



# Israel Guide Dog Center

NEWSLETTER

## EACH OF OUR CLIENTS IS A CHAMPION BUT THREE ARE PARALYMPIANS

Roni Ohayon, Gal Hamrani and Achiya Klein are amazing athletes. Each overcame obstacles to compete in the Tokyo Paralympic Games in August 2021. Fighting through injury, fatigue, and enduring a year-long postponement due to the pandemic, Roni, Gal and Achiya finally were able to represent Israel and compete on the world stage.



people who are blind or visually impaired. Two teams of three players compete indoors on a basketball court with goals at either end. The ball has two bells inside, allowing the athletes to identify its location. All players must wear a blindfold so those with residual vision don't have an unfair advantage. Team Israel finished just off the podium, but in a very respectable fourth place.

Achiya Klein led a four-person mixed rowing team through several heats—ending up competing in the finals! While the team gave it their all, it finished in sixth place. Achiya lost his vision in an explosion in Gaza in 2013, while serving in the IDF.

While our athletes didn't come home with a medal, they are all winners. They bring inspiration and pride to us all. We're excited to see what happens in Paris in 2024! 🐾

These exceptional athletes traveled with their special four-legged companions and guide dogs, Rudy, Dylan and Night! In fact, our delegation was one of a select few permitted to travel with their guide dogs. Most other visually impaired athletes chose to leave their dogs at home – but our dogs acted as ambassadors and drew a lot of attention when they marched in the opening and closing ceremonies.

Roni and Gal are members of Israel's Goal Ball team. Goal ball is the only sport in the Paralympics especially created to accommodate



President Isaac Herzog and the First Lady salute some of the Israeli delegation as they prepare to go to the Tokyo 2021 Paralympics



# What Can We Do About Fake Assistance Dogs?



Pet owners who attempt to gain entry to public places with dogs using fake certification, harnesses, and vests they purchased on the Internet have become a major problem. These dogs (and other animals) are not trained as service

animals and can misbehave and even disturb and attack genuine service dogs and endanger humans.

This problem also creates misunderstanding among the public about genuine assistance dogs and the critical help they provide to people with blindness and other disabilities.

Assistance Dogs International (ADI) has developed a digital ID card that will be issued to accredited assistance dogs and their handlers. The digital ID will enable quick and easy identification of accredited service dogs and help eliminate the problem of pet dog owners who acquire bogus certificates so they can bring their pet dogs and other animals into public places

The digital ID can be stored on any mobile device and includes both photo ID and contact details of the handler, as well as their certified assistance dog's public access license number, microchip details, and accredited training organization.

The Israel Guide Dog Center is a member of Assistance Dogs International and recognizes the importance of ensuring access to all public places for people assisted by genuine guide dogs for the blind, as well as other types of service dogs in Israel and abroad. 🐾



The photo shows a yellow Labrador guide dog puppy wearing a blue vest that says, "Guide Dog Puppy in Training." Our guide dog puppies are allowed into public places by law as part of their training.

## STAFF PROFILE:

# RINA ARBEL

## Volunteer Extraordinaire



### How did you first connect with the Center?

"I worked in the hi-tech industry and after leaving that world, I needed a change. I looked for something closer to my passion which is animals – dogs in particular. I volunteered at a veterinary hospital and then at a clinic. I continued to seek a place that was more positive and meaningful and found the center."

### What is your current role?

"I'm the Puppy Socialization Coordinator in our Puppy Center. I train and guide each of the six volunteers who work in this project. Previously I was one of the Dog Diversion Volunteers, with my pet dog. The objective of the Dog Diversion is to distract the guide dogs in training, and acclimate the dogs to future distractions they will encounter in their work as a guide dog."

### Favorite part of your job?

"Love flows to and from the puppies. It is good for the heart; helps ease the aches and pains of life. I love dogs and working with nice people – there is meaning in this. Dogs are G-d's gift to man. They are all heart and soul and only give. They can teach you so much about being in the moment and knowing how to relax. We can learn a lot from dogs."

### Do you feel you are making a difference in Israeli society?

"Whenever you volunteer you make a change. You make a change in your surroundings, which causes a change in society. Working with and for people with blindness changes society."

