



International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF)

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The International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) today launches **Strengthening Connections**- a new five-year strategy to achieve a world where people who are blind or have low vision can access quality guide dog and associated services so that they can live life on their terms.

International Guide Dog Day 2021 occurs while most of the world is still facing the unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic has been particularly serious for people who are blind or have low vision, meaning that guide dog services are in greater demand than ever before. However, the pandemic has meant that far fewer guide dogs completed training during 2020 than in 2019, because of the disruption caused by Covid-19 to guide dog organisations around the world.

IGDF's new strategy, **Strengthening Connections**, has been developed in response to the global demand for safe and effective guide dog services, and to support IGDF member organisations in delivering these life-changing services. The strategy has been informed by a comprehensive survey of IGDF's 99 member organisations.

The first International Guide Dog Day was celebrated in 1992 and is held on the last Wednesday in April each year.

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

Preliminary results from the 2020 annual returns submitted by IGDF members show that the pandemic has severely impacted guide dog training and service provision around the world.

| | 2019 | 2020 |
|--|--------|--------|
| Number of guide dogs currently working | 22,227 | 21,002 |
| Guide dog teams qualified during year | 3,091 | 2,038 |
| Total follow-up/ aftercare visits | 22,051 | 18,726 |

This is the first year since IGDF began collecting these statistics in 2012 that there has not been an overall increase in global guide dog services. The fact that the impact of the pandemic has not been more severe is testament to the extraordinary efforts of guide dog organisations, their staff, volunteers, and donors. They have shown exceptional resilience and flexibility in finding innovative solutions to the challenges posed by Covid-19. These have included increased use of digital technology, remote working and telephone services to continue to support people who are blind or have low vision.

The majority of guide dog organisations are small charities and have faced serious financial challenges, due to the economic hardship and additional expenses imposed by the pandemic.

Access and International Standards

Guide dog owners around the world continue to be denied access to many businesses and services including cafés, shops, taxis, and public transport, even in countries where access rights are protected by law. One major cause of this problem is the lack of internationally-recognised standards that define what is a genuine guide (or other type of assistance) dog. This makes it difficult for businesses to identify genuine guide dogs from the small but significant number of pet dogs which are falsely claimed to be guide dogs by their owners.

Since 2016, IGDF has been working to develop an international ISO standard to cover all types of assistance dogs. IGDF has dedicated significant resources to this project, and IGDF member organisations around the world have lobbied stakeholders and national governments to support the proposal. However, in a recent ballot of all ISO countries, this proposal narrowly failed to meet the 2/3 majority vote needed to allow further development of the standard.

The IGDF remains committed to improving access for guide dog users everywhere, and is now working on new initiatives to promote access by strengthening and increasing recognition of the IGDF standards.

About the IGDF

The International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) is a charity that defines and maintains international standards for the training of guide dogs around the world. This work ensures the quality and safety of guide dog services for people who are blind or have low vision.

IGDF was established in 1987 by representatives of 15 guide dog organisations from 10 different countries. IGDF has grown significantly over the years and now has 99 member organisations from 34 different countries. Over 20,000 people with sight loss enjoy the benefits of safe, independent travel through their partnership with a guide dog. However, the World Health Organisation estimates there to be over 250 million people who are blind or have low vision worldwide.

As well as developing international standards, IGDF supports new guide dog organisations around the world, helping them to grow and progress towards full accreditation against the IGDF standards. IGDF also offers scholarships which enable guide dog instructors to develop their professional skills by undertaking secondments with established IGDF member organisations.

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