

How we will support you

A guide dog partnership can be extremely rewarding - giving you confidence and independence to live life on your own terms, in your own way.

We also understand a guide dog might not be for everyone. If a guide dog isn't right for you, we have a range of other services that can support you. We can also provide information and signpost you to other organisations that can help.

In this leaflet we explain the different stages of the guide dog application process, and how we will connect with you during each stage.

The process at a glance

There are four key stages where we connect with you. Each stage helps us understand more about your individual circumstances and to find the right solution to help you achieve your aspirations.

Stage 1 - First conversation

After contacting Guide Dogs, we'll undertake a conversation with one of our Guide Line Advisors. This is the first step in us getting to know you.

Stage 2 - Second conversation

We'll arrange a follow-up conversation with one of our Vision Rehabilitation Specialists. If it's agreed at this stage that one of our services can meet your needs, we'll also complete a health risk assessment with you. If none of our services are suitable, we can discuss other alternatives and refer or signpost to other specialist organisations.

Stage 3 - Mobility assessment

We'll carry out a mobility assessment to fully understand your current and future mobility needs and find the best service for you.

Stage 4 - Guide dog assessment

We'll carry out a guide dog assessment to understand more about how a guide dog can support you and the type of dog that would be your perfect match.



Date: May 2024

What you can expect from us

At Guide Dogs, we know how important it is to get to know you as an individual. That's why we always arrange two conversations with you before we do any kind of assessment. This helps us understand what's important to you, your aspirations, the challenges you face on a regular basis and your priorities.

Before each call it's helpful to reflect and consider what's working well and what you find challenging in your life. This includes when you're out and about, in your home, using technology and the type of leisure activities you enjoy or would like to do more.

Stage 1 - First conversation

As soon as we receive your referral - either after you've got in touch with us directly or from another organisation - One of our Guide Line Advisors will undertake a 'first conversation' with you.

This 'first conversation' is the first step in us getting to know you. It's an opportunity to refresh what we already know about you or to share a little about yourself. The information you share helps us to provide the right communication and support based on what's important to you.

Stage 2 - Second conversation

After your first conversation, we'll quickly refer you to one of our qualified Vision Rehabilitation Specialists in your local area for a 'second conversation'. This conversation is usually over the phone and can last around 60 minutes.

This second call is an opportunity for us to build on the information you've already shared and to understand more about your sight loss, lifestyle and aspirations. We can then co-create an action plan with you, identifying your goals and sometimes identifying other services and technologies which might be helpful.

The aim is to create a clear action plan based on your needs and goals and detail who can support you to achieve them.

You'll need to provide proof of your identity (for example, your passport, birth certificate, bank statement or council bill with your name and address on it or any official form of identification) plus evidence of non-correctable sight loss (certification or registration letter).



Date: May 2024

At the end of the call, if it's agreed and identified that we might have a service that can help you achieve your goals, we'll book a time for a mobility assessment, which is conducted in-person in your home and local area.

Health risk assessment

Before the mobility assessment, we'll also complete a health risk assessment with you to help us identify your fitness levels and any health conditions that we may need to take into consideration. If required we may need to contact your GP or other specialists for more information, with your permission.

Stage 3 - Mobility assessment

The mobility assessment is an opportunity for one of our Vision Rehabilitation Specialists to learn more about your current orientation and mobility skills in your home area. We can assess your current vision and ability to move around safely and with confidence.

This helps us understand your current vision, orientation and mobility skills on your known routes, your confidence levels, any gaps in your skills that need bridging before progressing further and what service might be best to support you and meet your aspirations.

This information is gathered through two parts - a discussion with you, followed by an observation of how you travel outside.

Part 1: Discussion around your current skills and travel routes

This could be completed over the phone in advance or in-person at your home to gather more information about your vision loss.

Part 2: Observing your orientation and mobility skills on outdoor routes.

If you're applying for a guide dog, we use the mobility assessment to demonstrate if you have sufficient orientation and mobility skills to be an active partner to a guide dog. We use an eligibility criteria to measure this, which can be found at the end of this leaflet.



Date: May 2024

Your Vision Rehabilitation Specialist will meet with you at your home and observe you travelling on two meaningful routes that you know using your current mobility aids (if any) or sighted guide. We cover a route of at least 40 minutes or one mile and use this to assess your fitness levels and the potential workload for a young, active guide dog. If it's not possible to complete this in one visit, we can return for a second visit if needed.

During this visit your Vision Rehabilitation Specialist can also provide advice and support on managing your home, other daily activities and using technology.

Case review meeting

After each stage, a panel from your local Guide Dogs team will review your application and make an agreed decision on how best to support you based on the information gathered from you during the assessments.

