

## **Visual Impairment - some facts**

Contrary to popular belief most blind and partially sighted people can see something. This may mean they can only distinguish light and dark or it may mean more than that. Nonetheless fewer than 10% of those registered as legally blind see nothing at all. This usually comes as a surprise to sighted people. If you have a cane or a dog then people tend to assume that you see nothing at all.

The RNIB tell us that there are over 2.1 million people with a severe visual impairment in the UK, and that for every one person on the register, there are a further two who simply go unregistered. These are only the people with a registerable visual impairment. Who knows how many people there are with poor vision that is not quite so severe?

The BBC tell us that one in three people currently driving would fail a driving test on grounds of poor vision. Statistics such as these suggest that at least a quarter of your customers would be helped significantly by the adoption of these guidelines - or at least some of them. What business can afford to ignore a quarter of its customer base?

A minority of visually impaired people can distinguish light but nothing else. Others have no central vision, while others have no peripheral vision (like me). Some people see everything as a vague blur. I've got friends like that, they're not visually impaired they just drink a lot. Others see a patchwork of blanks and defined spaces.

There are many different eye conditions that can lead to more serious problems, too many to list here. Some people are born blind or with reduced vision, others suffer sight loss through accident or simply the

ageing process. The effects vary widely depending on the condition, its progress and how the person is coping at that point in time. Therefore it is of vital importance that we speak to the individual about the effects of their impairment and how they cope, so that their individual needs can be met.

Trying to anticipate the problems of a visually impaired person without first discussing it with them can cause hurt and offence where none may have been meant. If in doubt, ask! Like our dogs, we don't bite. For example, please don't lead us across the road without first asking if we want to go there and that we need your help to do so. You may not think so but this kind of thing happens all the time.

When you meet a visually impaired person there is no need to feel ill at ease. Awestruck is fine, but not ill at ease. Remember that visual impairment is not an infectious disease, you cannot catch it and therefore there is no need to hold visually impaired people at arms length.

## **Models of Visual Impairment**

We'd like to take a little time to talk about models of visual impairment.

We think it is important that we all understand how visually impaired people experience their disability, as this experience is what influences both the behaviour of visually impaired people and in turn our behaviour towards visually impaired people and how it impacts on them. These models will also help when it comes to implementing these guidelines.

There are two main models of visual impairment, the medical and the social.

### **The Medical Model**

In the medical model, visually impaired people are defined by their visual impairment.

Medical diagnosis is used to control access to benefits such as housing, education, leisure and finance etc and yes, even to literature. This has the effect of disempowering the visually impaired person, leading eventually to lives of poverty, isolation and loneliness.

This model sees the visually impaired person as dependent and needing to be either cured, or cared for - thus it sees the visually impaired person as burdensome, as problematic and a drain on resources.

It seeks to justify the way visually impaired people have been systematically excluded from society.

It sees the visually impaired person as a problem for society to deal with.

Control resides firmly in the hands of the professionals, choices for the individual with the visual impairment are limited to the options provided and approved by these so called experts.

Far too often, services for visually impaired people are being run by sighted people who determine the agenda.

The medical model insists that the visually impaired person must adapt to society and the way it is organised and constructed.

The medical model is vigorously rejected by visually impaired people and the bodies that represent them; yet, it still pervades many attitudes towards visually impaired people, even today, in the UK, in the 21st century.

### **The Social Model**

The social model has been developed by visually impaired people themselves as a response to the medical model and the impact it has had on their lives.

Under this model, visually impaired people are disabled by society and the way that it operates.

It's no longer the fault of the visually impaired person, nor is it a consequence of their limitations.

No - visually impaired people are being disabled by the physical, organisational and attitudinal barriers, present within our society.

Barriers which lead to visually impaired people being discriminated against - barriers like badly designed, inaccessible literature.

This discrimination will only end when society changes its way of thinking and approach towards people with a visual impairment.

The social model enables us to take account of visually impaired people as a full part of our economic, environmental and cultural society.

The barriers that prevent a visually impaired person playing a full part in society are the problem, not the visually impaired person themselves.

Barriers still exist even in the 21st century, the so-called "Age of Equality". Barriers of education, information, working environments, communications systems, technology, health and social support services, transport, housing, public buildings and amenities. The devaluing of visually impaired people in the media, films, television and newspapers also acts as a barrier. Read any newspaper article about a blind person and it is likely to contain the words "tragic victim". This is not how visually impaired people perceive themselves.

