

# Visionary

Edition **46**  
November  
2021

**International  
Sporting  
Achievements**  
And the Tokyo  
Olympics

**Mathilda Guide Dogs  
Celebrates 10 years**  
And tribute to  
Countess Mathilda  
Nostitz



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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, Canada, Czech Republic, Italy, Israel, France, Poland**



#### Cover Photo

Countess Mathilda Nostitz sitting by a lake with 3 labradors

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## Message From The Chair

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

At our recent well attended AGM in September, we underwent two changes to the board. Wells Jones (USA) and Kazu Oda (Japan) both completed their time on the Board. On behalf of us all, I wish them both the very best for the future and thank them for their service to the IGDF and remind you all the important contribution that they made to the IGDF.

At the same time, I have had the pleasure to welcome two new board members. I am delighted to welcome Chris Benninger (USA) and Seishi Tanoue (Japan) to the board. I and the entire board welcome you both and look forward to working with you on behalf of our members.

There is presently a great deal going on within the IGDF, and I hope that you will enjoy this edition of Visionary and learn about all what is taking place. I would also like to remind you that, all our board, committee members and assessors are volunteers and as such volunteer their time and knowledge and we are, greatly indebted to them and their organizations for loaning their staff. A Big “Thank You” to all our volunteers, one and all.

The Education committee is on track to have the online Moodle GDMI/Trainer theory education program up and running by July 2022. This is an industry changing education tool for everyone. In particular, the organizations that have historically had limited resources

continued

## Message From The Chair



to deliver theory education to GDMI and Trainers. A big note of appreciation must be given to Guide Dogs of Queensland for their support of the education committee and their willingness and generosity to share their development of the Moodle education program with us all.

Another new online development for all members is the launch of the online Discord Channel.

Discord servers are organized into topic-based channels where you can collaborate, share, and just talk about your day without clogging up a group chat. We have proceeded with this new tool



in response to members feedback from workshops and surveys. We hope that you make good use of "Discord" and enjoy the new experience.

On the topic of member survey's, we will once again hold another member's survey in January 2022, keeping in line with with the IGDF Strategy.

In partnership with our friends at Assistance Dogs International (ADI), we have started to share recordings of each organizations' webinars. The webinars will be linked on each respective organization's website a few days after the webinar presentation. We have many areas of common topics and, we hope that you will full take advantage of this new opportunity.

Lastly, I am very excited to announce that plans are underway to hold an IGDF Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, September 22nd to 25th 2022. BC & Alberta Guide Dogs will host the Conference "Strengthening Connections" and it will be held at the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver. We very much look forward to welcoming you all to Beautiful, British Columbia... so save the date! More details to follow.

**Bill**

## Update from the Education Committee

Paul Adrian  
IGDF Education  
Committee

**The Education Committee have had a very fruitful period over the past months and are pleased to advise that the new Guide Dog Mobility Instructor / Guide Dog Trainer curriculum has been finalised. You can find it here, on the 'Education Committee - What's New Page'**

The primary focus of the committees work is now shifting to the collaboration between the IGDF, Guide Dogs UK and Guide Dogs Queensland to produce a suite of learning materials that align with the curriculum requirements.

When complete, this work will deliver members an off the shelf training package for GDMI's and GDT's that meets all IGDF requirements. The materials will be delivered within a learning management system known as "Moodle". Moodle will provide trainees with the opportunity to engage with learning materials at their own pace.

While the training package will have a syllabus that meets all of the IGDF curriculum requirements, organisations will still be free to add additional units of their own to their training packages if they so choose. Many organisations with existing

comprehensive staff training programs will choose to continue using their own materials and systems. This is also entirely acceptable provided staff training meets the IGDF curriculum requirements.

Following the webinar which introduced the work of the Education Committee and the exciting collaborative work outlined above, a survey of member organisations was undertaken. Organisations large and small, established and emerging were amongst the respondents.

Key results included:

- Over 75% of respondents are currently training GDMI's or GDT's.
- The number of GDMI's being trained varied from 1 to 24, with an average of 4.
- 80% of respondent organisations plan to recruit additional GDMI trainees in the next 5 years.
- 60% of respondents do not have all of the training materials they believe they need to support trainee development.
- 100% of respondents believe an IGDF library of training materials would be of great value.

Importantly, 90% of respondents were in favour of the IGDF establishing a voluntary certification process for Guide Dog Mobility Instructors. This piece of work will be pursued by the IGDF Education Committee once the work required to deliver GDMI training materials and the learning management system are complete.



## Board and Committee Update



Seishi Tanoue, left,  
and Christine  
Benninger, below

### New Board Members

#### Congratulations to the following new Board Members who were elected at the 2021 AGM:

- Christine (Chris) Benninger – Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA
- Seishi Tanoue – Japan Guide Dog Association

Our thanks and best wishes go to Wells Jones and Kazumasa Oda for their years of service on the IGDF Board.

