



## My Guide Dog Journey So Far My Daisy Diaries

Is it just me, or is there a sense of freedom walking down a street, no white stick, no worries, just you and your destination in mind? Well, I used to feel like that, then I got to a point in life that I needed to start using a long white stick due to my sight loss. Even just to

walk down the road to ensure I didn't end up tripping on a pavement edge or face-planting a tree (which happened ... A LOT). Though I knew it made me safer, I hated the stick and many times I accidentally forgot it in taxis, pubs, cafes etc. I also knew I was a fast walker, but I still refused to use it properly and I'd normally end up still finding every lamppost or tree between A and Z. There had to be a better way ... ... WELL! I found it! Her name is Daisy and she is my first Guide Dog.

From a young age I'd thought about it, but I always questioned - "is it a DOG what I want, or a GUIDE dog?" This is something really important to take into account. Is it the companionship and love of a furry friend, or is it the case that you're happy to toilet them, groom them, get up extra early, potentially sacrifice something because it's more important that the dog is happy and comfortable? Once you have decided, that's when you know you're ready (though don't get me wrong! A furry friend is definitely a bonus at the end of the day too).

I personally had a lot of barriers and challenges to my process; it wasn't straightforward. I began the process in 2014 and I finally had Daisy in 2019, but this length of wait isn't always the case. So what's the process? Here's how it would go if everything goes smoothly:

1. Meet with a representative of Guide Dogs in your local area and chat about your decision so they can also check you've thought it through thoroughly.
2. Complete all necessary assessments and forms (this is ongoing throughout the process).
3. Get put on the list.
4. At a future date, get that all-important call to say a dog is a potential match to your needs and lifestyle.
5. The next step is very important: meeting the dog. You need to make sure that, first off, it's a logical decision not an emotional one. Does the dog walk at the right speed? Will it fit in with your lifestyle? Will it fit in with friends/family (if you live with others)? Hopefully all the boxes will be ticked.
6. Finally, the best part! You have a minimum of 5 weeks to train with your dog; to learn the rules, procedures, commands etc. Best of all, you can be as emotional about him/her as you want - fuss them, play with them, get to know them; the bond between you and the dog is a special one. They say it takes at least a year to create a strong bond with your dog, so the earlier you start to love each other the better.

Once you've qualified, life begins anew.

My advice from my experience so far? Try everything and don't be afraid to ask for help. If you want to take them to a beach but you don't know if the dog will be too excited, ask your instructor. Or, if you're brave enough, take the dog along with you and friends or family, so you have that bit of extra support in case any issues do occur. But never worry, just because you might not be able to do something, or take them somewhere today, doesn't mean you can't do it in the future. It looked like I might not be able to take Daisy to Goalball events which was a massive thing for me – BUT I took her along to a club session along with a friend and her guide dog, and together we ensured Daisy was happy and comfortable and we had absolutely no problems. And if we had, well it just would've given us a target to work towards. Guide dogs are amazing creatures; love them, respect them and they'll do the same back. Your dog, your life, your way.

# **Sex and Sexual Health – Making it accessible**

At the end of February we held a Storm Event with our Cardiff group in the Public Health Wales building.

The event's theme was Sex and Sexual Health and we had a couple of things happening during the event. To start, Mared and Megan ran a quiz to see how much people really knew and then showed an informative video called 'Consent, it's as simple as tea', offering a cup of tea as a metaphor for asking someone for sex. For example, if someone said 'yes' to tea last Saturday, it doesn't mean they want tea all the time. Whether it's tea or sex, consent is everything.

This was followed by three people from Cardiff YMCA who talked through all the different safe sex and contraceptive options, allowing everyone a chance to see them all close up. They also gave everyone the challenge of putting a condom on a model properly. We also had two members of staff from the STI and Sexual Health clinic in Cardiff talking through the process when you visit the clinic. A really valuable discussion started around accessibility in the clinic. We spoke about things like making the signage more accessible, how could we

tackle the issue if people can't see the signs, and the possibility of making the forms large print or digital.

Lastly, we were joined by Arielle and her colleague from Promo Cymru who wanted to work with the group to collect feedback on the material that they use to promote their Meic service. Meic is the helpline service for children and young people up to the age of 25 in Wales. Promo Cymru's Meic can be accessed via 080880 23456.

## **Transition and Transport**

Our most recent Storm event was held the last week of May in Cardiff. It was focused on Transport and Transitions. We held the event in the WCB office meeting room and had guests from Cardiff Bus, Transport for Wales and Guide Dogs. They all came to talk about the different accessibility services that are available to their customers. Carys from Cardiff Bus spoke about their talking buses, the use of the Cardiff Bus app and concessionary passes. Geraint from TFW shared the plans for the future development of the trains and stations, the use of the orange wallet and what accessibility options are currently available to passengers at the moment. These include discounted rail fares, assistance while travelling and information that is available online.

Nathan Foy from Guide Dogs Cymru also joined us for the meeting and was able to give information on what work is being done to campaign and raise awareness of issues around accessibility. He also asked for feedback of peoples experiences good or bad whilst using public transport, be that buses or trains. This information will then be fed back to the accessibility panel.

Unfortunately, because the session ran longer than we'd expected as a lot of discussion arose from the information that was being provided, we only had time to have a brief conversations around transition and people's experiences and stories of this. We will follow up with people who had stories they wanted to share in the future to collect a series of their experiences.

We hope to run similar events in other areas of Wales. If you have any experiences or stories around transport or transition you would like to share please get in touch with us at StormWCB.

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