

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

Visionary

Edition **59**
March
2026

**Facility and Kennel
Designs** to improve
outcomes

Paws for Access
survey across the
globe



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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, Belgium, Canada, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, USA**



Cover Photo

Training dogs relaxing in front of the fireplace at Kansai Guide Dog Association's training centre – Article page 27

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Message From The Chair

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

It is now less than two months until the 2026 IGDF Conference in Yokohama, Japan. Registrations have now closed, and I am delighted to confirm that we will be welcoming over 300 delegates. In February, David Maynard and I visited the conference venue and can confirm that the facilities are truly excellent. The venue's location, set beside the waters of Tokyo Bay, is especially beautiful. Our hosts, The Japan Guide Dog Association, along with the Board and Organizing Committee, warmly look forward to welcoming guests to Yokohama for what promises to be an engaging and memorable programme, delivered with the exceptional care and hospitality for which Japan is renowned.

Education remains central to our mission of improving the availability of high-quality guide dog services. The Board continues to prioritise the IGDF Academy project, first introduced in the November issue of Visionary. In January, we appointed a Digital Learning Consultant, who has been working closely with the Education Committee to ensure the appropriate technology is in place to deliver the Academy. The Committee will present a detailed update on this exciting initiative at the Conference.

We have also been progressing a proposal to develop a professional register for Guide Dog Mobility Instructors (GDMIs). This idea, suggested by member

continued
Message From The Chair


organisations, aims to strengthen external recognition of the GDMI profession. We recently conducted a consultation to gather further input on how the register should operate and what information it should include. Thank you to everyone who contributed. We are currently reviewing the responses and will share the findings at the Conference, along with an update on the anticipated timeline for launch.

As many of you may know, we have recently welcomed a new member to the IGDF team. Charlotte "Lottie" Mercure has joined us as Administrative Assistant and is already proving invaluable in supporting David and Clare and helping to keep everything running smoothly. Lottie will be attending the Conference in Yokohama, and I know many of you will enjoy meeting her in person.

Finally, it is with great regret that we say goodbye—and extend our sincere thanks—to Christine Baroni-Pretsch, who has

stepped down from the IGDF Board after many years of outstanding service. Christine has made a significant and lasting contribution to IGDF's work. In her most recent term, she has served in a wide range of roles, including Vice-Chair, Chair of the Conference Programme Committee (3 times), and liaison to several committees, as well as a member of the Standards Committee. We will greatly miss Christine's wisdom, thoughtfulness, and unwavering dedication to IGDF's mission.

Wishing your organization and every one of you, a truly successful 2026.



William S. Thornton GDMI
Chair IGDF



Conference Schedule:

Thursday 14th May

8.30am - 5.30pm: Fuji Harness Tour
10am-3pm Senior Leaders Networking Event
6pm - 9.30pm: Welcome Reception

Friday 15th May

8.30am - 5.30pm: Presentations
8pm - 10pm: Video Session/Dorothy Awards

Saturday, 16th May

8.30am - 5pm: Presentations
7pm - late: Gala Dinner

Sunday, 17th May

9am - 12 noon: Presentations
2pm - 6pm: Kanagawa Guide Dog Training Centre Tour

Scholarships and Awards

10th April 2026 is the deadline for all award and scholarship nominations.

If you wish to nominate for the Ken Lord Award, the Derek Freeman Scholarship, The Dorothy or the John Groom Long Service Award, please do so now before the closing date. Details can be found on the [2026 IGDF conference page](#).

Conference Podcast

The March 2026 conference update podcast is now available.

Listen now on Soundcloud, Spotify or Apple, accessible through the [IGDF podcasts page](#)

IGDF Recruitment

IGDF can only achieve its mission with the assistance of its passionate and professional members and volunteers. If you would like to get involved we are now recruiting for the following positions:

2 x Standards Committee Members
(Applicants from Asia and Europe preferred for geographic representation)

1 x Accreditation Committee Member
(We currently cannot accept applications from the USA or Australia)

2 x IGDF Assessors (We are currently only recruiting from the Asia region)

Further details are available on the IGDF website's [What's New page](#) or by emailing the IGDF office.

IGDF Assessments

Update from **IGDF Office, UK**

Congratulations to the following organisations which have passed their accreditation assessments:

- Israel Guide Dog Center
- Samsung Guide Dog School, Korea
- Chiens Guides d'Aveugles – Centre Paul Corteville, France
- Association Des Chiens Guides d'Aveugles Ill de France
- Les Chiens Guides d'Aveugles de Provence Côte d'Azur Corse, France
- Blindenführhundschiule Richter, Germany

Congratulations to the following organisation who has become an AO with IGDF:

- The Swedish Agency for Participation

Congratulations to the following organisations who has become an EO with IGDF:

- Fundación Gulliver del Perro Guía, Argentina

We say goodbye to the following organisation, whose EO status has lapsed:

- WEYS, Ukraine

International Guide Dogs Day 2026

Wednesday 29th April 2026 is International Guide Dog Day. This is the day when we celebrate guide dogs and all the amazing work that they do.

This is a great opportunity to raise awareness of guide dogs around the world. We encourage all organisations to plan events and media campaigns to celebrate International Guide Dog Day. The theme for this year's International Guide Dog Day is "Why a guide dog?" – celebrating and exploring all the benefits that guide dogs bring to their owners in addition to the central role of safe and effective independent mobility. John Welsman is producing a podcast which will feature many guide dog owners from different countries, sharing their experience of the many benefits of guide dog ownership.

IGDF Member stories

IGDF is inviting you to share your client success stories with us and the international community. We would love to receive your stories, which highlight the life-changing impact of your guide dog services.

These stories help demonstrate the real difference that well-trained guide dogs make in improving independence, mobility, and quality of life for people with vision impairment. We are particularly interested in clear, engaging examples that can be shared with a wider audience and that showcase the positive outcomes achieved through your programmes.

