## Summary

Having a personal interest in areas of disadvantage in society and in gaining a developed empathy for people in this situation led me to study the impacts Guide Dogs have on those with vision impairments, specifically; ‘how does owning a guide dog impact people with vision impairment in Australia socially, psychologically, and practically?’

The key findings were presented in written essay form. Through primary and secondary research processes, I found that the impacts of owning a Guide Dog are mostly positive. However, the lack of education and understanding of the general public around this topic can cause negatives to occur. My research examines these issues and provides an explanation of the benefits and drawbacks of owning a Guide Dog, with evidence and personal accounts. The information in my outcome may also serve a purpose in providing information for those considering applying for a Guide Dog.

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E1 Evaluation of the research processes used, specific to the research question  
Each of the research processes used in my outcome provided quality information, with limited bias and good credentials. Primary sources, in the form of interviews, undeniably provided the most useful and relevant information out of all the research processes. The biggest problem found in the research processes was the time required to go through books and find relevant information within all the unrelated material.

**Internet**Internet sources made up a large part of my research process as they were the easiest to access and provided a broad knowledge on Guide Dogs and people with vision impairments. The unregulated nature of information available via the internet, however, made it necessary to compare sources to find consistent, and therefore dependable information, through cross referencing and a systematic review. This aided to eliminate bias and improve the trustworthiness of the information that was compiled to use in the outcome. Due to the personal nature of the question, it was initially hard to obtain specific information relevant to my question. After looking at “Guide Dogs Australia” websites,[[1]](#footnote-1)-[[2]](#footnote-2) personal accounts were found[[3]](#footnote-3)-[[4]](#footnote-4)-[[5]](#footnote-5) and could be used as valid leads to gain more knowledge. Personal accounts tended to agree with each other on the various impacts of owning a Guide Dog, which gave credibility to the information. These accounts, although helpful, were generally brief in nature and only provided snippets of information regarding social, psychological and practical impacts. The internet also aided me in discovering and contacting two of my primary sources, through the Guide Dogs SA/NT Facebook site.

**Theses**Research was strengthened and broadened by being given access to the Flinders University Library. The theses discovered using the Library provided highly relevant, good quality information early on in the research process. Chris Muldoon, the Guide Dog Service Manager for the Royal Society of the Blind, had written a thesis (2000)[[6]](#footnote-6) specifically to do with the social aspects of life that are impacted by Guide Dogs. Dr. Geraldine Lane, a lecturer at Flinders University, gave further understanding to the various parts of life that are improved by a Guide Dog in her thesis (2014).[[7]](#footnote-7) The theses aided in answering many aspects of the question effectively due to reputable credentials and pertinent information. Corroborating information with the brief points I had made from Internet research was very helpful in expanding my outcome. This was more comprehensive and specific information than had been available via the Internet research process.

**Books**The books found using the Flinders University Library, and annotated in the research process contained valid information that was extremely relevant. Providing the most relevant information to my topic was “Lead with a Watchful Eye” by V.M. Branson and W.B.C. Rutt (1982).[[8]](#footnote-8) This was highly reliable information, being published by the Royal Guide Dogs for the Blind Association of Australia. Information contained within was relevant to social and psychological aspects of life, and specifically on gaining confidence and independence with a Guide Dog. Comprehensive evidence of this nature helped to broaden the answers for each section of my question. A disadvantage discovered in the annotation process of books, however, was that only a few of the many pages were relevant to my topic. Consequently, this research process produced a disparity between effort and data gained.

**Interviews**A very successful research process was the interviewing of primary sources. Interviews supplied me with key information and evidence, through first-hand, personal insights of Guide Dog owners. This was the best type of data for answering my question. The interview questions were designed to gain information to fill any holes in the secondary sources, however it transpired that the primary sources became the most useful reference for addressing my question, providing personal experiences on the impacts of owning a Guide Dog. Additionally, there was not much room for bias given my topic involved experiences rather than viewpoints.

