

# Visionary

Edition **56**  
March  
2025

**Eligibility criteria**  
to apply for a  
guide dog

**Standards**  
IGDF's revised  
standards 2026



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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 – **Canada, France, Japan, Slovakia, UK**



#### Cover Photo

The Ethical, Fair, and Transparent Allocation of Guide Dogs (l'Association de Chiens Guides de Lyon et du Centre-Est)

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## Message From The Chair

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

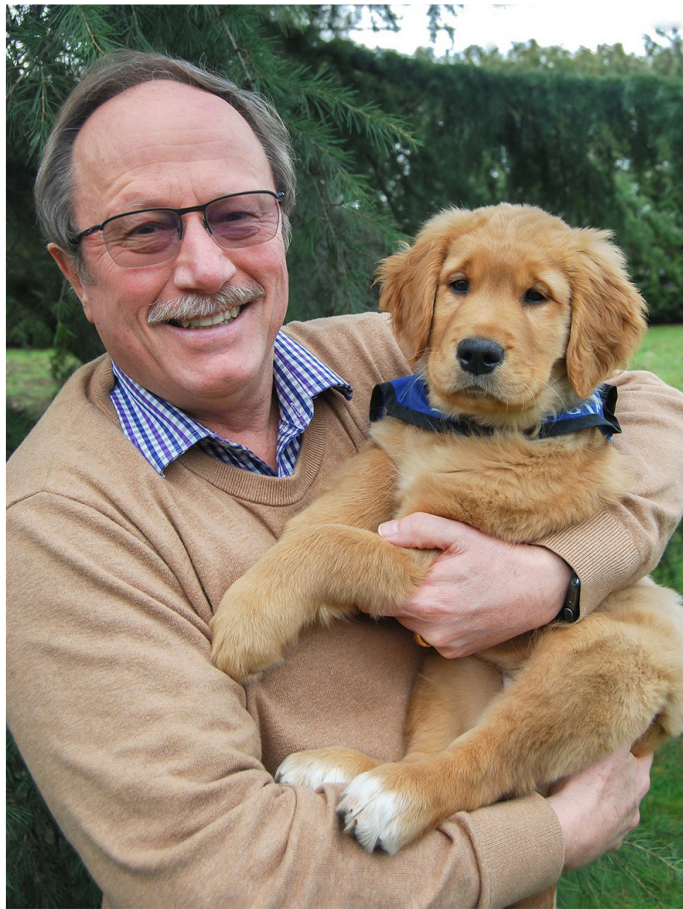
I am delighted to announce the publication of the new 2026 Standards. My thanks go to the Standards Committee and Standards Review Panels for all their diligent work. The Revised Standards have been sent to the membership, providing ample time for our members to make any changes before the Standards take effect in 2026. The Standards Committee will be running webinars and providing a Conference presentation on the introduction of the 2026 Standards. Revisions of our Standards is important as we continue to demonstrate to external stakeholders and regulatory bodies that our Standards are indeed 'best practice' and fully support the welfare of canines, our clients and the interests of society in general. Working jointly with our friends at ADI we are striving to strengthen our Standards and ensure they are recognised and respected globally. I am pleased to announce the development a new joint IGDF and ADI Dog Welfare and Ethics Advisory Panel. The Panel is chaired by Dr. Bob Proesmans (Belgium) and supported by Tim Stafford (UK), Dr. Mia Cobb (Australia), Dr. Nicola Cotton (Australia), Dr. Katy Evans (USA), Dr. Lynna Feng (USA), Prof. Caroline Gilbert (France), Dr. Brenda Kennedy (USA), Matthias Lenz (Canada) and Rachel Moxon (UK).

I am looking forward to welcoming you all to our 2025 IGDF Conference to be held June 19th through 22nd at Warwick University, hosted by our friends at Guide Dogs UK.



continued

## Message From The Chair



Your Board of Directors are putting final touches to the new IGDF Strategy. We look forward to presenting this very soon. Many thanks to the many members who have contributed to this process.

As part of the continuing modernisation of IGDF, we will become employers in our own right. Presently our two staff members, who are employed by Guide Dogs UK will transfer their employment to IGDF. This will make it easier for us to take on further staff as the organisation grows. Our registered office will remain at Guide Dogs UK Hillfields Office. We are greatly indebted to Guide Dogs UK as our host and mentor since 1986 and thank them profoundly for their support over the past 40 years.

In response to a request from some of our membership, I am pleased to announce the new IGDF [John Groom Award](#) for Long Service. The Award is named after Major General John Groom who, in 1984, was the Director-General of Guide Dogs UK and called a number of guide dog organisations together in April 1986 for a meeting to discuss the possibilities of creating an international body. John steered us carefully forward and in 1989 we incorporated as a UK Charity known today as the IGDF. John Groom was our first chair, and skilfully and diligently brought us all together for the founding of the IGDF.

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

I would also like to encourage your canine reproduction teams to sign up for the Breeding Conference on June 23rd and 24th June being hosted by our good friends at the [IWDR](#), Jane Russenberger and Dr. Eldin Leighton.

