



Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind

Building on Success...
Shaping the Future...

Strategic Plan '08 -'10
Executive Summary



irish guide dogs
for the blind

Executive Summary

This plan maps out the future in terms of our service provision and establishes realistic goals and objectives which are in line with our vision and mission.

Our Vision

A future where persons who are blind, vision impaired and disabled achieve independence and dignity through our world-class guide dog and ancillary services.

Our Mission

To provide the highest quality of services in partnership with our clients while planning for the future and valuing clients, volunteers and each other.

Our Core Values:

- Open communications focused on integrity, accountability and transparency
- A partnership approach with clients & their families, our volunteers, our staff and our Board of Directors
- Professionalism in our work
- Person centred

Strategic Objectives:

- 1: To provide quality dogs and services
- 2: To develop staff through excellence in recruitment and training & development
- 3: To value and support our volunteers
- 4: To develop services for clients' future needs
- 5: To expand our facilities to support the organisation's aims
- 6: To generate sufficient resources/funding to meet the objectives of this plan
- 7: To continue the development of the Assistance Dog Programme
- 8: To develop an organisational capacity for advocacy
- 9: To promote and facilitate research which supports the organisation's Vision, Mission and Objectives
- 10: To have in place an emphasis on value for money which underpins planning and day to day operations.

The Top Line Objectives Of This Plan:

- Achieve a population of 200 working Guide Dog partnerships by the end of 2010;
- Expand the Assistance Dogs Programme for Families of Children with Autism to facilitate training at least 40 families annually by the year 2010, and in the process achieve a client base of over 140 partnerships;
- Enhance our Orientation & Mobility, Child Mobility and Independent Living Skills training programmes to optimise training capacity and incorporate innovation;
- Put in place the human, financial and physical infrastructures necessary to facilitate the expansion in services and supports;
- Strengthen the role of volunteers in all aspects of the organisation's activities.

Our Five Main Services:

- The Guide Dog Programme
- The Assistance Dogs Programme For Families Of Children With Autism
- The Child Mobility Programme

- Orientation And Mobility Training
- Independent Living Skills Training

This plan is set against a background of sustained growth in demand for our five main services and is focused on developing our training capacity in all areas, delivering increased output and improvements in client support. It outlines a set of initiatives which aim to value and increase support to key stakeholders, i.e. clients, volunteers, donors and staff.

At present the organisation receives 15% of annual income from statutory agencies, with the remainder coming from fundraising and donations.

Delivery of this plan will add significantly to annual operating costs along with major capital investments. A coordinated approach to securing the additional financial resources necessary for the success of the plan is in place, with provision being made for additional fundraising activities and ongoing efforts to secure increased financial support from statutory agencies.

There is an emphasis on innovation and excellence in communications throughout the plan.

Demand Context

Over the past four years we have experienced continued growth in demand for all five of our services. This is largely due to an increasing awareness amongst potential applicants of the life-changing impact of professional mobility and independent living skills training. These applicants are further reassured by the quality of our client support and after care service.

There is an increased confidence throughout the organisation that further growth to meet additional demand is not just a possibility; it can be quantified, resourced and planned. This plan supports the expansion and continued development of existing and emerging services.

Our objective is to meet the additional demand with quality services, while minimising the client's waiting time between making an application and receiving training. Currently there are over 11,800 people in Ireland who are registered as blind. *

* Source: National Council for the Blind, Register of blind persons 2006

The total number of blind and vision impaired people awaiting specific services included in the National Physical & Sensory Disability Database Committee Annual Report 2007 ** (NPSDD) was 1628. It is widely recognised that this figure is significantly understated given that the total number represents 65% of the target national coverage for the database. Also it only includes persons aged under 66. However the NPSDD does point to significant levels of unmet need amongst respondents for two of our primary services.

The Guide Dog Programme

According to the NPSDD 2007 report, there was an unmet need for a guide dog amongst those having vision impairment, of 213 persons. Of that number, 173 respondents stated that they would avail of the service immediately were it available to them. There is a 21% increase in the unmet need for a guide dog when the 2007 NPSDD figures are compared with those of 2004.

** Compiled by The Health Research Board to provide information on the service needs of people with a physical/ sensory disability

Orientation And Mobility Service

Using the NPSDD data in relation to Orientation and Mobility Services (Long Cane Training), the unmet need in 2007 was 362 people (284 of whom cited an immediate need for services). This represents a 12% increase on the corresponding figure from the 2004 NPSDD report.

Independent Living Skills Training

In relation to Independent Living Skills Training, there is an increased level of demand owing to a greater awareness of our service amongst potential users.

Blind and vision impaired people of all ages can benefit from this programme, which focuses on independent living for both inside and outside the home.

We continue to raise awareness of the programme amongst potential users and are tailoring the training to ensure it meets individual needs.

Child Mobility Programme

We are actively engaged with the Department of Education and Science (Special Education Section) on the future development of the Child Mobility Programme. In 2006 the service was confirmed within the framework of services provided by the Department, having been operated on a pilot basis by Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind since 1999.

From our discussions to date with the Department of Education, there is evidence of a clear demand both from within the geographical area currently served (Cork, Tipperary and Waterford) and on a nationwide basis. Our focus is on further developing the service while continuing to work with the Department to ensure it is made available to children in other geographical locations.

A key factor governing the future will be the ongoing expansion of the visiting teacher service (as operated by the Department of Education). The expansion of this service will have the effect of increasing the number of assessments of blind and vision impaired children thereby establishing their mobility and living skills needs.

We very much value our role in providing this service. We receive ongoing feedback on the high quality of our work and the impact it has on the children involved and their families. We are confident in our plans to expand our activity in this area to meet future demands.

The Assistance Dogs Programme for families of children with Autism

Since its launch in 2005, the Assistance Dogs Programme for families of children with Autism has seen a significant level of interest from parents of Autistic children. Over the past two years the focus of our work has been on streamlining aspects of the service from the application and assessment phase to the training and support elements.

Through ongoing independent evaluation we have improved our understanding of the impact of the Assistance Dog on the child and the family. We have implemented changes to service provision, support and follow up based on the recommendations arising from the evaluation reports.

The evaluations have pointed to a consistent set of positive experiences for the families involved. The common theme emerging is one of a “life changing” impact.

At present, the level of demand for the service far outstrips our dog production and client training capacities. As more parents of a child with Autism become aware of the positive impact of the Assistance Dogs service and as the rate of assessment of need increases following on from the implementation of the Disability Act, we are in no doubt that demand for the service will continue into the future.

The plan is subject to regular review by the Board of Directors and Senior Management. Key performance indicators (KPI's) have been put in place for each element which ensures transparency of purpose. The KPI's assist our board and management in monitoring and evaluating performance against objectives and allow for corrective action where necessary.

A key principle underpinning the plan, and its implementation, is one of optimising the return on resources. This will be evident in; the deployment of staff, day to day spending and in capital investments.

A full version of this document is available to download from www.guidedogs.ie or by contacting Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind on 1850 506 300.

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