Hostility: The harmful impacts on guide dog partnerships

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Guide Dogs: A Unique Partnership
**Assistance Dogs**

Guide Dogs support vision impaired people to navigate, and are a type of Assistance Dog.

Other assistance dogs include:

- Hearing dogs
- Medical Detection dogs
- Dogs that assist with physical tasks for physically disabled people
Safeguarding & People with Vision Impairment

Over 40% increase in Safeguarding concerns over last 5 years at Guide Dogs
Out and about

- Verbal abuse
- Threats
- Physical assaults
- Hate crime / vulnerable victims
At home

- Threats
- Making noises
- Verbal abuse
- Filming
- Driving at person & dog
- Social media
Dog on Dog Attacks
Dog on Dog Attacks

• In March 2014, the Government passed the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (covering England and Wales). It reclassified a dog attack on an assistance dog as an aggravated offence, with penalties including up to three years’ imprisonment.

• Alongside the 2014 act, we also supported measures to give police and dog control wardens more powers to require pet-dog owners to muzzles their dogs, take them to behavioural classes and secure their properties where necessary to avoid attacks.
Dog on Dog Attacks

• Guide Dogs set up a number of Service Level Agreements with police forces to try and make sure these cases were handled appropriately.

• We’ve supported broader legislation tightening the law on animal cruelty committed by humans, and getting the sentencing guidelines to be clear that the role and importance of guide and other dogs is taken into account in sentencing (although cases of abuse by people towards guide dogs are thankfully vanishingly rare).
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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total 2016-2022</td>
<td>833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly average</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressor off lead</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack on qualified dog</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogs withdrawn</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost (withdrawn only)</td>
<td>£495,315.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated vet cost</td>
<td>£53,711.44</td>
</tr>
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In total, since 2010 there have been 1,641 attacks reported on Guide Dogs’ Stock.
Dog on dog Attacks - More than a mobility aid.

- Companion
- Independence
- Confidence
- Self Esteem / Respect
- Empowerment
- Social connectedness
- Symbiotic Relationship

Lorna’s study sought to understand the impact of a dog attack on the overall, holistic wellbeing of the guide dog owner.

The study provided deeply moving narratives which detail how an attack on a guide dog is never simply that. An attack is an attack on both the dog, their wellbeing and on the owner and how they feel physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. A total of 20 guide dog owners who had suffered dog attacks from across the United Kingdom agreed to participate in the study and were interviewed.
Dog Attacks - Impact.

“I was literally in tears, on the floor lying next to him - I wanted the other dog to attack me instead of him . . .”

“I felt totally helpless . . . . hopeless . . . I mean, what could I do? I wanted to help Harvey . . . but I couldn’t see what was happening. It made me feel totally, utterly helpless . . .”

“It’s the lack of control you have . . . the frustration at the owner not doing anything and just being able to get away with it.”

“I had bites to my fingers, I was bleeding, and the dog bit me on my forearm . . . and the skin was hanging off my fingernails . . . “
Dog attacks - Impact.

“I just gave up for a while and thought ‘what’s the point?’ . You know people talk about you talking to someone, getting psychological help . . . but sometimes you’re not really ready to . . . “

“To not have him beside me . . . . you are totally lost . . . . you have no direction, no sense of where you’re going in a metaphorical sense”

“. . . it’s not just the fact your pet, who you love, has had something horrible happen to them . . . it’s more than that - it’s not easy to explain the relationship with a guide dog . . . . it’s more than just being emotionally affected . . . it’s deeper than that . . .”
Access Refusals - a form of hostility

Open Doors for guide dogs. It’s the law.
Access Refusals - a form of hostility

- Disabled people including guide and other assistance dog owners have important rights under the Equality Act 2010, or Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 (Northern Ireland).

- The law surrounding access for disabled people is “anticipatory”. Service providers should consider the needs of disabled people, including guide or other assistance dog owners, and make any necessary reasonable adjustments prior to those customers accessing their service.
Access Refusals - a form of hostility

• Guide and other assistance dogs trained to a required standard, and which support a person with a disability are considered by the EQ Act 2010 an “auxiliary aid”. In the overwhelming majority of instances, a service provider must amend any “no dogs” policy to allow access for guide and other assistance dogs.

• Cultural beliefs can raise sensitive issues relating to dogs. However, religious grounds cannot be used to exclude guide and assistance dog owners. The Equality and Human Rights Commission successfully reached agreement on this with several religious groups.
## Access Refusals - a form of hostility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Refused Access</th>
<th>Times Refused</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food &amp; Drink</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>(2% 11+ times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi &amp; PHV</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>(7% 6 - 10 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>(5% 6 - 10 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Transport</td>
<td>12%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Access Refusals - Impact

“After building confidence to actually go out to get a refusal is soul crushing and confidence breaking.”

“When you’ve been refused access, it puts you off wanting to go out. Some people do not realise the damage they are doing to those just trying to live an independent life with the little sight they have left.”

“I’m left feeling like a second-class citizen... always having to stick up for my rights under the Equality Act which can be burdensome and exhausting at times but ALWAYS necessary to re-educate/train the relative companies and/or staff.”
Access Refusals - Impact

“To save myself and others any embarrassment of being refused I didn’t take my dog, this meant that I had to rely on my sighted friends to guide me, I felt I had lost some of my independence.”

“I avoid going to places I have previously been rejected or challenged. It spoils our day especially for the children.”

“I plan to do something, and then get really anxious about what might happen, and cancel my plans. Bad experiences with taxis is my major worry at the moment”.

Guide Dogs
Access Refusals - Impact

“I just don’t want to fight...with places anymore, so if I’m going somewhere I think they will have an issue with my guide dog I often leave him at home and go with a friend or family.”

“I have decided not to have a guide dog when my existing one retires because I’m sick of the fear I feel when approaching restaurants, taxis, hotels and shops. I’ve been challenged so many times that I just expect it.”
Access Refusals - a form of hostility

Key words used to self-describe:

Rejected, saddened, disappointed, isolated, anxious, angry, frustrated, embarrassed, humiliated and unsurprisingly discrimination.

• Become more reliant on family and friends to support them to access places.
• Changed their day to day lives in a bid to avoid hostility and the confrontation.
Access Refusals - a form of hostility

• We have a dedicated Access Team to support guide dog owners who believe that they have likely received an illegal access refusal or been discriminated against.

• 2023 the Access Team received 793 referrals of which 469 were deemed as access refusal/potential discrimination.

• We continue to campaign for a strengthening of the EQ Act 2010.

• Guide Dogs exists to help people with sight loss live the life they choose. Refusals are standing in the way of owners having the chance to flourish in their personal, social, and professional lives.
Empowering Partnerships

Campaigning for Change
Thank you

Q & A