BC & ALBERTA GUIDE DOGS
WELCOMES THE WORLD
MESSAGE FROM THE CEO
William S. Thornton, GDMI

I would like to welcome you all, to our most recent edition of Paw Prints. We have some wonderful stories to share from our exceptional graduate teams. Over the last 12 months, we have been able to gear up post-Covid, and have graduated a further 30 new Guide Dog and Service Dog Teams combined.

Since our inception, we have been active members of the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) and indeed, currently, I am proud to serve as the Chair of the IGDF. BC & Alberta Guide Dogs were the very privileged and proud hosts of the IGDF 2023 Conference at the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver. We were joined by 282 delegates from 30 different countries representing 76 guide dog organizations. It was a wonderful gathering and reunion of like-minded professionals who had not attended a conference since 2018 in Sidney, Australia, due to Covid. www.igdf.org.uk/

Our Autism Service Dog Program continues to be overwhelmed with requests for service. To better respond to this demand, we have moved the Autism Service Dog Program to fall under the Service Dog OSI-PTSD Department. The reason for this move, is that 90% of the dog’s preparation for real life work, is essentially the same for both the Autism Service Dogs and PTSD Service Dogs. We have recently recruited two new Apprentice Instructors to join our Service Dog Team Program and they, with the existing Instructors, will all go through training to be dual certified as Autism Service Dog and PTSD Service Dog Instructors. With this change, we will now be training Autism Service Dogs in Edmonton – a new program for Alberta. We are presently looking for an office in Edmonton to support the instructors located there.

You will see inside this edition of Paw Prints, that we have made a special effort to support the community of Vernon through the provision of three Autism Service Dog Teams. Many of our smaller communities in BC and Alberta, are underserved and we are trying to make a difference to these communities in partnership with local organizations, and in this case, with the Vernon Lions Club.

I hope that you thoroughly enjoy this copy of Paw Prints, and remember that whilst you read your copy, through your support, you have enabled us to support all of these wonderful people and their families.

Wishing you all the very best for the holiday season and Happy New Year to you all!

William S. Thornton, CEO
Shay is not just a dog; he’s a lifeline, a companion, and a source of hope for Reece and our family. Despite the numerous therapies I’ve pursued for Reece, there are moments of exhaustion and frustration that seem insurmountable. The toll on my family was palpable. While loving their brother deeply, my daughters couldn’t help but feel frustrated at times. They saw him as the reason for missed family activities and disrupted meals, but deep down, they knew it was the weight of autism that bore down on us all.

Reece’s journey and challenges are not just his alone but also our family’s. Every night, the simple act of teeth brushing became a battleground, and bedtime required my presence for Reece to settle down.

Shay became a part of the family in May. From day one, he and Reece have formed an incredible team. The changes in our daily life are nothing short of miraculous. I no longer spend my nights lying beside Reece to help him fall asleep. Instead, like clockwork, Shay and Reece will sit side by side to brush their teeth and prepare for bedtime, with Shay tucking himself in next to Reece.

Dinnertime, once a source of dread, has become a pleasant experience. Less frustrated at times, they knew it was the weight of autism that bore down on us all.

Since Jovie joined our family in May, our lives have been positive. The changes we have witnessed in Benjamin have been nothing short of remarkable. Often, when Benjamin becomes overstimulated, he wants to hide. This would result in running or crouching into a ball. Since having Jovie, Benjamin automatically reverts to crouching. Now he has somebody happy to be on his level and lay on the floor whenever he must take a moment.

He has a positive connection with her locked eyes, and this interaction has significantly reduced meltdowns in public. Having to get Jovie’s attention before giving a command has already started to help Benjamin develop the same connection when communicating with people, which had been an ongoing challenge with minimal progress.

The bond between Benjamin and Jovie is genuinely heartwarming. They spend much time cuddling, and Benjamin takes immense joy in learning basic commands and observing Jovie’s response. Simply following through on commands has instilled a sense of thrill in Benjamin and contributed to his emotional growth. Jovie has already made a significant impact in terms of play and physical activity. Benjamin had been interested in playing soccer and joining a team for two years. However, previous attempts at engaging in such activities always resulted in frustration and overwhelm. With Jovie by his side, Benjamin is gradually developing soccer skills, learning to aim for the net, navigating around Jovie, and exploring his physical boundaries through play.

Given Benjamin’s increased risk of bolting and experiencing meltdowns, having Jovie present ensures smoother transitions. Family outings have become more enjoyable, more frequent, and stress-free since Jovie joined us. Previously, trips to the playground were complicated. We had to search for empty playgrounds to avoid triggering selective mutism and bolting. However, with Jovie’s support, Benjamin requests more walks to the nearby playground.

The unconditional love and companionship that Jovie provides has made an immeasurable difference in our lives. Over the past year, Benjamin’s world seemed to shrink, and we found ourselves exhausting all available support. As a family, we began isolating to meet his needs. Benjamin requires full-time one-on-one support. His bolting behaviour had escalated to the point where he would attempt to leave school property. Furthermore, his social communication delay hindered his ability to engage in meaningful conversations, often resulting in one-sided monologues.

We are incredibly grateful to BC and Alberta Guide Dogs and all the individuals involved in bringing Jovie into our family.

From an early age, Benjamin was meeting his milestones on time or even ahead of schedule. However, around 10 months of age, we noticed that his sensory seeking became more intense. Between ages two and three, he had limited awareness of his environment, struggled to follow verbal directions, and exhibited significant delays in social communication. It wasn’t until his sixth birthday that he was diagnosed.

The addition of Shay, with his four furry paws, has truly been a transformative blessing for my family. When we were all feeling burnt out and in desperate need of help, we could never have imagined that this support would arrive in the form of such a beautiful dog.

