

PRESS RELEASE
31st August 2004

Guide Dogs' appeals to businesses: Open Your Doors!



Imagine attempting to enter a shop or restaurant, only to have the door shut in your face. Guide dog owners continue to face difficulties in accessing every day services and facilities the rest of us take for granted.

Today sees the launch of The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association's Open Your Doors

campaign, which aims to educate service providers about how they can best serve visually impaired customers.



Guide Dogs' Director of Policy, Tom Pey, explains: "Although there are many examples of good practice, guide dog owners continue to encounter problems accessing services in shops, hotels, pubs, restaurants, banks and building societies. We want to work with all sections of the service industry to ensure that guide dog owners receive the same standard of service as everybody else.

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.

The 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.

Guide Dogs plans to reward good practice by presenting Open Your Doors certificates to service providers, nominated by blind and partially sighted customers.

Tom Pey explains: "Highlighting good practice will help to make it the norm, so that in the future, our vision of doors always being open to blind and partially sighted people and their guide dogs will become reality."

Nominations should be sent to Chris Dyson by phoning 0118 983 8281 or e-mailing chris.dyson@guidedogs.org.uk

Service providers can find out more about the Open Your Doors campaign, and download guidance for serving assistance dog owners and visually impaired people, by logging-on to the charity's website: www.guidedogs.org.uk/access

FACTFILE:

How service providers can make a difference

Guide Dogs wants service providers to have the confidence to give blind and partially sighted customers the best possible service. Here are our top five tips:

- Explain the layout of your premises and offer to help the customer locate the items they plan to purchase.
- When the customer is paying, tell them the cost and give guidance, if necessary, on where the signature should be written.
- If handling cash, explain the denomination of the notes or coins you are handing over.
- 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.

Guide dog owners carry a card issued by the Institute of Environmental Health Officers advising that guide dogs should not be a risk to hygiene. Guide dogs are regularly groomed to the highest standard and the health and condition of every dog is checked regularly by a vet. It is the responsibility of guide dog owners to ensure that their dogs meet the highest level of hygiene.

End