

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

# Visionary

Edition **53**  
March  
2024

**The Social Benefits**  
of Guide Dog  
Ownership

**The Seeing Eye**  
Celebrates its  
95th anniversary



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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 – **Japan, Korea, Poland, Singapore, Switzerland, USA**



**Cover Photo**

Heidi from VBM | Blindenhundeschule Liestal walks her guide dog, Loony down a snowy cobblestone street

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**Message From The Chair**

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

On behalf of your Board, I welcome you to our March issue of Visionary.

Since our last publication the Board and your Committee have had a very constructive and busy time.

Our strategy review work, planning for the next five years is progressing well. A very big thank you to everyone who responded to our recent survey. The responses help give clarity to the Board as to the members’ priorities for the future of IGDF. Our steward of this process is Board Member Dale Cleaver and many thanks to Dale. Our next step is to attend a two-day face-to-face board meeting with facilitator Karen Griffin from Space2BE in April. Karen facilitated our previous successful five-year plan.

The membership review period of our current issue of Standards 2024 is now completed. As you will recall this issue of IGDF Standards is in effect as of January 1st, 2024. I would like to thank everyone who provided us with feedback.

To support the ongoing relevance and vigor of our standards, we have now also completed the recruitment for the Standards Review Panels for each of our standards. These panels will conduct their tasks under the guidance of Board Member Tim Stafford, Standards Committee Chair. We were thrilled to have had such a large number of enthusiastic expert specific, interested applications for these positions. Many thanks to everyone.

continued

## Message From The Chair

My congratulations to Chris Benninger, Chair of the Communications Committee and her committee members for the first anniversary of our social media plan. I know that I can be bold and say, what a positive difference this has made to us all.

To support our current modernization plans for the IGDF, we have started a recruitment process for two new positions. The Board has approved ongoing funding for these permanent new positions.

Firstly, we are recruiting an Assessment & Certification Coordinator to assist the Accreditation Committee and Assessors.

Secondly, we are recruiting a Digital Learning Specialist with the role of transitioning our Moodle library into a comprehensive GDMI & Trainer Education and Certification System. This position will work closely with the Chair of the Education Committee, Lee Buckingham.

Whilst on the topic of recruitment, we have standing committee vacancies and anticipate more after our AGM in July. If you are interested, we would like to hear from you.

We continue our collaborative work with Assistance Dogs International. The two Boards will have a joint meeting in the UK in April. A great example of the joint work completed to date is our collective stand on Canine Welfare and the realignment of our standards.

Our two newest joint initiatives with ADI started work recently. The Client Services and Ethics Working Group aims to produce

a joint position statement on client services and ethics.

Thanks to Christine Baroni-Pretsch, Antoine Bouissou and Melissa Allman who are representing IGDF on this group. We also have a joint working group reviewing Standard 6: Dog Health and Welfare. Thanks to Standards Committee Member Dr Nicola Cotton who is leading this work on behalf of IGDF. The full list of members of Standards Review Panels can be found on page 5.

Lastly, we recently held our first online CEO networking event. Through this exercise we received further terrific feed-back and thoughts for the betterment of the IGDF and the members. The knowledge gained will be of great added value for our two-day strategy review work in April. Many thanks to everyone who attended.

As we rapidly move through 2024, I trust that all is well with our member organizations. I hope that we are now all transitioning past the Covid crisis that impacted us all so terribly. I look forward to seeing our annual production numbers of graduate teams continue to grow and indeed surpass the number of graduate teams pre-Covid.

Wishing you all a continued successful 2024.

Bill Thornton  
Chair, IGDF



## Committee Updates IGDF Standard Review Groups

**Congratulations and thank you to the following people who have recently been appointed to the Standards Committee review groups:**

### Standard 1: Administration, Risk management & Business Continuity

Led by Tim Stafford  
Volunteers can still apply to IGDF.