## KUDOS TO OUR PUPPY RAISERS!

Each year more than 120 puppies are born at the Israel Guide Dog Center.

When they are eight weeks old, they are given to volunteer foster families who provide them with a warm, loving home, socialization, and obedience training for the first year of their lives. They help the tiny puppies to gradually become accustomed to many changes and stimuli with the help of constant guidance from our professional trainers.



The photo shows eight foster families holding their new puppies. Good luck to all of them!  
Photo: Eli Ben Boher

Our volunteers put these puppies through their paces to acquire the skills they will need as guide dogs, service dogs for IDF veterans coping with post-trauma, or emotional support dogs for children on the autism spectrum. At the end of the year, the puppy raisers return the dogs to our Center for evaluation, specialized training, and partnering with clients.

We are proud of our foster puppy raising families who enable us to provide dogs for people in need! 🐾

### PUPPY RAISING IS OUR MOST POPULAR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

– over 600 people apply every year. Most of our puppy raisers are university students – on campus. We have tracked outcomes and discovered the success rate is higher if the volunteer...

**Doesn't have a pet dog**

**Has no children under eight years old**

**Has no more than two roommates**

**Is over 21 years old**

**Doesn't leave the puppy alone for more than five hours a day**

**Takes two 30-minute walks per day with the puppy**

**Is willing to wait over a year for a puppy to raise**

## THE GUR APP: Technology to Assist Our Puppy Raisers

The word 'Gur' means Puppy in Hebrew



To improve outcomes, we developed an innovative system to gather data, respond to questions, and provide immediate assistance to our volunteer puppy raisers. Gur is a Mobile App, designed for two-way communication between our puppy raisers and our puppy managers. **We are the first guide dog school in the world to make use of this technology.**

The system tracks each puppy and automatically sends out regularly-scheduled tasks and instructions to the puppy raisers. Our puppy raisers enter milestone data for us to track, and each puppy has an updated record in our system. We developed the Gur App with the help of students and staff from the Sami Shamoon College of Engineering and the Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheva.

Through the app, puppy raisers can ask questions and receive almost immediate feedback from our puppy managers. We also hope to add video, so we can see any physical or behavioral problem – in real time.

Our goal is to use the information as a tool to improve the effectiveness of our training procedures. By tracking certain milestones, we hope to see developing patterns and identify marker traits to determine the best career path for the puppies early on either as Guide Dogs, PTSD Service Dogs, or Emotional Support Dogs.

The Israel Guide Dog Center wishes to extend our deep appreciation to the **Taubman Foundation** for their support in developing the Gur App.



## PTSD – “THE INVISIBLE INJURY”

Until recently, Israeli soldiers and veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) did not feel their needs were being adequately addressed by their government.

In a country where almost everyone serves in the military, there is still a culture where a man is considered weak if he can't handle emotional stress. All that changed in 2021, when IDF veteran Itzik Saidyan immolated himself to protest the mishandling of soldiers who had “the invisible injury.”

This tragic and desperate act suddenly put a spotlight on an issue that had long been neglected. Soldiers who experienced the horrors of war during military service were encouraged to come forward and share their experiences, so they could find new ways to cope with upsetting memories and alleviate the frequent nightmares and flashbacks.

The Israel Guide Dog Center began a pilot program in 2017 to train dogs to assist IDF veterans suffering from PTSD. The dogs are trained to recognize when a person is in distress – based on breathing patterns and body language – and respond by using techniques designed to interrupt the episode. First, a PTSD dog will nudge his owner to see if they can be distracted. If that doesn't work, the dog jumps up and licks the person's face until they wake up and/or calm down. Case studies have shown if a person can rely on their dog to consistently wake them from a nightmare or flashback, it greatly reduces the frequency and intensity of their symptoms.



The dog detects the onset of an episode, then jumps up on the bed and licks the face of a person in distress.

Not only do dogs offer a distraction but also help develop a healthy routine. Their partner can no longer just lie in bed and be depressed. They need to get up, let the dog out in the morning, feed and brush the dog, and take the dog on a long walk – so both get exercise. A PTSD dog pushes a PTSD sufferer out of bed, and into a more productive life.

