE	51
PURE LUCK	52
MAKING A DIFFERENCE	53
JUST ONE OF THE FAMILY	54
AN UNEXPECTED PATH	55
WE'RE A BREED OF OUR OWN	56
ROCK 'N' ROLL HOUND	57
RECIPE FOR A PUPPY RAISER	58
WHATEVER IT TAKES	59
EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED	60
LOVING THEN LETTING GO	61
A PASSION FOR CHANGING LIVES	62
REACH FOR THE STARS	63
EVERYDAY PEOPLE	64
THE JAM MAN	65
THE HAPPIEST YEARS	66
HELPING PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES	67
A GREAT HONOUR	68
WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?	69

FOREWORD

Sixty years is a great milestone and it is important that the development of the Guide Dog Association and its achievements over those 60 years be recorded. Many of those achievements are responsible for the present standing of the organisation today and all those responsible are to be congratulated.

One of the inspiring features of the work of Guide Dogs is that over the years various aspects of the activities have been directed to not only training dogs to assist people with sight loss but other projects that are aimed at treating people with early stage eye disease before they lose their sight. A considerable amount of the work today is directed towards this objective. It has not taken away the need to increase the output of trained dogs to assist people who have lost their sight and still much of the work of the organisation is in this direction.

It is important to recognise the contribution over the first 60 years by all those who have contributed to the growth of the organisation. The dedication of members of the Board, staff and the many volunteers has been magnificent as has the never-ending support of the countless supporters and donors and the work of the wonderful Puppy Raisers.

Back in 1957, I recognised the important contribution that Guide Dogs could make to people who have lost their sight and I am very proud to have taken the first steps to get the organisation started in NSW. I have watched the growth of the organisation over the years and while I have not been directly involved in the later years I have continued to support the movement wherever possible. The forward thinking of the Board is to be commended and I am firmly of the opinion that the organisation will continue to grow and expand into more ways to assist people who are vision impaired.

Doug Cameron

60 Year Supporter of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT
Zone 10 APEX President (1956 to 1958)

INTRODUCTION

There is evidence that man's relationship with wolves, the ancestors of dogs, stretches back 400,000 years. Man's domestication of dogs and the evolution of the early dog breeds dates back to around 150,000 years ago. This extraordinary and long relationship between man and dog stands out in our world.

The earliest recording of a person with sight loss being led by a dog is depicted in a mural in buried ruins near Pompeii from about 79 AD.

While there are further glimpses of these early Guide Dogs ranging back through history, the modern era of the Guide Dog commenced at the end of World War I in Germany in 1918.

In 1951, Dr Arnold Cook came home to Perth from Britain with his new Guide Dog, the first seen in this country. The sight of a blind person crossing a busy road led only by a dog caused such a sensation that the APEX Clubs of Australia decided that more people with sight loss should have access to these marvelous dogs.

In 1957, the Sydney APEX Club established a Guide Dog organisation in NSW.

In that period, we have trained just under 2,000 Guide Dogs and to do that, our Instructors and Puppy Raisers have walked around 5 million kilometres...which is the equivalent to six times to the moon and back plus 10 laps around the earth. At the same time, our Instructors have worked with another 22,000 people with sight loss who use canes and they have walked another 5 million kilometres during training. Our Instructors are very fit and extremely dedicated.

Dr Graeme White

Chief Executive Officer
Guide Dogs NSW/ACT



OUR HISTORY OF GUIDE DOGS

1950, Arnold Cook trained in the UK with Guide Dog, Dreena. He was the first Guide Dog Handler in Australia.

1951, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association was established in Western Australia.

1952, Guide Dogs for the Blind of NSW was formed.

1962, Guide Dogs were permitted to travel inside planes.

1973, Juliet Bishop was appointed the first Australian trained Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Instructor in Sydney.

1979, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association of NSW was renamed Guide Dogs Association of NSW to encompass people with vision impairment.

1982, Introduction of 'Pets As Therapy' (PAT) Dogs.

1991, Guide Dogs ACT joined forces with NSW to form Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

1996, A university course was developed to produce O&M (Guide Dog) Instructors.

2000, Construction of the Guide Dog Centre at Glossodia was completed (below).

2013, The Guide Dogs Breeding Program was launched and a new facility opened at the Centre.

2017, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT celebrated its 60th birthday.



A GUIDE DOG'S JOURNEY

0 to 8 weeks Puppy Breeding

We select only our best dogs with sound temperaments to be part of our breeding program so that our puppies will have the best chance of being suited for a life as a Guide Dog. Training starts as soon as the dog can walk but they spend most of their early days sleeping or playing.

7 to 8 weeks Off to a New Home

When the puppy reaches around seven – eight weeks of age, they are picked up from the Guide Dog Centre by their volunteer Puppy Raisers and will live with them for the next 12 months. Introducing sights, sounds and obstacles that a Guide Dog may encounter later in life is the key task for Puppy Raisers. Puppy Raising is a rewarding experience that will help change the life of someone with vision impairment.

10 to 12 weeks School Begins

At 10-12 weeks puppies are now out and about and attending Puppy Pre-school. Puppies start to learn important commands such as sit, stay and drop as well as socialising with other dogs. Puppy Raisers are supported by a dedicated Guide Dog Centre team who provide ongoing advice and support.

3 to 6 months Health Check

Also around this time, puppies are due for a check-up. A puppy will receive their vaccinations and basic health check to ensure they are in top shape. During its life, a Guide Dog will walk about 9,000km so it has to be in top physical shape.



14 months Farewells and New Beginnings

At 14 months, it's time for the Puppy Raising family to say goodbye. It's a sad time but knowing the young dog will one day give freedom and independence to someone with sight loss, makes it all worthwhile.

12 to 18 months Guide Dog Training

On returning to the Centre, all dogs will be tested on what they have learnt so far. The Instructor's job is to build confidence and consistency in the dog as it learns many new skills. The dog must also learn how to manage distractions when it visits busier and noisier places. This is also a good time for the Instructor to observe each dog's personality and to tailor training to suit their temperament.

20 months Graduation

After 20 weeks of intensive training, it is time for the dogs to take their final tests. They must now show the Instructor that they've learnt everything they need to know to become a successful Guide Dog. Dogs are tested on their ability to: ignore distractions such as food, noises and other dogs navigate obstacles travel on public transport.

18 to 24 months Match Makers

The dogs have now grown into lively Guide Dogs, so it's important that they're matched with the right person. A Guide Dog team must be a perfect fit. That's why each dog and their Handler are matched on personality, lifestyle and physical traits.

2 to 10 years Working Life

It's taken a lot of hard work but each Guide Dog is now ready to start their working life with their new Handler and owner. Training doesn't stop for Guide Dogs and their Handlers as the Guide Dog team learns to trust each other and develops a strong bond.

9+ years Retirement

After a dedicated working life, each Guide Dog will retire knowing that they've helped change someone's life. When the time comes for a Guide Dog to hang up its harness, the Handler will have the option of keeping their older dog as a much-loved pet and almost all retired dogs remain with the Handler's family.

FINDING A WAY

Graeme Innes learned from his family that most things could be achieved - the challenge was *Finding A Way*. This is the title of his recently published autobiography.

Achieving equality has been a lifelong passion for Graeme who is a lawyer, company director, public speaker, author, husband and dad. He was Australia's Disability Discrimination Commissioner for nine years, as well as Human Rights Commissioner and Race Discrimination Commissioner.

He has been a human rights lawyer for 30 years, involved in numerous landmark discrimination cases, and participated in the development of national and international human rights instruments and laws.

Graeme began to seek equality while a prefect at school.

"We wanted to call the school magazine by an Aboriginal name, which meant 'message stick' but the principal wasn't too keen on the idea. A group of five or six prefects and I protested by threatening to hand back our prefect badges if the name was not allowed," Graeme said.

"I remained a prefect, meaning we got the name we wanted."

Graeme used a white cane until his forties, deciding to work with his first Guide Dog, Jordie, when the pressures of family and more senior roles increased. Graeme, and many other people with vision impairment, still find that negative attitudes towards them have not changed.

"There are negative misconceptions about people with a range of disabilities, including blindness, and what we are unable to do."

When he graduated as a lawyer in 1978, finding a job posed a real challenge. People just couldn't understand how a blind person could work as a lawyer.



"People often didn't tell you why you weren't getting a job, but it wasn't hard to work it out. I went to about 30 job interviews in that year, and didn't get any of them. Finally I realised I was not going to get a job as a lawyer. I had to find another way.

"So I did the entrance examination for the NSW public service and started as a clerical assistant. Part of my first job was to answer the telephone and tell people the winning lotto numbers.

"I used to joke that I was the only clerical assistant in the NSW public service with a law degree," Graeme said.

"The mistake people often make about people with disabilities is to make assumptions about what we might need, or what we can't do, without asking first. Asking that question might provide some pleasing and surprising answers.

"Sometimes I challenge people by turning situations around. People often grab me by the arm and push me in the direction they think I want to go. I turn to them and ask, 'Can I help you?' as if they are seeking my help.

"People with disabilities should not be portrayed as victims or heroes, but as agents of our own destiny."

A NEW WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD

Janis Salisbury became a lifelong supporter of several animal charities after growing up in a home where donating to charity was second nature. She was inspired to support Guide Dogs NSW/ACT because of her friend, Rex, who was blind.

“Rex was a musician. He loved music, especially opera, and liked someone to go with him to performances. Knowing I was an opera fan too, we’d often go together when it didn’t clash with my nursing shifts. Whenever we went we’d buy a program and I’d sit down with him and read through it.

“During the interval of one of the first operas we went to, he asked me what had happened at a particular point in the show. I had to admit that I couldn’t remember as I hadn’t been watching that closely. After that, I tried to see both visually and non-visually, and paid much more attention to the things we take for granted when we go to a performance.

“At first it was a bit distracting. I was trying to do everything at once – seeing and not seeing – so I often lost my concentration. We used to have a laugh when he’d ask me questions about the performance and I wouldn’t have a clue what had happened. Down the track I learned to open up to a whole new way of seeing the world.”

Janis became one of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT’s most generous supporters, helping to fund vital mobility equipment and sponsoring eight puppies through their training to become fully-fledged Guide Dogs, Pets As Therapy (PAT) dogs and breeding dogs.



“I’m so inspired by Guide Dogs. They are never stressed and are so calm as they quietly guide their owners around. The owners and their dogs have so much trust in one another and I find it utterly amazing. Not many animals can do what these dogs do.”

Our wonderful Guide Dog sponsors often get to name their puppies, and Janis has named a few of hers after characters in her favourite childhood show, The Muppets and sponsored Kermit, Waldorf, Statler, Angelina, Eloise, Erica, Pearce and Tiffany.

MAKING A REAL CONTRIBUTION

Guide Dog, Hudson, was affectionately known as ‘Mr Reliable’. The gentle black giant became a well-known figure as he walked the corridors of both Parliament Houses in Canberra and Sydney with his Handler, Policy Advisor, Jaci Armstrong.

Issued with his own photo ID attached to his harness, Hudson was steady and dependable as he provided Jaci with the ability to work in the demanding world of State and Federal politics and community service. Hudson gave her the confidence and freedom to pursue her career aspirations.

These days, another Guide Dog, Nancy, safely guides Jaci as she travels around Australia. As Principal Policy Advisor for Guide Dogs Australia, Jaci primarily works on federal policies that affect all Guide Dog organisations, and helps them manage major issues including aged care, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), education, employment or transport.

Jaci and her twin sister were born prematurely. Her sister has cerebral palsy and is a wheelchair user while Jaci grew up without sight in her left eye and was always short-sighted in her right eye. When she was 15, she had an accident that badly damaged her working eye, making traveling to and around school and her local community suddenly really difficult.

“The loss of previously enjoyed independence totally destroyed my confidence. Then, when I was in year 10, I got my first Guide Dog, Annabel, and that changed everything. She came to school with me every day and was very popular!” Jaci recalls.

“I’ve now had five Guide Dogs including Annabel and all of them have been great problem solvers. The other night I was walking from the train station and access to the footpath was blocked. In the pitch black, Nancy safely guided us around several obstacles and across uneven surfaces before getting us back on the footpath. She knew what a great job she’d done and was so proud of herself.



“I’ve had great trust in all my Guide Dogs when I’m out but when we’re at home and the harness comes off them, they can play and relax. Each has their own personality, sometimes naughty, sometimes strong willed and often goofy.

“While Hudson was always very focused on safely guiding me when we were out, he loved coming home to his special collection of teddy bears. He was so intelligent but a real softy.”

Before joining Guide Dogs NSW/ACT in 2012, Jaci worked as an Electorate Office Manager and Advisor for a Senior Federal MP and was a volunteer coach and Chair of the Board for an organisation called Riding for the Disabled.

“It feels like my political and policy background, my volunteer work with Riding for the Disabled and my personal interest in vision loss and disability issues have all come together in this job, where I’m making a real contribution.

“As someone who has been a Guide Dog user for 20 years, it’s hard to put into words what they contribute to your life in terms of independence, mobility and confidence. I think once you’ve worked with a Guide Dog, nothing else really compares.

TAKING BACK CONTROL

Many people approach 85-year-old Colin Martin when he's waiting at bus stops.

They want to know everything about being vision impaired and he's happy to talk about how his long cane and new technology have given him the freedom and independence he loves.

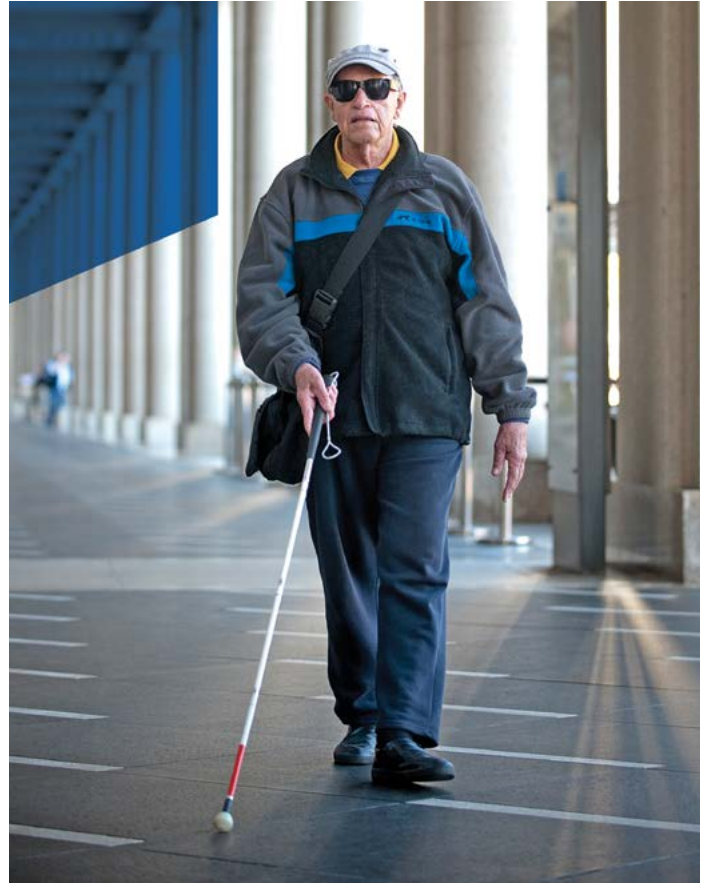
"You don't just go to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT to get a Guide Dog. There's so much other help they can give you," Colin said.

"When Guide Dogs NSW/ACT first suggested I use a cane, I said: 'There's no way anybody is going to see me walking around with a cane!' I had a very stubborn attitude."

"When I did get one I would creep around the corner before I'd get it out of my bag and use it. Now, I couldn't give a damn! It's my way of getting around, and if I didn't use it I'd be sitting here waiting for someone to come and get me.

"I wouldn't change a cane for a Guide Dog, because I trust a cane more. Lots of people think I should get a dog because they are so lovely, but it's not for me.

"I can do a lot of things by myself, but I still find many things difficult. People don't realise that just making a cup of coffee is very hard. I used to pour too much hot water into the cup so that it overflowed and I kept burning myself. But now I have a little gadget that sits on the side of the cup and beeps when I've poured in the right amount of liquid.



