

vi•sion•ar•y (vizh'n-eri || -erri) adj. 1. Characterised by vision or foresight

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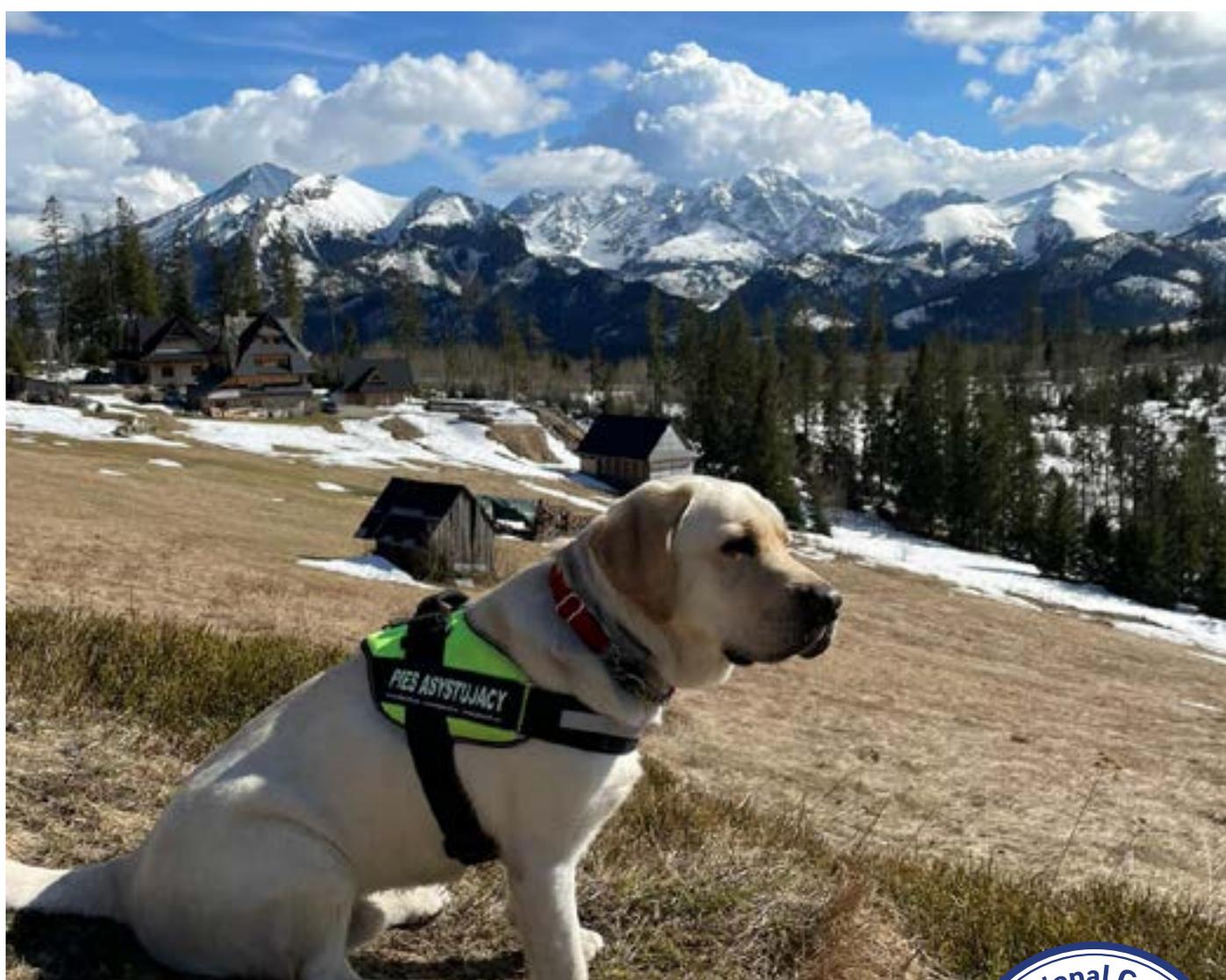
# Visionary

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Edition **47**  
March  
2022

**Puppy Raisers App:**  
Gur Report

**The Future**  
For International  
Standards



**International Guide Dog Federation**  
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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 - **Australia, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Poland, USA**



#### Cover Photo

Yellow Labrador overlooking the snowy mountains and alpine trees of Tatra National Park, Poland

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## Message From The Chair

Bill Thornton | Chief Executive Officer  
**BC & Alberta Guide Dogs, Canada**

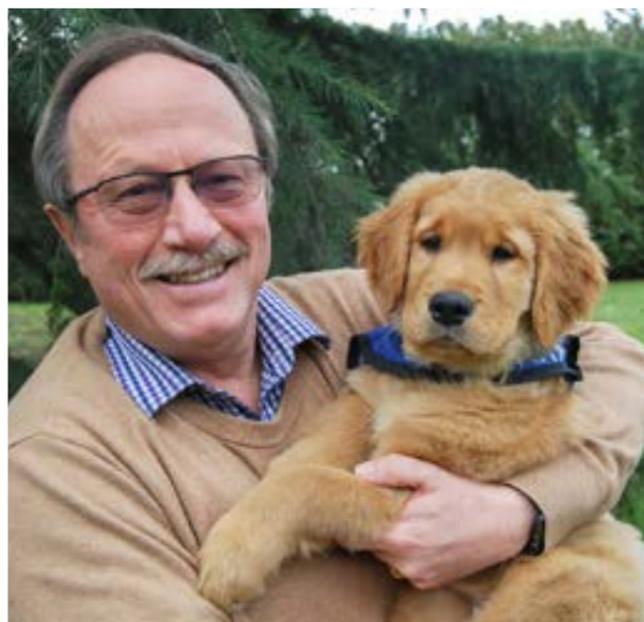
**Many thanks to everyone who responded to our recent membership survey. The feedback provided has helped us refine and define our strategy moving forward. Karen Hayes, board member and chair of the IGDF strategy initiative, will be leading an online strategy event for members in June. I look forward to seeing you all there.**

Regrettably, we have made the decision to delay our September 2022 Vancouver Conference. The Conference will now take place April 27 – 30, 2023. The location remains the same in Vancouver, Canada. Our IGDF Conference will immediately be followed by a Breeding Conference on May 1st and 2nd. The Breeding Conference will be hosted by Jane Russenberger and Dr. Eldin Leighton from The International Working Dog Breeding Association. Both conference committees, shall shortly be sending out full details. I look forward to seeing many of you in Vancouver.