### New Board Roles

#### Following the 2021 AGM, the IGDF Board roles are as follows:

- Chair – Bill Thornton
- Vice Chair – Christine Turc
- Treasurer & Finance Committee Chair – Karen Hayes
- Accreditation Committee Board Liaison – Christine Baroni-Pretsch

- Assistance Dogs International Liaison – Bill Thornton, Christine Baroni-Pretsch, and David Maynard
- Communications Committee Chair – Christine Turc
- Communications Committee Members – Chris Benninger and Karen Hayes
- Development Committee Board Liaison – Tim Stafford
- Education Committee Co-Chairs – Christine Baroni-Pretsch and Tim Stafford
- Finance Committee Member – Seishi Tanoue
- Strategic Review Lead – Karen Hayes

### Development Committee

#### The following new Development Committee members were appointed in September:

- Julijana György Matešić – Hong Kong Guide Dog Association
- Fabiano Pereira – Helen Keller Guide Dog Services, Brazil
- Jane Bradley – Vision Australia

They join the existing DC Members, Ivana Merryman Boncori, Bob Proesmans and Lukas Franck. Brad Hibbard retired from the Committee in September, and Ivana has been appointed as the new Committee Chair. Our thanks go to Brad for his years of service to the IGDF and we all wish him well for the future.

## IGDF Assessments

Update from **IGDF Office, UK**

**Due to the continuing restrictions on international travel, assessment visits are still suspended. There are therefore no new members or assessments to report. The Remote Assessments Working Group has developed detailed guidance for the roll-out of remote assessments. The first trial assessment at Vision Australia has now been completed and the group are working to roll out remote assessments to other member organisations in early 2022.**

Unfortunately, the process of developing remote assessments has been slower than anticipated and the IGDF Board has therefore agreed to postpone all assessments by one further year. Assessments originally scheduled for 2020, and postponed to 2021, will now take place during 2022 and so on. All IGDF Member Organisations have been contacted. If you are in any doubt about the timing of your next assessment, please do get in touch.

As a result of the continuing delay to the resumption of assessments, to ensure consistency, and to avoid confusion, the Board has also agreed that all assessments which take place after 31st December 2021 will be conducted against the Revised Standards.

If you have any questions or require further information about the Revised Standards, please contact the IGDF Office.

#### Congratulations to the following organisation which has moved from Enquiring Organisation to Applicant Organisation status:

- Stapell Working Dogs (Australia)

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

- Blindenfurhundschule Claudia Detzer (Germany)
- AUPAC (Uruguay)

## Dog Welfare Special Interest Group

We are delighted to announce the establishment of IGDF's first Special Interest Group (SIG). This has been formed in response to member survey responses, and will conduct research and develop policy on Dog Welfare. The group will be led by Dr Bob Proesmans (Purpose Dogs, Belgium) and Tim Stafford (IGDF Board).

The first meeting of the SIG on Dog Welfare takes place in November, investigating old and new insights concerning punishment and reinforcement. More information will follow in the next edition of Visionary.



## Mathilda Guide Dogs celebrates 10th birthday

Hana Jasenovcová and Linda Luksa  
**Mathilda Guide Dogs,  
Czech Republic**



Mathilda Guide Dog, Darwin in Prague

**Mathilda Guide Dogs was established in 2010 with a goal of creating a small organization where trainers would have tight bonds with dogs in training, clients, puppies and volunteers. All founding members of Mathilda Guide Dogs had many years of experience from the Czech Guide Dog School and thus had a clear plan of what the new organization should look like and what they wanted to achieve.**

From the beginning we based our standards on the IGDF ones and we were very happy that the standards of the IGDF can be implemented in a small organization such as ours. Thanks to the Development Committee and the generosity of several IGDF members, we were able to launch our own breeding programme, which gave us the possibility to produce high quality dogs for our clients.

Of course, great genes are not the only necessity, it is also the contribution of our volunteer puppy raisers, who do their best to socialize the puppies and teach them basic obedience – all done under the guidance of our four GDMLs. It is the training phase which is of key importance though and here a small school such as ours is quite specific – our dogs in training live at home with their trainers. This means the trainer knows absolutely everything about the dog and can perfectly match a client to it. Also, the dogs are under the trainer's influence most time of the day – even when resting at home or during outside walks.

Training the dog is not where it ends of course, our clients also undergo thorough training when receiving their new guide dog – everything is done in their home environment which they know, therefore they can fully concentrate on their new companion.

In 2020, Mathilda Guide Dogs turned 10! This was one of the reasons why we invited you, our colleagues and friends, to our beautiful capital city – Prague – to the IGDF Seminar. Unfortunately, a situation which nobody expected turned up and due to the pandemic the Seminar had to be cancelled. On this occasion, we would like to thank all of you for your understanding and words of support.

A special thankyou goes to Bill Thornton, Wells Jones, Paul Metcalf, David Maynard, Jen Burford and the rest of the IGDF team for their support and fantastic approach, thank you!

