THE CREDIT CRUNCH
Bridget Warr discusses the global recession, our members’ and maximum efficiency

CANINE BEHAVIOUR DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
New initiative at Guide Dogs (UK) to support the Identity and validation of new practises

TRAINING YOUTHS WITH GUIDE DOGS
Proving that blind or visually impaired youths can not only benefit, but thrive as guide dog users
First and foremost, membership of the IGDF enables guide dog schools around the world to join a community dedicated to serving the visually impaired. That community needs and wants to share its knowledge and the IGDF facilitates that.

The map below outlines the contributing countries for this edition of Visionary.
The Credit Crunch

The credit crunch is probably the worst global crisis for sixty years. It threatens the poor more than the rich, the weak rather than the strong, and the voiceless rather than the vocal.

‘Moreover, we know what we’re about, and no one does it better than our members’

Bridget Warr
Chair of the IGDF, UK &
Chief Executive of The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

The Federation, as the group representing the leading guide dog providers in the world, knows that blind and partially-sighted people are always the first to lose out in any economic downturn. So we have a greater responsibility than ever before.

Put simply – failure is not an option.

Yet, of course, our organisations are also hit by the credit crunch. We can each expect lower contribution levels, yet a higher demand for our services around the world.

So the challenge is for all of us, not least the Federation, to work smarter - by improving efficiency in terms of fundraising, focus and cohesion. Effective financial management is crucial to our development plans. It goes hand in hand with the Federation raising more money to implement its strategy up until 2013. We must be accountable to any future donors we wish to attract and we need subscriptions to be paid on time; there is no financial slack in the system. And how important this strategy is in a world where guide dogs are now an accepted service provider in every country. A world in which individuals in Greece, Turkey and Mexico - to name but a few - are turning to the Federation to request help in getting mobility services for blind and disabled people up and running in their countries.

I am delighted that so many organisations that have established track records in guide dog training in various countries, have offered help in response to a letter I sent to all members - but more assistance is always needed. You can never share too many good ideas. And we know that all parties benefit from sharing their experience. I am always aware of the Federation’s enormous skills base which, although not yet fully tapped, is a real asset at a global level. However, not enough people know about the level of strength and expertise that exists within our industry. Yet the good news is that we, the Federation, are modern, dynamic and forward looking.

Our new strategy takes account of the feedback which you gave us at last year’s seminar and the final version will be circulated soon. Together, we have an ambitious, yet realistic and achievable, vision for the future. Meanwhile, detailed action plans are being drawn up within the board to implement the Federation’s main strategic themes, focussing on three essential areas: setting and monitoring standards; promoting quality; and working together.

There is an ever increasing need for Federation members to collaborate by sharing and exchanging information globally. I am delighted that our website, for instance, is being redesigned to make it more accessible to all users. I think it is a major step forward that we are making communication between members simpler, quicker and more meaningful and reaching wider audiences. We are also in the process of improving this magazine, the Visionary, in terms of both content and format, to make it an even more informative and enjoyable read - and with a view to possibly selling advertising space to boost our resources. The Federation needs to think carefully about how best to build on our current relationships and forge new ones to the advantage of all concerned and, most importantly, to the blind and partially-sighted people we are all here to benefit.

Also, we must encourage professional education and development, so that all those involved in running guide dog services can rely on the most up-to-date information about their field of work. And we must work together to educate the health insurance companies in certain countries to support and demand the best possible training standards – which are, of course, those of...
The Credit Crunch Continued

the Federation. Additionally, we have larger term ambitions. Clearly, the implementation of the strategy is going to need additional resources - including finances – but the credit crunch is not going to stop us! The Federation is beginning to look into attracting donations and support from global companies and foundations. I firmly believe that there are still global opportunities out there if we actively seek them. After all, we have a convincing argument for potential backers. Since 1989 the Federation has grown from a group of 10 guide dog schools to 87. Our experts - our members - span the globe in the provision of specialist advice on all aspects of guide dog breeding, training and ownership and the maintenance of the very highest professional standards.

The Federation has established and consolidated itself as an internationally respected organisation whose members, between them, are responsible for the training of thousands of guide dogs each year, helping blind and partially-sighted people move around as they choose, from youth into old age.

Moreover, we know what we’re about, and no one does it better than our members. So we have to drive ourselves – never to accept second best. Colleagues, it’s time to wake up the sleeping giant! As we all know, the key to the Federation’s success is to continue to help more people, in more places, more often, through more members. That’s our challenge. We have to deliver.

Budget Warr

South African Guide Dog Owners Ideal Workplace

Gail Macdougall
Guide Dog Services Manager

Every year top companies compete for the accolade of Best Employer. If there were a Best Employer Award specifically voted for by visually-impaired people, Standard Bank South Africa would be a very strong contender. What would make one company a more attractive employer than another?

