

PAW PRINTS

Spring 2021
No. 43



Official newsletter from the staff, graduates and volunteers of:

BC & ALBERTA GUIDE DOGS

GUIDE DOGS • AUTISM SERVICE DOGS • PTSD SERVICE DOGS

MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO



As I reflect on the past 25 years, and read through the stories shared in this newsletter, I am reminded that there are some things that remain constant despite all the tumultuous change around us.

Foremost for me is that the impact of receiving a Guide or Service Dog is life-changing. We use those words often, but they continue to ring true for each and every one of the Guide and Service Dog teams that we have graduated since 1996.

This transformative effect is the direct result of the love and dedication of a remarkable family of volunteers, staff and donors through the years. While the faces have changed, and some have stayed the same, their commitment to our mission endures.

So, as we see an increased demand for our services, battle a decline in revenue due to the lack of in-person events, and face ongoing challenges for training during a pandemic, I know that we can find inspiration in something else that has always held us steady – hope. Hope, as I look at new litters born in loving homes. Hope, as these puppies grow up under the guidance of wonderful puppy raisers and instructors. And hope that is gifted to our clients when they receive their Guide and Service Dogs.

This hope has always been made possible by your support. Therefore, thank you from the bottom of my heart.



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ON THE COVER: Shay in Kananaskis Country, AB. Photo by Jessie Loutit

Brad with PTSD Service Dog Willie

Team Sponsor: BC/Yukon Command of the Royal Canadian Legion Foundation

There is something to the stereotypes about trauma. The veteran withdrawing from family, friends and everything they enjoyed. Endless hours wasted alone doing nothing. Being so agitated that it is impossible to cope with any of life's stresses. The despair and shame after turning from someone highly capable into someone barely capable.

I held off on applying to VICD Service Dogs as I felt taking on a dog and two classes a week seemed impossible. But despite an excellent care team, I was not well and not making progress. Out of desperation, I applied.

From the start, the team at VICD truly believed this program was something I could do. Gently, step by step, and with understanding when I hit the inevitable rough patches, the team helped me build back up. The successes in training with Willie started to restore my confidence. **The constant presence of Willie and her unconditional support gave me the courage to re-engage with the world.** And Willie's gentle interventions kept me from being able to sink into those empty hours.

Since starting the program, I have been able to heal relationships with my children, friends and family. I have been able to make real progress in starting my new civilian life. And I have been able to get healthier and more active than I have been in years.



I cannot say enough about my appreciation for the team at VICD. I am also deeply grateful to the puppy raisers and foster family - **you have my heartfelt thanks for raising a beautiful, supportive companion.**

Breeding Dog Caregivers: Ann, **Guiding Eyes for the Blind Whelper:** Sue **Puppy Raiser:** Lynn **Puppy Supervisor:** Matthias **Instructors:** Claudette & Kim **Boarders:** Pam & Don



Rosamund with Guide Dog Jill

Team Sponsor: Donald and Margaret Garnett Family Foundation - In Memory of Micki MacKenzie

Jill is my new and wonderful Guide Dog who has come into my life at just the right time.

Shortly after Jill's arrival, my dear Rory (who has been my guide for ten years) was diagnosed with acute leukemia - a devastating shock. I am happy to say though, that the medication that Rory is on has made a huge difference, and she is back to her almost-normal self. I know that for her short retirement, Rory will be comfortable and happy with us.

Jill is my sixth Guide Dog and the first one for me who has been trained with treat rewards, which meant I had to be trained as well and boy, do those treats work! Although playful out of it, Jill is a serious worker when she has her harness on, and has learned my routes very quickly. Rory had been slowing down over the last two years, which is totally normal for a dog who is ageing, but she was always a reliable worker. Now, with a two-year-old, I'm back walking the speed I like to go!

One thing I love about her training that I have never experienced before, is that whenever I call her, she comes running to me and touches my hand with her cold, wet nose; apart from being adorable, it makes life easier for me to put on her harness.

I am so grateful and want to thank everyone who has been involved with the raising and training of Jill; her puppy raiser, Anna; her supervising trainer, Matthias and instructor Addie; and her



Thank you all from the bottom of my heart for all you have done.

”

boarder, Kendra. You have all done a most excellent job in producing another great Guide Dog for me. **I look forward to having many years with a wonderful and trustworthy companion by my side.**

Of course, none of this would be possible without Bill and Linda, the Board and staff of BC & Alberta Guide Dogs, and Jill's fantastic donors. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart for all you have done to make this happen.



