



# Forward. Together.

Guide Dogs strategy, 2025 onwards



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Front cover image: Lena, a guide dog owner and fundraising volunteer is pictured with a fellow Honiton Fundraising Group volunteer on the seafront.





“

I was amazed by the confidence and independence a guide dog can give. With Mitch, I walk every day and meet friends. I have a bucket list of things to see before I lose my sight completely. We're an unstoppable duo!

”

Zee has retinitis pigmentosa and started losing her sight in her teens. Zee and Mitch qualified as a partnership in 2022, an event that transformed her life. She describes having a guide dog as like being “given wings to fly”.

# Welcome

“

We believe in a world where people with sight loss should have the same opportunities as their sighted peers, and we are absolutely determined to make it a reality.

”

Andrew Lennox,  
CEO, Guide Dogs.



“I’m pleased to be able to introduce **Forward. Together**, an ambitious, long-term plan that will guide our work through to 2040. As part of this, Guide Dogs is moving away from a five-year fixed strategy to a more adaptive, future-looking approach.

“This strategy is informed by our own extensive research about the lived experience of people with vision impairments, as well as insight from our sector partners. It remains rooted in our vision to help people with sight loss live the life they choose. But it also recognises that the life each of us wants and expects is constantly evolving.

“Society is changing faster than at any time in our 90+ year history, and so are we. This is challenging. But it’s also exciting. Because the work we do together now will put our charity on the strongest possible footing for the next 90 years.

“I’m so proud of this incredible organisation and all the passionate people who go the extra mile to help us deliver our vital services. **Forward. Together** belongs to all of us – our staff, our volunteers, our supporters and our service users.”

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The strategy has brought together insight from various research sources, representing more than 2000 survey responses and more than 170 in-depth qualitative interviews. This has been supplemented with additional sector insight gathered through trend scanning and interviews with sector experts.

# Introduction

We are Guide Dogs. And we're here to help people with sight loss live the life they choose.

Children and adults. Friends and family. Whoever you are, our expert staff, volunteers and life-changing dogs are here to help people with sight loss live actively, independently and well.



## Our purpose and vision

Guide Dogs exists to help people with sight loss live the life they choose.

Our vision is a future where every person with a vision impairment has the confidence and support to live their life to the full.

## Our ambition

As we strive to deliver our purpose and vision, Guide Dogs will harness the power of our people, our dogs and technology to change many more lives.



# A changing world

The social and economic world hasn't got any easier for people with vision impairments. Health and social care services are stretched. The quality and availability of support are inconsistent. Meanwhile, embedded cultural attitudes and inaccessible spaces and places continue to drive isolation – reducing social and work opportunities.



“

I got denied access by the same minicab firm three times in the space of three weeks. I made sure the call centre knew that I had a guide dog, but the driver still turned up, saw Colin and left. I was really mortified. It made me feel isolated and vulnerable.

”

Bhavini, guide dog owner.

## Inequalities among people with sight loss start early and can have lifelong consequences.



The number of children with vision impairments **achieving Grade 4 or above in GCSE Maths and English** is approx. **21% points lower** than their peers.

Source: 2022, Educational attainment report, RNIB.



The UK average **unemployment** rate is about 4%. **For people with sight loss it's 75%.** This disparity is unacceptable.

Source: Slade Labour Force Survey, 2018: comparison of people with sight loss to the rest of the population.



Nearly half of people with sight loss feel isolated, with **40% also reporting anxiety and depression.**

Source: Time to Focus, Fight for Sight, 2019.

Despite these barriers, some progress has been made. The rapid advancement of accessible technology offers opportunities for people with sight loss to navigate daily life more easily. And increased flexibility, remote working and training are also making it easier for people with sight loss to learn and work in some areas.

Many people with a vision impairment, including guide dog owners, have also completely changed how they navigate the world, using a variety of digital tools to help them access ever more places, spaces and opportunities.

But some groups are yet to experience these benefits. Financial barriers are also hampering many people's ability to access potentially helpful digital solutions. And people over 75 are far less likely to have access to or use the internet. But with the right support and access, they could also benefit greatly from technology.

