

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Royal Guide Dogs Association of Tasmania Client Newsletter 'InSight'. The first edition of InSight was very well received by our clients and supporters. It was pleasing to receive a number of letters from clients who liked the way we were focusing on the range of our services and how these services were improving the lives of people who are blind or vision impaired in Tasmania.

We are still in the process of updating our preferred format options and database. If you would prefer to receive InSight in a different format please contact Julie or Tracey on our statewide freecall number 1800 550 249. Alternatively you can email your option to tracey@guidedogstas.com.au

This year we are celebrating fifty years of the Royal Guide Dogs Association's work in Tasmania. Fifty years of service delivery to Tasmanians who are blind or vision impaired is a significant milestone. It is also a time for the organisation to recommit to maintaining quality services to clients for the next fifty years.

In this edition there are articles featuring the new electronic voting system for the upcoming Federal election. There is also an article about audio-tactile signals, feature stories on two clients and an article about Guide Dog Services.

Since our first edition, our Technology Specialist Wayne McLean has started his own business. Wayne's company is called Tasmanian Living Technology and we wish him every success in his new venture. Client Services Department is currently developing a model of adaptive technology services to continue to meet the needs of our clients. In the next edition of InSight I will outline this model in more detail.

I hope you enjoy this edition of InSight and if you would like any more information about any of our services please contact Julie on our statewide freecall number 1800 550 249

Best wishes,

Errol Ingram
Client Services Manager

“One door closes and another door opens”

by Roseanne Gregory

When Jan’s vision deteriorated suddenly and she drove over the top of a roundabout, instead of driving around it, she realised it was time to stop driving. Many of our clients have to cope with the difficult transition of having to give up driving as their vision deteriorates. In Jan’s case, she approached this challenge by focussing on the positives: “People say it must be awful not being able to drive, but now I don’t have to worry about finding a park for the car. Lots of people seem to worry about car parks, but I just use another form of transport!”.

“I always look at the options; if I’ve got a challenge, I just assess it and look at things from a different view and try new things”.

Jan also resumed martial arts training and discovered that Kung Fu taught her valuable sensory awareness skills that were extremely helpful for living with her vision impairment. She learnt to listen more effectively and to rely on all her senses to gain information about her environment. “It helps with confidence” Jan says, “You can be in the dark and know exactly where you are and what to do”.



Jan also maintains her fitness by jogging and has found the safest place to jog is on the paved paths around her house and she usually clocks up 5 kilometres on her talking pedometer.

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Jan also needs to wear very dark sunglasses when she's outside, and she's excited about the green pair she recently bought from Guide Dogs Tasmania.

When Jan had to stop nursing, another door opened, and she now enjoys working as a telemarketer at Guide Dogs. "Quite often I speak to people who may be having problems with their vision. I tell them that Guide Dogs Tasmania can help and to get in touch with them. The perception is that you've got to be totally blind". As Jan has discovered, that's not the case at all.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Access Expo 2007

Assistive Technology, mobility and rehabilitation equipment for older Tasmanians and those with a disability. November 27th at Wrest Point Convention Centre, Hobart, and Nov 29th at the Tailrace Centre, Launceston. Please register your interest in attending this event by contacting RGDAT on our statewide freecall number 1800 550 249.

Macular Degeneration Support Group

Macular Degeneration Support Group, Hobart: 25th Sept, 30th Oct, and 27th Nov. 1:30-3:30pm, 50 & Better Centre, 108 Bathurst St Hobart. Enquiries to Carol, phone: 6267 2316

Glaucoma Hobart Support Group

2:00pm 11th October, Royal Guide Dogs, 164 Elizabeth Street. Enquiries, phone 1800 500 880

Audio-Tactile Signals

by Roseanne Gregory
O&M Instructor

Audio-tactile push button signals (ATS) are located at pedestrian crossings and are used to indicate when traffic lights have changed to a walk phase. These signals are useful for people with vision impairment and those who are deaf-blind.

The tactile signal is detected through the raised arrow situated above the push button. When the pedestrian walk signal is red or in the “Don’t Walk” phase, it emits slow beeps and the tactile plate pulses slowly. When the pedestrian walk signal is green or in the “Walk” phase, the control emits rapid beeps and the tactile plate rapidly pulses.

The tactile information confirms the status of the signals when the ambient noise levels are high or another ATS is beeping close-by. They also provide useful information for a person who does not have good hearing.

If you notice an AT signal that is not working properly (eg: the beep is not audible or the unit has been vandalised), please report this as soon as possible by ringing 1300 139933 or emailing signals@dier.tas.gov.au. Many clients rely on these AT signals to safely cross the road. Please remind your friends and family to report faulty AT signals whenever they notice them. They may not realise how important they are!