"I'm lucky that at my age, I've been able to pick up all the new technology. I couldn't live without my GPS system – it's given me confidence and independence.

I can sit on the bus and it will tell me everything that's passing on either side of the road, and the distance to my stop. It even tells me when to press the button to get off.

BRINGING GUIDE DOGS TO NEW SOUTH WALES

According to the then Zone 10 APEX President, Doug Cameron, who was a delegate to the annual APEX National Convention in Adelaide, John gave such an impressive presentation at the convention about the work they were doing with Guide Dogs in the west that the decision was made to adopt Guide Dogs as the local project in NSW, even though the decision hadn't yet gone through the normal processes.

"My biggest concern at the start was the impact we might have on existing support organisations for people with low vision as I knew that the public would find our beautiful dogs very appealing," Doug said.

"I used to go to a lot of conferences regarding the expansion of the Guide Dog movement when I was State Secretary and on one occasion I went to Perth with a delegate from the Blind Citizens Club. We had a black tie dinner one night and I was to collect him from his room on the way to dinner.

"When I knocked on the door that night, he told me to come in. I opened the door and found the room was pitch black!

"That had a great effect on me. There he was, all dressed up with his bow tie and everything, and he had done it entirely in the dark.

"The next day we went to the beach to go swimming. After some time in the surf, my friend from the Blind Citizens Club said he'd had enough and was going back to the beach. He started to swim but was heading out to sea rather than to shore and I had to stop and turn him in the right direction. Those two occasions makes you realise what a blind person has to deal with every day.



"It made me feel very glad of the part I played in bringing Guide Dogs to NSW.

"Back in 1957, our original committee consisted of me as the APEX representative serving as honorary Secretary, a solicitor who was vision impaired and representatives from other organisations dealing with blind people. We used my accountancy practice office in Manly as the State office for three years. By the end of that time the organisation had grown to the stage that it was necessary to employ staff and it was no longer possible to maintain the original set up and a separate state office was established.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

If you're out and about on the roads in New South Wales or the ACT, you may come across another special traveller who's already travelled more than 30,000 kilometres across Eastern Australia.

Gulliver is a very special member of the Guide Dogs family. Made of foam and coated in fiberglass, Gulliver is a 4.3 metre-tall, 690 kilogram replica of the iconic Guide Dog collection boxes and is pretty hard to miss!

These collection boxes have been located in supermarkets and shopping centres since the 1970s and encourage shoppers to donate their spare change to support Guide Dog charities across Australia.

It takes more than \$35,000 to breed, raise and train a Guide Dog and Gulliver's travels help to raise awareness of the important work that Guide Dogs do and remind people how much we rely on their generous donations as we receive almost no government funding.

Unveiled in Sydney in 2010, Gulliver is the tallest of his kind in the world. He was named following a statewide competition and the name, Gulliver, was chosen in recognition that Guide Dogs are legally allowed to accompany their owners wherever they go.

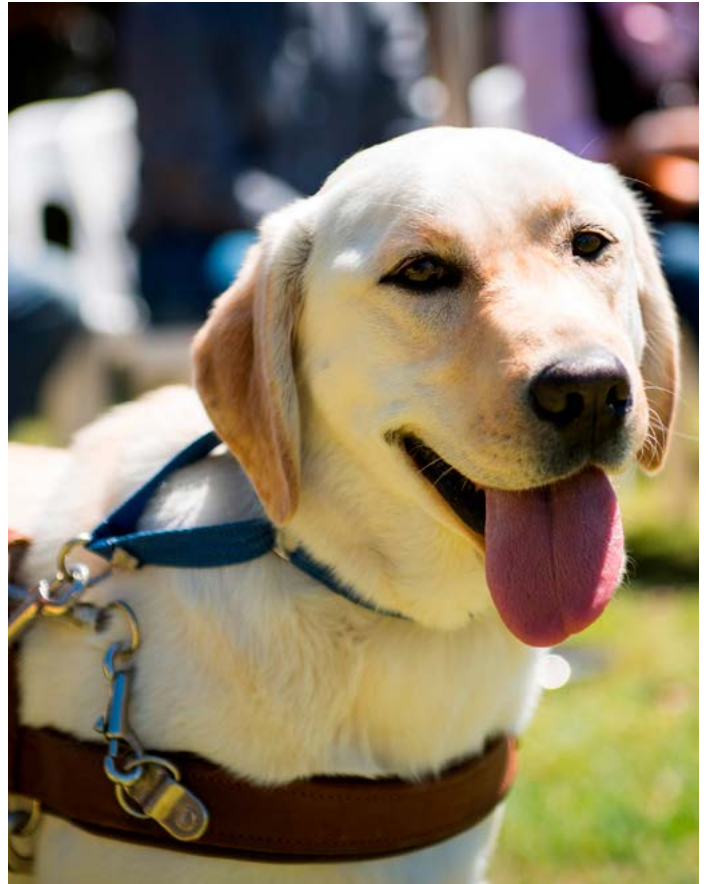
Although he has many miles already under his collar, there are many more to come so make sure you look out for Gulliver next time you're on the road and give him a friendly wave and smile for all his hard work.

You can follow Gulliver's travels on Facebook facebook.com/guidedogsnsnswact



FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT GUIDE DOGS

- A black mother and father can have all golden puppies and vice versa.
- Sometimes puppies can be born with brindle coloration which has shades of both black and yellow hair.
- Yellow dogs are the most popular colour among our clients, because for someone with vision impairment they are often easier to see.
- Some Guide Dog users do prefer a black dog if they work in an office as black dog hairs on their clothing are less noticeable than white or yellow hairs.
- Our litters range from two to 11 puppies, although the average litter is close to seven.
- Natural breeding tends to produce more puppies than artificial insemination breeding.
- Traditionally, each litter of puppies born at Glossodia is allocated a letter of the alphabet and each puppy in the litter is given a name starting with that letter.
- At about seven weeks of age, the puppies go to live with their puppy-raising families who raise the puppy for the first 12-15 months.



BREEDING THE PERFECT GUIDE DOG

When we're looking for the best candidates for the important job of Guide Dog, we have to be very fussy. A gentle temperament, intelligence, a keen work ethic and a willingness to work 24/7 for love are essential.

Identifying the desirable qualities that make the perfect Guide Dog is something the team at Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has been working on for years and our breeding program is the first step towards producing the perfect Guide Dog.

When veteran dog breeder and Puppy Development Manager, Karen Hayter, first laid eyes on Helinka, Karen knew she was the perfect candidate to start our new breeding program in 2010.

"We bought Helinka as a puppy and she went through our Puppy Raising program but before she finished we had already decided we would use her as our first breeding female because she had the wonderful qualities that we want in a Guide Dog," Karen said.

Purpose-bred puppy from another Guide Dog organisation, Helinka is a small, compact dog with a lovely, relaxed temperament. She was also a great mother and taught her puppies well. Easily able to adapt to a range of different environments, Helinka was great with her Puppy Raising family who had very young children. She was essentially the model dog and a wonderful breeding female.

"We have kept a couple of her children in our breeding colony and we're slowly increasing Helinka's excellent Guide Dog qualities in our breeding program as her puppies have puppies and become the mums of the future."



PUPPY RAISING VETERANS

Ian and Eileen Henderson are true puppy raising veterans. So far they've raised at least 14 puppies that have become working Guide Dogs, and they're still going strong.

With their wonderful kindness and dedication, they've made an incredible contribution to our community and a lasting impact on the pups they've raised.

"We were just sitting down at a recent Guide Dog graduation ceremony when we spotted this Guide Dog in the front row that was getting all restless and excited," Ian recalls.

"During the ceremony we heard that the dog's name was Ally and we'd raised a puppy with that name more than three years before, so we wondered... After the graduation we went up to Ally's owner and asked if it would be ok if we took the golden-white Labrador out of her working harness.

"Next minute, I had two paws on my shoulders and an enthusiastic tongue licking me all over my face. It was our Ally! After all these years she'd remembered me. It was such an emotional reunion."

Visiting Ian's and Eileen's home, it's clear that the household revolves around puppies. The doorbell is greeted by the thunder of three excited Labradors charging wildly up the hall. Not only are Ian and Eileen raising two Guide Dog puppies of different ages, they're also caring for a third Guide Dog while its owner is away.

Looking back on their time as Puppy Raisers, Ian said there's one thing that's kept their morale high and their passion strong through all the toilet training terrors, the early morning wake-up barks and the heartache of having to give up the puppies when it's time for their training.



"It is very hard to release the dog at the end because you get so attached, but it's for such a good purpose. You know that someone will really benefit from the work you've done and that the dog will go on to give someone the kind of help they can only get from a specially trained Guide Dog. The satisfaction of knowing that is what makes puppy raising such a fantastic experience," Ian said.

COURAGE BEYOND MEASURE

RECOUNTED BY JACQUI STEVENS

It is September 11, 2001 and Michael Hingson is at work on the 78th floor of the World Trade Centre's North Tower. His beloved Guide Dog, Roselle, is snoozing under his desk. It's 8.45am, and they're almost alone in the office.

Suddenly Roselle is shaken awake. Fifteen floors above them a Boeing 767 has crashed into the tower, creating a thunderous explosion.

Roselle leaps to her feet. Though he can't see the chunks of burning debris falling past the windows, Michael can feel that the building is in trouble. He straps Roselle into her harness and they head straight for the emergency staircase.

Michael's relief at reaching the exit is short-lived. It's more than 1,400 steps to safety and the stairwell is thick with the fumes of jet fuel. But he reassures Roselle and commands her forward and she calmly begins to lead him down.

At every floor more people crowd into the stairwell. The heat is oppressive, the smell nauseating.

There's panic in the air and people are screaming. But Michael and Roselle work as a team, keeping each other calm and focused. Step by step, she leads him downwards.

The air is thick with dust and every breath is a struggle. Roselle is panting and Michael knows she's desperately thirsty, but she keeps on going, doing her job, leading her best friend to safety. It takes 50 torturous minutes to reach the ground, and another 10 to find their way out of the building.

Just moments later the South Tower collapses, sending lethal debris hurtling towards Michael and Roselle. They run. Once again the valiant Guide Dog does her job, leading Michael through the suffocating clouds of ash to the safety of a subway station.



There were many stories of bravery around this horrific disaster, but Michael and Roselle's story is a defining example of the dedication of Guide Dogs.

In 2007, Roselle retired at a public ceremony at Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB). GDB also retired her name and no future Guide Dog will ever be named Roselle. Over the years, Roselle has received numerous awards for her role in 9/11 such as the Heroes of Hartz and the American Kennel Club's ACE Award for Canine excellence.

Roselle was 13 years old when she died on Sunday, June 26, 2011. Prior to her death, she was nominated for the American Humane Association Hero Dog Awards.

Michael survived America's deadliest terror attack. And it was all thanks to a golden Labrador who never panicked and never gave up.

60 YEARS OF LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCES

Providing life-changing independence and freedom to our clients with vision impairment has always been central to the work that Guide Dogs NSW/ACT does.

When James Williams, Chairman of Royal Guide Dogs Australia, joined the Board of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT in 1988, they were keen to get younger people involved.

“I’d love to say that I was 10 at the time! I certainly wasn’t, but I was younger than most of the other people on the Board,” James says.

Then in 1991, he was appointed to represent NSW on the Board of the Royal Guide Dogs Australia (known then as ‘Royal’) and he’s held the role of Chairman since 2001. During that time, he says the organisation has had quite a journey.

In the mid-1990s, the Board of Guide Dogs NSW decided to provide, on its own account, a range of dedicated services for the people of NSW and felt it would be really beneficial to have its own large-scale purpose-built facility in NSW.

“We wanted something that wasn’t too far from the centre of Sydney, where we could build a training centre. It took us a while to find the right place, but we ended up buying the 22 acres at Glossodia,” James said.

“We wanted a state-of-the-art facility, not just as a base for our operations but also a place we could show our donors and other members of the public what we do and how we do it. And it has just worked so well.

“I can still remember going out to Glossodia to see it for the first time. It was just the most wonderful thing to achieve something really excellent. I felt so humble being part of something like that and contributing in a small way towards the whole effort. It was fabulous!”

Some years prior to that time that the NSW organisation was starting to develop and grow

its own range of services, a decision was made to join forces with Guide Dogs ACT to form Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. This new name was really important so that people in the ACT were still represented.

When all the states began to start delivering services independently of Royal Guide Dogs Australia, it was important to ensure that service delivery standards remained consistently high across all the Guide Dog organisations. To that end the national body, Royal Guide Dogs Australia, has played a significant role. It also takes the lead in speaking as one voice to Government at a national level around important issues impacting people with vision impairment.

“Underpinning everything has been the amazing contribution of our many supporters, volunteers and donors. Without their incredible support, we would not have been able to help so many people with vision loss.

“What we’ve found is that our donors are people who love both the dogs themselves and the work we do. Above all else, they want to know that the money they give us is used as effectively as possible to deliver as much support as possible to the people we serve...and it is,” James said.

“We’re also very lucky that our Guide Dogs and Labrador puppies attract so much attention and seem to win people’s hearts wherever they go. People see our Guide Dogs out working and training on the street every day and they admire the special bond that exists between the person and Guide Dog as they go about their daily life. It’s fantastic!

“Back in the ‘90s, people were saying that Guide Dogs might soon be replaced by satellites. But Guide Dogs offer so much more than technology. They become a person’s best friend and constant companion, sharing the challenges they face as they take on the world without sight – and that’s incredibly special.

AN AMAZING ACHIEVEMENT

Australia is one of the global leaders when it comes to academic research in the profession of orientation and mobility (O&M) and Guide Dogs NSW/ACT is leading the way with the largest team of orientation and mobility specialists in the world.

Orientation and mobility specialists are Masters-degree qualified professionals who are trained to work with people with sight loss. O&M specialists teach individuals the way to get around in the community independently and safely by using a variety of canes, electronic travel and GPS devices and a variety of other aids.

In 2007, a member of this exceptional team, Dr Desirée Gallimore together with Dr Mike Steer from the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) Renwick Centre (University of Newcastle) launched the International Journal of Orientation & Mobility (IJOM).

“There has never been a specific orientation & mobility journal before. There are many incredibly talented O&M specialists nationally and internationally doing innovative work that no one really knew about. We would go to international conferences and discover that someone had been working on a very similar idea to the one we were exploring in Australia. Had we known about it we could have worked together,” Desirée said.

“So we formed a collaborative partnership with the University of Newcastle and decided to launch this journal.”

IJOM includes research articles, historical commentaries, case studies, policy analyses and innovative practice reports on issues and topics related to the profession of orientation and mobility.

The first issue was published in 2008 and since then IJOM has flourished. The editorial advisory panel includes professional leaders and

academics from across the globe and IJOM’s reputation and popularity has gone beyond anything Desirée or Guide Dogs NSW/ACT ever expected.

To date, 65 per cent of papers have been contributed from authors outside Australia.

“When I receive an article, I review it to make sure it’s worthy of blind peer review. Blind peer reviewed journals are of a high calibre with rigorous content. We encourage O&M professionals to submit their work, to share their experience, innovations, and expertise and publish alongside other academics. This is how we expand and improve our professional practice.

“The next stage, once an article is considered worthy of peer review, is to send it to at least three peer reviewers nationally and internationally.

Because of a lengthy editing process, Desirée and her team work a year ahead on the Journal.

“The Journal has grown significantly and it is now available in electronic copy together with hard copy. The IJOM has been published for nine years and I’m currently putting out an expression of interest for a new lead editor, who will build upon the work that’s been done over these years. IJOM has grown to a point where numerous volumes could be published per year. IJOM has the potential to be one of the great international journals, and it will remain one of the great innovations founded by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and its respected partner, The RIDBC Renwick Centre.”

The journal is available from
www.ijorientationandmobility.com

A LUCKY ESCAPE

But would it be as easy without your sight and you trusted a cane from the second you stepped outside your door?

Every year, on October 15, International White Cane Day is held to raise awareness about the incredible importance of the white cane and how much it increases the independence and mobility of someone with sight loss.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT provides a range of mobility aids including Guide Dogs, but by far the majority of people we support actually choose a white cane as their mobility aid.