The Board and I are very much looking forward to hosting our member's CEOs networking event at the Conference. I would encourage all Member CEOs to register. This is not only an important opportunity for dialogue between the Board and our Members, to let the Board know what they want and need from IGDF, but also a chance to network. Collaboration and partnerships are the very fabric of IGDF.

## IGDF Assessments

Update from **IGDF Office**

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

- Servizio Cani Guida Dei Lions, Italy
- Lund Hundetjenester AS, Norway
- Hundeskolen Veiviseren AS, Norway
- Stiftelsen Lions Førerhundskole og Mobilitysenter, Norway
- Kansai Guide Dogs For the Blind Association, Japan
- Japan Guide Dog Association,
- East Japan Guide Dog Association

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

- Blindenführhundschiule Katharina Richter, Germany

### **Congratulations to the following organisations which have become an EO:**

- Smart Service Dog, South Africa
- WEYS Guide Dogs, Ukraine

### **Congratulations to the following organisations which have become an AO:**

- Hessische Blindenführhundschiule, Germany
- Guide Dog S.R.O., Czech Republic

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

- Liberty Guide and Assistance Dogs, Greece

## IGDF Conference

### **All conference updates can be found on the [conference page of IGDF website](#).**

Included on this page you will find useful information on planning your journey to the UK conference centre, the latest version of the preliminary schedule, how to make an award submission, as well as a link to an interview with the Chair of the Conference Planning Committee and Guide Dogs UK discussing the upcoming events.

If you are still interested in participating, we are still accepting submissions for the poster sessions in the areas of: 'Puppy raising, dog training and client services'; and 'Veterinary, breeding and science'. Please email any proposals and posters to [enquiries@igdf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@igdf.org.uk)

We are also accepting submissions for the video session and details are available on the IGDF conference information page.



# Project THEMIS\*: Towards an Ethical, Fair, and Transparent Allocation of Guide Dogs

**Roland DONZELLE**  
**l'Association de Chiens Guides de Lyon et du Centre-Est (ACGALCE), France**



The Fair & Ethical Allocation of Guide Dogs

**For some time now, l'Association de Chiens Guides de Lyon et du Centre-Est has been rethinking the allocation process of guide dogs to better meet the needs of blind or visually impaired individuals. The stakes are high: How can the shortage (demand exceeding supply) be managed while ensuring the best possible match between the dog and the beneficiary and equity among candidates?**

The allocation of guide dogs is a complex process where the beneficiaries' needs far outweigh the available supply. This situation resembles the challenges of organ transplantation, marked by demand exceeding availability and requiring prioritization based on transparent and fair criteria. Project Themis draws directly from this approach, adapting principles of ethics and optimization to the field of guide dogs.

This article presents an overview of work led by the Lyon school in France, which collaborates on matching processes with researchers from the Development, Individual, Disability, and Education Processes Research Unit (DIPHE) at the University of Lyon 2.

Notably, a 1999 case law from the Tribunal de Grande Instance in Lille qualifies guide dogs as "living prostheses," implying a unique ethical responsibility in their allocation.

This initiative aims to improve the allocation of guide dogs by defining prioritization criteria and implementing a scoring system to rank candidates transparently, objectively, and fairly.

This model stems from observations of the organ transplantation system. It is inspired by the work of the French Biomedicine Agency\*\*, which manages organ transplantation – a field where scarcity, prioritization, and compatibility are also crucial challenges – and is now being applied to serve visually impaired individuals.

## Context and Challenges

The initial observation was clear: many blind or visually impaired individuals cannot benefit from a guide dog within a reasonable timeframe due to an insufficient number of trained and available dogs. Furthermore, significant geographical disparities exist: some regions offer quicker access, while others experience long waiting periods.

The allocation of a guide dog is a complex process that cannot be reduced to a simple chronological order on a waiting list. The Lyon school identified the need for a system to prioritize candidates based on several measurable criteria.

## Key Principles Implemented by the Lyon Association

The approach is based on two main axes:

1. **"Rightness"**: Ensuring that the dog-beneficiary pair will be effective in the long term, meaning the dog matches the person's needs, constraints, and lifestyle. This involves matching quality, the dog's integration into daily life, and the beneficiary's motivation.
2. **"Fairness"**: In a context of limited resources, equitable rules must be established to distinguish between candidates. This involves considering factors such as waiting time, psychological situation, level of autonomy, and the applicant's social environment.

## Development of Criteria and Scoring

To define and validate the prioritization criteria and scoring method, the Association formed a multidisciplinary working group including beneficiaries, guide dog trainers, a doctor, a psychologist, and a mobility instructor. Each contributed their expertise and field experience, allowing different perspectives to be discussed and a consensus to be reached.

This collaborative approach led to a balanced and widely recognized evaluation system that ensures both effective matching and consideration of each visually impaired person's specific needs.