Firstly Standard Bank has a long history of employing people with visual impairment. John Tyra was the first blind switchboard operator to be employed by Standard Bank. John began his employment on 1 March 1955 and went on to work for Standard Bank for 43 years. During all those years John was accompanied by a guide dog – five in all – Binny, Scotty, Bo, Luke and Ernie. John retired from the bank in 1998.

In 2006 Standard Bank began phasing out branch switchboards. A centralised call centre, that could answer all customer queries, was implemented. Standard Bank did not want to lose the loyal and experienced staff who were working in their branches and offered to retrain them to work in the call centre. Many visually-impaired people, including guide dog owners, were working at branches in and around the Johannesburg area. Staff who took advantage of this offer underwent a nine-week basic computer course at Optima Training College (this facility is linked to the National Council for the Blind and is registered to provide vocational training).

At the same time Standard Bank brought in a change management company to prepare the existing staff in the Shared Services Department where the guide dog owners would be working. Emails were sent to all staff in the building to inform them that the guide dog owners (and long cane users) were about to start their in-service training at the bank. Existing staff were given some general information on how they could assist a visually-impaired person if necessary and the importance of not distracting a guide dog while it is working. The bank provided free transport to work during the six months in-service training period to assist the visually-impaired staff to adjust to their new environment.

Standard Bank’s management team has recognised just how much potential the visually-impaired staff have. They are currently trying to reach the point where all files are compatible with voice software so that the visually-impaired staff can have access to the same information as sighted staff in the same role. Software is constantly being reviewed and upgraded so that this goal can be reached as soon as possible.

Management is also trying to make the day to day functioning of their visually-impaired staff easier and less stressful. They have bought a scanner, Braille printer and portable magnifiers, amongst other equipment, to assist their staff. Management has also participated in a blindfold experience so that they have a clearer understanding of the challenges that are facing their staff. The South African Guide Dog Association supplied guide dogs and Guide Dog Mobility Instructors to accompany each manager on a route through the building. The management’s willingness to participate in this activity certainly highlights their commitment to their staff.

Facilities in the work environment go a long way to making employees more comfortable. Standard Bank has excelled in this area. Human and canine facilities are top notch. The linked buildings cover 13,000 square metres and the facilities for the 14,000 staff include a gym, canteen, numerous coffee shops, doctors’ rooms, a pharmacy, board rooms, an auditorium, an art gallery, relaxation lounges, an open air park and staff banking facilities. Dogs have access to drinking water (in the office and leash relief areas), comfortable beds to lie on at their owner’s desk and access to the open air with a fully fenced park for leash relief use. You don’t have to be a dog trainer to realise that these dogs are content and comfortable in their working environment. There are currently nine guide dogs in the department and a further potential guide dog owner on the waiting list.

Proof of Standard Bank’s success as an employer of choice is evident by the number of visually-impaired people who are phoning to seek employment at the bank. Standard Bank’s success in this area is about more than the facilities available, it is about a determination to assist every visually-impaired person in the department to reach their full potential.
Revolutionizing Dog Guide Training with Technology

“One of the overriding themes we hear from our students is the anxiety and apprehension of travel in a new environment.”

Rachelle Kniffen
Marketing Specialist

For many, the first time using a dog guide combined with travel in a new city creates a situation that makes learning difficult and stressful. We believe we can really enhance the way we provide services by placing a GPS (global positioning system) device in every student’s hand while in our training program,” says Greg Grabowski, president and chief executive officer of Leader Dogs for the Blind. “By including a talking navigational device in training, we are revolutionizing the art of dog guide training.”

The “we” Grabowski is referring to is Leader Dogs for the Blind and HumanWare, makers of the GPS Trekker Breeze, an audible device that gives step-by-step directions for a programmed route and notifies the user of upcoming streets and landmarks. Together they are launching a completely unprecedented, state-of-the-art approach to dog guide training that fully integrates a talking GPS navigational tool into dog guide classes for people who are blind. “We are pleased to partner with Leader Dogs in this initiative that will bring GPS technology benefits to an even wider portion of the visually-impaired population,” says Gilles Pepin, chief executive officer of HumanWare. “This programme is a new chapter in this success story.”

In August 2008, Craig Hall returned to Leader Dogs to train with his third Leader Dog “Theo”. He agreed to test the dog guide/GPS training concept. “I found that I was much less worried about getting lost and could pay more attention to what I was learning. The last time I came to the school I spent a lot of time trying to memorise roads and really focusing on how I would get to places. Using the Breeze in class made me a lot more relaxed and I really enjoyed the experience,” reports Hall.

The first entire class to be trained in the use of the device during dog guide training at Leader Dogs arrived in November 2008. After the students completed the 24-day programme, 14 of the American students returned home with the Trekker Breeze (several students in the class were from Guatemala and Mexico). These students have been selected to participate in an ongoing study to determine the long-term usability and to assess the functionality of the GPS device in their home environment.