The IDF evaluated our program and deemed us the best provider of PTSD dogs. They urged us to produce more PTSD dogs– even though our main mission is to provide guide dogs for people who are blind or visually impaired. And while we will not deviate from our primary mission, we have agreed to double the number of PTSD Dog Partnerships by 2023. We are proud of this new program and happy to help IDF heroes who need a four-legged best friend to cope with the trauma and torment of their military service—and restore their peace of mind and ability to function. 🐾

To even be considered for a PTSD Service dog, the following conditions must be met:

- Received a “Disability Card” from the IDF
- In treatment with a trained therapist
- The therapist recommends a PTSD Service dog
- Experience severe symptoms on a regular basis
  - Nightmares
  - Flashbacks
  - Anxiety
- Difficulty being in public spaces
- Have a positive attitude toward dogs
- Ability to care for the dog
- Be in reasonably good health – able to take walks with the dog
- Nonviolent – able to control extreme emotions
- Ability to work with and be responsive to our instructor
- Family support
- The dog must be allowed to go to work with you – not left alone.

*The Israel Guide Dog Center is responsible for the dogs and will not put them in an unsafe or unhealthy environment.*

## ETIQUETTE WHEN MEETING A PERSON WHO IS BLIND



Have you ever seen a person with a white mobility cane or a guide dog on the street and wanted to help but not sure what to do? Is it OK to ask if they need help or escort them across the street?

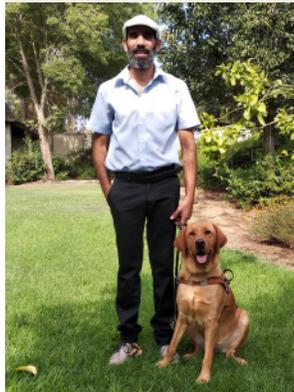
### Here are some etiquette suggestions to make things easier:

- First, ask whether the person needs help before offering it. Asking will not offend them. Let them decide if they need help.
- Don't touch a blind person without warning. They may be startled. Most prefer not to be touched by strangers. Respect their privacy as you would want others to respect yours.
- If a person accepts your offer of help to cross the street, offer them your shoulder or elbow so they can hold on to you. Warn them when you reach the up and down curb.
- When giving directions to a blind person, explain the route in terms they can understand and follow. Pointing and saying "It's over there" is not helpful because the person can't see where you are pointing. Give clear directions such as "the bank is about 50 yards ahead, on the right, just after you cross through the intersection."
- When you see a blind person who knows you, introduce yourself and others with you. This will put the person at ease, so they can respond to you. Playing a game of, "Do you know who this is?" is inconsiderate, and embarrassing.
- When shaking hands with a blind person, keep in mind if you extend your hand, they won't see it. Wait for them to extend their hand and then shake hands.
- You can help a blind person at a bus stop by asking which bus they are waiting for, or telling them which bus has arrived.
- If you are walking your dog, keep it on a leash, and don't let it get in the way or distract a working guide dog in a harness.

## Israel's innovative approach to find jobs for people with disabilities

*"Getting to know people who are different is the best solution for inclusion into society. When that happens, people quickly understand that we are just like everyone else. The best incubator for people's growth is their workplace."*

— GUY SIMCHI, program director and guide dog user.



Guy Simchi was responsible for implementing an agreement between the government and private sector that calls for proper representation of people with disabilities in the workforce. "Histadrut" was established as a social movement that knows how to create fair and dignified employment conditions for Israel's workers.

Histadrut was instrumental in passing legislation that calls for employment of people with disabilities. The

legislation states that if an organization has 100 or more employees, 3% of the workers must have a recognized disability.

There are more than 800,000 workers connected with Histadrut who sit on workers' committees throughout the country – each of which has significant power. Committee heads can pressure management to employ and integrate workers with disabilities and prepare them for this process.

Within five years we will be able to create a totally different society. When a person with disabilities begins working, their fellow workers need some training to address their needs and ensure success. The goal is for every person with a disability who wants to work to be able to enter the workforce as a productive member of society. The percentage of employed people with disabilities should equal that of people without disabilities.

"The solution to understanding people who are different – is simply getting to know them. Working together will show people they are like everyone else," said Guy, "This is a change that will continue for generations to come. From the moment you and I work together, we'll also go and have a beer together after work, and then the sky's the limit."