## Multiple Prioritization Criteria

To reconcile efficiency and fairness, a set of criteria was defined in a protocol:

- **Waiting Time:** The seniority of the request is automatically valued, with a score increasing quarterly and amplified over time, enabling dynamic management of the request list.
- **Sudden Loss or Renewal:** Points are added for situations involving sudden loss or the renewal of a previous guide dog, acknowledging the urgency of such cases.
- **Psychological Context:** Assessed by a psychologist, this considers the psychological aspects of the situation and the impact of introducing a guide dog.
- **Travel Needs:** The volume and frequency of professional or personal trips influence the score.
- **Social Environment:** Isolation or, conversely, a highly supportive network adjusts the score.
- **Motivation and Commitment:** Active involvement in the guide dog movement and participation in association activities are also valued.

	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Total points	Date début	1.Attente	2.ancienneté	3.ancienneté	4.Besoin déplacement	5.Absence soutien	6.Motiv
624	29/3/2016	489	60	10	10	50	
569	21/02/2017	434	100	10	10	10	
524	7/11/2019	274	100	50	30	50	
474	19/10/2020	219	60	90	50	50	
379	29/04/2020	244	60	10	50	10	
379	07/09/2021	164	60	90	10	50	
304	20/8/2021	164	0	100	10	10	
294	01/10/2021	159	60	50	10	10	
288	13/10/2023	48	60	100	10	50	
209	23/09/2022	99	0	100	50	10	
265	18/12/2023	40	100	80	20	20	
262	12/04/2024	27	100	100	20	10	
259	25/10/2023	44	60	90	10	50	
256	22/12/2023	36	60	80	30	30	

Criteria and Scoring



Continued:

## Project THEMIS\*: Towards an Ethical, Fair, and Transparent Allocation of Guide Dogs

Each criterion has its own score, established “all other things being equal”: a low score in one criterion is not necessarily offset by a high score in another. The result is an overall score reflecting each applicant’s priority level.

### A Multi-Step Allocation Process

The allocation process begins as soon as a request is received, which must first be deemed admissible by a multidisciplinary allocation committee. Then, an evaluation stage is conducted to refine the criteria: a home visit, input from a mobility instructor, and discussions with a psychologist provide crucial elements for determining scores.

Once the evaluation is complete, the allocation committee decides on acceptance, postponement, or refusal. If accepted, the priority score is calculated. When it’s time to allocate an available dog, the committee reviews the matching proposals made by technical teams, considering the order of priorities.

For candidates at the top of the list for whom the association does not have a suitable dog, the association can escalate to the national level to avoid excessively long waiting periods.

### Project Timeline

**January 2024:** Initial reflections and drafting of a recommendation note.

**February 2024:** Multidisciplinary workshops to validate criteria and scores.

**March 2024:** Creation of a vademecum and protocol.

**April 2024:** Implementation.

**Upcoming Steps:** Integration into the CRM (Salesforce).

### Figures:

- 42 current requests in the tool.
- 18 requests fulfilled since the tool’s implementation.

### A Flexible and Replicable Model

The criteria and system operation will be continuously adjusted. Personal situations evolve, and needs change, making flexibility essential. An evaluation will take place one year after implementation.

### Adapting the Approach to Other Contexts

While designed for France, this method can be adapted to other countries and contexts. Scoring systems are a relevant tool for managing scarcity, facilitating transparency, and encouraging a fairer distribution of guide and assistance dogs.

A transferable model, adjustable to local realities, it serves as a methodological and ethical foundation rather than a ready-made solution.

The core principles of equity and transparency should guide its adaptation to local contexts.

## Conclusion

By combining ethical evaluation, transparency, human support, and prioritization tools, the French guide dog allocation model tested in Lyon reflects a commitment to continuous improvement. Inspired by organ donation management and other international practices, it offers an innovative response to the challenges posed by the scarcity of guide dogs while respecting each beneficiary’s unique needs.

This approach deserves to be shared within the international guide dog community and the International Guide Dog Federation, hoping that these ideas will enrich practices and better serve visually impaired individuals worldwide.

### For More Information

Spreadsheets, ranking automation scripts, calculation formulas, and the Themis protocol are available from [l’Association de Chiens Guides de Lyon et du Centre-Est \(ACGALCE\)](#).

### Sharing Tools and Open License

To facilitate adoption and adaptation of this system, all technical elements — spreadsheets, scoring formulas, and ranking scripts — are available under a Creative Commons (CC) license. This open license allows any interested organization to freely draw inspiration from the work, adapt it to its needs, and make

improvements, fostering co-creation and dissemination of best practices.

(\*) The name “Themis” refers to the Greek goddess of justice, symbolizing the project’s commitment to placing ethics and transparency at the heart of the allocation process.

(\*\*) The French Biomedicine Agency is a national agency created by the 2004 bioethics law. It operates in the fields of organ, tissue, and cell donation and transplantation, as well as human reproduction, embryology, and genetics. It ensures that all patients receive the care they need while respecting ethical and equitable principles.



