



Service Dog Association TEODORS

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Service Dog Association TEODORS, Riga, Latvia

Annual Report 2015

In the year 2015, the Service Dog Association TEODORS put its creative skills to good use! As a result, we hope that we have become more useful, providing better quality services, learning from our mistakes and occasionally from those of others, as well as benefiting from the experience of other organisations for the blind in other countries. Consequently, we are doing all we can to add colour to the daily lives of our people with impaired vision, striving to enrich their lives through a wide range of positive and inspiring experiences. Over the past two years, our efforts in this regard have helped to establish a stable, friendly and creative team, characterised by unity. Accordingly, we are now setting ourselves higher and more audacious goals.



Photo 1: International Guide Dog Day at Vermanes Garden

On **29 April**, the Service Dog Association TEODORS celebrated International Guide Dog Day. The organisation spent the day hosting an informal get-together, which was attended by a number of people with impaired vision and their guide dogs. Over a cup of coffee, they chatted about their accomplishments, shared their experience and discussed their plans for the future. The representatives of TEODORS marked the occasion by organising some training activities. These involved the sight-impaired participants and their guide dogs tackling a set route through the centre of Riga, proving that people with special needs do not have to be restricted either by space or environment. For them, too, the doors to the world are open. The celebrations continued the next day at Vaivaru Primary School, Jurmala. Under the auspices of their project day, the schoolchildren met their sight-impaired guests, their helper guide dogs, as well as the therapy dogs from the Kenventaki Kennel. The event concluded with a press conference attended by two representatives of the Ministry of Welfare, who discussed State support for guide dogs and whether sight-impaired children should be allowed to attend school together with their guide dogs.

On **17 May**, 25,931 runners from 69 countries took part in the annual Riga Marathon. We are proud to inform that among the participants in this year's marathon were representatives of the Service Dog Association TEODORS including the young doctor Kristaps Dambergis and sight-impaired Aleksejs Korsaks and his guide dog Tikka. Kristaps ran the half-marathon, while Aleksejs and Tikka completed the 5 km distance, in so doing making Aleksejs the first blind runner to take part in the Riga Marathon together with his guide dog. We hope that next year the team of runners will be even more impressive, because this is an event where everyone benefits - the crowds watching the marathon had the chance to admire a person who dared to transcend typical stereotypes. The athlete himself got satisfaction from his achievement in completing the course in the company of his guide dog, while our organisation was most grateful for the generous amount of donations we received. Thank you to all our supporters!



Photo 2: boating trip along bends of the Daugava

Another special story involves our first organised boating trip along the bends of the Daugava. On the evening of **1 July**, a campsite near Krāslava on the shores of the Daugava welcomed a brave group of sight-impaired adventurers, their guide dogs and friends from Finland, Estonia and Latvia. They spent a fun evening next to a camp fire, savouring the treats they'd brought with them and sipping delicious rural tea. The next morning, the participants split into three groups, two of which occupied two 12-seater canoes, while the third was comprised of a Finnish family with two small children. Each boat contained a volunteer who

undertook the role of the boat's captain. At dusk on the second evening, the adventurers gathered around the camp fire and were all surprised to learn that they had covered a 30 km long stretch of the Daugava, particularly considering the difficult conditions: the canoeists had to avoid rapids and boulders, the hot sun baked the nose of more than one rower, and the crews even managed to row past the agreed meeting place. Overall though, we can surely say that this was a great idea, which proved to be an inspiring and life-affirming success for all participants.



Photo 3: EVS reception hosted by Latvian president R. Vējonis

At the start of **August**, the European Summer School (EVS) for Latvian children (with about 60 participants aged 11 - 16 years) from overseas and Latvia was once again attended by four blind children with their own special tutors. Velga Zēgnere had asked her friends and acquaintances to donate their attendance fees. Thank you to all the donors! The children spent two weeks having fun, learning and making friends. A truly exciting event for all the participants was a reception hosted by the new Latvian president Raimonds Vējonis.