### Tribute to our patroness, Countess Mathilda Nostitz

**“Help is not a question of money, but of the heart”**

Mathilda Nostitz was born in a family of an important Czech dynasty as the eldest daughter of Count Karel Nostitz. The Nostitz dynasty was known as a house of important patrons and philanthropists throughout Czech history. After the communist regime came to power in 1948, Mathilda's family was forced to leave what was then Czechoslovakia. Although the countess had lived involuntarily abroad since she was 12 years old, she was always actively interested in the situation at home. She could not return until after 1989.

Right after returning to the Czech Republic, she started learning Czech again and she did her best to find out how she could help. She quickly realized that contacts and information from around the world needed to be brought into this country that had been hidden behind the

“Iron Curtain” for 40 years. As the wife of an Italian ambassador, she lived in many countries around the world and knew where and whom to turn to when laying the foundations of professional guide dog training. A petite, beautiful, charismatic woman with endless empathy and optimism gradually opened the door to the world for us, and thanks to her, in 1997 the first Czech guide dog school became a full member of the IGDF.

In 2010, Countess Nostitz helped us establish the foundation, which bears her name to this day. We also established a small guide dog school – Mathilda Guide Dogs. At that time, Countess Nostitz had been helping people with visual impairment for over 20 years, perhaps this was because of her great, great-grandfather John of Luxembourg, Czech king, who became blind during his reign, or because of her mother who used to visit blind people in hospitals and read books to them. In any case, she received several prestigious awards for her work and she managed to personally support many projects which help blind and partially sighted people up to today. Mathilda Nostitz died on July 20th 2021 at the age of 85 and we will proudly take her name on.



Mathilda Guide Dogs patroness, Countess Mathilda Nostitz

## Karlee and Olympia are going for gold!

Guide Dogs  
NSW/ACT



Karlee running with her guide

### **Dream team Karlee and her Guide Dog Olympia make the perfect match to take on the 2024 Paralympic Games.**

Born with Leber Congenital Amaurosis (LCA), a rare genetic eye disorder that causes severe low vision, 19-year-old Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Client Karlee, has risen against the odds to achieve exceptional results at school, begin a medical science degree and carve out a stellar career in competitive athletics!

While Karlee's athletic ability was clear from an early age, her recent partnership with aptly named Guide Dog Olympia, has given her the confidence and independence to take her athletics career to the next level.

At the age of 11, while at primary school, Karlee began participating in cross-country running and athletics, and started

to progress through the ranks, qualifying to compete in national meets.

Karlee took a break from running when she started high school, but soon after, her Physical Education teacher recognised her talent and encouraged her to take it up again. At the same time she recommenced her running, Karlee started working with Guide Dogs Orientation and Mobility Instructor, Paul, building her skills so that she could work towards being matched with a Guide Dog.

**Karlee said, "Before, I had a human guide with me all the time, but that meant that I was totally reliant on people. Training changed everything. It made me independent."**

Karlee's ultimate goal – and something she had always dreamt about – was to get a Guide Dog, so she went through an

intensive program with Paul. Karlee recalls her excitement about being on the Guide Dog waitlist during this time – "I would constantly check for news and updates about puppies being born and Guide Dogs graduating, hoping that one day, one would be my match."

In February this year, Karlee received the call she had been waiting for – she had been matched with a beautiful Labrador called Olympia. Karlee spent the next few weeks getting to know Olympia and working intensively with Guide Dog Mobility Instructor Matt, with a large part of this training at her university campus.

**Karlee said Olympia has already had such a significant impact on her life. "Before I had Olympia I struggled with independence. I had no confidence and struggled emotionally as I felt trapped and isolated. I dreamt of one day having the freedom and independence everyone around me had," said Karlee.**

"Olympia has changed my life in such a positive way. She has given me the ultimate gift of freedom and independence that I have never experienced before."

"With Olympia, I am able to walk much faster and travel independently which is the best feeling. Olympia is a huge support to me at university and it's crazy how close we have become. What's even crazier is Olympia's name! Imagine my surprise at being matched with a dog called Olympia when I am aspiring to compete in the Paralympic Games! Not only is Olympia my eyes, she is my confidence, best friend and baby girl. I am so immensely grateful for Olympia's Puppy Raisers, Trainers and my Guide Dog Instructors for giving me this beautiful, clever girl."

Karlee competes in track and field as a "T11 vision impaired" athlete and currently holds the T11 100 metre open Australian record as well as the 200m, 400m and 800m under-20 Australian records. Her goal in athletics is to compete in the 2024 Paralympic Games as well as future World Para Athletics Championships.

**Karlee says "I love how athletics provides me with a challenge, and I continue to aim to improve my personal best performances. I also hope to inspire more athletes who are blind or have low vision to get involved in track and field."**

With her commitment and dedication to training, together with the confidence that she has gained since being partnered with Guide Dog Olympia, Karlee is well on her way to achieving her Paralympic dreams!



Karlee and guide dog, Olympia

## Graduates of the Labrador Guide Dog Foundation represent Poland in international sport

Irena Semmler, Piotr Goniewicz, Krystian Kisiel, Anna Gurak & Piotr Malicki  
**Labrador Guide Dog Foundation, Poland**



Anna Gurak, left, and Piotr Goniewicz, below



**“There are no challenges that are too demanding not to meet them...”**  
 – James Scott, “Lost in the Himalayas”

Does visual impairment equate to quitting or not being able to do sports?