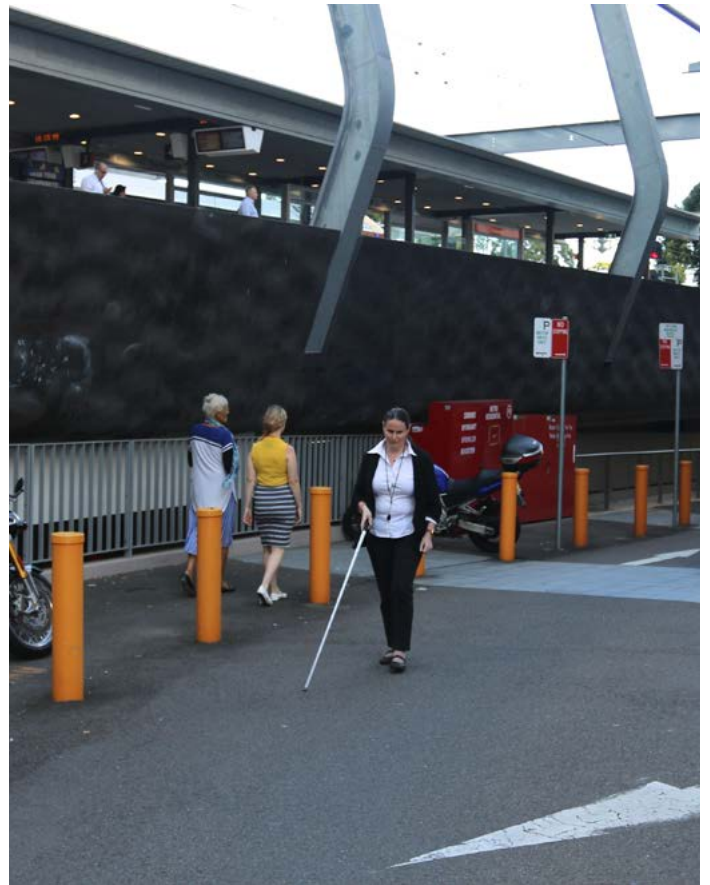
This year marks 96 years since an Englishman who lost his sight in an accident invented the long cane and painted it white to make it more visible to others.

For many people, a white cane can mean the difference between getting around safely. This is especially true when it comes to crossing the road, which can be very stressful and often terrifying for people with sight loss.

A Guide Dogs NSW/ACT survey showed that a horrifying one in two people with vision loss have had a near miss when crossing the road. Even more frightening is the fact that one in 12 have actually been hit by a vehicle.

Seven years ago, Jennifer Parry was seconds away from being hit by a car. The only thing between them was her white cane, which came off second best.

"I heard the sound from the traffic lights indicating I could go and I waited a couple of seconds in case there was a car, but I didn't hear one," Jennifer said.



"I proceeded to cross, only to be shocked to a halt when a car smashed into my white cane. It totally crushed the tip. A few seconds later and it would have been me."

Jennifer was lucky to escape unscathed, and while she has slowly regained her confidence and independence, crossing the road safely is a daily challenge.

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Our first-class Guide Dogs deserve a first-class Guide Dog Centre and we are constantly looking at how we can improve our breeding, puppy raising and training techniques and facilities.

Built over 15 years ago, the Guide Dog Centre continues to be developed to support the welfare of our dogs and the needs of our training and kennel staff. This means that major renovations and modifications to improve the centre's function are a constant feature of the site.

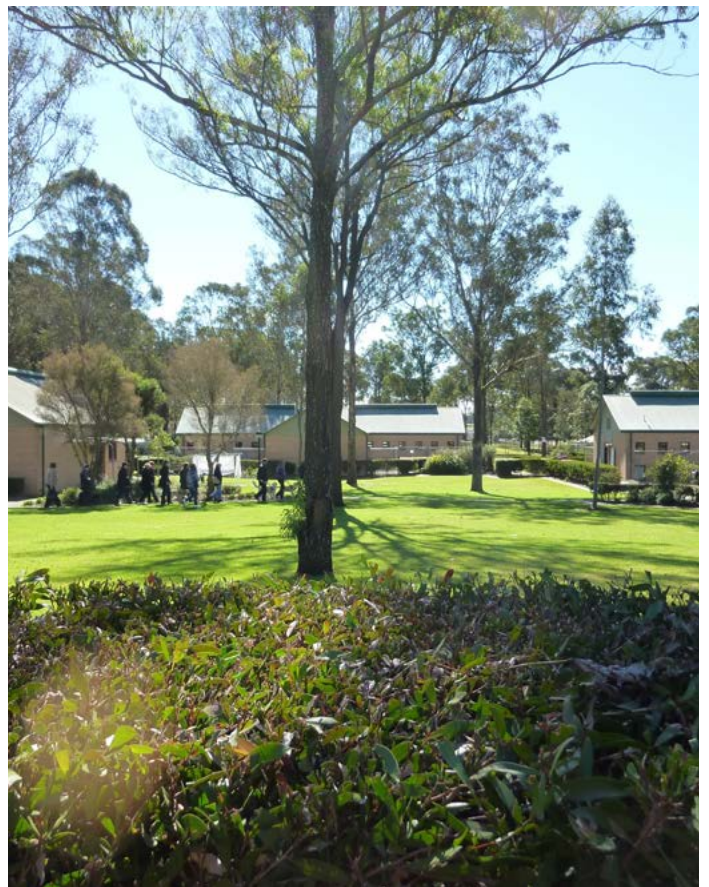
Minimising stress, creating hygienic conditions and an enriched environment are the key principles guiding the site improvements.

It is through the support of people like Tim Bainbridge and Damon Malek of FDC Construction & Fitout (NSW) Pty Ltd that these constant improvements are possible. Rather than writing a cheque they wanted to provide a tangible benefit.

And that's exactly what they did as they helped repurpose an existing training kennel into suites suitable for use by our breeding program.

Our centre has been transformed. From rooms suited to the whelping of puppies to areas that support the young puppies' development through play and socialisation over the vital first weeks of their young lives.

Other innovations and developments over the years include the building of enrichment areas for the dogs to explore, sound baffling, the removal of walls to create an open plan kennel and the recent provision of piped music to provide relaxing down time for dogs in training.



A DEDICATED TEAM

One by one, the adorable, hyperactive bundles of fur are brought into the veterinary clinic at Glossodia. One of the clinic's vets, Dr Caroline Moeser, calmly vaccinates each wriggling, squirming puppy.

Caroline has worked with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT for nine years and loves her work and has recently welcomed Dr Stephanie Fenn who is now helping the veterinary team meet the needs of the Centre's growing colony of dogs.

"One of the best things about working with Guide Dogs is that the dogs are all so well behaved and Labradors are such a lovely, gentle breed," Caroline said.

The clinic is always bustling with activity and there are many dogs living on site that need medical care. Caroline works part time but she's always on hand when her dogs and puppies need her.

"Working here I've had the opportunity to do a lot more than I would as a regular vet. I'm always learning particularly in exciting new areas such as artificial insemination, which we use in our breeding program."

Caroline always develops a close bond with the animals she cares for. One of her more memorable patients was a promising young Guide Dog candidate, called Andy, who suddenly developed a strange wobble in his back legs during training.

By the time Caroline saw him, Andy had a head tremor and was stumbling clumsily around – not at all like the surefooted, graceful dog she knew. She suspected meningitis and rushed him straight for testing. Her swift response saved Andy's life, but with the threat of a relapse hanging over him, his career as a Guide Dog was over.



Thankfully, Andy made a full recovery and the meningitis never returned. In 2010, he found a new calling as an ambassador for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and when not on the road visiting (and thanking) supporters, attending Field Days, morning tea events, the occasional boardroom meeting and retirement villages, he can be found enjoying the company of his work colleagues in the Chatswood office and lives with a member of our team, Katrine.

Like all vets, Caroline has a broad foreign body collection including mango seeds and small stones, which she has removed from our colony of very active young dogs that enjoy exploring their world.

A CRUCIAL MESSAGE

Not many people can claim they hold one world record and are planning to break a second but Aunt Mary Hooker can!

She's already knitted the world's longest scarf in Aboriginal colours and is currently creating the world's longest scarf to beat the Guinness World Record of 13 metres. Aunt Mary also proudly has the Aboriginal colours on her cane.

"When people ask me about my cane, I get the chance to tell them how I went blind. One in six Aboriginal people are affected by diabetes. Out of my family of 12, eight of us have developed diabetes although I'm the only one who has gone blind," Aunt Mary said.

Mary has diabetic retinopathy, a common complication of diabetes. In 2007, her sight began to deteriorate, first in her left eye and then her right. By 2010, she was legally blind.

"I wasn't taking my medication properly, mainly because I didn't have enough money. I had to give up work, and what money I did have was used for bills and food for my kids and grandkids. I would always look after myself last. Finally I found a chemist who let me pay in installments."

With her sight gone, Mary lost her independence. It was only after she contacted Guide Dogs NSW/ACT that Mary regained her freedom.

"I didn't call straight away as I didn't want a dog and I thought that was all Guide Dogs NSW/ACT could do to help me. I didn't realise at first that they could help me in other ways.



"When I did call them I asked to have my cane in the Aboriginal colours and they'd never had that request before! That same year they made me an Ambassador for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT so now I travel around and spread the word about all the ways the organisation can help people with vision impairment.

Having lost so much because of her blindness, Aunt Mary is passionate about educating young Indigenous children on how to take care of their sight.

AN OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION

For more than 50 years, the Presbyterian Ladies' College (PLC Sydney) in Croydon has been one of our strongest groups of supporters, raising funds through their annual Pet Show. Their contribution over the years is simply outstanding.

The school held their first parent-organised show back in 1953, with the girls proudly displaying their dogs and dolls for judging. The show was such a success that it became an annual event, and very soon the students were in charge. In 1962 they generously decided that all money raised would be donated to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

Their first donation was £50 in 1962 and since then the money raised has risen dramatically with the highest recorded donation being more than \$30,000 in 2003!

These days the annual Pet Show is a gala event with novelty stalls, food and drink, pet competitions and auctions. Run by Year 9 students, the Show can raise about \$10,000 in four hours and provides a wonderful opportunity for the students to give back to the community.

Eleanor Lawton-Wade is one of the students involved in running the 2016 event.

"I joined the Pet Show Committee because I felt it would be a great way to continue supporting a charity that's had a really big impact on me. My family raised a Guide Dog puppy for 12 months, which then became a breeding dog for Guide Dogs and finally a beloved family pet.

"Through that process I got to see all the work and money involved in raising a Guide Dog as well as the monumental impact they have on people who are vision impaired.

"As students and citizens of Australia we live incredibly privileged lives. I believe that fundraising and being involved with a charity is the best way to show our thanks for these lives.

"Supporting an organisation like Guide Dogs NSW/ACT helps you become a more



compassionate and loving human being, because it makes you aware of the challenges that others face – something we often miss in our self-absorbed lives."

As the current PLC Sydney Pet Show Coordinator, Lynne Knapman oversees the management and running of the show.

"The Pet Show is a service-learning project for our girls and is predominantly run by students with guidance given by staff. Each Home Room group has 14 girls who run two stalls on the day. There is also a Pet Show Committee that plans additional activities on the day and throughout the year," Lynne said.

The students really look forward to the Pet Show and work hard to fundraise for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. The girls take their responsibility very seriously and are really interested in learning everything that's involved in raising, training and using a Guide Dog.

Over the years, PLC Sydney has sponsored several Guide Dogs, each of which has gone on to transform the life of someone with vision impairment. It's an incredible achievement, and we couldn't be more grateful for all their hard work and for the strong relationship we've forged with this wonderful school community.

VERY DEAR FRIENDS

Marilyn Laving first learned about Guide Dogs NSW/ACT through Jenny, a close friend, whose baby was born with a congenital eye condition during the 1970s.

When Jenny asked Marilyn to help out with the Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Christmas appeal, Marilyn didn't hesitate and has maintained her strong support over 31 years, both as a member of staff and more recently, a volunteer.

"I've seen a lot of great changes since I first started working here. Back then whenever we had a major fundraising appeal, a small group of us would sit around a table opening envelopes, sorting money and cheques and handwriting receipts. These days many donations are made online and the receipts are quick and easy to produce on the computer," Marilyn said.

Over the years, Marilyn worked in many different departments before retiring in 2015. As part of the planned giving team, she took care of existing bequestors and other people who were considering leaving a much needed donation to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT in their Will.

"As we receive almost no funding from the government, bequests really are absolutely vital to the people who rely on our services.

"I absolutely loved visiting our supporters and listening to what they had to say about Guide Dogs and then following up on any request or issue that they raised. It's so important that our supporters know we heard what they said and that they could trust us.



"I found speaking to our donors incredibly rewarding. Many of the people have been personally affected by vision loss and it was wonderful to hear how much the organisation meant to them and how we've helped their friends or family members.

"Some of the major supporters I've met over the years have become very dear friends and I often have people calling me to let me know how things are going or even that their agapanthus flowers are blooming and they've set some aside for me to come and collect!

A BEAUTIFUL RELATIONSHIP

After years of denying that her sight was failing and trying to get around without using mobility aids, Liz Wheeler began to rely on other people to help her. As time wore on and her vision worsened, she became scared to leave her own home.

“About three years ago, I started to find it really difficult to safely cross roads and navigate footpaths. I was unable to cook and I couldn’t get up and down the stairs in my house easily. It was a very unsafe situation and I lost my confidence,” Liz said.

At 18, Liz had been diagnosed with *Retinitis Pigmentosa* but it was her great aunt who recognised the symptoms.

“When I got out of the car she waved to me from a balcony and I didn’t wave back and then she noticed I ran my hands across the walls to locate where I was. I just thought this was normal,” she said.

At the age of 23, Liz was forced to hand back her driver’s licence and at 26, she was declared legally blind. But it was still a number of years before she sought help.

Liz has now lost about 95 per cent of her vision and expects the little remaining sight she has to continue diminishing. Although she didn’t realise it at the time, a Guide Dog was exactly what she needed. That’s when Poppi came into her life and Liz found her freedom again.

“I wanted a dog with lots of energy, and that’s exactly what I got. Poppi pushes me to leave the house and this helped a lot with my confidence. Everything just became easier with Poppi.

“The same path that had taken me 20 minutes to navigate on my own only took five minutes with a Guide Dog. It was amazing I felt like I could walk at the same pace as I did before I lost my sight.

“Poppi loves apples. I attend Uni once a week and the students often swap seats in our class so we can get to know each other better. I don’t know



who I will sit next to but I can guarantee one thing – if there is a person in the room who has an apple in their bag, I will end up sitting next to them!

“Poppi has changed everything for me and opened up my world. She knows when I am feeling anxious or panicking and she will just sit with me. If I’m nervous, she will pick up on that and be more assertive to give me confidence.

“She knows me so well. I can’t imagine life without her and I believe she speaks a lot more English than she gets credit for.

“I was out one day and running early for an appointment so I decided to test her and see. I asked Poppi to ‘find coffee’. Once she had the command her tail started wagging and tug went the harness as she led me down a corridor, through a door, past some tables and to a counter where a barista was making coffee.

“I have used this command with great success several times since, except on one occasion when she took me into a cafe, past the counter and to a table where she placed her nose on another customer’s full cup of coffee. Now that was accurate!!”

AN ELECTRIC CONNECTION

As the door to the lift opens and Ann Murray walked into the Guide Dogs NSW/ACT office, a yellow Labrador came bounding over, seemingly unable to control her excitement.

“Here’s my girl! Alright, Summer, sit!” Ann said and the happy dog obeyed immediately.

The connection between Ann and this beautiful dog was electric. Summer’s tail wagged madly as Ann reaches into her bag for a treat.

“Now don’t gobble this down like you usually do,” Ann said with a grin.

“The best part of working here is the relationship with my colleagues. We are all working together for this amazing cause.”

Ann has been working with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT for many years after starting as a volunteer visiting shopping centres with her beloved Labradors, Chelsea and Zach, to collect donations from the public. Since then her passion, enthusiasm and dedication have helped to make the organisation what it is today.

As well as serving as a member of the Board and as a Puppy Raising Coordinator, Ann has had a major input into the selection and breeding of our precious Guide Dog puppies.

