



# There's More to a Dog Guide than Meets the Eye

A Mixed Methods Investigation into the Self-reported  
Benefits of Having a Dog Guide.

Geraldine Lane  
BSpEd, GradCertDisSt, GradCertEd  
GradDipEd, MDisSt, MEd(SpEd), MAppGeront,  
MPalliative Care (Aged Care)

This thesis is submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Disability and Community Inclusion Unit  
School of Health Sciences  
Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences  
Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia

Supervisor: Dr Brian Matthews  
Co- Supervisors: Dr Caroline Ellison, Dr Carolyn Palmer

## Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	8
List of Tables.....	9
Candidate's Declaration .....	10
Supervisor's Declaration.....	11
Certificate of Regulatory Compliance .....	12
Acknowledgements.....	13
Notes on the Text.....	16
Glossary of Terms.....	17
Dedication.....	21
Dedication to People who are Blind or Vision Impaired.....	22
Prologue .....	23
Abstract .....	25
Chapter 1	
General Introduction .....	26
1.0 Introduction.....	26
1.1 Background.....	27
1.1.1 Service Dogs and Dog Guides: A Perspective.....	28
1.2 Rationale and Aims of the Study.....	29
1.3 Statement of the Problem .....	30
1.4 Research Aims and Objectives.....	33
1.5 Significance of the Study .....	34
1.6 The Potential Contribution of this Thesis .....	34
1.7 Conclusion .....	35
1.8 Thesis Structure.....	35
Chapter 2	
Review of the Literature.....	37
2.0 Introduction.....	37
2.1 Defining Health.....	37
2.1.1 The Continuum of Health Promotion Approaches .....	40
2.2 Defining Disability .....	42
2.3 Defining Blindness and Vision Impairment .....	43
2.3.1 International Experience of Blindness .....	44
2.3.2 Blindness in Australia .....	45
2.3.3 Living with Blindness and Vision Impairment.....	47
2.3.4 Depression and Blindness and Vision Impairment.....	49
2.3.5 Rehabilitation after Loss of Vision .....	50
2.4 The Companion Animal .....	53
2.4.1 Pets as Health Enhancers.....	57
2.5 The Feel Good Hormones.....	61
2.5.1 The Link Between Oxytocin and Serotonin and Animal Ownership.....	61

2.6 Pet Ownership, Social Interactions and Self-Esteem.....	63
2.7 Pets As Therapy Animals.....	64
2.8 Potential Negative Effects of the Human-Companion Animal Relationship .....	65
2.9 The Service or Assistance Dog.....	67
2.9.1 Service Dogs and Health .....	71
2.10 The Dog Guide.....	73
2.10.1 Dog guides: An Historical Perspective .....	74
2.10.2 Dog Guides in Australia.....	74
2.10.3 Training with a Dog Guide .....	76
2.10.4 The Role of a Dog Guide – Benefits, Drawbacks and Societal Perceptions .....	77
2.10.5 Long Canes, Dog Guides and Alternate Mobility Aids – Empowering the Choice of Mobility Aid: Dog Guides Versus Long Canes .....	84
2.10.6 Awareness, Perceptions and Decision-making Processes.....	89
2.10.7 Expectations of the Role of a Dog Guide .....	90
2.10.8 Reasons Why People May Not Apply for a Dog Guide .....	91
2.10.9 Cultural or Religious Considerations.....	94
2.10.10 Increased Mobility and Independence.....	95
2.10.11 Social and Psychological Benefits .....	96
2.11 Implications for Service Providers.....	96
2.12 Research Questions .....	97
2.13 Conclusion.....	99
Chapter 3	
Methodology.....	101
3.0 Introduction.....	101
3.1 Goal Definition.....	102
3.2 Initial Research Process .....	102
3.3 Ethical Considerations.....	103
3.3.1 Respect for the Individual.....	101
3.3.2 Transparency.....	105
3.3.3 Adherence to University Research Ethics Guidelines.....	105
3.3.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity of Participants and Information ...	107
3.3.5 Data Entry, Storage and Disposal .....	107
3.4 Methodology .....	108
3.4.1 A Quantitative Approach.....	109
3.4.2 A Qualitative Approach .....	110
3.4.3 Mixed Methods.....	112
3.4.4 Triangulation.....	114
3.4.5 Process.....	115
3.5 Insider-Researcher Perspectives.....	117
3.6 Qualitative Research Undertaken via Self-reporting .....	119
3.7 Research Design.....	120