Guide dog and client from l’Association de Chiens Guides de Lyon et du Centre-Est



## The influence of the recipient's visual criteria on the guide dog's work

Nicolas St-Pierre,  
Mira Foundation,  
Canada



Mira client walking with her guide dog

**Each guide dog school establishes eligibility criteria for its users. At Mira, visual criteria significantly influence all operations (eligibility, training, dog welfare, etc.). Eligible recipients have vision ranging from low vision to complete blindness, with visual acuity of 6/200 or less and/or visual fields of 10° or less.**

Recipients must have strong orientation and mobility skills to travel safely. They must rely on other abilities such as hearing, orientation, proprioception, and kinesthesia.

Individuals with low vision must be able to move with the guide dog under various

lighting conditions without interfering with its work, such as pushing or pulling the harness handle.

Pre-training with an Orientation and Mobility Specialist (OMS) is crucial to develop the necessary skills for obtaining a guide dog. This professional expertise is well established in our operations through a partnership of over 44 years with the Nazareth and Louis-Braille Institute (INLB), and the presence of a full-time OMS at Mira.

Socialization and rigorous dog selection tests are essential to ensure their quality. Guide dog training lasts approximately six months and must be detail-oriented

with full comprehension of their work. The dog must perform well and make as few errors as possible, as the recipient cannot anticipate them. If the recipient relies on residual vision or handles the harness improperly, the guide dog will not take the necessary initiatives to perform its work adequately.

The dog should never endanger the recipient's safety. The maintenance of guide dog skills post-attribution depends on the quality and consistency of user handling, underscoring the importance of preparation by the OMS.

It is debatable whether training a dog to partially guide someone with functional low vision is beneficial. Experience shows that these individuals often end up leading their dog with the harness, compromising training achievements. If a guide dog no longer guides, can it still be

considered as such? Would it not be more appropriate to see it as a companion dog? Is it acceptable to train a dog for several months for skills that are minimally used due to lenient visual criteria? Should guide dog schools reconsider their minimum visual acceptance criteria? Should the IGDF impose specific guidelines for these criteria?

Regardless, Mira's mission is to enhance the lives of disabled individuals through the use of guide dogs. Our actions are guided by three keywords: safety, effectiveness, and comfort. These principles are fundamental and have been part of our vision since Mira's creation in 1981.

Our expertise, the professionalism of our staff, and our numerous partnerships in the field enable us to provide exceptional guide dogs free of charge, thereby changing lives one dog at a time.

## GD Applicant Eligibility Criteria: what's a must and what we can work with

Jana Kristofova and Ivana Merryman Boncori  
Dogs for Life, Slovakia

**The mission of our organization, Dogs for Life is "to create well-matched pairs who walk through life better together". The dog that was purposely bred, raised and trained creates only one half of the couple. The other half, our client, can expect from us that we do a high-quality job and enable him or her to have the best chances of succeeding in walking through life with a Guide Dog.**

To have the best chance entails that also the client – the Applicant – brings his or her fair share into the beginning of the

partnership with the dog and with our organization. And finding out what this "fair share" is, is one of the difficult but also most satisfying parts of our job.

As many other organizations, we have our set procedures for GD Applicants – the first interview, where the Applicant gets basic information about Guide Dog mobility; the assessment; and the pre-training course while the client is already accepted and on the waiting list.

One of the musts on the eligibility requirements list for our organization is



Continued:

## GD Applicant Eligibility Criteria - what's a must and what we can work with

O&M skills. In Slovakia individual O&M courses are provided by the professionals at the Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union and we require that our applicants complete such a course successfully to be assessed eligible for a Guide Dog. Dogs for Life works very closely with the O&M specialists. We will jointly work on the Applicant's profile. This is a process that can take several sessions, and the local



Guide Dog Atos guiding his client and his daughter on their route to kindergarten

O&M instructor's input is substantial. The process includes functional assessment of vision, assessment of the ability to use remaining vision effectively including how much mental effort must a partially sighted Applicant use to use their remaining vision effectively. We look at how well the Applicant uses hearing and other senses to get oriented in space and to navigate traffic. We assess the gait and posture, ability and courage to walk through open spaces without following tactile cues through the cane, ability to keep a straight line and turn into a required direction. These skills are assessed also when walking with a sighted guide and dog-sim to assess the ability to follow and the ability to notice deviations from a given direction. We assess balance and stamina. At the same time, we will get a good idea of the Applicants' manual skills, mental and cognitive abilities, and their willingness to learn and collaborate.

If an Applicant needs to work on their O&M skills or other abilities noticed when building his profile, he/she must show motivation to go through the O&M course. The plan for the course is made jointly by the O&M specialist and our GDMI and is tailored to the goal of being eligible and working effectively with a future Guide Dog. The course will cover specific Guide Dog mobility skills such as navigating clients' local routes without using tactile cues from the long cane, estimating time, distance and direction, the use of the ID cane (our organization highly recommends our clients to use the ID cane together with a Guide Dog) and entering/exiting procedures in public transport as when

using a Guide Dog. Our organization invests in the education of O&M specialists, so they know what is important for Guide Dog mobility and can work effectively towards that goal.

Our GDMI and O&M specialist communicate during the course about the progress, challenges and changes in the plan. The process is concluded by a joint assessment walk with both the O&M specialist and GDMI and just then the client is considered eligible and enters on the waiting list for a Guide Dog.

