

# 03

## Our guide dog service



**Providing the guide dog service is at the centre of what we do; it is one of our main services to blind and partially sighted people to give them independence and mobility.**

**In 2009:**

- We organised over 11,300 home visits to clients.
- We trained 762 people with a guide dog.
- We welcomed over 250 new guide dog owners.

Recent surveys show that 96% of guide dog owners felt that their guide dogs had helped them to meet their mobility needs and 90% felt that Guide Dogs had met or exceeded their expectations.

**Extracts from a letter from a guide dog owner to her District Team Manager following her new partnership with guide dog Quinn:**



Hi,

Well I am now writing as a qualified guide dog owner and it feels absolutely great. First I need to say a big thank you to everyone I have met from Guide Dogs – I cannot believe just how lovely all the staff have been.

My life has already changed for the better – I had forgotten just how much I have been missing. I cannot wait to get up and out – I even went to the supermarket yesterday for the first time in nearly three years, just me and my guide dog, Quinn.

I will be indebted to Guide Dogs forever. My trainer has worked extremely hard with me and nothing is too much for her. She always made me feel relaxed and at ease which has made it so much easier for me to learn.

So now before I start getting all sentimental I will go and enjoy my new life. But thank you for believing in me and keeping me focused at times when I have been down. And thank you for all the encouragement you have given me in the past.

Well, I have to dash now; just going to Tesco (Quinn's favourite haunt!) but thanks a million.

Lots of love,

The happiest lady in the land xxxxx



# 04

## Developing the skills to get around



**Sometimes a guide dog isn't suitable for a blind or partially sighted person's situation. In these cases, we offer other mobility services such as white cane and independent living training. Our aim is that all blind and partially sighted people receive the support they need to help them lead independent lives.**

### **Vision Support Services: white cane training**

12-year-old James may have a visual impairment but, like any other child, he still wants to join his friends at his local school. To help him get there, he has been receiving transition mobility training from Guide Dogs' Vision Support Services.



Following initial orientation within his new school surroundings, James was taught how to use his white cane to navigate the complicated route to and from school. Crossing busy roads, negotiating crowded pavements and catching peak time buses are just some of the challenges James faces on a daily basis; however, this is all possible now he knows how to tackle these obstacles.

James can travel the route completely by himself but he prefers to accompany friends as they travel to school too. By the time he leaves school it is estimated that the local authority will have saved approximately £6,500 in taxi fares.

### **Vision Support Services: independent living training**

Since being registered as Severe Sight Impaired, Mr M's quality of life had deteriorated as he had stopped doing many activities he enjoyed such as reading and watching television.

Moreover, his partner had become overprotective and would not let him do basic household tasks in case he injured himself.

Mr M's local Vision Support Services team assessed his situation and were able to teach him independent living skills such as walking to the shops, identifying the correct money to pay for goods, and preparing food and snacks in the kitchen without compromising his safety. They also helped identify special equipment so Mr M could start to read independently for short periods and watch television again.

Last but not least, time was spent talking through the programme with Mr M's partner. She was able to witness Mr M's progress which helped to allay her anxieties and give herself more freedom.

# 05

## Promoting the rights of blind and partially sighted people

Public policy and campaigning

We hope our ophthalmic research programme will contribute to lowering the incidence of sight loss in years to come. However, for those people who are blind or partially sighted, now and in the future, it is vital that they are able to get around as they choose. We work alongside them and campaign for the access and mobility rights that sighted people take for granted.

Two key campaigns for us in 2009 were **Say NO to Shared Streets** and **Talking Buses**:

- **Say NO to Shared Streets** – Guide Dogs supports the aim of creating attractive, people-friendly street environments. However, we oppose the creation of shared surface streets where there is no physical distinction between the pavement and road. Blind and partially sighted people are placed at a serious disadvantage with such designs since they are unable to make eye contact with other road users, and also can no longer use the kerb as a key navigation clue in the street environment.
- **Talking Buses** – Guide Dogs is campaigning for a change in the law to make audio and visual announcements for the current stop, next stop and final destination mandatory on board every local and scheduled bus and coach service in the UK. This is already happening on train services.



**SAY NO TO SHARED STREETS**  
IN EXHIBITION ROAD

Don't discriminate against disabled people



### Focus on: Say NO to Shared Streets

In 2009, the campaign to stop local councils' proposals for shared surface streets was central to our work of championing accessible street environments. Throughout the year, we supported local initiatives to campaign against proposed schemes.

For example, we successfully influenced the policy of Manchester City Council, where shared surface streets have now been ruled out in residential areas. We also worked in partnership with organisations in Northern Ireland to stop shared surface streets in Belfast and Londonderry.

Across the UK we gained the support of over 1,000 people, who wrote to their MPs about the issue. We also achieved the support of 183 MPs who signed an Early Day Motion (EDM). For the first time in Guide Dogs' history, we also began legal action against a local authority for its street design proposals. The outcomes of that action will become clear in 2010.

### Focus on: Talking Buses

Towards the end of 2009 we launched the Talking Buses campaign. The aim is to secure a change to legislation so buses are required to have audio-visual announcements for the current stop, next stop and final destination.

The campaign is supported by a number of other disability organisations, including those which represent people with other forms of sensory impairment.

Guide Dogs was highly influential in achieving the introduction of audio-visual information on all London buses.

An Early Day Motion (EDM) on Talking Buses in the Houses of Commons attracted the support of 232 MPs.

# 06

## Volunteers – supporting all aspects of our work

**There are around 10,000 volunteers supporting all areas of Guide Dogs' work. Following a review of our activities, in 2009 we recruited new teams in each region and put a new departmental structure in place. The new structure will make it easier for volunteers to support us where they feel they can make the most impact, and it also helps them to use their Guide Dogs experience to facilitate their own personal development.**

### **Roles offering real personal development**

There are many ways you can volunteer to help Guide Dogs and our work. You can take on as many roles as you have time for – the level of commitment is completely up to you! What's more, many volunteers find that our roles offer real scope for personal development which they can draw upon to help them in other areas of life.

Linda, for example, has taken on three different volunteering roles with us. She began puppy walking in August 2009 and recently said goodbye to her first pup, a black Labrador called Captain. Recently she was made redundant from her job, and while she is looking for further work, she has taken on two additional roles with us: firstly, working with head office to increase our profile on the internet; secondly, training to be the speaker coordinator for her county, a role in which she will ensure our speakers have the right support when they are promoting Guide Dogs in the community.

Linda is pleased that she used her time out of work positively. What's more, she will be sure to highlight the new skills she has gained through volunteering with us in future interviews to help her progress her own career.