“We are sure our newest initiative will dramatically enhance the ease and pleasure of travel for people who are blind and visually impaired. Once we are able to secure funding, we plan to offer every student who comes to our school to receive a Leader Dog a free GPS unit to complete their mobility package,” says Grabowski.

For more information on this programme, visit the Leader Dogs for the Blind website at www.leaderdog.org/breeze or the HumanWare website at www.humanware.com.
Dr Josephine DeFini was an energetic college student when she was matched with her first Seeing Eye dog.

Bonnie Lannom
A member of the Half Century Club, which recognises people who have worked with Seeing Eye dogs for 50 years or more, DeFini has seen many changes in the five decades since she picked up the harness of German shepherd Halla.

A native New Yorker whose daily routine is the organized chaos of Manhattan, DeFini has experienced ever-increasing vehicular and pedestrian traffic, the creation of more complex intersections, and changes in societal attitudes toward service animals. In a city that never sleeps, scaffolding, construction tape, and the beep and whir of back hoes and cement mixers are as much a part of the streetscape as the tourists and hot dog vendors. As she continues to navigate this seemingly impossible environment, now with yellow Labrador/retriever cross Mulvey, the one constant through this unpredictable, urban ebb and flow is The Seeing Eye’s firm commitment to her and to her fellow graduates. That commitment means rising to the challenge of a changing environment while staying true to the principles that have made it one of the most respected guide dog schools in the world.

“I grew up in the Bronx,” says DeFini, who is director of the Mental Health Services Center of Lighthouse International in New York City. “I lost all my vision at 11, and I never used a cane to get around in high school.” She, like many others she met who were blind, felt that the public attached a stigma to the white cane. “I think it was my family that influenced me to apply for a dog. It was 1957, and I went to Adelphi University on Long Island. My first class with The Seeing Eye was my first real experience of being away from home. The school treated me as a responsible young adult. The trainers were and continue to be serious, but we have a lot of fun.”

DeFini has had eight dogs and has seen The Seeing Eye’s campus move from a house in Whippany, New Jersey, to its current location; experienced expansion of class sizes; and witnessed the school’s evolution from the formalities common in its earlier days to a friendlier, casual environment today. Throughout it all, she says, “the training has remained constant.”

Beginning with Halla, who lived with DeFini on the Adelphi campus, The Seeing Eye has provided support whenever she has had a question or issue. “Over the years they have answered my training questions or sent out instructors if needed. They have even humored my nonsense calls,” DeFini laughs, referring to something all Seeing Eye graduates have experienced; not sure if they should call the school with what they fear is a ‘silly’ question, but having the staff treat their problem as if nothing could be more important.

DeFini has noted the adaptations the school continues to make and is especially grateful for advancements in advocacy and public education efforts. “I have seen public attitudes toward dog guides in the US change over the years, and I credit The Seeing Eye for much of this,” she says. “There are still access issues, especially with taxi cabs, but we have come a long way.”

Asked if she would have been as successful traveling in New York without her dogs, DeFini turns thoughtful: “Successful is a funny word. Would I have gone to work, the grocery store, et cetera? Yes! That is the person I am. Would I have been as brassy and adventurous, taking the subway and walking all over New York? Probably not.”

DeFini recalls a business trip to San Francisco she made many years ago. Finding herself with a few hours to kill before her flight, she decided to take a walk. “I had no idea where I was going,” she recalls. “The dog and I just started walking and walking and walking.” Eventually, she realised she was in a strange neighborhood and with no one from whom to get directions, she began worrying about missing her flight. “After a while, I heard a jingling sound, and this guy saying, ‘That’s a mighty groovy dog you have.’ I had wound up in Hippieville,” she laughs. “If I had had my cane, I probably would have just sat in the hotel until I went to the airport.”
Opposite
Jungle gyms designed for infants are put to good use by Seeing Eye dogs in training.

Left
A Seeing Eye kennel worker takes a moment for a playful ear rub.
**Going to the Dogs**

For the kennel workers, it’s all about keeping everyone happy and healthy. **Kennel Program, Summer Guide**

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**Teresa Davenport**

6:30am: paper coffee cups in hand, The Seeing Eye’s kennel workers line up to check the day’s assignment clipboard. By the end of the day, many of those cups will remain nearly full, ignored or forgotten amid the flurry of constant activity.

Lucky to get more than a sip or two of coffee before it grows cold, the kennel staff spend each day fighting the clock. Days are filled with cleaning up after, feeding, and bathing dogs; providing playtime; cleaning some more; making sure anyone due for a clinic visit gets there on time; supervising more play time; feeding again; and cleaning one last time.

The structure of each day is designed with one goal in mind: to ensure that the approximately 350 adult dogs on campus remain as healthy and happy as possible during their stay. Most of the dogs are in one of The Seeing Eye’s two, 45,000-square-foot kennels for one of five basic reasons: they are in training; available for adoption; newly returned from their puppy-raising families; being evaluated as potential breeders, or in holdover from initial training and under review for further training.

