

The official newsletter for Guide Dogs SA/NT

Welcome to our first edition of Paw Prints for 2021.

Page 2 and 3

## Message from the CEO, Aaron Chia

I'm very proud to reflect on our recent activity, and I offer my sincere thanks for your loyalty to Guide Dogs for continuing to make our vital work possible.

In this edition of Paw Prints I invite you to read about three very special Guide Dogs clients.

21 year old **Sacha** has been successfully matched with her first Guide Dog, Jesse. Like her Mum, and long-term Guide Dogs client, Alison, Sacha is legally blind. Our team has worked with Sacha since she was just three years old. Sacha has touched the hearts of many of our staff.

It's wonderful to see that Sacha and Jesse are a fantastic match, and I wish them well as they begin their journey together. Thanks to the generosity of people like you, we will be able to support Sacha and Jesse for the lifetime of their partnership and beyond. Read more on **page 14**.

**Maree** shares how Autism Assistance Dog Vixen has changed the life of her ten year old daughter, Madeline. Madeline has autism spectrum disorder, and until Vixen

came into their lives, even the simplest of tasks felt impossible for the Murphy family.

We shared Madeline's story in our Christmas appeal and I'm thrilled to announce that you donated an incredible **\$46,790**.

Maree says "Madeline has absolutely no sense of danger. Before Vixen came into our lives, everyday activities were extremely difficult. But with Vixen by Madeline's side, we know our little girl is safe. As parents, that is absolutely priceless." You can read more about Madeline and Vixen on **page 10**.

And thanks to your ongoing support, Guide Dogs is supporting 11 year old Kodi with Orientation and Mobility training as he commences high school. Kodi is testament to the life-changing transformation a white cane can offer someone with low vision or blindness. Read more on **page 4**.

In February I was privileged to host a very special event. Every year, we invite our Puppy Sponsors to attend a Graduation ceremony. Nearly 300 guests joined us at Adelaide Oval to celebrate members of the G and I Litters on completing their puppy training journeys. Find out what Gem, Gilbert, Gizmo, Imani and Iris are up to now on **page 8**.

Apollo was a very special four-legged guest at Graduation. Apollo represents a significant Guide Dogs milestone – he is our first Facility Dog placed in a South Australian primary school and is changing the lives and school experience of students with autism spectrum disorder, severe disabilities and behavioural challenges. Read more on **page 6**.

You may have heard that we are looking for some very special people to open their homes (and their hearts!) to a puppy-in-training. Raising a puppy is a special commitment that requires lots of dedication, but nothing compares to the feeling of making a real difference and giving people with vision impairment, children with autism, and their families, the freedom to live an independent life. Find out more on **page 12**.

Finally, I thank all those across Australia who walked their dogs as part of PAWGUST last August – collectively we raised a staggering **\$1,605,222**.

I trust you will enjoy this edition of PawPrints, and I offer my heartfelt thanks for your support.

**Aaron Chia**

Chief Executive Officer,  
Guide Dogs SA/NT

Page 4 and 5

## **Kodi's 'cane-do' attitude**

Eleven year old Kodi is testament to the life-changing transformation a white cane can offer someone with low vision or blindness.

A white cane is the mobility tool of choice for the majority of people with low vision or blindness because of its practicality, and the way it can give sensory feedback about the surrounding environment.

A white cane is also an important visual signifier to others in the community that the person has low vision or blindness.

Use of a white cane is often one of the first skills our clients learn as part of orientation and mobility training and, for children, a white cane may be the key to their first experiences of independence and freedom. It is a tool they will count on throughout their life.

“Regardless of your age or level of vision, it’s important to be able to move safely and with confidence through any environment you want to explore,” said Aaron Chia, Chief Executive Officer of Guide Dogs SA/NT.

For children with low vision or blindness, like Kodi who lives in Mount Gambier, their first white cane opens up a world of possibilities.

Kodi got his first white cane when he was three years old,” his mum, Julie, said.

“He was a bit unsure about it until his big brother dubbed the cane “Kodi’s magic stick”. It was the perfect name! Kodi’s cane gives him the power to do things he might not otherwise do.”

“Because Kodi was born without vision, he’s had to learn about the world differently. Now he’s eleven and growing in confidence with each training session.”