Meet the Beneficiaries of the Labrador Guide Dog Foundation from Poland whose lives and sports passions prove something completely different, people for whom the sentence quoted above is not empty words.

**Piotr’s Goniewicz’s** interest in sailing dates back to his school years. His dream of great sailing came true in 1993 when he first embarked on a yacht and made a seagoing voyage from the Netherlands to England.

In the following years, he used every opportunity. He went out to sea on well-known Polish vessels such as the flagship of the Polish Sailing Association Kapitan Głowacki, STS Pogoria, or the legendary Zawisza Czarny – the yacht of the Polish Scouting Association.

The vessel on which he sailed until the pandemic was “Empatia Polska” – a yacht built with disabled people in mind and adapted to their needs.

Piotr is active in the Blind Sailors Foundation “Ślepa Kura”, and because of his musical education, he also plays and sings.

His four-legged companion in everyday life is Luna, a black Labrador Retriever trained by the Labrador Guide Dog Foundation. Previously he worked with Alya, also a Labrador trained in Ireland.

**Krystian Kisiel** has been doing showdown since 2013. He has many successes to his credit and it can be safely said that he is one of the world’s leading players, both individually and as a team.

In 2016, he won third place at the European Championships in Italy, a year later in Sweden he was second.

He recognises the victory in the EUROPEAN TOP TWELVE (ETT) as his greatest individual success. Twelve best male and twelve best female players from Europe take part in this tournament.

Men and women compete separately. The ETT is the toughest showdown event as players have to compete in the round Robin mode during two days. This means 11 matches to be played, each of which consists of three sets won.

In the IBSA (International Blind Sports Association) Showdown World Ranking as of August 31, 2021, Krystian ranks first among men. Among women, the first place is also taken by a competitor from Poland.

In group competition, Krystian and his team won three gold medals at the European Championships: in 2016, 2017 and 2019, and two at the World Championships.

Currently, Krystian is waiting for his first guide dog.

**Anna Gurak** has always loved horses. They have been her great love since she can remember. When she lost her eyesight as a teenager, she did not stop training, but additionally, as she says herself, other opportunities opened up for her, because without sport and activities related to it, she could not imagine her life. She trained in athletics, classic bowling and bowling, tandem cycling, laser shooting and swimming. Under the watchful eye of the instructor, she also tried her hand on the surfboard.

She achieved remarkable success in trained sports, standing on the podium many times.

Currently, as a mother of two children, she no longer trains professionally. She teaches her son and daughter her love for horses. She also rides a tandem with her husband and children. On a daily basis, Anna works with a black Labrador named Bazyl trained by the Labrador Foundation.

**Piotr Malicki** has recently been training in blind tennis. This is what he says about his passion:

**Blind tennis is the best sport for me that I can practice as a blind person. Thanks to regular training and tournaments, I can improve my form and game. It is a great form of rebound and entertainment, as well as physical effort needed by everyone (including the blind). The trainings allow you to practice not only the game, but also concentration and reflexes, which are very important in this sports discipline.**

Piotr and his wife Barbara work with a Dog Guide, trained by the Labrador Foundation, and prepared to work with two people, a black Labrador named Grafi.

## Thanks to Libera , my guide dog, I have gained my autonomy and my place in society

Silvia Sabatini with  
translation by Rita Del  
Fosco (Antonio's sister)  
**Scuola Nazionale Cani  
Guida per i ciechi di  
Scandicci, Italy**



Antonio demonstrating his archery skills

In Italian, there is a saying “wanting is power”. Antonio Del Fosco and Libera (this means “free” in Italian) are a team formed at Italy’s Guide Dogs for the Blind training School in Scandicci in 2015.

Antonio and Libera’s partnership was formed during two weeks of intense work at the headquarters of the School and a following period of further training in the small town of Celano, Abruzzo, where Antonio lives.

Antonio has always wanted to have a dog as a companion with whom to share

the best moments of his life, and the opportunity came when he applied for his first guide dog.

Libera is a very intelligent but also determined female black Labrador. The two have started a beautiful journey that for four years now sees them constantly together to navigate a really challenging environment to a guide dog user.

Libera accompanies Antonio every day on his long journey to work which is 70 km from his hometown in Abruzzo.

The two depart early in the morning and change two buses before reaching the Juvenile Court of L’Aquila where he works as a switchboard operator. This busy and difficult daily commute has been facilitated and enriched by the arrival of his precious Libera.

Two years ago, during a trip to Tuscany with his dog, Antonio got closer to the world of sports by participating in a demonstration of archery.

Curious and filled with a desire to learn as he has always been, he decided to go with Libera to attend a taster day for aspiring archers with a local company called “Rainbow Archers”. It was love at first sight! His journey of dedication and satisfaction began then. Continuous training and



Libera relaxing at the end of the day

perseverance showed him a new vision and gave him a chance to realise his great potential.