“

**I wouldn't be doing the job I'm doing without Mack and my smartphone. The two go hand in hand. Mack helps keep me safe when I am walking, making sure I don't bump into anything. And with my smartphone I can navigate us around new places and towns. There's nowhere we can't go now.**

”

Guide dog owner, Devante.







“

I've always been so independent. It felt like my wings had been clipped. I didn't know how to be myself any more. I tried my best with a long cane, but I often felt like my independence was limited, always debating whether I could do certain things on my own.

”

Heather's life changed dramatically when she lost her sight suddenly overnight. After being rushed to hospital and having numerous tests she was told a brain lesion had caused irreversible damage to the blood vessels behind her eyes.

But now, with her guide dog Connor, nothing is off the table. "His confidence has sparked a newfound belief in myself. I haven't had a single 'down day' since I met him. He's truly life-changing. I've gone from merely managing, to thriving."



# Our aim:

## To level the playing field and help create a world where people with sight loss can live the life they choose

For people with sight loss, the ever-growing choice of helpful devices, apps and software has changed expectations of what it means to live independently, actively and well.

People with sight loss want a world where they can get on and do what they want, when they want. They want a level playing field. And they should have it.

Simply being 'mobile' isn't enough to address many people's needs. It's not just about accessing places, it's about accessing opportunities – living actively, independently and well.

To achieve this ambition, our research shows that people need a thriving mindset rooted in three interdependent pillars:

**Purpose** – vision of what you want to achieve.

**Mobility and access** – capability and opportunity to get on and do it.

**Self-belief** – the confidence in your ability to make it happen.



If you'd like to understand more about how purpose, access and mobility, and self-belief, impact people with sight loss, watch our short animation:

▶ [Accessible version](#)

▶ [Non-described version](#)



“

**I've never let my vision impairment be an issue, I've always decided what I want to do, then pushed to do it.**

”

16-year-old Archie is sport mad and dreams of swimming in the Paralympic Games - he's always been fiercely tenacious.

Guide Dogs habilitation specialists have been working with Archie on his cane skills and independent living skills, which has been a massive boost to his confidence and is setting him up for an independent future.



# Our five strategic priorities

To achieve our vision of a world where people with sight loss can truly live the life they choose, we will focus on strengthening purpose, access and self-belief through the support we provide. To do this, we have identified five strategic priorities:



## **Strengthen our foundations, ensuring our core services are the best they can be**

At the heart of this lies a non-negotiable commitment to ensuring that every pound we receive is used as wisely as possible – helping us create more life-changing guide dog partnerships and supporting more people with sight loss to live the life they choose.

We'll shore-up our core guide dog and children and young people services, providing consistent, quality services across the board. And we'll provide sighted guide training to families, businesses and community groups to help make the world more inclusive for people with sight loss.

We'll also ensure that we have the culture needed to deliver our ambitious strategy and adapt when needed. We'll make sure our fantastic staff and volunteers are able to bring their whole selves to the work we do, so that they can give their best and bring it out in one another.



# 2

## **Move beyond just mobility and evolve our expertise to ensure we are offering access to opportunities as well as places**

We'll build confidence and problem-solving abilities through our range of services for children, young people and families, including buddy dogs, habilitation services and My Time to Play. And we'll identify opportunities to help adults and children live with greater freedom, spontaneity and choice; working with others to ensure that people with sight loss have the ability and tools to access the places and opportunities they need, when they want to.

# 3

## **More personalised support around key life moments, stages and transitions**

We'll build people's confidence through more personalised relationships, working with children and adults to discover their hopes, dreams and ambitions, so that we can offer tailored support to help them achieve them. And we'll give people more focused support at the key life moments and transitions that they face. We'll also provide wider support for young people transitioning to adulthood, even if they don't meet the criteria for a guide dog.





# 4

## **Use tech to enhance dog training and welfare, and become the go-to in tech-driven navigation**

We'll continually explore the interconnection between guide dogs, technology and people, identifying how new technology can help improve and evolve the life-changing support and services we provide.