“Summer was the dog I’d have chosen to begin the Guide Dog breeding program as she had a successful bloodline and the great qualities we wanted in our Guide Dogs.

“Unfortunately, after some testing we realised that Summer’s hips were not 100 per cent. This was a major issue as Guide Dogs spend most of their lives walking and they need to have strong, healthy hips.



“Summer appeared in our campaigns and advertisements. She was such a beautiful dog and one of the faces of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.”

A true dog enthusiast, Ann bought her first dog, Mandy in 1968. She has bred Labradors for more than 40 years and has had a strong bond with several dogs including Summer.

Ann talks about the Guide Dogs she’s worked with as though they are friends. Like everyone who works here, she cares dearly for the success and happiness of every pup that goes on to become a Guide Dog and the people whose lives they transform.

SOME KIND OF MAGIC

As one of the first Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Instructors trained in Australia, Juliet Bishop (née Smith) loved working closely with vision impaired people as they mastered the challenges of a new environment.

“I think that when the public see somebody out on the street with a cane, they often assume there’s some kind of magic in the cane helping them out or that they can somehow see a lot more than they do. There are still so many misconceptions,” Juliet said.

“There’s also not a lot of understanding about how courageous people with vision impairment are. It takes real bravery to step outside every day (regardless of the weather) and rely totally on themselves in their use of a cane, dog or technology, no matter how they may be feeling.”

Juliet did her training in 1972 on a course modelled on those in the US with Instructors brought over from America. On completion she was the only O&M Instructor working for Guide Dogs in NSW so she was extremely busy working with many different clients – children and adults both young and old.

She really enjoyed the variety in the work liaising also with other professionals to support the individual.

“Today O&M instructing is quite specialised so it was wonderful that I started out with such a diverse, challenging job. It stood me in good stead for the rest of my career.”

One of Juliet’s most cherished memories as an O&M Instructor was travelling to India in 1977 to train Indian O&M Instructors.

“It was an amazing experience and a real eye-opener. The people on the course came from all over India and often didn’t speak each other’s language. The fact that men and women



weren’t allowed to touch each other made teaching them to guide very challenging!

“We had to work around all kinds of issues. There were huge unfenced drains in the middle of the street, 6-8 lanes of crazy traffic to try and cross, and other bizarre challenges. We were there for three weeks and it was a real highlight of my career.”

In 1979 Juliet joined the Board of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, where she served for more than 25 years. Her practical knowledge about the reality of life without sight made her an invaluable member of the group.

“Training Guide Dogs is just a small part of what the organisation does to help people with vision impairment. The dogs are wonderful, but people have to have the skills to be able to work with a dog, cane or whatever mobility aid they are using.”

“Guide Dogs NSW/ACT makes sure that everybody, whatever their needs and abilities, is looked after in the best way possible. That’s the truly great thing about this charity.”

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Keith Holdsworth and his wife came out to Perth from England as ‘ten quid migrants’ in the 1950s.

“We had no idea what we were coming to. As we stepped off the ship and saw our future home, we were hit by the oppressive heat of a Western Australian summer,” Keith said.

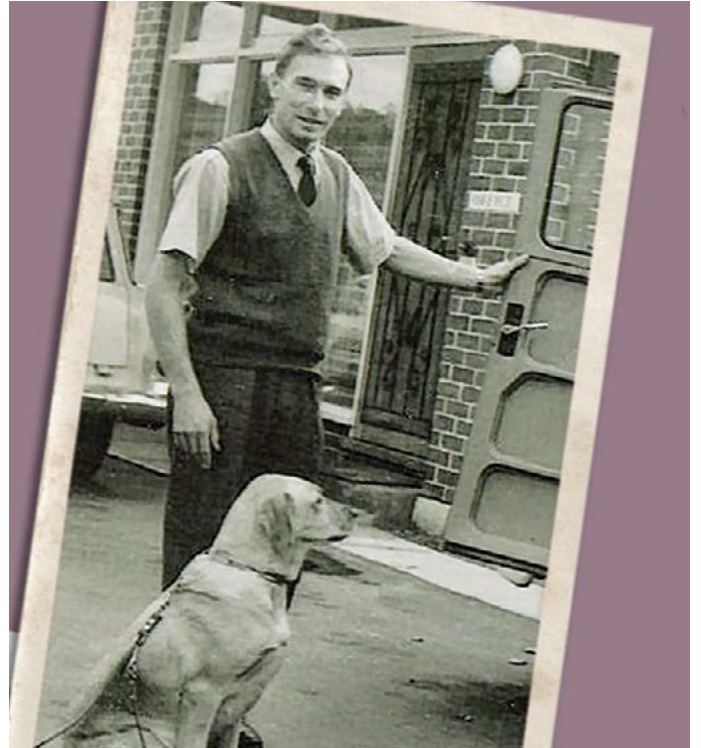
“It was hard work in those days and the summers were intensely hot. I’ll never forget the look on the shoemaker’s face when we asked him to make up some small boots to protect the poor dogs’ paws from the scorching pavements or the sight of the dogs when we first tried their shoes on, prancing around desperately trying to shake them off!”

Australia’s first Guide Dog, Dreena, had come to Australia in 1950 with her owner, Dr Arnold Cook, who had been studying in the UK and brought Dreena with him when he returned home to Perth.

Keith was only the second Guide Dog Instructor in Australia. He’d trained with the British Guide Dog Association under Russian Nikolai Liakoff, the ‘father’ of the Guide Dog movement in the UK.

Inspired by Dr Arnold Cook’s story, local APEX member Sam Clarkson invited Keith out to Australia to help launch the first Guide Dog school in this country. “It was all pretty informal back then. It was a case of picking up dogs from anywhere and everywhere, Labradors, retrievers, collies, German shepherds and kelpies, whatever we could get and making the best of them.

“We created our first primitive base in Western Australia by lashing two old tram cars together. The dogs lived at the kennels in the local Dogs’ Refuge Home. When we got more established we moved to two acres in the outer suburb of Belmont with a small cottage for offices.



“It was hard work. We spent our weekends building fences and doing our own maintenance with the help and camaraderie of members of APEX.

“Thanks to many people pitching in, the program blossomed but as the demand grew and more blind people put their hands up for a Guide Dog, we realised that it was just too expensive to service East Coast clients from Perth.

“That’s when John Stokes, President of the Claremont APEX Club, called Gordon Duxbury, President of the APEX Club in Melbourne, and proposed starting a Guide Dog service in Victoria.

THE RELIABLE MR DARCY

Trains, buses, taxis and ferries are all easy to navigate when you can see where you're going. But without sight, using public transport every day can be far more challenging.

Thanks to the generosity of the NSW Taxi Council, taxi drivers and taxi networks, one NSW woman with vision impairment is also travelling easier with the help of her four-year-old Guide Dog, Darcy.

Elaine Heskett describes Darcy as her “eyes and constant companion” and with Darcy by her side, she is able to navigate safely and confidently. He has given her the independence to lead a very busy life after he easily learned the route to the bank, bus, hairdressers, post office and Country Women’s Association (CWA) in a very short period of time.

“He is already an honorary member of the CWA and is found most Thursdays and Saturdays curled up under the desk in the craft shop,” she said of the dog she affectionately refers to as Mr Darcy.

“He allows me to walk upright and to use the little sight I have to orientate myself in my environment instead of only seeing a bit of the ground immediately in front of my cane.

“When he is in harness he is constantly watching the way ahead and also making allowance for any obstacles such as tree branches at head height.

He helps me walk up and down steps, find doorways and refuses to cross a road or driveway even if I have told him to go if there is any danger from traffic.”

Darcy is Elaine’s second Guide Dog after her first dog, Evelyn, retired due to ill health. When the time came to meet Darcy and undertake a two-week intensive training program at the Guide Dogs Centre, she was a bit anxious but soon realised that she didn’t need to be.



“Darcy himself went a long way towards making the experience relaxed and enjoyable as he was just so laid back and picked up everything expected of him with no problem at all,” she said.

When at home, Darcy and Evelyn are the best of friends. “From day one there has never been a cross growl between them. They play together, sleep together, and eat together. Darcy seems to know she has a problem and he is very gentle with her,” she said.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT is appreciative of the support and generosity provided by the NSW Taxi Council who has invested a lot of time educating drivers about the access rights of Guide Dogs and how drivers can assist passengers with vision impairment.

Over the past 10 years, the Council, drivers and networks have donated more than \$63,500 to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

Darcy is the second Guide Dog that the NSW Taxi Council has sponsored. When he graduated in 2014, it was a thrilling moment for the taxi and Guide Dog communities.

AN EXTRAORDINARY BOND

Barbara Bonfield leads a very active and independent life with the help of her wonderful Guide Dog, Samara, and being born with vision impairment hasn't stopped Barbara from enjoying her love of ballroom dancing every week.

With Samara always at her side, Barbara has no plans to give up her busy lifestyle just yet. She and her husband, Allan, go ballroom dancing three times a week.

"We dance Wednesday nights, Saturday nights and Tuesday afternoons. I would dance every day if I could, but Allan won't. When I'm dancing, I feel just the same as everyone else," Barbara said.

Born with a retinal eye condition, Barbara has been legally blind since she was 10 years old and for many years she struggled to get around, relying on her family for help.

"I only have one daughter and she was always my sighted guide. It wasn't really until she grew up and started to make her own way in the world that I realised I needed to become more independent.

Able to detect light and dark, Barbara assumed that she couldn't have a Guide Dog because she wasn't totally blind. But when she developed a repetitive strain injury from using a cane, Barbara was delighted to discover she was eligible for a Guide Dog.

Barbara received her first Guide Dog, Quella, in July 1994 and hasn't looked back.

"When I got Quella, it was wonderful. For the first time in my life I started to feel normal. Every day I go out and come home on cloud nine because I'm able to function independently in the real world."

Now in her 70s, Barbara is a public relations speaker for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. She travels around Sydney with her 'best friend' and fourth



Guide Dog, Samara, educating people about the work the organisation does.

"I think generally, people have more to learn about vision impairment so they can change their assumptions. People I haven't known for a long time often assume that Allan does everything for me. One year, we took homemade rocky road to a New Year's Eve dance and everyone asked Allan if he had made it. No one ever asked me if I had made it. People just assume that I can't and of course, I can!"

So often, an extraordinary bond develops between Guide Dog and owner as they learn to work together over many years.

"Samara is so amazing. She loves to work and thinks it's all a big game. She knows when the train is approaching my station as she can feel the bumps where the train lines cross just before the platform. It's like having a friend with me all the time. I have someone to talk to who never answers back and never disagrees with anything I say.

"I am much more independent now than when I had more vision. Because of my Guide Dog I'm more capable, and it's increased both my competence and my confidence.

WITH US AT EVERY STEP

Volunteers have been at the heart of our organisation since the first Australian Guide Dogs Centre opened in Perth in 1952. They are with us at every step, helping to transform lives all over Australia.

Beverley Davies is one of our most dedicated volunteers and for more than 35 years, has been putting her heart and soul into helping our organisation grow and thrive. In 1970, she started the Sydney City Committee which has held many fundraising events over the years.

“I first learnt about Guide Dogs NSW/ACT after joining the Opera Society as two of our members had Guide Dogs and I immediately knew I wanted to get involved, so I became the secretary of the Sydney group,” Beverley said.

“The best thing about volunteer groups is that they attract people who care for and like to help other people. We all worked so hard and did everything we could for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and it was an amazing experience.

“Over the years, we’ve encouraged a lot of people to go to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT for help. If there was someone who was blind or losing their sight I would talk to them and explain how the organisation could help them. I’ve always believed that spreading the word is the best way to go.

“We had a great range of volunteers back then. With a couple of journalists on the committee, we were able to get a lot of amazing publicity for our cause but sadly, most of the people from our original committee have now passed away.

“My husband and I were good friends with Peter Doyle who would let us use his world-famous seafood restaurant in Watson’s Bay for functions and he’d always make sure that plenty of people turned up, which was really wonderful. We usually had lots of adorable



little Guide Dog puppies at the events and everyone loved the puppies!

“One event I’ll never forget was the Camellia Ball held which was a fantastic fundraiser and absolutely gorgeous. The place was absolutely packed. We’d decorated the room with camellias and everyone wore these exquisite long gowns or suits.

“We don’t have as many social events these days. Now we have the Internet they’re not as necessary as they used to be, but for years, they were the main way we raised money.

“When anyone tells me they don’t know what to get someone for a present, I direct them to the Guide Dogs NSW/ACT online store and tell them they could make a real difference by buying their gifts there!

A SELFLESS TASK

Whenever she drove past the construction site of the new Guide Dog Centre at Glossodia 17 years ago, Samantha O'Keeffe knew that she wanted to work there. Less than a year later, she was.

At first she was motivated by her love of dogs, but as the years have passed it's become so much more than that. These days, Sam still loves her work as the Pets As Therapy (PAT) Coordinator and like the rest of the team, is passionate about trying to make life better for people who find themselves in a challenging place.

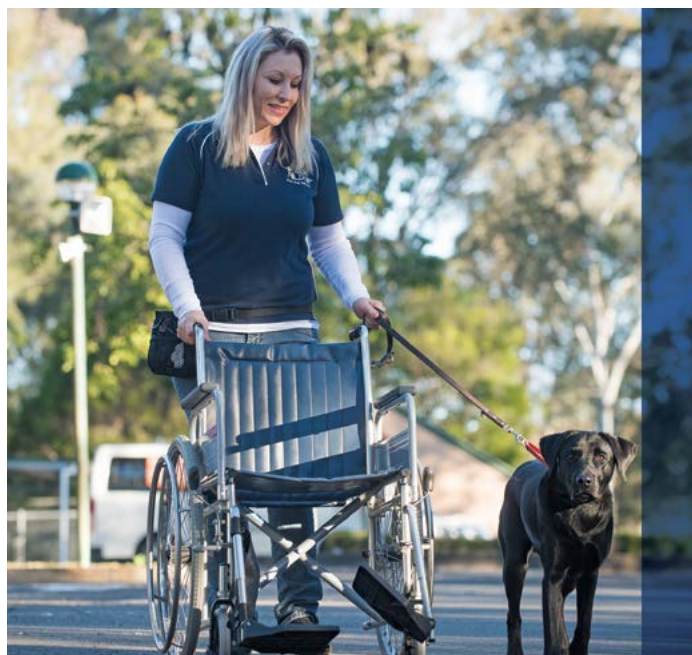
PAT dogs are placed with a broad range of applicants – people who have a physical disability, mental, emotional or behavioural disorder, or illness. Guide Dogs NSW/ACT also places dogs in school environments, nursing homes and with professionals such as physiotherapists and mental health workers. The common thread is that the applicant will benefit in their own way from the unwavering support and companionship of one of our beautiful dogs.

"I started out as a kennel attendant, then moved into the PAT trainer role after two years before taking up my current role running the PAT program which I've been doing for around 10 years," Sam said.

"My job is quite varied: I cover NSW and ACT by myself so I'm always on the road. I assess PAT applicants, assess and oversee the training of PAT dogs, match and place dogs with clients, and conduct follow-up visits to make sure each dog and client is settled and happy."

While Sam has many stories about the dogs she's cared for, she will never forget Gigi who remains dearest to her heart.

"I first met Gigi when I worked in the kennels. She was returned from three different Puppy Raisers because she was so boisterous. She really was a handful to manage. Gigi was jumpy, mouthy and loud!



"I felt so sorry for her that I ended up taking her home and finishing her puppy raising program myself. And wow, was she a challenge! But she completely stole my heart.

"When I had to return Gigi to kennels for intake I was a total mess. I had to hide from her because she'd bark and whine whenever she saw me. There were times I stood in the staff kitchen looking down at the kennel she was in and bawled my eyes out. Returning her was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do.

"As much as I tried, Gigi really wasn't Guide or PAT Dog material. She was deemed unsuitable for both programs and within a matter of weeks she was back home with me. I was offered her back as a pet and of course I said yes! She really was the funniest, liveliest, most affectionate, dog I've ever owned.

"I was by her side when she passed away; she was nearly 15 years old. It was heartbreaking. After spending all those years together it really did feel like she took a part of me with her. She was a special girl."

