

# The Guide

Issue 2 | March 2011



For children with a vision impairment, confident, purposeful movement is essential to ensure that they reach their full potential. At Guide Dogs NSW/ACT our training focuses on equipping children with impaired vision with the same skills as their sighted peers.

A child does not have to be blind to receive our services. We teach children with varying levels of sight to make the most of their residual vision, and our objectives are based on the specific needs of the child. For example, instructors will incorporate the use of prescribed low vision aids, such as a mini-scope, into lessons. We also work with children who have multiple disabilities.

Programs are devised to prepare a child for age-appropriate activities. Road awareness is taught at a young age in preparation for independent road crossing later in childhood. Our programs grow with the child, and activities could include learning how to

catch public transport or how to use a mobility aid such as a long cane.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Orientation and Mobility Instructors provide information, support and education to not only the child, but to their family and everyone involved in his or her life – such as pre-schools, schools and others in the community. All of our free programs are provided in the child's environment, where they are encouraged to move and explore what is around them - which may be prior to the child learning to walk.

We understand that 'fitting in' and feeling at ease is very important to a child. Along with structured lessons, mobility day group programs and active play are used to aid incidental learning and are a great way for children to meet and socialise with their peers.

To find out more about our children's services contact your local office on the numbers at the end of this newsletter.



## » Children services in Central West NSW

The Central West is quite a unique area in comparison to other regions of NSW. Not only is it magnificent country (with warm friendly people) but its population is spread out over vast distances. So delivering Orientation and Mobility (O&M) programs, particularly for children, requires us to constantly develop and maintain good working professional relationships with many people in the community.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT works not only with the families involved but also with the child's vision teachers,



Molly from Orange helps out with dinner for the paddy calves

schools and other community service professionals. This is one of the most rewarding aspects of our job, as it allows us to become closely connected with many communities, both big and small.

Our programs for children can vary enormously depending on the extent of the vision loss and the needs of the child and his or her family. We can conduct training with the child whilst at school, on the way to or from school, and also at their home.

O&M training involves not only cane and orientation training, but also looking at how a child is able to physically move through his or her environment. This is where we need to work closely with physiotherapists to develop programs that will help to strengthen the body in order for it to move in a more efficient manner.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT incorporates into its programs games that involve using exercise balls, play equipment (running modified obstacle courses), hide and seek, wheel-barrow races and many more. Some children (both blind and those with some remaining vision) may go horse riding, swimming or even partake in combat classes!

O&M training is crucial in the early years of a child's life with many technical skills to develop and polish, but it can be a whole heap of fun too!

For more information about children's programs in your region, contact your local office (see back page for details).

All Guide Dogs NSW/ACT services and equipment are provided locally and free of charge.  
There are no time constraints on the duration of training programs.

## » Instructor Profile Paul Chiara

### 1. Describe your job with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

As an Orientation and Mobility Instructor I work with a variety of clients ranging from two to 92 years of age. The people I see have varying amounts of vision, with some having additional disabilities. My primary aim, through providing orientation and mobility training is to improve independence and self determination. In the future I'd like to broaden my skill base and become qualified as a Guide Dog Instructor.

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

I enjoy working with children and seeing them gain skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. Guide Dogs' Mobility Days are a great opportunity for kids to learn and have fun at the same time. They can involve children travelling in the city on different modes of transport; a beachside walk using canes; a scavenger hunt where children have to locate stores and ask for different items; or visiting a gym to improve their gross motor skills. I hope to organise my own mobility outings in the near future.



## » Taronga Zoo and a koala or two



Rachel and Theodore spending time with a cute koala at Taronga Zoo

Many people would be forgiven for thinking that Guide Dogs NSW/ACT only provides Guide Dogs to help people with impaired vision to travel around safely and independently. But a recent trip to Taronga Zoo for ten children from across Sydney and Canberra, who have varying degrees of vision loss, demonstrated the diversity of the free mobility services we provide.

