

# VISIONS



Volume 25 | No. 3 Spring 2011

## Blind Courage Kokoda Trek

Mates with impaired vision complete gruelling journey for Guide Dogs



Two Australian men who have lost almost all of their eyesight as adults have trekked the Kokoda Trail to show that vision loss doesn't end dreams, and to raise money for Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

Coffs Harbour dairy farmer Jason Bake and Armidale Aboriginal Liaison Officer Steve Widders returned from the trek in July this year with stories of a tough and emotional journey, through mountain battlefields that still echo their pivotal place in Australian history.

Jason is a 41-year-old father of four who began to lose his sight 25 years ago due to the degenerative eye condition Retinitis Pigmentosa. He now has seven per cent sight. Jason hatched a plan to trek Kokoda with his brother-

in-law Craig Smith, who organised the Blind Courage project.

Steve Widders, aged 55, is a father of four and grandfather of eight. He was diagnosed with Cone Dystrophy in 1990 and has now lost 95 per cent of his sight. Steve trekked part of the Kokoda trail last year with an Aboriginal youth leadership group. He wanted to complete the trail this year to help gain recognition for the six Aborigines who died there in 1942 fighting with the Australian army.

The trekking wasn't easy. Jason says he landed face first in the mud about four times a day, but his cuts and bruises were minor compared to the elation they shared with highlanders' music each evening. Steve says while he was prepared physically, mentally it was a challenging experience having to concentrate on his guide's instructions and the emotion that came with honouring the



memory of those who'd fallen for Australia. He also had to tread carefully so as not to aggravate his ankle that was injured during training for the trek in January.

Jason and Steve are overjoyed that they have been able to raise \$30,000 to train a new Guide Dog.

The Blind Courage team hopes that their story will inspire others who have lost their sight to realise that vision impairment doesn't end dreams.

To see footage of the Blind Courage Trek, visit [www.guidedogs.com.au](http://www.guidedogs.com.au)

### In this issue ...

CEO's message.....	p2
Two great swimmers.....	p4
Community service close to heart.....	p5
Irish love for Guide Dogs.....	p5
Shop products.....	p6

## NEWS AND EVENTS

Here are some important happenings in the Guide Dogs NSW/ACT calendar. To stay even more up-to-date, visit our website: [www.guidedogs.com.au](http://www.guidedogs.com.au).

**Sunday 4 September**  
Cabramatta Moon Festival

**Tuesday 20 - Thursday 22 September**  
Henty Field Days

**Sunday 16 October**  
Sydney Spring Cycle

**Tuesday 18 - Thursday 20 October**  
Orange Field Days

**Sunday 20 November**  
Wet Nose Day

**Tuesday 22 November**  
Guide Dogs AGM



## VISIONS ...

... is published for the information of our supporters. All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

*Visions* is produced using paper stock harvested from sustainable forests.

You can view our privacy statement on our website at [www.guidedogs.com.au](http://www.guidedogs.com.au).

# Chief Executive Officer's message



Like many organisations, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT prepares its Annual Report around this time each year. Much of the report is provided in numbers that reflect our activities that assist people with impaired vision. However, when I look at all we have achieved – the thousands of people helped, dozens of Guide Dogs trained, countless presentations given – I am reminded of two things.

The first is that numbers can only ever paint part of the picture. It is the stories behind these numbers that are at the heart of what we all believe in; stories of hope, inspiration and joy. In this newsletter you can read just a few of these

wonderful accounts – like those of Jason and Steve who walked the Kokoda Trail, or Caitlin who has just received her first Guide Dog.

The second thing I am reminded of is how none of the numbers, nor the stories, would be possible without the commitment of kind people like you who believe in helping others, and in the magical role that dogs can play in people's lives. For making these stories possible, I thank you.

I also want to take this opportunity to recognise two loyal employees. Lyn Smith, our Planned Giving Manager, and Ann Roberts, our Telemarketing Manager, both retired at the end of June after more than 20 years service with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. They are both great examples of the commitment our staff have to the organisation. When this commitment is partnered with the generosity of supporters like you, the people we assist, and their amazing stories, become a reality. Long may it continue!

