

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

# Visionary

Edition **58**  
November  
2025

**The Power of  
Belonging:**  
Why membership in  
IGDF matters

**2026 IGDF Conference**  
Yokohama,  
Japan

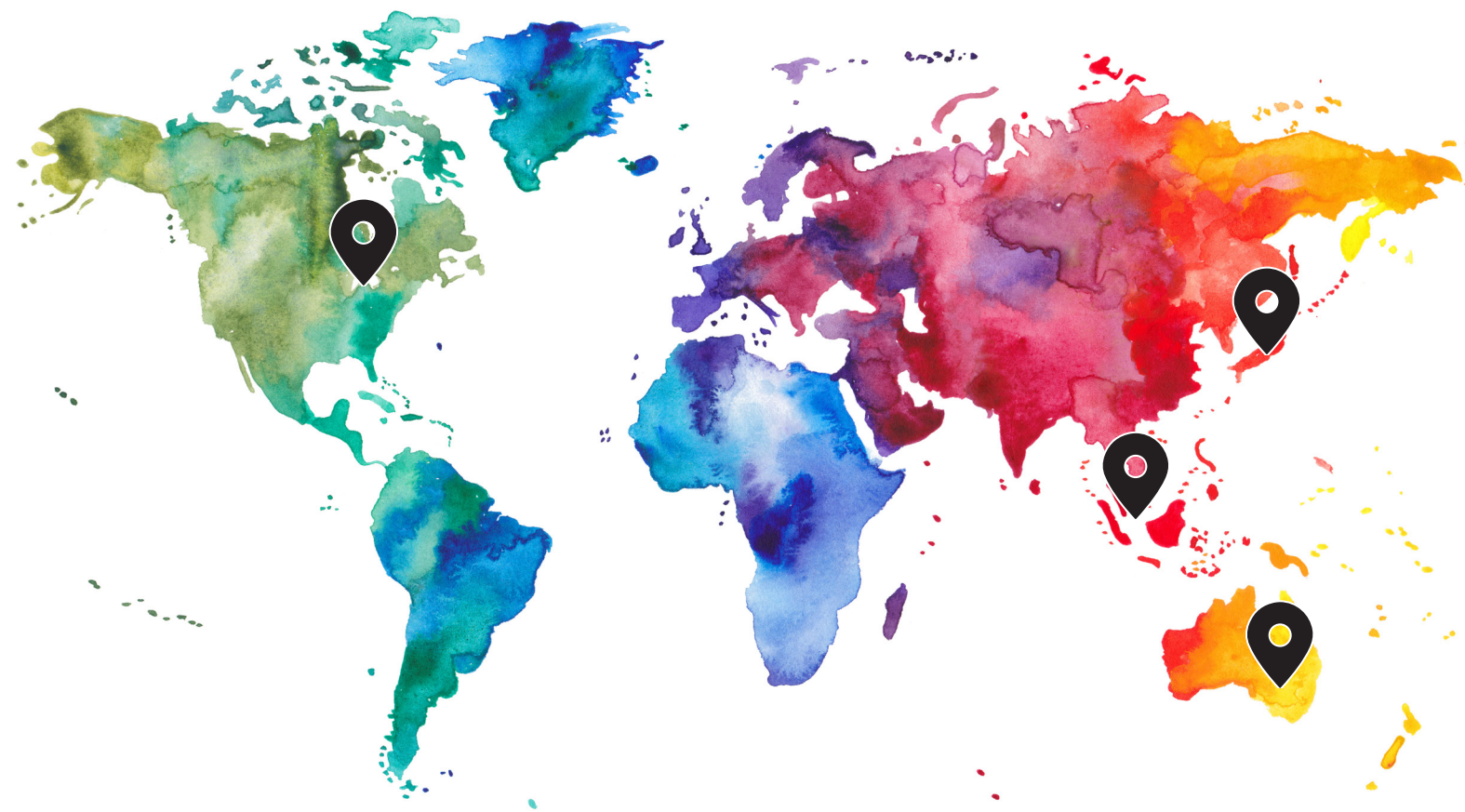


**International Guide Dog Federation**  
Hillfields, Burghfield Common, Reading  
Berkshire RG7 3YG United Kingdom  
[www.igdf.org.uk](http://www.igdf.org.uk)