3.7.1 Research Overview .....	120
3.8 Preliminary Research and Focus Group Meetings.....	122
3.8.1 Advantages of Focus Groups .....	125
3.8.2 Disadvantages of Focus Groups .....	125
3.9 The Questionnaire.....	126
3.9.1 Potential Advantages and Disadvantages and the Questionnaire Design.....	126
3.9.2 Advantages of Using Questionnaires .....	126
3.9.3 Disadvantages of Using Questionnaires.....	127
3.9.4 Distribution of the Questionnaire.....	127
3.10 Individual Interviews .....	129
3.10.1 Advantages of Individual Interviews .....	129
3.10.2 Disadvantages of Individual Interviews .....	130
3.11 Organisation and Coding of Data.....	131
3.11.1 Categorisation of Responses.....	132
3.12 Data Analysis.....	134
3.13 Reliability and Validity .....	135
3.14 Conclusion.....	135
Chapter 4	
Research Findings Ð Focus Group Meetings .....	137
4.0 Introduction .....	137
4.1 Focus Group Meetings Ð Background.....	137
4.1.1 Initial Focus Group Meeting.....	138
4.1.2 Demographic Information .....	139
4.1.3 Participants According to Age .....	139
4.1.4 Participants According to Level of Vision and Gender.....	140
4.2 Results from Focus Group Meetings.....	141
4.2.1 Initial Focus Group Meeting held in Perth, Western Australia .....	141
4.3 Follow-up Focus Group Meetings in NSW & Qld: Opening Discussion .....	143
4.3.1 Choice of Mobility Aid .....	143
4.3.2 DGH and Health Ð Discussion.....	146
4.4 General Discussion and Summary of the Focus Group Meetings.....	147
4.5 Conclusion.....	148
Chapter 5	
Research Findings Ð Questionnaire.....	149
5.0 Introduction .....	149
5.1 Response to the Questionnaire.....	149
5.2 Data Obtained from Questionnaire .....	150
5.2.1 Characteristics of Participants (Demographics) .....	151
5.3 Results from the Questionnaire .....	151
5.4 Preference for a Dog .....	154
5.4.1 Advantages of Working with a Dog Guide .....	154

5.4.2 Disadvantages of Working with a Dog Guide.....	156
5.4.3 General Health and Wellbeing.....	157
5.4.4 Depression.....	158
5.4.5 Exercise and Weight .....	159
5.4.6 Participants with Other Health Conditions .....	160
5.4.7 Adjustment to Loss of Vision .....	163
5.4.8 Unexpected Benefits of Dog Guide Mobility .....	164
5.5 Conclusion.....	165

## Chapter 6

Research Findings – Individual Interviews .....	166
6.0 Introduction .....	166
6.1 Individual Interviews .....	166
6.1.1 Participant Demographics – Individual Interviews.....	166
6.1.2 Vision Details.....	166
6.1.3 General Findings from the Individual Interviews .....	167
6.1.4 Adjustment to Vision Loss.....	173
6.1.5 The Dog Guide and Travel Needs.....	174
6.1.6 Post Dog Guide Issues and Quality of Life from Interviews.....	177
6.1.7 Preference for a Dog Guide .....	179
6.1.8 Other Health Conditions.....	180
6.2 General Summary of all Research Modalities .....	181
6.2.1 Theme 1: Increase in Confidence since Working with a Dog Guide	182
6.2.2 Theme 2: More Exercise Since Working with a Dog Guide.....	182
6.2.3 Theme 3: Emotional Gain due to Working with a Dog Guide .....	183
6.2.4 Theme 4: More Social Interactions since Working with a Dog Guide.....	183
6.2.5 Theme 5: Increased Freedom Associated with Working with a Dog Guide.....	184
6.4.6 Theme 6: On the Negative Side.....	184
6.5 Conclusion.....	185