Due to COVID conditions, the Accreditation Committee has now launched the first of many virtual assessments. Our thanks to AC Chair Susan Armstrong and the entire committee for the mountain of work completed to start this process. We look forward to returning to the normal assessment process as soon as this is possible. I am very pleased to announce that Minna Leppälä from Finland, was recently appointed to the Accreditation Committee. Welcome Minna and thank you for stepping forward.

continued

## Message From The Chair



In the spirit of our joint ADI and IGDF Memorandum Of Understanding, there are plans to hold a joint ADI and IGDF Board meeting in May. The purpose is to discuss how we can work together more effectively for the mutual benefit of all members.

Tim Stafford and AC Chair Susan Armstrong, have been working with Chris Diefenthaler and Peter Gorbing from ADI,

pursuing the possibilities of better aligning our standards.

The Education Committee, co-chaired by Tim Stafford and Christine Baroni-Pretsch, are hoping to launch the new GDMI and GDT education online Moodle Platform by September. Again, this has been a huge volume of work, supported by Guide Dogs Queensland and Guide Dogs UK. Many thanks to everyone involved.

I am sure that you will enjoy our latest edition of Visionary and a special thanks to our Communications Committee Chair Christine Turc, assisted by committee members Karen Hayes and Christine Benninger and our UK team. Thanks also to John Welsman from Guide Dogs UK for producing the Visionary podcast.

All the very best for 2022.

### Bill

**“To have tried and failed is better than to not have tried at all”**

## Conference Submissions

The call for Conference abstract submissions is now closed and IGDF will notify those who have submitted abstracts of their decision by 31st May 2022.

The call for submissions for suggested topics for panel discussions is also closed.

Anyone wishing to contribute to the poster or DVD session can still do so by submitting a summary of the topic to the IGDF Office.

If you require any further information, please visit the IGDF website or contact the IGDF Office at [enquiries@igdf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@igdf.org.uk)

## IGDF Assessments

Update from **IGDF Office, UK**

We have now commenced the roll out of our 2022 accreditation assessments. All IGDF Assessors have completed their training to undertake accreditation assessments remotely and the IGDF Office has made contact with all organisations being assessed.

This year IGDF are assessing 24 organisations remotely and training nine new assessors. We thank everyone for their patience and hard work to get us to this point.

The revised IGDF Standards took effect on 1st January 2022 and all schools will be assessed against the revised 2020 IGDF Standards.

### Merger of Finnish Members

NouHaun Opaskoirapalvelu, Finland merged with Näkövammaisten liitto ry:n Opaskoirakoulu Finland on 1st March 2022. The combined organisation is known as Näkövammaisten liitto ry:n Opaskoirakoulu.

## Thank you to Dell Rodman

**Finally, we'd like to give a big thank you to Dell Rodman who has stepped down as an IGDF Assessor after 8 years.**

Dell has been an IGDF Assessor since 2013 and undertaken numerous assessments on behalf of the organisation during that time.

### Congratulations to the following organisation which has passed its Accreditation Assessment:

- Vision Australia Seeing Eye Dogs (Australia)

### Congratulations to the following organisation which has been accepted as a new Enquiring Organisation:

- Fundación Argentina para el Perro Guia (Argentina)

### Congratulations to the following organisation which has been accepted as a new Applicant Organisation:

- Brugernes FørerhundeOrdning (Denmark)

### Our best wishes go to the following organisations which have left the IGDF:

- Blindenführhundschole Gunter Boldhaus (Germany)
- Blindenführhundschole Seitle (Germany)



His work and commitment has made a huge contribution to IGDF and we wish Dell well in his busy role as Director, CDC Operations at Guiding Eyes for the Blind in the USA.

## Leader Dogs Celebrates 20 Years of Free Orientation & Mobility Training

Leslie Hoskins  
Leader Dogs for  
the Blind, USA

Leader Dogs for the Blind is celebrating 20 years of providing free orientation and mobility (O&M) training to people who are blind or visually impaired throughout the United States.

The program is the first in the U.S. to offer a continuous week of training to help people learn to travel safely and independently using a white cane.



Orientation and Mobility Specialist Garrett Waldie teaches a client the technique for safely walking down a staircase using a white cane on Leader Dog's campus in Rochester Hills, Michigan.

The training is completely free to people at least 16 years old who are legally blind. From someone who has never used a white cane to a long-time user needing fresh skills to navigate a complicated travel environment, all skill levels are welcome.

To date, Leader Dog has provided O&M training to 1,086 people ranging in age from 16 to 87 years old.

In the United States, most O&M training is provided by government agencies that often have vocational requirements, making people who won't be entering the workforce ineligible for services.

Leader Dog fills this space by not having this requirement, so everyone has the opportunity for O&M training, including stay-at-home parents and seniors.

Also, if someone has completed their government-authorized services but needs additional training, they can participate in Leader Dog's program to continue to improve their independent travel skills.

The originator of Leader Dog's program is Rod Haneline, COMS (certified orientation and mobility specialist), who still consults with Leader Dog. **"When we realized that a lack of sufficient travel skills was the number one reason people were being denied guide dog training, I felt that we could fill the need,"** said Rod. He oversaw the initial class of six clients the week of January 6, 2002. **"From the first class until now," said Rod, "We find that clients of all skill levels show notable improvement in all areas of travel after just one week."**

## Puppy Raisers App – Gur Report

Dennis Allon  
IGDCB, Israel



Puppy Raisers for IGDCB Israel

**Volunteer puppy raisers receive our puppies when they are approximately 7 weeks old and remain with them until the age of one. They work with our professional puppy managers to teach our puppies good manners and provide socialization experiences for the first year of a puppy's life.**

Our puppy raisers are scattered across Israel. The puppies gain exposure to traffic, sitting quietly for periods of time, meeting new people, going to work, shopping at malls or supermarkets, visiting friends, restaurants, traveling on buses and trains, entering elevators and going up and down escalators. These experiences are critical in preparing the puppies for lives as Guide, Service and Emotional Support dogs.