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, Japan, Singapore, USA**



**Cover Photo**  
Minatomira, Japan

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## Message From The Chair

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

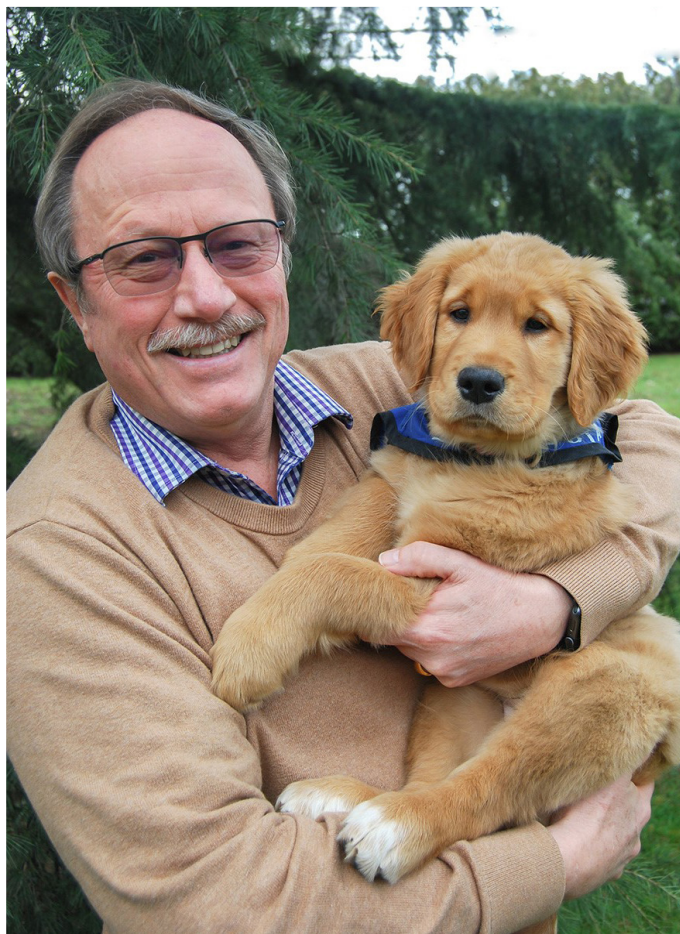
**As another busy year draws to a close, it is good to take some time to reflect on the achievements and challenges of the past 12 months, and to celebrate the spirit of cooperation and sharing which characterises our global community.**

Preparations are well underway for our 2026 Conference in Yokohama, Japan, hosted by our friends at Japan Guide Dog Association. Registration is now live on-line. I am looking forward to a very full conference. Please see pages 5 – 7 for full details of the Conference and how to register. Once again, I'd like to thank the Japan Guide Dog Association for kindly agreeing to host our Conference, and thank the Conference Programme Committee for putting together the content.

In October, the IGDF Board held our annual in-person meeting with the Board of ADI at Leader Dogs for the Blind in Rochester Hills, Michigan. For a full account of these meetings, see David Maynard's article on pages 12 – 13. I'd like to thank Leader Dogs CEO Melissa Weisse and her team for making us so welcome and ADI Chair Danny Vancoppennolle and the ADI Board for their continuing collaboration and goodwill.

We are now close to recruiting a third IGDF team member. Interviews have taken place for the new role of Administrative Assistant, and we hope to be able to introduce our new team member to you very soon.





The event was hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Dog Advisory and Welfare Group and included sitting Members of the UK Parliament and representatives from many businesses including the catering and transport industries. Speakers included journalist Lucy Edwards who spoke movingly about the emotional impact of access refusals and Steve Darling MP, who explained how his guide dog Jennie helps him fulfil his duties as a Member of Parliament.

I would like to remind you that we have launched our joint ADI and IGDF digital ID Card and I would encourage you to use it to the advantage of your working guide dog teams. More information is available on our website.

Thanking you all for your support though 2025 and looking forward to seeing many of you in Yokohama in May 2026.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Thornton'.