The interview process provided advantages over other processes. In particular, the face-to-face interview with Peter Green,[[9]](#footnote-9) a Guide Dog owner for two and a half years, supplied the most specific information, for instance the independence and confidence gained with his Guide Dog. Additional questions that came up during his interview could be asked, for example whether night time outings were enjoyed now, gaining further understanding, whereas this was a limitation of the online interviews. A strength of the interview process discovered when writing the outcome was the information provided by the online interview with Laura Richards.[[10]](#footnote-10) This gave insights of life before a Guide Dog that I had not anticipated needing, which was a useful comparison when assessing the impacts on current owners. Charlotte Germaine’s online interview[[11]](#footnote-11) also proved particularly useful in that she didn’t only focus on the positives of owning a Guide Dog, enabling a fuller picture to be portrayed in my findings. In compiling my outcome, I found that quotes from the interviews strengthened the information gained in the secondary sources.

### E2 Evaluation of decisions made in response to challenges and/or opportunities specific to the research processes used Obtaining primary sources was a major challenge I faced during the research process. I initially contacted the Guide Dogs SA/NT centre[[12]](#footnote-12) to ask if they could provide details of some people that would be willing to be involved in an interview, but they were unable to do this due to confidentiality reasons. Obtaining first-hand information was very important so I needed to make contact somehow. I observed that the Guide Dogs SA/NT Facebook page[[13]](#footnote-13) was very active. This made me think that if people were willing to engage on a public forum, they may be willing to participate in a questionnaire. Therefore, I decided to attempt to make contact through Facebook. The eventual outcome of this decision gave me the most valuable and authentic information to address my question. Two online questionnaires were completed and a face-to-face interview with Peter Green ensued which was lengthy and detailed. This helped me to zone in on social, psychological and practical details rather than considering the question as a broad ‘how’ question. The information gained was reliable and relevant as it came directly from those with, or awaiting a Guide Dog.

### Another challenge I faced in the research process was initially being unable to find reliable information on potential negatives of owning a Guide Dog. Internet sources were highly opinionated, and therefore very biased, and from people with no credentials. I decided to pose a question about negatives in my interviews which proved to be a valid solution. Both Peter and Charlotte outlined some insightful negatives to owning a Guide Dog, such as discrimination issues and unhelpful interaction with their dogs, which were important to add to my findings. Had I left this viewpoint out of my findings they would have been unbalanced and unrealistic.

### Having a very basic knowledge of this topic was a further challenge. This made it difficult for me to Discerning if a source contained reliable information was difficult, as I wasn’t sure what was factual. Hence, I decided to cross reference all my sources, including the interviews, and also conduct a systematic review. This was a valuable decision as it allowed me to discover the points that were consistent throughout, and therefore reliable. This helped cut down the information I had gained to only contain the most accurate information, providing a highly effective outcome.

E3 Evaluation of the quality of the research outcome  
My outcome was constructed by evaluating the reliability and relevance of my sources to answer my research question. My research question was answered thoroughly, providing the positive and negative impacts of owning a Guide Dog on the lives of vision impaired people in Australia. As my question was refined and split into various easily researchable sections (social, psychological and practical), I could find a variety of precise sources providing information that successfully answered my question. However, I feel each aspect of this question leads itself to being explored more fully in its own right as the subject matter is so intense.

A weakness of my outcome comes from the fact there is a great deal of information on Guide Dogs already, as can be seen in the variety and amount of the sources I discovered. The majority of these sources also come from highly credible and experienced authors, whereas my only education in this matter is this current research. However, there is a lack of detailed personal information readily available concerning the impacts of owning a Guide Dog. Therefore, my outcome could provid~~e~~ well-researched information for those considering applying for a Guide Dog. Personal insights of people in a similar position would make my outcome very relevant and interesting for these people, however they would need to look elsewhere for more technical and medical information.

My research was valuable to me as it allowed me to explore an area of disadvantage in society and gain a developed empathy for people in this situation. By talking to people with vision impairments, I was able to gain an understanding of their lives, and the incredible improvements that Guide Dogs provide.

WORD COUNT: 1499

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