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

Visionary

Edition 61
November 2026

Innovation and Technology

IGDF Academy update



International Guide Dog Federation
Hillfields, Burghfield Common, Reading
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First and foremost, membership of the IGDF enables Guide Dog Schools around the world to join a community dedicated to serving the visually impaired. That community needs and wants to share its knowledge and the IGDF facilitates that.

The map below outlines the contributing countries for this edition of Visionary -
Australia, Belgium, France, Japan, Netherlands, UK , USA



Cover Photo
Technology that Strengthens the Team, Never Replaces the Dog (l'Association de Chiens Guides de Lyon et du Centre-Est)

Registered in England Company No. 2376162
Registered Charity No. 1062441

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Message From The Chair

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

One of the primary priorities of the IGDF Board is to see the successful development and launch of our new Academy project.

It is therefore my pleasure to welcome Leanne Duffield and Tony Harvey to the IGDF professional team. Leanne and Tony will lead the delivery of the Academy, with an initial focus on the theory training for Guide Dog Mobility Instructors and Guide Dog Trainers.

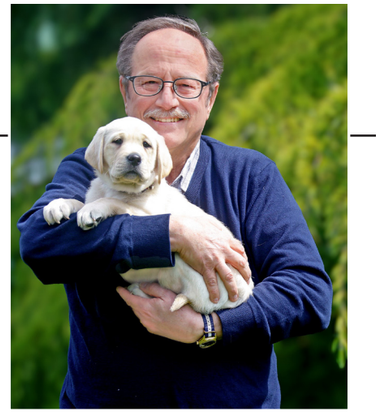
Both are working extremely hard towards our goal of launching the Academy at the 2028 IGDF Conference, taking place from June 22–25 and hosted by The Seeing Eye.

We are incredibly excited about what this project will mean for the future education and training of our technical professionals. Importantly, the Academy will help address some of the challenges our members face in delivering consistent, accessible and high-quality theory training to these essential members of their professional teams.

As we move forward, the Education Committee will be seeking further information and input from members to help determine the scale and scope of the Academy and ensure it meets the needs of our international membership. Some of this information will be gathered through the 2028 Annual Return Form.

This is an exciting and significant step forward for IGDF, and we look forward to working collaboratively with our members to bring this important initiative to life.

continued
Message From The Chair



In October, we came together in Paris for an IGDF face-to-face Board meeting. This was our first opportunity to meet in person as a newly appointed Board following the Japan conference.

On our second day, we held a joint face-to-face meeting with the Board of Assistance Dogs International (ADI). It was an extremely productive and positive meeting, with some exciting opportunities for further collaboration emerging. These include advocacy, standards, reducing duplication for organisations that are members of both associations, and the ADI International Breeding Collaborative. More deails can be found on page 32.

These discussions reinforced just how much potential exists when our two organisations work together. As the recognised world experts in our respective fields, IGDF and ADI have a unique opportunity to build on our shared strengths, advance our collective objectives and make an even greater impact across the guide and assistance dog sector.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of ADI's long-serving Chair, Danny Vancoppernolle, who will be stepping down from the role at the end of 2027. I and the IGDF Board, sincerely thank Danny for his leadership, commitment and support in helping to build and bring to fruition the strong relationship and high level of collaboration that now exists between ADI and IGDF. His contribution to this important partnership is greatly appreciated and shall always be recognized and valued.

Our meetings were hosted at the office of the French Guide Dog Federation (FFAC). I would like to take this opportunity to thank FFAC President Michel Rossetti and his outstanding team at the FFAC for their kindness and support.

Thanks also go to Frédérique Beaurain, President of Ecole de Chiens Guides pour Aveugles et Malvoyants de Paris et de la region Parisienne who treated us all to a tour of their impressive facilities and to our IGDF Board member from France, Antoine Bouissou for arranging and personally hosting us in Paris

What an outstanding year it has been for the IGDF. I would like to make one final thank you to the Japan Guide Dog Association, who provided one of the real highlights of the year, hosting their exceptional IGDF Conference in May. Thank you all for your wonderful hospitality and for delivering such a memorable event. Dōmo arigatō gozaimasu!

Thanks to all our volunteers, thank you, for your continued commitment, collaboration and support throughout the year. It is truly appreciated, and we look forward to working with you all again in the New Year! Simply could not do it without you all.

Finally, on behalf of your Board and our professional team, I would like to wish you all the very best for the upcoming festive season.

IGDF Assessments

Update from **IGDF Office**

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

- Chiens Guides de l'est France
- Chiens Guides D'Aveugles Du Centre Ouest, France
- OccuPaws, USA

The following organisation has currenlty been suspended:

- China Guide Dog Training Centre

The following organisations' EO status has lapsed:

- Fondacion Argentina para el Perro Guia
- Fundacion Lucha contra la Retinitis Pigmentosa (Fundalurp), Chile

In Memorium

Fondazione del Servizio Cani Guida dei Lions Italy – ETS | Limbiate, Italy

In Loving Memory of Giovanni Fossati: 21 Years of Service, a Legacy That Lives On

The Fondazione del Servizio Cani Guida dei Lions Italy – ETS mourns the passing of its beloved President, Giovanni Fossati, on 11 April 2026. For 21 years, he dedicated his life to helping others, including 15 years leading our Foundation with passion, humanity and vision. Giovanni believed that guide dogs, which he affectionately called "angels on four paws ", were not simply companions, but a source of independence, dignity and freedom for people who are blind.

His commitment to excellence and international cooperation reflected the values shared by the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF), of which our Foundation is a proud member. Being part of this global community represents an important commitment to



Giovanni Fossati

quality, collaboration and the continuous improvement of guide dog services. To honour Giovanni's extraordinary legacy, the National Giovanni Fossati Award has been established in his memory, ensuring that his spirit of service continues to inspire future generations. His greatest legacy lives on in every guide dog that changes a life.

Connecting People to Possibility

Yasuhiro Yamagishi,
Japan Guide Dog Association

My name is Yasuhiro Yamagishi, and I am a blind staff member at Japan Guide Dog Association (JGDA) and I primarily use a long cane in my daily life. While I fully appreciate the benefits of guide dogs, I believe people should be able to choose the mobility tools and support methods that best suit their individual lifestyles.

The Visual Impairment Support Department

The Visual Impairment Support Department is where I work.
Our department provides free long cane mobility training, activities of daily living (ADL) training, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training. For guide dog users, we offer support beyond guide dog mobility training, and for people considering a future partnership with a guide dog, we conduct guide dog experience walks. Across our various offices, our team consists of twelve staff members. In my role, I instruct clients who are blind or have low vision on how to use ICT devices.

The Main Areas of Instruction

I teach people who are blind or have low vision how to use smartphones and computers. Most of my clients are in their sixties to eighties.
For many people, shifting from a primarily visual way of accessing information to relying on speech output can be challenging, so I deliver most of my training one-to-one. As more people switch to smartphones, I often provide training from the very beginning because many of the operations are completely new to them.

I also spend a great deal of time answering questions by phone, particularly when clients have trouble using their devices outside of training sessions. Many people seem anxious when using unfamiliar technology.

Travelling to Appointments

I typically visit two or three clients in their homes each day. On some days, I transfer trains three times and then take a bus from the station to reach my destination. Sometimes I travel as much as a 100 kilometers (62 miles) round trip.
When moving from one training location to another, I also independently research and navigate to places where I can have lunch. Using smartphone navigation apps and camera-based accessibility features, I can conduct these home visits independently.



Providing technology support over the phone

A Rewarding Role

I am currently in my fifth year working at JGDA. The most rewarding part of my job is seeing clients use their devices smoothly after completing their training. In some cases, people gain the confidence to take new steps in their lives, and I find it especially rewarding to know that I have helped create those opportunities. I suppose I simply enjoy working directly in the field. Although there is still much for me to learn, I believe this style of work is uniquely possible today because of advancing technology.