**Bill Thornton**  
**Chair, International Guide Dog Federation**



The new role will take on more of the routine administrative tasks that keeps IGDF running smoothly. This will allow David and Clare more time to focus on their expanded new roles as we continue to grow and professionalise the IGDF team.

Executive Director, David Maynard, recently joined representatives from ADI Europe, Assistance Dogs UK and the European Guide Dog Federation at an event at the UK Houses of Parliament to promote the Paws for Access report, developed as a result of our joint access survey with ADI and IGDF. This raised awareness about the difficult access issues which many of our clients continue to face.



## Save the Date: IGDF Conference 2026 in Yokohama, Japan!

**The Japan Guide Dog Association (JGDA) is delighted to announce that we will be hosting the IGDF Conference 2026 in the vibrant city of Minatomirai, Yokohama, Japan. This exciting event will take place from Thursday 14th to Sunday 17th May 2026 at the renowned Pacifico Yokohama, located in the heart of the Minatomirai district.**

### Why Yokohama?

Yokohama, just a short journey from Tokyo, is a dynamic port city that seamlessly blends modernity with tradition. As Japan's first city to open its port to the world, Yokohama has long been a gateway for international exchange and innovation, earning its reputation as the "First Port of Call." Known for its stunning waterfront views, innovative architecture, and rich cultural heritage, Yokohama offers an ideal setting for this global gathering. Pacifico Yokohama, one of Japan's premier convention centres, provides state-of-the-art facilities and a convenient location, ensuring a smooth and enjoyable experience for all attendees.

### Hosted by JGDA

The Japan Guide Dog Association (JGDA) is honoured to host the IGDF Conference 2026. With decades of expertise in guide dog training and advocacy, JGDA is once again committed to making this event

a resounding success. The conference will highlight Japan's contributions to the guide dog movement while fostering international collaboration and innovation.

### What to Expect

The IGDF Conference 2026 'Guiding Tomorrow' will feature a diverse and engaging programme, including:

- **Workshops and Presentations:** Gain insights from industry leaders on the latest advancements in guide dog training, breeding, and services.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Connect with guide dog professionals, trainers, and advocates from around the world.
- **Tours to the JGDA Facilities:** As part of the programme, optional bus tours will be available to visit key JGDA facilities. These include the Kanagawa Training Centre, our primary training facility, and Fuji Harness, which serves as our whelping and retired dog centre and is open to the public.
- **Cultural Experiences:** Immerse yourself in Japanese culture and hospitality, with opportunities to explore Yokohama's iconic landmarks and attractions.

This conference promises to be an inspiring event, bringing together the global guide dog community to share knowledge, exchange ideas, and strengthen partnerships.



## Important Notice for Attendees Travelling with Guide Dogs or Assistance Dogs

If you plan to bring your guide dog or service dog to Japan, please note that the Japanese animal quarantine process requires at least six months of preparation. This includes meeting specific vaccination and health certification requirements.

Unfortunately, if you haven't started the animal quarantine process yet at this time, you may have to come to Japan without your guide dog in May.

Additionally, Japan's access law for assistance dogs recognises only three types of dogs:

1. Guide Dogs
2. Mobility Assistance Dogs
3. Hearing Dogs

These dogs must be certified by member schools of IGDF or ADI. Please also note that dogs trained for other types of work are not legally recognised as assistance dogs in Japan.

To secure access rights for a guide dog trained abroad, a **Temporary Certificate** approved by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is required.

The Japan Guide Dog Association (JGDA) can issue this certificate for guide dogs, valid only in Japan for a limited period.



Masahito Kanetaka, President of JGDA

## How to Apply for a Temporary Certificate for your Guide Dog

### 1. Contact JGDA:

- Reach out through the organisation where you received your guide dog training.
- Submit your application **at least 6 weeks before your arrival in Japan.**

### 2. Application Process:

- JGDA will review your documents, conduct an online interview, and send the certificate by mail once approved.
- Refer to our [website](#) for details.

## Plan Ahead

Further details about the conference programme will be shared in the coming months. JGDA and IGDF are working closely to ensure a memorable and enriching experience for all participants.

We encourage you to start planning your trip to Yokohama and take advantage of this unique opportunity to engage with the global guide dog community.