Libera is always by his side to protect and guide him in his movements and to support him in the official competitions, and has been adopted as an unofficial mascot by his fellow athletes.

After many regional competitions, it was the long-awaited moment of the National Championships in 2019 and 2021 in which he participated three times, winning a bronze medal in Palermo (Sicily) and a silver medal in Taranto (Puglia).

Antonio is proud of his achievements because, as he always says, disability is not an obstacle if we don’t think of it as one. Never stop fighting to achieve your goals.

His tenacity teaches us that with self-belief we can achieve our dreams. Hard work and determination are the keys to success and he has them! Good luck to Libera and Antonio , in life and in sport!



Antonio and Liberta on the podium



## A sense of mission and pride: Our three athletes in Tokyo

Bracha Ben-Avraham  
Israel Guide Dog Centre



Gail Hamrani and Dylan

**The Israel Guide Dog Center is extremely proud of its three graduates who were among the 33 athletes representing Israel at the Paralympic Games in Tokyo. Roni Achayon and Gal Hamrani play center on the Israeli Women's Championship Goalball Team, and Achiya Klein is the leader of a four-member academic rowing team. Gal, Roni, and Achiya were accompanied by their guide dogs Dylan, Rudy, and Night.**

When **Gal Hamrani**, 29, lost her vision in her late teens she considered getting a guide dog, but was reluctant to take on the responsibility of caring for a dog. She became acquainted with other guide dog users through the goalball team, and began to reconsider getting a guide dog. After she returned from the Paralympic Games in Rio she applied for a dog from the Israel Guide Dog Center and was partnered with her dog Dylan in October of 2017. "Dylan give me a lot of joy and

improves my quality of life," explains Gal. "When I have Dylan with me I know that I'll be safe."

Gal is a student majoring in psychology and special education at Ramat Gan College in central Israel. In addition to playing goalball she enjoys water skiing and snow skiing.

**Roni Ochayon**, 22, has had a visual impairment since birth and began playing goalball as a child at the Center for the Blind in Beer Sheva in southern Israel. She won the silver medal in goalball at the European Championship that was held in Germany in 2019 and was then partnered with Rudy, her first guide dog. Rudy has provided Roni with confidence and independence.



Roni Ochayon and guide dog Rudy

"Since I received Rudy it's much easier for me to get from one place to another, and I know I won't run into any obstacles." Roni has begun her first year of studies at the Faculty of Agriculture of the Hebrew University in Rehovot and is majoring in nutritional science.

Goalball is a unique competitive team sport designed specifically for players with blindness or visual impairments. The sport has been featured as an event in the Paralympics since 1976. The objective of the game is to score as many goals as possible in the opposing team's side of the court. The ball is equipped with bells inside it so that players can hear where it is located at all times, and players and spectators are required to maintain total silence throughout the game. All players wear blindfolds to ensure equal advantages between players with residual vision and those with total blindness.

**Gal Hamrani sums up what it is like to play an active competitive sport without seeing: "When you are totally blind you live by using your hearing!"**

**Achiya Klein**, 30, lost his vision 7 years ago during his military service in the IDF when he and his team were engaged in an operation to demolish a terrorist tunnel in Gaza. Achiya was seriously injured when a booby-trap set by Hamas exploded in the tunnel. After undergoing rehabilitation he was paired with a black Labrador named Night at the end of 2015.

Achiya holds two academic degrees and works as an inventor and consultant for

start-up initiatives. In addition to rowing he is also a triathlon athlete. He and his wife have one child and live in Tel Aviv.

**Achiya speaks about the source of his strength and perseverance: "There were many times when I wanted to give up, but I remembered the first time I represented Israel and the sense of mission and pride at wearing a jersey with "Israel" written on it!"**

Achiya's sport is academic rowing in which teams of four rowers propel long, narrow boats. It is a traditional sport popular in colleges in England and the United States. The team must demonstrate both strength and synchronization while rowing together to propel the boat and win the race. Achiya's job as head of the team is to provide the rhythm needed to synchronize the four rowers.

Our three athletes demonstrate the strength, determination, and perseverance that are needed to become a Paralympic athlete! We are proud of them and of their accomplishments and hope to see them compete in the Paralympic Games in Paris in 2024!

Achiya Klein and guide dog Night



## My Paralympic journey with Japlou

Timothee Adolphe with translation by Christine Turc  
**Association Les Chiens Guides d'Aveugles de L'Ouest, France**



Timothee Adolphe on the podium at the Tokyo Olympics

**I met Japlou in January 2016, this dog that I had encountered a few months earlier when I was forty years old at Les Chiens Guides d'Aveugles de L'Ouest (the school of guide dogs in the West). What an irony – a dog with an Olympic champion horse name, given to an athlete in search of gold at the games. For the record, I suggested that with a dog with such a name it was about time I started the 400m hurdles.**

Japlou, a Golden Retriever crossed German Shepherd, took the baton after nine years where Baltik had worn it with pride. As a Paralympic athlete, I run with guides, with five different guides, five human guides. Japlou is the sixth, but with him I do not fly over the tracks, no, together we cross the road of life.