I also believe that many people in Japan are still unaware of the support services provided by the Visual Impairment Support Department. I hope to keep finding effective ways to share information about the services JGDA provides with as many people as possible and connect them with the support they need.

However, none of this is achieved through my efforts alone. Mobility skills, accessible infrastructure such as sidewalks and public spaces, and above all, the people around me who are willing to offer assistance when needed make it possible. I hope that, little by little, more people will come to recognize that people with vision impairment can thrive in a wide range of workplaces and professions.

Smartphone and AI technologies continue to evolve rapidly, and I hope to use these developments to further expand what is possible. As innovation accelerates, new technologies and applications emerge every day, and I believe it is important to stay informed about these advancements. By keeping pace with the latest developments, I hope to share information and offer reviews from the perspective of people with vision impairments, helping more people benefit from technology and reducing the number of individuals left behind in an increasingly information-driven society.



Yasuhiro usually travels to two or three client homes each day to provide support

Guide Dogs Technology and ‘Connectors’: The Paradox of Modern Life

Rob Fletcher and
Cameron Algie
Submitted through Guide Dogs Victoria, Australia



Whether we like it or not, technology surrounds us. For people who are blind or who have low vision, current technology can feel like a paradox. There’s more available now than ever before, yet the landscape appears overwhelming. A smartphone can do hundreds of things. There are thousands of Apps, options which cost money or those which are free. Now, AI agents such as Microsoft CoPilot, Claude, Chat GPT, Google Gemini, or Perplexity are dominating the market. As technology users, our problem is knowing what to use and gaining the required skillset to take advantage of the benefits of change. AI based connectors can research and answer almost any question and assist in organising our daily lives. (NOTE: ‘Connectors’ are a term used by AI agents to physically connect to other software via the profile menu. This enables the agent more resources to solve problems).

However, knowing that these tools exist is not the same as knowing what you can really do with them. It is understanding the role of AI Agents as connectors of your technology systems which provides new hope and scope for the blind and vision impaired.

The real skill is not mastering technology; it’s understanding what’s possible and then critically understanding how to weave these new AI benefits together. This is where most get overwhelmed. They see tools, not the connectors between them!

What are Connectors?

Connectors are the invisible bridges between systems now made possible by AI Agents. They let an AI agent reach beyond itself for example, into your email, your calendar, the internet, your files, your data and pull information together without you having to switch apps, type commands, or fumble between screens.

To provide an old-fashioned analogy, instead of you being the switchboard operator manually plugging in different connections, AI connectors do this for you. For example, giving you information on travel timetables, the weather, or information contained in your emails. AI agents become an amazing voice activated, hands free, coordinator. In effect, they become your personal assistant, (PA) and you don’t have to pay a salary or provide office space!

Ask once and your AI agent such as Claude gathers information from multiple sources, combines different ideas, collects pieces of relevant information and other related facts, into a coherent whole, telling you what you need to know for decision making. For someone navigating the world with vision loss, this changes everything. For example, you are not cognitively overloaded, or struggling with fragmented information. A vision impaired person has usually massive amounts of information to handle as you navigate either familiar, or unfamiliar surrounds, so your AI PA enables you to be prepared, confident and capable. But here’s what people often miss: connectors don’t replace the cognitive skills you already have; they amplify them.

The blind and low vision community has already well-developed problem-solving abilities. You know how to work with what you’ve got, how to adapt and how to ask the right questions. AI Connectors give you more material to work with and organises it.

A Typical Day with Connectors

1. Preparing for Meetings

It’s 7:30 AM. You need to be at a meeting across town at 2 PM. Having uploaded your AI Connector and undertaken appropriate training, you ask your AI agent coordinator one question: “Can I safely and reliably make this meeting?”

The coordinator will check the weather, it knows your route and destination, understands what conditions make travel less reliable, and flags any concerns. For example,

- It will advise that Weather is good today and travel is feasible.
- It will check the train timetables,
- maps your journey and,
- tells you for example: leave at 1:00 PM, arrive by 1:55 PM.
- Your Coordinator will also cross-reference your calendar, advise of conflicts. You’re clear!

Now you have certainty. You know when to leave. You know the conditions are safe.



2. Logistics - Your Guide Dog

You call your faithful Guide Dog, 'Hamish.' He's been with you through countless journeys. He provides not just navigation, but companionship, confidence, and presence. He's your constant - the one thing that doesn't depend on batteries, internet, or software updates!

Together, you head toward the station, or bus stop. 'Hamish' handles the physical navigation on familiar ground. The two of you move as a team: technology managing complexity, your guide dog managing presence and connection.

3. Travel

On the train, or preferred mode, while your loyal GD 'Hamish' rests beside you, you prepare.

For example, ask the coordinator: "Tell me everything about this meeting? Pull all emails related to this calendar entry? Who am I meeting with? What's our history?"

The AI coordinator will extract every message thread connected to this meeting. It builds a profile: who this person/company is, what you've discussed previously and what decisions are pending. It's not just a name and a time. It will give you a full picture.

By the time you arrive, your mind is fresh, you are prepared, present and professional. This is what connectors make possible.



The Cognitive Work Behind Technology

But none of the above happens automatically. The AI coordinator doesn't know to check the weather unless you understand that weather matters to your travel. It doesn't know to pull meeting history unless you've learned to ask for this context. It doesn't know to flag scheduling conflicts unless you've thought about buffer time your destination, location i.e. is it on the 60th floor of a skyscraper? or in a complex service area such as a care-home or hospital?

These are normal problem-solving skills which the blind and vision impaired community has been dealing with for years. You know what you need in navigating your world safely and how to ask for information or further O&M support. You know how to think ahead.

AI connectors reward this thinking. They take your expertise in problem-solving and give you access to more information, more systems and greater possibilities. The person who understands what AI connectors can do, what information they pull, what systems they coordinate, what problems they solve, means you can build almost anything. And that person could be you!

Fundamental Skills Development

In these moments, you activate the cognitive problem-solving skills through years of navigating the world. The basic skill set you have gained through years of O&M support, come into play. Instead of following the AI coordinator's direction as gospel, you take changing circumstances and apply your own judgment and ask:

- What do I know about this situation?
- What's changed?
- What are my options?
- What's the safest next step?

Using your phone's contact list, you might call the station, text support or a friend, or use APPS such as AIRA or BE MY EYES for support of a 'live person'. You might decide the weather risk then work from home or take a taxi. You should have already thought through these contingencies because that's how you've always navigated.

This is your actual fall-back system: environmental awareness plus adaptive thinking. Your brain, constantly cross-checking reality against information, ready to shift strategy the moment something doesn't fit. Your AI coordinator gives you information efficiency; however, your cognitive toolkit gives you safety while your faithful guide dog 'Hamish' always present beside you and grounded in the physical world and training, keeps you anchored to reality.



Other Useful Technology

Necessity, Independence, and Connectors in Action: Digital Wallets

The world is changing, but not always to include you. Banking institutions are closing branches. Retail environments are replacing traditional PIN pads with flat panel touchscreens that offer no tactile feedback. The systems that once allowed you to transact independently are disappearing. Do you get the sense that you are locked out? You can't access your own money the way you once could. This is not a technology problem you created; it's a design choice that excludes you as well as many other older people.

But, for us, the people with vision impairment, here's where AI connectors change the game. (Note – These connectors are of a different kind from those mentioned above). A digital wallet—Apple Pay, Google Pay, or similar services on your smartphone or smartwatch—connects your banking system directly to payment terminals. Your phone becomes the interface. You tap it, authenticate using whatever method works for you, and the transaction completes. This isn't a luxury. It's essential infrastructure for maintaining independence.

Digital wallets, as a matter of fact, are more secure than hard copy cards. Physical cards can be skimmed. People can watch you enter a PIN compromising your security and dignity. But, with a digital wallet, authentication happens on your device the moment you unlock it, not at the point of transaction. That validation is yours alone. No one watching. No card exposed.

Your digital wallet is another connector. It bridges your bank account, your authentication system, your payment preferences, and the retail terminal—all without requiring you to see anything, type anything, or ask for help. You maintain control and security.

