

GUIDE DOG NEWS

2023
ISSUE 4

*DR. SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE,
DIRECTOR OF CANINE RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT*



Guide Dogs
for the Blind



Guide Dogs for the Blind

A NON-PROFIT, CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION

CONTACT INFO

California Campus, National Headquarters:

350 Los Ranchitos Road, San Rafael, CA 94903
415.499.4000 | Fax 415.499.4035

Mailing address (donations only):

P.O. Box 3950, San Rafael, CA 94912-3950

Tax ID: 94-1196195

Oregon Campus:

32901 S.E. Kelso Road
Boring, OR 97009
503.668.2100
Fax 503.668.2141

800.295.4050 | guidedogs.com

In Canada: Guide Dogs for the Blind International

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1275 STN K, Toronto, ON M4P 9Z9

Canadian registration number: 83061 8682 RR0001

866.797.6603 | gdbinternational.ca

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Guide Dogs for the Blind follows the guidelines recommended by the Council of U.S. Dog Guide Schools and the International Guide Dog Federation for the humane care and training of our dogs, and the instruction and services offered to our clients.

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On occasion, GDB will share donor information with like-minded non-profit organizations to better fulfill our mission. If you do not want your information shared, please email us at **donations@guidedogs.com**.

Get involved:

- Become a volunteer, **guidedogs.com/volunteer**
- Attend a graduation or an event, **guidedogs.com/events**
- Learn about our Guide Dog, K9 Buddy, and Orientation & Mobility Immersion Programs at **guidedogs.com/programs**

Greetings and Happy Holidays!

2023 has been a year of coming together to celebrate Guide Dogs for the Blind's (GDB's) life-changing programs and all of you who make our mission possible. These events include our:

- **Legacy Society Luncheon** for supporters who have included GDB in their estate planning.
- **Holiday Celebration Fundraising Event** held in California and Oregon, and livestreamed for our entire community.
- **Guiding Puppies Forward Leader Summit**, where we unveiled our new puppy raising curriculum to more than 200 puppy raising leaders. The new approach draws on science, our expertise and industry best practices, and focuses on building confidence and resilience in our puppies — key attributes to becoming a guide dog.
- **K9 Buddy Picnic**, where we welcomed families to our California campus to share their experiences, participate in activities, and connect with other K9 Buddy recipients.

This past year, we were thrilled to hire Dr. Sarah-Elizabeth Byosiére as our Director of Canine Research and Development. This new position was made possible thanks to a multi-year gift from Elizabeth A. Gard and Thomas J. Furlong. You can read about Dr. Sarah's innovative and industry-leading work on pages 4-5.

Looking ahead the need is significant, and your continued support will help GDB:

- **Train the world's premier guide dogs** to serve hundreds of new clients and support some 2,000 guide dog and K9 Buddy teams throughout North America.
- **Enable more clients** to receive orientation and mobility skills to qualify for our guide dog training program.
- **Introduce more youth** who are blind or visually impaired to the guide dog lifestyle through a variety of programs, camps, and workshops.
- **Serve as an innovative global leader** in creating more inclusive communities through our advocacy and educational outreach programs.

Thanks to you, it's all free of charge for our clients. Together, we are unstoppable!

With gratitude,



Christine Benninger
President and CEO



CANINE RESEARCH PROGRAM: IN SEARCH OF THE SCIENTIFIC SECRETS

What's the secret to successfully breeding, raising, and training an amazing guide dog? Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) has long been committed to participating in canine-related research to advance the health, behavior, and overall welfare of our program dogs. And thanks to the extraordinary support from Elizabeth A. Gard and Thomas J. Furlong, GDB launched the Gard/Furlong Canine Research Program last year to formally kickstart and incorporate this effort.

Dr. Sarah-Elizabeth Byosiére is GDB's Director of Canine Research and Development. She identifies, supports, and oversees research that focuses on improving the health, well-being, and success of GDB dogs. Dr. Sarah also serves as a resource to GDB staff and cultivates partnerships with peer organizations and universities.



DR. SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE

CANINE HEALTH AND LONGEVITY SURVEY

One project Dr. Sarah is overseeing is GDB's Canine Health and Longevity Survey, which seeks to obtain medical and end-of-life information on GDB's dogs. "These surveys are essential to track medical trends and will help us identify health-related conditions that may not appear early on in a dog's life," says Dr. Sarah. "Very few guide dog organizations conduct regular health surveys of this magnitude, so GDB will be leading the industry with this effort." The results from the survey will be used to guide decision making across all canine-related teams at GDB.