We are also working on the usual press release containing all the latest guide dog statistics which you can use in your own media activity.

The podcast and press release will be circulated to all IGDF organisations in the near future – so please look out for further communications!

As always we'd love to hear from you about how you celebrate International Guide Dog Day. Please do share your experiences via social media. We'd also love to receive any photos or articles for publication on the website or the next issue of Visionary. If you're looking for inspiration, why not check out some of the great celebrations from last year on our [International Guide Dog Day webpage](#).

If you have a story that illustrates the partnership between a client and their guide dog, and the role your organisation played in supporting that journey, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please consider submitting examples that can be communicated in an accessible and inspiring way for publication.

Articles can be submitted through our website here: [Articles - International Guide Dog Federation](#).

If you have any questions or require assistance, please email enquiries@igdf.org.uk

BGHSG geleidehonden, Genk Memorial Garden

Karliens Jespers
BGHSG,
blindengeleidehonden



Dogs are more a part of our lives than ever before. We form close bonds with them. We realize that dogs are creatures with emotions, just like us humans. They live close to us and with us, in our living room, kitchen, or even in the bedroom. We spend a lot of time with them. We take care of their physical and mental wellbeing. They are like family! And we get so much in return...

Unfortunately, the day will come when we have to say goodbye to them: preferably when they are old. But as humans, we have no control over that and we can not always choose when it happens.

It is no different for our guide dogs. The best thing, of course, is when a guide dog can work until the age of 10 and then enjoy a few years of rest and retirement. However, for every blind or visually impaired person, the day will come when you have to say goodbye to your companion. The impact is huge: a guide dog is more than a loyal friend; it has accompanied you for years to school, to work, to your sports and cultural activities. It ensured that you could walk safely from point A to point B and did so with dedication and passion.

So that none of our guide dogs are forgotten, we have created a memorial garden with a few volunteers on the BGHSG grounds. Each deceased guide dog is given a ceramic artwork with its own name on it and a butterfly as a symbol. We have also provided a place where our clients can scatter the ashes of their deceased guide dogs if they wish.

This gives our dogs a final resting place where clients can remember their dogs and meet each other.

The puppies and dogs in training who had to leave us also get their name and a 'four-leaf clover' in this place. Daffodils, crocuses, tulips, and lilies of the valley brighten up the whole place during the first days of spring.

Our dogs will always be in our hearts and we often think back on all the beautiful memories. But in this way, they also remain a visible part of BGHSG. And where better than in our own garden surrounded by greenery?



Paws for Access Survey Report helps bring assistance dog access issues to parliament across the globe

Tamara Searant
Chair, IGDF/ADI
International
Advocacy
Committee



Voices from across the community at the the UK Parliamentary event

Recent UK and Australian parliamentary events spotlighted findings from the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) and Assistance Dogs International (ADI) Paws for Access survey, highlighting access rights to policy makers.

The global survey of 1,200 handlers revealed the UK to be the country where assistance dog teams report the most issues, with 78% reporting multiple access refusals in the last year.

Australian respondents reported the highest incidence of emotional and behavioural impact, with 59% saying they considered avoiding public places altogether.

In November 2025, Assistance Dogs Europe (ADEu) organisations took these findings to policy makers in the UK during an event in parliament, where they were welcomed by the All-party Parliamentary Dog Advisory Welfare Group. The event was attended by Members of Parliament, service providers, colleagues from Assistance Dogs UK (ADUK), the Assistance Dog Assessment Association (ADAA), European Guide Dog Federation (EGDF) and IGDF as well as prominent guest speaker and Guide Dog Handler [Lucy Edwards](#). As a result of this event, ADEu will initially be working with several major service providers, revising guidance on welcoming assistance dog teams & providing organisational training.

In Australia, the survey findings were launched at a NSW Parliament roundtable event in Sydney. Participants included IGDF and ADI members organisations, the Minister for Disability Inclusion, human rights advocates and disability inclusion leaders.

The discussion focused on collaboration between government, disability rights, and assistance animal sectors to strengthen legislation and public awareness. The roundtable fostered a strong relationship with NSW Parliament, with the Minister for Disability Inclusion continuing to support further Guide Dogs NSW/ACT campaigns. Australia is currently advancing disability and assistance animal reforms, and parliamentary backing – reinforced by survey data – is critical to driving policy change.



Assistance Dog Handlers at Parliament, UK

Download the Paws for Access Survey Report on the [IGDF website](#).

For guidance on presenting findings to policy makers in your region, contact the IGDF/ADI International Advocacy Committee Chair on tsearant@guidedogs.com.au



Disability leaders, community reps, & government stakeholders at Parliament, Australia

Chester Outdoor Enrichment Project: Moms (and Dads!) Get to Play, Too

Craig Garretson
The Seeing Eye,
USA



The Seeing Eye upgraded play yards

The Seeing Eye's Chester campus, where all Seeing Eye puppies are born and spend the first seven weeks of life before going to their volunteer Puppy Raiser families, is famous for its "puppy playroom."

There, puppies can frolic with each other while learning to explore the world with confidence. The puppy playroom includes different surfaces, toys, wobble boards, short staircases, large plastic tubes that can be used as tunnels, and other interesting experiences – everything a curious puppy could love!

But the puppy playroom is for, as you might have guessed, puppies. What do their parents do for fun?

The Chester campus not only has puppies, but also The Seeing Eye's breeding population. These adult dogs, carefully selected by our Canine Development team, veterinarians, and geneticist to be the best of the best, are kept in shape physically and mentally

through exercise, obedience training, and daily walks and playtime with staff and volunteers before beginning service as Seeing Eye dogs or getting released from the program and returned to their puppy raiser families or to one of the many families waiting to adopt one of our wonderful dogs.