Someone had to imagine this solution first. Someone had to think, “The system is excluding us. What can we build instead?” Digital wallets didn’t exist as a necessity until traditional banking became inaccessible. This is what happens when you understand what connectors can do.

In Conclusion

Your guide dog gets you to the shop. Your smartphone handles the transaction securely. Your problem-solving identified the alternative when the original path closed. Together, these are solutions. They’re independence. They’re better than what came before.



Rob Fletcher (left) & Cameron Algie (right)

Your Choice

The blind and low vision community doesn’t need to wait for the world to redesign its systems. Accept the fact that we live in a ‘sighted world’ which is not, and perhaps never fully will, recognise the problems confronting those with vision loss. You already have what you need: the cognitive toolkit to master technological change, the problem-solving skills to identify creative solutions, the imagination to see what’s possible. Therefore, do not see technology as the enemy, surf the digital wave, or be drowned in the undertow. The choice is yours. The tools are here. Your imagination is the only limit.

Oh! And yes, one final point. Look down and give your loyal Guide Dog Hamish a pat and treat, you will get a response more affectionate than your Notepad or iPhone!

About the Authors

Rob Fletcher President Blind Sports & Recreation Victoria, 17 years of lived experience working as a Senior Manager for an International Energy company, BLV Representative on the Tennis Australia Disability Advisory committee, Handler of Hamish.

Cameron Algie AM Ll.B. Prize winning poet and author of ‘I Can See Clearly Now, Understanding and Managing Blindness and Vision Loss.’ He has over 50 years of lived experience, is a Board Director of Guide Dogs Victoria and a former CEO, Lawyer, Facilitator and Director. And Handler of Paula.

Innovation Projects at Dogs4blind

Jo Dierick
Dogs4blind, Belguim

Dogs4blind became an IGDF Applicant Organisation in June 2026. We were founded in 2012 and have since expanded our activities steadily and consistently. Although we are recognised by the Belgian authorities through CELMA, the Authorisation Committee for Assistance Dog Schools, we do not receive ongoing financial support from the government. Like other guide dog training centres, we receive only a one-off subsidy when a guide dog is placed with a beneficiary.

This means that we must continuously raise funds to ensure the centre can continue its work. We therefore rely heavily on volunteers, donations and other fundraising initiatives. In line with our continued growth and our ambition to provide eight guide dogs each year, we have recently launched two innovative projects.

Personalised Nutrition for Our Dogs

The health of our dogs is extremely important to us. We have observed that some dogs are more sensitive to certain types of food and treats than others. Although we are supported by a well-known pet food brand, we recognise that some dogs require additional care and attention in this area.

We have therefore launched a project to personalise each dog’s diet. Our aim is to give every dog the healthiest possible start in life while also providing foster families and, eventually, beneficiaries with clear guidance on how to maintain a healthy and alanced diet throughout the dog’s life.

Marie Celine Hottat, affiliated with Ghent University, is a Diplomate of the European College of Veterinary and Comparative Nutrition (ECVCN) and an EBVS European Veterinary Specialist in Animal Nutrition. She will work with us to bring this project to life, helping our dogs remain healthy and happy throughout their entire lives.

An Integrated Digital Management System

As a relatively young organisation, we have used various digital tools over the years, including Mailchimp, Excel databases, Trello and Adobe applications. As a result, our data is spread across multiple systems, and managing these different applications has become increasingly complex and time-consuming.

We have therefore decided to move to Odoo, an all-in-one business management platform that will allow us to manage different aspects of our organisation in one central system. Its applications cover areas such as accounting, sales, inventory management, human resources, customer relationship management and invoicing.

Our goal is for Odoo to become the central database supporting all our day-to-day activities. By consolidating our information and processes in one place, we aim to work more efficiently and devote more time and resources to our core mission: training and providing guide dogs to people who need them.

https://www.dogs4blind.be/

Technology that Strengthens the Team, Never Replaces the Dog

Pauline Froppier,
Chiens Guides
Lyon, France



A guide dog owner using SonarVision & his guide dog to navigate the streets of Lyon.

At Chiens Guides Lyon et Centre-Est, we support 114 guide dog teams. Whenever we look at a new technology, we ask one simple question: does it make the handler more independent? Our answer shapes everything described below. Technology can strengthen the team, but it never replaces the dog, nor the orientation and mobility training that keeps the team safe.

Precision navigation: testing SonarVision

Our school leads the new technologies working group of the French federation of guide dog associations (FFAC). Since June 2026, the group has been testing SonarVision with handlers, guide dog instructors and orientation and mobility specialists from several French schools. This French app guides pedestrians to within about 30 centimetres, for example to the exact starting point of a crossing, using visual positioning, high-precision GPS and spatial audio.

Lyon's pedestrian routes were mapped in 2024, and our vice-president Pierre-Marie Micheli, himself a guide dog handler, uses the app regularly.

The first lessons are as valuable as the promises. Battery life is limited, localisation can be lost near roadworks, and following audio guidance adds to the handler's mental load. This confirms the central role of mobility training. It also showed us that detailed route mapping is the key to success, which opens up a new role for volunteers.

Remote visual assistance with Be My Eyes

With the support of a partner, we have set up a private 'Be My Eyes' group for our community. In practice, a volunteer's eyes can help a handler pick out the right bottle of paw care product among several similar containers, or find the entrance to a shop. About ten handlers took part in a pilot.

Our communications team gathered their feedback and wrote simple user guides. We are now opening the group to all our handlers and growing the volunteer community that answers their calls.

Making access refusals visible

In France, the right of guide dog teams to access public places has been protected by law since 1987, yet refusals remain common. Handlers can report a refusal from their phone, through our school's app and through the app launched in 2024 by ANM' Chiens Guides, the French national association of guide dog owners. In 2025, ANM' recorded 375 refusals, more than one a day, mainly in shops, restaurants, transport, leisure venues and healthcare settings. Every report is followed up: in 2025, this meant 330 mediations and 18 legal complaints. Turning individual incidents into reliable data gives the whole movement solid evidence for advocacy.

Accessible by design, with the help of AI

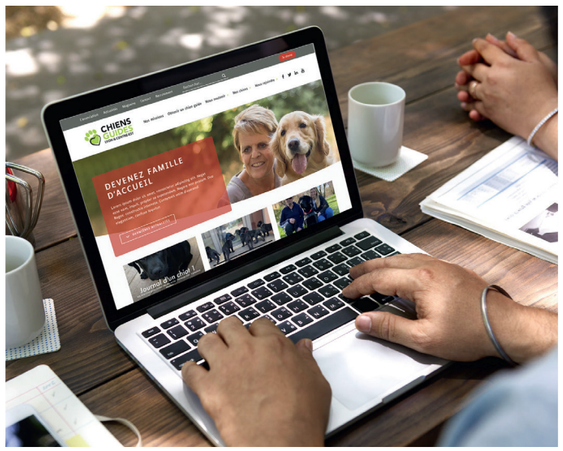
Accessibility starts with our own association. Most of our documents are produced as structured, tagged PDFs. For our general assemblies, they come with an audio version using a synthetic voice, so that our visually impaired members can read them, follow the debates and vote independently. Our tax receipts are tagged for screen readers, and members can sign documents electronically on their own.

Artificial intelligence now helps us go further. We have created a dedicated skill for Claude, Anthropic's AI assistant, which helps us apply our brand guidelines and accessibility rules (the French RGAA standard, WCAG 2.1 AA and PDF/UA) to every document: a single main heading, a consistent heading structure, properly tagged tables, alternative text for images, sufficient contrast and the Atkinson Hyperlegible font. Accessibility is built in from the start instead of being fixed at the end. Yet meeting the standards is not enough: only feedback from screen reader users can tell us whether a document is truly comfortable to read and navigate. Technical compliance and user experience go hand in hand.