“His Orientation and Mobility Instructor, Karyn, works side-by-side with Kodi to develop the skills he’ll need to be safe and independent as he makes his way through life,” Julie said.

**“With my cane, I can go anywhere and do anything!”** Kodi, Guide Dogs client

It’s estimated there are over 575,000 people who have low vision or blindness in Australia. While 70 per cent of those are over the age of 65, current estimates suggest one in every 2,500 children born in Australia will be diagnosed with a severe loss of vision.

“Around 60% of our clients use a white cane as their primary mobility aid, showing just how important they are in giving people with low vision or blindness the chance to live the life they want,” Aaron said.

“We all learn how to interact with the world from the day we are born... With a single white cane, a child with low vision or blindness can find this freedom too.”

Page 6 and 7

## Apollo's class act

Black Labrador Apollo has been changing the lives of students at Kidman Park Primary School in Adelaide's west.

A specially trained facility dog, Apollo works with children with autism spectrum disorder, students with severe disabilities and children with behavioural challenges.

From supervising yard duty and helping out in the Learning Centre, to rewarding well-behaved students, Apollo is very popular at the school. Apollo also participates in school events and has enjoyed his very own birthday celebration, class photos and was even presented with a Certificate of Graduation at the Year 7 Graduation Ceremony, where he donned a mortarboard and bowtie for the occasion.

**“A specially-trained Facility Dog can have enormous benefits on student wellbeing,” said Aaron Chia, Chief Executive Officer of Guide Dogs SA/NT.**

Amanda Walker, Assistant Principal and Apollo's handler, agrees. “We've done some research around the effects dogs have on kids and their wellbeing and mental health and we discovered that around the world

it's becoming more of a trend to have dogs in settings such as nursing homes and schools.”

“We do walks together where I have a chat to the kids and they hold Apollo's coat handle and debrief about what's happening for them and how they're feeling.”

“Alternatively, if a student has completely shut down, Apollo will kind of nuzzle his way in and they'll soon start talking about what has happened and why.”

Apollo has also been supporting children living with severe multiple disabilities, in the school's Learning Centre, where he wears a sensory jacket.

“That's probably the most labour intensive part of Apollo's work here because he has to focus really hard and make contact with wheelchairs,” Amanda said.

“The teachers have noticed real progress in these kids. When they see Apollo they're willing to push themselves to reach and grab something off of his sensory jacket.”

Apollo has laid a great foundation for the use of Facility Dogs in South Australian schools and is a testament to the impact these important dogs have on the learning outcomes and overall wellbeing of students and staff.



Page 8 and 9

## **G&I Litter. Where are they now?**

**Almost 300 Guide Dogs supporters joined us on 10 February at Adelaide Oval to celebrate the graduation of members of the G&I Litter.**

Puppy sponsors, corporate supporters, major donors and board members were among the guests eager to hear how far Gem, Gilbert, Gizmo, Imani and Iris have come since starting their training journeys two and a half years ago.

“Graduation represents a major milestone in the lives of our puppies-in-training,” said Aaron Chia, Chief Executive Officer, Guide Dogs SA/NT. “It’s one of my favourite events on the Guide Dogs’ calendar, as we celebrate the many ways our working dogs make a difference to people’s lives.”

### **Imani**

#### **Brood**

Imani is Iris’ quieter, more cautious sister. She takes her training very seriously and loves nothing more than a belly rub. She has a beautiful temperament and so much potential that she has been selected as a brood.

It is hoped that Imani’s calm temperament and willingness to learn will be passed down to her puppies so they can also go on to change the lives of people with vision impairment, children with autism, and their families.

Once Imani has nurtured the next generation of Guide Dog puppies, she will continue her career as an Autism Assistance Dog.

## **Iris**

### **Facility Dog at Wirreanda Secondary School, Morphett Vale**

Social butterfly Iris's friendly and enthusiastic nature was evident from a young age. She loved training and learned quickly, progressing into a confident dog who is calm in busy situations, adaptable and loves children. Iris loves her 'imPAWtant' role working with young people at risk of disengaging from education, where she provides companionship, comfort and emotional support.