Since the facility opened in 2001, we have had large, fenced-in exercise yards where these dogs can run and play with each other, as much fun as any dog park.

"Our dogs need a play yard for 'off leash' playtime, running after toys, retrieving them, and just having fun time," said Maria Hevner, Senior Manager of The Seeing Eye's Breeding Station and Clinic. "Each dog is in the play yards daily."

After more than two decades of use by hundreds of dogs, these yards needed some sprucing up. And the best of the best... deserve the best! So we went beyond just a little groundskeeping.

This fall, The Seeing Eye completed its Chester Outdoor Enrichment Project, refurbishing the outdoor canine exercise yards. We expanded the existing yards by leveling more ground and installing a retaining wall, giving us additional space to create two distinct areas: a 9,600 square foot agility yard, which contains equipment dogs can use to use to run, jump, climb, and explore; and an 8,700 square foot water play yard where our dogs would be able to play outdoors and still keep cool during the summer. It also features a large climbing structure that can be used year-round.

Additionally, we built two smaller fetch yards, where an individual dog can be taken out to play one-on-one with a staff member or volunteer.

"The dogs love the new playhouse station, running up and down the ramps, or just sitting on top and looking out at the other dogs," Maria said. "During the hot weather, the water features are a huge hit. And of course they love all the space to run around, play with the toys, and chase each other."



Water play for the dogs in the play yards



Playhouse in one of the new play yards

High-traffic areas have artificial turf, which is easier to keep sanitized as well as gentler on a dog's paw pads.

Finally, we also built a walking path that we will use to bring visitors to the facility... which, until now, was a rare experience, even for long-time Seeing Eye staff members. Visitors are not normally permitted inside the breeding center because it is a barrier facility; strict cleanliness protocols are followed to ensure the health and safety of the adult dogs and puppies there.

However, because the new walkway is around the outside of the facility's barrier fencing, guests can now visit the Chester campus and watch the dogs at play. Along the paved walkway are three education terraces containing informational signs that describe the work done by The Seeing Eye. To ensure that these signs are accessible to people who are blind, the information also can be listened to via audio recordings.

<https://seeingeye.org/>

ONCE inaugurate a Breeding Center and Care Complex

Elisenda Stewart Til
ONCE Guide Dog Foundation

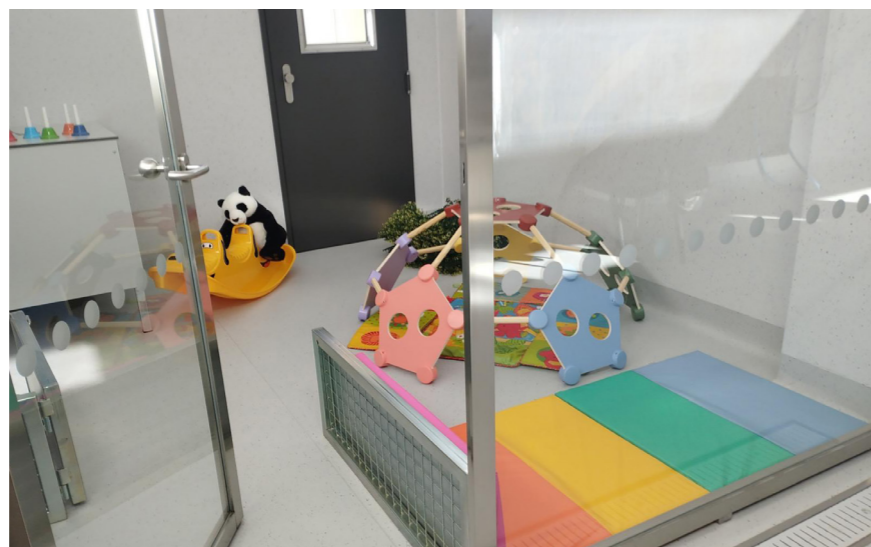


ONCE'S new Breeding Center and Care Complex focuses on animal welfare

The work carried out by ONCE Guide Dog Foundation for more than 35 years has taken a further step forward with the launch of its newly inaugurated Clinical and Care Complex. Its commissioning will allow an increase in the number of dogs housed at the school's facilities and represents one of the key pillars for expanding its production capacity, in order to meet the growing demand for guide dogs clients.

The complex consists of two U-shaped buildings comprising four blocks that house breeding facilities specifically designed for attending births and newborn litters; veterinary services, a laboratory, and a clinical hospital; as well as

temporary accommodation areas for breeding females and puppies. This layout helps to minimize health risks by separating areas for dogs in temporary housing from those where dogs are already in the training and instruction phases.



New puppy facilities

We are committed to all our dogs receiving the highest level of care regarding their nutrition, health, and environmental.

The new buildings feature whelping rooms with perimeter guards that ensure the first stage of puppy rearing; kennels with glass fronts and a small resting area for the mother; an early stimulation room equipped with materials to support cognitive development; an in-house laboratory; two fully equipped operating theatres with state-of-the-art technology; a hospital with 20 individual kennels; and up to 40 covered outdoor yards and 22 off-leash exercise areas adapted to the needs of each block, ensuring the recreation and well-being of every dog. All of this has been developed in accordance with sustainability and energy-efficiency and welfare standards.

The capacity provided by this expansion, together with the previously existing facilities and the ambitious growth plan currently underway at the school, will make it possible, in the medium and long term,



Elisenda in the new puppy facilities

to deliver up to a maximum of 175 guide dogs per year.

