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Guide dog owners still face discrimination in access to services

More than half of guide dog owners have been turned away by a service provider such as a pub, restaurant, hotel, shop or bank in the last five years, new research has found.¹

For an interview with a local guide dog owner please phone 0118 983 8281 or 8224.

A survey commissioned by The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association has found that 50% of service providers, and seven out of ten restaurants, have concerns about accepting guide dogs.

In response to these findings, Guide Dogs is launching its Open Your Doors campaign (Oct 4 -10) which aims to put an end to the discrimination faced by guide dog owners in accessing everyday services and facilities. The campaign will help educate service providers about how they can best serve visually impaired customers, as well as dispel misconceptions about the behaviour and cleanliness of guide dogs.

Guide Dogs' Director of Policy Tom Pey explains: "It is not only inconvenient but also very embarrassing to be refused access to a restaurant or pub because of your guide dog. Whilst the survey results are very frustrating, this research has enabled us to better understand the concerns of service providers so that we can work together to overcome any problems and ensure that guide dog owners receive a first class customer service."

To mark the campaign Guide Dogs is launching a pocket sized reference guide, entitled Opening Doors, for everyone who works in the service industry. It outlines the obligations of service providers, and gives practical advice and tips on how to provide a quality service for visually impaired people and assistance dog users. Free copies are available to service providers by phoning **0118 983 8379**. A new microsite has also been launched on Guide Dogs' website, which can be found at:
www.guidedogs.org.uk/access

Guide Dogs plans to reward good practice by presenting Open Your Doors certificates to service providers, nominated by blind and partially sighted customers, who have been particularly pleased with the service they have received. These will be presented to winning businesses in the coming months.

Open Your Doors survey: Key Results

- 52% of guide dog owners have been refused entry to a service in the last five years. Two in five guide dog owners (39%) have been turned away by a restaurant.
- One in ten hotels state they are not able to accommodate visually impaired people at any time.
- 10% of restaurants say they cannot allow, or will only allow restricted access, to guide dog owners.
- 40% of guide dog owners say they have had a particularly good experience in one of the services.
- 12% of businesses surveyed said they did not understand their legal obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act,² which makes it unlawful to treat disabled people less favourably than other people for a reason related to their disability.
- 50% of service providers, and seven out of ten restaurants, have concerns about accepting guide dogs.

Ends

Notes to Editors:

- ¹ Research carried out with 400 businesses and 100 guide dog owners by Buckingham Research Associates, September 2004
- ² The Open Your Doors campaign coincides with new rights for disabled people under the Disability Discrimination Act, which from October 2004 will require service providers to make 'reasonable adjustments' to their premises. They will need to ensure that there are no physical barriers stopping or making it unreasonably difficult for guide dog owners, and other blind and partially sighted customers, to use their services.
- Attached Top five tips for service providers

For further media information and photos please phone Chris Dyson or Tony Searle in Guide Dogs' Press Office on 0118 983 8281 or 8224 (mobile: 07768 523996).

Top five tips for service providers

- Explain the layout of your premises and offer to help the customer to a table or to locate the items they plan to purchase.
- If handling cash, explain the denomination of the notes or coins you are handing over. When the customer is paying, tell them the cost and give guidance, if necessary, on where the signature should be written.
- Consider introducing Braille signage, labels and menus (in pubs and restaurants), letting the customer know this is available.
- Advise your staff that guide dogs are highly trained and should not cause any disruption to staff or customers in premises where food and drinks are sold.
- Offer the guide dog a bowl of water.