# Dog Guide Handlers Australia Newsletter - March 2023

Welcome to the first edition of the DGHA newsletter for 2023. In this edition, you will find a variety of informative articles including:

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## Chairperson’s report

Hello everyone,

I hope this newsletter finds you well and looking forward to some cooler weather now that Autumn is here.

### New committee member and newsletter editor

I’d like to welcome Stephanie Mitchell to our committee as our new Newsletter Editor! Thanks for stepping up Stephanie, we hope you enjoy this role and we look forward to a good read every season. Please remember, we love contributions from members and supporters, so see below how you can contribute.

### Advocacy

Just a friendly reminder that our online [Dog Guide refusal reporting form](https://dgha.org.au/dgha/) is still open. We understand that reporting refusals is tedious and tiresome and can retraumatize, but if you can, please report refusals as having supporting data will help us resolve the number of refusals in the long run.

Unfortunately, refusal of Dog Guides is not a problem that will be solved overnight. Myself and Francois Jacobs recently attended an Assistance Animal Roundtable facilitated by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, Ro Allen and Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Dr Ben Gauntlett on Tuesday 7 February. This meeting was brought about through the hard work of Nina Smith from Travel Paws. I’d like to acknowledge the relentless advocacy work Nina has been doing on behalf of the Dog Guide and Assistance Dog communities, she has really put our issues under the noses of the right people. There were representatives from the major Dog Guide training schools across Australia, Assistance Animals Australia, and Blind Citizens Australia who were represented by Francois. The purpose of the roundtable was for the Commissioners to hear directly from the people who are affected by discrimination against working dogs and this was well achieved. Each representative was given time to share their organisation’s work, research, experience and proposed solutions to the problem. It was promising to know that our issues were well articulated by all present, and that we have been heard, even though there is not a well-articulated solution at this stage. While the Australian Human Rights Commission does not have the power to enforce laws, they do have the ability to inform and advocate on our behalf to the Attorney General and expressed their willingness to do so. Representatives were invited to contribute their work, research, potential solutions to the report that will be written in response to this meeting. It is reassuring to know that we now have a channel of communication and that the foundation work has begun in bringing a more favourable outcome in our direction.

It has been suggested by several of our members that we lodge a class action and the DGHA committee are currently investigating this option.

### Teleconferences

Watch this space, we are planning two teleconferences in the next few months, Monday 3 April and Monday 5 June, both to be confirmed when speakers are confirmed. The topics we are intending to cover are around advocacy around access to taxi and rideshare services and what might be involved in lodging a class action. If you have a suggestion for a topic or speaker, we’d love to hear from you!

## Lost in the crowd - navigating Japan's Dog Guide shortage

The story of Dog Guides in Japan started in 1938, with the arrival of a young American tourist and his trusty German Shepherd. It wasn't long before the National Guide Dog association in Japan was established, and four more German Shepherds named Rita, Astor, Podo, and Luthi became heralded as heroes. Since then, the eleven Dog Guide schools train around 150 dogs a year, and there are approximately 1500 handlers in Japan.

But here's the catch - there's a shortage of Dog Guides in Japan, which is a major problem because it means fewer people with vision impairments are benefiting from the freedom and companionship that Dog Guides offer.

One of the biggest challenges facing Japanese handlers is the lack of acceptance and understanding of guide dogs within Japanese society. Unfortunately, stores and transportation facilities have been known to refuse entry to dog guides, which seriously undermines the independence of people with vision impairments.

Thankfully, the Act on Assistance Dogs for Physically Disabled Persons was established in May 2002 to address this issue. This legislation mandates that public facilities such as stores and hospitals accept guide dogs, mobility service dogs, and hearing dogs that serve people with physical disabilities and if you're an individual who uses an assistance dog, you are required to control your dog's behavior and elimination habits, and display a sign indicating that your furry friend is a certified assistance dog. Assistance dog organizations are also required to breed high-quality assistance dogs to ensure that the needs of guide dog users are met adequately. Japan still has a way to go though - visiting Japan with a Dog Guide can be a challenge due to the need to apply to the national association of guide dogs in Japan.

So there you have it - the story of Dog Guides in Japan. While there may be a shortage of Dog Guieds, the love and dedication of these furry companions have helped people with vision impairments lead more independent and fulfilling lives. So let's keep spreading awareness and support for Dog Guide users, and maybe one day, everyone will understand the value of a loyal canine companion.

## Dog Guide Contracts and my aged care

The information below is a contribution from one of our members. They underline the importance of thoroughly reading and understanding agreements between Dog Guide handlers and Dog Guide training agencies and other service providers such as NDIS and the Home Care Package Program (HCCP) before signing.

It is highly recommended that all Dog Guide handlers request accessible copies of any agreement proposed by a Dog Guide agency well in advance of the signing date. This is so the handler can be fully aware of the general contents and financial obligations proposed in the agreement on both sides, and so that any unclear matters can be discussed and any necessary changes negotiated etc.