The tight collaboration with an O&M expert who works with the Applicant over a longer time allows us to discover and consider the other part of the eligibility criteria, where our approach is much more flexible and where we consider individually whether we would have to say no or whether we could work with a challenge.

A recent Applicant we have worked with had a particular family situation. We said yes to him being eligible and tackled the work with a very individualized approach. Our client and his wife are completely blind and have two pre-school-aged children without sight problems. The priority for this client was to include a Guide Dog in the daily life of the whole family as smoothly as possible, helping with and not disrupting their routines. Matching the right dog to the needs of the whole family was crucial. We created a book for the children about their Guide Dog Atos, with illustrations and simple text explaining dos and don'ts. Spending time with the children during the initial instruction was just as important as spending instruction time with the client. The client needed to continue to take his elder child to kindergarten, but it was important for him to use an ID cane together with a guide dog.



Working with the client's children - a book about Atos helps them learn dos and don'ts around a Guide Dog in the house.

We came up with colourful bracelets, connected with an elastic cord, which provides safety but allows flexibility of movement; and the little girl thought the bracelets were cool and funny.

At Dogs for Life, we believe that the balance between the strictly required eligibility criteria and the flexible ones is paramount. We are unwavering on some requirements, because we believe, that relenting them would result in lowering the chances of success for an Applicant and potentially compromising the welfare of a dog. At the same time, we are proud to be flexible and able to accommodate clients in particular situations and set them up for success with a Guide Dog despite challenges.

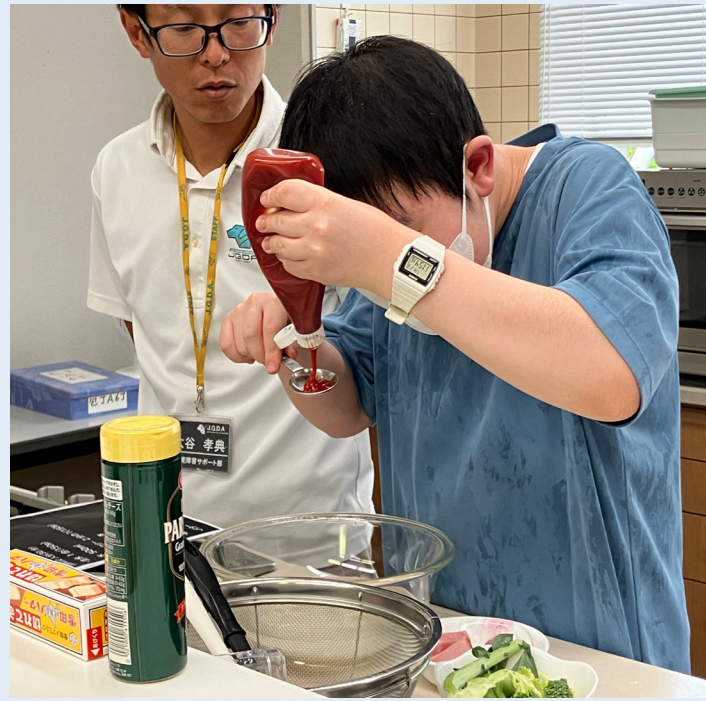


## Beyond Guide Dogs: JGDA's Innovative Approach to Transform Lives

Shiori Nishida  
Japan Guide Dog  
Association

The four conditions for applying for a guide dog at Japan Guide Dog Association are as follows:

- Individuals who feel that walking is difficult due to blindness or low vision.
- Individuals willing to participate in society with a desire to “actively go out with a guide dog.”
- Individuals who can undergo approximately four weeks of training.
- Individuals who can properly care for and manage a guide dog responsibly.



Imagine a world where the visually impaired can effortlessly navigate through bustling city streets, independently explore new places, and participate fully in society. This is the vision of the Japan Guide Dog Association (JGDA), which goes much beyond merely providing guide dog mobility.

At JGDA, we start the journey by ensuring that potential candidates understand the true implications of owning a guide dog and the lifestyle that comes with it. Whether they're struggling with blindness or low vision, our programs are designed to open doors to independence and empowerment. We invite them to step into a future where they're not just living with an impairment but thriving beyond it.

The guide dog application process is a well-crafted journey rather than a mere formal procedure. Enlightening guide dog mobility experiences and engaging

A short-term rehabilitation participant attempting to make risotto during a cooking training session with Takanori.

online seminars serve as the prelude to their lifelong companions. In an overnight session, applicants experience the intriguing everyday reality of life with a guide dog before making a commitment.

Our Vision Impairment Support (VIS) Department acts as a guiding light for those pursuing guide dogs, whether it's evaluating the choice of mobility tools or optimizing life skills. As the visionary Takanori Ohtani, leader of the VIS Department and OM instructor, articulates,

**“The true essence of our work is to maximize each client’s potential. We aim to prepare individuals for their journey with abundant information and rehabilitation training, whether they choose a guide dog or opt for other mobility aids.”**

One client, after taking long cane training sessions during the challenging nighttime hours when her vision is least reliable, contemplated whether she needed a guide dog at all. The nighttime trials with a guide dog also added to her reflections. Meanwhile, her family enthusiastically joined in by practicing dog grooming together, eager to envision the experience of having a guide dog in the warmth of their home. Another client transformed her daily commutes with renewed fervor after extensive mobility exercises, later branching out into cooking training sessions.