Shay’s response. Simply following through on commands has instilled a sense of thrill in Benjamin and contributed to his emotional growth.

The unconditional love and companionship that Jovie provides has made an immeasurable difference in our lives.
Vernon Lions Club raised more than $28,000 at the 3rd Annual Duck for Dogs Event at Polson Park.

With a three-year total of close to $70,000 raised, the Vernon Lions Club and the citizens and business community of Vernon have rallied around the BC & Alberta Guide Dogs Autism Service Dog Program.

With the help of the Vernon Lions Club, we have now placed 3 Autism Service Dogs with families in Vernon. Many thanks to the hard-working members of the Vernon Lions Club.

The 26th Annual London Drugs Golf for Guide Dogs teed off at Tsawwassen Springs Golf Course on August 11 with another successful fundraising round on the books. Our new venue was well received, and the golfers were as generous as ever.

Thanks to our title sponsor, London Drugs and more than 100 golfers who supported the event, BC & Alberta Guide Dogs raised more than $60,000 for our Client Training Programs.

Hosting a successful tournament for 26 years, speaks volumes to the commitment of our golfers, sponsors, donors, and supporting volunteers and dogs. We are so grateful to everyone who took part and made this event a fixture in our annual calendar.

Save the Date: Friday, August 9, 2024

The return of our Ties & Tails Charity Auction and Gala after a three-year hiatus proved our community stands behind BC & Alberta Guide Dogs. The event reconvened at its new location, Tsawwassen Springs, and raised more than $50,000 for our Guide and Service Dog Programs.

“It was incredible to be back celebrating with our supporters, volunteers and staff,” says Linda Thornton, Director of Breeding, and the lead event organizer. “We want to thank everyone who played a part in creating such a wonderful evening.”

The night featured BC & Alberta Guide Dogs’ Board member Steve Darling serving as MC, and highlighted speeches from Guide Dog recipient Angell Lu-Lebel with her dog Tipper at her side, along with videos featuring a pair of our recent OSI-PTSD graduates.

The successful return means supporters of the event can expect to see Ties & Tails return in May of 2024. Plans are already underway, and details will be released in early February.

“We didn’t know what to expect after being away for so long, but once again, our supporters and volunteers stepped up and delivered – thank you everyone.”

RunGo Dash For Dogs is just around the corner and is ready to celebrate 10 years of fundraising for BC & Alberta Guide Dogs.

The popular event is set for February 25, 2024, with its guided 10 km, 5 km or 2 km run/walk through Stanley Park in Vancouver.

Expect big smiles in the fun-filled, non-competitive race, which looks to build off last year’s momentum that raised more than $28,000.

Thanks to RunGo, almost $160,000 has been raised in support of our programs for our clients.
RECENT GRADUATE
2023

GUIDE DOG TEAM

Hope is what my service dog Teja has brought to my life. The VICD Service Dog program and training approach resounded with me. I learned more through their intake process, I started to see a sliver of light — maybe I didn't have to live being afraid to go out in public and being anxious. Maybe having a four-legged companion by my side would make things better.

My trainers were incredibly supportive and showed genuine care and went above and beyond to help and guide me through the challenges Teja and I faced as a team. Early on, they told me “trust the process”.

I dread the mornings before Teja came into my life but now, with him coming to the side of the bed and ever so gently licking my hand, and seeing his adorable face, makes a big difference to how I start my day. Teja gives me purpose and my motivation to get out walking and exploring my neighbourhood is greatly improved too.

The name Teja means strength, courage, and brilliance. He truly embodies all these qualities. Teja is making my dark days brighter and when I feel weak, and afraid, he is there with his chin on my lap, shining his bright light on me.

With the help of Certified Guide Dog Mobility Instructor Landra Berwick and GDMI apprentice Rachel Nelson, Sherlock and I officially qualified as a team in early August, and I couldn't be happier.

Sherlock has so many great qualities that make him a perfect fit for me and my family. He's quiet natured and a gentle, loving dog, yet once the harness is on, he is ambitious to work and willing to take on any adventure with me. I love exploring knowing Sherlock is by my side. Best of all, after a hard day of guiding me around Edmonton, Sherlock loves to cuddle.

Sherlock has also renewed my energy to go back out and explore after my second Guide Dog retired. We have bonded so much and so quickly that we seem to be in sync with each other.

I love Sherlock's energy. Nothing slows him down because he always overcomes any challenges we find along the way when we are out. Whether it's when he finds a post, a door, or navigating around an object that could be a potential problem, Sherlock safely helps me find my way, which is a big confidence boost.

I look forward to working with Sherlock for years to come. Thank you to everyone who made this possible, from the volunteers to the donors to everyone at BC & Alberta Guide Dogs.

COMMUNITY OF CARE

Whelp: Trish O’Meara
Brood Bitch Caregiver: Leah Rempel
Stud Dog Caregiver: Connie Caldwell
Puppy Raiser: Linda Chitwood
Boarder: Leslie & John Forbes

OSI-PSTD TEAM

Early on, they told me “trust the process”. They were 100 percent right ~ The program's training process is effective!

Teja

COMMUNITY OF CARE

Whelp: Zoe Stronge
Brood Bitch Caregiver: Elaine Meach
Stud Dog Caregiver: Kim Kendall
Puppy Raiser: Janelle Sandvol-Baillie and Chris Baillie David
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Leah Meeker

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Mary Jane Aylward
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**ACTIVE TEAMS**

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Photo by Lorna Shaw, Puppy Raiser
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Visit our website or call the number below to become a part of this heartwarming journey. Your generosity this Christmas will light up lives and make a lasting impact.

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