

Guide Dogs.

Welcome to the official newsletter of Guide Dogs SA/NT - Paw Prints Spring 2021.

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Message from the CEO, Aaron Chia

Thank you for supporting Guide Dogs

Welcome to our August edition of Paw Prints, full of heart-warming stories made possible thanks to your ongoing generosity.

I hope you enjoy reading about six year- old Thomas and black Labrador Vinn; one of our most recent Autism Assistance Dog matches.

As a father myself, I know that we all want the best for our child. I'm so pleased to be able to share that just two months after being matched, Vinn is supporting Thomas to access his community more safely, take part in family mealtimes and settle into bed at night.

To hear what a difference Vinn is already making in Thomas and his family's lives is testament to the vigorous training program our dogs undertake, ably led by our specialist trainers, and of course Thomas and his family's commitment.

I wish Tom and Vinn all the best in their partnership, and hope Vinn continues to bring increased safety,

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inclusion and independence to this wonderful family. Read more on page 4.

I hope you also enjoy reading about two clients closer to my own age than little Thomas! We've recently been so pleased to match Anthony with Guide Dog Kit (see page 6), and Rodney with Guide Dog Dakota (see page 14). Both gentlemen and their dogs joined us at our puppy Graduation event at Adelaide Oval earlier this year, and it was wonderful to hear how having Kit and Dakota by their sides has supported Anthony and Rodney to live their lives to the fullest.

In this edition we shine a spotlight on Puppy Sponsorship. Our regular Puppy Sponsors 'suppawt' our vital puppy breeding, raising and training program and we are so grateful for their commitment. We introduce you to Ivy, an adorable puppy who is keen to 'pupdate' you on her training journey so far.

We also share Melissa's story. Melissa is a University student in Adelaide, who is facing her future with confidence thanks to the efforts of our expert, compassionate staff and the ongoing support of people like you. Melissa has Stargardt's disease, a type of macular degeneration that causes a progressive loss of vision in both eyes.

Whilst Melissa knows her vision could deteriorate at any time, she says "getting support from Guide Dogs has helped me feel less scared. I don't know what

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will happen in the future, but I am already learning the skills that I might need which makes it less stressful for me." Read more about Melissa's journey on page 10.

Finally, I hope you enjoy reading how our long-term volunteer Linda has found 'puppy love' in Hutch. Linda has raised dozens of future Guide Dog and Autism Assistance Dog puppies and says "people always ask me, "How do you give the dogs up?" I tell them, 'This dog is going to help somebody'. What better gift can you give someone?"

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of Paw Prints. Thank you so much for your support.

Aaron Chia

Chief Executive Officer, Guide Dogs SA/NT

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The start of a beautiful partnership

Sam, mum to six year-old Thomas, knows only too well the difficulties often faced when your child has autism.

But thankfully she also knows the amazing impact an Autism Assistance Dog can make.

Thanks to the generosity of people like you, Guide Dogs is able to breed, raise and train highly-skilled Autism Assistance Dogs, providing freedom, independence and inclusion for children with autism and their families.

“Going out used to be very difficult,” says Sam. “Just everyday places, like the supermarket. Tom doesn’t have any awareness of safety, and doesn’t understand why he can’t run off or jump up and down in the trolley.”

“Tom also hated walking. He'd always ask to be carried – something that became increasingly difficult as he grew bigger and heavier. Whenever we drove into a car park, I'd hope there was a close parking space to the shop's entrance. If not, we'd risk meltdowns and Tom trying to run off amongst the cars.”

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Sam reached out to Guide Dogs to discuss the suitability of an Autism Assistance Dog for Tom with Assistance Dog Trainer, Leigh.

"When I first met with Tom, I could see the challenges he and his mum were facing," says Leigh. "At that time I had been working closely with Vinn, a beautiful black Labrador who was close to completing his training. I knew that Vinn had the potential to be the perfect match for Tom."