The social model aims to give visually impaired people the same opportunities as everyone else by the removal of these barriers. It believes that visually impaired people should have the right to determine their own lives.

In a world where all literature was produced in accordance with these guidelines, many more visually impaired people would be on equal terms with everyone else.

The social model is now being used to influence legislation such as DDA.

## Life as a Guide Dog Owner

For the sake of this exercise, let's say that the visually impaired person you are going to meet is me. You should be so lucky.

I'm an ordinary person, I just happen to be visually impaired.

Remember that this is an exercise and I don't want you thinking of me as ordinary outside the bounds of this exercise. For now at least, please treat me as you would anyone else.

I neither want nor need your pity. Beer, chocolate and money are fine but please no pity. Read any article about a guide dog owner and it will probably contain the words "tragic victim". Just remember this is not how we see ourselves and we are not looking for pity.

Please don't talk to me about the wonderful compensations of visual impairment. My senses of smell, touch and hearing and for that matter my sense of humour did not automatically improve as my sight worsened. It is true that I rely on them more than you and therefore I may obtain more information in this way than you do, but that is all.

If you are curious about visual impairment I will discuss it with you but you must remember that it's an old story to me and I have just as many other interests as you.

It's important that you speak to me in a normal tone of voice. You don't need to shout or address me as you would a child. It's only visual impairment; it's not a lack of intellect. It's important that you remember I may still have enough useful sight to deliver a blow accurately.

Talk directly to me, not through my friends or companions and especially not through my dog.

If you ever think that I may need some help, ask me. Let me be the one to decide - and please don't grab my dog's harness. To me, my dog's harness is a sensitive instrument in much the same way that your nose is to you. How would you like it if I grabbed you by the nose?

Let me take your left arm. I'll keep half a step behind you so as to anticipate kerbs and steps etc.

If you should ever have me as a house guest, then please show me the bathroom, the cupboards, the windows and the light switches too, it's important that I feel orientated just as you do. For my part, I'll try to behave as well as I can so you don't feel the need to show me the door.

Don't be afraid to use everyday expressions such as "look" or "did you see that programme on TV". I know that such phrases are accepted as part of our language and I am not some delicate little creature who needs to be kept in some politically correct crèche.

Always leave doors all the way open or all the way closed, a half open door is a hazard to me. You will often see me sporting various cuts and bruises as a result of walking in to a half open door.

If you ever have to leave me in an unfamiliar area, make sure it's near something I can touch such as a wall or a table. Being left out in an open space can be both uncomfortable and disorientating for me.



If I should ever ask you for directions, please give useful instructions such as across the street and left at the next junction. These are a lot more helpful than vague descriptions like 'over there'. Pointing is of no earthly use to a blind person - yet you'd be surprised how many people still do it.

If we are in a pub or a restaurant then clear directions to available seats would be much appreciated. While I find my way there, you will have time to get me a pint from the bar. Please avoid the temptation to draw other customers' attention to the dog (e.g. saying "look, isn't he cute" etc). This may cause as much embarrassment to the guide owner as saying 'look at the shiny wheels on the wheelchair' would cause to a wheelchair user.

Always be considerate, if you should notice a spot or a stain on my clothing; please tell me privately as you would wish to be told.

Never refer to a visually impaired person as a "VIP". This is a particularly patronising term and will almost certainly cause offence and you may not like the response you get. My usual response to the term VIP is "FU2"!

Never ever distract a guide dog when he's working. You wouldn't believe the number of people who try to talk to Jarvis as we're crossing the road.

Many members of the public think that you should never talk to a guide dog under any circumstances. This is not a view to which the Guide Dogs for the Blind association subscribe. Their advice is that you exercise some judgment. Wait until the guide dog owner is in a place of safety before asking them if you may fuss their dog.

Approach the owner first, not the dog. Remember there may be a vital reason why the owner does not want you fussing their dog at that particular time. It may be that their dog is somewhat distracted at the time and fussing may cause the dog to become over excited. It may be something much more mundane. Maybe the owner is simply running late and you may not have been the first one to ask to fuss the dog on this journey, after all these are very popular dogs.

A simple trip to the local shop which may take a sighted person ten minutes can take me twice as long simply because of the number of people who want to make a fuss of Jarvis.

Sometimes this is fine, and no-one enjoys it more than me. Then there are days when time is at a premium and I need to press on. There have been several occasions when people's feelings have been hurt because I didn't have time for them to fuss over Jarvis.