The Puppy Raisers give of their time, effort, and love to care and teach the basics to our puppies. In addition to the training, the Israel Guide Dog Center provides the food, veterinary care, and all the support that is needed.

In order to work more efficiently with the hundreds of volunteer puppy raisers we have annually, our Puppy Raising Department has been working with three students, Karen Abed, Rotem Halfon and Omer Hershkovitz and staff from the Sami Shamoon College of Engineering and the Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Be'ersheva to develop a software/app that will create a more efficient system.

This system is intended to eliminate redundancies and delays in disseminating information, automating age-specific tasks required by the puppy raisers in working with their puppies, responding to questions, and providing immediate assistance.

The data gathered will provide essential information to the assessors when the puppies return to the Israel Guide Dog Center.

In terms of technology, these apps may be groundbreaking in the world of guide dog training.

Presently, the Gur Report allows the puppy raisers to communicate with the puppy managers. The Puppy Raising Department is working on expanding the Gur Report to ensure an effective two-way communication system, automating tasks & providing instructions to puppy raisers.

Once completed, not only can the puppy raisers send essential information to the Puppy Manager but the Puppy Raisers Department will be able to keep track of the puppy's progress and ensure that tasks required are implemented and documented.

The health of the puppies, along with regular veterinary visits, can be followed-up on a daily basis. In addition, the app will expedite the process of reimbursing expenses to our puppy raisers. In short, the Gur Report improves the communications between the puppy managers and the volunteer puppy raisers.

The Israel Guide Dog Center wishes to extend our deep appreciation to the Taubman Foundation, USA, for their support in developing the Gur Report.



BLVNZ GDMIs sheltering from the rain

## Preparing Guide Dogs Amidst a Global Pandemic

Wendy Mellberg Haecker  
**Blind Low Vision NZ Guide Dogs,  
New Zealand**

**Throughout the first half of 2021, New Zealand was in the enviable position of having extremely low case numbers of Covid-19, with no community transmission and only 5 new cases in managed isolation as of 16 August. A quarantine-free travel bubble had opened between New Zealand and Australia in April, and life felt fairly normal.**

Then, on 17 August, a case of the Delta variant was discovered in the community and was traced to a returnee from Sydney 10 days earlier. In an effort to limit the spread, Auckland, New Zealand's largest city and home to the Blind Low Vision NZ Guide Dogs training program, was put into a full Level-4 lockdown prohibiting travel for all but essential workers. This full lockdown would remain in place in Auckland for more than five weeks as the case numbers ebbed and flowed.

At the Guide Dog Centre, a group of 6 dogs were just weeks from completing their 16-week training program when the operation shut down. Each of the dogs was fostered in a boarding home, the trainers were sent home, and all guide dog training ceased.

As a designated essential service, a limited number of Blind Low Vision NZ (BLVNZ) staff were granted authority to transport dogs, food and other necessary supplies to boarders and puppy raisers under the guidelines of contactless delivery. And when it appeared that a region neighbouring Auckland (Waikato) would drop to a Level-3 lockdown after 15 days, we applied for and received travel exemptions. My team, consisting of three cadet GDMIs and myself,



BLVNZ GDMIs on a training walk in deserted streets

travelled with the dogs 120km south of Auckland to continue the training in an attempt to qualify these 6 dogs and place them with our blind and low vision handlers.

We booked hotel rooms, found volunteer boarders in Hamilton, and commuted across the regional border every Monday morning, returning to our homes in Auckland on Friday afternoons. Each staff member was required to have a Covid-19 test within 48-hours of crossing the border, and so there were nasal swabs every seven days at a drive through testing centre in the city of Hamilton.

Upon our arrival in Hamilton, we set out to learn the area and find the best locations in which to train the dogs. Under Level-3 lockdown, all hospitality venues and shopping malls remained closed, so our routes consisted only of outdoor work. Although this wasn't ideal since the dogs were in the finishing phases of training, we made the most of the opportunity until the alert level was lowered to Level-2 one week later, allowing us to practice indoor work.

Guide dog training was not the norm in Hamilton, and it wasn't long before we caught the attention of the local media and were featured in both the online and paper versions of the Waikato Times, with a big front page spread. This publicity helped to raise our profile in the city and informed the community of our attempts to continue delivering life-changing guide dogs in the midst of the pandemic.

In four weeks' time, BLVNZ Guide Dog's newest cadets had each qualified their first career guide dogs amid the most unusual of circumstances, and 6 waiting handlers were matched with their new mobility partners.

As of the writing of this story, New Zealand is in the early grip of the Omicron outbreak. Until now, BLVNZ Guide Dogs has been fortunate in avoiding any Covid-19 cases among staff. However, with the transmissibility of this new variant, we are preparing for the possibility and doing our best to keep all staff safe and healthy as we continue to care for and train our dogs.

[Link to Waikato Times article](#)

## Guide Dog Poppi wins Australian Dog of the Year People's Choice Award

Guide Dogs Australia



As People's Choice winner, Liz and Poppi received:

- A \$250 Pet Circle Gift Card;
- A \$100 donation to the nominated registered charity (in Poppi's case this is Guide Dogs Australia!);
- A \$750 Gift Card for a Photography Session with Puppy Tales;
- A Media Campaign with Pet Journo announcing their title to the Australian Media; plus
- Bragging rights as the People's Choice in the Puppy Tales Australian Dog of the Year!

