DGHA Newsletter Autumn 2024

This newsletter was written by Annette Ferguson, Chairperson, on behalf of the DGHA committee.

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# We’re all in this together: the slow burn of systemic advocacy

Sometimes, it feels like nothing is changing and I hear the defeat in our Facebook group and in Handlers I talk to. We are still refused by taxi and rideshare drivers, airport security and booking flights with a Dog Guide can be difficult, hotels and motels want to charge us extra cleaning fees, the list goes on, there are so many challenges.

But let’s toss the doom and gloom to the side and have a look back over time. Big things don’t change quickly. Nothing the blindness and low-vision community or any other minority group has fought for happened overnight. Blind Citizens Australia outlines [‘A modern history of the fight for audio description in Australia’](https://www.bca.org.au/adontv/) on their website and, the Powerhouse Museum shared this [podcast about the 15 years it took to get the audio tactile PB/5 pedestrian crossing button](https://powerhouse.com.au/stories/push-to-walk) to become a regular installation at all Australian traffic lights.

Taking on the Chairperson role for DGHA in 2022, I’d hoped that in two or three years, I’d be able to tick a few boxes and claim that I’d had an active role in solving some of our refusal issues. Well, that didn’t happen. The steep learning curve I encountered taught me many moving parts need to be aligned, and there are many layers to wade through to make the significant changes we need. It became very clear why these boxes have not been ticked yet. I learned that you also need to be with the right people in the right place at the right time, something you can’t always plan.

There is no magic bullet that will suddenly make it all ok, but we mustn’t give up in despair. Making those refusal issues go away involves:

* Gathering data to demonstrate the scope of the problem
* Discussions with leaders, regulators, policymakers and Handlers to help everyone understand where the problems are and work out solutions
* Educating new and all Australians about laws and best practices that support our Dog Guides
* Changing policies, processes and regulations in various industries to support inclusion and eliminate discrimination
* Updating our legislation to be more specific about the definition of a Dog Guide or Assistance Dog and how we identify and verify them
* Implementing a national Assistance Dog/Dog Guide identification method
* Making complaint processes simple and accessible
* Improving communications and transparency about the processes and outcomes of complaints
* Educating the Dog Guide Handler community about their responsibilities in creating and maintaining a culture where they are respected, included and safe.

Gaining full acceptance of our Dog Guides is a complex task that will happen over time with a team effort. There are no quick fixes, but all the little wins along the way will eventually add up. Guide Dogs Australia, Vision Australia, Blind Citizens Australia, our schools in each state, and many others are advocating in many ways on our behalf. Here are three wins we’ve had lately.

* [Penalty increase for refusal of an assistance animal or an assistance animal in training](https://www.pointtopoint.nsw.gov.au/news/penalty-increase-for-refusal-of-an-assistance-animal-or-an-assistance-animal-training-0)
* [Uber enhances support for riders with assistance animals by introducing new training course, firmer consequences for drivers who refuse trips](https://www.skynews.com.au/australia-news/uber-enhances-support-for-passengers-with-assistance-animals-by-introducing-new-training-course-firmer-consequences-for-drivers-who-refuse-trips/news-story/9119f9fbe7dc71bb165503ba299b35c5)
* [Making some noise for safer vehicles](https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/c-king/media-release/making-some-noise-safer-vehicles)

## What can members do to assist with advocacy?

While advocacy fatigue and burnout are real, we understand that it can be traumatising to recount your refusal experience when reporting it. However, helping us collect data on refusals across Australia will help with our collaborative efforts with schools and other agencies to advocate for change. When there is no data, we have no proof that there is a problem, and we need that proof. [You can report your refusals on our Google Form here](https://forms.gle/TYRmGxCnTHtCgeCP7), or email the details to [dgha@dgha.org.au](mailto:dgha@dgha.org.au). If you need help letting us know about a refusal, please phone Annette on 0421 972 447 or Erika on 0419 918 264.

# Community advocacy resources

I’m always impressed by the wisdom and helpfulness of the DGHA community, and I was not disappointed in the two member meetings we held in April and May to develop community advocacy resources. The intention for this was to create content for fact sheets, posters, stickers and tiles that educate business owners and the public on how to behave around Dog Guides and people with vision and hearing loss. We’ve come up with four posters/fact sheets and a good selection of social media tiles and stickers. Once we distribute the finished products, members will be able to print and display the posters or fact sheets in their local community, order stickers to share or display, and share the digital versions on social media and in e-newsletters. The finished designs will be distributed to members and available on our website in the next month.

# Next conference

Thank you to all who attended our Members’ Meeting on International Guide Dog Day in April. We had some lively discussions about our next conference. It was unanimous that the venue and timing preference for our next conference will be Perth in 2026. This will give you plenty of time to save your pennies for a lovely adventure to the Wild West.

# DGHA merchandise

It’s coming soon! We’ll have t-shirts, bags, mugs, caps, and hats, all with the DGHA logo on them. Watch this space!

# Help us grow DGHA

We’re on a mission to grow DGHA. For us to ‘keep the doors open’, we need a steady stream of new members to cover our considerably low running costs. Our fees are a once-off payment for lifetime membership of $10 for associate members and $20 for full members. Thank you to the members who have joined recently!

