



Guide Dogs Scotland

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Engagement Officer



Aims:

To promote access for guide dog owners

To answer any questions you might have around guide dogs within your establishment



Background:

Guide Dogs Scotland is a charity which supports around 500 guide dogs owners around Scotland to get out independently.

Unfortunately, we are hearing of guide dog owners being refused access to restaurants, hotels, cafes, taxis, and other services, because of their guide dog.

The law



Disabled people, including guide dog owners and other people who are blind or partially sighted, have important rights under the Equality Act 2010 (which replaced the Disability Discrimination Act).

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on service providers e.g. restaurants, hotels, cafes, to make 'reasonable adjustments' to accommodate guide dog owners.

In the eyes of the law, these dogs are mobility aids, and should not be refused access.

Research

In July 2015, 1118 assistance dog owners took part in a survey around access.

After taxis, restaurants were the 2nd most frequent place for a guide dog owner to be refused, with almost a quarter of respondents (24%) being refused in the last six months.

Refusals

If a guide dog owner is refused access, they normally phone us – we work with the company to try and educate staff to prevent future issues. We now also report to Licensing Standards Officers.

In October and December 2016, guide dog owners had successful claims through the small claims court under disability discrimination through the Equality Act 2010, against a business who had refused their guide dogs.



Refusals



Scotland

“A café refused me entry due to having a guide dog so I challenged them and they backed down, but I never went again, why should I spend my money in a place that doesn't want us?” Guide dog owner, Stoke on Trent

“It's horrible, like I'm not a real person. I feel angry, frustrated because I have to explain about what an assistance dog is and what my disability is. All I wanted was a coffee but I'm stressed out and embarrassed. Public are very good at coming to the rescue and backing me up saying I am allowed in...” Guide dog owner, Essex

“It can also spoil enjoyment when you are constantly having to explain the law. It would be lovely to be able to book a break and just enjoy it without having to justify why you are blind and need the support of a guide dog.”
Guide dog owner, Staffordshire

“Each refusal is crushing, confidence shattering, rejecting, and traumatic. I always feel that I don't want to go out after - but work dictates I must.” Guide dog owner, Stevenage

It's not all bad news though...



“All the shops that I go in are very accommodating and ask how Ziggy is. That always makes me feel happy for the rest of the day,” Guide dog owner, Liverpool

Good service means a happy customer, which could lead to repeat business.

Bad service may lead to poor reviews online, word of mouth, press coverage.

How do I know it's a guide dog?



Guide Dog flash on lead



Harness



ID tag – number on the back of this will correspond to photo ID book that owner should carry

Assistance Dogs

Guide Dogs are one of seven assistance dog charities covered by the law:



- Canine Partners
- Dogs for Good
- Dog Aid
- Guide Dogs
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
- Medical Detection Dogs
- Support Dogs

All dogs registered with 'Assistance Dogs UK' will have a passport.



- Guide Dogs ✓
- Hearing Dogs ✓
- Assistance Dogs ✓

What to expect of a guide dog



- Expect it to be well groomed
- Well behaved
- Not to bark
- Lie quietly
- Not to disturb other diners
- Not up on the seats
- Harness off to allow to curl up

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Tips for helping customers with sight loss

Guiding a blind or partially sighted customer to their table, and assisting with a buffet.

Offering a menu in large print, or taking time to go through menu choices.

Make sure to explain where you've left things, e.g. wine glass at 2 o'clock, and explain if there's anything on the plate e.g. a stick holding a burger together!

Offer a bowl of water for the dog.

Please don't pat or feed the dog – this can be distracting if it is trying to work, or trying to lie quietly under the table!



More on the law...

It's worth noting that seating a guide dog owner in a separate area of the restaurant, away from other diners, could also be seen as discriminating as they are being separated from other diners.

Also asking the guide dog owner to sit outside because of the dog is discriminating against them.

Offering a bigger floor space near the table will mean the dog can stay out the way and not be a trip hazard – just ask the customer what would suit

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Guide dog in training

Guide Dogs Scotland, and other assistance dog charities, have volunteers and staff who train the dogs from a young age.

A main focus of this training is to get the dog used to places where it will eventually go with its owner, such as restaurants, shops and public transport.

It is very helpful if you allow our dogs in training to experience this, in order to ensure we provide people with sight loss guide dogs who are used to restaurants and shops.

Handouts



- Assistance Dogs Welcome window sticker
- Access to restaurants information leaflet / Open doors

Any questions?

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