PROFILE

# BARAK & AMIGO

## Navigating the Journey of Life Together



Barak Yefet had a kidney transplant a year ago which affected his health, recovery, life and business. He spent a year in rehabilitation. His ethnic food business in the Shuk Ha Carmel in Tel Aviv took a financial hit from both Covid and his illness. Barak's brother-in-law stepped in for him during this difficult time.

Barak received his kidney from a widower who had lost his wife and children in a horrific terror attack. The two have maintained a close connection ever since the transplant.

Barak told us, "You ask me why I chose to get a guide dog now. After my recovery something shifted in me, I felt ready to partner with a guide dog. I liked taking care of someone else besides myself. I finally accepted my vision loss. When I used a cane, I used to fold it up and felt embarrassed. It wasn't a good feeling. I would pretend it was something else – some other kind of cane – to trick myself and pretend in front of others."

That was when Barak decided to partner with his first guide dog, Amigo, a large yellow Labrador.

Now, with Amigo by his side, Barak walks proudly through the city. "I love feeling independent... not having to depend on anyone else. I feel confident." Barak struts across the streets with Amigo, and together they traverse the crosswalks. "I trust him. I know he will get me around obstacles. I learned Amigo is trained to disobey a command that could endanger us – that was amazing."

Barak feels a very positive connection with Amigo. "We are a good team and learn through lots of practice. I've incorporated the training techniques well, especially when working in real-life situations. I've increased my verbal communication with Amigo during walks and that has assisted in our teamwork. Amigo is my friend. Truly he has been well named. **I adore him—and the people who made him possible for me.**" 🐾

# WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT GOODBYE

by Liat Mhadipor



*I hate endings, but even more, I hate farewells! But I really love to learn life's lessons.*

Tomorrow, my immediate and extended family will say goodbye to Jeff. After many years of being an integral part of our family, Jeff ends his official role as my sister's guide dog.

It's hard to believe so many years have passed since Jeff became a part of our family – which began the moment they returned home from the Israel Guide Dog Center.

They matched perfectly. Jeff, a cross between a Golden Retriever and a Labrador – is an intelligent and well-trained dog.

Luckily for Jeff, and to my sister's delight (if you can call it that), Jeff will be returning to the couple that raised him as a puppy, and prepared him for my sister. A few years ago, these puppy raisers were students at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev. They were part of a project to foster guide dog puppies in training and prepare them to assist the people who needed them so much.

Now, after eight years, this couple has become a family with children. Jeff will retire to this wonderful family that will pamper and love him for the rest of his life.

There is not enough time to describe all the effort, energy, and love poured into each dog, and describe the significance of this dog to the person that receives it. Jeff was my sister's eyes, but more than that, he was her heart, soul, and the ultimate partner.

I learned an important life lesson from Jeff. My children learned to live with Jeff and to love him. Jeff was a major part of our lives

"To our dear Jeffy, thank you for who you are and what you have taught us. Enjoy your retirement, and go wild, running to your hearts content. Now you can!"

Next time you see a guide dog, don't just think about how cute the dog is, think about how significant this dog is in the life of its blind partner. This is not just any dog!

With love,

Liat

# BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

## PUPPY RAISER STAV MUSSEL & PACO



But won't it be hard to say goodbye to him?

"How many times have I heard this sentence in the last ten months? Since Paco came to me until our last days together, this sentence accompanied me everywhere. And I always tried to find the right answer.

Why say goodbye? We just met, I replied when Paco came to me at the age of seven weeks. A tiny and woolly lump that didn't know the world yet. A lump I carried in my hands, three floors without an elevator, in the middle of the night in February, in the peak of the cold, into the grass, just to pee. A little pup that can barely walk down the street, and anything he comes across is completely new to him.

"There's still time, I don't need to think about it," I replied when Paco was six months old. Still a lump, still full of excess skin and baby fat, but already a big baby. Full of energy, he knew the world a little better, and I started getting to know him a little better. A snack pouch accompanied us everywhere. Paco started to understand what is forbidden and what is allowed, learning at a dizzy pace. I started to understand that I received a gifted dog.