**"Poppi has made the ordinary for me not only possible, but extraordinary,"** said Poppi's Handler and GDN Client, Liz Wheeler.

Liz was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa – a degenerative eye condition – at age 18. At the age of 23 she was forced to hand her driver's licence back and at 26, Liz was declared legally blind.

Then, Liz was matched with a Guide Dog named Poppi who she credits with giving her back her freedom and independence.

"Poppi changed everything for me and opened my world up. She knows when I am feeling anxious and tries to distract me. If I'm panicking she will just sit with me or if I am nervous she will pick that up and be more assertive to give me confidence," Liz said. "She knows me so well and I can't imagine life without her."

Liz Wheeler and Guide Dog Poppi winning the Australian Dog of the Year People's Choice Awards

**Guide Dog Poppi, a bequest dog trained by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, recently won the People's Choice category in the Australian Dog of the Year Awards.**

The awards recognise dogs for inspiring, and making an incredible impact in the lives of people, the environment or other animals.

"Nine years ago I lost my sight, my job and the ability to do ordinary things like cross roads or cook. I lost all hope. Guide Dogs gave me Poppi. It was hard to be scared to leave my front door when Poppi was so excited to go.

"It's amazing. The same path that had taken me 20 minutes to navigate only takes five minutes with a Guide Dog. I feel like I could walk at the same pace as I did before I lost my sight. Things just became easier with Poppi."

"I had a goal to complete a counselling degree. With Poppi I was able to catch trains, find class rooms, and feel safe to study. Poppi attended all the classes and co-counselled during placement. She's a brilliant counsellor who has brought comfort to many. She's graduating with an honorary degree in March," Liz added.

**"Reading the entries of noble dogs has been moving, funny and always endearing,"** said Kerry Martin, of the

**Australian Dog of the Year Awards.** "We're reminded once again of just how incredible our doggos are, and seen how ordinary Paw-stralians from across our nation have helped their people through difficult times and made a difference to others and the communities that they live in.

"We've found ourselves smiling, laughing and even reaching for the tissues as we've read through the beautiful stories of our Aussie fur family and the people they've helped. Once again, it's been highlighted that for many of us, our puppies are our best friends, closest companions and furry superheroes!"

We are so proud of Liz and Poppi, and sincerely grateful for the wonderful bequestor who made Poppi's journey to becoming a working Guide Dog possible, and of course to the wider Guide Dogs community for voting for Liz and Poppi in the Australian Dog of the Year People's Choice Awards.

## Vale Willow Hayes, 2010–2021

It is with great sadness that Guide Dogs Victoria said goodbye to one of their beautiful Ambassador Dogs, Willow, who passed on Monday 27 December 2021.

In 2011, Willow stole the heart of Guide Dogs Victoria's then newly-appointed CEO, Karen Hayes AM DSJ, but her very special attributes were apparent even from her earliest days.

As a puppy, Willow was a swift and focused learner and, as she matured, her resolve to resist distraction became legendary.

It therefore came as no surprise when Willow passed her formal Guide Dogs assessment with flying colours and moved into the final stages of official Guide Dog training back at Kew.

Five months into training, it became apparent that this near-perfect dog had a peculiar aversion to some of the rougher surfaces; an aversion that grew the further into training she went.



We have a saying at Guide Dogs Victoria that there is no such thing as a failed Guide Dog, as every dog that we breed and train will go on to change a life in some way. The team at the time was determined Willow would do the same. An exceptionally talented dog, her skill and warm heart could not be wasted!

Timing is everything and, after just a few months in her new role, Karen requested that an Ambassador Dog was recruited to support her in her official duties.

With Willow still waiting in the wings, the Guide Dog Team knew exactly who would best fit the bill. After all, as the faces of Guide Dogs Victoria, Ambassador Dogs need exactly the kind of gentle temperament, patience, focus and fortitude that Willow had displayed from even her earliest days.

It was a perfect match and it has since been a long-running joke at Guide Dogs Victoria that some people get a company car but Karen got a company dog.

Since the very beginning of their relationship – just like all splendid Guide Dogs, Therapy Dogs and Companion Dogs – Willow has been Karen's right-hand (paw?) woman and the epitome of just the kind of unwavering loyalty, companionship and dedication all of Guide Dogs provide to their Handlers.

Her role as a Guide Dogs Victoria Ambassador Dog quickly led Willow to become one of the most well-connected dogs in the country, with her presence at the most prestigious of events warming the

hearts of even the most stoic and usually quite composed of guests! Similarly, silently tucked under the Boardroom table on many occasions, Willow inadvertently lifting the spirits of all involved.

Over her decade as an Ambassador Dog, Willow amassed an impressive resume, including appearances at:

- 2017 and 2018 Australian Grand Prix
- The Guide Dogs Victoria Virgin Australian Melbourne Fashion Festival's show, Diamond Dogs
- Come From Away
- Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show
- 2018 Chinese New Year – Year of the Dog Campaign
- Mr Walker Audio Book Launch at Park Hyatt, Melbourne

**Karen Hayes and Willow**



- HOWL-O-Ween Pet Parade 2018 and 2019
- National Seniors Week Event 2019
- Pick of the Litter Premiere
- Multiple end of year celebrations for Guide Dogs Victoria's incredible Otus Fellowship members
- Campus redevelopment "Turning of the Sod" event
- Multiple Western Spurs events as the team's unofficial mascot
- The launch of Gorman x Guide Dogs Victoria
- Dialogue in the Dark's first birthday celebrations
- Puppies in Parliament event 2017 and 2018

Through these events, Willow met some of the greatest philanthropists from across the state and country, media personalities, politicians, and Hollywood celebrities, and even royalty, but it was Willow's calming presence at our children's camps that touched everyone's hearts.

Willow had an innate ability to identify those who needed her support the most. During these camps, she would quietly seek out those on the fringes of the group and lean in, giving warmth and quiet encouragement to each child with her presence. Often at times, she could be seen snuggling up to the quietest child in the room or surrounded by kids lovingly hugging her as she stood patiently on. These memories will remain some of the most enduring images of Willow;

her gentle spirit symbolising the life-changing impact that each and every one of our dogs bring to the people who know and love them.