Our communications team also checks its publications with an AI review project built on recommendations on the best way to talk about disability, for inclusive and accessible communication. One rule never changes: the final decision is always made by a person, not by the AI. This approach is easy for any guide dog school to replicate.

The same question every time

Whether it is a navigation app, a video call with a volunteer or a well-structured document, our test remains the same: does it give handlers more autonomy and more choice? We would be glad to share our experience with other IGDF members. You can contact our communications team at communication@chiensguideslyon.org



Accessibility is built into every aspect of the association

Thank Dog It's Thursday: Bringing Innovation and Adventure to Guide Dog Training

Niki Beets
Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, UK

It's easy to fall into a routine: arrive at work, train dogs, have lunch, train more dogs, and repeat. For a trainee GDMS, the pressure to cover everything required while ensuring their dogs reach the expected quality standards can be daunting. I noticed my learners were falling into this cycle, and somewhere along the way, a little of the joy and adventure was disappearing from our day-to-day training. I wanted to change that.

The idea started with a treasure hunt. I wanted to give my learners an opportunity to focus on developing their dogs' through narrow gaps and in an unfamiliar place, but in a way that felt different from a typical training session.

With a little help from ChatGPT to create cryptic clues, an early morning to place the clues around the narrow gaps on my pre-determine route and an intriguing mission briefing, I sent them off on their adventure to locate each gap.

It was such a success that "Thank Dog It's Thursday" was born!

For the past eight months, most Thursdays has brought a new challenge, a different learning opportunity and something for the learners to look forward to. ChatGPT helps me create messages, clues and missions tailored to the skills my learners need to develop. What began as a treasure hunt has grown into a creative way of bringing variety, curiosity and fun into our training week.

The challenges are varied and designed around individual development needs. When one learner expressed a lack of confidence about getting lost, we turned that concern into an adventure. Using a location pin, I sent them to a free-running area in a completely unfamiliar town, with their dog and one simple instruction: get there! There was no pre-planned route and no step-by-step directions. They had to work out how to reach the destination themselves, navigating unfamiliar surroundings with their four-legged companion.



New recruits Justyna (left), Rosie (centre) and Hollie (right) test their skills. The coach, the handlers and the dogs are each given a mission to acheive before lunchtime. Points are awarded along the way.

Technology gave me a simple way to set the challenge, but the real learning came from the journey itself. It was an opportunity to develop independence, problem-solving and confidence without relying on familiar routes or routines. We've also used Strava picture challenges, coaching activities and other creative missions to encourage learners to think differently and take ownership of their development.

Sometimes, the challenge is about stepping outside a comfort zone in a different way. Blindfold exercises, or mindfolds as we call them, can make learners nervous. Rather than simply asking them to face their fears, I used ChatGPT to help create a light-hearted mission brief, complete with funny photo challenges to take the pressure off. The coaches had their own mission too, to collect points while reinforcing their coaching and communication skills.

Everyone had a role to play and the focus shifted from the nerves surrounding the exercise to the challenge itself. By the end, the learners had thoroughly enjoyed the session and felt much less apprehensive about subsequent mindfolds. It was a reminder that creating the right atmosphere can make a real difference to how people approach unfamiliar or challenging experiences.

The adventures don't stop at the training school, either. Learners have been set challenges to complete with their clients, bringing a little extra fun and engagement into their classes. We've had missions to find specific items for each dog, with photographic evidence required, of course! There's always a winner to be crowned, and occasionally a little friendly competition to settle. On other occasions, we've used Google Maps to identify suitable cafés where dogs can practise settling in a new environment.

The technology itself is simple, but the possibilities are surprisingly far-reaching. ChatGPT helps me turn individual learning objectives into creative, memorable experiences, whilst tools such as Strava and Google Maps help us plan, explore and approach training in different ways.



Rob (left) and Rosie (right) starting their mindfold challenge with Claude (yellow lab). Rosie was not allowed to work Claude with a lead and Rob had to focus on coaching Rosie through this using her body position to support Claude.

Continued:
Thank Dog it's Thursday

The challenges can be adapted to individual learners, their development needs and the dogs they are working with, allowing us to keep learning relevant while introducing variety into our days.

For me, the real innovation isn't just about using technology; it's about using it purposefully. These tools give me another way to encourage problem-solving, build confidence, develop communication and coaching skills, and help learners take ownership of their development. By introducing an element of mystery, adventure and humour, we can revisit essential skills without every session feeling the same.

Over the past eight months, 'Thank Dog It's Thursday' has become something the learners can anticipate each week: a break from the predictable, an opportunity to challenge themselves and a reminder that learning can be enjoyable as well as demanding. It has also given me a fresh way to think about my own role as a trainer, finding new ways to engage learners while keeping their individual needs and the dogs' development at the heart of each activity.

We're still working towards the same high standards, developing the same essential skills and preparing dogs for their important future roles. We're just doing it with a little more imagination, a lot more laughter and the occasional cryptic clue along the way.

After all, who says professional development can't involve a treasure hunt?

'Thank Dog It's Thursday' has shown me that innovation doesn't always require complicated technology or expensive equipment. Sometimes, it takes a little imagination, the right tools and a willingness to do things differently to turn an ordinary training day into an adventure.



Niki Beets at a free run location with trainees, Rosie and Justyna.

Example of one of the 'Thank Dog its Thursdays'

Welcome back, brave learners and your loyal adventure dogs!

A new quest awaits… it's time for another "Thank Dog it's Thursday" challenge!

Today, you and your four-legged explorers will set out on a mission to create your very own Strava masterpiece. For each of your dogs (or even just one), your path must form a shape worthy of legend…

Will you choose:

- A mighty bone
- A heroic heart
- A perfect paw print
- Or the first letter of your dog's name

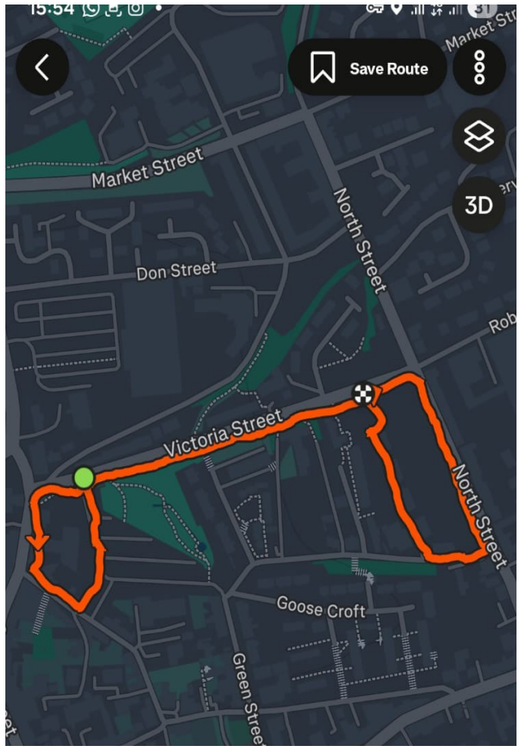
But choose wisely—both your route and your terrain will determine your success!

Glory awaits those who show the greatest creativity and the most accurate shape, along with a brilliant final photo to match your adventure.

Once your quest is complete:

- Capture a screenshot of your Strava creation
- Take a winning photo of your dog(s)
- Submit both to claim your chance at victory!

Good luck, explorers… may your paths be true and your paws steady.



Strava picture of a dog bone submitted by Rob at the end of his Strava challenge



New Generation of DogSims at KNGF Royal Guide Dogs Foundation

Harold de Ruiter,
KNGF Geleidehonden, Nederland



New KNGF DogSim

At The Royal Dutch Guide Dog Foundation (KNGF Geleidehonden) in the Netherlands, innovation does not always involve advanced technology. Sometimes, it can also be simply about improving an existing and very useful training tool.

Together with students from the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, KNGF has developed a redesigned DogSim: A simulator that allows people with visual impairments to practise certain aspects of walking with a guide dog, without having to involve an actual dog.