Audio-tactile push button signal

Music Man

by Diana Burrage
Program Manager

Bruce is 68 and lives in Northwest Tasmania. He recently contacted Guide Dogs Tasmania because, as a music composer and double bass player, he was dismayed that he was having difficulty reading print and music scores because of vision loss caused by macular degeneration. He uses his computer when composing and was finding it increasingly difficult to use the keyboard and see the music on his computer screen. After discussion with the Program Manager a range of services were arranged.

He was assessed by the Low Vision Clinic in Ulverstone and was very pleased to find that with an illuminated magnifier he could read printed material he previously needed to have read for him. Also provided were magnifying spectacles so that he can watch television comfortably.

After a visit by the Adaptive Technology Specialist he is now able to continue composing electronically on his computer using a large print keyboard and screen magnification adjustments.



Bruce with his magnifier

Bruce was also visited by the Orientation and Mobility Instructor and now feels confident and safe outdoors using a white cane, and he has tinted spectacles which help him to manage the effects of his eye condition.

Tactile marking on appliance controls and equipment such as a talking watch, coin holders and a liquid level finder to help him pour drinks, will be provided by the Occupational Therapist when he needs them, and while he does not have time to listen to recorded books at present Guide Dogs Tasmania can arrange a suitable library service for him at his request.

Independent Voting For People Who Are Blind Or Who Have Low Vision

Following the 2004 federal election, various agencies such as Guide Dogs Tasmania, made representations to the Government to provide facilities for voters who are blind or vision impaired to be able to have accessible voting so that they could cast a secret and independent vote.

In August 2006 the Federal Government provided funds for a trial to be conducted in a limited

number of locations around Australia for the next federal election.

The Australian Electoral Commission has developed a voting machine that is designed specifically for people who are blind or who have low vision.

The machine has headphones that assist the voter in navigating each “virtual ballot paper”.

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Jennifer trials the new electronic voting system

Voting For People Who Are Blind Or Who Have Low Vision continued..

A telephone style keypad is used to make selections. For those with some sight, the voting machine has a 21 inch screen. The text can be increased in size and the background colours changed to suit individual preferences.

When the voter has completed voting, the voting machine will produce a print out. In order to keep the voter's preferences secret, the preferences will be hidden in a barcode. These printouts are then placed in the ballot box and decoded after the election.

Voting will be available in pre-poll voting centres for two weeks prior to and on polling day. Pre-poll centres that are equipped with voting machines will be in each capital city or a venue nearby and other regional centres.

The locations of the pre-poll centres will be announced closer to the election. For more information please contact Catherine Poyner on 02 6271 4575.

Electors who are blind or who have low vision and will not be near a site involved in the trial have the option of casting an assisted vote at a polling place on election day, an early vote at either a pre-poll voting centre, or voting by post.

TECHNOLOGY EXPO FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Access Expo 2007 will showcase devices which assist people with disabilities including vision impairment to communicate, access computers and the Internet or control their environments. The range of equipment exhibited will also include mobility and rehabilitation equipment. The provision of such technology creates opportunities for people with disabilities in education, training, employment and social interaction, helping to create an inclusive environment. To maximise the opportunity for as many Tasmanians as possible to attend, this Expo will be held in the two major population regions of the state on:

November 27 at Wrest Point Casino, Hobart

and

November 29 at The Tailrace Centre, Launceston

Please contact us on freecall 1800 550 249 for further information

Guide Dog Services

Most people that know a bit about guide dogs will know the term “Busy, Busy” is a cue for encouraging our guide dogs to go to the toilet. But the same term could easily describe how things have been of late in the Guide Dog Department. Everything has been buzzing as we have prepared for one of the most exciting developments within the program for many years.

Kim Ryan, our Cadet Guide Dog Instructor, has relocated from the North and taken up residence in Hobart. This may not seem too exciting to some, but to us it is a really big deal. First and foremost, it means that our Guide Dog Handlers and Puppy Raisers in the south now have immediate access to the support they require. We have planned for presence in the south to provide timely support and now that it is a reality, we couldn't be more excited.

There have been plenty of other developments too. During a recent seminar, attended by Claire Robertson and myself, we learnt a lot about some new techniques being used with very young puppies to improve their potential as Guide Dogs. The seminar was very

exciting and we now have some fantastic ideas to implement with our younger pups.

And just when we thought we were busy enough, Aurora Energy have committed to a major fundraising event to support our Guide Dog Program. Aurora will have nine staff members riding bicycles from Strahan to Hobart, via the North West, North and East Coast, to raise \$50,000. The event, Pedalling for Puppies, aims to provide sufficient funds to fully sponsor two Guide Dogs. This is a fantastic initiative on behalf of Aurora and Royal Guide Dogs are fully committed to making it a success.

As part of our commitment, I will be riding with the Aurora team, who will be covering over 600 kilometres in six days. This should be a fantastic event and we would like to extend our thanks to Aurora Energy for their support.

Dan English
Manager, Guide Dog Services

