



A Monthly Newsletter for Friends of Dog Guides



World Autism Awareness Month

April is World Autism Month and the demand for Autism Assistance dogs continues to rise as more people are being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). According to a 2019 Canadian Healthy Survey on Children and Youth study, 1 in 50 Canadian children and youth aged 1 to 17 years were diagnosed with ASD. In addition to this, seizures are more common in individuals with autism than in the general population. ASD is a condition related to brain development that impacts how a person perceives and socializes with others, causing problems in social interaction and communication. The disorder also includes limited and repetitive patterns of behavior. There are three functional levels of autism.

The Three Functional Levels of Autism

ASD Level 1 Requiring Support	ASD Level 2 Requiring Substantial Support	ASD Level 3 Requiring Very Substantial Support
<p>difficulty initiating social interactions</p> <p>organization and planning problems can hamper independence</p>	<p>social interactions limited to narrow special interests</p> <p>frequent restricted/repetitive behaviors</p>	<p>severe deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication skills</p> <p>great distress/difficulty changing actions or focus</p>

The Autism Assistance Dog Guide program assist children (ages 3-12) on the autism spectrum. These Dog Guides provide safety, companionship and unconditional love. With such diverse clients, the dogs are specifically trained to fit each individual after completion of basic training.

At Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides (LFCDG), we celebrate and share stories in hopes of strengthening the understanding and acceptance of those with autism. Together, we can ensure that these individuals are supported and celebrated while we work towards a more inclusive world.

With the help of our supporters, our amazing instructors are able to continue training these dogs and matching children on the spectrum with their loving companions. Register for our upcoming annual Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides and help us continue to provide Autism Assistance Dogs to those in need of them. Visit www.walkfordogguides.com to donate and register today!

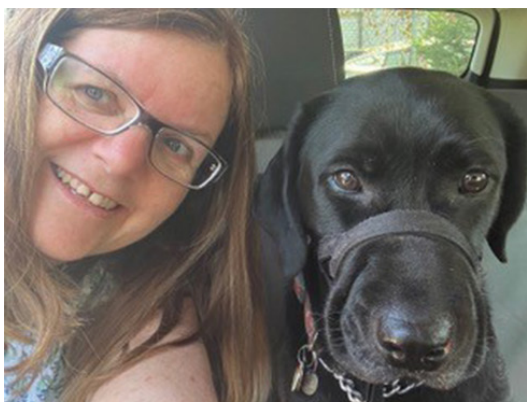
Donor Recognition

Paying it Forward

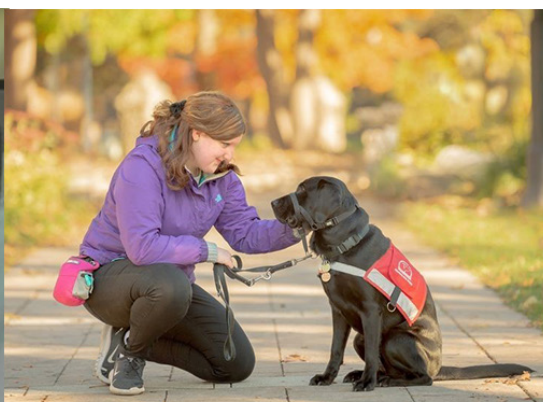
Cathy Law became a Dog Guides Guardian in 2023.

"Our family is forever grateful to Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides, their financial sponsors and donors who support the organization," Cathy says. "LFCDG's continued financial support allowed my daughter Madi to be matched with her hearing Dog Guide Echo almost 3 years ago. After being matched with Echo, Madi's life has enriched and she became more independent; her confidence boosted because she feels more secure knowing Echo is at her side to keep her safe."

Echo entered a pivotal moment of Madi's life, just before she was going into her first year of university. From the start, Echo has attended university classes with Madi - from lecture halls to theatre/studio classes. Madi is set to graduate in 2024, with Echo by her side.



Cathy and Echo



Madi and Echo

“I choose to give monthly to the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides to pay it forward and allow LFCDG to continue to train and match Dog Guides with people living with disabilities,” says Cathy. Like Madi, someone living with a disability will benefit from the help they receive from a trained Dog Guide making it easier for them to live independently.”