If you should see a guide dog owner standing still with the dogs harness laid flat on the dog's back, this may be a sign that they are in difficulties and you could offer to help. Guide dog owners often carry a little sign with the word "help" on it. If you ever see one of us holding such a sign, then please help.

## **The Outside Environment**

Motorists, never park your car on the pavement. You are breaking the law and, what is worse, you are placing visually impaired people in danger. Neither long cane users nor guide dog owners can negotiate their way through the narrow gap that is left behind, and you are forcing them to have to walk on the road. This is simply unacceptable behaviour and visually impaired people are campaigning vigorously against it. Why wait until the police start enforcing it more vigorously? You know it's the right thing to do, why not just do it? Many people who would never dream of drink driving or speeding in a built up area will, however, park on the pavement. Why? It's no less dangerous and the consequences are no less severe for anyone who may be affected by such a crime. DON'T DO IT!

Parking your car on the pavement is doubly hurtful. It's sending a message that says 'you blindies can't drive but I can, and what's more I'll park where I like'. Think of it this way - the road is your highway, your means of access - the pavement is ours.

Never leave obstacles such as wheelie bins, push chairs or bicycles in the middle of the pavement. Again these are hazardous. How many times have you had to negotiate your way around and over a bike or pushchair to gain access to a shop? Imagine how much more difficult it must be for a visually impaired person. I've often had to wait outside a shop and wait for someone to come out and move such an obstacle so that I could get in. You've no idea how frustrating this can be.

Street furniture such as waste bins and bollards or benches can also be hazardous. I would urge anyone placing such items to think carefully about their location.

There is a current trend for more and more cyclists to use the pavement. My best advice would be never cycle on the pavement. It's illegal, just like parking on the pavement, and it's equally inconsiderate to pedestrians, including the visually impaired. If you must be so inconsiderate, then at least have the good sense to dismount when approaching a visually impaired person. Many guide dogs have been startled by cyclists on the pavement. At best it can frighten a dog badly and at worst it can ruin its career. Rest assured that if this were to happen to Jarvis, myself and all of his fan club would hunt said cyclist down.

Town planners are slowly sneaking in a new practice of painting a white line down the centre of a pavement and thus designating one side for cyclists and one for pedestrians. Have you spotted the problem yet? Yes, you've guessed it; visually impaired people can't see the line - so we don't know which side we're supposed to be on. If it was so obvious to you, why couldn't the idiots at the town hall work it out?

Another practice that town planners seem enthusiastic about is the creation of what they call "shared streets". This practice originated in Holland and is being adopted more and more in the UK. Here in Newcastle, you can see it all around the area of Grey's Monument and parts of Grainger Street, Grey Street, Dean Street and the Quayside to name but a few. For those of you who haven't noticed what "shared streets" are, it means the removal of kerbs and road markings so that pedestrians and motorists share the same surface. The research that came from Holland showed that this had the effect of greatly reducing vehicle speeds, making it safer for some pedestrians. However, guide dogs are trained to follow the line of a kerb. If you remove the kerb,

the guide dog has nothing to follow. In “shared street” spaces, not only is there no line for the dog to follow, but the dog is being encouraged to mingle with traffic - which is entirely against all of its training. Some dogs have become so confused and stressed by this that they are no longer able to work. When you consider that a guide dog costs in excess of £50,000 to provide across its lifetime, this is an incredible financial waste - and who can put a price on the stress caused to the dog itself? Guide dog owners often have to wait over a year to find the right match between them and a new dog, and then can spend many months building up the strong bond that is needed to provide a successful partnership. To have to give up this partnership is very distressing, and can potentially lead to a visually impaired person becoming housebound until a new match is found.

If you have trees and bushes that overhang a pavement, please keep them trimmed back. Guide dog owners and long cane users cannot account for these or other obstacles - and at head height they may cause injury.

## **Rights not favours**

It is vital that you remember in all your dealings with guide dog owners and visually impaired people in general, that you are not doing them a favour by allowing them into your premises; it is simply their right, like any other customer, to patronise your business. The DDA gives the right to all assistance dogs to accompany their owner while visiting your premises. All guide dogs wear the official harness and a medal on their collar which is engraved with their identification number. Guide dog owners are issued with ID and are encouraged to carry this with them at all times.

When a guide dog owner qualifies with their dog, they sign a contract with the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. Part of that contract is an agreement to groom the dog every day. It is also part of that agreement that the dog receives a veterinary health check every six months. All dogs are wormed and have anti-flea treatments regularly. A key part of the dog's training relates to "spending" on command. Guide dogs will only spend away from their designated area at home under extreme circumstances, and in such cases will always let the owner know that they need to go outside to a suitable place. A guide dog owner will not be given a dog if they are not capable of dealing with the dog's need in such a situation, including cleaning up after it.