I take my hat off to all the Puppy Raisers who devote their time and hearts to raising these beautiful dogs in the hope that their furry little pride and joy will go on to change lives as a Guide, PAT or breeding dog.

SHARED JOURNEYS

During his 30 years with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, John Payne has witnessed the introduction of many new initiatives including audible tactile road-crossing signals, GPS and talking technologies, phone apps and computers that have given our clients so much more opportunity to be independent.

“When I first started out I was a one-man band in Newcastle with no office or support. Back then my role was developing and delivering orientation and mobility services to existing clients, and working throughout the region to build up referral networks for new clients,” John said.

John was manager of the Newcastle office from 1990 until 2013 and during that time, there was a lot change with nine Instructors and an office liaison person now covering metropolitan and rural Newcastle CBD and areas such as the Central Coast, Nelson Bay and Forster.

“In the early days, Newcastle was recovering from the 1989 earthquake. It sure was interesting training people with sight loss when there were chimneys on the footpaths and tradesmen working on the awnings above with their radios blasting!”

Rural areas don't always have the infrastructure of the big cities, especially public transport, but the training is similar, if a little more laid back.

There's a wide variety of environments and challenges which make regional work very interesting.



“It's been wonderful to play a part in some of the changes that have made a huge difference for people with vision loss – like the audible tactile road-crossing signals. I had a great working relationship with a fellow from the Department of Main Roads (now Roads and Maritime Services), who contacted me about where to place the signals. I worked with him for 20 years and we managed to get tactile traffic lights installed all over the region.

“Another great area of progress has been our children's programs. Being able to introduce mobility skills to very young children is a fantastic move forward. Originally children weren't referred to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT until they were 10, but I often managed to break the rules and teach preschool children how to use a cane! Now it's the norm.

THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

Whenever she drove past the construction site of the new Guide Dog Centre at Glossodia 17 years ago, Samantha O'Keeffe knew that she wanted to work there. Less than a year later, she was.

Just this side of heaven is a place called the Rainbow Bridge. When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here on earth, the pet goes to the Rainbow Bridge. There is also a special place there for stray and ill-treated animals.

There are meadows and hills for all our special friends, where they can run and play. There is plenty of food and water and sunshine. They are warm and comfortable.

All animals that have been ill and old are restored to health and vigour. Those that were hurt or maimed are made whole and strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days gone by.

The animals are happy and content, except for one thing – they miss someone very special to them who had to be left behind. They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance.

The bright eyes are intent. The nose twitches. The ears are up and the eager body begins to quiver. Suddenly he or she begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, legs moving faster and faster. You have been spotted.



And when you and your special friend meet, you cling together in joyous reunion. The happy kisses rain upon your face, your hands caress the beloved head and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life, but never absent from your heart.

Then, together, you and your special friend cross the Rainbow Bridge.

STRIVING FOR CHANGE

While businesses and individuals can be fined if they deny a Guide Dog access to their venue, the situation is usually very distressing for a Guide Dog Handler.

New research reveals that a third (33 per cent) of Guide Dog Handlers in NSW/ACT have had their access rights challenged when visiting hotels, motels, caravans and other accommodation within the last year. Some Guide Dog Handlers also report being refused entry entirely or asked to pay an additional bond because they were accompanied by a Guide Dog.

As the leading provider of Guide Dogs and other mobility services for people who are blind or vision impaired, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has worked closely with various hospitality and transport industry bodies to provide educational materials and training for staff to ensure they are aware of Australian Guide Dog access laws.

CEO of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, Dr Graeme White, said the organisation has influenced positive changes in the community in recent years to improve Guide Dog access; but more still needs to be done.

“Put simply, a Guide Dog is allowed to go anywhere that a member of the public can, with the exception of operating theatres and the zoo.

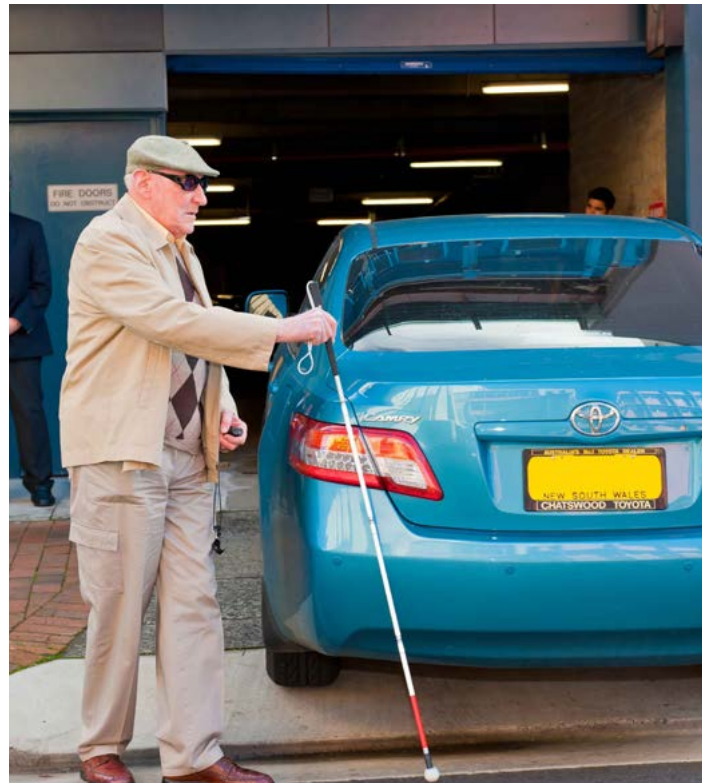
“Guide Dogs are not pets. Guide Dogs are highly trained to open up the world for people who are blind or vision impaired, not close it down, which is effectively what discrimination does.

“A Guide Dog gives a person who is vision impaired a greater sense of independence and freedom. While the public generally do the right thing, our research shows people with Guide Dogs continue to face many barriers when going about their daily lives, which strips them of their independence.”

Research shows just how widespread the barriers can be for Guide Dog Handlers:

60% of Handlers said they had experienced access issues in restaurants and cafes

52% had problems using taxis



32% of Handlers had been challenged trying to enter shopping centres.

Significantly, one in two Guide Dogs has been attacked by another dog when guiding its owner, creating a very dangerous situation for the Guide Dog and their Handler.

Gaining employment also continues to be a challenge with 58 per cent of people who are blind or vision impaired and of working-age being unemployed. A further one-third of those people who are employed, have indicated that they would like to work more hours¹.

Moreover, 42 per cent of the general public are not aware that Guide Dogs can legally enter a restaurant and 36 per cent are unaware they can legally enter hotels and clubs.

“Guide Dogs NSW/ACT plays an important role in advocating on behalf of people with sight loss to ensure the community is a safe, accessible and easy place in which to live and work. We want everyone to understand and appreciate the access rights of Guide Dog Handlers,” Graeme said.

THE AGONY

I can only describe it as agony as you writhe with the pain, grief, loss, guilt, sadness, anger, frustration and even sometimes (I'm ashamed to admit) embarrassment.

These are just some of the turbulent emotions that come with discovering that your child has a disability.

You try to escape in denial. You berate, and then try bargaining with God. You hate yourself, your partner, this child, perhaps your other children, everybody. And then there's the dread. What will happen when you, as the protector, are no longer around?

I know all this because I'm the parent of a child who was born blind.

It's a struggle, coming to terms with the reality that this precious child will never live the life that I dreamed for her.

She won't have any way of knowing how our complex world works. She'll always be different. She'll never get a driver's licence. How will she make the life choices that are so ordinary for sighted children? Without vision, how will she know how she looks?

And should she ever have a wedding day, the love in her bridegroom's eyes as she walks down the aisle towards him will be hidden from her. Or how will she be able to marvel at the perfect picture of her first born.



My despair often overwhelms me. Life is already so demanding. How will I cope with the extra pressures?

I'm told that there are resources out there with people who will help. The longer I wait to reach out for that help, the more difficult it will be for her to catch up.

I know Guide Dog NSW/ACT will be there for me when I'm ready. Perhaps tomorrow?

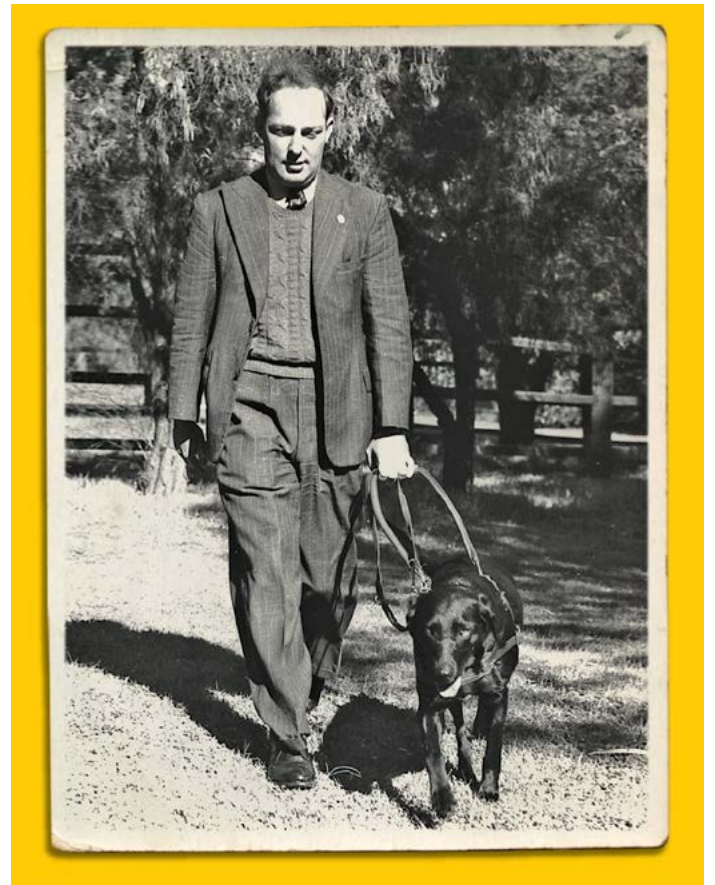
AUSTRALIA'S FIRST GUIDE DOG

It was a beautiful black Labrador called Dreena who started our groundbreaking tradition. Dreena travelled to Australia from the UK in 1950 with her Handler, Dr Arnold Cook – the first person in this country to have a Guide Dog.

Dr Cook was born in May 1922. At just 15 he was diagnosed with a degenerative condition, retinitis pigmentosa, and by 18 he was totally blind. Determined not to let disability get in his way, he learned to read braille and went on to study at the University of Western Australia. In 1944 he won a scholarship to study at the London School of Economics before later travelling to the United States to study in 1957. He earned his doctorate from Harvard University in 1961.

In London, Dr Cook heard about the British Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and realised how much more independent he could be in the busy city if he had a Guide Dog by his side. He applied for a dog and before long he was matched and in training with his beloved Dreena.

In 1950 Dr Cook returned to Australia to become an economics lecturer at his old university. His arrival created quite a stir and as the first Guide Dog team in the country, Dr Cook and Dreena became instant celebrities. They were often in the newspaper and soon Dreena was the most famous dog in Australia!



A HUMBLING EXPERIENCE

“I can honestly say I have been to Bourke!” says Sue Gosewinckel, an Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Instructor with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, who specialises in working with the elderly and teaching clients to use a cane.

Early in Sue’s career, she worked with a client who was recovering in a Sydney hospital after he lost all his sight. It was her job to provide instruction in the use of the long cane and then fly back with him to his home town of Bourke to continue his orientation in his home and local community.

“It was one of the most humbling and memorable highlights of my career,” she said afterwards. “I knew I was placed outside my comfort zone having to fly in a Fokker Friendship aircraft on what was to be a very turbulent ride ahead with my client back to his hometown of Bourke.

“But for my client I could not imagine the enormity of the challenges that lay ahead of him. Returning home without vision and having to learn the necessary orientation and mobility skills to travel safely within his home and environment seemed like such a huge feat at the time.

“One of his main priorities was to be able to walk his children to school, using the long cane, and to pick them up again in the afternoon.”

This remarkable and modest man had shown such incredible drive and determination throughout his orientation and mobility training and was finally able to navigate his environment with ability and pride. It was a sobering experience early on in my career.

“I have had the privilege of working at Guide Dogs NSW/ACT as an O&M Instructor for more than 30 years now, and during this time, I have met and worked with many wonderful people, both clients and colleagues.



“I’ve had an interesting and varied career with my primary role providing O&M services to clients. I have worked with some of my clients over many years and one of the downsides has been the passing of some of these clients.

“The biggest changes I have witnessed over the years (second to technological advances) have been the growth of the organisation to include the many regional offices. In the earlier years it was not unusual for my working week to take me to Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. Now we have regional offices and specialists based in more than 10 locations around NSW and the ACT.”

JUST PUPPIES BEING PUPPIES

As one of the first schools to start raising puppies 11 years ago, Sydney's Abbotsleigh School for Girls has provided a loving start for several successful young Guide Dogs and the puppies in turn have helped cheer up a generation of Boarding school girls when they were homesick or upset.

The school's Deputy Head of Boarding, Mrs Allysia Heness-Pugh, said she just can't imagine working without a puppy at her heels and it definitely makes every day exciting and memorable.

"As an ongoing service-learning project for the boarders we did this to give something back to the community, but what's been amazing is how much we get out of raising a Guide Dog puppy. We suddenly have this gorgeous animal with us, who can help cheer up homesick girls and bring a sense of normality to the house," Mrs Heness-Pugh said.

"We have about 90 per cent country NSW boarders and they miss their animals just as much as their families. The Guide Dogs comfort the girls without even knowing it. They're just puppies being puppies!

"We started with the program 12 years ago and we've had 11 dogs. Each one has been so special. A couple of times we've even had two dogs at once, which has been fun – hilarious actually. It has been great watching the older dog model 'good' behaviour to the new pup except when that behaviour involves stealing teddy bears off the girls' beds. We had to do some quick intervention when we discovered that!

"While we didn't name her, our first puppy was called Abbie, which was perfect because it matched our school's name, Abbotsleigh. We all loved that and felt it was a perfect start to our involvement with the program.

"You'd think we would know what we're doing after all these years, but all of the dogs are



so different and you never quite know what to expect!

"The puppies usually go with me everywhere, so on the odd occasion when they're not at my side – if I'm attending a meeting – the girls always ask where it is. It just shows how big a part of their everyday lives the dogs have become."

"The girls see the pups playing and being lively and hilarious, and then they see photos of the dog at graduation and go 'Oh wow! We helped to do that.' The older students really take ownership of what they're helping to do and I think that's a very valuable experience for them.

"Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has given us the amazing opportunity to help someone with vision impairment get back their independence. If we can have a puppy in our house, play with it, give it love and attention, and that changes someone's life down the track, then that's really pretty cool," she said.

HENRY THE SONG IN MY HEART

Bev Larsson abruptly lost her vision eight years ago. She suffered bilateral optic nerve atrophy and was eventually diagnosed with permanent blindness.

A former triple-certificated registered nurse and nurse manager with a particular concern for child and family health, Bev struggled to adapt to her radically changed circumstances. After two years, her beautiful Guide Dog, Henry, entered her life.

“He transformed my life, giving me freedom and a newfound independence to support healing,” Bev recalls. “He is clever and sensitive, and sometimes I feel as though he can read my mind, whether he is in or out of harness.

“We are a working partnership. Henry makes me feel a lot more confident and secure. We can go off the beaten track and I trust his judgement implicitly. Walking along the beach on our way home following yoga class, he protects me, anticipating and averting possible risks such as rogue waves, snakes, unchecked dogs or thoughtless people.

A former triple-certificated registered nurse and nurse manager with a particular concern for child and family health, Bev struggled to adapt to her radically changed circumstances. After two years, her beautiful Guide Dog, Henry, entered her life.

“He transformed my life, giving me freedom and a newfound independence to support healing,” Bev recalls. “He is clever and sensitive, and sometimes I feel as though he can read my mind, whether he is in or out of harness.

“We are a working partnership. Henry makes me feel a lot more confident and secure. We can go off the beaten track and I trust his judgement implicitly. Walking along the beach on our way home following yoga class, he



protects me, anticipating and averting possible risks such as rogue waves, snakes, unchecked dogs or thoughtless people.