The complex was inaugurated by H.R.H. Infanta Sofía. During the event, the Director of ONCE Guide Dog Foundation, María Jesús Varela, stated: **"With this Complex, we are consolidating a model of care for dogs centered on their well-being, through enriched environments, early stimulation, and an individualized approach, which will promote the training of more balanced, confident dogs who are better prepared to guide blind people."**

<https://perrosguia.once.es/>



ONCE Guide Dog Foundation staff

Designing with Purpose: The Blind Low Vision NZ Guide Dog Development Centre

Melinda Dawson
BLVNZ



Blind Low Vision New Zealand's Development Centre

As New Zealand's sole provider of professionally trained Guide Dogs, we breed, raise, and train dogs to meet the individual needs of Blind Low Vision NZ clients who choose guide dog mobility.

By 2020, our kennels had served their purpose for 35 years but no longer met our needs. Consultation, feasibility, planning, and collaboration with experts in animal health, behaviour, architecture, and university research led to the creation of the Guide Dog Development Centre (GDDC): Three purpose-built buildings designed to give our dogs the best possible start, with animal welfare, training, and staff needs at the heart.



Outdoor enrichment areas



Purpose built training environments

Why a new facility was needed

The previous kennels, while remarkable for their time, split dogs into separate wings around a central kitchen and staff workstation. This layout limited visual contact between dogs and staff and reduced opportunities for small group interaction and close supervision.

Dogs were housed in less intimate spaces, which influenced behaviour, socialisation, and overall wellbeing, while also making the management of health and hygiene more challenging. While the old kennels served us well, they no longer supported the flexibility, visual inclusion, and welfare focused environments required for our guide dog programme today.



New kennel layouts



Areas focus on visual inclusion between dogs and staff

Key objectives of the GDDC

The GDDC was designed to feel like a “home away from home.” Circular shaped dog pods create visual inclusion with the surrounding environment, rather than isolating dogs into rooms or runs. Smaller pods accommodate up to ten dogs, fostering a group or household-

style setting, with the flexibility to open into a larger pod of up to twenty dogs when space or specific needs require it.

Separate buildings allow dogs to be housed according to their individual requirements, such as new intakes, younger dogs, girls in season, or those needing lower visual and auditory stimulation.



Clear sightlines allow staff to monitor dogs easily with minimal handling



Aircraft training space

A dedicated isolation unit supports dogs of any age or stage requiring more intensive care.

Throughout the design process, collaboration with specialists ensured that every element, from acoustics, airflow, and natural light, to staff workflows and training environments, was intentionally designed to support dog welfare, learning, and staff safety, while remaining adaptable as practices evolve.



Controlled street layouts

Welfare and staff safety

Natural light, consistent airflow, and sound-dampening materials help reduce stress and noise levels. Clear sightlines allow staff to monitor dogs easily with minimal handling, while indoor/outdoor flow supports natural behaviour, physical health, and daily enrichment.

Supporting confident learning

Further to the Guide Dog Development Centre (GDDC), our Mobility Centre next door includes purpose-built training environments that mirror real-life scenarios. Trainers can introduce street layouts, obstacles, and decision-making challenges in a staged, controlled way, building confidence before dogs transition into live urban environments.



Urban training environments

For Blind Low Vision NZ, the GDDC demonstrates how intentional building and kennel design, guided by expert collaboration, can directly strengthen service delivery. By prioritising welfare, flexibility, and purposeful learning, the Centre actively supports successful guide dog partnerships.

Email GuideDogs@BlindLowVision.org.nz or visit BlindLowVision.org.nz to know more.



Urban training environments

Designing for Welfare, Flow, and Growth

William Thornton,
BC and Alberta Guide Dogs



View from the front of the new Victor and Anna Kern Breeding and Training Centre

At BC and Alberta Guide Dogs, we provide Guide Dogs, Autism Service Dogs, and OSI-PTSD Service Dogs at no cost to clients across British Columbia and Alberta. As demand has grown, so have waitlists. The Victor and Anna Kern Breeding and Training Centre was built to help us reduce multi-year waitlists and serve more people, while strengthening canine health, welfare, and training outcomes through purposeful building and kennel design.



View from the rear of the new building

In our first 30 years, we have graduated over 400 Guide and Service Dogs, serving more than 75 communities across British Columbia and Alberta. Today, we support over 220 active teams. This new Centre expands our capacity to support individuals with blindness and low vision, children with autism and their families, and Veterans and First Responders living with Occupational Stress Injury – PTSD.

Designed around the full working-dog journey

From birth to advanced training and graduation, the Victor and Anna Kern Breeding and Training Centre is organized to support the full lifecycle of a working dog. The building is intentionally zoned into health, breeding, training, and wellness areas, improving flow, reducing unnecessary cross-traffic, and supporting consistent routines that benefit dogs and staff alike.

Specialized neonatal care, built in

A dedicated neonatal ward supports early puppy development in a controlled environment. Key features include a nursing station for staff and volunteers, a whelping room, and multiple mother-and-puppy nursing pods. Underfloor heating and adjustable lighting in the whelping and nursing areas supports comfort and safety for both mom and puppies. The ward also includes secure isolation for unvaccinated puppies, with closed-circuit monitoring and a sealed viewing corridor that allows safe observation by the public while maintaining biosecurity.

With this facility, we will be able to breed and raise over 100 puppies each year, increasing long-term capacity while maintaining high welfare standards.



Left: Administration Office;
Above: Reception area

Veterinary infrastructure that supports proactive care

The Centre features an onsite reproduction laboratory supported by an adjoining veterinary clinic, creating an integrated environment for coordinated health and wellness care. Our capabilities include ultrasound and endoscopy, puppy incubator facilities, semen collection and in-house cytology and reproductive analysis using advanced microscopy.

We also perform transcervical insemination, allowing us to access frozen semen from guide and service dog programs around the world. This significantly diversifies and strengthens our genetic pool while preserving valuable working lines.

With two Registered Veterinary Technicians on staff, we can conduct routine wellness checks of breeding dogs and puppies, monitor pregnancies, and provide neonatal care. The facility also enables us to host vaccination clinics and specialized eye examinations in partnership with a board-certified ophthalmologist.