In was late 2021, during Willow's annual vet check, that an aggressive form of leukaemia was sadly uncovered.

Willow was a beloved member of both the Hayes family and the Guide Dogs Victoria family and will be sorely missed by all who came to know and love her. Although she may not be physically here with us any longer, her tireless work as an Ambassador for Guide Dogs Victoria will continue; with The Friends of Willow Fund providing an opportunity for our supporters to help us help our iconic dogs when they need us the most. The Fund will be an opportunity to give a gift to Guide Dogs Victoria in Willow's name, to ensure we keep our splendid dogs – Willow's friends – happy, healthy and in the best shape possible to support Victorians living with low vision or blindness for generations to come.

As one close Guide Dogs family, we all know the love we have for our precious animals and how hard it hits when they pass. We thank everyone who played a role in Willow's journey.

**Vale Willow Hayes, 2010 – 2021**

**Ambassador Dog extraordinaire, faithful companion, and stealer of hearts since the day you entered this world. Your impact will live on in the hearts of all who met you, as will your legacy in every life-changing Guide Dog, Companion Dog, Therapy Dog, Breeding Stock Dog and Ambassador Dog bred, raised and trained by your friends (and greatest fans) at Guide Dogs Victoria.**

# Assistance Dog Status in Polish Law

Irena Semmler  
Labrador Guide Dog Foundation, Poland



Katowice lecture hall

**This article contains basic information about the rights of persons with disabilities using assistance dogs. It can be helpful for people who are planning to travel to Poland with their guide dog.**

The history of guide dogs in Poland is relatively recent. Its origins date back to the 1950s. Guide dogs were rare at the time, and their training was handled by Milicja Obywatelska (until the change of the political system in Poland, the equivalent of the Police).

German Shepherd Dogs were used for training. Unfortunately, the level of their skills left a lot to be desired.

The situation changed radically after 2000. At that time, new schools started to emerge, in which, following the example of schools abroad, a new model of guide dog training was adopted, with the trainer working alongside volunteers bringing up puppies.

In addition to guide dogs, other types of assistance dogs were also introduced. German Shepherd Dogs were replaced by Labradors, which in Poland, like all over the world, make wonderful family and working dogs for over 10 years.

The efforts of the blind community in cooperation with non-profit organisations involved in guide dog training, as well as the support of the Ombudsman and influential activists and politicians, led to the statutory regulation of the assistance dog status in 2008.

In the Act on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, in effect since 1998, new provisions were added, including the definition of an assistance dog as an appropriately trained and specially marked dog, in particular a guide dog for a person with blindness or visual impairment, and an assistance dog for a person with motor disability, which facilitates the active participation of a person with a disability in social life.

Four types of assistance dogs were distinguished:

1. Guide dog for a person with blindness or visual impairment;
2. Assistance dog for a person with a physical disability;
3. Signalling dog for a person with deafness or hearing impairment;
4. Dog signalling a disease attack.

The rights of a person with a disability accompanied by an assistance dog were defined, indicating that such persons have the right to enter:

- Public utility buildings, in particular: buildings and their surroundings intended for the needs of public administration, justice, culture, education, higher education, science, health care, social and welfare services, banking services, commerce, catering, services, tourism, sport, servicing of passengers in railway, road, air, sea or inland water transport, provision of postal or telecommunication services and other generally accessible buildings intended for similar functions, including office and social buildings;
- National parks and nature reserves;
- Beaches and bathing areas.

These rights are also valid on rail, road, air and water transport and other means of public transport.

The assistance dog must wear a marked harness and its handler must own a certificate confirming the assistance dog's status. Proof of veterinary vaccination is also required.

Persons with blindness accompanied by a guide dog may participate in the religious rites of the Catholic Church, bringing dogs into sacred buildings.

People intending to visit Poland with a guide dog can, without any hindrances, use airline services, public transport and health services, enter a bank, post office, office or restaurant, do shopping, visit a museum or a library. They can learn and study assisted by their dogs.

To those who want a break from the hustle and bustle of the city, beaches, swimming pools and national parks are also open. However, it is important to ensure that dog owners have a certificate or equivalent document confirming the dog's status and a veterinary certificate.

Please also note that each of the places listed above may have its own internal rules and regulations that must be adhered to, for example: in national parks dogs should be kept on a leash.

If you are interested in obtaining more information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Katowice museum



# The Joy of Going Out For Everyone!

Japan Guide Dog Association

It is our important mission to **“let as many people as possible know about people with vision-impairment.”**

### Message on the poster:

Some people have not been able to regain the joy of going out.

We realized that going out was a joy in a new lifestyle that no one expected. It makes us extremely happy to be able to go wherever we want to go. It's the same for people who are blind or have difficulty seeing. Japan Guide Dog Association provides free mobility instruction with guide dogs and long canes.

AC Japan, a public interest incorporated association, made this commercial as part of their “Support Campaign” to assist the advertising activities of non-profit organizations engaged in public welfare activities.

[Link to on air commercial](#)

The ad calls out to people who are blind or have difficulty seeing to “go out with a guide dog or a long cane.” We hope that they will enjoy going out again and catch up with the life they want.

Many people think that if they become visually impaired, they will not be able to do anything independently. However, this is not true. We want to dispel this image of the visually impaired and create a society where everyone can say, “I’m going!”

## Japan Guide Dog Association’s Desire: ‘Joy of Going Out to All People’

**It is a joy for everyone to be able to go anywhere, at any time they want. The COVID-19 pandemic, which no one could have predicted, has made us feel the inconvenience and anxiety of not being able to go out. But many people have been feeling this way long before the pandemic.**

From 1st July 2021, a new Japan Guide Dog Association commercial was broadcast and aired and posters are displayed in newspapers and on railway stations.

