



PRESENTATION SUMMARY

Matching guide dogs to people: Assessing the relationship between 50 people and their first guide dogs

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Matching a person who is blind or sight-impaired with a guide dog is a process of finding the most suitable guide dog available for that individual, and a successful match is one that is deemed to be 'compatible' by the handler (owner). Not all guide dog partnerships are successful, and the consequences of an unsuccessful partnership may be severe in terms of the reduction in mobility and quality of life for the handler, and time and resources for guide dog schools. Guide dog schools worldwide pay a great deal of attention to the process of matching a dog to its user, but little data exists in the literature on this process, nor on the outcome of the partnership. 'Matching' is an art as much as a science, and as such, there may be no such thing as a perfect match. However, there are several key factors to be considered when making a match that influence the success or failure of the process.

This study investigated how compatible people and their first guide dogs were on mobility and non-mobility issues, and identified the main reasons why some of these dogs were rejected. The results of this study show that the majority (84%) of handler and first guide dog relationships were successful. Dogs mainly ceased working due, in order of magnitude, to: retiring of old age, ill health and being unsuitably matched. Of the small number of dogs that were rejected (16%), dogs were deemed incompatible mostly for distraction/aggression to other dogs while working, followed by deficiencies with specific guiding tasks and social behaviours equally. Four items on a 'compatibility scale': the dog's effects on mobility, the person's

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ability to control the dog, like-mindedness between the person and the dog, and the dog's effects on social-interactions appeared to be good predictors of matching success. Issues such as: being emotionally attached to one's dog, companionship, need for a dog and motivation to get one did not make a significant impact in this study.

These results may be of practical use to the Guide Dog Orientation and Mobility Instructor to identify important aspects of the matching process, and/or be used as a screening device to identify areas where a matching problem exists.

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