## **Gem**

### **Pet Dog**

As the only girl in the G Litter, Gem had to outdo her brothers for attention – and often succeeded! Sweet, affectionate Gem decided a career as a working dog wasn't for her, and is now bringing joy to the lives of a retired couple where she has fun all day long in their big backyard.

## **Gilbert**

### **Facility Dog, The Society of Saint Hilarion Aged Care Facility**

As the largest member of the G Litter, Gilbert has found his perfect career as a Facility Dog in a residential care

setting. Gilbert, known as 'Handsome Boy' brings joy to residents, supporting them with physical and mental wellbeing whilst enjoying lots of pats. On weeknights and weekends, Gilbert stays with his primary handler, Milani where he unwinds with more cuddles and goes to sleep with his favourite toy 'Teddy'.

## **Gizmo**

### **Pet Dog**

As a puppy, Gizmo was cheeky and adventurous. He loved exploring new places, meeting other dogs and running around as fast as he could!

Gizmo is now enjoying life as a pet dog. He is adored by his new family, including two teenagers and his new best friend, Amber the Golden Retriever.

## **A perfect match: Madeline and Vixen**

**It's truly heartbreaking to meet a family in despair. And all too often, when a family of a child with autism approaches our team, they are close to breaking point.**

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

Adelaide mother Maree Murphy can attest to the life changing difference one of these very special dogs can make. When her ten year old daughter Madeline was just three years old, she was diagnosed with level three Autism Spectrum Disorder – the most severe kind of autism.

“At eighteen months old, literally overnight, Madeline lost all the words she knew. Madeline didn't say a single word again until she was six years old. Madeline's early years were very challenging. She has no sense of danger whatsoever. She has escaped from the house, jumped into pools or run onto the road countless times. “Many everyday activities were impossible for our family. A trip to the hardware store would see Madeline eating leaves from the plants. At the supermarket she would climb the shelves or attempt to climb inside the milk fridge.

“We knew we needed more support the day Madeline pulled away from my hand and ran onto a busy six-lane highway in the middle of peak hour. Miraculously, there was a gap in traffic, and no harm was done.”

“The day I met the Murphy family, they were in real distress,” remembers Guide Dog Mobility Instructor, Lisa. “Madeline was just seven at the time but was a master escape artist. “Her parents were at their wits’ end. It was clear to me that Madeline needed much more support. She needed an Autism Assistance Dog to keep her calm, and in turn, safe.”

## **Lisa had the perfect dog in mind; yellow Labrador Vixen.**

“Vixen is an amazing dog. She flew through her training, passing with flying colours. She’s totally laid-back – nothing fazes her. She’s very confident, robust and is totally at ease being part of a busy household – an ideal match for the constant noise and chaos that’s inevitable in a house with three young children.”

“Vixen is the most wonderful, loving dog,” agrees Maree. “She has made such a difference to our family. Madeline finds it very difficult to form close relationships with people, but will happily snuggle up with Vixen. Their bond is just beautiful.

“She’s an extremely intuitive dog – she can just sense when Madeline needs space, and will hang back. She is often the first to know when Madeline will benefit from

physical touch, and will snuggle up beside Madeline or put her head in her lap.

“Watching my daughter walk safely with Vixen by her side is just wonderful. At ten, Madeline doesn’t want to have to hold her mum’s hand all the time – and as she gets bigger, I can’t guarantee I can physically stop her if she tries to run away.

“With Vixen by her side, I know that Madeline is safe. As a parent, that is absolutely priceless.”

Vixen has given Madeline the gifts of peace, independence and safety. Autism spectrum disorder affects 1 in 100 Australians, and our waitlist of children like Madeline is growing.

It takes more than \$50,000 to train an Autism Assistance Dog like Vixen and help transform a family.

Can we count on you to help more children like Madeline? Donate now by calling 08 8115 6060 or visit [sant.guidedogs.com.au/donations](http://sant.guidedogs.com.au/donations)

Page 12 and 13

## **Puppy Raisers wanted!**

### **Can you help us raise the next generation of Guide Dogs, Autism Assistance Dogs or Facility Dogs?**

We are looking for some very special people to open their homes (and their hearts!) to a puppy-in-training. Become a volunteer Puppy Raiser and play an invaluable role in the development of our puppies as they prepare for their imPAWtant careers.