# The Future for International Standards

Tim Stafford  
IGDF Board



Tim Stafford



Christine Turc

Many countries around the globe ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of the United Nations over the last decade and are implementing it on a national level. On the fundamental issue of accessibility, the CRPD requires countries to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers and ensure that persons with disabilities can access their environment, transportation, public facilities, and services.

However, there is no internationally agreed definition of an ‘assistance dog’ and people with disabilities frequently experience discrimination and access refusals due to the presence of their assistance dog. There are increasing numbers of people with more diverse disabilities looking for a trained assistance dog. There are more providers seeking to meet this need, and the ‘charitable model’ is no longer the only service model on offer.

Meanwhile increasing numbers of people are presenting their pet dog as an ‘assistance dog’, on occasions simply to gain access to air travel, transport, or public spaces.

The growth of truly fraudulent practices, both from ‘service providers’ who provide poorly trained dogs to vulnerable people and people without genuine disabilities who present their pet dog as an assistance dog or ‘emotional support dog’ is causing significant alarm, especially to the air travel industry.

The issue of a certification process for assistance dog partnerships is far from clear or consistent.

The need for clarity on the definition of an assistance dog, the call for a more inclusive certification process and the increasing issues relating to uncertified and occasionally fraudulent assistance dog partnerships are driving the need for the creation of international standards.

The world has changed since IGDF was created. This article details the current situation relating to the creation of European standards (CEN/TC 452) and considers the impact of these developments upon IGDF.



Continued

## The Future for International Standards

### What Are Standards?

A standard is a voluntary agreement between interested parties in respect of a product, person, service, or process. They are standardised, transparent and based upon consensus. They are stable and reviewable and due to the principle of consensus, broadly supported and accepted. As such they are powerful instruments of self-regulation and deregulation. Standards are written by technical experts, with knowledge of the content. These technical experts may receive procedural support from a national standards body.

### European Standards

European legislation frequently mentions 'recognised assistance dogs' whilst failing to define what this term means, or who is authorised to recognise them. At the end of 2016, within the European Committee for Standardization (CEN), a Technical Committee (TC) was established: CEN/TC 452 Assistance Animals and Animal Training Competencies, with a stated priority to "Publish European standard(s) that will establish training standards and deliver assistance dogs with consistent and high standard which will secure and maintain freedom of movement for assistance dog service users both within and between European States."

A European standard will define the requirements for assistance dogs and service providers, as well as standards of performance and the training of any associated professional staff. The standard is expected to facilitate the exchange of

knowledge, improve visibility of assistance dog partnerships, and improve the lawful right of access to public spaces, transport, and the built environment. Upon adoption, they are expected to replace any national standards and will help ensure a safe and recognised standard across Europe.

CEN/TC 452 has created seven working groups covering all essential elements of service provision: WG1 Terminology; WG2 Lifetime Welfare; WG3 Competencies for Professionals; WG4 Training and Assessment of Dogs; WG5 Client Services, WG6 Accessibility and Universal Access and WG7 Conformity Assessment. These working groups are made up of subject matter experts who are willing to work on the detail of the standard and produce a series of drafts that are then debated, first within the CEN/TC group, before circulating more widely through national mirror committees and finally through public consultation. It is highly unlikely that any one country will have undue influence over the final standard and compromises are to be expected. CEN/TC 452 is expected to progress WG1 Terminology to the next stage in 2022, with other working groups not required to do likewise until 2023.

### Risks and Threats – the changing role of IGDF

IGDF is cognisant to the potential interest from independent parties on establishing themselves as a certification body (using any new CEN standard). This would offer owner-trainers and others an alternative way to gain a certified status. However, it also may introduce more 'competition' and

something that IGDF needs to be prepared for in terms of its own sustainability.

Ensuring a position of influence in the creation of European and International standards does require investment of resources – human, time, and cost. IGDF is already well represented at CEN/TC452 working groups and national mirror committees and in general terms the progression of this work is on track. But greater IGDF participation within the working groups is encouraged.

Standardisation is not the same as certification and certification has its own standardised process. IGDF is already working on a project to formally establish itself (become 'accredited') as a certification body (using ISO/EC 17065) which may strengthen its credibility when assessing organisations against IGDF standards or potentially any new European standards in the future. As this project develops it is expected that IGDF's current standards, language and current 'accreditation' process will need to change to align to meet the expectations of a formal standards framework. However, IGDF will remain in control of this development and be able to decide for itself the correct course of action for our membership.

### Strengths and Opportunities

The application of any International Standards, and the resulting certification of assistance dog organisations, would help ensure that assistance dogs are trained according to safe and recognized standards by training staff qualified to carry out the work, taking into consideration human and animal welfare and wellbeing. Only by training dogs to such high standards can service users rely on the quality of their dogs. Similarly, this would offer guidelines as to whom to give access and whom to refuse access. Moreover, public service providers would be far more inclined to support access for assistance dogs to their premises, which in turn would help to strengthen rights of access for assistance dog users, especially when they travel between countries.

Whilst the current work is limited to Europe, we know there is interest in the progress from other parts of the world. For our European members, it is not too late to get involved, especially with national mirror committees. If you are interested in finding out more about IGDFs involvement, how to get more involved in the creation of standards within the CEN/TC 452 project you may contact: Christine Turc or Tim Stafford through the IGDF office.



## Committee Focus: Bob Proesmans



Bob with his Leonberg and Chihuahua

**Interview with Dr Bob Proesmans, DVM, Vice-President of Purpose Dogs, Belgium. Bob is also Chair of the IGDF Dog Welfare Special Interest Group, and a member of the IGDF Development Committee.**

### How did you first get involved in the guide dog sector?

I graduated in 1986 as a veterinary surgeon at Ghent University, with an interest in small animal medicine. I started to practise in 1987, and in 1988 I was contacted by someone who was starting up a guide dog programme in Belgium and had received two Golden Retriever puppies from Derek Freeman at Guide Dogs UK.

The reason they contacted me was because there was a radio programme in Belgium and the initiators of the guide dog programme were asking for volunteer puppy walkers. The two volunteers who were accepted came from the same town as me, so I was approached as the local veterinary surgeon.