Sometimes, our introductions come unexpectedly. Like the sudden turn of fate for a patient who lost his vision in

an accident—the journey with JGDA began with a meeting in a hospital room, evolved through home visits, eventually leading to his embracing of a guide dog. This story, brimming with courage and transformation, epitomizes our endeavor.

**“A guide dog serves as one of several options that empower those with vision impairments to access any place, any time,”** Takanori reassures. Yet, the true gift offered by JGDA is freedom—the freedom to choose, to live, and to excel far beyond expectations. Whatever path the vision-impaired person opts for, know that JGDA stands resolute, steadfast in support, and ready to guide every step of the way.

Voyage with us where independence is not just a service but a vibrant lifestyle.



Takanori helps a short-term rehabilitation participant try out different long canes.



## The Louis Braille Legacy

Siobhan Meade  
Guide Dogs (UK)



Siobhan reading a sheet of Braille text

**Braille is not just a system of raised dots; it is the language of my life, the tool that has unlocked the world and allowed me to navigate it with confidence, independence, and pride. It's a tactile miracle, a way of connecting with ideas, knowledge, and creativity. Braille isn't simply a method for blind people to read and write—it's a powerful symbol of inclusion, accessibility, and equality. For me, it's been the foundation of everything I've achieved and the means through which I've built my life, step by step, touch by touch.**

When I first encountered braille, it felt like discovering a hidden treasure—a key to a locked door that I'd long been standing in front of, unsure how to open it. My fingers

traced the raised dots, and suddenly, the world didn't seem distant anymore. It was here, within my grasp, waiting for me to claim it. But my journey to this realization was far from straightforward.

As a child in a mainstream school, I often felt invisible. My teachers didn't know how to support me, and I was left on the sidelines while my classmates read books, solved problems, and embraced the joy of learning. I was handed lego to pass the time, as though my presence didn't matter and my potential wasn't worth exploring. It was a devastating experience, isolating and disheartening, and it left me questioning my place in the world.

When I moved to a school for blind and vision-impaired children, everything changed. For the first time, I wasn't an afterthought—I was a student with value, with potential, and with dreams worth nurturing. It was there that I discovered braille, and with it, my life transformed. Braille didn't just give me access to education; it gave me the ability to imagine a future for myself. Those tiny raised dots carried with them the power to connect me to knowledge, to books, to my own ideas. Braille was the bridge between the world and me, and it became the foundation of my independence.

For anyone unfamiliar with braille, it is a tactile writing and reading system developed by Louis Braille in the 19th century. Louis was just a boy when he lost his sight due to a tragic accident in his father's leather workshop. But rather than letting blindness limit him, he created a

system that would empower blind people to read, write, and access knowledge. At the time, literacy for blind people was almost unheard of. The few systems that existed were cumbersome, ineffective, and relied heavily on memorization. Louis Braille changed all of that.

Born in Coupvray, France, in 1809, Louis Braille was blinded at the age of three after a tool in his father's leather workshop accidentally injured his eye. Infection spread, and he lost vision in both eyes. Despite this, he was a determined and intelligent child. At the age of 15, while studying at the Royal Institute for Blind Youth in Paris, he developed the braille system. His invention, inspired by a tactile military communication system, replaced entire words with patterns of raised dots that corresponded to letters, numbers, and punctuation.

Louis Braille's system was revolutionary. It wasn't just about making books accessible—it was about granting blind

people the ability to read, write, and communicate independently. For the first time, blind people could fully engage with knowledge and education. Braille was a tool of liberation, a way of breaking down barriers and saying, "We belong here, too."

I had the incredible privilege of visiting Louis Braille's home in Coupvray, now a museum dedicated to his life and legacy. Walking through the very house where he grew up was deeply moving. I could almost feel the echoes of his determination in the air, his refusal to accept a world that excluded people like him. Standing there, I thought about the countless lives he has touched, mine included. His invention isn't just a part of history; it's a living, breathing tool that continues to empower millions of people today.

Braille has shaped every aspect of my life. It's how I write shopping lists, follow meeting agendas, and organize my daily tasks. It's how I read novels, poetry, and articles—how I immerse myself in the beauty of language and ideas.



Tactile writing device known as a slate and stylus, used for writing Braille



continued

## The Louis Braille Legacy

Braille has been there for me in the quiet moments of self-reflection and in the big milestones of achievement. Through it, I've been able to express my thoughts, share my voice, and claim my place in the world.

But braille is not static. It has grown and evolved, just as the world has. In the past, it was limited to embossed books and paper, but today, technology has taken braille to new heights. Refreshable braille displays, which connect to computers and smartphones, allow blind people to access digital information through touch. These devices have made it possible for me to navigate the digital world with the same ease and confidence as anyone else. Braille has adapted to modern life, proving that accessibility is not a limitation but a source of innovation.