Essentially, this means that kennel workers, who have full-time exposure to the dogs, serve as the eyes and ears of the clinic staff, the instructors, the adoption office staff, and the breeding committee. Because employees in those departments normally work with one dog at a time, they depend on the observations of the kennel workers to inform many of their most important decisions.

Is a dog in training gregarious or shy when its instructor isn’t around? Is a dog that just came in from puppy placement running a fever? Is a dog that’s available for adoption laid back or highly strung? All these questions can be answered by the kennel workers.

The kennel staff get to know the dogs so well, in fact, that they know them all by name and can remember every dog they ever met. Sometimes a dog will come in and we’ll say, “I think that dog’s related to so-and-so” because of the way the dog looks or acts,” says Director of Programs Doug Roberts, whose job includes overseeing the management of the kennels. Each yard also has a plastic playground – the type designed for human toddlers – that the dogs love climbing on and jumping through. “Dogs have a lot of energy, so we try to give them as much run time as we possibly can.”

The dogs are never left in the yard for more than a few moments without human supervision. The staff makes sure that no one dog has the opportunity to dominate the group. Once in a while in the adoption kennel, special records are reviewed for further training.

In those cases, the assigned kennel worker goes through a meticulously orchestrated process to decrease the chance of fights breaking out. The process goes something like this: move the dogs from inside kennels to outside kennels, to the play yard, back to inside kennels, while remembering who likes to go first and who needs to go last, checking each dog’s identification to make sure everyone gets into his or her assigned spot. No two males in a kennel, please. Then remain focused while one dog is trying to get away with some chicanery while the other 20 are vying for attention.

And then, there’s the cleaning. In terms of priorities, keeping germs at bay is a close second, right after playtime. Before instructors arrive at 7:45am to begin working with their dogs, kennel staff must move the dogs to the outside boxes so the entire inside can be hosed down and scrubbed top to bottom, then sprayed with disinfectant, hosed down again, then gone over with a squeegee.

Over the weekend, each kennel gets an additional cleaning with a de-greaser. Individual air exchange vents in every kennel also help keep everyone healthy.

After the morning’s housecleaning, the dogs not assigned to instructors need to be fed, making sure each dog remembers their table manners and sits before being fed, and then is given some time to play. Next, it’s bath time for any dog leaving for an adoptive home or for those who managed to get into smelly mischief during the night.

Charts are checked to see who is due for a medical visit, and those dogs are escorted to the nearby clinic before 10am. In between all the scurrying around, workers also dispense medications to any dogs needing them. Sometimes that simply means dropping a pill into the mouth of a dog but at other times, the process resembles something closer to a wrestling match! Any dogs sent to the clinic have to be picked up, there’s more playtime, then just before lunch break, everyone goes back into the inside kennels.

After lunch, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, volunteer dog walkers arrive to spend time with the dogs in the adoption kennel. One by one, they walk each dog around a path just outside the kennel. “We really believe this keeps the dogs more adoptable. Unlike the dogs in training, they’re not going into town to spend time alone with an instructor. This gives them some special one-on-one time and lets them burn off some energy,” explains Williams.

Many of the workers find special assignments when they check the morning clipboard, which means they might have the additional job of washing or refilling food dishes, taking out garbage, processing in the new dogs, cleaning the relief area used by students’ dogs, administering heartworm tests or reading laboratory slides.

Before the day ends, the outside yards are hosed down, disinfected, then rinsed again. The dogs get another meal, and everyone records any pertinent notes on their dogs.

For the first time all day, the kennels are completely quiet. The dogs settle in for a good night’s sleep after a day of hard play, as the last kennel worker pours that cold cup of coffee down the sink and shuts out the lights.
Guide Dogs for the Blind graduate Stacy Patnode has trained her guide dog LaniJo to locate an offset kerb in San Rafael, California.

Mosque

It was a small step for an animal, but a giant leap for blind and partially-sighted people across the globe, when a guide dog entered a UK mosque for the first time with its owner.

Mahomed-Abraar Khatri, 18, was able to worship independently for the first time in his life, accompanied by his labrador cross golden retriever, Vargo, at the religious centre in Leicester in the English Midlands.

Community leaders worked with Mahomed-Abraar, his family and Guide Dogs staff to build an enclosed rest area at the Bilal Jamia mosque for Vargo to use while the student was praying. The dialogue with the Muslim Council of Britain led to the Islamic Shari’ah Council establishing a religious precedent called a “fatwa” which is binding throughout the worldwide Muslim community.