Preparing clients and assessing their skills

The DogSim consists of a wheeled frame equipped with a guide dog harness handle and is operated by an Instructor (GDMI) or Mobility Specialist (GDMS).

In the Netherlands, organisations for the blind and visually impaired, Visio and Bartiméus use the DogSim for orientation and mobility training with prospective guide dog users. It helps clients on the waiting lists prepare for certain aspects of walking with a guide dog and supports existing guide dog users who need to learn new routes after relocating. Training focuses on route knowledge, recognising environmental cues, responding to unexpected situations and finding their way back when they lose their orientation. KNGF also provides training for Orientation and Mobility specialists from these organisations, helping them develop the practical skills needed to use the DogSim.

At KNGF, the DogSim is an important assessment tool. It enables GDMIs to determine a client's walking speed, which is essential when matching a client with a suitable guide dog. But its value extends much further. For example, does the client follow the DogSims movements, or do they anticipate where they think they should go and attempt to steer through the harness?

GDMIs also assess balance, physical coordination, the use of residual vision and knowledge of familiar routes. Furthermore, by deliberately deviating from a known route, they can observe whether clients recognise the mistake and respond appropriately and in time.

These observations help identify individual training needs and provide valuable information for the matching process. All this can be assessed without placing unnecessary demands on a guide dog or potentially influencing its trained behaviour through inconsistent handling.



New KNGF DogSim design

Redesigning the DogSim

After years of intensive use, KNGF's existing DogSims were due for replacement, and a new manufacturer also needed to be found.

A major problem with the original DogSim was its instability: the wheels sometimes lifted off the ground during use. In addition, GDMIs had to operate the DogSim using a single-handed grip, which could cause considerable forearm fatigue during longer sessions or when working with clients experiencing balance difficulties.

The students at the Rotterdam University successfully developed a much more stable and ergonomic version. The redesigned handle allows GDMIs to operate the DogSim with both hands, much like pushing a stroller, reducing physical strain. Lighter materials have also been used, while key components can be produced using 3D printing, making parts easier to replace. The new design is also easier to assemble.

For the wheels, the students chose Bugaboo, a Dutch company known for its innovative stroller designs. The wheels are readily available, easy to replace and can be purchased by KNGF at a significantly reduced price.

The increased stability does require GDMIs to become familiar with the new handling characteristics. With the new design it can be harder to detect whether and in which direction clients attempt to steer through the harness, rather than following the simulated dog's movements.

Another important improvement is the integrated speedometer, allowing GDMIs to measure a client's preferred walking speed or speed range objectively.

Following successful prototype testing, students from Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences were also willing to take on the production at an agreed price, enabling KNGF to order more than twenty new DogSims.

Ultimately, the DogSim helps KNGF understand clients' abilities and needs before introducing a guide dog. It supports better preparation, more informed matching decisions, and tailored instruction.

Equally important, it allows potentially confusing handling habits to be identified and addressed without involving a live dog.

Smart Glasses Training at Dogs Inc.

Karissa Keller,
Dogs Inc, USA

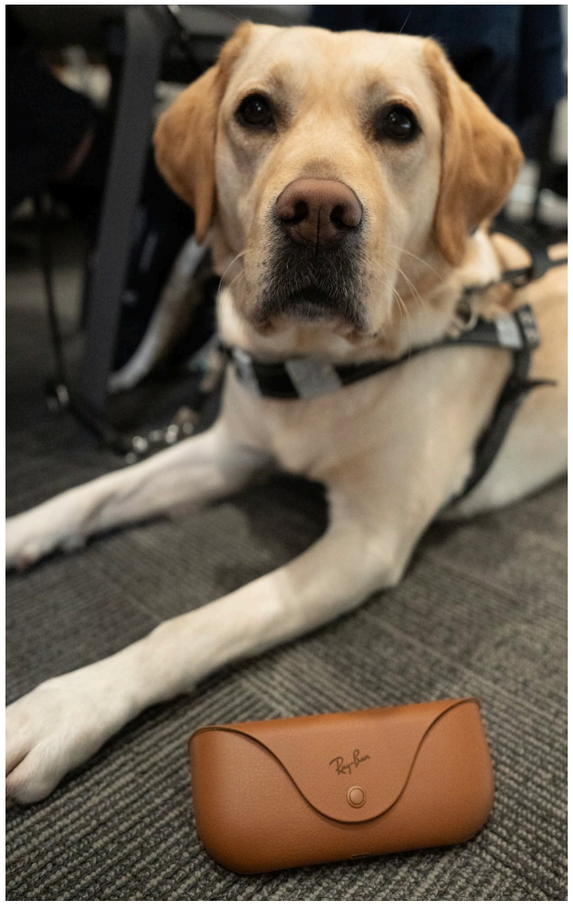
Reading a menu, checking a package label, or choosing a shirt by its color can involve information that is difficult to access with vision loss. At Dogs Inc in Palmetto, Florida, we are helping guide dog alumni explore how Ray-Ban Meta smart glasses can support these everyday activities while preserving the central role of their guide dog partnership.

We launched our first smart glasses training in January 2026 and have since trained 48 alumni. Through in-person, one-on-one sessions, we help participants set up their glasses, connect them to their smartphone, and practice using features in situations relevant to their daily lives. This individual approach gives each person time to ask questions and become comfortable with technology.

Connected to a compatible smartphone through the Meta AI app, the glasses allow users to make and receive calls, send and hear text messages through supported services, listen to music, and capture photographs and videos. Voice commands make many of these functions available without reaching for a phone. Features vary by location, language, and device settings.

For people with vision loss, the camera and artificial intelligence offer additional ways to access visual information. Users can ask the glasses to read a menu or ingredients on a package, help identify a banknote, or describe the color of an item. A question such as “Hey Meta, what color is this shirt?” connects the technology to an immediate, practical need. These tools can offer more choice in how people complete familiar tasks independently.

Training extends beyond setup and indoor practice. Alumni also learn how to incorporate the glasses into a route with their guide dog. This provides opportunities to reinforce safety in the context of the partnership. We emphasize stopping in a safe place before requesting visual information, maintaining awareness of the surroundings, and continuing to use established handling and mobility skills.



The guide dog is the handler’s mobility aid. The glasses provide supplementary information.



Dogs Inc are exploring how Ray-Ban Meta smart glasses can support everyday activities while preserving the central role of guide dog partnerships

Throughout the session, the message remains consistent: the guide dog is the handler’s mobility aid. The glasses provide supplementary information; they do not replace the dog or determine when it is safe to cross a street. AI responses can be incomplete or incorrect, so information with safety implications, including allergen details, needs independent verification. Learning the technology’s limitations is part of learning to use it well.

We have recently expanded this work through a partnership with Meta to provide glasses and training to veterans with vision loss. The program continues to gain traction, bringing the opportunity to explore accessible technology to more people. Pairing the device with personalized instruction helps participants move from receiving a pair of glasses to understanding how they might use them.

For our team, innovation means helping people apply technology to the activities that matter to them. By combining practical instruction with ongoing reinforcement of safe guide dog handling, we aim to give alumni another useful tool for everyday independence.

Readers interested in our training approach or veterans’ program are welcome to contact the Dogs Inc Online University team.

Teaching Handlers to Use AI Smart Glasses Alongside Their Dogs

Jim Kessler,
The Seeing Eye Inc., USA



Melissa Allman pictured with her guide dog and Meta glasses

Nearing its 100th anniversary, The Seeing Eye is deeply committed to the fundamental belief that enhancing independence, confidence, and dignity through guide dog partnership is as vital and irreplaceable as ever. But we are also evolving to meet today's handlers where they are, and embracing technology and its extraordinary benefits – including AI-assisted tools – will allow us to evolve and step boldly into a second century of guide dog instruction.

AI-powered glasses are evolving from a novelty to an everyday tool. More people use them to read signs, identify objects and access information hands-free, through voice commands and a small camera. For some, this technology is transformational, and it's expected to grow more powerful. It is also, for our community, genuinely complicated, because without proper training, a handler listening to their AI-powered glasses while working a dog can easily become distracted at exactly the moments when the partnership depends on focus and trust.

