

# Guide Dogs AUSTRALIA



## THE MARKET

Guide Dogs Australia (GDA) represents Australia's state based Guide Dog organisations. As the nation's leading providers of Orientation and Mobility services, GDA gives people who are blind or have a vision impairment the freedom and independence to move safely and confidently around the community. Without any government funding for the breeding, training and provision of Guide Dogs (which are provided completely free of charge to clients) GDA relies heavily on the support of business and the community to help deliver vital mobility services to those in need.

According to the 2009 report Clear Focus: The Economic Impact of Vision Loss in Australia almost 575,000 Australians over 40 had vision loss, representing 5.8 per cent of the population in that age group. Of these people around 66,500 were blind. It is projected that the number of people with vision loss aged 40 or over will rise to over 800,000 by 2020 and those who are blind will rise to 102,750. The total economic cost of vision loss in Australia was estimated to be \$16.6 billion in 2009 or \$28,905 per person with vision loss aged over 40.

## HISTORY

Arnold Cook was responsible for bringing the first Guide Dog to Australia. A young West Australian, Arnold lost his sight through a rare disease at the age of 18 and after graduating from the University of Western Australia, went to England to further his studies at the London School of Economics. Whilst there, Arnold heard about the Guide Dog Association in Britain and applied for a dog. He was accepted and trained with Dreana, a black Labrador bitch.



In 1950 Dr Arnold Cook, returned home with his Guide Dog, Dreana who created enormous interest as a potential type of mobility aid for other people with vision impairment. Soon other blind West Australians were anxious to have dogs for themselves and a year later the first Guide Dog Association in Australia was formed in Perth with the support of Apex Clubs. The Guide Dog Association brought the first trainer to Australia from England and the first Guide Dog to be trained in Australia was a Kelpie/Border Collie cross, named Beau. Beau and his blind owner Mrs Elsie Mead, travelled all over Australia promoting Guide Dog mobility and by 1957, there were Guide Dog Associations in each state.

## THE PRODUCT

Guide Dogs Australia is the leading provider of Orientation and Mobility services to assist people with vision impairment to get around safely and independently. This means they can go to work, study, go shopping, pursue goals and interests,



without having to rely on others to take them. Services include teaching people with vision impairment the skills to accomplish tasks on their own such as negotiating stairs, travelling on public transport and learning how to find the way from one destination to another, whether it's a regular route or unfamiliar territory. Training might also include learning how to use mobility and travel aids like canes, Guide Dogs, talking GPS technology and low vision aids like a magnifier or making environmental modifications to make life easy.

It takes nearly two years to develop a playful pup into a responsible Guide Dog. The process outlined below ensures that GDA get the right dog for the job.

### Step 1

GDA work with purebred Labradors, Golden Retrievers and Labrador/Golden Retriever crosses - breeds that are calm, loyal and intelligent and have a proven track record as Guide Dogs in the past.

Veterinarians check that the new recruits are confident, responsive and healthy – always the qualities of a successful Guide Dog – and pups are placed with volunteer families, or 'puppy raisers' that have been specially selected by Guide Dogs staff.

Over the next 12 months, these families provide the pups with basic social skills and obedience mixed with lots of fun. The pups visit places they later encounter as Guide Dogs and experience all the sights, sounds and - most importantly for any dog - smells of the outside world they will eventually have to negotiate.

### Step 2

When the pups are about 14 months old, they return to the Guide Dogs Centre and over a two-week period qualified instructors carefully assess every puppy on several long walks. Prospective Guide Dogs must be eager to work, with good concentration and initiative. Handlers must also assess whether dogs are distracted by food, noise or other circumstances that would be likely to produce an anxious reaction in the average pet dog.

The criteria for selection are extremely stringent as the personal safety of their future vision impaired handler is paramount. This is why only about fifty per cent of pups are accepted into the Guide Dog program. Pups that are unsuitable for Guide Dog work may go on to become Pets as Therapy (PAT) dogs, Companion Dogs or they may be offered to the Puppy Raiser or members of the general public as pets.

Puppies that are selected to become Guide Dogs

undergo an intensive five-month program to learn the complex skills required for their new job. They begin with simple commands and progress to more challenging tasks.