### Standard 2: Staff Education & Professional Development

Led by: Christine Baroni-Pretsch

- Becca Gamble (Guide Dogs UK)
- Sven Bürgin (VBM Blindenhundeschule, Switzerland)
- Melinda Bowden (Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, Australia)
- Ben Francis (CNIB Guide Dogs, Canada)
- Aurore Antoine (Chiens guides Grand Sud-Ouest Aliénor Bordeaux, France)

### Standard 3: Client Services

Led by: Barry O'Toole

- Caroline James (Guide Dogs UK)
- Caryn Gates (Guide Dogs of the Desert, USA)
- Jennifer Thurman (Occupaws, USA)
- Lauren Ross (GDB, USA)
- Russell Harrison (Guide Dogs Victoria, Australia)
- Shona Kemp (CNIB, Canada)

### Standard 4: Breeding & Dog Supply

Led by: Nicola Cotton

- Glenna Fiddgymnt (Guide Dog Foundation, USA)
- Haley Andrews (Guide Dogs UK)
- Katy Evans (The Seeing Eye, USA)

- Lauren Holtz (GDB, USA)
- Linda Thornton (BC & Alberta Guide Dogs, Canada)

### Standard 5: Dog Training & Behaviour

Led by Jim Kessler

- Caroline James (Guide Dogs UK)
- Matthias Lenz (BC & Alberta Guide Dogs, Canada)
- Rivi Israel (Southeastern Guide Dogs, USA)
- Sven Bürgin (VBM Blindenhundeschule, Switzerland)
- Stacey Ellison (GDB, USA)
- Sandrine Lebreton (Les Chiens Guides d'Aveugles de Provence Côte d'Azur Corse, France)

### Standard 6: Dog Health & Welfare

Led by: Nicola Cotton

- Kaitlin Cherney (Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA)
- Katy Evans (The Seeing Eye, USA)
- Louisa Rodgers (Guide Dogs UK)
- Lynna Feng (Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA)
- Nicole Potter (Southeastern Guide Dogs, USA)

### Standard 7: Facilities & Kennels

Led by: Tim Stafford

- Erin Kelly (GDB, USA)
- Haley Andrews (Guide Dogs UK)
- Nicole Potter (Southeastern Guide Dogs, USA)
- Russell Harrison (Guide Dogs Victoria, Australia)
- Beth Williams (The Seeing Eye, USA)



### **Congratulations to the following organisation which has passed from being an EO and become an AO:**

- Dogs for Life (Slovakia)

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

- Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, Australia
- Guide Dogs Victoria, Australia
- Gaus Assistentiehonden, Netherlands
- Mathilda Guide Dogs, Czech Republic
- Guide Dog and Service Dog and Hearing Dog Association of Japan
- Guide Dogs of Texas, USA
- Association Chiens Guides Grand Sud Ouest, France

### **Congratulations to the following organisation whose suspension has now been lifted:**

- Hong Kong Guide Dog Association

### **Our best wishes go to the following organisations who have now left IGDF:**

- Slovenian Instructors Association – Centre for Guide Dogs and Assistance Dogs – SLO-CANIS, Slovenia
- Body Klub, Slovakia

### **The following organisation has currently been suspended:**

- The Mira Foundation, Canada

**I have albinism, and I'm legally blind. My vision changes a lot with the lighting – if it's bright outside, I can't see anything. I also have a hard time at night with streetlights drowning out everything else. That's why I have a Seeing Eye dog.**

Zenith is my first dog. I got him right after I graduated from high school, and he's just been the best. He made college so much fun and safer, and he loved every second of it. Now we're starting our new post-graduate adventure in Washington, DC, and he seems to be really excited about that – as am I!

I feel like people are more willing to approach me. I think it's probably less othering [isolating] to be seen with a dog than with a cane. One experience I had with a cane was senior year of high school. There was an orientation event, and every seat was full except for the one right next to me. Because most people don't want to interact with you when you look different. With a dog, you also look different, but people are less intimidated by it.

Zenith's personality works perfectly with mine. Zenith is always making me laugh (especially when he's being silly off-duty), and we always have so much fun playing together. I feel like Zenith and I have the same energy—we're both calm and chill, but also silly and full of goofy personality at the same time. And I haven't even gotten to the best part: Zenith's walking speed, pace, pull, and way of moving matches mine perfectly. When we walk, it's like we're one being gliding through space.



Kay in her graduation gown with the guide dog Zenith looking on.

On one occasion when we're leaving an appointment and walking back through the waiting room, instead of taking me outside he took me back to the seat we were sitting in before. He's like, 'Kay, this is your spot!' – even if someone else is sitting in the seat!