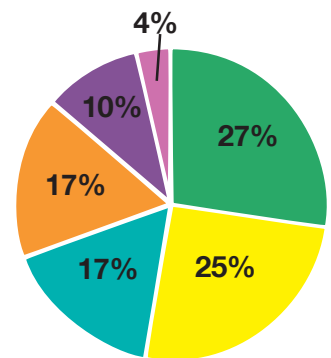
Thank you for your commitment.

Graeme White  
*Chief Executive Officer*

**In 2010/11 Guide Dogs NSW/ACT completed 8,339 programs (including follow-ups) for 3,648 clients**

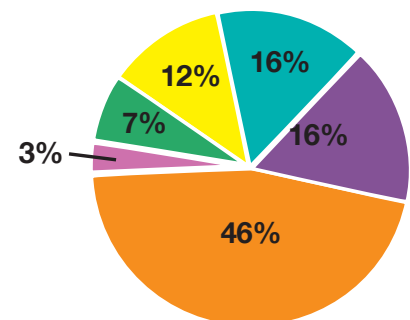
### Age of clients

- 0-20 years old
- 21-40
- 41-60
- 61-80
- 80+
- Unspecified



### Types of programs

- Mobility programs
- Electronic, inc GPS
- Guide Dog programs
- Orientation programs
- Low Vision programs
- O&M access programs



# Planned Giving Manager Lucy Smink shares her story

After more than 20 years at Guide Dogs, Planned Giving Manager Lyn Smith retired in June for some well deserved relaxation. We had a chat to Lyn's successor, Lucy Smink, who is relishing her new role.

## **When did you start working at Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, and what were you doing prior to this?**

I started working here four years ago. Before that I worked for a small charity that provided educational and medical aid for people in India and South East Asia.

## **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

I love talking to supporters, and am always incredibly cheered by their enthusiasm and commitment to our cause. Seeing our Guide Dog trainers and Orientation and Mobility Instructors at work is a privilege; it changes your outlook on life to see how their care and patience enhances the lives of so many. And of course, last but not least, I love seeing the tail-wagging puppies arrive, and then seeing them again two years later as proud Guide Dogs.

## **How important are Bequests to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT?**

Bequests are a vital source of funding. All the work we do helping people with impaired vision and educating the public is only possible because of these very special gifts. In fact more than 60% of all that we achieve is thanks to supporters who include a gift to us in their Will.

## **If someone is considering including Guide Dogs NSW/ACT in their Will, what should they do?**

The best thing to do is to contact us for the correct wording and to tell us about your exact wishes. Then, contact a solicitor to update your Will professionally.



*New Planned Giving Manager Lucy Smink with Judyth Wiley, who is leaving a gift to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT in her Will.*

## Introducing ... Katie!



Although she's only three months old, young Katie has been keeping very busy. This adorable Guide Dog recruit has been settling into her new home, where she will be for the next nine or so months.

Katie is living in what most people would call a full house. There's Katie's Mum and Dad puppy raisers, five children, four cats, two birds, another dog and a bunny rabbit! There is certainly never a dull moment, and Katie always has someone to play with.

Growing up in such a bustling household will also help with Katie's Guide Dog training. It is important that the puppies are well socialised so that as an adult dog they are confident and relaxed in the variety of environments that they may encounter as a working Guide Dog.

Katie's puppy raisers have said that she has a quirky and cute personality. She's also quite the little lady ... whenever she is ready for a nap she promptly drags her dog bed to a quiet spot, and is out for the count! Katie certainly enjoys her creature comforts!

Are you interested in learning more about puppies like Katie, and all the happenings at the Guide Dogs Centre? You might like to join our Puppy Pals program. You can sign up using the coupon on page six of this newsletter, or on our website: [www.guidedogs.com.au](http://www.guidedogs.com.au).