Potential outcomes from the mobility assessment

1. If a guide dog could be the right next step for you, we will arrange a guide dog assessment to take place at your home.
2. If more information is required before proceeding, we may need to complete a further assessment visit or we can offer to provide a training plan to enhance your orientation and/or mobility skills before proceeding.
3. If after the assessment a guide dog is not right for you or you don't yet meet the eligibility requirements to proceed, we'll discuss these individual reasons with you and look for ways to help you work towards meeting these where possible. This could include other guide dog services or make a referral for external support or training. Our specialist staff can advise on alternative mobility options that may better meet your needs and aspirations to help you maintain your independence and keep you active.

Stage 4 - Guide dog assessment

If a guide dog is the right next step for you, we'll arrange a guide dog assessment to be carried out by one of our qualified Guide Dog Mobility Specialists. The purpose of this assessment is to gather information on your suitability and skills to partner and support a young, active working guide dog and help us identify the type of dog that would meet your needs.



Date: May 2024

Part 1: Discussion about your home and eligibility

This discussion may take place over the phone but usually we would visit you at home where we discuss and assess your home environment, suitability for a guide dog and make sure all the eligibility criteria will be met.

Part 2: Practical assessment walk

During the second part of the assessment, we'll demonstrate how a guide dog partnership works, how you use information from the guide dog harness to navigate your routes and how you can use your voice to communicate with a guide dog. We will carry out a practical outdoor assessment in your local area and assess your individual requirements for a potential partnership, such as your walking speed.

Potential outcomes from the guide dog assessment

1. **Ready to Train list** - If it's agreed that a guide dog is right for you and you meet the eligibility criteria, you'll join our Ready to Train List while we find the right guide dog for you.
2. **Further assessment** - In some cases we may need to complete a further assessment with you with a guide dog in training or provide extra support with one of our Specialists on your routes. This will be arranged to be completed over a few days.
3. **Decision that a guide dog will not meet your mobility or lifestyle needs** - If this is the case we will explain the reasons behind the decision, how we came to that outcome and recommend alternative services or support that will better meet your current mobility and life style needs.
4. **Right to appeal decision** - If you feel the panel of specialists haven't correctly assessed your mobility you have the right to appeal the decision within 14 days of receiving the decision.
5. **Referral or signposting to other organisations** - With your agreement we may suggest and direct you to other specialist organisations who could support you.

Eligibility criteria for the guide dog service

Before applying, it's important to check that you meet our eligibility requirements. We also recommend that you consider other pets, family, or your career and whether you have the time and space in your life for a guide dog.



Date: May 2024

We treat all applications for a guide dog fairly and equally, by considering each application on an individual basis. We apply the same set of eligibility criteria to every application, regardless of whether this is a new or replacement guide dog application.

Your need

Your vision impairment must be significantly impacting on your ability to travel safely, efficiently, confidently and must be restricting your general mobility and ability to carry out your daily activities. We'll work with you to assess if a guide dog has the potential to help you make decisions that would improve this.

Confidence in getting out and about

To be an excellent partner for an active guide dog you need to have some confidence and knowledge of the routes and environments you'll be using regularly. You need to be able to orientate independently when you are out and about. This could also include using public transport. This is important so you can support your active guide dog by always knowing where you are and where you want to get to. We like to use the analogy that you are the navigator and your guide dog is the driver.

Proof of identity

You'll need to provide proof of your identity (for example, your passport, birth certificate, bank statement or council bill with your name and address on it or any official form of identification) plus evidence of non-correctable sight loss (certification or registration letter).

Residency

You need to be able to prove:

- You have been a UK resident for a continuous basis of at least 12 months.
- You have the right to remain in the UK for a further 18 months at the point of application.
- You have the right to remain in the UK for at least 12 months at the point of beginning training with a guide dog.



Date: May 2024

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is concerned with promoting welfare and keeping people safe from harm. This applies to our service users, supporters, volunteers, staff and members of the public. Guide Dogs takes safeguarding seriously and will act upon concerns if someone is at risk of harm or poses a risk to others.

Data protection

You need to agree with Guide Dogs data protection statements, which are in line with the current data protection law and regulations.

Language

You don't have to be able to understand instructions in English to access our guide dog service. During your initial conversations with us, as we determine whether the service is right for you, you can be supported by a family member or another interpreter. However, during the assessments and the duration of a service you will need to provide a registered interpreter, due to the technical nature of the training.

If you have dual sensory loss (e.g. impaired hearing and impaired vision) we'll provide a sign language interpreter or equivalent for all interactions with you.

Your mobility and fitness

While the exact level of fitness and mobility required from you will depend on a range of factors, including your dog's specific needs, your home and local environment, it's important to consider your own physical abilities before applying for a guide dog.