But this skill is so helpful for me, because when we're at a restaurant, he can find my table if I leave and come back. Before Zenith, leaving the table was a little stressful. Say I needed to go to the bathroom, I would have no clue where my table was after. But now, when we leave the

bathroom, I just say 'Zenith, forward' and, with no other instructions, he just takes me to our table. At school, Zenith remembered where all the buildings were and all my classrooms and all my seats in all the classrooms. I think it's amazing.

### **So what have Kay and Zenith been up to lately?**

After moving to Washington, DC for her new job, Kay said they've been out and about every day:

I had mixed feelings about moving because I did all this work to learn how to navigate my old city independently. I was afraid I would have a harder time learning DC, that it would be scary. But that just hasn't been my experience. With Zenith by my side and my phone as GPS, I've been able to get around safely and navigate very well. I've been having so much fun just exploring, and that's possible because of Zenith.

When I first went to The Seeing Eye, I wasn't expecting it to be so emotional, but it totally was and I was definitely a little scared, because I knew how big a change it was going to be. I remember thinking, wow, my whole life is about to change forever. And it did. My life will never be the same.





## The social benefits of guide dog ownership – Heidi's story

Heidi and Loony  
VBM | Blindenhundeschule  
Liestal, Switzerland



Heidi with her second guide dog, Jazza

When I was approached to write about this topic, I mentally travelled back and forth between being with and without a guide dog. What I write will probably result in a very personal text, because I think that all visually impaired and blind people will relate differently, and I can only talk about myself and my experiences.

I have been visually impaired since birth, yet grew up with three brothers, who did not have any visual impairments. At that time, my school did not have any program in place for those who were blind. I was expected to function in the regular classroom with no assistance, which was challenging. I grew up in the countryside, people knew me, and they also knew that I couldn't see much.

As I got older it became different as my social contacts were limited to

familiar ones, and new and spontaneous encounters were not possible. My world was a bit smaller than everyone else's, but I didn't know anything else. I only realized that later on, and that was, when I got my first guide dog.

I remember my numerous train rides to work, alone in silence. Only with Bani, my first guide dog, a number of people suddenly became names and voices. I started talking more and friendships developed that still exist now. Today, as then, I experience my dog as a bridge to the outside world. No longer travelling alone gives me security and makes me braver. So brave, that I decided to get my matura (a matriculation examination to get in to university) and go to university, Bani always by my side! I am absolutely sure that I couldn't have done it without him.

After I had to give away my second guide dog, Jazza, a German Shepherd, due to old age, I've been without a guide dog for nine months. The waiting time seemed endless and almost unbearable to me. The days became long and boring. No one was there to nudge me and say, "Hey, let's go out!" However, since I did not have a guide dog, I started walking in our town with my white cane. I was surprised again, as I was stopped by people, some I knew but also ones who had never spoken to me before.

**They all asked a similar question: "Is your German Shepherd guide dog alright?"**

The topic brought more and more conversations for the next few months, and I realised that some of the inhabitants were as excited as I was about my next guide dog.



Heidi with her third guide dog, Loony



Heidi and Loony free running with friends

Now here she is, Loony, a chocolate Labrador with a curious, optimistic and friendly attitude towards people and dogs. Funnily enough, now out on the morning free-run field, I have started to 'meet' some 'new' dogs and owners. Through these conversations, I realised they actually had seen me for years, but because Jazza was more shy and would not feel so comfortable with other dogs, they were used to keeping their dogs and themselves at some distance, in order not to interrupt or disturb us.

Overall, I am really enjoying setting off spontaneously again, without having to rely on my family and friends. But it's not just the regained independence, life is just more colorful with a guide dog!



## The social benefits of guide dogs – Sophie and Hong Sen’s stories

Sophie and Hong Sen  
Singapore Guide Dogs

There are currently six working guide dog teams at Guide Dogs Singapore. We are an Applicant Organisation, working towards full IGDF membership. With the friendship and generous support from our partners, Guide Dogs Australia (Victoria) and Nippon Light House (Japan), our organisation has trained and graduated 11 teams since our inception.

The authorities in Singapore give us their full support which has helped to improve accessibility over the years. This article spotlights two of our youngest handlers – Sophie and Hong Sen. Sophie is a paralympic swimmer and Hong Sen is working as an IT Trainer and Consultant at our organisation.



Sophie with her guide dog, Orinda

### Sophie’s Story

Independent mobility to me doesn’t just mean getting from one place to another. It is also my way of showing the world I am just as capable doing anything anyone else can do, despite of my disability.