[The Dog Guides Guardians monthly giving program](#) is seamless for our donors and has a low administrative overhead for us. Dog Guides Guardians, like Cathy, get the benefit of automatic donations while knowing that their gift goes each month to help match more life-changing Dog Guides to people who need them. Guardians receive a consolidated annual tax receipt each year at tax time.

[Become a Guardian Now](#)

Autism Assistance Team – Cosmic and Jason’s Trip to BC

At the start of March, Wilma and Case Pronk went on a trip to BC to visit family with their son, Jason, and his Autism Assistance dog, Cosmic. They had not seen Jason’s grandparents for a year and a half, so they had planned a four-day trip to spend time with them. They had flown before with previous Autism Assistance dogs, but this was the first flight they had with Cosmic and not something they would attempt without him. Wilma happily shared their experience from this trip:

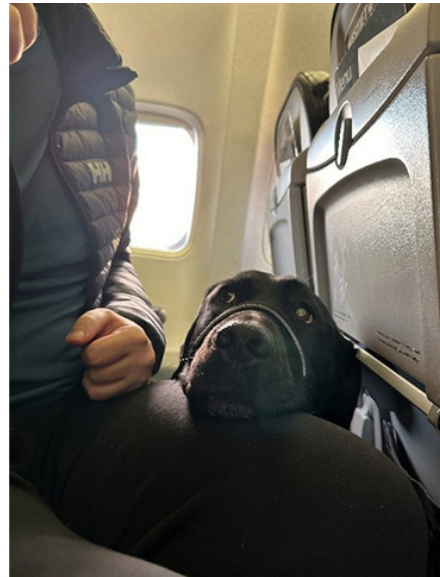
“Taking Jason anywhere can be quite a challenge so a trip like this was really, really big. The main thing is that he just needs a dog with him. Jason has had one for 16 years, and he will not walk without his dog. If he didn’t have his dog, we would be grabbing him by his sleeve trying to drag him along. Now when we tell him to grab his handle, he grabs it, and he goes. He just walks. That’s the biggest role for Cosmic with Jason.”

Cosmic is Jason’s fourth Autism Assistance Dog, one of three from Dog Guides. *“It’s really neat because each dog that he’s had has been perfect for him for each stage of his life. It makes our hearts so happy watching them work together. The first time that Jason was attached to a dog when we took him to the park was the very first time he could walk without us hanging on to*

him. It was just freedom. It's allowed us to go so many places even where it's busy. The dog is his lifeline."

Bike riding was one thing the family loved and always felt a bit sad that Jason couldn't participate in. Last year they bought a tandem e-bike where he could sit in front while reclining, and they have another e-bike that has a trailer in the back so Cosmic can join as well!

"Only those who have experienced a child running away and almost being hit on several occasions can understand the joy we have when we see this relationship. The bounce in Jason's step as he walked down the ramp to get to the plane gave us the biggest smiles. We looked at each other and said, 'That's why. That's why he needs his dog.' As Jason always says before going to bed, 'You need dog. Mummy, you need dog.'"



Autism Assistance Dog Guide team – Stephen and Doug

The Lions of Saskatchewan generously sponsored Autism Assistance Dog Guide Doug, and changed the life of a boy named Stephen, along with his family and community.

Stephen was diagnosed with autism in elementary school where he excelled academically but could easily be set off by changes in routine or sensory input. It could take several days for him to calm down from an incident and cause him to stay home. Sometimes he would run home from school as a response to the stressors, which was terrifying for the family living near a valley, river, and busy roads.



However, Stephen's parents noticed how calm he would be when visiting his grandparents' neighbour and spending time with their Hearing Dog Guide, Taylor. Upon realizing this, they worked with their social worker to apply for an Autism Assistance Dog Guide and received Bingo in August of 2016. The difference in Stephen's behaviour was remarkable and the tantrums, uneasiness with schedule changes, and safety were hardly an issue anymore. Laurie, Stephen's mother, recalls how significant this was. "The year before Bingo got into the school, he ran away from school 20+ times - we stopped counting at 20. Since he's had Bingo, he has left only 3 times, with leash in hand."

When Bingo started slowing down, the family applied for a successor dog and received a message in January about a dog that was ready for Stephen, They had their class at the end of February. "The boys had a strong connection from the moment they met. We expected it to take a week or two to get Doug to transition into school, but he was ready after one day of visiting the school! He is helping with sensory overstimulation and calming. He is quietly attending school and preparing to graduate with Stephen."