In September 2026, The Seeing Eye launched a pilot to teach the safe, effective use of AI-powered glasses as part of its training curriculum. A generous donor and the ADP Foundation funded the pilot year, allowing The Seeing Eye to offer glasses at no cost to our incoming students and active graduates.

The pilot's premise revolves around the understanding that the glasses are for gathering information, and the guide dog is for safe, independent mobility. Our job is to make sure the first never interferes with the second. We feel the best way to do this is to ensure the handler is proficient in each skill before combining the use of the glasses with guide work.

Our instruction and training team built the curriculum over the course of a year, drawing on workshops with graduates, testing and observations of active Seeing Eye teams. The result is a tiered, safety-first pathway for incoming students and established Seeing Eye teams.

For individuals coming into class, our staff will assess their command of the technology through practical assessment. Those who are proficient will be introduced to the use of the glasses alongside their dog at the end of class. A handler who is not yet ready will work with their dog as normal and build fluency for the technology integration at a later Seeing Eye-led workshop.

For graduates who are already part of an established guide dog team, we will have workshops where there is a concentration of graduates, as well as webinars for those who may be geographically isolated.

The Seeing Eye believes that it is essential that handlers who wish to adopt fast-moving technology are introduced in ways that strengthen independence without compromising safety. AI is one more tool a handler may choose and it is beyond exciting how AI glasses can describe the world. A guide dog will continue to be essential to moving through it safely. Teaching handlers to work with both, and know the difference, is the key to maintaining the safety and integrity of our partnerships as we embrace the rapid pace of technological change in our future.

IGDF Conference 2028 - Save the Date

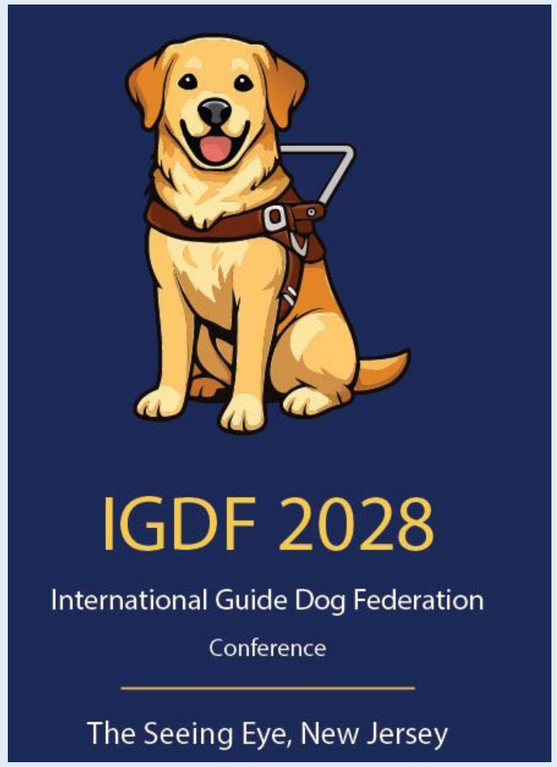
The Seeing Eye Inc. USA is proud to host the

2028 International Guide Dog Federation Conference

Thursday 22nd – Sunday 25th June 2028

A video of what to expect from our 2028 hosts can be viewed here:

IGDF 2028



Beyond the Database: Finding New Possibilities with PAWS

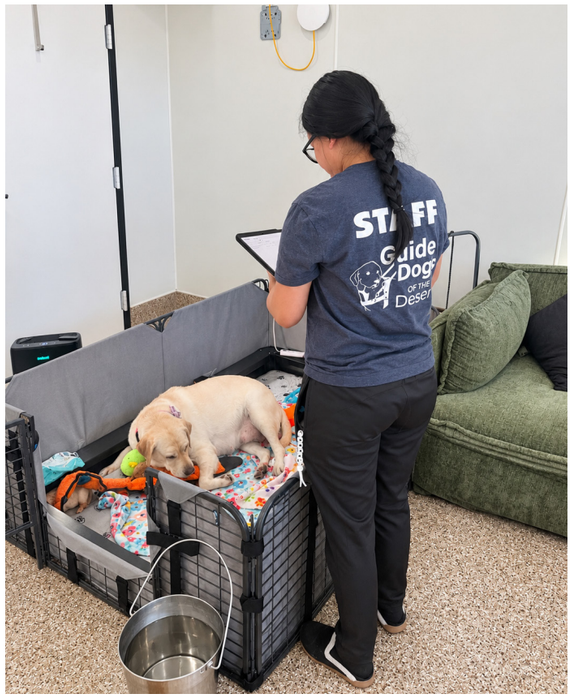
Danielle Larsen
Guide Dogs of the Desert, USA

How creative thinking and collaboration can help guide dog programs get more from the technology they already have.

At Guide Dogs of the Desert (GDD), some of our most useful innovations haven't come from introducing new technology. They have come from looking at the systems we already use and asking a simple question: Could we make this work better?

PAWS, a database designed by Pentagon Computers specifically for guide dog programs, is central to how we manage information across our organization. Like many guide dog schools, we rely on accurate records to follow each dog's progress, coordinate work across departments, and maintain connections with the people who make our programs possible. But we've learned that a database can do much more than store information. With some creative thinking and collaboration, it can also help us rethink the way we work.

One area where we've seen this potential is in the everyday tasks that take staff time away from other responsibilities. Medical documentation is a good example. Recording the findings of a dog's physical examination can be cumbersome, particularly when information must be entered into multiple fields. We began exploring whether we could simplify the process without asking our medical team to change the way they work.



Managing breeding dog data through the PAWS database

By combining PAWS's open API with external tools, we developed a voice-transcription process for physical examinations. Staff can dictate information using a phone, tablet, or computer, and the resulting information is mapped to the appropriate fields in PAWS. The documentation can then be uploaded directly to the dog's medical record. By connecting tools that would otherwise operate separately, we've created a more streamlined process using technology we already have.

That same approach—looking at a familiar task and finding a better way to manage it—has influenced other parts of our work, too.

A guide dog's journey involves many people and departments, from breeding and puppy raising through medical care and training. Each stage contributes information that matters, not only in the moment but throughout the dog's life. When that information is connected across records, we can preserve the dog's history, better understand its progress, and make more effective use of the information we've collected. PAWS also provides built-in statistical and demographic reporting, helping us turn consistent recordkeeping into information we can use to understand our program.

For a smaller organization like GDD, this is particularly valuable. We need reliable information and efficient processes, but we also have to be realistic about staff time and resources. Finding ways to capture information clearly, consistently, and in the right place helps us get more value from the system without having to build a separate solution for every need.

Sometimes, improving a process also means making it easier for other people to participate. Our puppy raisers are essential partners in preparing future guide dogs, and their updates help us understand how puppies are progressing. We wanted to make sharing those updates as straightforward as possible, so we developed a process that allows reports to be submitted and linked to the appropriate records in PAWS.

The change made a noticeable difference. In one month, we received more than three times our usual submission rates. It was a useful reminder that innovation doesn't always require a complicated technical solution. Sometimes, making a process easier is enough to encourage greater participation and give staff better information to work with.

We've applied similar thinking to other communications. Applications and alumni update surveys can be distributed electronically, with responses attached to client records. We also use an interdepartmental communication system to coordinate puppy sponsor updates and track their status. Although these functions serve different purposes, they share the same goal: reducing unnecessary steps, keeping information organized, and helping the right people follow through.

Of course, not every need can be met by rethinking an existing feature. Sometimes, we need to develop something new. Our breeding program provided an opportunity to do just that. We wanted to calculate the coefficient of inbreeding (COI) for specific mating partners using Wright's Formula. Pentagon Computers worked with us to incorporate that calculation directly into PAWS. This allows us to keep a specialized capability within the system we already use and connect it with our broader breeding records.