When my vision started dropping rapidly from 2017 to 2018, I was forced to become a full-time cane user in a matter of months. I felt my walking speed decrease drastically, and I was feeling anxious doing the things I could do so confidently before I lost so much sight.

When I was matched with Orinda in January 2020, I could very quickly feel my confidence and independence coming back, and possibly even more than what I had before. I had an extra pair of eyes constantly looking out for my safety and helping me weave through crowds and obstacles at speeds I could never do before. I also became confident to try new things that I never dared to do, even before I became a cane user. For example, taking the bus from bus stops.

Though these may seem like mundane every-day tasks for anyone free of disability, being able to move around with this much confidence feels incredibly freeing and a huge relief knowing my schedule and independence isn’t relying on anyone but myself. Also, it’s a huge plus having the cutest companion to travel about with me, not just keeping me safe, but also distracting me from the stares and remarks I get from the public, regardless of whether I’m with my cane or a guide dog.

### Hong Sen’s story

My guide dog journey began with a routine visit to the ophthalmologist. My vision had remained fairly consistent, allowing me to see the world in lights and shadows. However, in 2016, I noticed changes in my vision; I could not ‘see’ as well when I travelled with the cane. I discussed this during my consultation and tangentially, learnt about guide dogs and their potential to enhance my life.

Guide dogs have been an intriguing concept, ever-present in the visually impaired (VI) community, yet elusive. Guide Dogs Singapore provided me with valuable insights into the role and impact of guide dogs, dispelling my misconceptions. As my GDMI pointed out, “Having a guide dog doesn’t mean that the world automatically becomes your oyster!”

In 2017, I was paired with my guide dog, Clare. Having Clare has developed my confidence and abilities, socially and in mobility. In Singapore, I need to advocate for guide dog access by debunking misconceptions among the public and service staff, while also sharing with fellow VIs what being a guide dog handler truly means.

With Clare, travelling through crowds has become a breeze. I can now walk at a faster pace than before and quickly target landmarks along our route, without having to worry about tripping someone with my cane or hitting into obstacles.

Clare, it has been six years since you started this journey with me. Thank you for making this possible. Life may not always be easy, but you make it a bit easier.



Hong Sen with his guide dog, Clare



## The social benefits of guide dogs – BJ, Juanita and Meredyth’s stories

BJ, Janita and Meredyth  
**Leader Dogs for the  
Blind, USA**

**Leader Dogs for the Blind (LDB), like all IGDF members, knows that guide dogs positively impact their human partners every day. But our clients have first-hand experience; three of the many people who currently work with a Leader Dog shared how their dogs impact their social lives.**



BJ with his guide dog, Jackson

### BJ’s story.

**BJ lives in Wisconsin with his fifth Leader Dog, Jackon.**

When I received my first guide dog, my focus was on how this precious animal was going to guide me around and not bump into different obstacles in life. What I did not realize was the social doors he would open.

One summer while at a car show with a friend, a stranger approached me and began telling me about his brother who was going blind and said he did not know how to help him. I passed on my business card so he could contact me with any more questions. A few days before

Christmas I received a call from the man’s brother who was going blind. I could tell he was struggling with the holiday because he was talking about all the things he could no longer do with his grandson. We chatted about the struggles, but then I asked him “Does the time with your grandson matter more about the activity or about being together?” We both agreed it was about being together. This small moment was given to me because I had a guide dog and was seen as approachable. I am glad the stranger decided to ask me questions to maybe give his brother a little hope during the holidays.

When a guide dog helps guide you, it is not just always around a physical obstacle, it could bring you to a moment where you can make a difference. These are the moments I did not think of when I received my first guide dog, but I now understand the moments outside of the physical. A guide dog also allows you the mental wellbeing of confidence and compassion.



Juanita with her guide dog, Resi B

### Juanita’s story.

**Juanita lives in Michigan with her second Leader Dog, Resi B.**

My Leader Dogs have connected me with a supportive blindness community that has been vital as my vision declined. I have learned indispensable tips from fellow guide dog users that have enhanced my independence. The emotional support within this community is remarkable, covering aspects from navigating beyond using a guide dog to understanding the complexities of blindness.

Thanks to my Leader Dogs’ adventures, I have found a deep connection within my local community. Their companionship has amplified my independence and confidence, showing that blind individuals can excel in daily activities and travel. This journey boosts my personal growth and transforms perceptions globally.