# 5

## **Reframe expectations of what's possible for people living with a vision impairment**

We'll shift public perceptions of what's possible for people with sight loss, through authentic storytelling and communications that celebrate both the exceptional and the ordinary. And we'll help build purpose by enabling adults, children and families envisage a world where they can live the life they choose, through our services and by connecting them with others in similar situations.



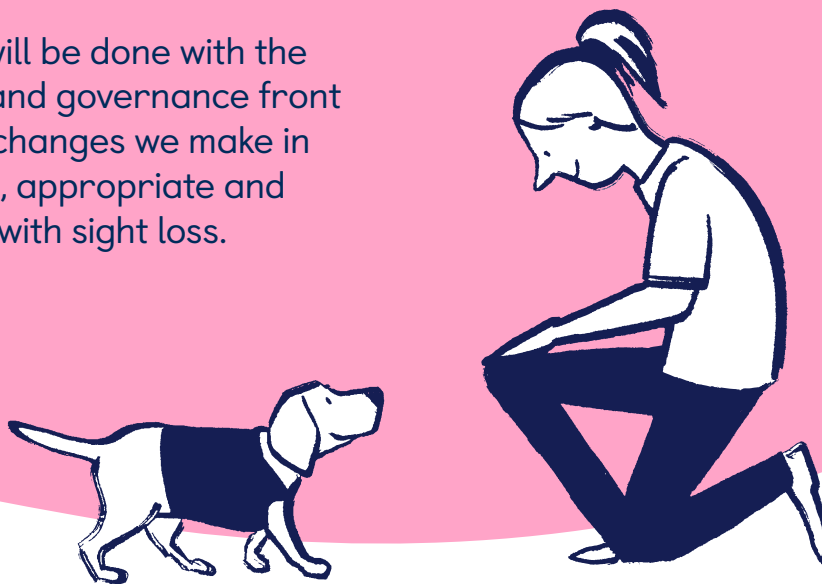
# How we'll do this

Within each strategic step, there will be activities we can tackle immediately, and others that will take more time. Our immediate focus will be on our first strategic priority – bolstering our core services and ensuring our culture and organisation are fit for the future, but we have also begun work to start realising our greater ambitions.

And we'll learn along the way, enabling us to be agile and target the activities that will make the greatest difference.

At the same time, we won't be tackling this alone. We're outward looking and understand the huge impact that positive collaborations within industry, technology and the charity sector can deliver. We've already begun working with several exciting new and established technology firms, with the aim of helping to create and deliver products that will open up the world to people with sight loss.

And all our activities will be done with the environment, society and governance front of mind, ensuring the changes we make in this area are inclusive, appropriate and accessible for people with sight loss.



“

Guide Dogs are collaborating with us to test and refine our mobility harness, NOA, which has the potential to transform how people with vision impairments navigate their surroundings. While a guide dog is irreplaceable for many, electronic travel aids like NOA can complement and enhance the experience for guide dog users or offer essential support to those who are not suited to having a guide dog and rely on a long cane.

”

Maël Fabien, CEO of Biped



“

Meeting the habilitation specialist from Guide Dogs put us at ease. I feel good about Mabel's future now. There is no limit to what she can do, and she can't be defined by her vision impairment. The impact Guide Dogs has had is immeasurable.

”

Max, father of four-year-old Mabel.



“

When I first spoke to Guide Dogs, they asked about me, and my hobbies, and what I wanted to do. When I said I couldn't run any longer they told me about guide running and connected me with my local group. Now, if someone says something can't be done, then I want to give it a try and show it's possible.

”

Ultramarathon runner and guide dog owner, Steve.





# Be a part of it

Our services help thousands of people with sight loss to lead confident, independent and fulfilling lives, and we plan to help many more.

But we can't do this without our incredible volunteers and supporters. There are many ways for individuals, groups and corporates to get involved and have a direct impact on the lives of people with vision impairments.

Find out more at [guidedogs.org.uk](https://www.guidedogs.org.uk)



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