



Servisa suņu biedrība TEODORS

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Service Dog Association TEODORS, Riga, Latvia Annual Report 2016

On 12 April this year, the Service Dog Association TEODORS celebrated its third birthday. Every year, we are not only acquiring greater experience, but also daring to do more, as well as doing our best to improve the quality of our work. We train young guide dogs, raise puppies, who will eventually become professional guide dogs; organise various educational and informative events for both visually impaired people with guide dogs and the general public.

The year began with a happy piece of news — on **27 January**, our association acquired the status of a *Public Benefit Organisation*. In the three and a half years that we have been in operation, we have trained seven guide dogs for visually impaired people in Latvia. They are all registered with VA "Agricultural Data Centre". This is a great outcome, which the organisation has achieved through its own efforts, as well as with the help of donations from the public. Our dogs are Feja, Tikka, Toni, and Latti, and, of course, our Teodors, who unfortunately left us in September, after he lost his brave battle with bone cancer. This year, the association has received a gift from Zaiga Kļaviņa and Juha Herttuainena in the form of another two guide dogs: Rīga and Neira, for which we are most grateful to them. With a view to nurturing a new generation of young guide dogs, at present foster families are raising four puppies.



Photo No.1. Project opening event at Birojnica.

In the spring, we were delighted to receive support for our seminar project "Provision of Social Assistance" from Latvian State Forests and *Ziedot.lv*. We began the series of seminars on International Guide Dogs Day on **27 April**. During the morning, guide dog guardians from Riga, Daugavpils, Carnikava and Liepaja and dogs met up at Vērmāne Garden to take part in a practical training session along the streets of Riga. Later, at the official opening ceremony (Photo No.1), Project Manager Gunta Bite greeted the public and talked about the association and especially thanked the foster families raising service dogs in Latvia, as well as the guests from Finland, who have helped to raise a number of guide dogs now living in Latvia.



Photo No.2. Seminar participants at Liepaja Beach. Photo: Ligita Damberga

We organised seminars in three Latvian cities — in Cesis (in May), Daugavpils (in June) and Liepaja (in July) (Photo No.2). During these seminars, visually impaired people learned how to correctly interact with guide dogs and how to look after them. In addition, we informed the public about our association's work, about the daily life of visually impaired people and guide dogs, and explained the important role played by the foster families that raise young dogs. We also arranged a trek lasting several hours along the coast

from the centre of Saulkrasti to the White Dune. At the end of the trek in Carnikava, we relaxed in the glow of our warm camp fire, and reminisced about our experiences over the course of the

summer. Under the auspices of the project, and in collaboration with the Latvian Library for the Blind, we have also published an information booklet, written in both Braille and standard lettering and accompanied by an audio CD, which is entitled, "THE SERVICE DOGS AND HIS MISSION. Methodical Guidelines for Working with a Service Dog".

On **7 May**, we were visited by some guests from Lithuania, comprised of a coach full of 50 members of the Lithuanian Society for the Blind from Klaipeda and the surrounding area. The main goal of the visit was to give



Photo No.3. Baiba Baikovska with her service dog Elfa and Hildegunn Grønvold Rosslund from Norway with his service dog Qonnie.
Foto: Ligita Damberga

our guests a better understanding of the inner world of the TEODORS association, to find out the true nature of guide dogs, and how one can acquire and handle such a dog, because there are no guide dogs in Lithuania.

Just like last year, **in early May**, our association's visually impaired members joined our guide dog Teodors and our supporters in taking part in the Riga Marathon.

During the summer, we met an interesting young woman in a wheelchair, Hildegunn Grønvold Rosslund from Norway with her service dog Qonnie (Photo No.3). Both of them showed us all the amazing things that a guide dog can do, and how it can help a person with mobility problems. Our prospective service dog Elfa has already learned a lot, but it's clear that she still some new tricks to master.