## Chapter 7

Discussion .....	186
7.0 Introduction .....	186
7.1 Addressing the Research Questions.....	187
7.1.1 Findings from all Research Modes .....	189
7.2 Limitations of the Study and how they were Addressed .....	189
7.3 General Discussion .....	192
7.4 Specific Issues .....	195
7.5 The Identification of Key Indicators.....	196
7.6 Focus Group Meetings Discussion .....	198
7.7 Questionnaire Summary and Discussion .....	199
7.8 Individual Interviews Discussion.....	201
7.9 Analysis of Findings .....	202

7.10 Conclusion.....	205
Chapter 8	
Conclusions and Recommendations – Reflecting Back but Looking Forward.....	206
8.0 Introduction .....	206
8.1 Reflections on Research Processes Used in this Study .....	207
8.2 Reflecting on the Ideas Highlighted in this Thesis.....	211
8.3 Future Directions for Research.....	212
8.4 Final Reflection.....	214
Reference List.....	216
Appendices .....	237
Appendix 1	
Letter of Introduction, Questionnaire.....	237
Appendix 2	
Consent Form for Participants.....	238
Appendix 3	
Invitation Form for Participants (Focus Group).....	239
Appendix 4	
Information Sheet, Overview of the Project.....	240
Appendix 5	
Consent Form for Participation in Research (By Interview, Focus Group).....	241
Appendix 6	
Questionnaire .....	242
Appendix 6.1	
Tables.....	250
Appendix 7	
Sample Questions – Individual Interviews.....	252
Appendix 8	
Excerpts of Interview Transcripts from Participant with a Dog Guide .....	255
Appendix 9	
Interview Guide and Codes Assigned to Individual Interview Questions .....	257
Appendix 10	
Ethics Approval Notice Flinders University .....	260
Appendix 11	
A Guide to Australian Eye Health Data.....	261
Appendix 12	
Projected Numbers of People who are Blind or Vision Impaired up until 2024 .....	264
Appendix 13	
Approval letter SEDA .....	268

Appendix 14	
Email Distributed by Blind Citizens Australia .....	269
Appendix 15	
Statistics from Whitmarsh (2005) Guide Dog Study .....	270

## List of Figures

Figure 1	
The Continuum of Health Approaches .....	40



## List of Tables

Table 3.1	Codebook Examples .....	132
Table 4.1	Distribution of Participants According to Age.....	140
Table 4.2	Gender Distribution of Focus Group Participants .....	140
Table 4.3	Distribution of Participants according to State of Residence in Australia .....	141
Table 5.1	Participants by Gender – Questionnaire.....	150
Table 5.2	Participants by Age – Questionnaire .....	146
Table 5.3	Categories of Vision Loss – Questionnaire.....	151
Table 5.4	Questionnaire Respondents with Other Health Conditions .....	163

## **Candidate's Declaration**

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Candidate's Name: Geraldine Lane

Signature:

Date: 11<sup>th</sup> April 2014

## **Supervisor's Declaration**

This is to certify that the research carried out for the doctoral thesis 'There's More to a Dog Guide than Meets the Eye: An Investigation into the World of the Dog Guide Handler. The Potential Benefits to Health of Living and Working with a Dog Guide', was completed by Geraldine Lane in the Disability and Community Inclusion Unit, Flinders University, Adelaide Australia. The thesis material has not been used in part or in full for any other qualification, and I confirm that the candidate has pursued this course of study in accordance with the requirements of Flinders University regulations.

Supervisor's Name: Dr Brian Matthews

Signature:

Date: 11<sup>th</sup> April 2014