Leigh worked closely with Tom and his family, helping Tom develop a trusting relationship with Vinn and completing many practice walks. It was the start of a beautiful partnership.

"Tom used to be really wary of dogs," says Sam. "But with Vinn it was different, right from the start. Tom picked up the handle on Vinn's harness straight away." Today, Tom is a much happier child – and is much safer out in the community. I don't panic about finding the perfect parking space anymore," says Sam. "Now we can park around the corner and walk and Tom's happy to walk greater and greater distances with Vinn by his side."

Before Tom and Vinn were matched, Tom also found it very difficult to sit still at the table for mealtimes, often throwing food. Now, Vinn settles down for his favourite snack – a crunchy carrot on his bed, whilst Tom sits up at the table calmly to eat.

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Leigh has since worked with Tom and his family to incorporate Vinn into Tom's bedtime routine. Vinn now joins the family for daily story time, and Sam says "Vinn really enjoys snuggling down to listen to a bedtime story."

"In just two months, I can see just how much Vinn has, and will continue to, make such a positive difference in our lives."

Vinn is making a world of difference for Tom and his family. Autism spectrum disorder affects 1 in 100 Australians and our waitlist of children like Tom is growing.

It takes more than \$50,000 to train an Autism Assistance Dog like Vinn and help transform a family. Can we count on you to help more children like Tom?

Donate now by calling 08 8115 6060 or visit sant.guidedogs.com.au/donations.

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A Pawfect Partnership

It's fair to say that when Anthony describes himself as a 'Guide Dogs veteran', he's not exaggerating.

Although Anthony has more than 40 years' experience as a Guide Dog handler, it was still an incredibly special moment when he was recently matched with Guide Dog, Kit.

Anthony was born with 'full' vision, but lost this instantly after a car accident when he was just 17. It was a difficult road ahead, but Anthony was dedicated to 're-educating' himself. Today Anthony is an accomplished athlete, author and musician in addition to being a passionate traveller. He believes there's no better way to explore the world than with a Guide Dog by his side, and has hitch-hiked across Australia and New Zealand with the support of a Guide Dog. He excelled in Judo, becoming a dual World and Paralympic Vision Impaired Judo Champion, and also twice won the Australia Judo Championships, where he competed against sighted people. He has even 'thrown' former Prime Ministers Bob Hawke and John Howard! In 2018, Anthony was inducted into the South Australian Sports Hall of Fame.

Anthony wrote and published his autobiography and motivational book, 'Achieving the Impossible' and

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has become an inspirational speaker, encouraging people to break barriers and develop leadership skills.

Anthony has become so fond of Guide Dogs that he completed a canine massage course and now runs his own business as a dog masseur.

“It’s a privilege to support Anthony and it was wonderful to have him and Kit join Guide Dogs supporters of the G&I Litter at Adelaide Oval earlier this year to celebrate the graduation of the G&I Litter puppies in-training and our most recent Guide Dog matches,” says Aaron Chia, Chief Executive Officer, Guide Dogs SA/NT.

We wish Anthony and Kit all the best in their future adventures together and thank our supporters for making matches like these possible.

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Changing lives... with your support

Have you ever considered becoming a Puppy Sponsor?

At a cost of more than \$50,000 to breed, train and raise each of our highly-skilled Guide Dogs and Autism Assistance Dogs, we rely on the kindness of generous people like you to 'suppawt' our work.

Our Puppy Sponsors make a regular automatic donation to Guide Dogs, helping set our puppies up for success and allowing a life of independence for people with low vision or blindness, children with autism and their families.

Our Puppy Sponsors' impact begins as soon as a new litter is born. Our puppies' journeys start the moment they open their eyes and continue for the next two years, as they develop the skills and confidence they'll need to prepare for their life-changing careers. Puppy Sponsors share the litters' joys and triumphs through regular 'Pupdates' in the mail and via email, featuring adorable photos, heart-warming videos and training updates written especially for you by members of your sponsored litter.