Breeding Dog Caregivers: Mike, Bev & Rupert **Whelpers:** Janet **Puppy Raiser:** Anna **Puppy Supervisor:** Matthias **Instructor:** Addie **Boarder:** Kendra

In Memory of Micki MacKenzie

Don and Margaret Garnett of West Vancouver have generously provided funding for the raising and training of three puppies in the BC & Alberta Guide Dogs team sponsorship recognition program.

Their gift will provide full training for a Guide Dog, Autism Service Dog and a PTSD Service Dog for a veteran. The Garnett's wishes are to provide this gift as a memorial to their late, dear friend and neighbour, Micki MacKenzie, and her constant companions, Labrador Retrievers Maggie and Mollie, who were never far from her side.

Micki was a kind and caring person who was an active member in her West Vancouver community and beyond. She would be extremely humbled and honoured by this acknowledgement and thrilled with the profoundly positive impact the Garnett's donation will have on the lives of the recipients of these three Guide and Service Dogs.



Tristan with Autism Service Dog Echo



Team Sponsor: The Allen & Loreen Vandekerkhove Family Foundation

Tristan has a favourite storybook called *Beyond the Pond* by Joseph Kuefler, which tells the story about a boy who goes exploring with his dog and finds the world is so much bigger than anyone around him realizes. What an incredible metaphor for how Tristan sees his world!

Tristan has many interests, such as books, music, the natural world and specifically animals of all kinds. But for a curious boy who has sensory and processing difficulties, as well as impulse control issues, much of what he wants to do collides against what he is able to do. His frustration sometimes leads to isolation and anxiety.

Echo has opened up Tristan's world in many wonderful ways



Echo has opened up Tristan's world in many wonderful ways, but most importantly, by giving him a very tangible connection, not just to an animal, but a friend that can reciprocate in terms he can understand and bond with. **Echo is his anchor, both emotionally and literally! He is able to teach Tristan about relationships and how to feel secure and able to explore the world more safely.**

Echo is so much a part of our family that it is hard to imagine life without him. As a family, we feel better able to engage in activities we previously would have shied away from either for safety reasons or because Tristan might not have been able to handle the stimulus. We

have started practicing walking to school, which is something that was unimaginable before. And having a real cleaning and checkup at the dentist was a success for the very first time ever without tears!

I will be forever grateful to BC & Alberta Guide Dogs for the amazing work they have done with Echo and for all their guidance and support!

With his friend beside him, Tristan is able to conquer worry and feel like he can be brave, strong and curious. I practically have *Beyond the Pond* memorized as I read it so often! But every time I do, Tristan insists that I change the name of the boy in the story to his name, and the dog's name has to be Echo. Perhaps that alone says it all!



Breeding Dog Caregivers: Eneken, Connie **Whelpers:** Zoe
Puppy Raisers: Verne & Linda **Puppy Supervisor:** Matthias
Instructor: Danielle **Boarder:** Corrine

SAVE THE DATE! - Upcoming Events

LONDON DRUGS
24th Annual
GOLF FOR GUIDE DOGS
FRIDAY, AUG. 20 *Lite*
In Memory of Howie Meeker, C.M.
Hosted by Leah Meeker

15th Annual
Charity Auction & Gala
Ties & Tails
Virtual Extravaganza!
Saturday, Oct. 23

Further details will be posted on our website as they come available: bcandalbertaguidedogs.com/events



Abdullah with Autism Service Dog Ochos

Team Sponsor: Burnaby Lougheed Lions Club

My family and I were so thrilled when we heard that we would be getting Ochos, both as a new addition to our family, and as the much-needed support for my 10-year-old son with autism.

When Abdullah was younger, I was constantly on edge whenever we went out, and always kept hold of his hand in case he would bolt away with no awareness to danger. This was also very difficult for me as a single parent because Abdullah has a younger brother Ibrahim who also required my attention. Most of the time I had to let Ibrahim know that I needed to focus on Abdullah first, and that I needed his help too, for all of us to be together and safe.

Despite our efforts, there were always people in the community who would glare at Abdullah during a meltdown, or when he verbal stimmed. My sons and I were once accosted by a woman who insisted that I take Abdullah to go have his meltdown in the public washrooms because she did not want to see him behave that way. I explained

that he had autism, and that we were handling it. She continued yelling and stated that she did not care. That was a difficult day for us; we left the place in tears. Ibrahim told me later that he was nervous about going outside again with his brother. I explained that it was not his brother's fault that we had a bad day, and that sometimes he just needs help and understanding, but I was also anxious about when the next "incident" would happen.