There's nothing to think about. I knew it when I took him, I replied when Paco was 10 months old. No longer a little baby that needs

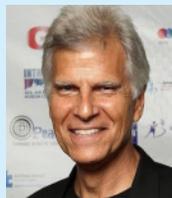
to be taken care of, but a true partner on the road. He went to work with me, was with me on travels, went on trips with me, did everything with me. And what fun, that this special dog is allowed to go everywhere. With a vest and a certificate, and my saying often, 'he is a guide puppy, he is allowed', Paco has experienced everything with me. And, at this point I already knew him like the palm of my hand: how much he loves to meet and play with his friends (humans and dogs). How he knows how to be playful and energetic when you need to, but sleep and indulge him when you get home. How he must hold something in his mouth when he gets excited (toy, bone, leash, his leg...what's most available). What an amazing dog he is!

"And now I'm going to stop answering this question, because Paco and I broke up today. After ten months of growing this magical creature, I brought him back to the Center, where he is going to continue his training to be a guide dog. And it's hard and sad, but also happy. I'm glad Paco will be able to exhaust his crazy potential, use his sharp brain and huge heart to help someone else. I am happy that because of him (and a little thanks to me) someone will get a better and more independent life.

"This was an amazing experience. I got to know Paco and accompany him every day from a small pup to a strong and mature dog. I got to know all the amazing people and dogs that went through this process with us. So, for everyone who asked - yes, it's hard to say goodbye. But so worth it!" 🐾

## OUR NEW CHAMPION!

Olympic Champion Mark Spitz volunteered to be our special guest during a nationwide Zoom meeting in February.



Mark is best known for winning seven Gold Medals while setting seven world records at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games – a record that held up for 36 years! Mark shared several fascinating and humorous stories from his career.

Featured during the Zoom event was our host, Helen Varon of Palm Springs, California, who started an annual luncheon in memory of her beloved grandson Matthew Varon. Noach Braun – our Director in Israel, as well as Achiya Klein, a young soldier blinded in Gaza who is also a Paralympic athlete (see our cover story), also joined the event.

A recording of the Zoom event is still available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8AAhnYHWrg>



**STAFF PROFILE:**

**TOMER EDEN**

**Becoming A Guide Dog Mobility Instructor**



Why did Tomer Eden decide to become a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor? "I love dogs, people, and bringing them together," she explains. "I also love teaching and learning. The Center offers me all these things."

Tomer began her three-year apprenticeship at the Center in 2019 and recently graduated as a fully qualified GDMI (Guide Dog Mobility Instructor). She previously worked as a dog trainer and a rehabilitation counselor for *Enosh* – an organization that helps people with mental disabilities.

During the first stage of apprenticeship, trainees begin training dogs, accompanied by a senior instructor. Halfway through their apprenticeship, they receive certification as guide dog trainers, and begin learning to instruct clients. Apprentices attend instruction courses as observers and eventually begin instructing a client during the course. By the end of the apprenticeship, the new instructors experience the entire process including screening dogs, training, matching clients, and instructing the new client-guide dog teams.

After completing the three-year apprenticeship and meeting the requirements of the International Guide Dog Federation, the graduate receives certification as a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor. The Federation determines requirements that include periodic examinations and ongoing evaluations.

One of the most significant learning experiences involves spending 24 hours blindfolded. Apprentices live at the center under conditions identical to our clients who receive instruction. Their instruction includes using a mobility cane and then being trained with a guide dog.

Tomer recalls the moment she received her training guide dog as exciting and significant: "The door to my room opened, and suddenly a four-legged ball of energy entered and joined me. The dog made me feel I was no longer alone and gave me confidence." 🐾

**MAKE A WILL FOR FREE**



We want families and friends of the Israel Guide Dog Center to feel secure as they look ahead – and one way to do that is to write your will, protect the things you love, and support the organizations important to you.

Our trusted partners at FreeWill can help you complete this important task and protect what matters most in 20 minutes or less! Create your free, legal will today. You can use this tool to save time at your attorney's office – if you have a more complex will.



If you make a bequest of \$10,000 or more, your name will be permanently added to our "Visionaries Wall"

**DON'T DELAY, DO IT TODAY!**

[www.freewill.com/IsraelGuideDogCenter](http://www.freewill.com/IsraelGuideDogCenter)



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