**Guide dogs Victoria's Perceptions December 2018:**   
**a newsletter for professionals working with people with vision loss**

# **Spotlight on Beacon Technology.**



Warm Regards

Shelley Pannier

Client Services Manager

Remember:

* Refer online, via the ‘Request a Service form’ on [www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au](http://www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au/).
* We always welcome your feedback, comments and contributions. You can contact us on [info@guidedogsvictoria.com.au](mailto:info@guidedogsvictoria.com.au)

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**Dates for the Diary**

**Close down period**: Please be aware that Guide Dogs Victoria will close down over the Christmas and New Year period.  Our final day is Friday 21st December, and we return on Monday 7th January 2019.

During this time we welcome your referrals and encourage you to use the ‘**Request a Service**’ function on our website *(request a service words to be a link to this website function)*.

We will have a small crew of Customer Service Staff working on all days (excluding public holidays), so you are welcome to contact us on 1800 804 805 with any queries about your patients.

Our Customer Service Team will continue to process your referrals and add them to our waitlist, ready for allocation to a Practitioner once we return on the 7th January.

Please note that this will lead to some delay in our response time, and we will attend to referrals as soon as possible on our return.

Regional Information Sessions**:** Free information sessions with morning or afternoon tea covering the locally available services provided by GDV. Come and meet some local practitioners, have a look at some technology, meet a Guide Dog and see if we can offer you something new to help your patients and clients. No bookings necessary. Further info 1800 804 805.

* Friday, 15th February, Shepparton RSL, 88 Wyndham Street, Shepparton 1:30 – 3:30

**Acquired Brain Injury and Vision loss – Professional’s Workshop**: run regularly by Guide Dogs Victoria. 2019 Sessions:

* 21st March 2019
* 27th June 2019
* 31st October 2019

All on campus at GDV, all 1-3pm

For further information or to express your interest email info[@guidedogsvictoria.com.au](mailto:CSAdmin@guidedogsvictoria.com.au) or call 1800 804 805.

**Low Vision Orthoptist Assessments:** available for any patient or client with a diagnosed uncorrectable vision condition. They will receive a functional vision assessment and some strategies for reading/lighting/glare etc, plus access to an ongoing program if they require. GDV is registered with NDIS to provide Orthoptic assessment and equipment recommendations.

We will be running these assessments all over Victoria throughout the coming year, but you can also arrange a bespoke information session for your staff, or a low vision orthoptist clinic for your patients, at a time & date to suit you by contacting info[@guidedogsvictoria.com.au](mailto:CSAdmin@guidedogsvictoria.com.au)

We offer various programs to people experiencing vision loss from information sessions through individual programs, peer support and group programs. You can refer any of your patients to explore these programs, by advising them to email info[@guidedogsvictoria.com.au, or call 1800 804 805.](mailto:CSAdmin@guidedogsvictoria.com.au)

**All about Beacon**

Over the last 12 months, Guide Dogs Victoria (GDV) has been implementing new technology to improve wayfinding through internal, and unmapped, public places.

As GPS is not available inside, those unable to read printed signage find it extremely difficult to find their way around. Working with GPS app developer ‘BlindSquare’, GDV brought wayfinding beacon technology to Australia.

Strategically placed throughout an internal space, beacons communicate with the ‘BlindSquare’ app and provide information about the relative surroundings to the user. Audio messages are read out by the phone, giving the user a ‘virtual look around’ just by pointing their phone at different directions. The relayed information can be updated, allowing the user to access up-to-date details on the environment, such as if there are lifts out of operation, exits closed etc.

This technology is not limited for use by those with low vision or blindness. Anyone who finds it difficult to read the visual signage will benefit from having the audio message sent straight to their device. With the app available in over 32 languages, users from non-English speaking backgrounds can select the language they would like the information in.

Currently this technology is available in two schools, District Docklands and Melbourne Zoo. Over the next few months, all of Melbourne’s City Loop train stations (as well as Footscray and Richmond), Albert Park and Jells Park will be fitted with the new technology.

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**Client Story: How working with Guide Dogs Victoria in 2018 Changed Dave’s life.**

Walking my three-year-old daughter to crèche was becoming impossible. I had to concentrate so hard on merely staying on the footpath that we could no longer admire the flowers and the birds.

Road crossings were stressful and dangerous. As we waited to cross the road at an intersection one day in June this year, I found myself asking her if there were any cars coming. That's the day I decided we couldn't continue doing this anymore and I'd have to surrender this part of my life, just like I'd surrendered so many other things over the years due to my failing vision.

Driving went first. Then I had to stop going out at night. Meal preparation was a challenge as I was burning myself and I developed a fear of sharp knives. Reading became more and more difficult to the point where I just stopped bothering. The list goes on. But I didn't mind too much. It was after all, to be expected.

However, losing that special time with my daughter each day was too much to bear. Would we really never sing our walking to school song again? I'd walked my elder children to school through their primary years and experience had taught me that kids don't want dad to hold their hand forever and that these tender years are fleeting.

My wife has long suffered because of this foolish pride. She has shouldered more than her share of family responsibility. Added to everything else she does, now it would also fall to her to drive our daughter to crèche. And to kindergarten next year. Then school after that.

For the first time in my life I began to feel depressed, not merely sad or nostalgic for another part of my life I'd lost, but a deep depression. It felt like a dark cloud was looming over me and that it was all downhill from now on. I faced a stark choice. I could let this situation continue or I could do something about it. I thought maybe I'll just look up the Guide Dogs online and see if I qualify for some help. So that's what I did. I had no expectations really.

A very kind lady from Guide Dogs Victoria phoned me and we spoke about my vision loss and how it was affecting my life, my relationships with my family members and my role in the community. For the first time I realised that having independence was something that had to be achieved and that independence could be achieved and maintained if I worked at it. I wasn't asking for help at all, I was in fact working for my independence.

And it has been hard work. I've had many visits from the amazing staff from GDV. Learning to navigate with the long cane has been tough for me, but I've persisted and it has paid off. I've seen the future that awaits me through assistive technology and it's a brighter future than I could have ever imagined.

As 2018 draws to a close, I'm once again walking my beautiful daughter to crèche, singing as we go of course. I once again walk to the supermarket for groceries. I've been approved for the NDIS and await my plan. 2019 is going to be a great year, I can feel it. I want to once again do some volunteer work and I'm looking forward to being able to do more around the home to help my family.

I am very grateful to the professional staff at GDV for empowering me and for the tireless encouragement I've received. I still have my pride, not the foolish and stubborn pride of old. Rather, I feel the pride of achievement, the pride of independence and self-belief. 2019? Bring it on.

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For **clients of all ages,** Guide Dogs Victoria offers so much More than Dogs:

* **Low vision orthoptic service** to educate clients and monitor vision issues, assist in making the most of declining vision, assess for magnification/tech aids to assist vision
* **Specialist Occupational Therapy & Assistive Technology advice** to support daily living skills
* **Adult and Child Mobility Service** to support safe independence at home and in the community, including Victoria's only specialist **Acquired Brain Injury Mobility service** for people experiencing low vision or blindness.



1800 804 805

www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au