Enrichment and training spaces designed for outcomes

Early development is supported through a Puppy Play and Enhancement Centre designed for puppies in their first weeks, featuring safe enrichment elements and a variety of underfoot surfaces to build confidence and adaptability.



Neonatal Nursing Station exterior



Neonatal Nursing Station interior



Puppy Enhancement Area



Dog bathing area

A dedicated Veterans' Training Hall supports our Guide Dog and Service Dog programs and serves as the primary onsite training space for weekly supervised classes for puppy raising families. With the new Centre, we will be able to double the number of working teams we graduate.

The Victor and Anna Kern Breeding and Training Centre is more than a building. It is an investment in welfare, quality, and capacity, designed to help more people regain independence with a highly trained dog by their side.



Veterans' Training Hall

What our heroes do on the weekend and life in the KNGF kennel

Eveline Lentz-Mulder,
The Royal Dutch Guide
Dog Foundation (KNGF)

During the week, the dogs in training at KNGF Geleidehonden follow a structured daily routine designed to prepare them for their future role as assistance dogs. Life in the kennel revolves around a balance of training, care, hygiene and rest, ensuring that every dog stays healthy, motivated and ready to learn.

The entire kennel environment and daily routine are built around providing the best possible care for the dogs during their training period.

A kennel designed for wellbeing

The care for the wellbeing of the dogs in training is at the heart of the daily work in the kennel. Both permanent staff and volunteers dedicate themselves with great commitment to caring for the dogs. At the same time, the environment in which the dogs live is carefully designed with their comfort and social needs in mind.

The kennel itself is spacious and filled with natural light and fresh air. The kennels are built in a distinctive diamond-shaped (wybert) layout, which allows the dogs to always see each other as well as the kennel staff. Dogs are social animals that have a strong need for contact with both other dogs & people, and the design of the building supports this natural behaviour.

The dogs are housed in pairs, allowing them to keep each other company and play together. The kennel fences are deliberately low so that staff can easily interact with the dogs, creating an open and approachable environment. The walls between kennels are also low,

making it easy for dogs to interact with their neighbours. They often sniff each other through the openings, and toys are sometimes tossed between kennels.

The facility also includes a well-equipped veterinary room, ensuring that medical care is always close at hand.

A structured start to the day

Life in the kennel follows a predictable daily rhythm. The day usually begins around 7:00 a.m., when the dogs are first taken outside to relieve themselves. After that they receive their breakfast and are taken outside again. Dogs that require medication receive it during this time.



Breakfast time in the kennels

Once the dogs have eaten, the kennel staff prepare them for the day's activities. Trainers collect the dogs that will be going out for training and transport them in special vans to locations such as cities, public transport systems & shopping areas where they practice real-life guiding skills. A planning board in the kennel helps staff ensure that the right dogs go with the right trainers each day.

Cleanliness and hygiene

Keeping the kennel clean is a major part of the daily routine. Once the training vans have left, the staff begin an extensive cleaning process. The kennels are cleaned daily using high-pressure hoses and scrubbing machines. Food bowls are washed, bedding such as blankets and towels are cleaned, and several times a week the facility is thoroughly disinfected. This strict hygiene routine helps prevent disease and ensures a safe and comfortable environment for all the dogs.



Dog bathing area

Dogs staying behind

Not every dog goes out for training every day. Dogs that stay in the kennel still receive plenty of attention and stimulation. Staff members may take them for walks in the forest, practice basic obedience exercises, or provide enrichment activities such as puzzle games.

The kennel even houses resident cats, allowing the dogs to gradually get used to cats during their training an important skill for future guide dogs who will encounter many different animals in daily life.

Each dog's activities are carefully tracked so that staff can maintain the right balance between exercise, training and rest.

Evening care and rest

At the end of the afternoon the training dogs return to the kennel. After a busy day, they receive their evening meal and settle down for some well-deserved rest.



Staff member reads to the dogs

In the evenings, volunteers often assist by brushing the dogs and giving them extra attention and affection. A staff member also stays overnight in the kennel to keep watch and ensure that the dogs are safe and comfortable.

The next morning, the familiar rhythm of rest, cleanliness and routine begins again helping the dogs develop into confident and capable assistance dogs.

[Hondleiding - KNGF Geleidehonden](#)



Staff working in the kennels

Reimagining Our GD Centre: Designing for Access, Connection and Impact

Melinda Bowden
Guide Dogs
NSW/ACT

Guide Dogs NSW/ACT's administration building, located on the grounds of the Guide Dog Centre in Glossodia (NSW, Australia), first opened its doors in 2000. Twenty five years later, we saw a powerful opportunity: to transform this trusted space so it truly reflects who we are today – a modern, inclusive organisation committed to accessibility, connection, and the integral role dogs play in our work.

In April 2025, we officially opened our reimagined space, and we couldn't be prouder of what it represents for our clients, our people, and our dogs in training.



Digital welcome board

A workplace designed for inclusion

The new environment sets a benchmark for what a disability inclusive workplace can be, strengthening our commitment to people with low vision or blindness. Every feature has been purposefully crafted:

- A fully accessible bathroom and baby change facilities
- Dimmable lighting to support diverse sensory needs
- Braille signage and tactile wayfinding
- Rounded edges for safer mobility
- Hearing loop enabled meeting rooms
- Thoughtfully colour contrasted bathrooms
- Hallways wide enough to comfortably accommodate two Guide Dogs and handlers passing, or two wheelchairs side by side

Together, these elements ensure every client, staff member, and visitor has the freedom to navigate the space safely and confidently.

Prioritising staff wellbeing

Staff experience and comfort were central to the redesign. Sit stand desks are now located throughout the office to create a more ergonomic and inclusive work environment. A new quiet room provides a calm, low sensory space for employees who benefit from time away from noise and stimulation – supporting wellbeing in a meaningful, practical way.