# Two great swimmers



Caitlin Blay, an 18-year-old Moruya resident, dreams of one day competing for Australia in the Special Olympics – but her love of sports is not the only thing that keeps her active. Caitlin has Cortical Vision Impairment which means she has no field of vision. Growing up, Caitlin relied on her parents to get around town and to school. However that all changed four years ago when she sought help from Guide Dogs.

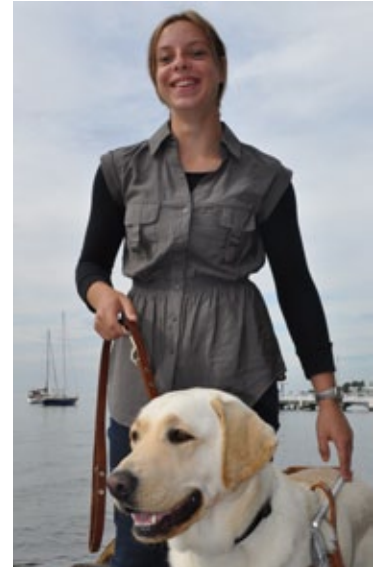
“Initially a Guide Dog instructor taught me how to use a long cane, but five months ago I was lucky enough to be given Betty, my first Guide Dog,” said Caitlin.

Along with playing soccer, basketball and tenpin bowling, Caitlin is also a fantastic swimmer, winning 16 medals and 45 ribbons across a range of disciplines. She has been competing since she was six but now has a very special companion to watch her progress.

“Betty absolutely loves the water, so when she attends training with me she just sits at the edge of the pool, with my mum, keeping an eye on my laps,” said Caitlin.

Unfortunately, Caitlin missed the July national selections for the Special Olympics as she was involved in another kind of special training – with Betty and her Orientation and Mobility Instructor.

“I was disappointed that I couldn’t go to the selections, but there will always be other chances. I am so grateful to have completed the training with Betty, as I can now go to the shops without my mum or anyone to guide me. I can do anything with Betty by my side,” Caitlin concluded.



**All our services are provided free of charge. With no government funding, we rely solely on donations from the public. Thank you for your ongoing support.**

## Flying start to Newcastle Mobility Day



Standing ‘air-side’ while an RAAF jet takes off, getting kitted out in fire-fighter uniform, blasting bins with a hose and a ride in a fire engine would put a smile on any child’s face. So when Guide Dogs took a group of children from the Hunter region to the local airport and fire station, there were smiles all around.

The Mobility Day had a flying start at Newcastle Airport where the group was greeted by Kylie, the tour guide, with special behind the scenes visitor passes. After “checking in”, Kylie led the children through security to the departure lounge to discover the mysteries of the baggage handling area.

Without a doubt the most impressive part of the visit was the “air-side” experience of commercial planes and RAAF jets taxiing, taking off and landing.

A lovely lunch in a river-side park was followed by more excitement: a visit to Raymond Terrace Fire Station. After an informative fire safety lesson, the children were thrilled to change into fire-fighter uniforms, get behind the wheel of the fire truck and turn on the sirens. After blasting a wheelie bin with a hose, the day wrapped up with a ride in the fire truck with Doug, second-in-charge at the station.



*Connor, Nathan and Sam stand tall in their fireman uniforms!*

# Community service close to heart



After raising three children, a pet dog and a Guide Dog puppy, you wouldn't expect Michael and Vanessa Leigh to put their hands up once again to be volunteer puppy raisers. However for this special family, community service is very close to their hearts.

Marrying at the age of 22 and running their own Gyprocking business, Michael and Vanessa Leigh's worlds came crashing down three years ago when Michael was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa, a hereditary eye disease.

"Michael started tripping over everyday items at home," said Vanessa. "So we decided to see a doctor who then referred us onto an optometrist." Michael was declared legally blind two years ago and now has only ten per cent of his vision remaining.

"It took us some time to really come to terms with Michael's diagnosis, but with three children and a mortgage we knew we had to stay positive and make some major lifestyle changes," Vanessa remarked.