Whether you are a guide dog professional, trainer, breeder, or advocate, this conference is not to be missed.

For inquiries, please contact the IGDF Office at [enquiries@igdf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@igdf.org.uk) or the International Affairs Department of JGDA at [international@moudouken.net](mailto:international@moudouken.net).

We look forward to welcoming you to Yokohama in 2026 for what promises to be an extraordinary event!

## Registrations are now open!

[More information and registration for this event can be found on the IGDF website.](#)



Minatomirai offers various facilities within walking distance for visitors



## IGDF Assessments

Update from **IGDF Office, UK**

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

- Association Les Chiens Guides d'Aveugles de L'Ouest, France
- Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind, Ireland
- Entrevues asbl, guide dog and mobility, Belgium
- Œuvre Fédérale Les Amis des Aveugles et Malvoyants, Belgium
- Ecole de Chiens Guides d'Aveugles de Lyon et du Centre Est, France
- Stiftung Schweizerische Schule für Blindenführhunde Allschwil, Switzerland
- KNGF Geleidehonden, Netherlands
- The Seeing Eye, USA
- Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, USA
- America's VetDogs, USA
- Hong Kong Guide Dogs Association

## Towards a Professional Register for Guide Dog Mobility Instructors

Tim Stafford  
**IGDF Board**

### **Shaping the Future Together**

**In the ever-evolving landscape of guide dog services, the role of the Guide Dog Mobility Instructor (GDMI) remains pivotal—not only in training dogs but in empowering people with vision impairments to live independently and confidently. As the sector grows in complexity and visibility, so too does the need to formalise and elevate the professional standing of those who deliver this life-changing work.**

That's why the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) is exploring the creation of a Professional Register for Guide Dog Mobility Instructors—a landmark initiative aimed at recognising the expertise, commitment, and ethical standards of GDMI's across the globe.

This proposed register would serve as a centralised, voluntary listing of qualified GDMI's who meet agreed professional standards, adhere to a code of conduct, and commit to ongoing professional development. It would not only enhance public trust and transparency but also foster a stronger sense of identity and pride within the profession.

### **Why Now?**

The timing couldn't be more appropriate. With increasing public awareness of disability rights, growing demand for guide dog services, a more interconnected global community of practitioners, the time is ripe for a framework that supports professional recognition.



A register would also help address challenges such as inconsistent training standards, limited career progression pathways, and the need for cross-border recognition of qualifications. By establishing a shared benchmark, we can ensure that all GDMI's—regardless of geography—are equipped to deliver safe, effective, and person-centred mobility training.

### **Your Voice Matters: Launching the Consultation Survey**

To ensure this initiative reflects the needs and aspirations of the community, IGDF is launching a global consultation survey. We want to hear from GDMI's, guide dog organisations, service users, and other stakeholders about what a professional register should look like, how it should operate, and what value it could bring.

The survey explores key questions such as:

- What criteria should be required for registration?
- How should continuing professional development be supported?

- What governance and oversight mechanisms would be appropriate?
- Should registration be mandatory or voluntary?

Your insights will directly shape the design and implementation of the register. Whether you're a seasoned instructor, a new recruit, or an organisation training and employing this workforce, your perspective is vital.

### **Next Steps**

The survey will be coming out in early 2026 and will be accessible via the IGDF website and member communications. Following the consultation, a working group will analyse the feedback and develop a proposal which will then be shared at the next IGDF conference.

This is more than a policy initiative—it's a chance to co-create the future of our profession. A professional register could be a powerful tool for recognition, development, and unity. But it must be built collaboratively, with the voices of those who live and breathe this work every day.



# The Power of Belonging: Why Membership in the International Guide Dog Federation Matters

Jane Bradley  
Chair, IGDF  
Development Committee

**In today's interconnected world, collaboration is no longer optional – it's essential. For organizations dedicated to dog guide services, belonging to a recognized member body such as the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) offers far-reaching benefits that strengthen programs, enhance staff development, and ensure the highest standards of service for clients and their dogs.**

## Setting Global Standards

IGDF is the leading authority in establishing international benchmarks for guide dog programs. Membership signals a commitment to excellence, transparency, and accountability. Accredited organizations demonstrate that they meet rigorous standards in training, welfare, and client support—building trust among stakeholders and the communities they serve.