Fast forward to having Michelle (our amazing instructor) and Ochos in our home. We were all so excited, and Abdullah's eyes lit up when he came home from school and saw Ochos in our living room. He was instantly curious about Ochos and was touching his ears, tail, paws, and face. Ochos was so patient and just stared back with his beautiful hazel eyes.



Since then, we have had Ochos by our side at grocery trips and school pick-ups and drop-offs. We cannot wait until Covid-19 restrictions are lifted and it is safe to go to our usual fun places.

Abdullah is calmer, does not verbal stim, and does not try to pull away when he is walking with Ochos. Ibrahim does not need to be heightened and aware of Abdullah's behaviour because Ochos is by his side. People in public do not glare at us anymore and actually give us extra space and smiles when we walk through the area!

We have gained enormous confidence as a family with Ochos by our side, and we could not be more thankful to BC & Alberta Guide Dogs for making this wonderful change happen.

We are also so grateful to everyone who donates, sponsors and volunteers their time to this life-changing organization!



Breeding Dog Caregivers:

Janet, Connie

Whelpers: Janet

Puppy Raisers:

Kathi & Annette

Puppy

Supervisor:

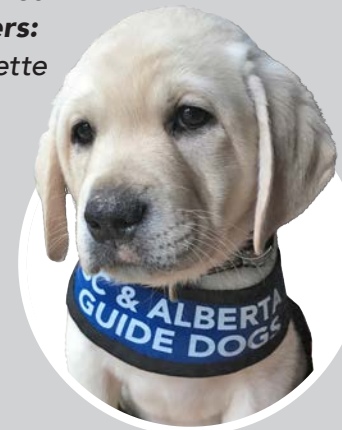
Sandra

Instructor:

Michelle

Boarder:

Sage



Jen with PTSD Service Dog Salish

Team Sponsor: Wounded Warriors Canada

I knew within two days of receiving Salish that we were a good fit. I was having a hard time at a doctor's appointment and she immediately got up from sleeping and put her chin on my lap. That gesture overwhelmed me and brought tears to my eyes. When she recognized that I was crying, she climbed up into my lap. **She was so perceptive and immediately knew what I needed.**

One morning, we came to an intersection where there was a semi backing up and using a very loud indicator. We moved to the side, and unfortunately, right after we stopped, audible train crossing arms started going off and the train went by blowing its horn mere feet from us. All of these loud sounds for someone already in a state of hypervigilance can be very distressing. I could feel myself starting to 'zone-out' and disassociate, but I couldn't stop it. Salish jumped up, put her paws on me and brought me back to the present. I am so thankful she was able to recognize what was happening. Salish noticed it and dealt with it better than I could. That's the bond that is formed with these incredibly well-trained, smart dogs.

Medications for our condition can have some very unpleasant side effects. Seven months after receiving Salish, I went off all medications.

Thanks to Wounded Warriors Canada and VICD Service Dogs, Salish has changed my life. This condition can be very isolating, and I never walk alone anymore.

She has brought me back to the land of the living.

Breeding Dog Caregivers: Leo & Joanna, Bev & Rupert
Whelpers: Diane **Puppy Raiser:** Kim **Puppy Supervisor:** Samantha
Instructors: Claudette & Kim **Boarders:** Joan & Bill



Joan with Guide Dog Arthur

**Team Sponsor: Provincial Employees
Community Services Fund**

When my previous Guide Dog, Zax passed away late last year, it felt like someone pulled a rock from underneath me. It was so sudden and a huge blow. I was very lucky to receive a dog so soon after.

With Zax, we had a great routine. We'd be out for the whole morning; going to the gym and getting the shopping in. Covid-19 has really prevented this, so adjusting to Arthur has definitely been different from the others. I'm sure that once restrictions are eased and the beautiful weather has arrived, we'll be able to get out on more walks and get to more of my usual places where he can build a relationship with everyone.

Arthur is very inquisitive! When I'm working out in the garden, he loves to run around, burn off some of his energy and nosy about. He is such a happy boy and his tail is always wagging.

My granddaughter loves to come over for visits and enjoys playing

Breeding Dog Caregivers: Ulrike, Chris & Brook **Whelpers:** Ulrike **Puppy Raiser:** Cathy **Puppy Supervisor:** Sandra
Instructor: Addie **Boarder:** Kendra



with him. Sometimes my son and granddaughter will take him to run around the park, which he absolutely loves.