For Vanessa it meant retraining as a marriage celebrant and for Michael a complete role reversal, to a stay-at-home dad. "One of the hardest things was giving up the business that I had started in my early twenties," said Michael. "But in a way I'm grateful because I get to spend a lot more time with my children. I'm there to pick them up every afternoon and they enjoy the bus ride home."

The Leigh family are now puppy raising their second Guide Dog recruit, Barnaby. Their first puppy Hendrix, is due to graduate in September and we're sure, that the Leigh's loving parenting and dedicated training helped Hendrix to get over the line.

"For us, puppy raising has been a great way to teach our children how to give something back to the community. It has also been great for them to know that they might be able to help someone who has the same condition as their father," said Vanessa.

**Guide Dogs is looking for puppy raising families in the North-West of Sydney. If you are interested please call the Guide Dogs Centre on 4579 7555.**

## Irish love for Guide Dogs

The Guide Dogs Centre had two special visitors recently – a couple who were on their honeymoon! Irish newlyweds Martin and Mary White, who have impaired vision, were keen to find out how the Guide Dogs organisation operated in Australia.

So, they made a trip to where a lot of the action happens – the Guide Dogs Centre at Glossodia. Martin and Mary took a walk through the kennels and had a chat to Centre staff about the Guide Dogs training process. Mary also jumped at the chance to cuddle two cheeky Labrador puppies, as her Guide Dog Minta was having some rest and relaxation time back home in Ireland.

After their tour, Mary and Martin noted that one of the main differences between the Irish and Australian Guide Dogs organisations, is that Ireland have Labradoodles and German Shepherds as Guide Dogs. However on the whole, the organisations have similar ways of working, with equally positive results: "I have been given confidence and independence, and can cope with any environment. The help just changes your life completely," said Martin.



*Irish honeymooners Martin and Mary enjoyed finding out how Guide Dogs are trained in Australia.*

# Yes, I would like to help Guide Dogs ...

Contact name \_\_\_\_\_  
(Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/Other) \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (     ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Fax (     ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_

- I would like information about:
- leaving a gift in my will to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT
  - fundraising
  - services for people with impaired vision

Our Privacy Policy is available at [www.guidedogs.com.au](http://www.guidedogs.com.au). To help our fundraising, we may make our list available to like-minded organisations. If you prefer us not to share this information, please tick this box .

I am sending a **single gift** of:  
 \$25    \$50    \$100    \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (my chosen amount) Or

I would like to be a Puppy Pal by donating a **fixed monthly gift** of:  
 \$15    \$20    \$30    \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (my chosen amount)

Please find enclosed a (**for single gifts only**):  
 cheque    money order (payable to Guide Dogs NSW/ACT)

Please debit this card:  
 MasterCard    Visa    Amex

Card number: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Name on card: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Complete this form and return in an envelope (no postage needed) to:  
Guide Dogs NSW/ACT  
PO Box 496  
North Sydney NSW 2059

All donations of \$2 or more are tax-deductible. Credit card donations can be made by phone (02) 9412 9300 or online at [www.guidedogs.com.au](http://www.guidedogs.com.au). Thank you.

## Guide Dogs merchandise - great products, delivered to your home

To order, phone 1300 362 922 or visit [www.guidedogs.com.au/shop](http://www.guidedogs.com.au/shop).  
Many more quality products are available!

### Opulescence pillows

Supplied in 4 and 5 Star hotels and resorts and available to purchase exclusively from Guide Dogs. Ideal for allergy sufferers. Machine washable and may be tumble dried. Includes 2 complimentary pillow protectors.



### Dog bowls

Made from virtually unbreakable melamine with a non-slip rubber grip.

Small: 5cm deep with a 11cm diameter

Large: 8cm deep with a 15cm diameter



### Tyrrell's Guide Dogs label wines

Fancy a drop of wine? Tyrrell's and Guide Dogs have enjoyed a close relationship for over 15 years. We have a great range of quality wines available at affordable prices. For more information please call us or visit our Online Shop.



### Guide Dogs rubber backed floor mat

This polyester blend, rubber backed floor mat is ideal as a special mat under your pet's bowls.

Size: 69 x 45cm