## Collaboration in Action

The power of collaboration is best illustrated through real examples. Over the past five years, Guide Dogs Singapore has worked closely with other IGDF member programs and the Development Committee and successfully achieved full accreditation. This milestone was possible because of strong partnerships and knowledge-sharing across borders.

Initially, trainee instructor Christina Teng traveled to Guide Dogs Victoria to complete her instructor training, while clients also

attended to train with their dogs. Building on this success, another trainee, Shi Lin Tan, was recruited and trained at Seeing Eye Dogs Vision Australia. Shi Lin quickly became an integral part of the Vision Australia team, training over 15 dogs and supported clients across the entire country. She quickly adapted to our diverse conditions with her work spanning rugged outback landscapes, remote South Australian properties, and major cities including Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide – each environment demanding adaptability, precision and a deep understanding of both dog and handler.

Shi Lin's development was supervised by senior instructor Justin Marshall,



Shi Lin Tan and Justin Marshall

whose extensive experience across Australia provided invaluable guidance. These collaborations not only strengthened individual skills but also created lasting professional networks. Trainers learn about cultural differences and client needs in the host country, while home organizations gain insights into diverse practices. The ripple effect of these exchanges is profound—leading to shared training methodologies, and programs that remain relevant to client communities.

Shared knowledge between Guide Dogs UK and Vision Australia through the assessor network also helped develop a wheelchair guide program in Australia, which has now trained five clients.

## Accreditation and Long-Term Impact

Accreditation through IGDF is more than a badge—it's a promise. It assures clients, donors, funding bodies and partners that the organization adheres to internationally recognized standards. For organization's

like CNIB, DCN Geleidehonden Netherlands, Fondation I See Belgium, Guide Dogs Singapore, collaboration and accreditation have resulted in strong and relevant programs, and improved outcomes for clients.

## The Bigger Picture

Ultimately, IGDF membership benefits extend beyond organizational walls. By aligning with a global federation, guide dog programs contribute to a unified mission: improving independence and quality of life for people who are blind or have low vision. Collaboration ensures that no organization works in isolation, and every client receives the best possible support and quality dog from their organization.

Congratulations to Shi Lin and the entire team for demonstrating how international partnerships can transform programs and lives. This is the true power of belonging to IGDF.



Guide Dogs Singapore during their IGDF Accreditation Visit



## IGDF and ADI 2025 Joint Board Meetings and visit to Leader Dogs

David Maynard  
IGDF Executive Director



IGDF and ADI Board members at Leader Dogs, USA

**Since 2022, the IGDF and ADI Boards have held an annual in-person meeting to discuss existing joint projects and areas for future collaboration. These meetings have been a key part of our strategy of closer engagement and collaboration with ADI – which has consistently been identified as a high priority by IGDF members. Previous meetings have taken place in Vancouver, Brussels and Leamington Spa, UK.**

These have helped improve the relationship between our two organisations and sparked successful collaborative projects including the Joint Position Statement on Dog Welfare, the Joint Position Statement on Client Services & Ethics, the Paws for

Access survey, the Advisory Panel on Dog Welfare, the Joint Access Committee, and the alignment of ADI and IGDF Standards.

The IGDF Board also uses this rare opportunity to get together in the same room to hold our annual in-person Board meeting. Because of the wide variety of time zones represented on the IGDF Board, our usual monthly Zoom meetings are limited to 2 hours, and these start very early in the morning for some and finish very late at night for others. Being together in the same room for a whole day and a half gives us the opportunity to discuss more complex and strategic issues which are difficult to get into in a shorter Zoom call.

This year saw us back in North America, visiting the delightful town of Rochester Hills, Michigan, USA, home of Leader Dogs for the Blind, which is a member of both ADI and IGDF. Leader Dogs for the Blind has been training guide dogs in Michigan since 1939 and provides guide dog and Orientation & Mobility services across the United States, as well as supporting international clients in collaboration with other IGDF member organisations. Leader Dog also offers both a summer camp experience for young people and teen orientation and mobility service allowing them to bring a supporter, parent, or sibling to the training experience to create community and support.