They were looking for a veterinary surgeon who was willing to provide free veterinary services for one year for the two puppies. It was a definite yes as I had just started up my own private practise, I had the time, and I was interested in the world of assistance dogs.

I provided the free veterinary service for one year, after which the people who had set up the guide dog programme asked if I was willing to become a board member and continue my services to them. This guide dog programme gradually became the Belgian Centre for Guide Dogs which became a full member of IGDF in the 1990s.

I have since left Belgian Guide Dogs and started a breeding programme in order to provide healthy puppies to all assistance dogs schools in Belgium. This is known as Purpose Dogs and is an Affiliate Organisation with IGDF.

### Briefly describe the responsibilities of your day job.

I've never been on the payroll of any guide dog school. I provide voluntary veterinary services for Purpose Dogs and live off the income of my veterinary practise.

### So why is it important that you are a part of this breeding programme and it's not the schools doing it themselves?

It's always the same when you start a programme, and it was back in the 1990s when we started in Belgium; there are no resources. A lot of people volunteer services for free and because Purpose Dogs is growing and able to survive it can provide these services.

### Briefly describe your IGDF role.

I have been a member of the IGDF Development Committee since 2013, but I also Chair the Dog Welfare Special Interest Group. The Development Committee's role is to help emerging schools to become full members of IGDF, and I can provide them with veterinary advice on dog health, behaviour, reproduction and genetics, or try to put these schools in touch with someone else in their country who can assist them.

### How do you find time to balance all these responsibilities?

With difficulty! A veterinary surgeon has unpredictable hours, so I do end up working odd hours. In the morning I could be doing surgery, an hour later I'm having an IGDF meeting and an hour after that I'm on to something else. The constant shifting of focus can be exhausting, but I like the challenge.

### What do you like most about your current IGDF role?

The people I talk to in IGDF, all share the same drive and the same values. We have similar attitudes that inspire each other

and whether we are from the US, from Israel, or from Japan, we all have this in common.

### What advice would you give to someone who would like to get involved in IGDF, especially other Veterinary Surgeons?

Working with IGDF enables you to dig into problems with the aim of preventing other problems. Veterinary medicine is primarily about prevention, and working at IGDF level enables you to work to create healthy dogs from the very beginning.

If you are a vet thinking about working with IGDF, I'd say go for it. It's fun, it's a good cause and you get to use what you learn by being a vet in the world of guide dogs.

### What do you see as the main challenge currently facing the guide dog sector?

Social media is a challenge in the sense that everyone is walking around with a smart phone ready to film a puppy walker or guide dog which may be in a situation that they do not understand or filmed out of context and draws undue negative attention to our industry.

Bob in his vet practise



Continued

**Committee Focus: Bob Proesmans**

Additionally, there are challenges in reproduction. In order to provide healthy puppies, we need genetic diversity, and to do this, we need to exchange broods and semen from all over the world. It would be great if we had one bank that everyone in the world could draw from, but then of course these things need to be moved about, and in some countries, there are some very strong legal restrictions back by animal rights groups who have very strong opinions on artificial insemination, making it difficult for us to do this.

#### **What do you see as the main opportunity for the guide dog sector going forward?**

We can use social media to our advantage, using it to educate people about who we are, what we do and the reasons behind why we do it. We can use it to show the public that assistance dogs really do have a great life.

#### **What is your funniest or most embarrassing guide dog moment or story?**

When mobile phones first came out, we had invited a Guide Dog Instructor from the UK to come out for 14 days to assist us. Whilst she and I were driving back from a meeting with the Chair of Belgian Guide Dogs we were having a discussion about the meeting and the Chair. Somehow, whilst I was driving, I must have pressed a button on my phone that dialled the Chair's number. The phone was sitting right between the Instructor and myself whilst we talked and the Chair was on the other end of the phone listening for about

30 minutes before the beeping phone battery alerted me to the fact. It was extremely embarrassing.

#### **Do you have any dogs or other pets at home?**

I have many fish, a cat and three dogs. A Leonberg and Chihuahua and a 10 year old Labrador. The Labrador was from a litter of a donated Guide Eyes for the Blind brood bitch who had had her litter in my living room.

#### **What do you do to relax in any spare time you have outside work and IGDF?**

I find it very relaxing to look after my fish and clean their 800 litre tank. I do this once a week and it'll take half a day, but it's a hobby that I can undertake in the comfort of my own house. I also like skiing. There is a small place about an hour from where I live, but also Italy is a one-day drive away and there the views are like being on top of the world.

Bob with his wife and three daughters



## **IGDF Dog Welfare Special Interest Group**

Dr Bob Proesmans  
**Chair of IGDF Dog  
Welfare SIG**

**For some time, animal welfare has received the attention it deserved. This was especially true for “dogs with jobs”, like guide and assistance dogs, which stood the test of criticism for many years, as the public assumed that our industry ensured the highest standards of welfare.**

There is no doubt that our practices were based upon the best knowledge that was then available, but times have changed: are we all up-to-date on the current knowledge?

Are we still convinced that all our training methods are justified? Is it just the outcome that justifies the methods? A successful outcome of a training method and the dog's performance sometimes tells us more about the resilience of our dogs, than about the quality of the training. Have we ever thought about the fact that training a dolphin, cannot be achieved by positive punishment? Have we ever thought about how an elephant is trained to have its nails “trimmed”, or a blood sample taken? Do we understand the concept of choice?

Of course, we should all care for our dogs, and we do. But our care should be based on current evidence on animal welfare, learning principles, training tools, a dog's emotional state, its physical and mental needs etc. In short, do we think enough “dog” when handling, training, and keeping dogs?

The goal of the IGDF Dog Welfare Special Interest Group is to investigate the topic, by looking at it from different angles.

We want to provide the IGDF and its members with clear pragmatic information, in order to translate this into professional practice. The information provided can, and should, be evidence-based, as there is ample published research, and more to come.

