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# Older Adults' Experience in Owning a Guide Dog

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# To Explore the Facilitators and Barriers of First Time Guide Dog Owners



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## Background

Low vision is an age-related condition in which vision cannot be improved by surgery, glasses, or contact lenses (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). The growing population of older adults with low vision may encounter mobility and safety issues as well as feelings of isolation and/or depression (Cimarolli, Boerner, Brennan-Ing, Reinhardt, & Horowitz, 2012).

Guide dogs have been shown to be an effective assistive device for low vision and bring psychological benefits (Hersh, 2013; Whitmarsh, 2005; Wiggett-Barnard & Steel, 2008).

A gap exists in the literature regarding impacts on first time guide dog owners among older adults with low vision.

Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) is a non-profit organization that prepares highly-qualified guide dogs to enhance confidence, mobility, and independence for individuals who are blind or have low vision in North America.

## Statement of Purpose

To explore the facilitators and barriers of older adults with low vision who are first time guide dog users.



## References

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## Research Design & Methods

### Participants:

- 7 adults with acquired low vision as primary diagnosis
- Average age is 65 (SD = 3.9)
- First time guide dog owners who have own a guide dog between 3 months to 1 year at time of study with an average month of 6.3 (SD = 2.7)

### Data collection:

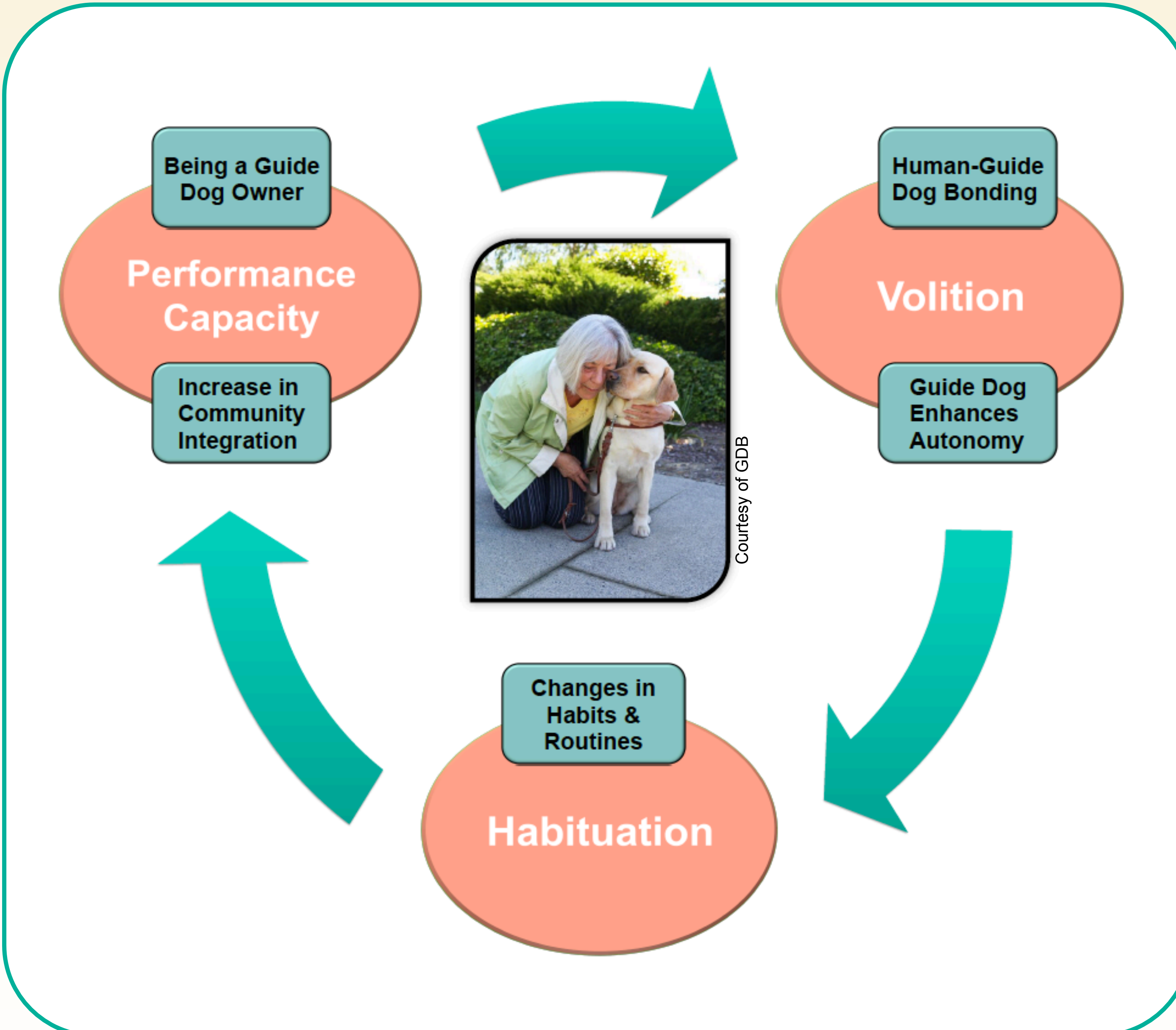
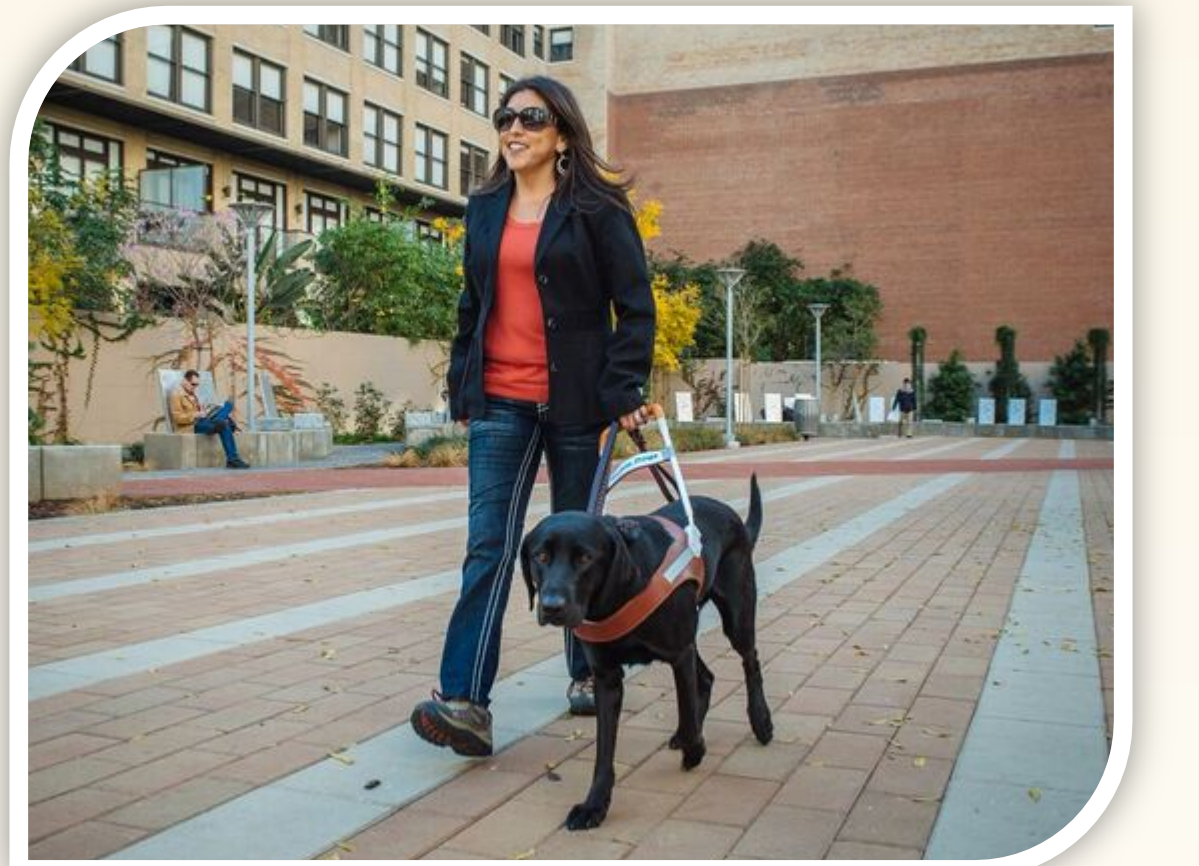
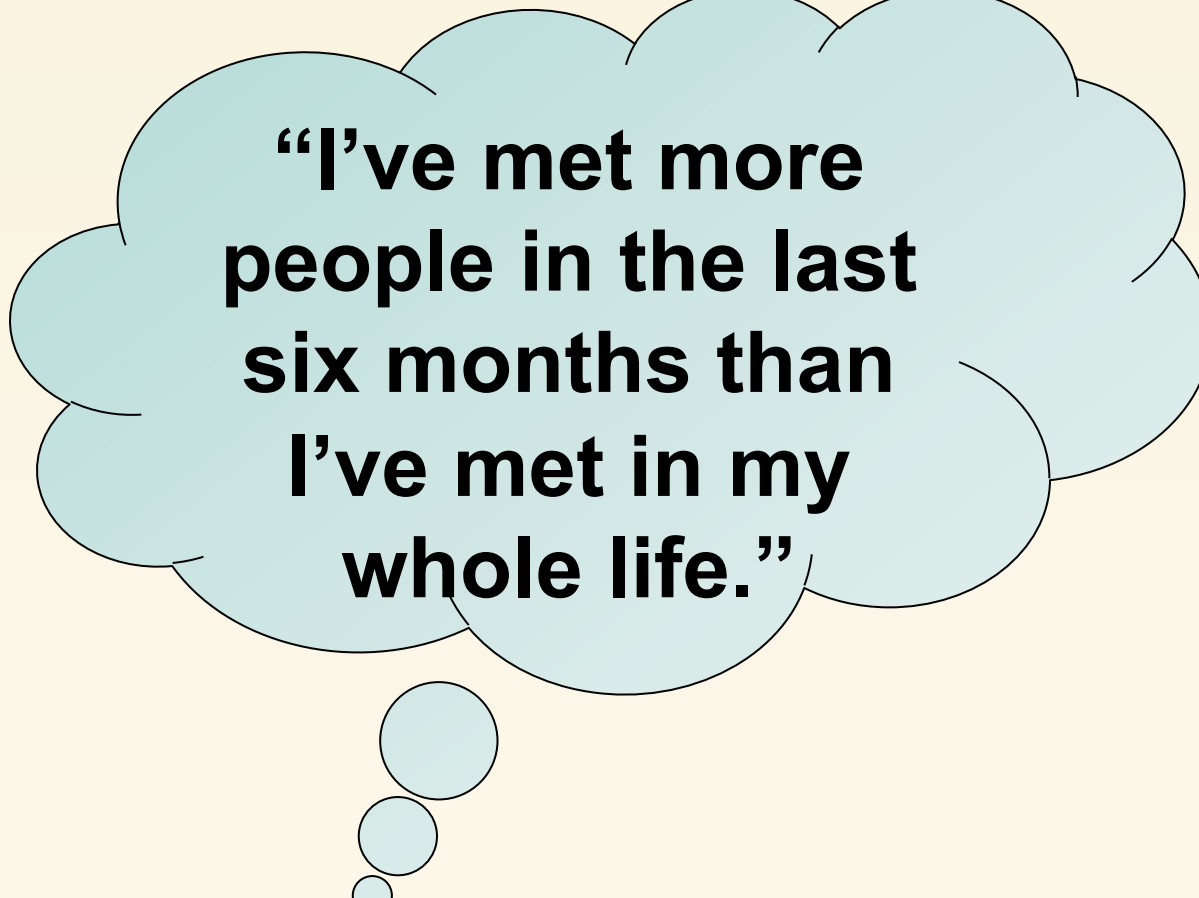
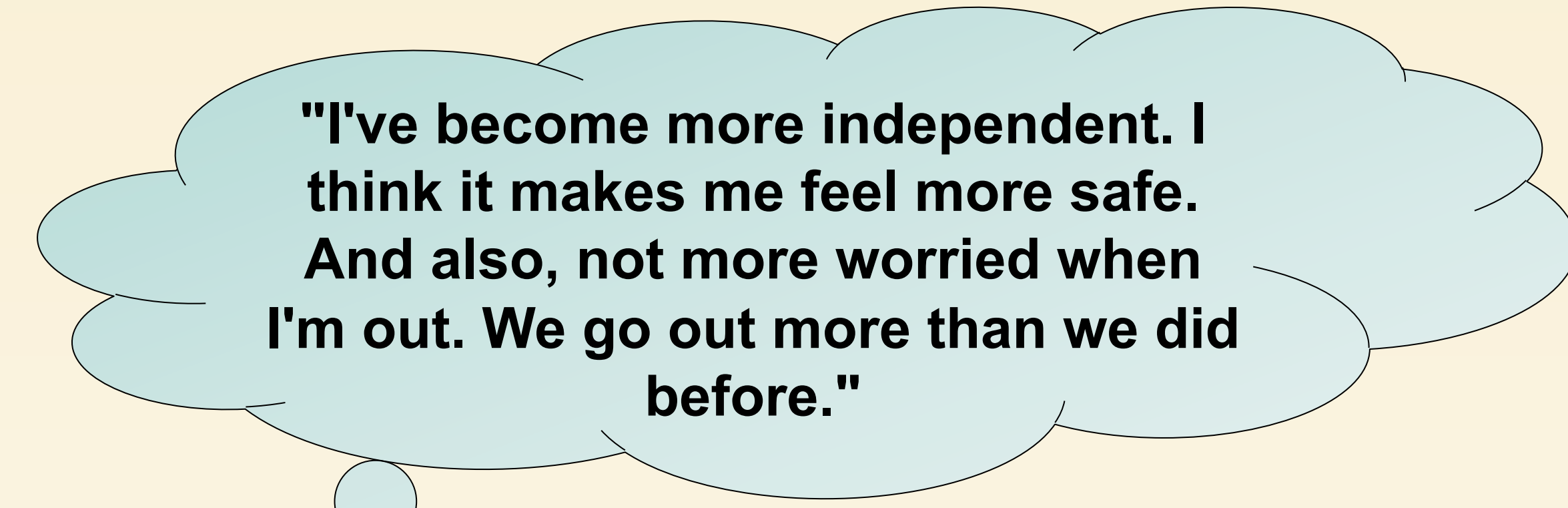
- Semi-structured phone interviews guided by the Model of Human Occupation
- Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim

### Analysis:

- Interviews were coded using triangulation and analyzed with a constant comparison method until 100% consensus was reached
- 5 themes emerged: Being a guide dog owner, increase in community integration, human-guide dog bonding, guide dog enhances autonomy, and changes in habits and routines

## Implications for Occupational Therapy

- Provide proper training when using a guide dog as an assistive device
- Promote understanding and awareness to changes in habits, roles, and routines within guide dog owner's environment and social context
- Prepare potential guide dog owners by improving their strength and activity tolerance to meet the GDB's requirements
- Enable older adults with low vision to participate within their communities



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