The Guide Dogs association monitors all of these requirements stringently - if a guide dog owner fails to honour these obligations then the dog will be removed. All this means that you can be very confident that a guide dog is clean, healthy, hygienic and poses far less of a health risk than most humans!

## Literature Design

We have already mentioned the legal obligations regarding Braille and large print - now let's talk about producing literature such as pew sheets etc that is well-designed and easy to read, making it accessible to the greatest number of people while still attractive to look at.

When designing your literature it is important to remember the conditions under which it is likely to be read. It is likely to be read in lower light conditions, often in shadow, and often under lighting of a particular colour. Something that looks great on your computer screen or in an office during daylight, can become much less user- friendly in real-life church conditions.

Things to consider:

- Contrast & colour
- Text and background
- Font sizes
- Font styles
- Appeal - what's cool
- Lamination / coating
- Clear Print

## **Disabled Facilities**

Many guide dog owners have been challenged when asking to use the disabled facilities - this may seem surprising to you, but it happens regularly. Guide dog owners need extra turning space. The guide dog and its owner are one unit, and move as one. Confined spaces make this impossible. Therefore, disabled facilities are the only accessible option open to guide dog owners.

All too often, disabled facilities are mis-used by staff. Guide dog owners regularly report having to negotiate their way past cleaning equipment or other items being stored in the disabled facility. This is not acceptable, and is in fact illegal. It simply must not happen.

Many churches insist on keeping the key to the disabled toilet held by a particular person. When was the last time you had to ask someone for permission to go to the toilet? It was probably when you were a child. If you don't have to endure the embarrassment of being treated like a child in this respect, then neither should any disabled person.

## **Signage**

We would recommend that you develop two distinct categories of signage - those that are related to health and safety, and those that are advertising. There should be clear differentiation between the two - e.g. signs to the toilets should not look similar to the specials board!



Information signs, e.g. directional, health & safety, etc, need to adhere strictly to the Clear Print guidelines (supplied with this pack). They should be very obvious and large enough to be read from a distance. Standard pictograms should be used, rather than bespoke, “arty” substitutes which are more difficult to spot and decipher.

Signage should always be well-lit and not placed in an area of shadow. Not only should you take account of good colour contrast on the sign itself, but you should also pay attention to the contrast between the sign and the background on which it is placed. E.g. a blue sign on a blue wall will not stand out well.

### **Outside Signage**

By and large, the same rules apply to signage outside your premises. However, there are some things which need special consideration. The placing of signage is important - is it likely to be obscured by street furniture, parked cars, trees, etc? Have you made sure it is not in an area of shadow? Is it made from weatherproof material which will retain legibility long term - e.g. will it fade in the sun? Is it on or behind a highly polished or reflective surface, which will reflect the glare of the sky and obscure the text? Is it well-lit? Are free- standing signs placed so as not to present an obstacle to movement? (particularly important to the visually impaired).

### **Temporary signage, posters etc**

If you have need to make a temporary sign, e.g. “wet floor” or similar, you still need to have an in- house style that retains accessibility. Often, you will see several signs that have been made, sometimes on a computer, in several different styles, in close proximity to one

another. This is very confusing for many visually-impaired people. Many of these signs are often either laminated or placed in plastic wallets - both of which cause glare from reflections and are much harder to read. It is possible to get matt laminates and wallets which do not reflect the light and so avoid this problem.

### **Preferences?**

Whenever you meet a guide dog owner, it is important to take your lead from them. It is good practice to offer some of the options below, however you must not assume that you know what the guide dog owner will want, nor must you make a decision for them or without asking. Most guide dog owners will be thrilled to have these things offered to them, and very encouraged by your level of awareness. On the other hand, most guide dog owners will be hurt or offended if you just assume they want these things.

Things you might offer a guide dog owner include:

- A seat near a window (for better light)
- A seat in another well-lit area
- Many churches have a very heavy door, or double doors, leading to the outside. A guide dog owner needs their left hand to work the dog's harness and may therefore find your lobby area difficult. It is always good for someone to hold the door(s) open for them.

- If a guide dog owner is accompanied by friends or family, it is not an acceptable option to offer to seat him/her away from that them.

