

Helpful Kaylah guides Martin's life



Martin Z'Graggen and his guide dog Kaylah.

Picture: CARLY EARL - PPH43639

ROBERT KENNARD

WITH a long leash and a little love, man's best friend is now also his best guide.

Eastwood father Martin Z'Graggen is working for today's 2011 International Guide Dog Day, raising awareness that regular check-ups are essential for maintaining good eyesight.

As one of 300 guide dog users in NSW, Mr Z'Graggen said his dog, Kaylah, had been a priceless addition to his life.

"She is so affectionate and loyal – even more than humans I'm afraid to say!"

An international chef who travelled the world with his family, Mr Z'Graggen's life changed when he was diagnosed with glaucoma six years ago.

The irreversible condition gradually destroyed his peripheral eyesight.

"When it happened it was devastating as I lost not only my sight but my career," he said.

"Looking back though, I'm now able to spend more time with my wife and children, so it's not all bad."

About 200,000 people in NSW and the ACT aged over 40 experience vision loss, with more than 40 per cent having a non-correctable condition.

Guide Dogs NSW / ACT chief executive Dr Graeme White said people often left it too late to ask for help. "Last year, we helped 3500 people with impaired vision

DID YOU KNOW?

- Guide dogs take two years to train
- They cost about \$30,000 from breeder to trainer
- They are free for vision-impaired and blind people
- Don't pet a guide dog when it is in harness and on the leash
- Guide Dogs NSW/ACT also provides free training and services for guide canes and electronic travel devices
- For more information, visit guidedogs.com.au or call 9412 9300

across NSW and the ACT, however there is still a large number of people who are not seeking our help," Dr White said.

"We're encouraging people to seek our assistance early, to help reduce the risks of accidents, falls and depression and improve their quality of life."

Mr Z'Graggen's daughter, Ysabella, agreed, saying Kaylah had not only improved her dad's life, but also hers.

"I was actually really scared of her at first as we never had a dog before. She is actually a really good, loving guide and pet – she even jumps into bed with me sometimes!" Ysabella said.