

Fifty Years of Dedication to Safe and Comfortable Mobility

The Japan Guide Dog Association (JGDA) marked its 50th anniversary in 2017 and commemorated the anniversary on October 6, 2017, at the Keio Plaza Hotel in Tokyo. More than 600 people from across Japan attended the event, including guide dog users, volunteers and representatives from supporting organizations. The event was uniquely spectacular due to the presence of approximately 180 guide dogs accompanying the participants.



Yukihiko Inoue, our president, gave the opening address, in which he said, “We will uphold our commitment to earnestly serving the visually impaired.” In response, a representative of guide dog users expressed their gratitude to countless supporters, saying, “guide dogs are a precious gift we’ve received from society through JGDA.”



Paul Metcalf, the chair of the International Guide Dog Federation, one of the guests, gave his congratulatory address and said that JGDA has been playing an important role in observing the global standards of guide dogs following the IGDF's strategic objectives.



The guide dog program in Japan is included in governmental welfare policies for visually impaired persons. Organizations for guide dog training are licensed by the laws and granted subsidies by some local governments where guide dog users reside. However, these public subsidies are insufficient; over 90 percent of the program cost is covered by the private sector.

Additionally, the laws stipulate visually impaired persons carry a cane or be accompanied by a guide dog when walking on streets. Guide dogs are thus legally recognized. Under the laws, JGDA was established in 1967 as the first juridical foundation for training guide dogs in Japan. We sent a total of 851 guide dogs to visually impaired persons by the end of July 2017. As of March 2017, 951 guide dogs were at work in Japan. Of them, 232 were trained by our school.

Looking back on its history, we could not operate on a full-fledged scale in the beginning. For its first 30 years or so, it had to work on a limited scale, such as renting guide dog training locations from farms. However, thanks to government support and donations from private entities, we opened the Kanagawa Training Center in 1997, Sendai Training Center in 2001, Fuji Harness at the foot of Mt. Fuji in 2006 and Shimane-Asahi Training Center in 2008. Now, it is the largest guide dog training organization in Japan with four training centers and 120 staff members.

Immediately after the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, we set up support headquarters at the Sendai Training Center. It provided relief to all visually impaired persons hit in the quake by involving government offices. In

another program, the Shimane-Asahi Training Center collaborated with the Justice Ministry to work on a new attempt to involve inmates in raising puppies.

We work to provide safe and comfortable mobility with guide dogs for visually impaired persons without sacrificing any persons or dogs, and to train guide dogs while respecting animal welfare. Our training program has shifted its main concept from training for obedience to education, working under the supervision of Sam Tawada, who has been serving as an IGDF assessor for more than 20 years. The shift stemmed from the belief that guide dogs are required to have the ability to act proactively and choose the right solution on their own from among different options, deciding by themselves, and, as a result, secure the safety of persons walking with them.

The manager of the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry's Department of Health and Welfare for Persons with Disabilities reported that the Ministry had sped up its preparations to smoothly accept assistance dog users from overseas, working toward the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympic Games. The Association, too, is willing to provide support in collaboration with IGDF member organizations to help guide dogs from overseas obtain short-term certification to work in Japan.

Throughout the event which lasted for over 5 hours, none of the 180 guide dogs present in the venue barked even once. IGDF Chair, Paul Metcalf was amazed to watch these dogs' good behavior and said that it was the fruit of the high-quality training provided by JGDA.

JGDA will continue training 50 guide dogs a year on a regular basis without resting on the fruit of our work from the past 50 years. We will also strive to help build better social environments where visually impaired persons can walk with guide dogs without anxiety and be active in society.