### **The Layout of your premises**

When tables and chairs are laid too close together and clear access routes between them are not immediately visible, this can be very confusing for many types of visual impairment. Many visual impairments can only distinguish between objects when there is clear space between them. Putting too many objects too close together will mean that it is just a blur to many visually impaired people.

Aisles should be kept clear at all times.

It is important to achieve good contrast between the floor surface, the furniture, doors and walls. A common mistake is to change a floor surface in the middle of a room - e.g. from tiles to carpet. When visually impaired people are given mobility training, they are taught to discreetly rub their toes over the floor surface on entering a room, as they pass through the door. This gives them an indication of the kind of surface they are going to be walking on. They will not be expecting to have to do this again until they pass through another doorway. Therefore, a change of surface within the room is a significant trip/slip hazard for visually impaired people and would be better avoided.

## **Parking**

If you have a parking area, be aware that guide dog owners are often Blue Badge holders. The reason for this is that guide dog owners need extra space to get their dogs out of the car and into harness safely before setting off.

## **Conclusion**

Visually impaired people encounter problems such as we have described, on a daily basis. What we have tried to set out here is a set of guidelines representing best practice. However we don't want you to feel so intimidated that you are so afraid of getting it wrong you end up doing nothing. The important thing is that you treat a visually impaired person with the same respect you would wish to receive.

We're often told by sighted people that they have tried to engage with a visually impaired person and have had what can only be described as a negative response. We would urge you to remember that many visually impaired people suffer abuse from the public on a daily basis and it is the grind, grind, grind of this that can sometimes send a visually impaired person on to the offensive. I have sometimes caught myself doing just this.

It should also be remembered that many visually impaired people have not had great educational opportunities and may therefore not possess the best communication skills or a great deal of confidence. Please remember to exercise your patience and tolerance.

Remember, facing up to a visual impairment is a very difficult thing and whilst it may seem obvious to you, it may not be something that they themselves have come to terms with. This could be an area that

they are very sensitive about. I know because I've been there myself. If you were to catch me on a bad day, which, thank God are fewer nowadays, then you may not get a great response from me either.

## **The Visit**

We have collected a lot of anecdotal evidence from visually impaired people and used their experiences to dramatise two visits to church. All of the experiences contained in these two stories are real - they have happened to us or to people we know. They may not all have happened on the same occasion, but we've used a bit of artistic license to give a full picture of the good and the bad.

Although these stories are based around visits to traditional churches, the principles that they express are applicable to many settings, and we're sure you'll be able to translate them to your situation if your premises are different.

So, let us take you on two imaginary trips to church with Dave and Jarvis, his guide dog. The first is to a church where there has been no training and the people are not aware of the needs of visually impaired people. The second is to a church where the people are well-informed, aware and friendly to their visually impaired visitors.

## **The First Sunday**

Arriving in the church car park I find that the only designated disabled bay is taken by a car not displaying a blue badge. It is 7pm on a winter's night and there are no exterior lights on in the car park, it is very dark. Jarvis and I make our way across the car park, stumbling over several unseen obstacles en route.

Eventually we find the entrance. There is a lobby where the outer door opens inwards and the inner door opens outwards. As I'm trying to deal with this and getting tangled up in leads and harness, one of the parishioners thinks this would be a good time to introduce herself to Jarvis without even bothering to ask me if it's a good idea.

Finally I make it in to the Narthex and am greeted by a member of the welcome team who, whilst introducing herself to me, has already begun to stroke Jarvis - again without asking me. I've not been here two minutes and my mood is beginning to boil already. I explain to the lady that there are no lights on in the car park and that the only disabled bay in the car park is occupied. "Oh" she says, "we can't afford to run the outside lighting - and the vicar always parks his car there".

"I would like to welcome you to our church" she says. "Would you really" is what I'm thinking. She hands me an order of service and a hymn book - both in 10 point Times New Roman. I explain that I won't be able to read them so she quickly grabs them back off me without warning. I ask if she has any accessible copies in Braille or large print but she says they don't and excuses herself by saying they have never been asked for them before. I try another tack and ask do they have a screen and projector and will the service be displayed on that - only to be told that there is one, but the vicar doesn't know how to use powerpoint so they don't bother with it.

The service is due to start soon and I want to find a suitable seat for Jarvis and I so I try and make my way through the Narthex which is crowded with people arriving, chatting, getting hymn books and visiting the fairtrade stall, as well as a group of young children playing

a chase game. As I move out of the Narthex area and in to the centre aisle I crash in to a collection box on a stand in the aisle, only to be tutted at by an angry parishioner.