The relationship is built over days, weeks, months and then years. We each evolve.

This little fellow weighing thirty-eight kilos grew up, matured and faced challenges by my side.

Japlou then discovers the INSEP (the national institute of sport of expertise and performance), and is quickly adopted as its mascot. He who barks or snores to the rhythm of my strides on the edge of the track.

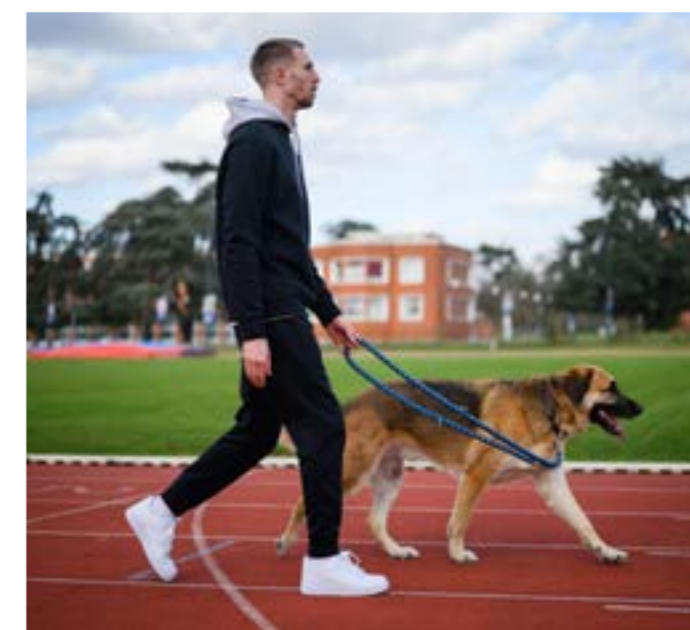
During August, Japlou and Newt took over the management of my parents' comfortable home while I flew to Tokyo to claim my first Paralympic medals.

We arrived in excellent shape, our sights set on 100m and 400m events. But on the 400m race day, the weather conditions are particularly difficult and while we are well ahead, the bond between me and my human guide slips from his hand 45 cm from the finish line, earning us a cruel

disqualification. The story repeats itself. Indeed, I had been disqualified despite a victory in 2016.

No more choices, we had to take revenge on these twists of fate by doing something in the 100m. And what a thing! I became the second fastest blind man in history, taking the silver for France in this 100m T11 final, the fastest in history.

If I had to sum up these five years together with Japlou in one word, it would be sharing. Sharing a life, sharing a daily life, sharing emotions, sharing defeats and disappointments, sharing victories and joys.



Timothee with guide dog Japlou

## The Canada – Australia project

Kezia Gray  
**CNIB Guide Dogs**

**The global pandemic has brought many challenges to the world – but with challenge comes opportunity. That is exactly what happened when CEO of Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) John Rafferty reached out to CEO of Vision Australia, Ron Hooton asking for a helping hand in tough times.**

CNIB Guide Dogs is a fairly new member of the guide dog family around the world and their breeding program is not yet well established. Since CNIB Guide Dogs began in 2017, it has been a high priority to have high quality service dog lines within the organization resulting in more successful guide dog partnerships. CNIB Guide Dogs found that level of quality in Career Dogs Australia, being an independent organization that specializes in breeding dogs specifically for the service dog industry.

Up until March 2020, CNIB Guide Dogs has been successfully importing a steady flow of puppies from Australia to Canada where they undergo training and eventually, are matched with a Canadian living with sight loss. Unfortunately, the global pandemic caused a swift halt to all direct flights between the two countries, which essentially put a halt to CNIB's supply of puppies.

Not only did the border closures create challenges with CNIB's supply of dogs, it also resulted in a dramatic increase of applications coming from Canadians who normally get their guide dogs from American schools. Schools that they no longer had access to due to the ongoing border closure between Canada and USA.

With all of this in mind, CNIB Guide Dogs began thinking outside the box to develop

Continued  
**The Canada – Australia Project**

a plan to keep up with the demand and prevent further delays with matching guide dogs with Canadians in need. After a quick call to some friends down under, Seeing Eye Dogs (SED) willingly offered to help CNIB Guide Dogs in any way they could.

Within a few months SED was accepting puppies from CNIB's breeder in Australia and placing them with their own volunteer puppy carers to begin their journey to becoming a guide dog. To help with the extra workload, CNIB arranged for one of their team members to temporarily join the SED team in Melbourne and with that, a huge weight was lifted knowing people with sight loss are not waiting longer than they should have to for their freedom and independence.

The collaboration between CNIB and SED started as a friend helping out a neighbour but has evolved into so much more. It has strengthened the bond between two reputable schools and has been a great example of what can be achieved when we work together.

In August 2021, the first four puppies from the group that were placed into the care of SED successfully travelled from Melbourne to Toronto where they will continue their training in CNIB's puppy raising program. The remaining six are expected to arrive in Canada before the end of 2021 and will be placed in Calgary, where they will continue their training with the same team member that supported the SED team in Melbourne.



