



FACT SHEET

SNAPSHOT

It is important to realise that Guide Dogs have limitations and can only be effective when supported by their handlers who are blind or vision impaired. The Guide Dog is one half of a partnership - the Guide Dog handler is the other half. It is the combination of the skills of both the handler and the Guide Dog that allows for safe and successful travel.

Matching

Dogs that successfully complete the rigorous Guide Dog training program are matched with a potential handler. This is an important process, with our Orientation and Mobility Instructors ensuring that the dog is well-suited to the person's specific lifestyle and travel needs. For example, a very active person living and working in the city would need a dog that can handle stress and loves to work, while being equally content to wait patiently for many hours while their handler is in the office.



Guide Dogs NSW/ACT client Daniel Searle and his Guide Dog Bear

Team Training

Once matched, the new team needs to build trust and establish a bond, as well as learn how to travel together. The pair undergoes five weeks of intensive training with an experienced instructor; starting with basic obedience and progressing through walking in harness, stopping at steps, stairs and kerbs, walking straight across roads when directed, and turning. As the working bond grows, the complexity of the environments increases. The handler learns the commands for directing their dog while the dog learns its handler's travel routes. Over time, the dog learns how to guide its handler to an increasing number of destinations.



Kate and her Guide Dog Otis

IT'S A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Not everyone wants or needs a Guide Dog. Applicants don't have to be totally blind but their vision must be at a level where they need assistance to get around and they've probably already mastered how to use a long cane. If they have too much vision it may result in the dog getting confused about when it does and doesn't have to guide. The person must be:

- well orientated to their chosen routes.
- able to direct the dog where they want to go .
- able to cross roads confidently.



Ian and his Guide Dog Dusty

The Handler's Responsibilities

Once training has been successfully completed, handlers are wholly responsible for the care and well-being of their Guide Dog. This includes: providing for the dog's daily needs, such as food, grooming, toileting, exercise, play time and health checks; and for maintaining the quality of their work to ensure accurate and safe mobility. Guide Dogs NSW/ACT's instructors provide yearly follow-ups with the team and the handler is able to request assistance at any stage of their dog's working life

Retirement

Once a Guide Dog begins to show signs of ageing such as slowing down, arthritis or other medical issues, it is time for the handler to decide if they are going to retire the dog, and if so where it will spend its twilight years. Some will keep it as a family pet. Others will place it with a family or friends, or even the dog's original Puppy Raiser.



A retired Guide Dog



Archie and Arnie learn escalators

Correcting Misconceptions

A Guide Dog does not know when to cross a road, nor does it know when the traffic lights turn green. This decision is made by the handler, who will use their skills and knowledge to assess traffic flow. The handler needs to determine if traffic is moving or stopped and then instruct the dog to guide him or her across the road. Another misconception about Guide Dogs is that the dog can take the handler to any place named. The Guide Dog, like the handler, has to learn any new routes over a period of time and, even then, cannot be expected to know where the handler wants to go simply by the naming of a building or landmark.