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You'll even receive an exclusive invitation to their graduation celebration event at the end of your litter's Puppy Development program.

Best of all, your gifts will give our puppies the best 'pawsible' opportunity to change a family's life.

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Ivy's Pawtastic Pupdate

Our 'Pupdates' are normally provided exclusively for our Puppy Sponsors, but we wanted to share puppy-in-training Ivy's first Pupdate with you all as a behind-the-scenes peek...

Hi everyone! It's Ivy here.

It's my first pupdate! I'm a little nervous but very excited. Hopefully, you find what I've been up to interesting. Here we go, woof!

I live with my pawsome Puppy Raisers in Glengowrie...Hope I spelt that correctly, woof. Another puppy-in-training called Royal used to live with us but has recently moved to the Guide Dogs Puppy Development Centre to complete the next stage of his training. It was amazing having Royal with me for a while to learn from a great mentor and someone who has completed the same training as me. Royal taught me how to settle while indoors and also how to play nicely with other dogs.

Life is a blast, I am always eager to meet new people and explore new places. I am lucky enough to go on lots of training outings around Adelaide, visiting local shopping centres, cafes, gardens, public transport and more. I feel very honoured to wear my puppy coat and have access to places most dogs couldn't

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explore. Although I have to remember I am training and can't lose focus on the task at paw.

Training is very enjoyable! I love making my Puppy Raisers proud. I am doing well with recall and settling in busy public places. On the other paw, I am still a puppy, and learning what is right and wrong. For example, I now understand that landscaping and digging up the backyard is best left to the hoomans, woof! Every day I'm learning new things.

Although I have LOTS of energy and love to train and play, I also LOVE to nap. You'll find me snoozing at my Puppy Raisers' feet whenever there's a bit of quiet time. Carrots are my favourite treat and I really enjoy playing with any toy that squeaks...my Puppy Raiser's on the other hand...not so much. Woof!

Wowee, I think I need a carrot and a nap now. My puppy paws are tired from all this typing. Thank you so much for your support, you give me the best pawsible chance to becoming a Guide Dog, Autism Assistance Dog, Facility Dog or Therapy Dog.

Licks and cuddles,

Ivy

Ready to become a Puppy Sponsor today? Please call 08 8115 6060, email puppies@guidedogs.org.au or visit sant.guidedogs.com.au

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Bright future for Melissa

20-year-old Melissa has been working with Guide Dogs since 2012. Thanks to your generosity, Melissa is able to live independently and achieve her goal of studying at university.

At Guide Dogs SA/NT, we work side-by-side with people of all ages and vision levels, and provide services across South Australia and the Northern Territory.

Meet Melissa

Melissa grew up in Renmark in South Australia's Riverland, where she enjoyed a typical country childhood; camping, fishing and riding motorbikes with her family and friends, and also learning to bake with her grandmother.

When Melissa was just 11 years old, she began complaining of headaches especially after spending time reading or writing.

"Everyone in my family wears glasses, so at first we thought I might just need to get a pair of glasses as well," Melissa said. "I had my eyes tested and they realised it wasn't as simple as needing glasses, but they couldn't give me a specific diagnosis."

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Melissa visited different specialists and underwent numerous tests. Around six months later, she was officially diagnosed with Stargardt's disease, a type of macular degeneration that usually occurs before the age of 20. It causes a progressive loss of central vision of both eyes.

Melissa and her family first reached out to Guide Dogs for support nearly 10 years ago for an assessment of Melissa's school environment.

Melissa also attended several Life Skills Camps run by the team at Guide Dogs, which support children and teenagers with low vision or blindness to work towards their goals for improved independence, confidence and wellbeing while connecting with their peers.

Sadly, there is no cure for Stargardt's and Melissa knows the progressive nature of Stargardt's means her vision could deteriorate at any time.

Melissa has regular Orientation and Mobility training with Guide Dogs, ensuring she has the skills and confidence to maintain her independence now and in the future. She started training with an Identification cane and is now learning to use a long cane.