Photo No.4. Liga Ķikute with guide dog during the Riga competition. Photo: Liene Šternberga

Following an invitation from the Finnish Society of the Blind, **in September** the organisation's representatives took part in a trek in Finland. We spent three days on the Island of Örö, which is a beautiful island with unblemished nature. The trek was difficult and challenging; the course twisted its way through the forest, before winding its path among large boulders overgrown with moss, along the seashore, across sand and pebbles, and amidst huge blocks of stone. Over the three days, we covered over 13 km.

On **1 October**, for the second time, we organised the International Guide Dog competition in Riga. The participants included two participants each from Estonia, Finland and Latvia. The route was quite complicated. It twisted and turned along the streets of the Old Town through to the finish at the Opera House. In the individual competition, TEODORS' representative Viktors and his guide dog Neira finished 4th, while Līga and the association's dog Rīga (Photo No.4) finished joint 5th. Given the tough nature of the competition, our trainers were especially pleased and proud of our achievements, because in contrast to the Estonian and Finnish teams, whose participants had already taken part in the competition for several years in a row, our representatives were taking part in the competition for the first time. Moreover, both participants had only spent just a few months in the company of their dogs.



Photo No.5. One of the last photos of Teodors and Aleksejs in Daugavpils in June 2016.
Photo: Ligita Damberga

A very painful experience for all concerned was the sudden illness of our first guide dog and — *the association's mascot* — Teodors. The whole of Latvia followed this unequal battle. In just a couple of days, the funds required for Teodors' treatment were collected through

donations. Unfortunately, Teodors was unable to recover, and therefore we lost a wonderful friend and great guide dog. Teodors meant a great deal to all of us. (Photo No.5)

We also took part in several other events. More detailed information about the association's work is available on our homepage: www.teodors.org and on social media: *Facebook.com/ servisasunubiediba*, *Twitter.com/ servisasuns* and *Draugiem.lv/ servisasunubiedriba.lv*.

Having assessed this year's activities and their results, next year the association's board plans to devote more time to public relations work to inform the public about the service dog association and its importance to the lives of visually impaired people.

Planned activities in 2017:

- social work in schools, as well as at meetings and summer camps
- looking after guide dogs and providing them with veterinary care
- providing support to puppies and their foster families
- taking part in the guide dog guardians' trek in Finland

- a celebration marking International Guide Dogs Day
- qualification trials for participation in the International Guide Dog Competition in Estonia and participation in the final event,
- training work with guide dogs and their guardians
- a trek for guide dog guardians and friends of the service dog movement in Latvia
- dog assistant training for people with functional problems



Photo No.6. Prospective guide dog Tallers with his foster family from Preiļi. Photo: Ligita Damberga

The main goals and tasks of the association are as follows:

- to encourage the fully-fledged social integration of people with functional impairments with the help of service dogs;
- to encourage the development of the service dog (guide dogs, assistants, therapy) movement in Latvia, in accordance with international standards and to collaborate with service dog organisations in other countries;
- to care for the association's dogs from the time of their purchase until the end of their life;
- to establish a network of foster families for service dog puppies up to one year old of age;
- to educate society and people caring for service dogs;
- to attract donations for the development of the service dog movement.

The association uses donated funds solely for the attainment of the association's goals as expressed in the articles of the association.

The association's account for donations:

Bank: **SWEDBANK**
 Recipient: **Servisa sunu biedriba**
 Reg. No. **40008208343**
 Acc. No. **LV04HABA0551036537614**
 BIC/SWIFT: **HABALV22**

The association would like to express its utmost gratitude to those, who already support the service dog association in Latvia, including our Finnish partners. We would also like to express our deepest thanks to everyone who responded to the association's call to donate funds for Teodors' medical treatment. Thank you to each and every donor! Currently, €2,563.56 from the donated funds have been allocated to cover the costs of the potential treatment of other guide dogs, as well as to pay for other medical services. Everyone interested in the expenditure of these funds should visit the association's homepage section, "Medical Treatment for Dogs" (<http://www.teodors.org/sunu-arstesana>).

We would also like to take this opportunity to invite you to continue your generous support of our association so that the service dog movement can continue its work!

Yours sincerely,

Service Dog Association TEODORS