As I move through the chancel I noticed that in an effort again to save money, many of the lights have been turned off. Without Jarvis to guide me I would never have made it down this aisle.

I made my way to the front pew where I am best able to use the little sight I have and where there is extra floor space for Jarvis, only to be told that these seats were reserved for dignitaries. "There is space over there behind that pillar and your dog won't be in anyone's way" was what I was told. So I'm now sitting in a place of shadow, behind a pillar, without reading material and no view of the altar, imagine how welcome I'm feeling now.

A bell rings and the celebrants begin to process into church. The woman behind me nudges me in the back and in a very loud whisper orders me to stand. I explain that if I stand now, that would signal to Jarvis that we are about to move off - and as we are not, we'll remain seated. She tuts at me.

As the service begins, I notice Jarvis's lead begin to tighten. The gentleman next to me has slipped him a boiled sweet. When I explain that this is not acceptable, he scowls at me.

We make our way through the service without much further incident, but with me unable to join in the responses because of a lack of an accessible order of service.

Finally we make it to communion and as I'm making my way to the altar rail, people in the queue are constantly trying to fuss Jarvis as he

is guiding me. Everyone is kneeling at the altar rail, but I remain standing - if I kneel down beside Jarvis, he will think it's play time and get excited. Again the person next to me says "kneel!" in a loud and angry whisper.

The priest reluctantly gives me the host in my one outstretched hand - the other hand still hanging on to Jarvis - and is followed by a lady with the chalice who refuses to let go of it, making it very difficult for me. In my own church the priest always gives Jarvis a blessing at this point - recognising him as a real part of the team. No blessing for Jarvis was forthcoming today, however.

### **The Second Sunday**

On arrival at the car park we immediately notice a well-lit sign giving clear directions to the disabled parking spaces. There are plenty of disabled bays, some of which are already occupied by cars displaying blue badges, but there are still spaces available. We park the car, and I'm relieved to notice that there's plenty of space for me to get Jarvis out of the back and put on his harness, without us having to stand in the roadway.

Once again, there is a clear well-lit sign guiding us to the main door of the church. There is an A-board, but as it's placed on the verge at the side of the path in a well-lit area, it's not causing any obstacle to anyone.

We are greeted outside the entrance by a member of the welcome team, who has noticed our approach and opened the door for us. The narthex is well-lit and free from obstacles and we receive a warm welcome. Already, this is becoming a much more pleasurable



experience. Since the welcome has been so hospitable and friendly, I introduce him to Jarvis and ask if he'd like to give him a stroke.

Once he's said 'hi' to Jarvis, he offers me a hymn book and an order of service, which are both in Clear Print. I notice, on the same shelf, there are also Braille and Large Print copies. The gentleman also explains that everything in the books will be displayed, in Clear Print, on a projection screen at the front of the nave. He tells me that there is reserved seating at the front, in the centre, for visually impaired people, and offers to guide me there if I should need it. As the Narthex is well laid out, well-lit and clear of obstacles, I tell him that Jarvis and I will be fine. I am pleased to find that the Nave Aisle is similarly free from obstacles and well lit, and we find our seats without problem. There is plenty of room for Jarvis, and he lies down and makes himself comfortable.

As the service begins, I am sitting in a good seat, from which I can see the screen clearly. I am comfortable and relaxed, and feeling very welcome. Jarvis is getting plenty of admiring looks, but nobody has attempted to fuss him or in any way distract him. It's great to be able to read the screen easily, and join in with the responses.

On the way up to Communion, Jarvis is again receiving lots of admiring glances, but nobody bothers him and he is free to guide me without distraction. We are both thrilled when the celebrant leans over the altar rail and gives Jarvis his blessing.

At the end of the service, the priest gives an invitation to everyone to stay for coffee in the Narthex. One of the welcomers comes over to me and offers to walk me to get a coffee and show me to a table. Jarvis makes himself at home under the table, where there is plenty of

room for him, and I am joined by a few other worshippers for a chat over our coffee. I'm even pleased to discover that it's good quality coffee and not the 'cheap and nasty' stuff I've had in so many places!

Following coffee, nature takes its course and I find I need the loo. As there are clear and easily readable signs, I don't have to ask for help, I can just go without any fuss or attention. The accessible toilet is free from clutter, and there is plenty of room for Jarvis to turn and wait for me.

It's time to go home, and I leave the church feeling that I have been among new friends, have been able to focus on worshipping God, and will definitely be back here again.

What a difference from last week!