

The Guide



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"I want Aboriginals and all cultures to know about Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. If it wasn't for them I wouldn't be where I am at the moment - at college continuing my studies. They helped me develop the skills I needed to get out of the house, catch a bus and get around independently in the community. Not only did it help for me, it also helped my family."

»» Aunty Mary promotes Guide Dogs' services

The Central West town of Wellington was recently transformed into a mini-movie set for the filming of a new film designed to educate Aboriginals who are blind or vision impaired about Guide Dogs NSW/ACT's free, local services.

The film, Community Service Announcement for TV, brochure and poster, will form the basis of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT's first Aboriginal-specific education campaign that will be launched during NAIDOC Week in Wellington in the first week in September, 2013.

The campaign is the initiative of Aboriginal Elder Aunty Mary Hooker, a Bundjalung woman from Taree now living in Mudgee, who is vision impaired and wants to ensure other Aboriginals don't wait like she did to seek assistance from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

Aunty Mary said the campaign's focus was to present information about Guide Dogs NSW/ACT's services in a simplified manner that was language and culturally accessible for Aboriginal communities, with all materials to be designed using Aboriginal colours.

"Until I discovered Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, I felt isolated and couldn't identify with any services that were culturally appropriate and sensitive to Aboriginal people," says Aunty Mary, who is legally

blind due to diabetic retinopathy – a condition that causes damage to the retinal tissue and can lead to blindness if left untreated.

"In fact I didn't approach Guide Dogs NSW/ACT at first because I thought they would give me a Guide Dog. But I heard an ad on TV saying that they also train people in how to use canes. So I rang them; they came out to me and gave me cane training."

The blindness in Aboriginal adults is over six times the rate in mainstream Australia.

"Our services are not widely known in Aboriginal communities, so we're hoping that this new information kit will be very useful for both Aboriginal Health Workers, people with vision impairment and families and carers supporting people with vision impairment" says Jennifer Moon, Community Education Coordinator for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

With 10 offices across NSW and ACT, including in Central West NSW, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT is committed to serving all communities and providing local services wherever possible.

To learn more about this project, visit www.guidedogs.com.au or call 9412 9300.

» Blacktown office opening



Barbara Bonfield, John Robertson, Local Member for Blacktown, and Regina Renfree.



Staff from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT pose with Gulliver at the opening.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT celebrated the opening of its' new office located in Blacktown with a breakfast for local community and health service providers.

The office, at Suite 302, Level 3, 83 Flushcombe Road in Blacktown, is the base for the organisation's Western Sydney team of 14 Orientation and Mobility Instructors, who were previously located in Westmead.

Regina Renfree, Regional Manager of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT's Western Sydney team, said the team was looking forward to introducing itself to the local community.

"If you are a health or community worker and you have a client or patient with a vision condition that is affecting their ability to get around safely, our free services can help," said Ms Renfree.

"While training Guide Dogs is an important part of our work, our most common program is showing people with impaired vision how to safely move through different environments. We provide training on safe travel skills as well as how to use a range of mobility aids such as long canes and electronic devices.

"Our services enable people with vision loss to go to school, go to university, go to work and pursue social and sporting interests without having to rely on others to take them."

Ms Renfree added that the organisation had chosen Blacktown as its new Western Sydney base to make it easier for instructors to visit clients across the region.

"Our expert instructors specialise in providing services to people in their local areas, so we needed to be closer to them. Our region spans west to the Blue Mountains, south to Campbelltown, north to Wiseman's Ferry and east to Strathfield."

In the past 12 months, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has delivered 1,382 orientation and mobility programs to people with impaired vision living across Western Sydney. Of this, 189 programs were delivered in the Blacktown Council area, to about 110 residents with impaired vision.

For more information about Guide Dogs NSW/ACT's services across Western Sydney please call the Blacktown office on **9676 5802** or visit: www.guidedogs.com.au

»» When Jeannine met Coral...

Coral was 63 years old when she first contacted Guide Dogs 3 years ago. Despite having been legally blind from birth, she was strongly discouraged from using a long cane so she never sought mobility assistance. Coral is married with 5 adult children but throughout her whole married life, she rarely ventured out independently. Whenever she did venture out Coral usually had close calls - with the gap at train platforms, when crossing roads and judging drop offs.

After contacting Guide Dogs, Coral's was quick to learn how to use a long cane and soon had confidence to begin orientation training. This enabled her to travel independently from her inner suburban home to busy and complex areas such as the Opera House, Ensemble Theatre, Sydney's CBD as well as several major city train stations.

On a trip to the Red Cross Blood Bank in late December 2012, Coral met Jeannine, a 44 year old lady who recently had an extremely rare allergic reaction. This left her with an inability to produce her own tears to lubricate her eyes, causing severe dry eye syndrome. She now needs specialised autologous serum eye drops, which requires regular trips to the Red Cross Blood Bank. Despite this medication, Jeannine's vision continues to fluctuate according to the humidity and she is greatly affected by glare.

Thanks to Coral's recommendation, an intense course in long cane skills commenced the same day Jeannine contacted Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, three days before the office was due to close for its Christmas break. Jeannine had lost all confidence to do even the smallest of travel routes, not even feeling confident to walk her two children to their school around the corner.

Orientation and Mobility Instructor Elaine Neal was able to help Jeannine to feel confident using her cane in preparation for a family holiday on a cruise ship to celebrate Jeannine's father 70th birthday a week after Christmas day. Elaine reports that *"Jeannine was immediately amazed at the difference the long cane made to her level of confidence and ability to use her vision in a functional manner"*.

Jeannine continues to use her cane, as required, on her "bad days".

A podcast of Coral's story can be found at <http://is.gd/6ofF58>, interview #37.



View more about Jeannine's story at <http://is.gd/theguide>



»» Fred's story has just begun...

An unfortunate accident on his fourth birthday caused Fred significant vision loss. As Fred's vision deteriorated later in life, a family member suggested he contact Guide Dogs to help him get around more safely. An Orientation and Mobility (O&M) instructor visited Fred at home. After completing training, Fred found his identification cane useful to alert the general public that he could not see as well as others, resulting in people getting out of his way and bus drivers stopping to collect him.

In May 2011, Fred tripped and fell, damaging his remaining sight and leaving him totally blind. Long cane training commenced soon after, whilst he was still in hospital, continuing when Fred returned home. The long cane training gave Fred the skills and confidence to carry on with everything he enjoyed before his total vision loss.

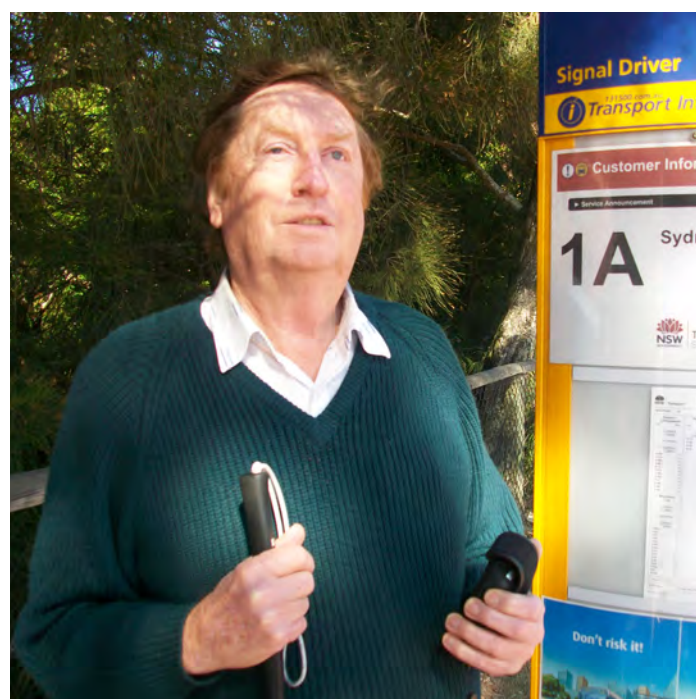
Ongoing O&M has provided Fred with the equipment and skills to use:

- Mini Guide - a device the size of a match box which vibrates when it detects an obstacle; it works along the same principle as reverse parking sensors in cars.
- Trekker Breeze - this device works similarly to the GPS most people have; its names the upcoming crossing giving Fred a richer understanding of the environment.

When asked about the impact of services from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, Fred responded *"I had the option of staying indoors all day doing nothing or trying to learn a new skill. I can go out; I can do things. Without the training from Guide Dogs I would not even begin*

to know where to start. You learn how to cope with change and use the skills taught to you in every situation to avoid obstacles. I was not aware of all the different equipment available, so when the instructors suggested that I try something new I jumped at the chance. I mean, how are you supposed to ask for something when you do not know it exists?"

BREAKING NEWS! – see Fred training with his new Guide Dog Pedro:
http://is.gd/learning_together



»» Contact Details

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT provides all of its services, including mobility aids, free of charge.

To refer someone to us, with their permission, please phone your nearest Client Services office on:

Sydney East Region:	(02) 9412 9300	Lismore:	(02) 6621 8475
Sydney West Region:	(02) 9676 5802	Newcastle:	(02) 4925 3066
Low Vision Clinic:	(02) 9412 9342	Orange:	(02) 6362 6625
Guide Dogs Centre:	(02) 4579 7555	Tamworth:	(02) 6761 3152
ACT:	(02) 6285 2988	Wagga Wagga:	(02) 6925 3559
Albury:	(02) 6041 5201	Coffs Harbour:	(02) 6652 7424
Wollongong:	(02) 4225 9247		

Or contact us at www.guidedogs.com.au/contact-us

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