The International Guide Dog Federation will be able to share the benefits of the landmark decision with individuals who are showing interest in setting up guide dog training in countries such as Turkey, Abu Dhabi, and the Philippines – and which may one day follow Vargo’s lead, too. Alan Brooks, Guide Dogs International Affairs Manager, says: “It is difficult to over-state the significance of this breakthrough to the Islamic community around the world. Careful and respectful dialogue over a two year period has enabled a mutually beneficial outcome which could help many hundreds of people across the globe.” At issue was a compromise between established religious convention and the needs of blind and partially-sighted people who need guide dog assistance animals to function independently.

Most Muslims regard dogs as hunting or working animals. Some see them as “unclean” and refuse to have any interaction with them under any circumstances. Yet guide dogs help improve the quality of life for their visually-impaired owners, so an exception was made to allow Mahomed-Abraar’s dog into the mosque. Local mosque leaders gave the teenager their full support when he began his training with Vargo. The Islamic Shari’ah Council backed the move.

It issued an historic fatwa (directive or verdict) declaring: “A blind person, in the light of Shari’ah Law, will be allowed to keep a guide dog to help him and, if required, to take him to the mosque for his prayers.”

Assistant Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra says: “I hope this development will help Muslim communities to better understand the teachings of Islam with regards to guide dogs that make such a difference to the quality of life of their owners. The scholars who have deliberated this ruling have explored the issue from all angles and we are delighted with their fatwa.”

Bridget Warr, Chief Executive of Guide Dogs and Chair of the IGDF, says: “This important development could benefit blind and partially-sighted people and guide dog organisations across the world, both now and in the future. I am sure colleagues in other countries, too, will want to follow up on this policy, which will allow local agreements to be established much more quickly now that this ground breaking precedent is in place.”

But Mahomed-Abraar, whose determination to become more independent in every part of his life and set the ball rolling, is characteristically blasé about his role. Vargo, too, takes the controversy in his stride. He steadfastly refused to acknowledge the phalanx of reporters, photographers, radio broadcasters and camera crews that captured his moment of history in Leicester. In fact, he’s refused to say a word about the issue - which just shows how well trained he is!

The historic fatwa includes the crucial ruling: “A blind person, in the light of Shari’ah Law, will be allowed to keep a guide dog to help him and if required to take him to the mosque for his prayers. In all such cases, dogs may not be allowed inside the prayer hall for the sake of hygiene. However, such dogs may be used as a guide and they can accompany a blind person up to the area where shoes are placed.”

Now the Federation is taking steps to ensure the ruling is enacted around the world.
Clicker Training for Blind Handlers

Michele Pouliot
Director of Research and Development

Todd Jurek and I gave a presentation on ‘Clients independently clicker training their guides’ at the IGDF conference in June last year and have been delighted at the numerous responses we have received about our client clicker programme. Our guide dog school is very excited at the thought of more schools considering adding this powerful tool to their training programmes. We would like to share the viewpoints of guide dog owners and members of staff who use clicker training, since their opinions are important to schools considering adding these impressive techniques.

Quotes from guide dog owners:

“My current and third guide Onyx perks up and begins to wag his fluffy black tail as I tell him to ‘find the button’. Pedestrian push buttons can be quite a challenge to find, but with the assistance of the clicker this has become a game where there is always a treasure when the task is completed. I can feel Onyx smiling in the harness as his pull slightly increases towards the push button pole and his nose marks the exact spot.

Additionally, Onyx has been recently struggling with a fear of vehicle exhausts, and I know that if it wasn’t for the clicker being used as Onyx boards and departs from buses and cars, his attitude wouldn’t be half as positive. Thanks to this tool my guide is working through a major fear successfully.” Erin and Onyx

“I was surprised at how easy a concept it was to learn. I was also impressed with how quickly my dog caught on to the targeting theory.” Ken and Bristol

“Felita is my first guide, and I have had her for six years. She gets very excited about playing this clicker game. I try to switch the cues up, so she has to pay attention to which behavior to offer. I used this on several occasions to redirect her when she was having fear reactions to other dogs after her dog attack. Now, I can use the hand signals even without the clicker to get her animated if she is in a stressful situation.” Erin and Felita

“I have just finished training with my sixth guide dog, Splash, the first one to be clicker-wise. The speed that Splash learns new behaviors, like finding the chair and pole, has been very quick compared to that of my previous dogs. In the past, these behaviors took a long time, and there wasn’t a lot of enthusiasm for giving the behavior, whereas Splash enthusiastically tries to figure out what I want. I trained my previous dogs to work a circuit through the weight room at the gym by pattern training but it took a long time – eight to nine months. I would get frustrated when the gym changed the locations of the machines and I would have to start again with the pattern training. It never carried over to new locations.

In one month I have trained Splash to locate seven particular machines, and have named them. Now I can go to the machines I want to go to without having to stay in the same circuit order that I did in the past. She knows the names of the machines and will take me to them no matter where we are in the room. I can also go to other gyms when I travel, and she knows how to find the machines at these gyms too. The public is wowed by her ability to locate what I ask her to find, and they can’t figure out how she can do it. I have certainly enjoyed playing with people’s minds!”