Leader Dog's President and CEO Melissa Weisse welcomed us to the Leader Dog campus on Monday 20th October and Leader Dog staff and volunteers provided guided tours of the site. The IGDF Board had a very productive in person meeting at which we made several key decisions, including the selection of the company which will design and build the technology for phase one of the IGDF Academy Learning Management System.

On Tuesday 21st October we held the in person meeting with the ADI Board. This was a very productive meeting at which we reviewed the progress of the current collaborative projects and discussed new areas to work together, as well as discussing the new strategies of our organisations. We also discussed other important topical issues including the new CEN European Standard for Assistance Dogs, and instructor certification.

This meeting also gave us the opportunity to meet the new Executive Director of ADI, David Locklin. David will be familiar to

many of you from his long career in the guide dog sector, most recently as Chief Program Officer at Guide Dog Foundation & America's VetDogs. We also said thank you and goodbye to ADI's outgoing Executive Director, Chris Diefenthaler. Chris has achieved a great deal in her time at ADI and has helped us deliver many exciting collaborative projects. Many of you will know Chris from her attendance at previous IGDF Conferences and we all wish Chris well for her retirement.

After the meeting, we enjoyed dinner at a local Italian restaurant in Rochester Hills. This was an opportunity to get to know the many new faces on the ADI Board and renew existing friendships.

I am very much looking forward to working with David over the coming months and years as ADI and IGDF continue to collaborate more closely. I firmly believe that by working together we can more effectively serve all our member organisations and the thousands of guide and assistance dog partnerships we represent around the world. Finally I'd like to thank Melissa Weisse and all the staff and volunteers at Leader Dogs for the Blind for hosting these meetings and making us so welcome in Rochester Hills.



IGDF and ADI Board members



# Committee Updates

## IGDF Education Committee Review Panels

**Congratulations and thank you to the following people who have recently been appointed to the Education Committee review panels.**

These panels of experts will be reviewing, amending and creating learning content for IGDF’s redesigned and restructured online learning platform. Each panel will focus on a section of the IGDF curriculum.

### Section 1: Dog Health and Welfare

**Led by** Melinda Bowden, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, Australia

- Arnold Goldman – Fidelco, USA
- Claire Northrop – Guide Dogs NSW/ACT
- Emily Sharp – Leader Dogs, USA
- Julijana György Matesic – Huikuang Guide Dogs, Taiwan
- Sarah-Elizabeth Brosiere – Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA
- Shona Kemp –CNIB, Canada

### Section 2: Dog Training and Behaviour

**Led by:** Yuko Inuoe, Japan Guide Dog Association

- Alyssa David – Guiding Eyes for the Blind
- Eddie Sullivan – Guide Dogs NSW/ACT
- Geoffery Fournier- Chiens guides Grand Sud-Ouest Aliénor Bordeaux, France
- Hannah Voss – Guide Dogs UK
- Nichola Prince – VBM, Switzerland
- Robert Ellis – Guide Dogs UK
- Sven Burgin – Stiftung Schweizerische Schule für Blindenführhunde Allschwil

### Section 3: Working with People

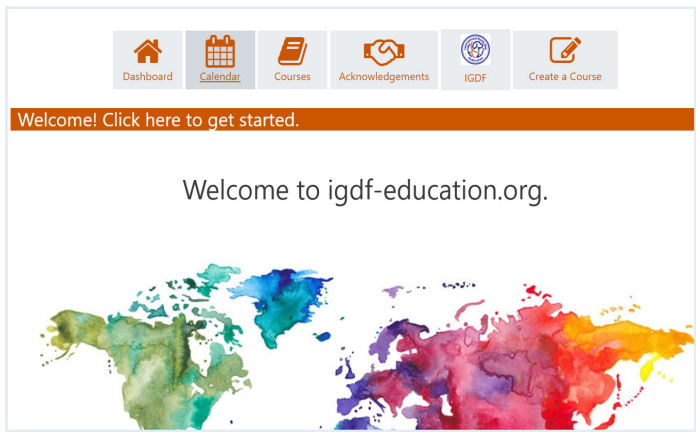
**Led by:** Ben Cawley, Guiding Eyes for the Blind, USA

