

Hello, my name is Darinka Lecnik-Urbanc. I run SLO-CANIS, the premier guide dog school in Slovenia and I'm proud to say we were recently accredited by the International Guide Dog Federation. SLO-CANIS is a member of the European Guide Dog Federation (EGDF) and I am a member of the board. David Adams, the President of EGDF, could not be here today and has asked me to deliver this paper on his behalf.

## Guide dogs – 100 years of progress

Most people associated with guide dogs know that they are not new. The excavations near Pompeii found evidence of guide dogs back in 79 AD. Throughout history guide dogs appear in artworks, literature and other records. If you are interested, there is an excellent history of guide dogs prepared by Canadian National Institute for the Blind online at <http://www.cnib.ca/en/living/safe-travel/Pages/history-dogs-0807.aspx>

So, guide dogs are not new, but they really got going operationally during the First World War, when German soldiers returned home blinded by poison gas. The movement grew rapidly in Germany and fascinated an American woman named Dorothy Harrison Eustis, who studied training methods and began her own school in Switzerland. Her writings came to the attention of another American, Morris Frank, who started his own guide dog school in America with his famous guide dog Buddy. After this, the number of guide dog schools proliferated rapidly in the period between the two world wars.

In 1948, the United Nations launched the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Eventually this was supplemented by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006. This was a major step forward, as we will see later.

Since 1916 much progress has been made.

- Breeding programs have been developed so that dogs are genetically selected to have a good temperament and live long healthy and productive lives.
- Training methods have improved as animal psychology has developed and trainers shared their knowledge.
- Recent development of a questionnaire which predicts puppies' suitability as guide dogs before they enter costly training.  
[https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2017-06/uon-nth061417.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2017-06/uon-nth061417.php)
- Matching of dogs with their blind partners and training of those partners has become more scientific.

- Standards have been set, both by IGDF and Assistance Dogs International, which means negotiations regarding access have a firm platform.

However, despite all these developments, what use is a guide dog if it can't go places? This is where we come back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UNCRPD. As these were adopted by countries around the world, the notion of disability discrimination began to take hold and we saw the introduction of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 and the adoption by the European Union of the UNCRPD in 2010. So, we reached a point where notionally it was wrong to deny a guide dog access to anywhere his human partner can go.

However, in practice, every day there are problems and we fight against these discriminatory situations, whether it's taxis, museums, restaurants or any other place open to the public. Even though the guide dog movement expanded rapidly in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and EGDF has over 50 members in 25 different countries, there are still countries with no guide dogs. Most recently we assisted our member in Turkey to start their first guide dog school, which now has two guide dogs and one trainer to cover a population of 80 million. Lithuania still has no guide dog school and we are working on it.

Every day we make a little progress, but there is still a lot to do. The UNCRPD is a permanent and ongoing statement of intent. The UN's recent 17 Sustainable Development Goals, set measurable targets for the period from 2016 to 2030.

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300> They include and emphasise the rights of persons with disabilities for the first time, which means we have more powerful arguments to support our cause. European countries are working together through their national standards bodies to develop European standards for the training of all types of assistance dogs and their handlers. This follows successful programs in various provinces of Canada and some other countries.

Progress over the past 100 years has been a progression of small steps. There is still much to do. We need to keep working hard to make progress and currently have a petition at the European Parliament. Please sign our petition and make sure your representatives fight for the rights of guide dogs and assistance dogs.

<https://petiport.secure.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/petition/content/1140%252F2015/html/Petition-No-1140%252F2015-by-Mark-van-Gelder-%2528Dutch%2529-on-behalf-of-the-European-Guide-Dog-Federation-and-Assistance-Dogs-Europe%252C-on-access-rights-for-persons-who-require-assistance-dogs-within-the-European-Union?>

Thank you.