“I also use the clicker when I am traveling and am first shown my hotel room. She is very accurate when finding my room for the rest of the trip. I can also use it to locate particular places in a hotel if I need to return to them and the route happens to be a little convoluted. I am enjoying thinking of new and creative ways to use the clicker!” Aerial and Splash

“I did use the clicker with Meryl and found that I could train her to perform tasks quicker with the clicker than without it. It is a great asset. I urge every guide dog user to learn the proper use of the clicker and I urge all guide dog schools to clicker train their guides.” Michael and Meryl

Quotes from staff:

“About 19 out of every 20 students participate in the clicker programme during class. Comments in the exit interviews are excellent; they love the dogs of food and clicker.” Pete O’Reilly, San Rafael Class Manager (37 years experience)

“The feedback gathered after our students’ training in class has been overwhelmingly very positive. Most students have stated that they know exactly where they would start using it when they get home. When I’ve talked to graduates in the field, most have said they are currently utilising the training. There is no doubt that adding the clicker training to our class training program has been an enhancement.” Keith Laber, Oregon Class Manager (32 years experience)

“I wanted to share some experiences I’ve had working with our graduates in the field using the clicker. For years, teaching the dogs to target the pedestrian push buttons has been time consuming and has had limited success. When graduates need to train their dogs to target the buttons now (via clicker), it is a matter of minutes and the dogs are so excited to learn and play the clicker game! While recently training an apprentice trainer on a follow up trip, I was able to observe the apprentice and graduate problem-solve as the apprentice used her clicker training expertise. They needed to target a random spot on the sidewalk that would line up with the graduate’s apartment on the other side of the quiet residential road. This graduate and older guide dog had never used the clicker, but the apprentice adeptly taught them how to load the clicker and then back chain the targeted spot along the sidewalk edge. Within minutes the graduate was able to turn the corner, work to approximately mid-block, give a verbal cue and his dog happily and with confidence targeted the correct spot to cross. My second clicker story involves a client whose guide dog was attacked by a dog while working. The guide dog developed a fear of the client after she had yelled at the attacking dog. Even away from the location of the attack, the guide dog was acting afraid of its handler. We introduced the clicker and the client played the clicker game several times a day with her guide. Within a week, her sensitive guide was completely recovered! I think about the progress Guide Dogs for the Blind has made in the last 23 years and can honestly say this technique has changed my job. Malinda Carlson, Field Service Manager (23 years experience)

At the Guide Dogs for the Blind Inc, USA we are more than enthusiastic about the results of our client clicker training programme and we hope to inspire other schools to add this powerful tool to their programmes. As you will have seen from the comments made by guide dog owners and trainers in this article, the feedback is very positive. Our next step is to host a guide dog clicker seminar in June 2009 as a means of sharing the details of our clicker programmes with other IGDF schools. We hope to see some of you there!

For more information about the seminar, visit www.guidedogs.com/site/Calendar/544842610?View=Detail&id=100221
All businesses need to continually develop, especially in the current economic climate, and guide dog schools are no exception. The guide dog product continues to change and evolve in response to changing client needs, modifications in the working environment and the evolution of dog temperament and behaviour.

David Grice
Senior Operations Project Manager

Guide Dogs (UK) is fortunate to have a large base of qualified Puppy Walking Supervisors, Guide Dog Trainers and Guide Dog Mobility Instructors, which ensures our capability to produce approximately 740 guide dogs each year. As with all dedicated staff that enjoy their work, guide dogs staff in particular have an ongoing desire to learn new training skills and techniques.

This is obviously extremely positive but also presents our organisation with a very real ‘challenge’: that of being able to provide experienced staff with appropriate and motivating professional development, whilst controlling technique use within the organisation.

You may be interested why I have termed this as a ‘challenge’. After all, dog training information has become extremely accessible in the public sector, and in the UK it is now almost fashionable! A vast amount of information exists via a number of different sources including books, the internet and television programmes. The more recent dog training ‘hype’ has also given rise to a number of high profile ‘experts’ holding workshops and seminars and promoting their ‘innovative and fool proof’ techniques or methodology.

The ‘challenge’ is to decipher how, with all the options available, the organisation can evaluate and validate methodology and processes appropriate for guide dog training. I think we are all aware that the role of the guide dog is very different from many other ‘dog jobs’ which exist and most importantly, the future owner of a guide dog remains a vital key in maintaining working performance and as such, the methodology must be appropriate for the owner’s needs and abilities. Guide Dogs (UK), like its staff, is keen to continue to review its training processes in order to improve product development, reduce wastage and to remain at the forefront of behaviour modification techniques. In order to do this in a structured way, the organisation has launched a project entitled ‘The Canine Behaviour Development Project’.