However, the story of braille is also a story of inclusion—or the lack thereof. Historically, blind people were often excluded from education, employment, and participation in society. Braille challenged that exclusion, asserting that literacy and knowledge are rights, not privileges. But while attitudes have evolved, there is still progress to be made. Inclusion is about more than providing tools; it's about fostering a world where accessibility is the norm, not an exception.

Braille stands as a powerful reminder of what is possible when barriers are removed. It challenges the misconception that blindness equates to helplessness. Instead, it demonstrates that with the right tools and opportunities, blind people can thrive, contribute, and excel. Braille is a testament to resilience,

innovation, and the unyielding belief that everyone deserves access to knowledge.

For me, braille is more than a tool—it's a part of who I am. It has been my companion in moments of joy, my anchor in times of uncertainty, and my guide through life's complexities. It is the language of my independence and the means through which I've found my voice.

Every time my fingers glide over those raised dots, I am reminded of Louis Braille's legacy and the incredible gift he gave to the world. Braille is more than a system of reading and writing, it is a revolution at our fingertips. It is a symbol of possibility, inclusion, and equality. It is a bridge between blindness and the world, a tool that empowers us to shape our own futures and write our own stories. Braille shows us that the world is never out of reach, it is here, waiting to be explored, one touch at a time.



Museum bust of Louis Braille

## IGDF Standards Update

**IGDF is a membership organisation and believes that members have an important part to play in the creation of credible industry standards. Standards constantly evolve, based upon new evidence, feedback received from professionals and service users and insight gained from academics, other organisations, and changes in societal expectations. In 2024 the IGDF Standards Committee committed to undertaking a full review of the standards.**

Effective standards are achieved through a process of consultation and consensus building, with the technical content created by experts. I would like to take this opportunity from the start to thank my colleagues on the Standards Committee for leading the review panels effectively and for the experts on the review panels for their hard work.

Standard 2 (Education): Christine Baroni-Pretsch and her panel: Becca Gamble (Guide Dogs UK) Sven Bürgin (VBM Blindenhundeschule, Switzerland), Ben Francis (CNIB Guide Dogs, Canada) and Aurore Antoine (Chiens guides Grand Sud-Ouest Aliénor Bordeaux, France)

Standard 3 (Client Services): Barry O'Toole and his panel: Caroline James (Guide Dogs UK), Caryn Gates (Guide Dogs of the Desert, USA), Jennifer Thurman (Occupaws, USA), Lauren Ross (Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA), Russell Harrison (Guide Dogs Victoria, Australia) and Shona Kemp (CNIB Guide Dogs, Canada).

Standard 4 (Breeding and Dog Supply): Nicola Cotton and her panel: Glenna

Fiddgymnt (Guide Dog Foundation, USA), Haley Andrews (Guide Dogs UK), Katy Evans (The Seeing Eye, USA), Lauren Holtz (Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA) and Linda Thornton (BC & Alberta Guide Dogs, Canada).

Standard 5 (Training and Behaviour): Jim Kessler and his panel: Caroline James (Guide Dogs UK), Matthias Lenz (BC & Alberta Guide Dogs, Canada), Rivi Israel (Southeastern Guide Dogs, USA), Sven Bürgin (VBM Blindenhundeschule, Switzerland), Stacey Ellison (Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA) and Sandrine Lebreton (Les Chiens Guides d'Aveugles de Provence Côte d'Azur Corse, France).

Standard 6 (Health and Welfare): Nicola Cotton and her panel: Kaitlin Cherney (Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA), Katy Evans (The Seeing Eye, USA), Louisa Rodgers (Guide Dogs UK), Lynna Feng (Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA) and Nicole Potter (Dogs Inc, USA).

Standard 7 (Facilities and Kennels): Tim Stafford and his panel - Erin Kelley (Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA); Nicole Potter (Dogs Inc, USA); Russ Harrison (Guide Dogs Victoria, Australia); Haley Andrews (Guide Dogs, UK); Beth Williams (The Seeing Eye, USA).

### The review process

The review panels were required to consider the following guidance:

1. Aligning IGDF standards to those of Assistance Dogs International (ADI). At times, reviews may be co delivered by IGDF/ADI experts.



continued

## IGDF Standards Update

2. Using clear, concise language, avoiding long words, and technical jargon when possible; appreciating that English is a second language for many members.
3. Avoiding writing guidance or an instruction manual rather than a standard.
4. Writing standards using internationally accepted terms – shall, should and may statements.
5. Ensuring compliance to standards can be evidenced through independent assessment and what type of evidence may be appropriate.

The review process included two rounds of feedback from members and other IGDF Committees and was, for the first time, further enhanced through collaboration with our colleagues at Assistance Dogs International in the review of Standard 6 (Health and Welfare) demonstrating our commitment to ongoing collaboration, shared interests and sector leadership.