Reception and volunteer facilities

Enhancing how dogs connect with office life

A major focus of the redesign was creating an environment where dogs can thrive. Every desk has a tether point, raised water bowls are positioned throughout the building, and dog beds are readily available to support pups and dogs in training as they practise settling behaviours.

We also introduced a second dedicated puppy enrichment area with this one being a space where donors can engage with our young pups in a controlled, positive environment that still meets the essential quarantine requirements essential for our young pups' health. This area has adjustable louvres allowing for appropriate levels of UV for hygiene whilst protecting our pups from heat or rain when they are using the area.



Main Office



Puppy Enrichment Space

A flexible, connected, and modern workspace

The refreshed layout includes customisable digital welcome signage, a 16 seat boardroom, technology enabled meeting rooms, and an inviting open style kitchen that naturally brings people together. The highly flexible multi function room supports everything from puppy assessments to professional development seminars or all staff lunch events.

Visitors and volunteers now enjoy their own designated tea and coffee facilities – a small but meaningful gesture that enhances connection and recognises the invaluable contribution our volunteers make in transporting, raising or otherwise supporting our dogs.



Multifunction Room

A sustainable approach

Sustainability was front of mind throughout the project. Where possible, equipment and furniture were donated to local charities, helping reduce waste while supporting the surrounding community.

A space that reflects our purpose

The redesigned Guide Dog Centre is now a bright, functional, and deeply accessible environment – one that strengthens collaboration, enhances integration with our dogs, and nurtures the relationships that allow us to deliver life changing outcomes for people with low vision or blindness.

<https://nsw.guidedogs.com.au/>

Kansai Guide Dog Association's training centre, Japan

Miki Asano
Kansai Guide Dogs for the Blind



Outside view of Kansai Kennels

Kansai Guide Dog Association's training centre is located in a picturesque wooded valley just outside Kameoka west of Kyoto.

Our current kennel was built in 2016. It was designed with the idea of creating an atmosphere like a family living room. Since guide dogs spend most of their time in a home environment except during training periods, we wanted the kennel to resemble a home as much as possible. In this kennel, someone is always nearby during the day.



Kansai Kennels creates a family living atmosphere

As a result, the dogs experience less stress compared to before, staff can notice the dogs' subtle changes more easily, and it creates a beneficial environment for both. Even when visitors or guests come, the dogs rarely bark. The kennel is more hygienic than before, and everyone can feel

comfortable there.

Occasionally, concerts are held in the kennel. During these events, the dogs listen quietly to the music, and this experience also serves as practice for when they become guide dogs. In winter, the dogs spend their time surrounded by gentle sunlight and the warmth of a wood stove. If you have the opportunity, please come and visit. All of our staff look forward to welcoming you.

<https://kansai-guidedog.jp/>

Creating a Harmonious Haven Kennel Renovation for Dogs and People

Kimiko Iwamoto
Japan Guide Dog
Association



Dogs relaxing on a soft carpet by a kennel staff in the raised seating area, where staff take off their shoes

In December 2025, the kennel at the Japan Guide Dog Association's Kanagawa Training Centre was completely renovated. The new space features improved air conditioning management and ample natural light, ensuring a comfortable environment for both people and dogs.

The request from the kennel staff, made before renovation work began, was for "a place where people and dogs can spend time together".

In the previous kennel, the dogs primarily resided in their kennels. The kennel staff performed administrative tasks and moved

around for cleaning in areas overlooking the kennels. Outside of training, grooming, and exercise times, the dogs and staff were separated by the kennel fencing.

In the new kennel, the dogs still rest in their kennels, but when the kennel staff is doing administrative work or taking their lunch break, they can spend time with the dogs in various areas: the 'open space', 'raised seating area', 'multi-purpose hall', 'sunroom', and 'lounge'.

The emphasis was on creating a 'home-like feel'. We aimed for spaces reminiscent of home life: floors covered with rugs, low tables, cushions, and tissue boxes nearby...

Dogs of every status spend their time at home showered with affection, but only the training dogs live in kennels.

Whereas before, all the family's attention was focused solely on them, in the kennels, they must compete for attention among many other dogs to get noticed.

Some dogs bark or soil themselves to get attention; other stressed dogs chew their own limbs or tails. Some pass the time gnawing on mats or walls.

Behaviours that might be avoided in a home environment can be exacerbated in kennels, leading to physical and mental health issues or reduced training performance.

Moreover, actions physically limited in kennels become options for dogs when placed in home-like spaces. Whether they choose to misbehave, sleep peacefully, or run about excitedly, these self-selected behaviours reveal their true nature. This allows us to assess their suitability for guide dog work based on who they are, rather than training them to appear well-behaved.

The Japan Guide Dog Association will continue to pursue comfort for both humans and dogs, aiming for a future where dogs can relax and freely be themselves in their chosen spots, even without fencing.

<https://www.moudouken.net/en/>



Dogs playing with a trainer in the tiled multipurpose hall

Redefining Accessibility and Inclusion: Inside Guide Dogs Victoria's Transformative Campus Redevelopment

Aimée Goder
Guide Dogs
Victoria,
Australia



Guide Dogs Victoria official Campus opening

Guide Dogs Victoria (GDV) has a long history of leadership and innovation in the vision sector. The recent completion of its Campus redevelopment marks a significant advancement towards a fully accessible and inclusive environment for people with low vision or blindness. Informed by over five years of meticulous planning and international study, the transformed Campus was officially opened in September 2024 and guarantees to benefit the Victorian blind and low vision community for generations to come.