Because of my dogs, I am excited to explore new places, go on long walks, and keep myself healthy. Without them, I might not be as eager to have these cool experiences that make my life better.

### Meredyth’s story

**Meredyth lives in Florida with her first Leader Dog, Luna.**

The day after I returned from Leader Dogs for the Blind with my dog, Luna, I was told that a family member had unexpectedly passed away. I was asked to attend the funeral three days later, and under prior circumstances without a guide dog, I would not have attended. Considering I now had Luna by my side, I chose to attend the funeral. Not only was I able to participate in the entire event including the receiving line, but Luna also created

an atmosphere of love and joy in a very somber setting.

A different experience is related to the fact that I had not been to a sports stadium in years due to the difficult navigation of several sets of stairs and the lack of bathroom accessibility. After getting Luna, I was invited to an arena football game which provided access to a skybox including food and an accessible bathroom. I went, and after that event, I decided to spread my wings and attend a baseball game with friends—and successfully navigated the stadium with Luna. It felt so good to be amongst thousands of people who were mostly fully able-bodied, and I felt a true sense of belonging.

There are thousands of people with guide dogs from all IGDF organizations who have wonderful stories just like these. All we need to do is reach out and ask.



Meredyth with her guide dog, Luna



## The social benefits of having a guide dog, Poland

Sabina Pawlik and Irena Semmler  
**Labrador Guide Dog Foundation  
for the Blind, Poland**



Former HR manager, Anna with guide dog Mokka during a lecture on accessibility before a performance at Teatr Polski in Bielsko-Biała

**The Labrador Guide Dog Foundation (Poland, Poznań) has been training and providing free guide dogs for over 20 years. Such a long period allows us to notice how the private lives and the involvement in social life of blind people using the help of guide dogs have changed.**

For the first few years of its operation, the Foundation's clients were mainly people aged 35+, professionally active, for whom a dog was an aid in moving around faster and more efficiently.

After the entry into force of legal regulations defining an assistance dog and regulating its status, including guaranteeing free access to public facilities, an increase in interest in guide dogs was noticeable. There has been a

positive social change in the perception of people with disabilities and their assistance dogs.



Former soldier, Piotr with guide dog Hilda at the finish line of a long-distance run

Young people studying in secondary schools and intending to continue their education also started applying for dogs. They often lived away from their families and a guide dog was an invaluable help in 'getting used to' the new reality and establishing new social relationships. Students and their dogs arouse great interest and kindness among both peers and teachers.

Currently, in most cases, dogs are applied for by adults who have lost their sight as a result of accidents or disease. A person in crisis of vision loss experiences a significant difference between the past and present quality of life and has a great need to return to efficient functioning. Owning a dog is often a breakthrough in this respect. The Foundation's experience shows that by receiving a dog, these people regain the ability to fulfil social roles that are important to them.

By gaining independence thanks to a dog, blind people not only work outside the home, often holding important positions, but also successfully engage



Polish language teacher, Joanna with her guide dog Raja at the school for blind children in Owińska.



Dominik with his guide dog, Melba during graduation from the University of Silesia.

in new passions and pursue old ones. They conduct various types of education projects, act as advocates for blind people regarding the accessibility of public spaces, practice sports, and travel with dogs, using all available means of communication.

They also declare that they are again able to fulfil their role as parents, because thanks to the dog they can independently pick up their child from kindergarten or school, or take them to additional classes.

By actively participating in various forms of social life, blind people with guide dogs play another extremely important role, namely they are ambassadors of the organisation that prepared the dog for work. Nothing speaks better to both blind and sighted people than a confident and independent person supported by a well-trained guide dog.



## The social benefits of guide dog ownership, South Korea

Yu Seok jong and Baron jang  
**Samsung Guide Dogs,  
South Korea**



Samsung guide dog puppies acclimatising to a child's rocking horse

**Established in 1993, Samsung Guide Dog School hosted various events to mark its 30th anniversary last year. Despite the lack of social awareness of disabled assistive dogs, steady efforts have led to many changes in public perception.**

Let me tell you about some of the social benefits of guide dog activities.

Firstly, vocational rehabilitation for the visually impaired has a great impact on social cost reduction. Restrictions on independence is one of the biggest obstacles to vocational rehabilitation for the visually impaired. Guide dogs have played a very important role in enabling more visually impaired people to get out into society.