We’re actively approaching all the schools in Australia to seek support from them by sharing this [invitation to join DGHA](#InvitationToJoinDGHA) with their new and existing Handlers and we love that the ones we’ve approached so far have all been so keen to help.

If you have friends who are Handlers, please share this [invitation to join DGHA](#InvitationToJoinDGHA) with them so they can have the opportunity to support and be supported by our community.

## DGHA stats

FYI, here are some stats on DGHA

We currently have 211 financial members and 955 members in our Facebook group. We’d love to bring those numbers closer together. We have financial members in all seven states and territories in Australia, with the majority in Victoria and NSW, followed by Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory, and the Northern Territory. 166 members are full members and 45 are associate members.

# DGHA Reflections

Have you had a look at [the DGHA Reflections page on our website](https://dgha.org.au/reflections/)? There are some lovely stories about our faithful working friends on there. If you’d like to contribute a story or reflection of your Dog Guide, please email [dgha@dgha.org.au](mailto:dgha@dgha.org.au).

# Help Guide Dogs Australia with some airline advocacy

Our friends at Guide Dogs Australia are working with the aviation industry to improve the in-flight experience for Dog Guide Handlers. When it comes to the absorbent mats our dogs are required to sit on, they’d like to know what type of mats or beds we bring with us when we fly so they can assess potential safety issues and provide education to staff. Please share what bedding you might travel with, including brand and product name, material, size and any other details you may have, by emailing [dgha@dgha.org.au](mailto:dgha@dgha.org.au).

# Oh Crap partnership

We want to remind members and their friends, families and networks that DGHA has established a partnership with Oh Crap Poop Bags.

Since we began this partnership in the second half of 2023, we’ve racked up 21 orders and $111.55 in earnings! Thank you to everyone who has placed an order.

When you [purchase Oh Crap products through this link](https://www.ohcrap.com.au/?ref=dgha&utm_source=partner), you receive a discount, and DGHA gets a small percentage of the payment as well.

# DGHA information

## Invitation to join Dog Guide Handlers Australia

DGHA is a peer-led organisation run by a small committee of volunteers who are all Handlers.

The purpose of DGHA is to provide a community where Handlers can connect and learn from each other and share experiences of navigating the world with a Dog Guide by their side. We also support and contribute to systemic advocacy to ensure that legislation, policies and practices support our rights as Dog Guide Handlers.

We offer members:

* An active Facebook group
* An email news list and a regular newsletter
* Member teleconferences throughout the year
* And a biennial face-to-face conference.

We use the generic term ‘Dog Guide’ to include Guide Dogs, Seeing Eye Dogs, Stapell Working Dogs and any other working dog used by someone with low vision or blindness as a mobility aid in Australia.

DGHA has two membership categories offering lifetime membership. Our modest membership fees as well as donations (see below for how to donate) cover our minimal running costs.

1. Full Lifetime Membership, $20, for any Australian with low vision or blindness who uses a Dog Guide. ‘Dog Guide Handler’ includes any Australian resident who currently uses a Dog Guide, past Dog Guide Handlers, Handlers who are in between Dog Guides, and are awaiting a replacement dog, any person registered as a client of a Dog Guide school to receive a Dog Guide, or any person exercising as an owner-trainer, who has an accredited Dog Guide.
2. Associate Lifetime Membership, $10, for any other person who is sighted or lives with low vision or blindness, who supports the objectives of DGHA.

We encourage employees of Dog Guide organisations, including trainers, instructors, and puppy raisers, to join.

We make every effort to ensure our Facebook group, teleconferences and face to face conferences are safe, accessible and welcoming for everyone. While our members often share their experiences of what works and doesn’t work for them, and how they navigate challenges as a Handler, these are individual opinions and experiences only and not the opinions or advice of DGHA. We do not provide professional advice; we recommend consulting your instructor about training-related advice and your vet for advice on the health of your Dog Guide.

We hope you’ll come and join our community.

You can [**join online by visiting the DGHA website membership page**](https://dgha.org.au/membership/) or email [**dgha@dgha.org.au**](mailto:dgha@dgha.org.au).

You can [**make a donation via PayPal**](https://www.paypal.com/donate?token=scbrNbAEvE79wKUajK6UtCSfQtggN7oA6Pw-tD5TwOWBT6cKC8VBeghx7A2kKxXGC3jxyIF2DBZ1xDZo) or [**find our electronic funds transfer details on our website.**](https://dgha.org.au/membership/)

## Have you updated your contact details lately?

If you’ve moved house, changed your email or phone number, been matched with a new Dog Guide or know another member who has, please email new details to [dgha@dgha.org.au](mailto:dgha@dgha.org.au) so we can update you on our database.

## 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). 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 email us at [dgha@dgha.org.au](mailto:dgha@dgha.org.au) to discuss your contribution.

## Dog Guide Handlers Australia

Email: [dgha@dgha.org.au](mailto:dgha@dgha.org.au)

Website: [www.dgha.org.au](http://www.dgha.org.au)

### \*\*Disclaimer:

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