Growing up, Stephen had not been able to attend school consistently and his parents

were ready for him to spend a few extra years to complete high school. "With the help of his Autism Assistance Dog Guide, Stephen will be graduating on time this June, at the top of his class. In the fall he is moving with Doug to Saskatoon from Moose Jaw to attend University of Saskatchewan."

Laurie and her family are extremely grateful for Doug's sponsorship. "Without a Dog Guide, these dreams would remain dreams. You all have made our dreams come true and have made it possible for Stephen to continue his life journey. Thank you to the Lions of Saskatchewan for your sponsorship of Autism Assistance Dog, Doug, from Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides."

Canine Vision team, Bev and Jensen

Bev Berger, a recipient of six of our Canine Vision Dog Guides, was featured in the Toronto Sun discussing her journey and how her Dog Guides have changed her life. Her pairing with Jensen, a black Lab, makes her the client who has received the most Dog Guides from LFCDG!

"After I received Jensen, I kind of felt like I won the lottery twice because I came home with this great, young Lab and then I find out I'm the 200th sponsorship for Pet Valu, so 'Hello!' It just kind of made it fun."

The [article](#) also features a photograph of [Bev and Jensen](#) taken by her daughter, Stephanie Lee Stephenson, a talented photographer that has beautifully captured her mother's relationship with her dogs. There is also an additional [album](#) of a winter photoshoot with Lotus, her previous Canine Vision dog before Jensen.



Diabetes Alert team Ellen and Vesper

Back in March, CEO of LFCDG Bev Crandell and Diabetes Alert team Ellen with Dog Guide Vesper participated in a TedX Talk in Montreal that focused on LFCDG's matching process. Check out the [TedX Talk!](#)



LFCDG Happenings

Upcoming Events

As we step into this vibrant season, we want to share some exciting updates and upcoming events that we have planned:

Who Let the Dogs Out Open House - April 6th, 9:30 AM to 3:00 PM:

Mark your calendars for our upcoming open house event on April 6th at 152 Wilson St. In Oakville! Join us for a day filled with opportunities to learn about the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides. Meet our dedicated team, explore career and volunteer opportunities, connect with Pet Valu representatives, and discover more about our programs and services, including our career change dogs. Plus, don't miss out on our raffle, featuring incredible prizes like Blue Jays tickets, a signed ball, a round-trip WestJet flight, and an overnight stay at the Walper Hotel with breakfast included. McDonald's Piper Food location will be onsite providing complimentary refreshments.



National Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides Early Bird Special - \$500 Prepaid VISA card:

The National Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides is fast approaching. Be sure to register by May 1st for your local walk and enter for a chance to win a \$500 prepaid VISA card! National Walk Day is on May 26th, 2024, but be sure to see what date your local walk is happening. Visit www.walkfordogguides.com to sign up and get involved.



Oakville Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides – May 26th, 2024:

The Oakville Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides is looking to host a community market place this year, were looking to secure local entertainment, artisans and business to get involved if you or somebody you know would like more information, please email Jennifer Boyd at jboyd@dogguides.com

McHappy Day 2024:

May 8th we will be at select McDonald's locations in Oakville where a portion of sales will be donated to our foundation. Please plan on purchasing from a participating McDonald's May 8th to support our mission and vision.



Ride for Dog Guides Committee Recruitment:

Calling all motorcycle enthusiasts! We're actively recruiting members for the Ride for Dog Guides Committee. The Ride for Dog Guides is a motorcycle ride poker run, and we need your help to make it a success.

Visit www.ridefordogguides.com to learn more and head to our volunteer page to get involved with the committee.



Mississauga Marathon:

LFCDG will be onsite at the Mississauga Marathon with slush puppies to cheer on the runners and spread awareness about our Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our foundation. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities across Canada.

Career Change Program – Oodles of Love with Zoodles

Not all of our dogs are meant for the working life and there's nothing wrong with that! These dogs can make wonderful, loving pets. The Foo Family recently adopted Zoodles, a black Standard Poodle, and they are overjoyed with their newest family member!