Being able to get out into society with a guide dog and work, empowers that person, gives them independence and enables them to be economically active. Guide dog organisations are not simply about providing support measures through care for the visually impaired. They are a kind of social investment that realizes social and public interests by allowing people to live as members of society and as a human being. Guide dogs are the result of joint investment made by members of society to achieve a worthy society.

This enabling of social and economic independence for a visually impaired person can also have a positive effect on the social activities of family members. This is because it provides a foundation for living each other's lives rather than focusing on taking care of each other's lives. As a result, vocational rehabilitation through guide dogs contributes to the expansion of opportunities for the people around them to participate in society, impacting positively on both society and economy as well as the quality of life of each person.

Secondly, recognising that visually impaired people also have the desire and capacity to be providers of care themselves has a great impact on improving disability awareness throughout society. The desire not just to receive affection, but to give care and to have the confidence to give care is a basic human emotion if not need, and it can improve the quality of someone's life.

Unfortunately, disability often hinders society's realization of these basic needs.

The process of responsibly caring for a guide dog themselves provides an opportunity to realize this need for care and to be care-givers. Through this, it is possible to increase individual self-esteem, confidence, and social connection, just like non-disabled people.

In particular, a sense of social connection provides an opportunity to construct a smooth social interpersonal relationship, which is the result of the satisfaction and happiness gained by caring for and supporting a guide dog.

Guide dogs act as an important factor that makes the social movement of 'People First' possible, and when a visually impaired person is enabled to make social connections, they are perceived and treated less as isolated individuals, but as active and inclusive participants of society.

This change in perception plays an important role in helping visually impaired people live in a more inclusive and accessible society and contributes to fostering a culture in which all members understand and respect each other.

Thirdly, the guide dog training program has infinite potential to lead to a better dog culture.

All training systems for guide dogs are ultimately aimed at establishing smooth relationships with people. In other words, it is a program that instills positive thinking by exposing dogs to various environments so that they can adapt to people. There are also various forms of education that help visually impaired people and guide dogs maintain these smooth relationships with each other.

As a result, guide dog owners handle very friendly and well-behaved dogs that are trained and prepared for their environment. With an increasing number of people living with dogs worldwide, we are seeing an increase in poorly behaved dogs that have not been provided with adequate training. So, it is time to find a way to positively apply the programs of guided dog schools to society to foster a better dog culture.

Guide dogs play a big role in reducing social costs, allowing visually impaired people to leave their disability aside and live fully as themselves. Now that we are celebrating our 30th anniversary, we are reflecting on just how much this role affects all members of society beyond just individuals.



A Samsung guide dog owner out and about



## New Guide Dog Team Start-Up Ceremony

Masanori Kanai  
Japan Guide Dog  
Association

**The Japan Guide Dog Association has a 'New Guide Dog Team Start-Up Ceremony,' an event to celebrate the start of clients who started life with a guide dog in the previous year.**

JGDA has four training centres, and the ceremony is held at each centre. The purpose of the start-up ceremony was initially for guide dog teams certified in the previous year to come to the venue of the start-up ceremony by themselves as one of the follow-ups/aftercare events and to interact with the staff. However, as the event went on, it became more and more important for everyone who regularly supports JGDA to see the new guide dog teams and get to know the clients they support. The event is now positioned as an opportunity for those who support our guide dog project to see the guide dog partnerships in action, experience the results of their support, and support us further.

The start-up ceremony consists of two parts: the ceremony, which includes the introduction of the new guide dog team, the presentation of commemorative items and a speech by the guide dog user, while the reception is a friendly get-together party with the new guide dog team and the attendees. Participants include guide dog users, JGDA officials, staff and supporters.

Clients who travel a long way to attend the event have researched the route to the venue beforehand, and some of the teams make their first trip away from home. Many clients show great relief when they arrive safely at the venue.

Above all, the main event of the ceremony is, of course, the clients' speeches. Some users speak humorously about why they chose to live with a guide dog, episodes after starting to live with a guide dog, stories of minor successes and failures, their gratitude to their supporters, and other topics. In contrast, others sometimes share episodes that bring tears to the eyes of those in attendance. Some of the clients also spoke of how they had been able to fulfil their wishes and dreams, such as "I wanted to take my daughter to the park" and "I wanted to go to the barber and hospital by myself", while others reflected that "if I had met a guide dog earlier, I wouldn't have had to quit my job". Some of the supporters realize that what we take for granted is something the clients finally achieved by living with a guide dog.