The Project

The objective of this project is to provide the organisation with a mechanism for identifying and validating relevant and appropriate external canine behaviour development practices and education suppliers, directly under the control of the operations department. This will be done by using a team of individuals to proactively seek out positive practice and strategies from a wide range of practitioners and research. In effect the team will act, on behalf of all Guide Dogs operations departments, as a screening process for any external canine behaviour technique or expert considered for use by the Association when developing its staff.
Team Composition

The team composition is a crucial factor in the success of this project. A rigorous recruitment process was carried out from our pool of technical staff. Applications were invited via a scored application form, and this was followed by a formal interview and practical assessment.

The key qualities required of individuals in the group centre around a degree of technical role experience and competencies, but most importantly an objective and informed attitude towards canine behaviour and temperament techniques, as well as openness to explore and challenge our current practices and procedures via a structured process.

As a result, the team now has seven members. This includes representation from Puppy Walking, the Guide Dog Training Schools, two representatives from Client Services, and myself as chairperson. In addition, the group includes a member of the technical staff training team, to ensure that identified best practices are built into staff training programmes, and a Research Assistant to support the validation and testing of methodology. The panel’s membership is intended to be a fluid, rather than a static body, with membership not exceeding three years.

Work in Progress

Terms of reference have been established to ensure the team and organisation remain aware of the team’s role and the scope of the project. The terms of reference also include details of the objectives, methods of working, membership and membership review, and the process for proposing research.

With this done, the team will be tackling several key areas initially including:

- The design of internal and external communication strategies to involve all Guide Dogs’ staff with both input and output, as well as establishing links with related external suppliers and organisations.
- The identification of the development requirements of technical staff.
- The identification of external suppliers and information.
- An analysis of suppliers’ credentials and experience to ensure their relevance to the business.
- An evaluation of the assembled information.
- The initiation of project pilots to validate identified approaches. These are likely to be separate projects.

Potential Benefits

Although this work has a large scope and is likely to become an integral part of our operations, it has the potential to offer the organisation a number of benefits, which include:

- Ensuring national quality control regarding product development techniques.
- Ensuring all techniques and methods used meet our ethical approach to training guide dogs.
- Ensuring new training practices are only introduced where they have been shown to be effective and as good as, or better than existing methods.
- Ensuring misinformation is not put into practice.
- Providing a pro-active forum within Guide Dogs to ensure that the organisation is gathering and reviewing all new and potentially beneficial training methods.
- Providing a platform for product improvement and process evaluation.
- Enhancing the Association’s collaboration with other professional dog trainers and improving our reputation and image as a result.
- Providing staff with relevant, continued professional development.

If you would like to comment on this work either to ask further questions or add thoughts and suggestions, please contact me directly via email to david.grice@guidedogs.org.uk.

I would be particularly interested to hear of any specific training, behaviour modification methods, techniques or equipment which you currently use to positive effect and/or any specific individuals within or outside of guide dog training you would recommend as a source of knowledge.

A New Life is Coming!

When two guide dog puppies were born on 29 August 2008 in Taipei, Taiwan, it marked a milestone in the Taiwan Guide Dog Association’s (TGDA) six-year history.

Rachel Dung
Guide Dog Trainer

These two creamy coloured, golden retriever/Labrador cross puppies not only opened a new chapter for TGDA, but also represent a success for TGDA’s breeding programme. This first successful breeding was conducted with artificial insemination by a local veterinary clinic. With limited practical experience but a lot of support from other experienced guide dog schools, Rei Chang, the breeding programme coordinator of TGDA, supervised the whole process.

Due to the absence of a breeding kennel, yellow Labrador Ivy was looked after by a family chosen from the puppy raiser candidates. Rei and other staff from TGDA gave practical support throughout the entire pregnancy and maternity periods. Puppies Tiger and Tammy were delivered naturally.

It is certainly quite a challenging task to take care of Ivy and her two puppies. There’s the physically demanding daily job of keeping everything clean, ensuring mother and pups remain healthy and looking after the puppies as they begin to grow up. But Ivy’s breeding family undoubtedly feels proud to be involved in such a significant breeding scheme and will remember in particular the thrilling moment of the puppies’ arrival. “It realised our dream in terms of joining in the very touching and amazing moment of a new life coming!” say Sinnas Hsieh and Yu-fu Fan, Ivy’s breeding family.

Tiger and Tammy were given names beginning with the letter “T” in honour of the very first litter to be conceived and born locally. The stud dog of this litter is Dano, a three-year-old Labrador/golden retriever cross. Both Ivy and Dano were donated from Japanese guide dog schools through the cooperation between TGDA and the Asia Guide Dog Breeding Network.
Clearly the founders of The Seeing Eye were keenly aware that their work would someday be the inspiration for movies, books, and theatrical productions.