*“As well as the thrill of visiting Taronga Zoo, the trip was organised to help the children develop skills they’ll need during their lives to independently and safely travel to desired destinations,”* said Kelly Prentice, an Orientation and Mobility Instructor with Guide Dogs.

The zoo visit also involved the children travelling by train from Central Station to Circular Quay, where they caught a ferry to the Taronga Zoo jetty before taking the Sky Safari to the Zoo entrance.

Before visiting the animals, the children undertook a tactile mapping exercise to learn their way around the zoo and to locate different animal enclosures. Ten-year-old Rachel Shipp from Figtree said the zoo visit was a fantastic experience that had helped to broaden her skills.

*“It was really exciting because we got to touch the animals,”* said Rachel, who is being taught how to use a cane by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. *“I also learnt a lot from the tactile mapping exercise and having to travel on various forms of public transport to and from the zoo.”*

Rachel is one of almost 650 children and youths across NSW and the ACT, who Guide Dogs works with to provide free mobility services each year. Services are uniquely tailored for toddlers, preschoolers and young teens, and include training in the use of mobility aids, public transport and use of remaining vision and other senses.

**Want to learn more about our services  
for children with impaired vision?  
Contact your local Guide Dogs office about  
arranging a free presentation or workshop.**

## » Little Room makes world of difference for Dallas

Sixteen-month old Dallas, who was born with anophthalmia, has blossomed with the help of a specially built space designed to stimulate movement.

Called a ‘Little Room’, the space has objects that are within reach of Dallas, so that by touching them she learns about space and movement and can form an understanding of the world around her.

Dallas and her mother Jade are visited regularly by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Orientation and Mobility Instructor Carolyn Bates. *“O&M focus in early intervention is all about babies developing spatial awareness, self initiated purposeful movement, and gross motor development. The Little Room provides this”*, explains Carolyn. Carolyn also works with other professionals providing services to Dallas.

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT has a number of Little Rooms available to help young children with impaired vision. As with all its services, the Little Rooms and associated training are provided free of charge.



Dallas practices rolling over in her ‘Little Room’ (top) and enjoys her toys and other stimulating objects (below)

## »» Regional Office Profile Newcastle

The Newcastle office was officially opened in 1990 with three instructors delivering services from Umina in the south to Forster/Tuncurry in the north and west to Murrurundi on the New England Highway and Merriwa on the Golden Highway.

Today Newcastle has ten mobility instructors, including two Guide Dog Instructors. The office also has a full-time administration officer who produces Soundtracks, an audio newsletter for clients.

*Staff enjoy the challenge of providing innovative and holistic services*

2010 saw our instructors complete nearly 1200 training and follow-up programs. Besides the general and individual training programs, the Newcastle office runs adult mobility days where clients have to travel to a set destination and meet other people with vision loss; off the beaten track bushwalking mobility days, which allow participants to experience bushwalking; and children's school holiday programs that focus on more fun and challenging aspects of mobility, such as public transport, interesting destinations and peer learning where their siblings often participate in parts of the programs. A walking group is being created where more challenging walks will be attempted, along cycleways initially. The Brisbane Waters Challenge is to be an annual 13km walk from Gosford to Woy Woy held in April and open to clients throughout the state.

Our instructors are proactive within the community, representing clients on issues with accessibility,



Some of the dedicated staff from the Newcastle office

including liaising with local councils, the Department of Housing, the NSW Department of Community Services, RTA, State Rail, bus companies and taxi services. Instructors also provide support to parents, teachers, health departments, and other organisations that provide services to people with a vision loss.

Community education sees instructors deliver talks to groups such as Lions and View clubs; conduct training workshops for service providers such as aged care facilities, health professionals such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists in rehabilitation hospitals. Workshops are also provided for bus drivers, taxi drivers and workers in the hospitality industry.

The Newcastle office has a real team approach to service delivery and staff enjoy the challenge of providing innovative and holistic services that aim to help people with impaired vision get around safely and confidently.

## »» 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 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](http://www.guidedogs.com.au/contact-us)

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