- Aurelie Tremblay – MIRA, Canada
- Danielle Cuenoud – Guiding Eyes for the Blind, USA
- Haley Andrews – Guide Dogs UK
- Kate Roberts – Leader Dogs, USA
- Lukas Franck – The Seeing Eye, USA
- Thibaut Blairon – FFAC, France

### Section 4: Client Services

**Led by:** Ben Cawley, Guiding Eyes for the Blind, USA

- Aurore Antoine – Chiens guides Grand Sud-Ouest Aliénor Bordeaux, France
- Danielle Cuenoud – Guiding Eyes for the Blind, USA
- Isabelle Le Bouedec – Les amis des Avengules et Malvoyants, Belgium
- Ky Wiese – Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA
- Louise Freed – Guide Dogs UK
- Rafi Taglicht – Israel Guide Dog Center
- Shaun Basham – Guide Dogs UK



# Welcome to Alba de la Gándara García

**Welcome to Alba de la Gándara García who has joined the IGDF Development Committee.**

Alba began her career in Spain working in dog training, behaviour, and Search and Rescue before moving to the UK in 2014 to join Support Dogs UK. In 2018, she began working as a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor (GDMI) with Guide Dogs UK and later became a Training and Behaviour Advisor,

providing behavioural support across staff teams and leading welfare-focused initiatives to enhance training quality and dog wellbeing. In 2024, Alba returned to Spain to join Fundación ONCE del Perro Guía as a GDMI and Training Coordinator, overseeing programmes aligned with IGDF standards and supporting the development of Trainee Trainers and Instructors.

# Thank you Lee Buckingham

**Our thanks go to Lee Buckingham who has recently stepped down after 3 years serving on the IGDF Education Committee, including one year, as Chair of the Committee.**

Lee was instrumental in helping to deliver the first phase of the IGDF Online Learning Platform (Moodle) and his knowledge and

input have played a significant part in driving the Education Committee forward.

We wish him all the best as he continues to focus on his role at Guide Dogs South Australia and Northern Territory.



# Thank you Doug Ritchie & Peggy Gibbon



**IGDF would also like to thank Doug Ritchie, from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, and Peggy Gibbon from The Seeing Eye, USA both of whom have stepped down as IGDF assessors.**

Both Doug and Peggy started as IGDF assessors in 2015, and since then Doug has undertaken 11 assessments, and Peggy 10.

All Committee and Assessor roles at IGDF are voluntary roles, and assessors must fit the work around their day jobs at their own organisations.

As two very dedicated and professional assessors, IGDF thanks you both for the time and commitment you have given to IGDF over the years.





# 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.

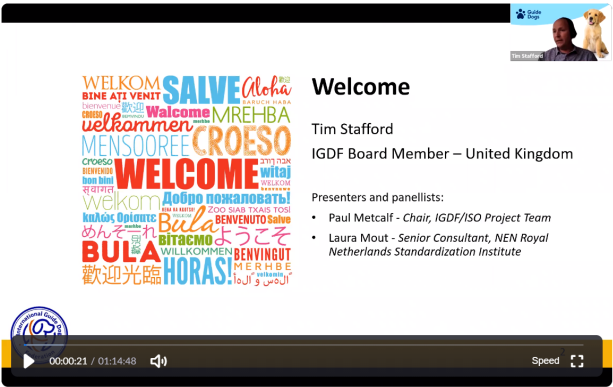
## Webinar Recordings

Recordings of past webinars and conference presentations are available to view on the [IGDF webinars page](#)

## ADI Webinars

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

- Difficult Conversations
- Applying Animal Welfare Concepts in Your Organization
- Empowered Partnerships: Navigating Agency and Consent in Assistance Dog Work



## 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](mailto:enquiries@igdf.org.uk)



# Visionary

## Next Issue

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

## Special Feature: Building and/or Kennel Designs.

We'd love to hear about the innovative things organisations are doing with their buildings and kennels to better serve clients and care for dogs.

Please send articles to the IGDF Office by the above deadline.

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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