**Guide dogs Victoria's Perceptions June 2019:**   
**a newsletter for professionals working with people with vision loss**

# **Spotlight on Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)**



This issue of *Perceptions* focuses on Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).  
  
A brain injury can change a person’s vision and impact their mobility, as Guide Dogs Victoria Client Elwyn discovered after experiencing a stroke in 2017.  
  
Elwyn describes her introduction to and work with a Guide Dogs Victoria Orientation and Mobility Instructor as a “lifeline”. Read how Elwyn, with the support of the GDV team, has defied her initial expectations to live independently again in her own home.  
  
As always, we also have some great events coming up including a workshop on ABI and low vision. We would love to see you there.  
  
Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions or would like to discuss something further. We can be contacted at:

Website: www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au  
Email: info@guidedogsvictoria.com.au  
Phone: 1800 804 805

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**Dates for the Diary**

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

* Friday, 5th July, Morwell RSL, 50 - 52 Elgin Street, Morwell  
  1:30 – 3:30pm

**Acquired Brain Injury and Low Vision – A Workshop for Professionals**: run regularly by Guide Dogs Victoria. 2019 Sessions:

* 27th June 2019
* 31st October 2019

All on campus at GDV, from 1 to 3pm  
   
For further information or to express your interest email info@guidedogsvictoria.com.au or call 1800 804 805.  
   
Each prospective client for the ABI Mobility Service undergoes an initial assessment which aims to:

* Determine the extent of vision loss and impact on independent travel skills
* Determine the ability to move freely and safely around a range of environments
* Determine the ability to route plan, orientate and problem solve
* Determine the impact of other impairments eg. memory, balance, attention and concentration on mobility
* Determine the ability to traverse different surfaces including stairs
* Assess ability to use public transport if required
* Evaluate the need for a mobility aid
* Educate the individual, their family and rehabilitation professionals about the nature and impact of the vision loss / difficulty

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](mailto:info@guidedogsvictoria.com.au ) or call 1800 804 805.

**Elwyn’s Story: How I regained my independence**

'I had a stroke in 2017 which resulted in some visual issues. I was diagnosed with a homonymous hemianopia (the loss of half of the vision – the left side – in both eyes) and also a left visual inattention – damage to the brain that resulted in me being unable to pay attention to information on the left side of my body and in the environments around me.  
  
I was referred to Guide Dogs Victoria by the Occupational Therapist in the rehabilitation ward of the hospital, just before I was transferred to the Transitional Care Program (TCP). After I left hospital, I spent a further two months in TCP. I was definitely concerned about whether I would be able to return to live independently in my own home. Meeting Angela, an O&M (Orientation and Mobility Specialist) from Guide Dogs Victoria, and working with her in TCP and also in my home was a lifeline.  
  
I felt stupid. I had lost vision on my left side and it was like the left side of the world didn’t exist anymore. It caused me a lot of confusion and was very difficult. I was experiencing disorientation just moving from one room to another. I had to stop at the doorway of my bedroom before I walked into the hallway. I tried to think hard about where I had to go and how to stay orientated. I was also distracted by things happening on my right side.  
  
It was very helpful to have some focus about learning to ‘scan’. It was like a light bulb went on in my head when I saw a demonstration of how to scan! The physical act of scanning is a prompt to pay attention to the left side. I’m also compensating for the missing vision on the left side. When I scan, I turn my head to the left side regularly to check that the area where I’m walking is clear, that I’m aware of people moving toward me from my left side and to ensure I’m checking adequately when crossing roads.

Learning techniques such as scanning with Angela reinforced that I wasn’t silly, I just had to re-learn how to do things so that I could get around safely.  
  
I’m totally convinced that the sooner you get the correct help, the better. Every second counts after a stroke and it was good to understand what was going on. In between my sessions with Angela, I was doing extra scanning activities with a Nurse and Allied Health Assistant. An Exercise Physiologist drew up an exercise program for me and an Occupational Therapist was helping me with basic household tasks, like breakfast preparation, washing dishes and making my bed. The Occupational Therapist also assisted with crosswords, highlighting where to scan so I could see the whole page.

The support and services provided by my rehabilitation team complemented each other and enabled me to do everyday tasks, as well as activities I enjoyed again.  
  
Having Angela come to my home was very helpful. It personalised the service even more, providing me with direction and reminding me when and where to scan while walking around my local community. Extra attention was given at certain roundabouts, or busier road crossings. I still often have Angela’s voice in my head reminding me to scan!  
  
Angela also introduced me to and taught me how to use an Identification Cane, which helps me feel more relaxed when I’m out and about because other people are aware I have a problem with my vision. I also use it to check how close things are on the left side and to locate the edge of the curb. I’ve had positive feedback about my Identification Cane from people in the community.  
  
I’m slower at doing activities than I was before my stroke and, naturally, I still have some ups and downs. I’ve had to learn to ask for help and to do some things differently. But overall, I’m so glad to be in my own home and coping well. It was a big goal for me to work towards post-stroke and I’m very grateful for all the support of many people, including Angela and the GDV team, who have assisted me to get to this point.'  
  
**Did you know, Guide Dogs Victoria provides the only Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) low vision service in Victoria?**

Our ABI Mobility Services can minimise the challenges associated with ABI by equipping people with skills for day-to-day living after a major neurological event.  
  
Training could include:

* Scanning to compensate for visual field loss
* Increasing understanding of change in vision and the impact on functional mobility tasks
* Road crossing strategies
* Public transport
* Development of problem solving, planning and other cognitive skills relevant to independent mobility
* Mobility aid training

All of our services are offered at no cost to our clients. Find out more about our ABI mobility services via our website here [http://bit.ly/2I31DqY](https://www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au/resources/about-our-services/acquired-brain-injury-services/)

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# **Our Referrals Team Are Here to Help**

Many people with low vision wait far too long to receive daily living supports. This may seriously decrease their independence and safety.  
   
Anyone can refer to Guide Dogs Victoria and by doing so you could be a part of a life-changing moment.  
   
Furthermore, many people are unaware that only 30% of our services are Guide Dog related. We have a wide range of services and we would love to let you know.  
   
If you would like information, or a presentation for you and your colleagues, please contact:  
   
Laurie Kelly, 9854 4419 Or  lauriek@guidedogsvictoria.com.au

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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