Particular attention should be paid to the following:

* The time of the agreement; i.e. is it for the term of the handler's working life with the Dog Guide? or is it for one year, two years, etc, and if so, what is the procedure for agreement renewal.
* Will there be a charge for ongoing Dog Guide support services provided by the training agency, or can charges be made in the future at the agency's discretion?
* If there is, or may be, a charge, who or what will be charged for the cost of ongoing Dog Guide support services, such as follow-up visits?
* If you are a senior handler and in receipt of a Home Care Package, the agency may, as in the case above, want to charge your package for these services. So if this is to happen, it must be written into the agreement in specific terms and only with the handler's consent. If consent is given, it should be on the condition that the charge is discussed in advance of an upcoming service with the handler and not with his other Home Care provider. The discussion must be about whether, in the handler's view, the proposed charge can be afforded, given the current level of their package funding, and what other needs have to be paid out of the package at the time. The handler is not obliged to divulge to the agency the amount of funds in his or her package at that time nor what other needs have to be financed out of the package. The handler should stress in the agreement that the agency is to deal with him or her directly and not contact his or her Home Care Provider about Dog Guide matters. If a handler feels that a reasonable charge for services can be accepted due to sufficient free funding being in hand, then the agreement should state that all invoices for service are sent to them to pass on to the package provider in due course.
* If an agency wishes to propose fees for ongoing Dog Guide services, then the fee amount should be fixed in the agreement and not open to arbitrary increases by the agency. Also, the number of service visits per year should be fixed and stated clearly, again, so the number per year cannot arbitrarily increase, thus potentially increasing the cost to the handler.
* It should be stated in the agreement that regardless of any charges for follow-up services mentioned in the agreement, no charges will be made for Dog Guide problem-solving visits by trainers, as this is the responsibility of the dog-guide agency and not the handler.

## Conference update

Our conference committee are buzzing with excitement at the moment, things are starting to fall into place for the DGHA conference in August. We’ve secured a couple of sponsors and funders already, including Guide Dogs Victoria’s Connected Together Grant!

We know people are keen to get flights and accommodation booked so we’ve shared the code GROUP15 for you to get a 15% discount on accommodation when you book at the conference venue, Royal on the Park in Brisbane. You can book by calling Lisa on 07 3112 1609 between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday or [book on the website](https://www.hotelsone.com/brisbane-hotels-au/royal-on-the-park.html?as=g&aid=396141845640&dsti=582734&dstt=8&nid=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA3KefBhByEiwAi2LDHATfqyQTElzVgtk4QWCvBNqEDSR3kZxJ5jemrXqOrAQPq4btacR4HxoCwq0QAvD_BwE&fbclid=IwAR1mSH5hvjmgvUsGvJooldhHtFPhI9KiyW53w0Hi3ewHrcXoW6IhhJdrrto). Please note: the website may not be accessible with a screen reader. So a phone call is recommended.

We’re planning to open registrations on 1 April so please keep an eye out for this, if we can get this happening sooner we will. We’re also in the process of organising pre and post conference activities with several organisations on 3,4,7 and 8 August and will share these with you once confirmed.

I’ve had a couple of members express their concerns about attending the conference alone. I’d like to reassure you that you won’t be left alone at the conference (unless of course, you want to be!). We’ll have volunteers and helpers to make sure everyone can find what and who they need and we’ll leave no one behind.

Here's a question for you… what do Dog Guide Handlers drink instead of cocktails?

Why, DogTails of course! We hope your travel plans will include our DogTail party on Friday night, 4 August!

## DGHA information

### How to Join DGHA.

There are two categories of DGHA memberships. Full Membership: $20.00 for any Australian who is blind or vision impaired and who is a Dog Guide Handler Associate Membership: $10.00. Any other person who is sighted, blind or vision impaired supports the objectives of DGHA.

If you are not already a member of DGHA and wish to be, please visit our website and fill in the accessible membership form. We welcome full memberships for Dog Guide handlers and associate memberships from Dog Guide trainers, puppy raisers and friends and family of dog guide handlers.  The joining page on our website is at  <http://dgha.org.au/dgha/membership/>

### Sign up for this newsletter

If you know someone who may be interested in receiving this newsletter, for example, a new Dog Guide handler, a puppy raiser or your instructor, please send their email address to us (with their permission) by reply email or to [dgha@dgha.org.au](mailto:dgha@dgha.org.au), and we’ll add them to our list.

### Contribute to this newsletter

We welcome your input into this newsletter. If you have a story, an idea, or a review of a doggy product you love, don't hesitate to contact Stephanie by emailing [newsletter@dgha.org.au](mailto:newsletter@dgha.org.au) email address to discuss your contribution.

### Contact Dog Guide Handlers Australia.

Email: dgha@dgha.org.au

Website: www.dgha.org.au

Twitter: @DGHAustralia via <https://twitter.com/dghaustralia?lang=en>

### Disclaimer:

Views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or DGHA. Any advice is general in nature and should be checked with relevant schools, your vet or other relevant authorities.