These skills include:

- Walking in a straight line without sniffing.
- Walking on the left-hand side slightly ahead of the trainer.
- Stopping at all kerbs.
- Waiting for a command before crossing roads.
- Stopping at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Avoiding obstacles at head height.
- Avoiding spaces too narrow for a person and a dog to walk through side by side.
- Boarding and travelling on all forms of public transport.



- Taking the trainer to a lift.
- Laying quietly for some time, particularly at a workplace or in restaurants.
- Refusing commands that may lead the trainer into danger - for example, if the trainer instructs the Guide Dog to walk them into a hole, the dog should refuse to walk forward when commanded.

As training progresses, Guide Dogs learn to travel through confusing and crowded areas, such as shopping centres and busy city streets. Experienced Guide Dogs can lead their users to a list of destinations – a task that requires careful teaching so dogs learn each command in a complex sequence of events.

Despite the hard work involved, Guide Dogs have a rewarding job indeed, as these intelligent dogs lead an interesting life and enjoy its many challenges.

### Step 3

As well as training dogs GDA also trains people. Before taking on a Guide Dog, clients must be able to use a long cane and have received Orientation



and Mobility training.

Dogs that successfully complete the rigorous training program are matched with a potential client, with GDA making sure each dog is well suited to the client's specific lifestyle and travel needs. Even though it is the Guide Dog that must negotiate obstacles, stop at kerbs and always be on alert for emergency situations their vision impaired owner cannot see, they are still as much under the guidance of their owner as the other way around.

Together, the bond and trust builds and the working team learns how to best to employ its training to avoid obstacles like crossroads, navigate hard routes, find destinations and use public transport, safely and independently. Training also includes learning how to best care

for the Guide Dog, in and out of harness, such as grooming, diet, and providing plenty of playtime and exercise.

### BRAND VALUES

Each of the following words underpin GDA's brand essence and mission - they are the values on which Guide Dogs Australia has been built, and motivate all actions and efforts.

#### Community:

A sense of community is very important – GDA works on behalf of people with impaired vision and deals with government, local councils, organisations and individuals to improve understanding and access. GDA travels wherever it's needed to help people.

#### Transparency:

GDA is an open and honest organisation. Its services are offered free of charge to any person who needs them and they make services as easy to access as possible.

#### Commitment:

Many vision related conditions deteriorate rather than improve, which means that people's needs will change overtime. GDA's assistance and support is aimed at delivering quality outcomes, by continuing to work with people for as long as it takes for them to achieve their mobility goal.

#### Education:

There are many misconceptions surrounding people who have impaired vision and the conditions that affect them. So, along with improving mobility and independence, GDA also strives to remove these misunderstandings and educate the community about issues related to vision impairment.



### CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Not everyone wants or needs a Guide Dog, which means GDA have to be flexible in their approach to working with people to improve their mobility. If there is a recent technological advancement that is more appropriate for a person, GDA will consider it and will adapt their strategies and approach to meet individual needs.

To support the Guide Dogs organisation in your state, or to discuss national partnership, sponsorship or Cause Related Marketing opportunities please call 1800 804 805.

### THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT GUIDE DOGS AUSTRALIA

- A litter of puppies are not always the same colour. If Mum or Dad have a black coat, there's a good chance that some of the litter will be born with dark colouring. Sometimes, it's even possible to have a litter of yellow, black and chocolate puppies!
- The Guide Dogs Centre is set on 25 acres of Australian bushland and features 23,000 native plants and trees.
- Labradors are picked to be Guide Dogs for a variety of reasons. One of the Labrador's best qualities is that they strongly identify with people. They are highly trainable and learn to quickly focus on tasks. Finally, although they have a great sense of loyalty, Labradors can readily transfer their respect and allegiance from one person to another without any issues.
- Guide Dogs Australia have the world's biggest model Guide Dog. Gulliver, weighs in at between 500 and 700 kilos and stands at 4.3 metres tall and 2.3 metres wide. He's made of foam and coated in fibreglass.
- A Guide Dog walks approximately 9,000 kilometres in its working life.