Central to the redevelopment were mandatory universal design principles, shaped by extensive consultations with Clients, their families, staff, and volunteers to ensure the facility met the community's needs. A key piece of research was an international study tour of eight sensory spaces across three countries, informing the design and showcasing global standards for

accessibility, inclusion, and learning. GDV's research included visits to locations such as the Anchor Center for Blind Children in Denver, Guiding Eyes for the Blind in New York, and Hazelwood School in Glasgow. The insights gained and support received from every institution visited were invaluable to the success of the redevelopment, and GDV extends its heartfelt thanks to all involved.



Guide Dogs Victoria external reception

Leveraging holistic accessibility tools including light, scent, sound, and touch to stimulate the senses, the Campus ensures every visitor, regardless of vision level, feels a deep connection to their surroundings.

"The gold standard for accessible buildings, as defined by GDV, starts with the adoption of universal design principles, a co-design process, and involves implementing a range of tools such as tactile surfaces, contrasting colours to define spaces, adaptive lighting, and advanced wayfinding systems like BindiMaps within the new build, the needs of the community remain front of mind always.

A standout feature is the updated residential accommodation, where Clients can develop essential life skills in a supportive environment fostering immersive confidence and purpose.



GDV residential accommodation

Featuring seven ensuite bedrooms, a wheelchair-accessible bedroom, a training apartment, sensory breakout spaces, and an accessible communal training kitchen with electric adjustable sink and cooktop, and overhead cabinets that lower for easy access; the spaces are exemplary models of accessible design.



Guide Dogs Victoria Kids Room

Continued
GDV Campus Redevelopment

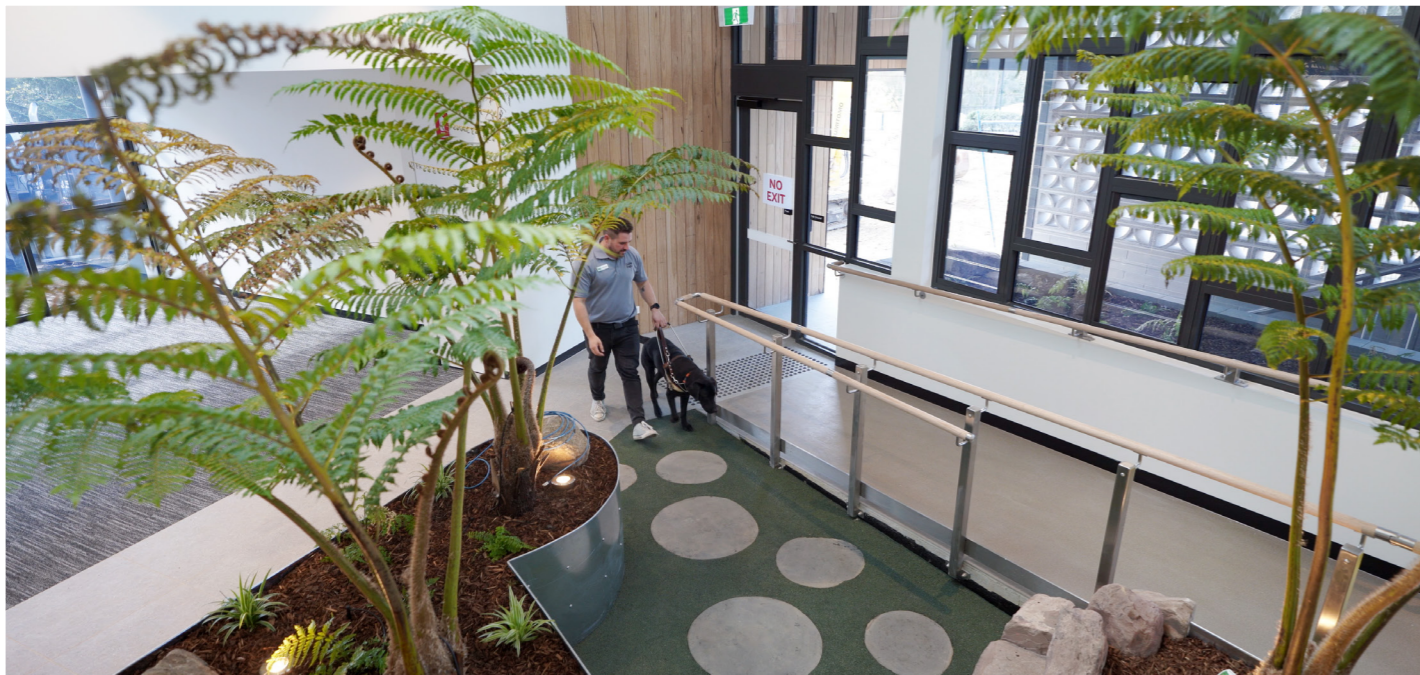


Guide Dogs Victoria hallway

The residential accommodation facilities simulate real-life living conditions while maximising accessibility and learning opportunities, with communal areas like the dining space, a Client lounge that community peer groups can utilise, plus sensory rooms crafted to encourage social connections and reduce isolation.

Both puppies and Clients can thrive at the new Campus, with a centrally-located early puppy development courtyard where the public can come and watch potential future Guide Dogs puppies play and learn through enrichment activities.

At GDV, Clients can access a range of Guide Dog training opportunities that can be delivered at their home or on-site utilising the new facilities. Clients opting for residential training stay on-campus for two weeks to bond and train with their Guide Dog match, creating a fantastic opportunity for peer support and to meet with other staff while exploring GDV's diverse services. Clients can also return with their current Guide Dog for long cane refresher programs or can explore developing new skills such as accessing the CBD independently via public transport.



Guide Dogs Victoria sensory indoor garden



Guide Dogs Victoria training apartment

Client who recently participated in a residential program shared, "The accommodation was premium, with incredible attention to detail that made it feel homely. The rooms were spacious, with plenty of storage, allowing me to fully unpack and feel at home rather than living out of a suitcase."