“The best science always starts small,” says Dr. Sarah. To ensure the validity of the survey, people who adopt retired breeders were asked to complete an early version in April 2022. Thanks to 270 survey respondents, GDB has preliminary information regarding the health and longevity of our breeding colony. While the data is currently being analyzed, very few health-related concerns have been identified. Comments in the survey include: “Our retired breeder is aging gracefully!” and “She’s doing really well for a 13-year-old!”

WHAT’S NEXT

The next step for this research involves sending the survey to people who adopt GDB program dogs and regularly collecting health updates. “Many diseases that affect dogs have a heritable component, so the more information we know about the diseases our dogs develop, the healthier our GDB dogs can be,” says Dr. Sarah, noting that it’s equally helpful to know if a dog has been healthy and disease free. “To help the GDB dog and client teams of tomorrow, the collective support of all GDB dogs is needed.”

BENCHMARKS AND SURVEILLANCE

The Canine Health and Longevity Survey represents just one project being conducted at

GDB that helps establish benchmarks for industry excellence. The results from these projects will help Dr. Sarah determine how to best develop a monitoring system to identify opportunities for improvement in real time on everything from breeding and puppy raising, to training and client services. By utilizing historic data and identifying statistically significant trends, evidence-informed decision making can occur earlier. “For GDB this is an exceptionally important piece of the puzzle as puppies that are whelped today will be placed as guides in over a year,” notes Dr. Sarah.

LONG TERM

Canine and Community Operations Officer Kristin Lucas is excited to have Dr. Sarah on the team, stating “she has an amazing breadth of knowledge, a fresh perspective, collaborative skills and industry reputation, as well as a curiosity and a love of dogs and people to help GDB move our canine research forward — all in service to canine success and longevity in partnership with individuals with visual impairments. With Dr. Sarah at the helm, we look forward to strengthening our external research relationships and utilizing our incredible resources to advance our knowledge in the guide dog industry and beyond.”



“To help the GDB dog and client teams of tomorrow, the collective support of all GDB dogs is needed.”

—Dr. Sarah-Elizabeth Byosierra

**KRISTEN INGALZ WITH
GUIDE DOG, BESTIE**



A TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY

December 17, 2022, will always be a special day for Kristen Ingalz. That's when she and her yellow Lab, *Bestie*, graduated as a guide dog team on our Oregon campus. "To say that *Bestie* has changed my life is an understatement," she says.

A few years earlier, Kristen, a wife, mother, and aspiring Japanese translator, was attempting to seek out orientation and mobility (O&M) services near her home in San Jose, Calif. She had experienced changes to her peripheral vision and knew that she needed to learn the O&M skills necessary for safe, independent travel with a white cane. But finding O&M instruction was proving to be difficult.

Kristen attempted to enroll in a formal program but the agency only accepted school-age clients or senior citizens. Kristen then explored do-it-yourself O&M training by watching YouTube videos. Needless to say, the resources were lacking and after several run-ins with overhead obstacles that left her with concussions, she found herself staying home more often. Eventually she only felt comfortable leaving home when she was with other people who could help her remain safe.

OMI PROGRAM

40% of the people who don't qualify for GDB's Guide Dog Training Program lack the foundational orientation and mobility skills to work with a guide dog.

Since the program launched in 2016, 250+ clients have been served.

Fortunately, a friend told her about GDB's Orientation and Mobility Immersion (OMI) Program, and it was exactly what she needed. She quickly applied and attended the course. "I learned more in a week than I did in the previous several years," says Kristen.

GDB's OMI Program also gives clients the opportunity to walk with a guide dog. For Kristen, that walk was life changing. "I wasn't even thinking about getting a guide dog," she said, "but when the guide dog kept me from walking into an overhead tree branch, a light bulb went off in my head. That's when I knew I wanted a guide dog."

Several months later, Kristen entered GDB's Guide Dog Training Program and was partnered with *Bestie*. "When our class went to a nearby Target, I couldn't believe the way *Bestie* navigated around the people and various obstacles in the aisles. I felt safe with her," says Kristen. "Now, I go to the shopping mall, the movies, and the grocery store. I am more involved in my 11-year-old daughter's school functions and enjoy hiking busy trails with my family. I can't tell you how much my life has changed for the better."