"I don't know how much vision I will lose in the future, or when. I need to learn skills now so that I'm prepared for further changes to my vision," Melissa says. "The thought of losing my vision scared me in

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the beginning, but now I just try and take it day by day.

"Getting support from Guide Dogs has helped me feel less scared. I don't know what is going to happen in the future, but I am already learning the skills that I might need which makes it less stressful for me."

Today, Melissa is studying a Bachelor of Social Work at University in Adelaide. She has spent more time in Renmark recently because of the pandemic, but plans to return to live and study in Adelaide full-time next year.

The team at Guide Dogs has also supported Melissa to use Assistive Technology to make it easier to read text on screens, such as her computer.

Melissa has also had training to help her safely and confidently navigate public transport, including night time travel, and developed road crossing and landmarking skills which helped prepare her for the move from Renmark to the much busier environment of Adelaide city centre.

Thanks to the kindness of our supporters, Melissa is able to live independently in student accommodation with the right support and planning. "I need to be organised and keep things in the same place," she said. "If I move things, or someone else moves things, it can be more challenging."

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After University, Melissa hopes to work for a governing body, focusing on the treatment of people with disabilities and identifying and improving ways people access services. She also has a passion for supporting children in foster care.

“When I’ve accessed services, I’ve always had someone to guide me so I would like to be that person who can help someone else.”

Can we count on you to help more young people like Melissa? Donate now by calling (08) 8115 6060 or visit sant.guidedogs.com.au/donations

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Puppy Love Changing Lives

Puppy Raising with Guide Dogs is a Volunteer role like few others, and we couldn't be more grateful for our wonderful Puppy Raisers.

A Volunteer Puppy Raiser opens their home – and their heart – to a puppy as they prepare for their life-changing career as a Guide Dog, Autism Assistance Dog, Facility Dog or Therapy Dog.

The aim of the Puppy Raising program is to nurture puppies so they are well-socialised, confident and focused before they embark on their formal training.

Puppies are ready to join their Puppy Raisers between eight and 10 weeks of age and remain in training until they come of age.

Long-time Guide Dogs SA/NT Volunteer, Linda Wood, says you never forget the moment a new puppy bounds into your home.

"You always remember the first time you pick a puppy up from Guide Dogs," she says. "In December 2019, we picked up this tiny Black Labrador puppy, Remy. I brought her home and I was thinking, 'Oh, she's just so cute!'"

"It was incredible seeing her grow and learn and become a beautiful, confident dog."

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It might be the puppy dog eyes that draw you in, but it's the pride that you feel knowing you've made a real difference in someone's life that keeps you involved.

Linda is now approaching 10 years as a Volunteer with Guide Dogs SA/NT. In that time, Linda has raised or cared for dozens of puppies.

"By raising a puppy for Guide Dogs, you feel like you're giving back," Linda says "You have the chance to guide the puppies and give them a good start."

Each Puppy Raiser is partnered with a Guide Dogs Puppy Raising Advisor, who provides support and practical advice through the puppy's training period.

"The Puppy Raising Advisors are there for you practically 24/7 and they want the dogs to succeed just as much as you do," Linda says.

"The trainers give you advice and make it easier. Over the years, I've learnt so much and I'm more confident than I was when I first started as a Puppy Raiser."

"When a puppy learns something new, it's very rewarding to think 'Wow, I did that!'"

Guide Dogs SA/NT also covers the costs associated with raising a puppy, including food, toys and veterinary care.

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“The only thing I can’t resist is buying a squeaky toy for the dogs!” Linda says.

Guide Dogs Puppy Raisers integrate puppies into their daily routines, introducing them to a range of new experiences and environments.

Over the years, Linda has taken puppies to football games at Adelaide Oval, shopping centres, cafes, on public transport, the hairdresser and even a trip to the Yorke Peninsula.

“Having a dog with me hasn’t affected my day-to-day life at all. The only difference is that people stop to talk to you all the time!” Linda says.

