



Guide Dogs Association of the Blind



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Dogs are said to be man's best friends. This phrase is never more true than when the man is blind. Techniques of training and use of guide dogs have improved greatly. Better trained guide dogs have been found to improve the mobility and lives of blind persons all around the world, initially in Europe, then the United States, Canada, and subsequently Australia, New Zealand and recently Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Singapore is the latest to be added to this list. The Singapore Parliament, on 19 September 2005, addressed the issue of use of guide dogs by blind individuals.

The use of guide dogs for safe and effective orientation and mobility for the blind will lead to better opportunities for education, employment and recreation. The white cane has been the primary tool of mobility for the blind in Singapore. However, guide dogs will add a new dimension to their lifestyle and allow them to do what most sighted people take for granted.

The need to support the use of guide dogs in Singapore was first highlighted when a blind Foreign Service staff of the United States Embassy came to Singapore to work from 2002 to 2004. In his words, he felt "trapped" in a "first-world nation with a worse than third-world social support service system that denied basic human rights of the blind for a guide dog!" In those days, he was hampered from taking the Singapore Mass Rapid Transit (SMRT) trains as "pets" or animals were not allowed at stations or on trains. This US Foreign Service staff was told that his only means of getting around Singapore was either to walk

or to take taxis. However, the taxis then would not allow him to take his dog either.

The Guide Dogs Association of the Blind has made much headway since then. Before governmental legislation was implemented, most public establishments were unwilling to allow guide dogs into their premises. The most notable exceptions were Alexandra Hospital and Parkway Parade Shopping Centre, both of which welcomed guide dogs into their premises in November 2005 before governmental legislations were introduced to allow guide dogs into such places. Since then, the ever insightful Singapore government ensured that public service departments, general establishments and other privately owned places serving the public were open to the use of guide dogs.

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Some of our notable achievements include:

1. Guide Dogs Inc. of San Rafael, USA, agreeing to provide trained guide dogs free of charge to the blind in Singapore. At the same time, it will provide training for the blind to use these guide dogs. Those “fortunate” enough to be approved to get a dog will be provided training in the USA with free board and lodging.
2. The Singapore government through the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports has further issued requests to all public and government-owned and operated establishments to allow the blind and their guide dogs freedom of access.
3. The Singapore Mass Rapid Transit (SMRT) and Singapore Bus Services (SBS) have allowed guide dogs on their trains and public buses since 1987 and 2005 respectively.
4. The Housing Development Board (HDB) made amendments to the “only small dogs” rule so that the properly trained guide dogs which are usually large Labrador retriever dogs are now allowed in their high-rise homes on a “case-by-case” basis since August 2005.
5. The National Environmental Agency (NEA) has also amended the Public Health Act to allow guide dogs into restaurants and food centres since 1 January 2006.
6. ComfortDelGro, one of our local taxi companies, has started a training programme for taxi drivers to accept guide dogs in their vehicles since September 2006.

The GDAB has also been very encouraged by the mass media for their help with our public awareness activities and programmes. These programmes will continue to be needed to integrate guide dogs into our society.

The Singapore public has shown tolerance, support and approval, and in many cases, even adoration for the working guide dogs of the GDAB.

The blind dreams of being able to move about easily and spontaneously and this will only be possible if they can have access to a properly-trained guide dog. To this end, the GDAB will continue their work to introduce properly-trained guide dogs and their proper integration into our society.

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In Appreciation

Guide Dogs for the Blind, USA

Honors

A/Prof Au Eong Kah Guan

Thank you for your support in promoting public access for the people of Singapore who enjoy safe and independent travel through the use of guide dogs.

Bob Phillips
Bob Phillips, President and CEO



Guide Dogs for the Blind—using our power of partnering to improve quality of life.
Guide-Dogs FOR THE BLIND
www.guidedogs.com

Leading the way for more **guide DOGS**



You may have seen or heard of Kendra, the only guide dog for the blind in Singapore.

The Labrador Retriever, who belongs to Mr Kua Cheng Hock, president of the Independent Society of the Blind and a patient of Alexandra Hospital (AH), has attracted many curious onlookers – whether on the MRT or in restaurants.

Hopefully, with the setting up of a new body – Guide Dogs for the Blind Singapore – more visually impaired persons here will get to benefit from having a guide dog.

Adj. A/Prof Au Eong Kah Guan, Head and Senior Consultant of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at AH, will be its Vice-President.

Indeed, AH has been very supportive of the guide dog movement here, and was the first healthcare institution to allow such dogs on its premises.

On March 11, it held a mini-symposium for the public to generate awareness and acceptance of guide dogs. Guest speakers were Mr Bob Peterson, from Seeing Eye Guide Dogs for the Blind, New Jersey; and Ms Susan Armstrong and Ms Jenna Robinson from Guide Dogs for the Blind, San Francisco.

GUIDE DOGS WELCOME!

Alexandra Hospital (AH) has taken another step to be a patient-friendly hospital by being the first medical establishment in Singapore to allow guide dogs on its premises.

This is a move applauded by Mr Kua Cheng Hock, president of the Independent Society of the Blind, who hopes to see more guide dogs, like his Labrador Retriever Kendra, being used in Singapore.

Adjunct Professor Au Eong Kah Guan, Head and Senior Consultant of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at AH, who had championed this special cause for the blind, explains: "We know that many blind people can benefit from the use of guide dogs. However, the use of guide dogs is practical only if as many places as possible are accessible to these people and their dogs. Since the blind also need to use medical services like everyone else, we want to make Alexandra Hospital accessible to them even if they are using guide dogs."

Mr Kua says: "With guide dogs, we can move around a lot faster and safer. When we use a cane, we use it to look for obstacles. However, a guide dog is constantly avoiding obstacles and this helps a great deal."



Photo: Au Eong Kah Guan, AH (2)