Kristen credits *Bestie* for giving her the added confidence to pursue her master's degree to fulfill her lifelong dream of becoming a Japanese translator. "I want GDB's donors to know that in the span of one year, I went from a place of feeling such anxiety over the potential hazards of simply getting around safely to now being able to do the everyday things that most people do. The freedom to live my life on my own terms is truly life altering."



GIVE TO CREATE MORE LIFE-CHANGING PARTNERSHIPS

 **\$50** helps provide a leash and grooming supplies

 **\$100** helps cover a client's transportation costs to class

 **\$250** assists with the cost of a "Puppy Raising Kit" for a volunteer raiser

 **\$500** helps pay for an ergonomic guide dog harness

 **\$1,000** helps support the cost of training a guide dog team

HYBRID PUPPY RAISING PROJECT OFFERS VOLUNTEERS FLEXIBILITY

GDB has a new Hybrid Puppy Raising Project for volunteers in the San Francisco Bay Area who want to raise a puppy but whose schedules make it difficult to attend traditional puppy club meetings. The project is led by GDB staff experts who provide volunteers with support and education through a hybrid model of online trainings, webinars, and in-person workshops. In-person meetings are consolidated to one day on the weekend every quarter, making participation realistic for many people.



“The hybrid project gives me the ability to raise a puppy without the commitment to weekly meetings and monthly outings with a specific group,” says Larry Bowman with puppy *Sandra*. “We have the freedom to raise a puppy in spite of a busy family schedule.”

Jessie Becker with puppy *Asher* feels the same. She says GDB’s staff experts have been great. “They are always available for questions and ready to offer support. They set us up for success.”

Jessie also says the spirit of community so essential to GDB’s traditional puppy raising program is not lacking in the hybrid program. “We are able to connect with the other raisers easily — in person at our quarterly meetings, and through zoom, email, and social media every day.”

While she knows it will be tough to say goodbye when *Asher* returns to GDB for formal training, Jessie says knowing the impact GDB’s dogs have on clients’ lives inspires her to volunteer. “I love knowing that Asher will be such an important part of someone else’s life and that we had a chance to help on his journey.”

Based on early volunteer enthusiasm, GDB hopes to expand the hybrid project to additional geographic areas in the future. For more information, visit guidedogs.com/hybrid.

MEET GDB'S NEWEST BOARD OF DIRECTOR MEMBERS



RHONDA BAKUSKO **TORONTO, ONTARIO**

"It's an honor to join the GDB Board! I am a strong believer in the connections between humans and animals to make the world a better place, and GDB is at the forefront of this important work. It's an exciting opportunity to serve such a world-class organization and help it carry out its mission."

—Rhonda with Cheri's guide dog *Martinez*



CHERI OWEN **SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA**

"I'm honored to be appointed to GDB's Board and support GDB's mission in such a profound and impactful way. I am excited to work with the entire Board to build community, spearhead inventive networking possibilities, and be a positive resource for sustaining the life-changing partnerships which GDB creates."

—Cheri with her guide dog *Martinez*

FUNDRAISE FOR



**PAWSitive
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GDB has launched a new peer-to-peer platform that makes raising money for GDB easy and fun! Visit **fundraise.guidedogs.com** to learn how you can turn your celebrations, athletic events, and more into fundraising opportunities that benefit GDB.

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CONVERSATIONS WITH CHRIS

GDB President and CEO Christine Benninger will be joined by GDB clients for her Annual Update on GDB's programs and plans for 2024.

Tuesday, January 30, 2024 10:30 am PT.

Don't miss this complimentary in-person and livestreamed event. Learn more and register at guidedogs.com/update.

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July 1, 2023 - September 30, 2023

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For more info, please return the coupon below, or call our estate planning team at 415.499.4468.



“As breeder custodians and adopters of two career change dogs, we are proud to be GDB supporters and ambassadors. It is our honor to enhance the lives of others through our legacy planning as our lives have been so enriched by GDB.” —Barry and Linda Leng



GDB CHARITABLE ESTATE PLANNING

- ☐ I have already included Guide Dogs for the Blind in my estate plan. I accept the invitation to be recognized as a member of the Legacy Society.
- ☐ Please send me suggested language to use in my will or trust.
- ☐ I would like to receive information about charitable gift annuities.

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Joan Scott, Planned Giving
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