A GDMI entering training notes from her dog's workout on her phone

continued

Beyond the Database

That brings us to another important part of our experience: the people behind the technology.

Our relationship with Pentagon Computers has been about much more than purchasing or maintaining a database. We've spent countless hours brainstorming with their team, talking through challenges, exploring what PAWS can already do, and considering where additional development might help. They approach these conversations with warmth and enthusiasm, and they are willing to work with us to turn ideas that emerge from our day-to-day operations into practical solutions.

That kind of collaboration matters. We know our program, our people, and the challenges we encounter. Our technology partner understands the system and helps us explore how it can meet those needs. When those perspectives come together, a problem that initially seems like a limitation can become an opportunity to improve a process or develop a new capability. PAWS has continued to evolve alongside our program, rather than requiring us to fit every need into a fixed way of working.

We're still finding new possibilities. Each time we encounter a cumbersome task or wonder whether information could be captured more effectively, we have another opportunity to ask what might be possible. Our experience has shown us that innovation doesn't have to begin with a major investment or an entirely new technology. It can start with a practical question, a willingness to look at familiar processes differently, and a collaborative conversation.

For other guide dog programs, especially those working with limited staff and resources, it may be worth taking a fresh look at the tools already in place. Where does information become fragmented? Which tasks take more time than they should? And what might be possible if your technology provider understood not just what your system does, but what your team needs it to do?

For us, PAWS has become more than a place to keep records. It has become a way to solve problems, connect information, and continue improving how we work. The biggest lesson may be that innovation isn't always about finding the next new thing. Sometimes, it's about recognizing the potential in what you already have—and working with the right people to bring it to life.



Standards Committee Update

Welcome Ky Wilder



Ky Wilder joined Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA in 2018 and completed the GDMI apprenticeship in 2021.

She later returned to graduate school, earning a master's degree in special education and certification in Orientation and Mobility in 2024. She is now a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) through ACVREP.In her current role, Ky primarily serves clients through GDB's Orientation and Mobility Immersion (OMI) program, helping guide dog applicants and cane users develop the skills necessary to achieve and maintain readiness for guide dog travel or independent cane travel. Her work focuses on connecting clients with individualized services that support safe, confident, and effective mobility.

Welcome Edmund Sullivan



Eddie joined Guide Dogs NSW/ACT (GDNSW) as an O&M Specialist in 2007 before commencing training as a GDMI in 2009.

Since then, Eddie has worked as a GDMI with both GDNSW and Guide Dogs Victoria. In 2018, Eddie was appointed Training and Dog Supply Manager and has since held several management roles across Dog Services, most recently as Puppy Development Manager.

Eddie holds a Bachelor of Applied Science (Human Movement), a Graduate Diploma in Education and a Master of Special Education (Sensory Disability). Eddie is also a Certified Professional Dog Trainer – Knowledge Assessed (CPDT-KA) through the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT). With experience spanning client service delivery, guide dog training, puppy development and management, Eddie brings a broad perspective and a keen interest in all areas of the IGDF standards.

Welcome to the Prison Standard Working Group

Congratulations and thank you to the following people who have recently been appointed to the Standards Committee's Prison Standard Working Group:

The Working Group will be working with the Standards Committee to develop a new IGDF Prison Facility Standard for puppy raising.

- Anna Standing, Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, UK
- Ashley Ayers, Guide Dogs of Texas, USA
- Allison Green, Leader Dogs, USA
- Nicci Cahill, Guide Dogs Queensland, Australia
- Emily Dann, Guide Dogs Queensland, Australia

IGDF Academy Update

IGDF's current key strategic goal is to create a digital Learning Academy for people training to be Guide Dog Trainers and Guide Dog Mobility Instructors.

Our vision is to provide high-quality, engaging learning resources, delivering the knowledge required to meet the IGDF curriculum. The Academy will offer an accessible, intuitive and easy-to-use experience for users around the world.

To support this work, two new team members have joined IGDF:

- Tony Harvey, Academy Manager
- Leanne Duffield, Digital Lead

Tony will lead the development of Academy content and ensure it aligns with the curriculum. Leanne will lead the digital design and user experience, although they will both help and support each other in their roles as well.

The Academy will be available to IGDF Organisations for a small fee which will help cover the ongoing costs of hosting, maintenance, and support. We are currently developing the details of this approach and will share further information as soon as possible.

Project Stages

The project has been divided into two main stages:

1. Design
2. Development

We are currently in the Design Stage, which consists of four phases:

1. Project Mobilisation (September/ October)

Project planning, scheduling and project management, research and development, developing a draft Design and Functional Specification.

2. Content planning (October/November)

Conducting a content review, developing learning objects and developing a draft Content Specification to detail how each curriculum area will be delivered, developing the learning design approach.

3. Learning Architecture (December/ January)

Finalise Content Specification, develop format templates and examples.

4. Development planning (January)

Detailed plan for Development Process drafted, reviewed and finalised[LD1.1].

This design and content planning work will ensure the Academy is built on clear, carefully considered, and approved plans and principles.



Animations will bring learning content to life

Content Reviewers

Content development will begin early next year, and we would like to involve member organisations in reviewing materials and providing feedback. Your experience and expertise are extremely valuable. We welcome volunteers who would be interested in reviewing content, scripts, and storyboards, and sharing their insights to help ensure the learning materials are accurate, relevant, and effective.

Media

Once content creation is complete, we will begin developing the learning modules and supporting media assets.

This will include videos, graphics, and photography designed to bring the learning content to life. We will be looking for schools that can host visits for filming, as well as schools that may be able to capture and share footage remotely.

Learning Academy Webinar

We are planning an Academy Workshop Webinar on 27 January 2027. This will provide an opportunity to share more information about the project, demonstrate our progress, and gather your feedback.

We look forward to sharing further updates as the project continues to develop.

Contacts

- tony.harvey@igdf.og.uk
- leanne.duffield@igdf.org.uk
- enquiries@igdf.org.uk

Academy Research Survey for GDMIs and GDTs

We want to ensure the new IGDF Learning Academy meets the needs of our Members and the people who work within their organisations.

As part of our user-centred design process we are currently conducting research into our audience, which will help inform the Academy's content, resources and development, ensuring it supports the diverse needs of our global Membership as effectively as possible. We are also defining the project's success measures and feedback will also enable us to gather some baseline information to help us measure progress and impact over time.

We really appreciate you taking a little time to complete this questionnaire and share it with colleagues and contacts who are experienced and trainee GDMIs and GDTs.



You can complete the survey here

ADI and IGDF Boards Agree New Collaborative Projects

David Maynard
Executive Director, IGDF

This year the annual in person meeting of the Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and IGDF Boards took place in late October in Paris, hosted by the FFAC – the Fédération Française des Associations de Chiens guides d'aveugles – or French Federation for short. FFAC is the umbrella body for guide dog organisations in France, which manages many key activities, including GDMI education, dog supply, and advocacy on behalf of the regional guide dog schools.

On Monday 26th October, the IGDF Board met in person to discuss progress against our current strategy – Consolidating for Growth 2025-2029. This included a detailed update on the IGDF Academy project from Academy Manager Tony Harvey and Academy Digital Lead Leanne Duffield. After the meeting, we visited the Ecole de Chiens Guides de Paris (Paris Guide Dog School), together with the Board of ADI. We were welcomed by Frédérique Beaurain, President of the Paris Guide Dog School and Director of Training and IGDF Assessor Benjamin Valembois.

Benjamin guided us on a tour of the Paris Guide Dog School and we had the opportunity to meet and speak to several members of the team. The organisation is beautifully situated on the edge of the Bois de Vincennes, which combines proximity to central Paris with easy access to the surrounding woodland.

The joint meeting of the ADI and IGDF Boards took place on Tuesday 27th October at the recently refurbished FFAC head office in central Paris.

The meeting began with updates on each organisation's current strategy before receiving detailed updates from all the joint committees and working groups.