Over the past five years, Bev and Henry have become Ambassadors for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and together have been invited to address a variety of schools, business events and community groups.

Bev says, “During our presentations he thoroughly enjoys my reciting our story, *Along Came Henry*, and harness-free interacts beautifully with our audiences.”

To enquire about either ***Along Came Henry*** as a resource, or Bev and Henry for speaking engagements, contact Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

A GUIDE DOGS ICON

As the first and longest serving Guide Dog Mobility Instructor in Australia, Ray became a treasured member of the Guide Dogs community and a true icon. For hundreds of people, he's been a genuine life changer.

"I've kept in contact with many of my clients over the years and they've become very special to me. Some have given me experiences that I will definitely never forget," Ray said.

"One time I was out in the country working with a farmer with vision impairment. I'd brought him his new Guide Dog and we were in the fields preparing to herd his cattle through a gate.

"The farmer introduced the Guide Dog to the cattle so they wouldn't be afraid of each other. When he gave his command and the cattle began filing through the gate, the Guide Dog suddenly wound its way to the front of the herd and instinctively began to guide them across the paddock. That was the first time I ever saw a dog guiding cows!

"Another time, I had a client who had been a snake catcher before she lost her vision. After one of our training sessions I sat down for my usual debrief and she asked whether I'd mind if she nursed her pets as we spoke. She went over to a glass tank and came back with several small snakes, which she stroked as we talked.

"Suddenly the phone rang and before I could think she stood up, dropped the snakes in my lap and ran off to answer it. It's lucky that I'm a farmer's son and not afraid of snakes or I'm not sure what would have happened!"

Always a keen inventor, Ray was responsible for some of the brilliant innovations that have made life so much easier for Guide Dog Handlers including a waist belt for pulling prams or trolleys to free up client's hands, and the 'doggy-doo', a bag apparatus that can be attached to the harness to help clients clean up after their Guide Dog.

The best part about working for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has been helping people do what they



love to do, says Ray Joyce who during his 50 year career, trained more clients to work with a Guide Dog than any other Instructor in Australia.

Over the years Ray saw the organisation go through many exciting changes.

"Many countries now look to Australia for ways to improve their training methods and a lot of this is down to two incredibly forward-thinking men who headed up Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, Keith Holdsworth and Eric Hatchley.

"While other training centres were focused only on Guide Dogs, we explored every opportunity to help people with vision impairment. We were the first Guide Dog organisation to train people with all available mobility aids including long canes and electronic aids like GPS navigation.

"The job fitted me like a glove and it was the best job that I could imagine doing. I feel very privileged to have been able to do it. Helping to make life easier for people with impaired vision is a wonderful opportunity and it's good for the soul," Ray said.

HEAVENLY INTERVENTION

It's 1977, I'm in outback Western Australia, 30 kilometres east of Derby, at a mission hospital run by nuns for leprosy patients.

There are two of us and a Guide Dog, standing frozen, with this bloody great emu running circles round us, kicking up dust, neck extended, ready to bite.

I'd brought Guide Dog Oona to be matched with Teresa, an Aboriginal patient in her 60s and this was our first day of training.

The emu was a long standing resident of the hospital grounds and he definitely wasn't taking Oona's invasion of his territory lying down.

Every training session I had with Teresa, the emu would be laying in wait for us.

Consequently, Oona was becoming increasingly distressed and distracted from her guiding work. We were getting nowhere fast.

I pleaded with the Mother Superior that something had to be done about the emu. After consulting with the tribal elders, she delivered the decision:

"Sorry, the emu was here first. The emu stays."

The elders were willing, however, to take responsibility for protecting Oona by walking everywhere with us to fend off the aggressor. As our training group grew in numbers, the emu, unrelenting, hissed and kicked up his dust a little further away.

Two weeks later, training was eventually over and I was leaving with a heavy heart and no real hope that the emu would ever allow Oona to do her work.



With their goodbyes, the Sisters promised to pray for a solution to the problem.

Two weeks later I received a message from Mother Superior:

"Our prayers have been answered," she said.

"The emu has become Oona's protector and now if any stray dog comes to harass Oona, the emu chases that dog away."

THE BEST START IN LIFE

After more than 40 years, Mars Petcare remains a valued supporter and proud sponsor of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

The family-owned company produces several iconic dog food brands and first became involved with Guide Dogs NSW/ ACT in 1974. Today they keep all our dogs and pups well fed with ADVANCE®, their super premium dog food provided at no cost.

Raising and training happy, healthy puppies and maintaining adult Guide Dogs require a lot of resources. Mars has also supplied a range of suitable toys and accessories not just for Guide Dogs in training, but also for all the playful, exuberant puppies being raised by our dedicated Puppy Raising families.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT is grateful for the continuous support that Mars Petcare has provided over the years (well over \$1,000,000), enabling us to give our Guide Dogs a great start in life and the best chance of successfully becoming a working Guide Dog.



A VERY LONG JOURNEY

People often think that the Guide Dog journey is all about the five months of intensive training each dog receives before being placed with a person who is vision impaired but the journey actually begins before a puppy is even born.

According to Guide Dog Services Manager, Paul Adrian, dogs chosen to become part of the breeding program at Guide Dogs NSW/ACT undergo the most stringent examination of their behaviour and their health.

“Over 50 separate behavioural traits are measured and recorded so we can analyse the dog’s breeding potential using data gathered from related animals in Guide Dog schools all over the world,” Paul said.

“Digital x-rays and complete health records on every puppy ensure that common breed diseases are very rarely seen in our Guide Dog stock.

“The journey through puppyhood too is focused on giving every puppy the best chance of reaching its full potential. Enrichment and early education begin from the days after the puppy opens its eyes and continue right through the months it spends in the home of a loving and dedicated volunteer Puppy Raiser.

“The socialisation that Puppy Raisers provide to the puppy ensures they grow up into a healthy, confident and well-balanced young adult, when they return to the Centre for training.

“As a trainer, you never forget the Guide Dogs you’ve trained but there are some that are particularly memorable.

“For those of us providing those five months of intensive training, life is just a pleasure when we are working with well-bred and well-prepared dogs. An old saying is that good dogs make good trainers and I still think that’s true!

“Many years ago when I first began training I recall the trainers fighting over who would



be the lucky one to have the Fabian and Olita puppies in their training groups. Fabian was a stud dog at Guide Dogs Victoria and the puppies he sired with Olita had a fabulous success rate.

“Two of those pups are among the first dogs I trained. Trebla, a big handsome fellow and steady as a ship was placed with a gentleman from South Australia. Tara, who looked like Trebla’s twin but trimmer and more elegant, was placed with a young woman from NSW.

“Of the two, Tara was the high-energy dog and I had a lot of trouble stopping her from pulling my arm out such was her enthusiasm. Both dogs served their new owners for many years as did so many of this line of dogs.

“Today we have so many stud dogs it’s hard to keep up. They come from Guide Dog schools all over the world, mostly in the form of frozen semen! We still have our favourites though and we never ever forget those special ones that were part of our early days!” Paul said.

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Blind since birth, Ian Florek spent his childhood in and out of hospital enduring more than 16 operations on his eyes, and causing him to miss school and be far behind his classmates.

After finishing school, Ian worked for years in a sheltered workshop and was repeatedly told he could forget ever having a 'real' job or aspiring to do anything else in life.

But then Ian became involved with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT as a public speaker.

"A newspaper reporter was at one of my presentations and I asked him to report that I wanted a job as a switchboard operator. He agreed on the condition that if I got a job I would let him be the first to report on it," Ian said.

"I agreed, thinking that would never happen. But the very next morning I got a call from the manager of a hardware chain offering me a job! I started on the teenage wage of just \$26 a week but it was a start, and I wouldn't be where I am today without it."

Ian has worked as a switchboard operator ever since and currently works full time in Sydney's bustling CBD.

But Ian also had childhood dreams to travel and experience Australia with his Guide Dog.

"My first big dream was to climb Ayres Rock and in 1981 I climbed it with a sighted guide, while my then Guide Dog, Lex, sat on my seat on the bus and watched me out the window. When he saw me coming down the Rock he raced out of the bus and was so excited to see me again that he almost knocked me over.

"It was absolutely marvellous at the top of the Rock. I stood there and pinched myself. I couldn't believe I was actually there."

Ian's proudest achievements include travelling to the notorious Canning Stock Route, and completing the journey to the tip of Cape York



with his Guide Dog, Henry the first Guide Dog to make footfall at the point.

Ian is now approaching his 52nd year as a Guide Dog Handler and has successfully worked with six Guide Dogs, having his fair share of hilarious experiences over the years.

"When I was working with my first Guide Dog, Doric, we were walking along in the city and the next minute, my Guide Dog turned left. The road was on my right, so I knew we had walked into an enclosed area. A lady came up to me and asked whether she could help, and I told her that I was training with my dog and believed we had gone astray.

"It was then that she told me we were standing in the middle of a ladies' lingerie shop! It was so embarrassing! Doric had taken me there so perfectly that to this day I'm absolutely certain he had been there before."

GRADUATION DAY

It's a joyful celebration for Puppy Raisers to watch the puppies they have cared for and nurtured for 12 months, complete their training and launch their careers as fully fledged Guide Dogs.

While the day includes fascinating presentations by experienced Guide Dog Handlers, a behind-the-scenes tour of the Guide Dog Centre at Glossodia, and a cuddle and photo with gorgeous Guide Dog puppies, the much anticipated main event is the arrival of the graduating class.

After they leave their puppy-raising families, our dogs receive five months of intensive training to learn everything they need to help them do their job of successfully guiding people who are vision impaired. On Graduation Day, the dogs walk the red carpet and are presented with their official working harness a shiny new uniform to match their all-important skills and prove they have what it takes to guide a person safely through their life.

One by one, each newly-graduated Guide Dog is presented to the assembled audience before their puppy-raising families give them one last hug and proudly wish them on their way.

The Puppy Raisers play an extremely important role and have an immense impact on the lives of our young dogs.

Following their graduation, it's time to let each new Guide Dog do the same for others, changing the life of a person with vision impairment in ways most of us could not imagine.



OUR SIGNATURE UNIFORM

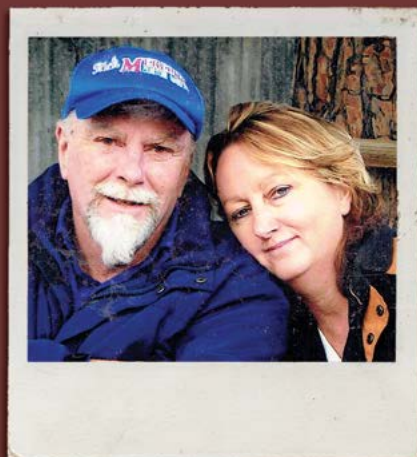
It's the distinctive leather uniform of our Guide Dogs that is both practical and instantly recognisable when our dogs are working, that's become a key part of what defines the Guide Dogs NSW/ACT most trusted brand.

Rick and Gail Meredith from Rick Meredith Custom Saddlery have been making the beautifully-crafted harnesses for our Guide Dogs for more than 25 years. Typically, each harness lasts 10-15 years, which is longer than the average career of a Guide Dog, thanks to the technique and top quality leather they use.

"First and foremost, I'm a saddle maker," Rick said. "I fell in love with Roy Rogers and Hopalong Cassidy when I was a kid and, coming from a horsey family, I always wanted to be a cowboy. I've worked not only as a saddle maker, but as farrier, horse breaker and trainer, and on a stud farm breeding thoroughbreds. I've basically spent my whole life around horses.

"I've always enjoyed designing and making things, and built a reputation as one of the top Western saddle makers in Australia. We source only the finest leather and the quality we provide is the best you can get.

"When Ray Joyce from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT first asked us 25 years ago if we could cover some handles and make a Guide Dog harness, I told him I should be able to do a handle for him. The next day he turned up with 60! We've been working with them ever since."



It takes about five hours to make one harness from start to finish – cutting it out, preparing it, putting it together and stitching it. Typically, they make about 50 at a time so Gail does all of the cutting and preparation and then Rick works the machines to stitch them together.

"Making Guide Dog harnesses is like driving a car: once you know how, it's easy to do but it's like anything. You learn little tricks along the way that help make everything easier when it comes to putting the finished product together.

THE MAGIC MOMENT

“The hardest thing about being blind is not being able to see my grandchildren who are growing up so fast, and it’s frustrating that I have no clue what they look like. I just go on what other people tell me,” James said.

“As I lay in hospital I was introduced to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT in the form of John ‘Doc’ Payne. When I asked him what he did, he said that he was there to get me out and about – and the rest is history.

“I went through the orientation and mobility program, and at first I just used a long cane and a Miniguide*. Then, about nine years ago, I was crossing a set of traffic lights in the Newcastle suburb of Hamilton when a bus ran a red light and I ended up wedged between a car and a steel pole. It was then that Doc suggested I get a dog.

“My first dog was Putu and we worked together for eight years before Putu retired and passed away. I’ve been with my second dog, Brogan, for just over four and a half years now.

“Putu was a great dog. He could really guide and alert me but he was easily distracted. It wouldn’t interfere with his work but I constantly had to keep him focused.

“But Brogan is very different. Where I’d have had to say something about five times to Putu, I only say it once to Brogan. I think that’s all down to the Guide Dogs breeding program and to subtle changes in their training methods.

“It took a very long time for me to trust Putu. They call it the ‘magic moment’ and it was about three months before it happened for me and I realised that I had total faith in my Guide Dog.

“It’s amazing. I’m actually much more confident now with Brogan than when I had my sight. As a sighted person one tends to be a bit distracted.

“Now it’s just a matter of trusting my dog – if there’s a patch of water or an electric lead across the floor he’ll stop me and tell me there’s something in the way that I need to be wary of. But when I could see I’d just keep trekking on and not look or think.



About 12 years ago James Bennett had a cardiovascular event that killed the optic nerves in his only sighted eye and he literally went blind overnight.

James is a disability auditor in quality management systems and travels alone with his Guide Dog all over Australia by air, rail, bus and taxi, visiting many different companies and staying in a host of different hotels. One would think this schedule was challenging for someone with sight but James takes it all in his stride.

“As a cane user I would always want someone to come with me wherever I went. Having a Guide Dog has opened up a new career path for me and pushed me into a whole new sphere I never thought I’d get into.

“I joined the Board of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT mostly out of gratitude for what the organisation has done for me and I use my auditing expertise to suggest ways to make our organisation even better.”

IN MEMORY OF JOSEPH PATRICK FINUCANE

Joe Finucane served as the Chief Executive Officer of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT for nearly 20 years.

During his time as CEO, Joe guided the organisation through many exciting developments. Guide Dogs NSW/ACT worked with universities across NSW to develop orientation and mobility training courses and we embraced wonderful new technology, like the revolutionary Miniguide.

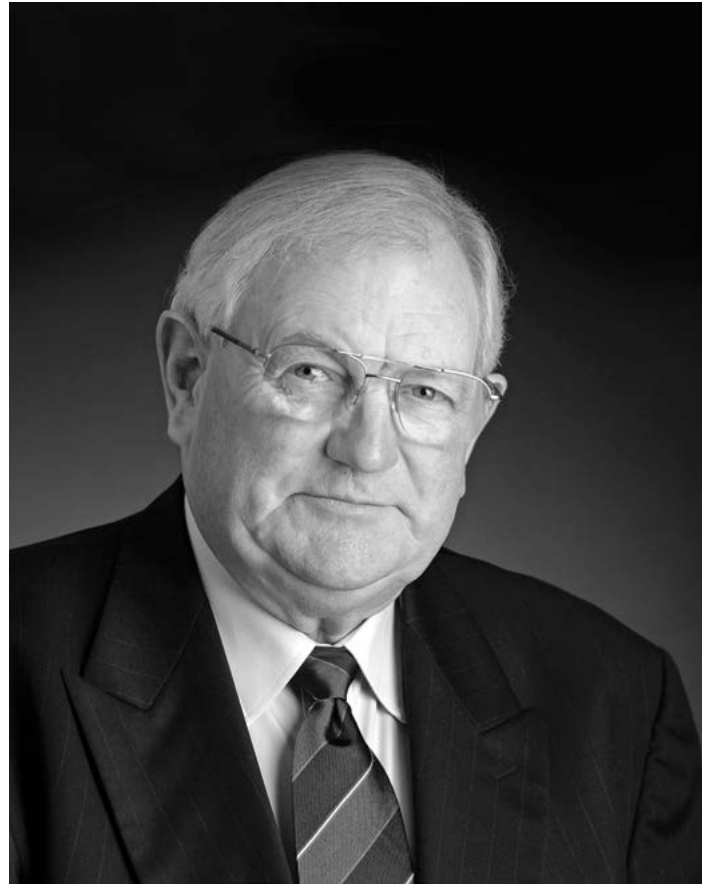
It was during his stewardship that the organisation adopted the official name, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, and published our first book, Guide Dogs Current Practice, which was acclaimed internationally as a 'landmark stride' by Guide Dog organisations.