Linda also discussed her Puppy Raising plans with her employer, who was supportive of her bringing a puppy into the workplace.

“My team leader went to Human Resources (HR) and told them I wanted to be a Puppy Raiser and bring a dog to work,” she says.

“They said, ‘Yes no problems’. The dogs would mostly just sleep under my desk during the day. Everyone got on board and supported what I was doing.

“Every Friday used to be a casual day and we’d make a donation to a charity in exchange for wearing casual clothes. We had a day where we donated all

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proceeds to Guide Dogs and my team made cupcakes.”

“We even had a ‘puppy’ shower for one of my dogs, Yuki, who was chosen to be a breeding dog and was pregnant at the time.”

Linda has also made good friends through volunteering with Guide Dogs SA/NT, including a couple she still meets regularly for coffee.

Of course, saying ‘goodbye’ to a dog at the end of the Puppy Raising journey can be difficult.

Linda believes this is outweighed by knowing you have helped to change the life of a person with low vision or blindness, or a child with autism, and their families.

Plus, there’s always the opportunity to raise another puppy!

“People ask me, ‘How do you give the dogs up?’” she says. “I always tell them, ‘This dog is going to help somebody’. “What better gift can you give someone?”

Are you interested in learning more about becoming a Puppy Raiser? Please call (08) 8115 6050 or email hr.volunteer@guidedogs.org.au

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A perfect match: Rodney and Dakota

It's always a very special day at Guide Dogs when we confirm a match between one of our highly-skilled Guide Dogs and its new handler.

Thanks to the ongoing generosity of our supporters, Guide Dog Dakota recently arrived in Adelaide from Sydney into our client Rodney's life – and heart.

Rodney, a father and grandfather, was born with Congenital Glaucoma, a rare condition caused by incorrect development of the eye's drainage system before birth. This leads to increased pressure within the eye, in turn gradually damaging the optic nerve.

Before his vision decreased, Rodney regularly walked Adelaide's Linear Park Trail and hiked Morialta Falls.

Today Rodney has no vision remaining in his left eye and tunnel vision in his right eye.

Rodney reached out to Guide Dogs in 2013 for support with maintaining his freedom and independence. He worked side-by-side with our expert team for Occupational Therapy, cane training and assistive technology, then joined the waitlist as a high-priority candidate for a Guide Dog.

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Rodney needed a Guide Dog that would complement his walking style and share his love of the outdoors.

Through the Guide Dogs national collaboration, Rodney's perfect match, Dakota, was found in New South Wales. The pair immediately hit it off on their first matching walk and after extensive training together, graduated exactly three months later.

"I'm so proud that Guide Dogs was able to provide training to Rodney, particularly given the extra challenges posed by the COVID19 pandemic," says Aaron Chia, Chief Executive Officer.

"As an organisation we embraced innovative practices to offer socially-distanced training and went above and beyond to support people like Rodney, providing continuity of care wherever possible."

"We are thrilled that Dakota is supporting Rodney to be active again and live life the way he wants. We wish Rodney and Dakota the very best on their partnership."

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A partnership to advance generations of Guide Dogs

Did you know that nationally, our dogs eat 95 tonnes of ADVANCE™ food every year? Guide Dog training certainly works up a healthy appetite!

We feed our dogs ADVANCE™ from Puppy Raising and training right through to graduation. We know our dogs are getting the best food possible to maintain their health and energy so they are ready to take on the exciting adventures that every day brings.

Labradors are highly motivated by food rewards so our Guide Dog Trainers use ADVANCE™ kibble to reward dogs during training activities to reinforce good behaviours and to let them know when they have done a particularly good job.

ADVANCE™ is one of Guide Dogs Australia's longest standing partners, having supplied their Australia-made super premium dog food for our dogs across Australia since 2004.

This incredible support has provided the very best start for generations of life-changing working dogs, and helped our organisation support more Australians living with low vision or blindness, children with autism and their families.

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