From The Seeing Eye Archives

We know this because of the wealth of materials that they somehow knew to save. They must have known that they were making history. Black and white films from the late ’20s and early ’30s; newspaper clippings reporting on Morris Frank’s return to the United States with the first Seeing Eye dog, Buddy; Buddy’s well-worn harness; and countless other memorabilia have resided in a temperature- and humidity-controlled archive room since 2004, thanks to gifts from Mr and Mrs Rodney D Day III, the FM Kirby Foundation, and the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust.

Authors, illustrators, script writers, and movie producers have benefited from the historical treasures contained within this room. We love sharing artifacts from the archives with readers, one of them being a letter written by Helen Keller in February 1930 to Seeing Eye co-founder Dorothy Harrison Eustis. The letter was inspired by Keller’s recent visit to our campus, and she describes the feelings she experienced while walking with a Seeing Eye dog.

February 27, 1930

Dear Mrs. Eustis,

We are still talking about the wonderful dogs we saw last Saturday. I wish every teacher and pupil were as intelligent and eager as yours. Perhaps there would be more wide-awake and happy pupils if all teachers were as understanding and sympathetic as your staff.

Down through the ages dogs have been friends of man, sharing his toil and his holidays and hunting with his arms. They have been trained to guard their master’s home and to protect their owner. They have been taught to do a man’s work, to pull carts, to pull boats, to pull sleds, to pull coaches, to pull wagons, to pull wagons, to pull wagons, to pull wagons.

We know that they are not as dependable as they are in the pictures. They are not as dependable as they are in the movies. They are not as dependable as they are in the stories. They are not as dependable as they are in the books. They are not as dependable as they are in the real world.

But they are still our friends, and we love them. We love them because they are our friends, and we love them because they are our friends, and we love them because they are our friends.”
Many modern guide dog schools still do not accept applications from people any younger than 16 to 18 years of age. Despite the controversy surrounding young guide dog users, however, British Columbia Guide Dog Services has opened its waiting list to youth applicants between 13 and 18 years old.

Jaime L. Arnup
Guide Dog Mobility Instructor

The organization graduated its first youth early on, and since then, it has trained a total of nine youths—which accounts for approximately 15 percent of its total graduates. Understandably, training youths with guide dogs has been met with many reservations. There are a number of influences that could potentially threaten the overall success of the team, which stem mainly from one particular concern: the youth’s overall level of maturity.

This key factor can affect many things, including:

• Their ability to take responsibility for the care, welfare and proper handling of the dog;
• Their ability to deal with the mental stress of training and working with a guide dog; and
• The possibility of becoming jealous or resentful towards the guide dog for dominating people’s attention.

In consideration of this, British Columbia Guide Dog Services has adapted its application process to address potential concerns prior to acceptance. Most importantly, we believe that a successful youth guide dog team does not just include the guide dog user and their dog, but also the continued support and involvement of their parents, school teachers, aides and especially their Orientation and Mobility Officer. Therefore, during the application process, the training department is expected to:

• Liaise with the Orientation and Mobility Officer to:
  • Set up a line of communication;
  • Confirm the applicant’s level of mobility, their motivation and basic character;
  • Advise the applicant of any preparation they must do prior to training;
  • Discuss their role in the success of the team after graduation; and
  • Offer any necessary advice in continuing orientation and mobility lessons with the new dog.
• Liaise with the school principal to ensure the school’s full cooperation and support.
• Liaise with aides and vision teachers who are directly involved with the youth’s education.
• Ensure that the applicant’s family is educated about their role in the success of the team and is prepared to support them.
• Confirm that the applicant maintains good grades at school and has an acceptable record of attendance.

With these essential elements in place prior to training, and with valuable communication maintained throughout the life of the guide dog team, we have achieved a 100 per cent success rate. Our first youth graduate recently retired his dog after a full working term, and all of the remaining youths are currently thriving as rather exceptional guide dog users. For British Columbia Guide Dog Services, the proof of our Youth Training Program’s success is strongly reflected in the success of its graduates.
The Visionary has the potential to be the professional journal of the guide dog industry.

Carrying technical and newsworthy articles of value, importance and interest to all working in the field, it is our ambition to lift the professional standard of the journal closer to this goal.

This is consistent with the IGDF’s role as the professional global watchdog of accreditation of organizations and standards. It will take the commitment and contribution of many Guide Dog experts to help us achieve this ambition, and we have started by seeking the submission of articles widely. Please contribute articles to your journal, as everyone is interested in learning from member schools and hearing how different programs are progressing.

This is a wonderful opportunity for the International Guide Dog Federation to provide useful and interesting information amongst members. The Communications, Marketing and Fundraising Committee is determined to make sure that the Visionary continues to evolve into a professional journal that all IGDF members will highly appreciate.

If interested in submitting an article, please contact the IGDF office first to obtain the detailed criteria for the format required. Deadline submission dates for articles are May 31st and November 30th.