Future CNIB Guide Dog Bridget, a yellow Labrador, at a beach in Geelong, Australia with four Seeing Eye Dog pups, all black Labradors.

## Transitioning International Guide Dog Federation to become an accredited certification body



From the very earliest proposal back in 1973, the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) has been concerned with raising the standards of guide dog provision so that people living with blindness or low vision receive

the very best service, and to encourage national legislation to enable full public access due to the dogs excellent training and preparation.

However, the world of assistance dogs is changing. There are now many more assistance dogs, in a more diverse number of roles, than ever before. There are a growing number of people getting dogs from a variety of different sources, including emotional support and therapy dogs, but which may not have the same degree of training or safeguards, and thus may present a poor impression or danger to the public. International standards on assistance dogs are unlikely to remain solely in the domain of IGDF and Assistance Dogs International (ADI) in the future. The European Standards (CEN/TC 452) are expected to produce a set of standards against which European organisations could be assessed. These standards could be written into statutory regulations. Whilst IGDF and our colleagues in ADI are well recognised and offer credible

'accreditation' services to our members, neither organisation is themselves assessed or accredited by an independent third party.

Having listened to our members during our strategic review, IGDF believes that the time is right to raise the professionalism of IGDF and progress to an independently accredited 'certification body.' This would offer IGDF, and therefore our members, an extra layer of validity to our work. It would enhance our reputation with regulators and thus could support stronger access rights for our service users. IGDF would continue to provide the same service to our members, using our own IGDF standards, but would itself be assessed against our own suitability to undertake these assessments (known as conformity assessments in ISO). In other words, this process checks the checkers!

UKAS (the United Kingdom Accreditation Service) is the national accreditation body appointed by the UK government. As a UK based charity, IGDF has agreed that it would be desirable to use their services to provide a 3rd party (independent) assessment. The standard that we would be assessed against is ISO/IEC 17065. The current IGDF 'accreditation process' would need to be re-positioned as a 'conformity assessment scheme' and IGDF become the scheme owner. On successful achievement of a conformity assessment, members would be provided with a 'Certificate of Conformity' (Certification). In a practical sense, members are unlikely

Continued

## Transitioning International Guide Dog Federation to become an accredited certification body

Tim Stafford  
IGDF Board

to notice too much change to the current process, but some change as we raise our professional standards is to be expected. The costs of a conformity assessment remain under the control of IGDF and are unlikely to be substantially different to the present situation.

Tim Stafford is leading this project with the support of David Maynard and Clare Pritchett. The first steps are to review IGDF's

internal processes, policy documents and standard operating principles and complete a gap analysis against the requirements of UKAS ISO/17065. This work will be completed by the end of 2021 and UKAS will be invited to complete an initial assessment during the first quarter of 2022. The timescale for completion of this project is a little bit open at the moment, subject to an initial report from UKAS, but we will keep members updated as we make progress.

## Committee Focus: Susan Armstrong



**Interview with Susan Armstrong, Vice-President of Client Training and Veterinary Operations at Guide Dogs for the Blind's Oregon Campus (USA), and Chair of the IGDF Accreditation Committee.**

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

I've always been an animal lover and interested in dog training as a child, and my plan was to be a veterinarian. I was on the track of becoming a veterinarian and I happened to do a college class on service dogs when I came across Guide Dogs for the Blind. During my research I read about the Guide Dog Mobility Instructor job and the training of dogs and clients seemed to be a great fit for me. The year that I graduated from college in Oregon (1995), was also the same year that the Guide Dogs for the Blind Oregon Campus was built. Again, it seemed like a great fit for me and so that is how I started my career.

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

I oversee all our client services (we have around 2000 clients) as well as our dog

and client training programmes and the support services that work alongside them, including veterinary operations. Most of my work is looking at strategic direction and supporting those managers that I work with to navigate the challenges of managing our guide dog programme.

### Briefly describe your IGDF role.

My role as Chair of the IGDF Accreditation Committee is working with a fabulous group of committee members and assessors to ensure that the accreditation process is carried out. During the pandemic, this has involved pivoting to see if we can operate a little differently whilst carrying out our function. The Committee also looks at the Standards, a process which ensures our members deliver high quality guide dogs whilst allowing for differences around the world.

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

A lot of it is organisation and a passion for wanting to contribute on a global scale. It is a love of mine, so whilst it can involve working weekends and into evenings or early mornings, I ensure I organise my time so I can meet all my responsibilities. I also have some fabulous support from the IGDF Office and other Accreditation Committee Members.

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

There are so many wonderful, knowledgeable, and competent people, not just within the Accreditation Committee and the assessors' group, but in all the schools around the world trying to do this work and it really stretches my thinking. It's also important to me to have an

influence on the IGDF Standards as we go forward to promote high quality guide dog work and dog welfare etc. I love receiving the input from everyone around the world and then trying to make the best decision. Stretching my thinking has been one of the best things about being involved with IGDF.