Every user also conveys words of gratitude to their supporters. Seeing the guide dog teams and the clients' words is an excellent motivation for the staff. In this way, the start-up ceremony is an event full of joy for everyone, with clients, supporters, and staff celebrating the start of a new guide dog team together.



12 clients from Kanagawa Training Centre

## The Seeing Eye, U.S. Celebrates its 95th Anniversary

Michelle Barlak  
The Seeing Eye,  
USA

**As The Seeing Eye embarks on its 95th year, it acknowledges growing concerns in the guide dog community about service denials. To address these concerns The Seeing Eye Board of Trustees has established a new department focused on raising awareness and support for guide dog handlers.**

On January 1st, 2024, David Johnson was selected to lead this department as the Director of Advocacy and Government Relations. Johnson, who joined The Seeing Eye in 1984, previously served as the Director of Instruction and Training from 2009 to 2023.

Our Senior Specialist of Advocacy & Government Relations Melissa Allman will continue her efforts as the two join forces in this new department. Allman was hired as the full-time advocacy and government relations specialist in 2018. She holds a law degree and has devoted her career to pursuing social justice for underserved and minority communities. She is a graduate of The Seeing Eye program, working with a yellow Lab/golden retriever cross Seeing Eye® dog named Luna.

We are delighted to share that Jim Kessler was promoted from Assistant Director to Director of Instruction & Training. Jim joined The Seeing Eye in 2001. He has been an assessor for IGDF since 2019 and currently serves on the standards review committee.

Lukas Franck retired from his position at The Seeing Eye in September this year.



The Nasdaq Group Seeing Eye

You can read more about [Franck's career](#) on our web site. He will continue to work with our organization as a consultant.

The organization also welcomed a new Director as Deb Morrone-Colella, the Director of Donor & Public Relations, retired at the end of December after nine years with The Seeing Eye. [Daphne Halpern](#) has joined The Seeing Eye as the new Director of Philanthropy. Although the title is different, the department has not changed. Daphne has 25 years of experience in fundraising and executive management.

The Seeing Eye is also preparing for a leadership change in 2024 as its current President & CEO prepares for retirement at the end of 2024. [Peggi Howard](#) has been the President & CEO since December 2021. She first became involved with The Seeing Eye as a member of our Board of Trustees in 2009. A formal announcement will soon be made about the search for a new President & CEO.



## 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.

### AO and EO Networking Event

9am BST: Tuesday 30th April 2024  
3pm BST; Thursday 2nd May 2024

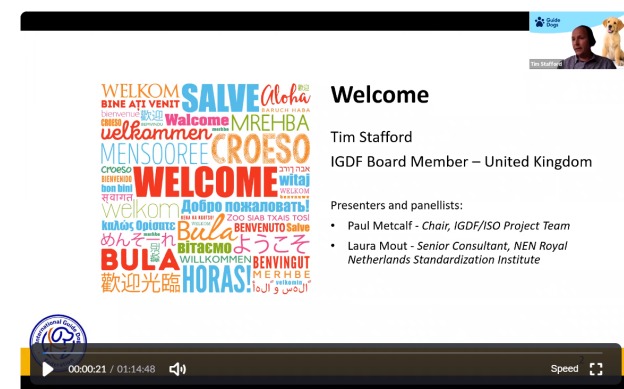
Invites to be sent out shortly.

### Webinar Recordings

Recordings of past webinars are available on the [IGDF webinars page](#)

### US OMSA Webinars

IGDF members can now access resources and webinar recordings from the US Orientation and Mobility Specialist Association (OMSA) through IGDF [here](#)



### 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 – although adding English subtitles would be desirable.

Please contact the IGDF office at [enquiries@igdf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@igdf.org.uk)

### Guiding Eyes for the Blind host a lunchtime pizza and video session with IGDF webinars

Why not take a leaf out of the book of Guiding Eyes for the Blind and organise your own pizza and video session with your staff to watch some IGDF webinars. What a great way to get together!

# Visionary

## Next Issue

The deadline for articles for the next issue of Visionary is: **1st June 2024**.

### Special Feature:

**Innovations in guiding harness design and use.**

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

In the meantime, if your organisation has

any other 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/>



**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.