GDV also regularly hosts additional upskilling programs such as the 'Cook to Connect' occupational therapy program where Clients can learn or enhance basic cooking skills, while building confidence in their independence and safety at home. The on-campus veterinary hospital is another notable addition, offering specialist care to the local community and GDV's dogs directly on-site. Guide Dogs Victoria has partnered with Advanced Vetcare who operate the soon to be 24/7 facility. Guide Dogs Victoria's own veterinary team also works alongside Advanced Vetcare's team in the state-of-the-art facility.

This redevelopment marks a new era for GDV, positioning it as a global leader in providing holistic support for

the community they serve. The new Campus is more than just a facility; it is a vibrant community hub where ability is nurtured, celebrated, and developed in an environment that is as inclusive as it is innovative. By creating a space that maximises learning and social connection, GDV has set a new worldwide benchmark, proving once again the importance of thoughtful design to enhance learning, independence, and wellbeing for the blind and low vision community.



Guide Dogs Victoria community hub

Knowledge Sharing Webinars

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

Webinar Recordings

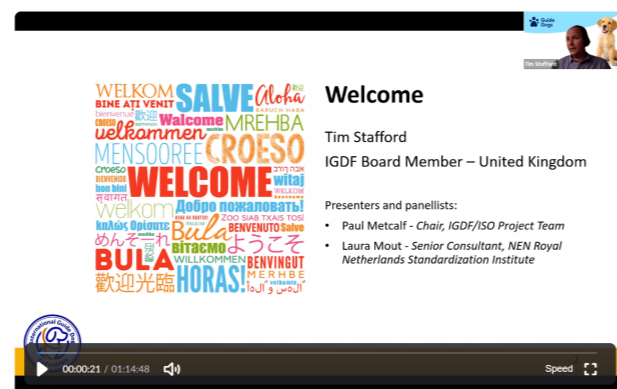
The below IGDF webinar is available to [view on the IGDF website here](#)

- Benefits of a Federation: The French Federation of Guide Dog Association

ADI Webinars

The below ADI webinar is available to [view on the IGDF website here](#)

- Growing and Sustaining Volunteers
- Cross Organizational Communication: Tips, Tools, and Lessons Learned

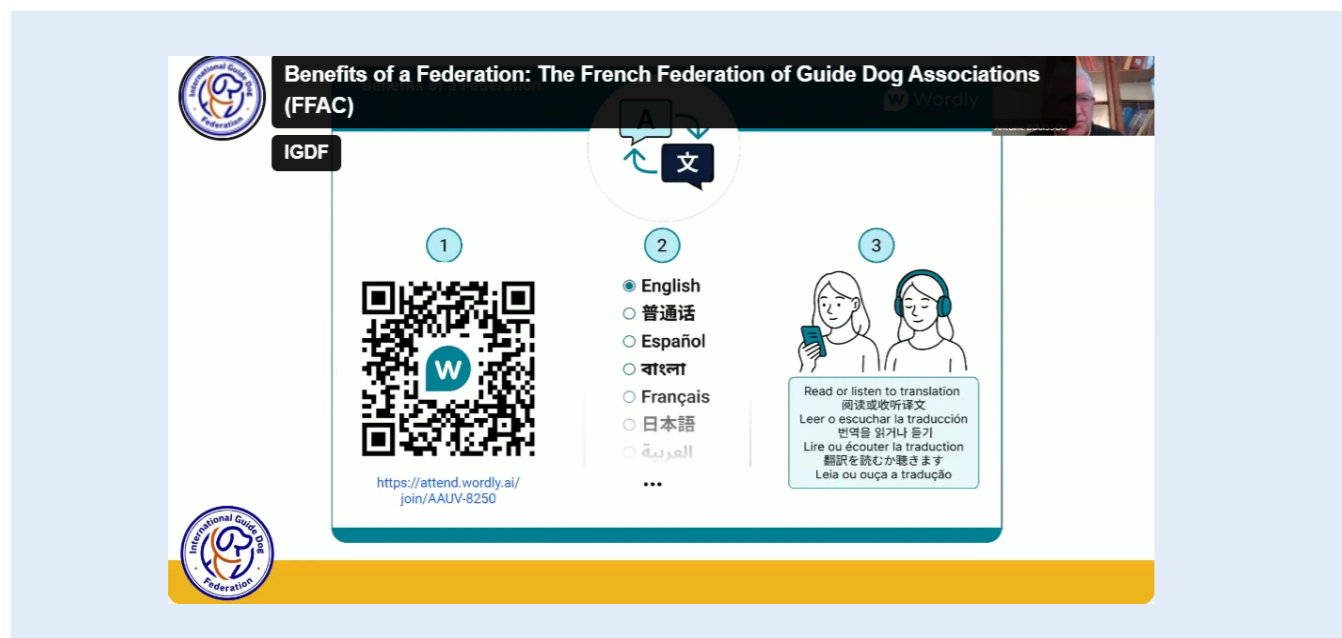


Webinar Presenters Wanted

We are looking for volunteers interested in sharing their knowledge with the IGDF community. This could include a tour of your facilities, an introduction to a new programme or project, or an in-house presentation you think the wider IGDF community would be interested in.

We welcome pre-recorded presentations, including presentations not in English.

Please contact the IGDF office at enquiries@igdf.org.uk



Visionary

Next Issue

The deadline for articles for the next issue of Visionary is: **1st June 2026**.

Special Feature: Collaboration and Co-operation.

Please send any enquiries or articles to the IGDF Office by the above deadline.

In the meantime, if your organisation has any additional stories it would like to

share, it can do so on the new IGDF articles webpage [here](#).

Please supply your articles as a Word file with original images attached as separate jpeg images along with their captions.

Further information can be found on our website at <https://www.igdf.org.uk/>



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