



Living with visual Impairment

Guide dogs and White Canes

Jackie:

I think one of the problems when a lot of people do lose their sight in various circumstances, everybody automatically thinks that that person having a guide dog will solve their problems overnight. It doesn't actually work that way. A guide dog is actually a mobility aid, it is not going to take you from A to B automatically without any instructions and in many respects is a living, hairy, breathing white cane. It is a mobility aid, it will not do any different tasks for you other than a white cane will do, you have still got to tell it to turn left and turn right, to go forward. It will not make a decision for example to tell you when to cross the road, you have to tell the dog when to cross the road. The other issue that a lot of people do have with a guide dog is the fact that you have got to look after it as well. A dog has got to live in your home 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. You have got to look after it, you have got to groom it every day and dogs can become ill as well, they can have bad days as well so the other issue as well with a guide dog is that you also have to be a competent cane user so for example if you do need to get from A to B one day and your dog is taken ill, that you can still undertake a certain route and have other mobility support as well.

White canes are considered mobility aids, there are a number of white canes available to visually impaired people. You do need to have an assessment by a specialist worker to have a mobility aid issued that meets your needs and fulfils all your requirements as well. The general one that most people in the street would probably see is known as a symbol cane, it is a very lightweight foldable type of white cane that really acts as a sign really to the general public and to drivers for example, that a person does have visual impairment. There are other types of cane as well, another one is called a guide cane which is primarily used by people that are partially sighted that do have a certain amount of limited vision. people that are totally blind they would normally use a cane for tactile purposes which is known as a long. But training in any cane is required, for example long cane training is quite a long in-depth piece of training and you do need some specialist assessment and training to use any mobility device. Some people prefer not to use a mobility aid, there are a number of people who are visually impaired who choose not to use a mobility aid, for example children and younger people may see it as a taboo, they don't like the idea of carrying 'a white stick'. It is a big issue for a lot of younger people but in many cases it will increase confidence, it will increase independent travel and with the right training people can get from A to B safely and that's really the idea of mobility aids.