### What advice would you give to someone who would like to get involved in IGDF?

The new IGDF website is fabulous, so I would encourage people to look through the content to spark their thinking and keep an eye on any vacancies advertised there. Most organisations will likely have staff members involved with IGDF, so also talk to them about their experiences. I believe that more than ever before, IGDF is offering opportunities to get involved, so if you are looking to get involved on some of the committees, we would welcome anyone to reach out to our committee members and ask us for advice or offer us their services.

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

I have a couple of different thoughts on this. Firstly, I think that we are always fighting for access for guide dogs and with the advent of fraudulence service dogs, that has become challenging. There is also a lack of access to Orientation and Mobility services for clients. This may be more of an issue in the US, but I have also heard of it being a challenge in other countries too. Orientation and Mobility is so important, as a core skill to enable someone who is visually impaired to be able to have the mobility that they want and to do whatever they want in their life. They are also important skills to develop for guide dog work so having access to those services is important. In the US, these services are government run and separate to what

the Guide Dog schools offer and with the pandemic and political challenges, these services are currently under threat.

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

I think the chance of further inclusion for our clients and highlighting the voices of people that have a visual impairment is something that every guide dog school has an opportunity to do. I think our global mission is helping people achieve what they want to achieve in life and inclusion is a part of that. The pandemic has highlighted the need for inclusion and equality around the world, so I think that guide dog schools have an opportunity to enhance inclusion by the way that they advocate for clients, the way they get involved with clients and the way they highlight their voices.

### What is your funniest guide dog moment or story?

I can't come up with a funny moment that would be sharable, but I can think of one of my most memorable moments. Growing up my sister had a best friend who was visually impaired and whilst I just knew her

### Susan's border collies enjoying the snow



### Susan's border collies on the beach

as her friend, when I came to work in the guide dog industry, I thought about her quite a bit. She didn't use a guide dog, but about 8 years ago she came in to get her first dog. To have that personal connection and seeing someone that I grew up with get a guide dog for the first time and how that changed her life was one of the most memorable things for me.

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

I currently have 2 boarder collies who are 6 and 8 years old and they are my world. They provide lots of humour and most GDMIs will sympathise with me in that I don't go home and train them, so their antics are quite funny to me.

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

One of my favourite things to do is to play poker and interestingly when I go around the world in my travels and to do assessments, I am always on the lookout for places to play poker. I also love any kind of art and painting, and am a huge sports fan, playing basketball myself into my thirties.



**International  
Guide Dog  
Federation**



## SEPTEMBER 22-25, 2022

**Sept 22**

*"Let's get reacquainted"*  
Evening Reception

**Sept 23-25**

Two and a half days of plenary sessions and workshops, concluding with lunch on the 25th



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



2022 IGDF Conference  
Host IGDF member  
**BC & Alberta Guide Dogs**

2022 IGDF CONFERENCE

# Strengthening Connections

## WELCOME BACK MEMBERS!

The Board of the International Guide Dog Federation is very excited to welcome you to Vancouver, Canada for the 2022 IGDF Conference **"Strengthening Connections"** to be held September 22-25.

Cradled amid sky-scraping mountains and sparkling oceans, our international delegates will experience [the very best of this beautiful city and super, natural British Columbia](#). At the same time, enjoying educational plenary sessions and workshops at the world-renowned Fairmont Hotel Vancouver. We look forward to strengthening connections with colleagues and friends after so much time apart. Further details to follow early 2022.

Registration details coming soon to:

[WWW.IGDF.ORG.UK](http://WWW.IGDF.ORG.UK)

## 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 new IGDF website.

### IGDF – ADI Webinar Sharing

We are delighted to announce that IGDF and Assistance Dogs International (ADI) have agreed to share webinar recordings and open up live events for the members of both organisations. IGDF and ADI hope that this will be of great benefit to all member organisations and above all the service users around the world. We are currently working to make recordings of previous ADI events available through the IGDF website.

### December

#### Supporting staff through change using a behavioural science approach

**Date:** Tuesday 14th December, 9am UK

**Led by:** Hannah Wright, Guide Dogs UK

### January

#### Pain and Behaviour

**Date:** Tuesday 25th January, 9.30am UK

**Led by:** Karen Brady and Sara McIver, Guide Dogs UK

### February

#### Coach, Reinforce, Repeat

**Date:** Tuesday 8th February, 7pm UK



**Led by:** Tony Harvey, Guide Dogs UK

### IGDF Curriculum Update

**Date:** Tuesday 22nd February, Time TBC

**Led by:** Dani Prebensen, Lee Buckingham and Marc Lyell, Guide Dogs Queensland

### March/April

#### Additional Needs

**Date:** Tuesday 8th March, Time TBC

**Led by:** Lee Stanway, Guide Dogs UK

### IGDF Strategy Update

**Date:** March/April, Date/Time TBC

**Led by:** IGDF Board

# Visionary

## Next Issue

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

### Special Feature

Welcome to the new normal – changes in practice as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. Share your stories of how your organisation has adapted.

Please send articles on this or any other topic to the IGDF Office before

the February deadline.

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



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