When he retired in 2009, Joe said that he had been most fortunate to have worked with a team of loyal and ever-willing staff, volunteers and support groups, as well as with a group of astute and diligent directors.

In 2013, Joe was elected as an Honorary Life Member for his outstanding contribution to the lives of those living with vision impairment. His election was greeted by riotous applause and a standing ovation.

Joe will always be remembered for his presence and insight, his gentle yet determined approach and his keen sense of humour.

He is sadly missed.



PURE LUCK

If you ask Norma May what she thinks of the four Guide Dogs she's sponsored, she'll tell you that they are all just perfect.

"I always wanted Guide Dogs NSW/ACT to be my only charity ... and it is. But for years I didn't know how to get in contact with them and then one night, by a lucky coincidence, I discovered their Chatswood office," Norma said.

"My late husband, Allen, was a member of the Chatswood RSL Club and we used to go there for dinner during the week, and we would always sit outside and have a drink first. One night when we were sitting outside I happened to glance across the road and suddenly spotted the big Guide Dogs' logo on the building opposite! We rushed straight over and it all went from there.

"The dogs are the reason why I love Guide Dogs NSW/ACT so much – which is why I've now sponsored four of them. I named my first and second dogs Ally and Marsha, after my darling husband Allen Marshall May.

"I feel like I'm Ally's second mother and I adored her. I love the blonde female Labradors best of all, which is why my Ally is just perfect.

I've become very good friends with Ally's Handler, Sarah, who even came to speak to everyone at the North Sydney Leagues Club where I'm a member. They all loved her and Ally.

"It can be tough sometimes, because I care so much about the dogs I sponsor. Some of them don't make it through the training to become Guide Dogs, which can be really upsetting."



Norma will never forget the day she was out at the Guide Dog Centre inspecting the new breeding centre and learnt that her beloved Marsha had developed cataracts and after treatment, was now back living a happy life with her puppy raising family. It was then that Norma was asked if she would like to sponsor another Guide Dog called Jill, who was part of the Centre's breeding program.

"Jill had five puppies in her first litter followed by a second litter of eight puppies and six puppies in her final litter. Every one of the puppies in her first litter was yellow – my favourite colour – which was so special.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Former President of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, Andrew Pierce, first became involved in 1992, through the then CEO, Joe Finucane, who invited him to consider a position on the Board. Andrew joined the Board and later became Treasurer, Secretary and finally President.

“Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has changed substantially since I started. We were able to take it from a small-scale company to a large, skills-based professional organisation,” Andrew said.

“One of our biggest changes of direction was the creation of the Centre for Eye Health at the University of New South Wales. This centre included in excess of 20 of the latest and most advanced pieces of equipment in the world, all under one roof. We went from being at the end of the chain, looking after people when they had already lost their sight, to head of the chain, seeing people before things went astray and preventing their sight from deteriorating if we could.

“We’ve actually been able to diagnose very young children and save their sight. It’s wonderful.

“In my opinion, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has probably become the pre-eminent Guide Dog organisation in the country, if not the world. What makes it so successful is our incredibly loyal and dedicated staff who are passionate about helping people. We really look after our clients and that’s appreciated and it brings us a lot of public support.

“Our donors and supporters are loyal too, which is why we’ve been voted the most trusted charity in Australia by Reader’s Digest five years running. The public can really see where their donations are going and our transparency in how we manage and use their generous gifts is a big priority.”

Andrew has many fond memories but in one unforgettable experience, Board members took part in an induction program to gain a better



understanding of what it was like to be blind. His eyes were covered and an Instructor walked him around Chatswood through the shopping centre and up and down stairs and escalators. It was quite an incredible experience.

“Still blindfolded, we went to a coffee shop in the Mall and I sat down and waited for the Instructor to get me a cup of coffee. I was amazed at what I could hear – your hearing becomes very acute very quickly when you can’t build a visual scene in your mind.

“I overheard a conversation between two people that should never have been held in public. I’d never have been able to hear it if I hadn’t been unsighted and I’m sure the couple would have been horrified if they knew I could hear parts of what they were discussing!

“It was a fascinating exercise and very valuable as a Board member to understand more about what a vision impaired person goes through every day,” Andrew said.

JUST ONE OF THE FAMILY

PAT dogs become companions to people who are disadvantaged due to age, illness, disability or isolation. These beautifully behaved dogs still need training, and there is a long waiting list to receive one.

Liam is a young boy who has been a beneficiary of the PAT program for several years. Liam is completely blind due to a rare genetic condition called Norrie disease, but with the help of his best friend, PAT dog, Yoda, nothing is impossible.

“When we decided to have a family dog, Liam’s needs were uppermost in our minds,” says Liam’s mother, Julie.

“We knew we needed a dog with a beautiful, gentle nature that would be safe around him. We also really wanted Liam to feel comfortable around dogs and to understand what it really means to own and care for an animal. We know this is a great foundation if Liam wants to have a Guide Dog as an adult.

“When we read about the PAT program, it was exactly what we were looking for and contacted Guide Dogs NSW/ACT instantly.

“Liam was just three when Yoda came to live with us. At the time, Liam was very sensitive to his environment and scared to explore, particularly outside the security of our house.”

The attraction between Liam and Yoda was immediate. Playing with Yoda has made Liam less resistant to different textures and touch and as the special relationship has grown so has Liam’s confidence.

“We didn’t expect this bond, but it’s been wonderful to see. I think of Yoda as one of my three sons. Not only does he have a special bond with Liam, but my younger son, Mitchell, also adores him.



“Yoda brings us all hours of outdoor entertainment. His favourite game is to lick or nudge Liam, and then move to see if Liam can find him and then lick him again for a hint.”

Now that Liam is older, he loves to kick the ball for Yoda and have him bring it back. Yoda sometimes forgets that he weighs more than 40 kilos and tries to be a lap dog. With a lot of laughter, Liam tries to push Yoda away which usually leads to lots of cuddles and wrestles.

AN UNEXPECTED PATH

As a child, all Karen Hayter wanted was to join the mounted police. Her dreams were dashed while she was still at school and discovered she didn't meet the height requirements.

Karen was devastated by her shattered aspirations but the experience set her on the path to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and she wouldn't change a thing.

"I think I'm taller than half of the police officers you see nowadays! But from the moment I started working here, I couldn't imagine ever leaving. I work with people who are all so amazing and I absolutely love what I do," Karen said.

As Puppy Development Manager, Karen manages the puppy raising program at our Guide Dog Centre at Glossodia.

"The goal of our puppy raising team is to assess people to see if they're suitable to come into our program. We do placements, home visits and training days with our Puppy Raisers right up until the puppy comes to live with them. Our staff members spend hours upon hours with each family just to make sure everything is perfect."

Puppy Raising is great way to get involved with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and make a difference to the lives of people with vision impairment. Each year, around 200 puppies are sent to Puppy Raisers and several criteria are used to choose puppy-raising families. They need to be at home during the day, have a relaxed and stable home environment and be available and willing to travel to Glossodia for training and socialisation days. They also need to be willing to spend lots of time working patiently with their puppy.



"Puppy raising is perfect for people who don't want or can't have a dog for life. We have people from overseas who work here for two or three years and have had to leave their dog behind. It's wonderful company for them during what can be a lonely time. People who have been posted to Sydney with the military often do it for us too, and then we have families who just want to give back to the community."

WE'RE A BREED OF OUR OWN

We're a familiar sight in the community. Icons, really. Even though we're just moulded Collection Dogs ... giant money boxes if you like.

You'll find our smaller cousins on the counters of shops and businesses. Our big dogs sit at the front of most Coles and some Woolworth stores, where kids love to ride on them.

In the days when we used to carry a slogan saying, 'Please Feed Me', you'd be amazed how many children would take that literally, generously sharing their biscuits, smarties and lollies. Now that our slogan has changed to "Help me grow into my harness", people stick mainly to our healthier diet of loose change.

It's fun to watch patiently as mums juggle bags of shopping and that loose change received from the checkout operator, knowing that these coins are sure to fall on the ground.

That's when their children will help retrieve them, and rush over to place them through our waiting slot. Thanks kids!

Some of us get picked up by members of the Guide Dog Support Group, when we're emptied and the money gets counted and bagged.

Ultimately, most of us stay at our stations 24/7, and wait for a visit from a Guide Dogs NSW/ACT staff member so see how we're doing.

On their knees, emptying out our contents and cleaning up our coats which get lovingly stroked by young sticky fingers, it's sometimes hard to keep a straight face when the staff have to deal with remarks, like, "Are you a qualified vet?" or "There must be a name for what you're doing to that dog?" and "The dog must be enjoying that, there's a smile on his face."



Furthermore, when our worn or chipped noses are getting a touch up with black paint, someone is sure to quip, "I need a nose-job too."

I rest my case. We're a breed of our own.

ROCK 'N' ROLL HOUND

Talented musician, Matt McLaren, 27, became a household name after reaching the finals of the national Australia's Got Talent program accompanied by his beloved Guide Dog, Stamford.

With the help of Stamford, Matt has travelled around Australia and all over the world, performing in gigs up to six nights a week. He sings and plays the keyboard as a solo artist or as part of small band, performing an eclectic mix of pop, funk, dance and blues covers. All while working full-time running his recording business.

In late 2015, Matt made the nerve-wracking decision to audition for the popular TV show, Australia's Got Talent. His stunning performance was met with a standing ovation – and with the public behind him, Matt got through to the 2016 Grand Finals, where he gave another mind-blowing performance.

Stamford took all the excitement in his stride.

Matt first became involved with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT when he was three.

“John Payne, an Orientation and Mobility Instructor, came to see me in my small country town to teach me how to use a cane,” Matt said.

“When I finished school and moved out of home to live in Newcastle I started to gig. At that point, the cane just wasn't doing it for me, especially when I needed to carry equipment. I needed to be able to go to new environments and adapt quickly and easily, so a Guide Dog was the obvious choice – I haven't looked back since.”

With clients at his recording studio five days a week and gigs almost every night, Matt and Stamford are always on the go.



“Having Stamford lets me get out and be independent. He has been very adaptable and is great around the loud music and the general shenanigans that go on at live gigs. And he definitely gets a lot of attention. Whenever I come off stage everyone wants to pat him and I have to tell them he's still working, even though he's in a bar!”

Matt's advice for young people living with vision impairment is to get out, work hard and allow yourself to be the best you possibly can.

RECIPE FOR A PUPPY RAISER

How to make a Guide Dog cake!

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup of patience
- 1 cup of understanding
- 1 cup of hard work
- 2 cups of praise
- 2 cups of fun

METHOD

- Blend ingredients well
- Take one puppy, roll and play until lightly pampered
- Heat with the warmth of your heart until puppy has doubled in size
- Slowly add in owner and mix thoroughly until consistency is smooth

VOILÀ!

You have the perfect Guide Dog cake!



WHATEVER IT TAKES

Mike Poynting has a job that most people would give their right arm for! He gets to travel around NSW meeting the most amazing people and indulge his absolute love of working with dogs.

Mike started with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT in 1990 and has been a full-time Guide Dog Instructor since 2000, covering the Western Sydney region, Western NSW and Broken Hill.

“I love my country trips. It can be hard for people in isolated areas to find out about Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and the ways we can help them, so we spend a lot of our time trying to spread the word, going out to community health centres, optometrists, hospitals, etc., and giving out materials to help people find us,” Mike said.

“One of my favourite memories from the past 25 years was training an 83-year-old lady to work her first-ever Guide Dog. She had migrated to Australia during World War II and still had a razor-sharp mind and rapier wit. She was an incredible person.

“It took more than two months to complete her training because she fell ill part way through and at one point she spent two weeks in hospital while one of her friends cared for her dog.

“I went to visit her and found her in floods of tears because someone had told her that she’d have to give up her Guide Dog because she wouldn’t be able to care for him. She was devastated.

“But I told her we’d never take her dog from her and that as soon as she was well again we’d get back to training. The following day her Guide Dog was taken to visit her in hospital and spent the whole day next to her bed and, when no one was looking, on it!



“Sure enough, a few weeks later she and her Guide Dog successfully completed their training and I’ve honestly never seen anyone as proud and delighted as she was to work with her Guide Dog.

“What makes my job so great is that our organisation is all about giving clients choice. Whatever their needs are, we keep working with them, trying things out, until we find the right way to help them,” Mike said.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Recounted by Keith Holdsworth

“Hello Keith.” It was one of our Guide Dog Handlers in Tasmania on the phone laughing uncontrollably.

She’d been walking down the street in her small home town in Northern Tasmania when her Guide Dog just stopped in her tracks.

“Well, did you try everything we covered in your training?” I asked.

“Yes, I did everything you taught me. I backtracked and then moved forward. I tried moving sideways. But no matter what I did, she just lay down on the ground and refused to move.”

“Well, what did you do next?” I asked.

“I tried to get her to budge for several minutes, when a kind man came up to me and asked if I needed any help getting around the elephant!”

Her Guide Dog had come face to face with an elephant from the visiting circus.

Well, that’s one situation that’s not covered in the training manual.



LOVING THEN LETTING GO

Halo is just like any other puppy. She's cuddly, playful, curious and mischievous and totally adorable. But there's something very special about the life that lies ahead of her.

Our story begins the day Halo is picked up from the Guide Dogs Centre in Glossodia by her new Puppy Raiser, Kirsten Parker.

"The moment this tiny little puppy was placed in my arms, I knew it was the beginning of an incredible journey. When we brought her home that afternoon she fitted straight into our family. She quickly proved to us that though she was small in body, she was VERY big in personality!" Kirsten said.

"As each day goes by, Halo's little world expands with wonderful new experiences. She's learnt so much in just these last few months and I feel so privileged to witness the life of this beautiful little puppy unfold before my very eyes.

"As Halo's Puppy Raisers, my family and I are putting a lot of work into giving her the best possible foundation – providing both training and a loving home, so she can become the best Guide Dog she can be. Right now we're really working on her walking-on-lead skills and basic obedience, and it's so rewarding to see her improving every day."

When Halo is running around in the backyard, playing games, begging for belly rubs and getting into all sorts of mischief (which she loves to do), it is hard to imagine this beautiful, cheeky puppy in a harness, guiding someone around.

"But when she's on a lead and we go out on a walk, she trots along like she's the proudest thing on four paws. That's when I get a glimpse of the noble Guide Dog inside her.



"When Halo is 14 months old, her puppy-raising time will be over and the next stage of her life will begin. I know saying goodbye to her will be one of the hardest things I will ever have to do, because I already love her dearly. She has dug herself deep inside a special place in my heart.

"But as desperately as I shall miss her, I really hope she will graduate from her training to become a wonderful Guide Dog and treasured friend to someone who needs her more than I do.

A PASSION FOR CHANGING LIVES

It's a sobering thought. While there are currently 250 Guide Dog clients living in NSW/ACT, only one in four people who needs a Guide Dog, actually has one.

Faced with an ever-growing need, the team at the Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Training Centre at Glossodia in Sydney, is making groundbreaking changes to the way they breed and train dogs.

For many years, the organisation sourced puppies from registered local breeders but this supply proved to be unreliable and unpredictable in both the number and suitability of available pups.

In 2012, the team established their own specialised puppy breeding program using 40 of the best and most suitable dogs. The goal was to produce a colony of puppies and dogs that were suited to the needs of clients with vision impairment.