"We had heard about guide dog organizations that may have career change dogs for whatever reason who needed forever homes. Zoodles' profile instantly caught our attention with her soft enquiring eyes and great smile. I received an email for an interview with Dog Guides' Career Change department shortly after our application. We were thrilled to learn that we had been matched with her and awaited our meet and greet a couple of weeks thereafter. It was love at first sight after catching a glimpse of her beauty."

"She is a breath of sunshine and energy, giving lots of kisses to everyone she meets. Zoodles became an instant addition to our family, and we couldn't imagine life without her. We feel like we've hit the jackpot and serendipity led us to her. We are very grateful to Dog Guides for providing training for her. She is very intelligent, and we look forward to loving and caring for her in her forever home."



Interested in giving a dog like Zoodles a new home? We have a list of current dogs for adoption on our website and if you would like to receive our adoption newsletter with information on all available dogs, please submit an application to be added to our waitlist.

April 8th Solar Eclipse

[The Canadian Space Agency](#) offers some helpful information, videos, and detailed graphics to learn more about the eclipse's path of totality and how to stay safe during the upcoming solar eclipse. [Time and Date](#) is another useful website with additional details.

Volunteer Corner

National Volunteer Week 2024

Join us in celebrating National Volunteer Week 2024, running from April 14th to 20th, under the theme "Every Moment Matters." At Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides, we recognize and honor the invaluable contributions of every volunteer. Their dedication strengthens inclusivity and wellbeing within our community.

Now more than ever, we appreciate the significance of every moment volunteered. Whether it's sharing time, skills, empathy, or creativity, each contribution plays a vital role in our mission. Throughout this week, let's come together to acknowledge and celebrate the impact of every volunteer, from every role, supporting LFCDG.

Thank you!



Foster Families Needed

Just like humans, our working dogs start off as babies that need to be taken care of, raised, and taught important lessons. With the support of our Puppy Program, foster families play an essential role in the development of our future Dog Guides in the first 14 months of their lives.

Fostering is a fulfilling experience and a unique opportunity to give back. All major costs are covered as Pet Valu generously provides food for all our dogs and veterinary care is given by the organization. If you love dogs and live within 75 minutes of our Oakville and Breslau training facilities, this may be a suitable role for you!

Some benefits of fostering include companionship, the experience of raising a dog without the costs or commitment of a house pet and becoming part of the incredible community of LFCDG.

We are currently looking for fosters to help us raise and train future Dog Guides.

Visit Foster Puppy Program to learn more or to apply to become a foster family.

If you are interested in fostering, please visit [Foster Puppy Program](#) to learn more. All vet, food and training expenses are covered by LFCDG, and all fosters will receive full training and support.



Day School Volunteer – Emily Langton with Abby

Some of our dogs begin displaying signs of stress in the kennel when they start training which hinders their progress in school. Emily Langton, Development Lead at Dog Guides, talked about the positive impact Day School has had on her and Abby, Canine Vision Dog Guide. Since joining LFCDG in September, Emily's been interested in participating in the program because she wanted an opportunity to introduce dogs to her family, especially her mom. Abby, a white Standard Poodle, is Emily's first Day School dog and they've had immense progress with her training since December.



"My first impression of Abby was that she was much more rambunctious than some of the other future Dog Guides I know. I was worried about her energy levels, but after settling into her new routine with us, she calmed down and fell right into her groove. The biggest difference I've seen is that she is much calmer when meeting new people or experiencing new things. Now, she will rarely jump up... I've been told that she's better behaved at school too, which is the best thing to hear!"

Greg Clarke, Abby's instructor in the Canine Vision program was happy to report that ever since Abby started Day School, he has observed a big improvement in her. "She takes less time to settle which means we can start training almost right away and her crate manners have also improved significantly!" says Greg.

As a young person who lives at home, Emily thoroughly enjoyed her time with Abby.

"Volunteering for Dog Guides gave me an opportunity to enjoy the experience of having a dog without all of the costs attached to it. The dog is also in class every day, so the stress of wondering what they'll do while you're at work doesn't exist. It's a great option for a young person, or anyone really, who wants the companionship of a dog without some of the stress and responsibility of owning one. It was a very easy decision for me to make!"

If you would like to open your home to a Dog Guide in training and help prepare them for their future, please visit Day School Program.