I would really like to say "thank you very much" to the puppy raiser and trainers for their hard work. **Because of you, I not only have a Guide Dog, but a companion.**

It's really nice to just be able to put that harness on Arthur and go out for a walk on your own, and not rely on a sighted person or a cane. It makes a huge difference for me and I'm so happy.

Thank you as well to Bill, and to the donors who have made this possible.





RunGo Dash for Dogs \$11,424

A big thank you to all the participants and donors who contributed to the first ever virtual RunGo Dash for Dogs race series! Together we ran over 1,250km and raised \$11,424.23. We would like to send a special thanks to Craig Slagel and RunGo for their hard work and support!

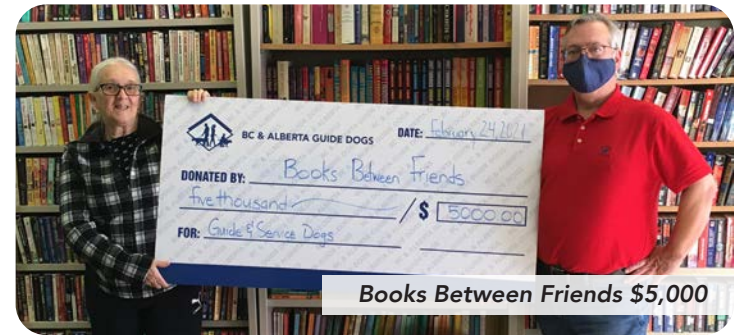


Innovative Fitness - Kitsilano \$7,150

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Laura Rushforth \$1,111



Books Between Friends \$5,000



Amazon YVR2 \$5,000

Laura has raised \$1,111 through her recent fundraising efforts, selling hand-made braille cards and other items, combined with her positive energy and spirit! Thank you!



Richmond Lahoo Leo Lions Club \$5,000

Kitz4Kids - In Memory of Andrew Dolejsi

Despite having to cancel the 13th Annual Kitz4Kids fundraiser gala, the Dolejsi family proceeded with a virtual "Lemonade Challenge" and raised an incredible \$10,587.

Combined with the very generous Schmelke Family Charitable Foundation donation of \$20,000, this year's Kitz4Kids grand total is \$30,587 towards our Autism Service Dog program.

The Kitz4Kids fundraiser has raised an astounding \$200,000 for BC & Alberta Guide Dogs since 2014. We are so grateful for your support!



The 'PUP'ulation increases!

SPECIAL THANKS & PATRONS

Runa & Finn - Nov. 15, 2020



Velma & Felix - Nov. 25, 2020



Bertie & Bert - Dec. 21, 2020



Dewling & Truman - Feb. 20, 2021

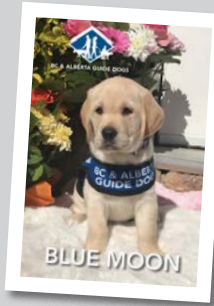


New Puppies on Sponsorship!



Interested in Puppy Sponsorship?

Help our puppies grow into life-changing dogs from \$15/month.



Visit bcandalbertaguidedogs.com, or call our head office for more information at **1-877-940-4504**.

Blue Moon and **Bunker** from Dewling's litter, and **Lulu** from Star's litter have just joined the Puppy Sponsorship program.



Star & Max - March 2, 2021



PATRON
Leah Meeker

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Grand Chapter of British Columbia & Yukon — Order of the Eastern Star

The Allen & Loreen Vandekerkhove Family Foundation
Variety — The Children's Charity

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British Columbia Guide Dog Services was founded in 1996 as the province's first Guide Dog School for the Blind. In 2002, the organization expanded to also provide Guide Dogs for citizens of Alberta.

Seeing a great need of Service Dogs for children with autism and their families, the organization launched its sister charity, *Autism Support Dogs* in 2008. In 2014, the charities amalgamated to form one organization, collectively known as *BC & Alberta Guide Dogs*.

BC & Alberta Guide Dogs also worked alongside *Vancouver Island Compassion Dogs* as it formed in 2013 to ensure that PTSD Service Dogs were provided to Canadian Veterans. In early 2019, *VICD Service Dogs* was officially amalgamated with *BC Guide Dogs* and together they expanded their mandate to include assistance for First Responders living with operational stress injuries.

Today, the organization is a leading provider of Guide and Service Dogs in Western Canada. *BC & Alberta Guide Dogs* thanks everyone for their ongoing support as it celebrates its Silver Jubilee and 25 years of transforming lives!

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