A new specially-constructed Puppy Breeding Centre provides a support system for the entire colony with purpose-built accommodation, an onsite veterinary hospital, toys to chew and cuddles and attention from kennel staff.

When two successful Guide Dogs with highly desirable qualities are mated, their puppies often follow their parents to become excellent working dogs. The program has already doubled the success rate for puppies.

The program was initiated by CEO, Dr Graeme White and introduced by the then Centre Manager, Graeme Mitchell and it has continued to flourish under the guidance of current Centre Manager, Paul Adrian.



According to Paul, the pairing of the parents is an important stage in the program.

“If the parents are selectively bred for favourable behaviours and characteristics such as a calm temperament, medium size, good health, low reactivity with a strong desire to guide, then our puppies have a much higher chance of successfully completing their training and graduating as Guide Dogs,” Paul said.

REACH FOR THE STARS

How often do you see a Labrador leading a woman leading a horse?

Not often but that's just an average day for the unstoppable Sue-Ellen Lovett, who grew up on a 21,000-acre property in regional NSW. Sue-Ellen was born with a degenerative hereditary eye condition called retinitis pigmentosa, which causes gradual vision loss and often leads to total blindness.

But Sue-Ellen wanted to ride and nothing was going to stop her. Today, she's one of Australia's most successful dressage riders having competed in the 1996 Paralympic Games in Atlanta, the 1999 World Equestrian Games in Denmark where she won a Bronze Medal and was ranked 4th in the world, as well as the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

With only 2 per cent vision in 1999, Sue-Ellen was undaunted by the incredible technical challenges of dressage and she found a solution.

"I counted the strides when I was competing. At other times if I was in an indoor arena where it was very dark, I had people positioned at different places around the arena holding lights. I was like a little white moth – I rode to the lights while counting the horse's strides!" Sue-Ellen said.

These days, Sue-Ellen has no sight but still regularly competes in national and international dressage competitions with people stationed around the arena, calling letters. She rides in the direction of their voices and is currently in the top 10 per cent of able-bodied equestrians in Australia.

Beginning in 1981 with her first Guide Dog, a German Shepherd called Donna, Sue-Ellen credits all six of her Guide Dogs with giving her an amazing life of independence and allowing her to fulfil her dreams.

With previous Guide Dog Prada and now Armani by her side, Sue-Ellen has also completed nine long-distance rides raising \$3.1 million for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and other charities.



She also travels Australia giving motivational talks advising people to: "Reach for the stars and never be afraid to have a go. If you fall down and don't succeed, get up and have another go. It's so important for people to know that disability is not a reason not to live."

It's clear how close her Guide Dog is to her heart. Whether riding at home or competing in the arena, Sue-Ellen, her horse Cascador and Prada made a formidable team.

While Prada was initially wary of Cascador, they learnt to work together in perfect harmony, with Prada ready to be Sue-Ellen's 'eyes on the ground' whenever she left the saddle.

"My dogs have given me amazing independence and the ability to do what everyone else does. I would hate to think of my life without them. I wouldn't have a life without my beautiful Guide Dogs."

At the time of going to print, Sue-Ellen was already planning her next amazing fundraising feat a 1,000 kilometre ride through Central West NSW in late 2018.

EVERYDAY PEOPLE

29-year-old Ashleigh Brooks is passionate about setting an example for other young people with sight loss, who are looking for ways to make their way in the world.

Growing up in regional NSW, Ashleigh and her sister were born with a congenital vision impairment called Leber's congenital amaurosis.

Relying on a white cane to negotiate her way through each day, has not slowed Ashleigh down. She has successfully completed a Bachelor of Social Work and when she's not working full-time, she's indulging her love of overseas travel.

"It isn't going to be easy and there are going to be days when you hate it but you need to push these boundaries. As a cane user with vision impairment, finding employment hasn't been easy," Ashleigh said.

"I've faced a lot of discrimination in the past and one of the main issues has been that I don't have a driver's licence. Another big concern is around occupational health and mobility as people think it's too risky to employ someone who is vision impaired. They're worried that if a client gets agitated, I won't be able to help them or that I might bump into a door or won't be able to get out if there's a fire.

"It's just a mindset many people have. They're not willing to think of other ways to get around it.

"It's so important to educate employers to focus on the capabilities of a person with sight loss, as well as their requirements, and the incredible damage discrimination can do. It's about creating a positive mindset among employers and encouraging them to think outside the square."

Ashleigh loves travelling and exploring new countries, often being amused by the reaction of some locals to her sight loss and has never let their opinions stop her. During a recent trip to China, she and her friends went to a night club where they were told it was too dangerous



for Ashleigh to be dancing. In typical fashion, Ashleigh had a great time, proving them wrong and is already planning a return trip to the rural areas of the country.

On another occasion, it was here in NSW when a kindly local came to her aid.

"I was out walking and one of the streets I was crossing was poorly aligned. I lost my way, ending up in the middle of the busy Pacific Highway with cars flying past me. Thankfully a woman grabbed my arm and led me back to safety of the footpath before continuing on her way.

"Young people who are just starting on their journey need to know that they really will get there. They just have to keep trying and not give up.

"People who are vision impaired aren't inspirational, or amazing, or special or anything like that. We are every day, normal people who just happen to use a cane."

THE JAM MAN

Known fondly as The Jam Man by everyone in the Guide Dogs family, Peter Francis never failed to bring homemade jam or marmalade with him when he visited the Guide Dogs Centre at Glossodia. But his delicious gifts were just the tip of the iceberg.

Peter has already donated money to help build our breeding centre and support our breeding program. Peter's amazing generosity is recognised at both the breeding centre and another wing of the Guide Dogs Centre. In yet another extraordinary act of generosity, he's included a gift to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT in his Will.

"I love dogs and I'm frightened of going blind. It's as simple as that," Peter says.

"When I had cataracts removed several years ago, I learned what it was like to walk around with one eye. That was bad enough but the thought of doing without both eyes scares me."

Peter lives in a picturesque country town and loves seeing Guide Dogs in action.

"Once you become involved with Guide Dogs, you start to notice how many of them are around.

"A funny thing happened one day. I'd just parked my car at the local shops when I saw a lady walking towards the car next to mine with her Guide Dog in harness.

"She opened the car door and the dog jumped in, then she went to sit in the driver's seat. It was only then that she turned and saw the look on my face.

"She said: 'Oh don't worry. This is my daughter's Guide Dog. She's in hospital and the only way I can get the dog to behave when I'm grocery shopping is to put its harness on!'

"I wasn't sure what I'd have done if she'd just got into the car, turned the key and driven off!"

But there's one local Guide Dog that will always have a very special place in Peter's heart.



"We had a postman called Phil who had tunnel vision. Eventually he gave up trying to do things on his own and got a Guide Dog, Pebbles.

"When he came over for a chat one day, I bent down and gave Pebbles a good scratch as she was out of her harness. A couple of days later, I was outside in the front garden and called out a greeting to Phil as he walked past. Pebbles stopped dead in her tracks and looked at me.

"From then on, every time the two of them walked past my house, I would watch through my window. Instead of looking straight ahead, Pebbles would turn her head towards my house, looking out for me and would always stop when she heard my voice. I think I was a bad influence on her!

"Sadly, Pebbles died a few years ago and mail deliveries just aren't the same," Peter said.

THE HAPPIEST YEARS

It was the handwritten notes of passionate support for our wonderful Guide Dogs and puppies, that Lyn Smith remembers most about being the first Bequest Officer at Guide Dogs NSW/ACT in 1989.

“I was nursing at the time and looking for a nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday job, when I saw a newspaper advertisement that didn’t say who the employer was or what the job entailed but they were looking for somebody who was comfortable with elderly people. It sounded perfect,” Lyn said.

“I was very surprised indeed when I got the job and found myself a Bequests Officer for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT although when I started no one really knew what a Bequests Officer did – least of all me.

“But as I got involved with the fundraising appeals, I started to notice that people would write little notes to us on their donation slips. So I began responding to those communications. Then I started to go and visit people, and that’s how it all got going.

“It dawned on me that my job was to help supporters understand how their contribution can develop our wonderful Guide Dog program that assists people with sight loss.

“That’s why I always encouraged people to come to our Guide Dog graduations, so they could see first-hand what the organisation does and how it works.”

However, it was during her home visits that Lyn learnt to expect the unexpected and recalls that she was regularly ambushed by a sofa-guarding rabbit when she visited one long-time supporter.

The supporter had a colourful Russian heritage and enthusiastically plied Lyn with tea whenever she visited. However, unbeknown to Lyn, the supporter also owned a pet rabbit that lived very comfortably under the woman’s sofa, which it was not fond of sharing, and often took small bites out of Lyn’s shoes during her many visits.

“People choose to support Guide Dogs



NSW/ACT for a range of reasons but for many, it’s our working Guide Dogs that really resonates with them, particularly the way the dogs enable people who have lost their sight to lead independent, successful lives.

“Other supporters feel that losing their sight could be one of the worst things that could happen but then they listen to one of our amazing speakers and these stories really strike a chord.

“Of course it helps that what we do has always been so visible. Most people love animals and you notice Guide Dogs everywhere you go and you only have to hop on a bus or a train to see them at work. Whether it’s through a cane, a Guide Dog or technology, our work is about giving people back their independence, and that really matters.”

Lyn said it would always bring her such joy when she was giving a talk or doing a promotion and someone would come up to her and thank Guide Dogs NSW/ACT for helping a member of their family.

“That really made me feel so good about what I was doing and it’s what made me decide to leave a gift in my own Will.

“My whole experience working with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT was just amazing. I loved my 27 years as a nurse but my 22 years working there really were the happiest of my life. It was the donors, the staff and the clients...just everyone!”

HELPING PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES

Phoebe had an amazing ability to figure out how to get her Handler, Nicole Holmes, back to the starting point of any journey whenever they got lost.

For nine years, Nicole and Guide Dog, Phoebe, had a true partnership. Phoebe's inquisitive, 'get up and go' personality suited Nicole's busy life perfectly and together, they travelled all over NSW, enjoying many adventures.

"I'm generally a very busy person! I've travelled by myself to many countries overseas and I also travel around the state as part of my job as an accessibility professional, so I'm always going to new places and meeting different people," Nicole said.

"It's less tiring having a Guide Dog to help me navigate and I am more able to concentrate on my work rather than safely getting from place to place. An added bonus is that Phoebe and now my new Guide Dog, Toby, are also great conversation starters."

Nicole was born prematurely, causing her retinas to detach, leaving her with no useful vision but with the help of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, she's had the freedom to live a busy life.

Nicole has had a long association with Orientation and Mobility Specialists from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, who have armed her with the skills to explore a range of environments today. Guide Dogs provided opportunities for her to interact with the environment as a child, orientated her to new schools and universities, and encouraged her to explore many and varied places.

It was while she was studying at University, that Nicole got Phoebe. The combination of expert Orientation and Mobility training, empowerment and a Guide Dog made Nicole feel just as capable as her peers.

It inspired Nicole to apply for a job at Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and later complete a Master's Degree in Special Education in vision impairment.



"Outside work, I really enjoy music and the piano. Over the years, I've enjoyed going to many concerts with Phoebe beside me.

"Phoebe was a life-changer in so many ways. I found that going to new places with her was so much easier and thought that if I can experience all this and my life is so good, why not help others do the same?"

Nicole says there are times when being a client herself really helps with her work as telling clients about her personal experiences can also help boost their confidence.

"I've always had a passion for accessible technology. As part of my role, I coordinate our GPS programs and train our Instructors to use a range of devices that can arm our client with information about using public transport and travelling to specific locations.

"Technology is constantly changing even with everyday things like the iPhone making a real difference. For example, you can now get an app where you take a photo and your phone tells you what's in it."

In the future, I hope to keep working in the sector and doing a lot more with technology. Who knows what amazing things will be available in five years' time?

"I wouldn't mind working overseas in a different environment and I'm always looking for new ways to challenge myself. The future is very exciting," Nicole said.

A GREAT HONOUR

There are around 600,000 not-for-profit organisations in Australia and of these 54,000 are registered charities. A large number of these charities are well known, respected and worthy organisations doing fantastic work within the community and most have recognisable brands.

It is critical for a charity to have a recognised and well-regarded image or brand in the community, if they require public support and if fundraising is important for the organisation's survival.

For many years, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has worked hard to inform the public about the services provided by our organisation and the values we stand for. We have strived to be transparent and frank with the media and anyone making enquiries of us. We have advocated strongly for the rights of people with sight loss and their entitlement to be treated fairly, whether or not they are accompanied by their Guide Dog.

For people to want to support Guide Dogs or come to us for services they need to trust our organisation and believe that Guide Dogs will be true to our mission and our conviction to provide the highest quality services.

Reader's Digest is an international and highly respected magazine that has published periodicals for 95 years. In 2000, Reader's Digest launched its 'Most Trusted Brand' survey and awards. This survey is conducted by Roy Morgan across Australia and across a wide demographic of 2,450 people every year. The survey is designed to find out which company brands people trust the most as being genuine, authentic, reliable and consistent. And the categories of brands surveyed range from cars and banks to toothpaste and paints.

In 2013, Reader's Digest introduced the category of 'Most Trusted Charity Brand' for the first time.



In 2013 – its first year – Guide Dogs won the 'Most Trusted Charity Brand' Award. This was a great honour and surprising given that we were competing for this title with a very large number of sizeable and well known charities.

Guide Dogs also won this award in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017... every year since inception of the charity category. Five years in a row.

To win this award once is fantastic but every year is extraordinary.

The staff at Guide Dogs are humbled and very proud to be so highly regarded by the community. We are committed to taking the responsibility of this trust very seriously and continue to ensure that all donor, bequest and organisation hard-earned dollars will be used efficiently and effectively to help people with sight loss with the highest quality services possible.

It is an unrealistic expectation to think Guide Dogs will have a stranglehold on this Award forever, nevertheless we intend to keep living up to this wonderful reputation and stay true to everything we have done and achieved that has earned us this reputation over our first 60 years.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

It is believed that there are around 110,000 people in NSW/ACT with uncorrectable vision impairment. Of these, about 30,000 are blind.

The 2015 Intergenerational Report¹ projects that Australians will live longer and continue to have one of the longest life expectancies in the world. The Report also predicts that the number of Australians over 65 years of age will double over the next 45 years and we will enjoy a healthier old age. While this is great news for Australians, what does it mean for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT?

Sight loss is a condition of ageing. The prevalence of sight loss trebles with each decade over the age of 40². With the number of healthy aged people in the population substantially increasing in the future, the number of people with sight loss and wanting to get out and about, travel, live independently etc., is expected to increase considerably.

While Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has grown tremendously over its first 60 years of operation, we are still providing services to only 4,000 people per year. If we are to try to keep up with the anticipated growth in demand for our services we must expand enormously.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a wonderful initiative. As we prepare this book, the Scheme is still scaling up from trials but projections suggest that it is unlikely to provide services to more than about 3,000 people with sight loss in NSW/ACT. And the NDIS does not provide services to people who lose their sight over the age of 65. Government funding for people over 65 with sight loss is minimal until they become quite frail. So the NDIS and Government funding are not the solution.

How about technology? There are already excellent applications available for smart phones and tablets and it is expected that these will proliferate, providing excellent guidance and information for people travelling through their environment and for coping with chores around the home.

Technology will also help people with sight loss gain and retain much wanted employment. Bionic eyes and devices that can be worn that provide an image or interpretation of the view in front of the wearer are expected to become available and affordable within the next 5-10 years.

Driverless car technology is available now and being tested around the world ... this technology will give people with sight loss the ability to own a car and be driven around independent of a carer or being reliant on taxis, and this will be available in Australia within the next five or so years. In so many ways, technology will make life easier for people with sight loss and Guide Dogs NSW/ACT will need to invest in assisting people to adopt these technological developments ... but I believe technology will never take the place of a loving, loyal and intelligent Guide Dog.

I foresee a future of massively growing demand on Guide Dogs NSW/ACT services, relatively limited Government help and therefore the need for this organisation to find support from the community to enable the growth needed to help so many more people.

While we have achieved so much in the last 60 years, there is so much more to do.

Dr Graeme White, CEO, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT