

# The Guide

Issue 1 | September 2010



Hello and welcome to the first edition of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT's *The Guide* professional newsletter.

The aim of this publication is to provide you with information that will assist your understanding of the services that Guide Dogs NSW/ACT offers. In turn, this will allow you to answer questions from, and provide advice to members of our community who are vision impaired.

Right up front I'd like to take the opportunity to burst a few myths about Guide Dogs. Firstly, clients do not need to be totally blind to receive our services. The majority have some residual vision. Our aim is to provide suitable mobility aids and training specific to the clients needs, taking into account their visual capabilities.

Secondly, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT is not just about Guide Dogs! While they are an important part of our service offering, we also specialise in showing people with impaired vision how to use a mobility cane; assisting them orientate themselves to new travel routes; delivering training in electronic aids such as

GPS devices; as well as programs for children with vision loss.

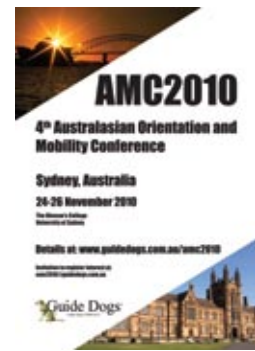
In this first edition of *The Guide* we feature the story of a client who talks about the impact that our services have had on his life. There is an article on the upcoming Australian Mobility Conference, which will be held in Sydney for the first time, and we introduce our Sydney West office. We also profile one of our regional Guide Dog Mobility Instructors. I hope you enjoy reading these stories.

Referring someone to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT or seeking further information on our services is as simple as picking up the phone and calling your nearest office.

Chris Harvey  
*A/Client Services Manager*



# »» 4th Australian Orientation and Mobility Conference: 24-26 November



Health professionals, educators and community workers interested in better understanding how vision impairment impacts a person's mobility, and available solutions, are encouraged to attend a professional development conference about this in Sydney in November.

Hosted by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, specialists in this field, the 4th Australasian Orientation and Mobility Conference is being held at Sydney University's Women's College, 24-26 November.

Guide Dogs Orientation and Mobility Instructor Jenny Croaker said there was great potential for professionals to work together to benefit people whose mobility is affected by vision loss.

*"Orientation and mobility is a little known or understood profession, yet demand for these skills is only going to grow,"* said Ms Croaker.

*"While we are known for our Guide Dogs, many people do not realise that the majority of what we do is providing free, tailored mobility programs that give people the confidence to safely and independently negotiate their environments, regardless of their level of vision impairment.*

*"As well as learning strategies and tools that can be incorporated into their work, we want delegates to*

*become more aware of our specialised skills so they will consider involving us with programs to maximise outcomes for individuals."*

There are about 570,000 people<sup>1</sup> in Australia who are blind or have impaired vision severe enough to cause problems with daily living, with this figure expected to double in the next 20 years<sup>2</sup>.

AMC2010 will be an interactive platform for sharing new ideas, knowledge, skills and resources among allied health professionals. Conference topics range from innovative tools for helping children with impaired vision develop movement to strategies for assisting people who have had a stroke regain mobility. Delegates will receive an attendance certificate that may be used to gain CPD points.

To register visit [www.guidedogs.com.au/amc2010](http://www.guidedogs.com.au/amc2010) or email [registrations@guidedogs.com.au](mailto:registrations@guidedogs.com.au) or [amc2010@guidedogs.com.au](mailto:amc2010@guidedogs.com.au). Conference updates can be followed on Facebook or Twitter @AMC2010Sydney. Registrations close 8 November.

References:

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, National Health Survey 2007/2008
2. Centre for Eye Research Australia, Clear Insight 2004



## »» Instructor Profile Taylor Bradshaw

### 1. What made you choose a career with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT?

I was in my third year studying Furniture Design when I saw an advertisement in the local paper for Orientation and Mobility Instructors. The job was to be based in Coffs Harbour, so I applied and as they say the rest is history.

I started work in 2004. Since then I have been fortunate to have undertaken 12 months training in Sydney to become a Guide Dog Instructor. In July this year I have successfully completed all relevant modules and I am now a qualified Orientation and Mobility (Guide Dog) Instructor.

### 2. What are the most satisfying aspects of your job?

Seeing a client first start working with a Guide Dog and progressing to becoming a competent Guide Dog Handler is so rewarding. So too is working with clients who first learn how to use a long cane and watching them develop and maintain their independence. Every day is different and you never know who you will meet or what the day holds for you.



# » Orientation & Mobility training targets neurological vision impairment

While people recovering from strokes, tumors or brain injury might experience mobility issues like bumping into obstacles or misreading street signs, they may not realise the problem is vision related, because superficially there is nothing wrong with their eyes.

However, damage to sections of the brain that control vision can cause the visual message to be misinterpreted or processed ineffectively.

As experts in helping people who are blind or vision impaired, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has a number of Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Instructors who are specially trained to address the neurological vision impairment problems that sometimes make it difficult for clients to move around safely and confidently.

*“We teach clients techniques to compensate for their vision loss by scanning effectively and consistently to their affected side.”*

*“The most common type of neurological vision impairment is visual field deficit, where the world for the person, visually speaking, has been reduced by half,”* O&M Instructor Alli Fagan said. *“People standing opposite might appear to have only half a face, print might dance around in front of their eyes, and the person affected can become quite anxious in crowded places.”*

Guide Dogs instructors work with the client’s rehabilitation team in hospital and at their home following discharge to provide training in ways to overcome vision problems.

*“We teach clients techniques to compensate for their vision loss by scanning effectively and consistently to their affected side,”* Ms Fagan said, adding the client also receives orientation and mobility training at home to help them get around safely and independently.

*“We take into consideration any additional problems resulting from stroke or a brain injury and we also educate clients and their family or carers about the implications of neurological vision loss. Like all our programs, this service is completely free of charge.”*

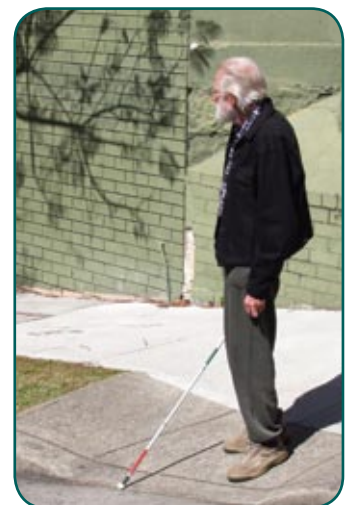
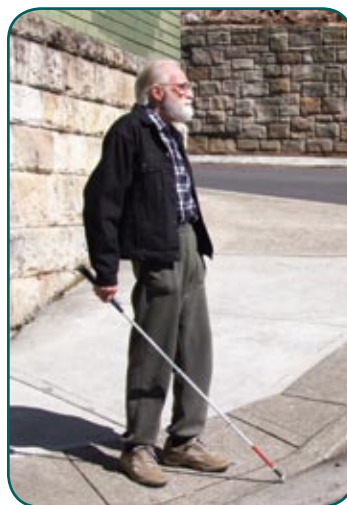
Thanks to these services, 68-year-old Allan, who has a left visual field deficit as a result of a stroke, has regained his confidence in independent mobility and has returned to most of his everyday activities, except for driving.

Guide Dogs instructors assessed Allan in hospital, where they began a program to train him in systematic scanning strategies that encouraged him to turn his head and eyes to the affected side.

At home, Allan was trained in the use of a long cane for road crossings and public transport. He also received help with money handling, and was referred for alternative reading materials such as talking books.

*“Our neurological orientation and mobility training program can help people like Allan overcome vision problems that can have quite a big impact on their confidence and livelihoods,”* Ms Fagan said.

For more information please visit [www.guidedogs.com.au](http://www.guidedogs.com.au).



Allan applying scanning skills at a road crossing

## » Regional Office Profile Westmead

The Western Sydney office of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT is located at Westmead, close to the train station. The area covered by this office is: north to the Hawkesbury; west to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains; south to Campbelltown; and east to Strathfield. This encompasses 14 local government areas.

Western Sydney has a growing population and we have recently employed two new instructors to prepare for the predicted increase in requests for programs.

*All together our instructors have around 105 years experience.*

There are now 15 Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Instructors based at Westmead, with backgrounds in orthoptics, occupational therapy, psychology, teaching and science. All are multi-skilled and many have been trained in teaching clients to use GPS, Miniguides, various canes, and scanning. Four instructors are also fully qualified as O&M (Guide Dog) Instructors, with a further three instructors currently completing Guide Dog modules. All together our instructors have around 105 years experience.

The Westmead office runs workshops for health-care professionals and potential client groups to let more people in the community know about our services and how they might benefit from them. Workshops have been co-presented on Falls Prevention and Macular Degeneration awareness.



Some of the dedicated staff from the Westmead office

Over the last 12 months instructors in this region have delivered 1033 programs and travelled over 142,000 kms to provide services for people with impaired vision in their home areas.

We work with people of all ages. Our youngest client is about six months, and our oldest is a 100-year-old man!

The Westmead region runs school holiday programs for children to expand their mobility experiences. Skills taught include: using different types of public transport; physical challenges such as indoor rock climbing and tandem cycling; and cane use in different environments like bush tracks. For older children and adults Guide Dogs has also offered fitness training and abseiling programs.

Recognising that Western Sydney has many different cultural groups, as a part of our service we will organise an interpreter, where required, at no charge to the client.

For further information on the services provide by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT in western Sydney please call our Westmead office on 9891 4914.

## » 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) 9891 4914	Newcastle:	(02) 4925 3066
Low Vision Clinic:	(02) 9412 9392	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](http://www.guidedogs.com.au/contact-us)

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