The rounds of member consultation produced 218 pieces of feedback, received from 21 members. Much of the feedback proved to be editorial (encouraging us to be ever clearer in our use of language and terms) and suggesting individual areas for improvement. Feedback on Standard 5 (Training and Behaviour) attracted a theme debating the proposal to prohibit use of some aversive dog training equipment. All feedback was considered by the experts within the individual review panels who produced a recommended draft document to be considered by the

standards committee before progression for board approval. The standards have now been approved by the board who have agreed to implement the new standards from January 2026.

### Next Steps

The Standards Committee will deliver a webinar to support the launch of the new standards and deliver a presentation at the 2025 Conference.

The Accreditation Committee will start to prepare assessors for the 2026 accreditation assessments and support members to prepare for these assessments.

The Development Committee and/or the Education Committee will support on all education matters, especially relating to dog welfare/training methodology. The 2025 Conference already has significant content that will support organisations to adapt their operational practices if this is required.

This process has been completed diligently and thoroughly. The proposed standards present IGDF as a credible industry-leading accreditation body, well able to stand up to the scrutiny of other regulatory bodies and/or comparison with other standards.

Once again, I would like to sincerely thank my colleagues on the Standards Committee and the many people who generously provided their time and expertise to the process. We look forward to speaking more about the standards in the future.

## Development Committee Update: New Members

### Welcome David Locklin

David began his career at Guide Dogs UK in 2000, and over the last two decades has worked at Organizations in Ireland and the USA. As well as being a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor he has held various leadership roles, and currently oversees all the operations as the Chief Program Officer at the Guide Dog Foundation and America's VetDogs, USA.

He is actively involved with ADI serving on their board of directions, is the vice-chair of the North America council, chair of the membership committee as well as a member of the candidate review committee.



### Welcome Hannele Ruokonen

Hannele began her career at the Guide Dog School of the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired in 2007. Over the years, she has had many different tasks and responsibilities in the organisation. For the past ten years, she has worked as the Puppy Program

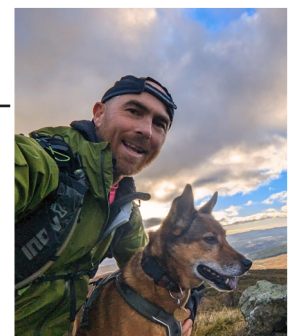
Coordinator and developed the current program together with her team. Hannele has been a member of the school's breeding group for many years and is the school's representative in two international breeding collaborations. She has also been Finland's representative in the international committee that works to create a European standard for assistance dogs (CEN TC 452).

### Welcome Tony Harvey

Before beginning his Guide Dog career in 2008 in the UK, Tony worked for SeeAbility, a charity supporting individuals with visual impairments, additional disabilities, and neurodiversity. He initially served as a GDMI before relocating to New Zealand where he transitioned into a rehabilitation role and also worked with Epilepsy Support Dogs NZ. Tony returned to the UK in 2015 as a GDMI, has since held a variety of management

roles and is now a Regional Academy Manager.

Tony is passionate about positive interactions and has developed several webinars on positive management techniques and effective coaching. He is also a member of the TAGteach faculty.





## 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.

### Introducing the new IGDF Standards 2026

**Led by:** IGDF Standards Committee

**Date:** April 15th 2025, 11:00am BST

(3am PDT; 6am EDT; 7pm JST; 8pm AEST);

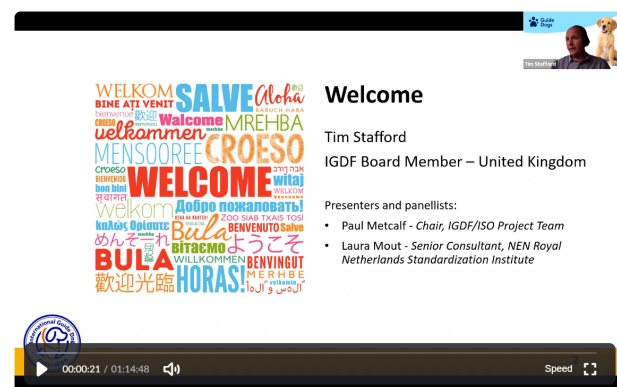
### From 'Unit' to 'Partnership'. The evolution of modern guide dog training

**Led by:** Tim Stafford, Guide Dogs UK

**Date:** May 15, 2025, 11:00am BST

(3am PDT; 6am EDT; 7pm JST; 8pm AEST);

In this webinar Tim Stafford will discuss the evolution of guide dog training over the past 100 years with particular reference to how Guide Dogs UK has adapted their training methodology since 1931 to the present time. This webinar will explain some of the challenges and opportunities of evolving established principles and practices within a large and complex guide dog organisation and how we think



about human-dog relationships today. The themes may inspire professional debate in other organisations too. It may be of particular interest to people intending to attend the Guide Dogs Academy Trainer Workshop in 23-25 June.

Register in advance for either of these Zoom webinars: <https://www.igdf.org.uk/members-area/upcoming-webinars/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 – although adding English subtitles would be desirable.

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

# Visionary

## Next Issue

The deadline for articles for the next issue of Visionary is: **1st June 2025**.

### Special Feature:

#### The Power of the Partnership.

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

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

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

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

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



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