Remember, you'll need a certain level of independent mobility for a guide dog to be a positive addition to your lifestyle. To ensure that your lifestyle and mobility levels are suitable for an active dog, we'll need you to demonstrate the following:

- You have sufficient mobility to maintain your dog's guiding skills - your dog will need to be working five days a week, as a minimum, for at least 40 mins or around a mile every day using a variety of at least three different routes across the week
- You have a level of general health and fitness to be able to work and care for a young, intelligent, and active working guide dog.



Date: May 2024

If you aren't comfortable walking at least 40 minutes a day and navigating unfamiliar areas, a guide dog may not be right for you. If this is the case, there are other support options available. You, a family member, or a friend can contact and ask for advice from your Local Authority Sensory Team. They can assess and provide support which can include learning new skills and issuing equipment for people with a vision impairment to maintain independence. Voluntary organisations for people with a vision impairment are also available and can provide advice, help, and support in your local community.

Application of skills

You must demonstrate the potential and willingness to always handle a guide dog in line with Guide Dog's Ethical Training policy.

Together we'll investigate if you've the potential to transfer your current orientation and mobility skills, (including learning to adapt how you use any remaining vision) to enhance a partnership with a guide dog.

Motivation

You must have completed all training plans that have been recommended by Guide Dogs to enable you to reach the minimum standard for guide dog ownership.

Dog welfare

A guide dog partnership involves building a relationship. Although your guide dog will have training and skills that enhance your quality of life, your dog is an individual with their own needs and will require care and attention in return.

As part of the assessment process, you'll need to demonstrate to us that your guide dog will receive a great quality of life in your care. Please note that the following are the basics of animal welfare, and we expect guide dog owners to always promote and enhance their dog's welfare:

1. **Nutrition:** ensure your dog always has access to fresh water and a nutritionally balanced diet suitable for their individual needs.
2. **Environment:** provide a safe, temperature regulated and secure indoor area in a smoke-free room with a comfortable bed suited to the individual dog. Outdoor areas must also be safe, clean, and enclosed.



Date: May 2024

3. **Health:** ensure your dog maintains healthy body weight, is provided with regular prescribed flea and worming medication, has their six-monthly vet checks and vaccinations (as required), and receives medical attention for any issues in between check-ups in a timely manner.
4. **Behaviour:** provide varied environmental enrichment to allow your dog to exhibit natural behaviour and appropriate exercise to keep them healthy and happy. Treat your dog with kindness in all aspects of their life and adhere to Guide Dogs' standards on ethical training.
5. **Positive experiences:** agree to never leave your dog alone for more than four hours in 24 hours and supply your dog with appropriate toys and enrichment activities. Play with your dog to enhance their life outside of their working role.

If you have other pets in your home, you'll need to demonstrate that they won't compromise your guide dog's wellbeing, safety or working ability due to the number, type, or behaviour of the animals you have. You should be able to show that you can cater for all of your animals' needs and provide appropriate resources for all animals in your home.

Ready to Train

Once you're ready to be matched with a young active dog, you'll need to stay independently mobile on your routes, keep up your health and fitness and complete any suggested pre-training prior to joining us for the next stage in your journey with Guide Dogs and inform us of changes to your circumstances.

Your eligibility to train with a guide dog will be reviewed regularly, and your application may be paused if your readiness for training changes.

What happens if a guide dog isn't the right option for me?

A guide dog is, most importantly, to help you move around, although we know that owning a dog brings many other benefits - such as companionship. We also know that a dog is not always the right solution for everyone's mobility needs. When this happens, we'll always explain why this has been decided, and if appropriate, we'll work with you to either help you adapt your current skills for a guide dog in the future or discuss alternative services with you either through our own services (for example,) or from other organisations.



Date: May 2024

Our promise to you

- We promise to meet every person face-to-face who has completed our enquiry process and meets our eligibility criteria for one of our services.
- We promise to listen to your story to understand your needs and aspirations.
- We promise to have honest and frank discussions with you on whether we can meet your needs. We will provide you with clear reasons if we are unable to deliver a service to you.
- We promise to involve everyone you feel is important to you during your assessment and the duration of a service.
- We promise that our staff will have the right skills, knowledge and experience to deliver a high-quality service.
- We promise to listen with empathy, behave with dignity and respect, and conduct our service in a non-judgemental way, appreciating the diversity of cultural identities, values and beliefs.
- We promise to provide services in a safe and supportive environment.
- We promise to work with you and your families to continually review progress and deliver a flexible service that can adapt as circumstances change.

Your promise to us

- We ask that you treat our staff with courtesy and respect.
- We ask that your home is safe for all our staff to enter, and this may involve containing pets and includes not smoking 1.5 hours prior to, or during a visit from a member of our team.
- We ask for your commitment and cooperation in undertaking any training.
- We ask for at least 24 hours' notice when cancelling an appointment.
- We ask that you have patience and understanding, particularly when progress is slow and/or difficult.
- We ask that you always keep us informed when your circumstances change.

End of document



Date: May 2024