Working side-by-side with Guide Dogs staff, you will introduce a puppy to a range of new experiences and environments as part of your daily routine and help them prepare for formal training.

Raising a puppy is a special commitment that requires lots of dedication, but nothing compares to the feeling of making a real difference and giving people with vision impairment, children with autism, and their families, the freedom to live an independent life.

**“We were inspired to become Puppy Raisers after learning how these dogs can change people’s lives. The best part is the satisfaction we feel when dogs graduate and go to their new homes.”**

Margaret and Ray, volunteers for almost 12 years

## Frequently asked questions

### What do I need to become a puppy raiser?

Lots of energy, patience and love! You also need to have a driver's licence and access to a vehicle 24/7 in case of emergencies.

### What happens if I want to go on holiday?

No problem! Our volunteer boarders are always happy to look after an adorable puppy-in-training.

### How much time do I need to commit to raising a puppy?

You'll need to take your puppy to weekly training sessions at Guide Dogs in Adelaide (or within the metropolitan area) as well as dedicating time to exposing your pup to new environments. Puppies should also never be left alone for more than four hours at a time, and even less for younger pups.

### Can I take the puppy to work?

You'll need to seek permission from your employer, and they'll need to be understanding that young puppies need regular toilet breaks, occasionally have toileting accidents and may make some noise.



## **A pawsome result!**

**Our annual PAWGUST fundraising challenge sees people and their pooches take to the streets last August to walk 30 minutes a day – no small feat in winter weather!**

Participants encourage their friends, family and colleagues to help them raise funds for Guide Dogs. This year our supporters raised over \$130,000 in South Australia and the Northern Territory - unPAWlievable! This will enable Guide Dogs to help breed, raise, train and supPAWt 32 Guide Dog puppies across Australia.

Want to learn more about being part of Pawgust 2021? Pre-register today at **[pawgust.com.au](http://pawgust.com.au)**

## **A perfect match: Sacha and Jesse**

**You may remember reading about a special young woman; Sacha.**

Guide Dogs has been working with Sacha since she was just three years old. Sacha has touched the hearts of many of our staff.

Like her Mum, and long-term Guide Dogs client, Alison, Sacha is legally blind.

A determined little girl, Sacha learnt to use a white cane when she was just four years old.

“Even when I was little I wanted to do things on my own. With the help of Guide Dogs, I learnt to use a white cane when I was four, then when I was older I learnt to travel independently using public transport,” Sacha explains.

Now, Sacha is all grown up and is more determined than ever. Like many 21-year-olds, Sacha is beginning the next stage of her life. She is currently at University, studying a double degree in Media and Computer Science with a major in Japanese.

“Growing up, Mum has always had a Guide Dog, so I always kind of knew I’d be matched with my own dog one day,” says Sacha.

**“Being matched with my own Guide Dog was an incredible feeling – it’s so freeing.”**

“I can’t wait to be able to travel freely through the city. I’ll be able to explore new areas and take new routes, knowing I can trust Jesse. I’ll be able to walk through Rundle Mall, even on a busy day, which is something I’d never have contemplated before.”

“I’m so looking forward to agreeing to meet friends at whatever location they suggest – and not have to ask them to always meet at a place I know well. That’s huge.”

Sacha has spent several weeks working closely with Guide Dogs Mobility Instructor, Patrick.

“From their first trial walk, it was clear Sacha and Jesse were a team. Sacha is smart, ambitious and a brisk walker. Jesse is the perfect dog for her!” says Patrick, Guide Dogs Mobility Instructor.

Jesse appears to be the perfect match for Sacha. “Jessie is speedy, focussed and very cheeky,” says Sacha. “I describe her as a tiny pocket rocket! She’s a great match for me – we’re both very fast walkers.”

Thanks to the support of people like you, Sacha is able to look forward to the future with Jesse by her side with confidence.

**“A Guide Dog will give me the confidence to take on life’s challenges and spend more time out and about doing what I want to do.”**

Page 15

## Get your paws on the pawfect gift!

All proceeds go to supporting our puppies-in-training.

### A4 Notebook

The pawfect sketch pad. \$8

### Training clicker

The pawfect tool to train your dog. \$8

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Includes mini harness. 23cm tall. \$8

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\$3.50 each

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