Access and advocacy remain a key focus for both organisations. We discussed the future of the digital ID card and how we can raise awareness of recognition of this with airlines and other service providers. We also discussed plans for the next Paws for Access Survey, which will go live in late 2026. Looking further ahead, the two Boards approved a proposal to work with Professor Virginie Abat-Roy of the Université de Moncton, Canada to undertake a comprehensive academic study of the scale of access refusals globally and their impact on service users. We believe that undertaking a rigorous academic study will give the resulting findings much greater weight. This will help us persuade governments and other stakeholders of the need for meaningful change. ADI and IGDF will also deliver advocacy events to lobby governments directly, starting, with the European Union, Canada and the USA.

Another major new collaborative effort will be aimed at reducing the administrative burden for the increasing number of dual members who are assessed by both ADI and IGDF. Over the next 3 years, ADI and IGDF Standards Committees will jointly review those standards which have not yet been fully aligned. At the same time, we will work to coordinate assessment schedules so that ADI and IGDF assessors can conduct their assessments side by side. This will remove the disruption caused by preparing for two separate assessments.



ADI and IGDF Boards together with the staff of Ecole Chiens Guides de Paris

Once a particular standard has been fully aligned, it will only need to be assessed by one of the assessors. As the number of fully aligned standards increases over time, this will reduce the time and cost of assessments for those members.

IGDF assessors will always remain solely responsible for assessing guide dog specific components, and ADI assessors will be solely responsible for other assistance dog-specific elements. We will also seek to standardise pre-assessment documentation to reduce duplication. Taken together, we believe that these measures will substantially reduce the administrative and cost burden for the relevant members, while preserving the integrity, thoroughness and value of separate accreditations for guide dog and other assistance dog programmes.

ADI have also agreed to open up their International Breeding Cooperative to IGDF members. We believe that this will help to maintain genetic diversity and promote further cooperation.

This was the last joint Board meeting for ADI Chair Danny Vancoppernolle, whose term as ADI Chair ends on 31st December 2026. Danny has been instrumental in improving the relationship between ADI and IGDF and promoting increased collaboration between our organisations. This collaboration is already increasing our collective effectiveness in many areas, including advocacy and dog welfare. The extensive new collaborations agreed at this meeting will further amplify the overall impact of our organisations to enable all members to deliver more life-changing services to people around the world. This is a fitting legacy for Danny's four years as ADI Chair. We all look forward to continuing to work with ADI to deliver these projects and better serve our members.

A huge thank you to Antoine Bouissou, FFAC President Michel Rossetti, FFAC CEO Alexandre Cathelin, Paris Guide Dog School President Frédérique Beaurain, and FFAC Projects Officer Anne Viot for their generous hospitality and making these meetings possible.

Championing Standards, Breaking Down Barriers Parliamentary Events



Sam Boyle (ADUK) left and David Maynard (IGDF) back right

IGDF Executive Director David Maynard and Accreditation Manager Clare Pritchett represented IGDF at the recent Assistance Dogs UK (ADUK) event at the UK Parliament.

This event with the All-Party Parliamentary Dog Advisory Welfare Group focused on addressing access refusals and strengthening and clarifying the law around assistance dog rights.

Parliamentarians, service providers and assistance dog partnerships came together to discuss how unclear legislation and guidance are contributing to the problem of access refusals.

This included exploring access issues from the perspectives of both assistance dog partnerships and businesses. Guest speakers included Steve Darling MP, ADUK Ambassador Noah Caborn and Jane Cooper, Cabinet Office Appointed Disability and Access Ambassador for UK Tourism.

ADUK also outlined its key priorities for change including:

- Establishing a clear legal definition of assistance dogs.
- Taking a sector-wide approach to standards that will inform clear legal expectations around training and welfare, whilst recognising the diversity of excellent training and practice across the UK.

You can read ADUK's new position statement here: [ADUK Position Statement - Assistance Dogs UK.]

ADI and IGDF will be working together to deliver similar events next year to influence other parliaments, including the European Union and USA. We will be working closely with member organisations in these places to influence lawmakers and advocate for equal access for our service users.



Recruiting and Retaining Puppy Raising Volunteers

IGDF Puppy Raising Collaborative Group Forum



Thank you to everyone who joined us for the IGDF Puppy Raising Collaborative Group Forum this month to discuss Recruiting and Retaining Puppy Raising Volunteers - Sharing Challenges and Successes. Around 70 people joined us across the 2 calls to share their ideas and experiences.

The group started by discussing how COVID-19 had shifted volunteer expectations toward more flexibility and how organizations have adapted through virtual training and remote support. Participants shared successful recruitment methods, including word-of-mouth, local media and targeted social media ads, informational videos, and partnerships with churches, prisons and universities, noting that academic credit for volunteering can be a strong motivator.

The group discussed co-raising as a way to increase flexibility, emphasizing the need for clear agreements and consistent handling between partners.

Organizations shared effective retention strategies including mentorship programmes, regular communication through newsletters and engagement sessions, community-building efforts such as regional meetups, annual campus events and social media groups, and showing genuine appreciation through personal interactions and special recognition events. The conversation emphasized the importance of connecting raisers with the organisation's mission or purpose through client speakers, providing regular updates on dogs in training and invitations to graduation events. Finally, the group briefly touched on the use of puppy raiser portals and the value of recorded webinars to keep volunteers engaged.

Perhaps the most powerful takeaway was the recognition that challenges are truly international. While programmes may differ in size, structure and location, many are facing similar questions about how to attract, engage and retain dedicated volunteers in an increasingly busy world, so creativity and sharing ideas is increasingly important.

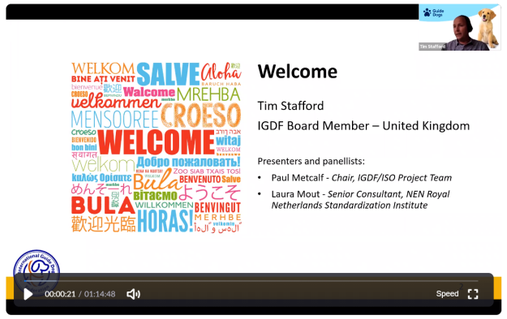
Interesting in running an IGDF Discussion Forum?

IGDF is hugely grateful to Sarah Blevins, Kerry Lemerise and Helena Gibbons for leading this group for our IGDF members. Discussion groups and forums are a great way for members to share knowledge and exchange ideas with colleagues.

If you or someone you know would like to lead a group forum on a specific area of work within the guide dog industry, we would love to hear from you. IGDF can support you with arranging the calls, advertising and invitations, so please get in touch with us at enquiries@igdf.org.uk should you wish to set something up.

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.



Puppy Raising Quarterly Call

Puppy raising managers and leaders are invited to join us to discuss: **Behavior Support for Volunteers**

Join puppy raising colleagues from across the IGDF international network for a forum focused on helping volunteers address common puppy training and behavior challenges. Discussion topics may include teaching basic cues, establishing good manners in the home, introducing puppies to everyday environments and experiences, and addressing common behaviors such as mouthing and jumping.

These forums are interactive discussions rather than presentations. Facilitators from the IGDF Puppy Raising Collaborative Group will guide the conversation, giving participants opportunities to learn from one another, explore shared challenges, and identify approaches that have delivered positive results across different organizations and regions.

Choose one of the following two sessions; each session will cover the same topic. Email IGDF with your details for an invite.

- **Tuesday, 23 February 2027 at 21:00 UTC**
- **Thursday, 25 February 2027 at 11:00 UTC**

IGDF Academy Update

Led by: IGDF Learning Academy

Wed, 27th January 2027 at 11:00 UTC
Wed, 27th January 2027 at 21:00 UTC

Register in advance here

ADI webinar

A recording of the ADI webinar: "**Making Every Story Count: Social Media for Greater Impact**" is now available to view on the IGDF website here: ADI Webinars

Webinar Presenters Wanted

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

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

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

Visionary

Next Issue

The deadline for articles for the next issue of Visionary is: **1st February 2027**.

Special Feature:

History of guide dogs in your school or region.

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/



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