



FACT SHEET

SNAPSHOT

A Guide Dog's job is to guide someone who is vision impaired around obstacles and from one location to another. As the person's safety is paramount, the criteria for selecting pups into the Guide Dog training program are extremely stringent.

Selection

Pups return from being raised by their volunteer Puppy Raisers to the Guide Dog Centre when they are about 14 months old. Over two weeks, our expert Guide Dog Instructors carefully assess every dog on several long walks. Prospective Guide Dogs must be healthy, eager to work, display good concentration and be able to control the temptation to be distracted by food and other animals.



Guide Dog in training, first time in harness

How do I become a Guide Dog Instructor?

Not everyone has the patience or temperament to become a Guide Dog Instructor. Those selected will need to complete post-graduate study, work for at least three years with people who are vision impaired, pass internal selection and undertake special training that meets the International Guide Dog Federation standards.

The role involves training dogs; assessing applicants on suitability; training handlers to work safely with their guide dog; and supporting handlers and their dogs.



Guide Dog in training at Glossodia

GUIDE DOG TRAINING BASICS

Straight line travel: learning to walk straight to a kerb with the instructor introducing the command "To the kerb".

Right shoulder work: the dog learns to allow for extra space on their right, ensuring their handler is safe from oncoming obstacles.

Formal turns: stopping on command and taking further directional instruction.

Artificial obstacles: learning how to move around an obstacle AND to return to the straight line on which they were travelling.

Traffic exercises: this builds awareness of traffic and how to be careful around vehicles, stationary or moving.

Destinations: a dog learns to locate a door when a new destination is introduced.

Public transport: the dogs are introduced to buses, trains and car travel helping them to learn what to do and what is expected.



Guide Dog in training at Glossodia

Training

Selected puppies undergo an intensive five-month program with a Guide Dog Instructor to learn the complex skills required for their new job. They begin with simple commands and progress to more challenging tasks to acquire new skills. The Instructor's job is to build each dog's confidence and consistency, while observing their personality and tailoring training to suit their temperament. Training occurs through positive reinforcement; lots of pats and food rewards.

Some tasks, like stopping at kerbs and staircases are taught through repetition. Other tasks, such as safely crossing the road, require intensive training. And it takes a well-trained dog to handle an unexpected event, like a car reversing from a driveway. As training progresses, the dogs learn to travel through confusing and crowded areas, such as shopping centres and busy city streets. In fact, experienced Guide Dogs can guide their handlers to a range of destinations. As you can imagine, this requires careful teaching so the dog learns each command in a complex sequence of events.



Guide Dog in harness

Despite the hard work involved, Guide Dogs have a rewarding job and of course when the harness comes off there's plenty of downtime.

At the completion of training each dog is tested on their ability to ignore distractions such as food and noises, navigate obstacles, travel on public transport, find landmarks such as bus stops and cross roads safely.



Guide Dog in having harness instruction



Graduating Guide Dogs, May 2013 Glossodia