We also must practice what we preach, as failure to do so will immediately be turned into a trial by media. The public is watching us, and there are smart phones filming us at every corner. There is always the potential for a local media story to ‘go global’ and affect us all.

Another guide dog welfare angle to consider is that dogs might also benefit from being an assistance dog. Of course, this can only be true if we really allow ourselves to be open-minded and concentrate on the needs of our dogs. Only then, can performance go hand in hand with physical and mental welfare.

Doesn't this hold true for all mammals, including ourselves?





**International  
Guide Dog  
Federation**

**2023 IGDF CONFERENCE**

# Strengthening Connections

**NEW DATES - APRIL 27-30, 2023**



## WELCOME BACK MEMBERS!

The Board of the International Guide Dog Federation is very excited to welcome you to Vancouver, Canada for the 2023 IGDF Conference **"Strengthening Connections"** to be held April 27-30, 2023.

Cradled amid sky-scraping mountains and sparkling oceans, our international delegates will experience the very best of this beautiful city and super, natural [British Columbia](#).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, enjoying educational plenary sessions and workshops at the world-renowned Fairmont Hotel Vancouver. We look forward to strengthening connections with colleagues and friends after so much time apart. Further details to follow.



Fairmont Hotel Vancouver  
900 W Georgia St, Vancouver  
British Columbia, Canada



2023 IGDF Conference  
Host IGDF member  
BC & Alberta Guide Dogs

Registration details coming soon to:

**WWW.IGDF.ORG.UK**

\* The video contains scenes of Vancouver throughout the seasons including parks, restaurants, ski areas and cultural attractions



**2023 BREEDER'S WORKSHOP**

# Genetically improving the whole dog

**WELCOME MEMBERS!**

The International Working Dog Breeding Association (IWDBA) is pleased to announce the 13th Breeder's Workshop "Genetically improving the whole dog" to be held May 1-2, 2023 in Vancouver, Canada at the world-renowned Fairmont Hotel Vancouver.

With so much to enjoy in this modern, cosmopolitan city that blends culture and landscape, our delegates will experience the very best of super, natural [British Columbia](#).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, enjoying informative sessions led by industry leaders on such topics as health, behaviour, performance, inbreeding, reproduction, genetic tests, and collaboration.

The IWDBA 2023 Breeder's Workshop will take place immediately following the International Guide Dog Federation Conference. Further details to follow.



## MAY 1 -2, 2023

The final program will be based on survey input from you. Please help by completing the survey [HERE](#)

Topics and levels are appropriate for breeding managers, veterinarians and staff involved with behavioural measures of any level.

Topics under consideration include: Health, Behavior; Conformation, Reproduction; Selecting best young dogs as parents; and Genetic Selection.



Fairmont Hotel Vancouver  
900 W Georgia St, Vancouver  
British Columbia, Canada



2023 IGDF Conference  
Host IGDF member  
BC & Alberta Guide Dogs

Registration details coming soon to:

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\* The video contains scenes of Vancouver throughout the seasons including parks, restaurants, ski areas and cultural attractions

## Webinars and Workshops

Stay in touch with news, research, and best practice from around the world by attending our webinars and workshops. These are open to all IGDF Members, Affiliates, Applicant Organisations and Enquiring Organisations. Webinar registration details are available on the IGDF website and workshop details are circulated by the IGDF Office.

### Workshops:

#### April

##### IGDF Risk Management Workshop - Session 1

**Date:** Tuesday 26th April, Time 5.30pm BST

**Led by:** IGDF Accreditation Committee

##### IGDF Risk Management Workshop - Session 2

**Date:** Thursday 28th April, Time 9.30am BST

**Led by:** IGDF Accreditation Committee

This workshop will be discussing examples of how different IGDF organisations monitor and record risk.

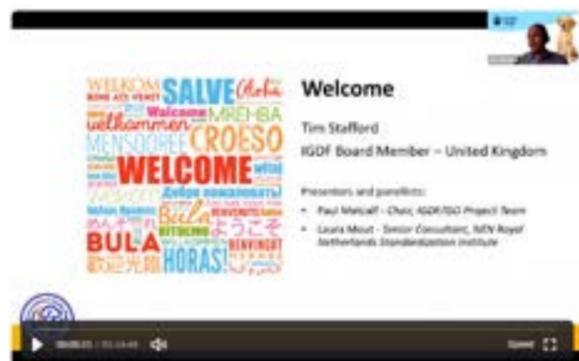
### Webinars:

#### September

##### IGDF online GDMI training platform

**Date:** TBC (September)

**Led by:** Guide Dogs Queensland



#### June

##### IGDF Strategy Update Workshop - Session 1

**Date:** Tuesday 7th June, Time 8am BST

**Led by:** IGDF Board

##### IGDF Strategy Update Workshop - Session 2

**Date:** Thursday 9th June, Time 7pm BST

**Led by:** IGDF Board

These workshops will be feeding back the results of the members' survey and the subsequent adjustments to the Strategy.

**Please note that the above workshops are each scheduled as two sessions to allow members in different time zones to attend. They are however, the same workshop, run at different times.**

**If you would be interested in presenting a webinar please contact the IGDF office.**

# Visionary

## Next Issue

The deadline for articles for the next issue of Visionary is: **1st June 2022.**

### Special Feature

International Guide Dog Day 2022. Share your stories of how your organisation has marked International Guide Dog Day 2022.

Please send articles on this or any other topic to the IGDF Office by the above deadline.

We' also love to receive any photo submissions for featuring on our final page.

Please supply your articles as a Word file with original images attached as separate jpeg images. The IGDF Office will contact you if your article is accepted with details of how to submit a recording for the Visionary podcast.



**Disclaimer** | Whilst the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) retains editorial right to all articles presented within the Visionary, accuracy of specific detail and figures quoted are as provided by the author and their supporting organisation. The IGDF, whilst welcoming feedback on content, will not enter into any dialogue relating to perceived inaccuracies in these areas.