This year's International Guide Dog Competition took place in Järvenpää, Finland, in early **October**. Participants from Estonia, Finland and Latvia had to negotiate a very challenging 1.5 km course, which was testing, because it included streets without curbs and pedestrian crossings. Latvia was represented by Solveiga Vildmane with Ulla, who finished 4th and Natalja Muravjova and Lati, who came 6th. Overall, the Latvian team finished 3rd. From our perspective, this is an important recognition of our work, because we are the most recently established organisation among the participants. 2016 will be the Year of Persons with Disabilities, and we will celebrate it by hosting the International Guide Dog Competition in Riga, Latvia.

In **October**, the organisation received an invitation from the Lithuanian Society for the Blind to visit them and introduce them to the guide dog movement. While we already have seven guide dogs in Latvia, in Lithuania there are none. On a beautiful autumnal October day, dog handler Zaiga and three TEODORS members and their four-legged assistants headed to Biržai to share their experiences with their Lithuanian sisters and brothers. We said goodbye to our Lithuanian friends in the sincere hope that their efforts to establish a guide dog movement will succeed.



Photo 4/5: Andris with guide dog Feja at the Latvian Red Cross after the collaboration agreement extension (left) and service dogs' informative vests (right)

On **1 December**, we visited the offices of the Latvian Red Cross to extend our collaboration agreement. As a result, we can continue to use the Red Cross on dog leads and service dogs' informative vests, which makes it easier to identify dogs as helpers. Over the course of the year, our experience shows that people are more helpful and

understanding if they see the Red Cross. During the course of our joint discussions, some new ideas were born as to how we can expand our collaboration in the future. Thank you to the Red Cross and we look forward to continuing our successful collaboration in the future! Since the spring, the organisation's members have worn specially made reflective vests bearing the organisation's large logo on the back. Now both dogs and humans are dressed so that we are easily seen and recognisable in public!

This year, we have done a lot of public relations work, informing the public about the significance of service dogs. Several interviews have been given to newspapers, TV and radio. You can view or hear these on our organisation's homepage: www.teodors.org. The organisation's new pamphlets and visit cards with photographs of Teodors and Tikka have been printed. We have also visited several schools. Thus, for example, on **11 November**, on Lāčplēsis Day, we visited Marupe Secondary School, where we told 1st grade children about sight-impaired people, their daily lives, as well as about guide dogs and their huge role in helping these people to live their everyday lives. We also explained how important it is for people with special needs to integrate into society and for them to be able to enjoy the environmental access they need. And last, but not least, we explained just how much work goes into teaching these guide dogs.

In August 2014, the Service Dog School delivered eight Labrador puppies, four of which were entrusted to foster families in Latvia, while the other four were placed in the care of foster families in Finland. By early this summer, these puppies had matured into young dogs and were put through character tests, which were successfully completed by all dogs. Six dogs successfully passed the veterinary tests. Another will undergo another test next year, while one dog has returned to his foster family in Finland, because of health problems. Thus, seven young dogs have commenced training and the first three dogs (Argo, Laimīte and Piķis) will start work in January or February of next year.



In 2016, Zaiga and Juha hope to present (deliver) two young guide dogs to sight-impaired people in Latvia. Unfortunately, the organisation's finances are not yet healthy enough for us to be able to pay them for their work. However, we are most grateful to them and all the foster families, which looked after our puppies, cared for and loved them. Without their help, we would not be able to do our work. This year, foster families are looking after one puppy in Latvia and one in Finland. Come the spring, we will once again seek new foster families for the next prospective service dogs. Maybe in reading this, somebody will consider this possibility and apply to us!

You can learn more about the organisation's work, by visiting our homepage: www.teodors.org.

Activities planned in 2016

- social work in schools, events and summer camps;
- training of a new guide dog (approximate cost: EUR 10,000);
- guide dog upkeep (approximate cost: EUR 100/month per dog);
- celebrating International Guide Dog Day
- organizing the International Guide Dog Competition in Latvia
- qualifying heats for participation at the International Guide Dog Competition, as well as participation in the competition itself
- a cross-country hike for guide dog holders and their friends



- international activity — a three-day cross-country hike along the coast with overnight accommodation in tents for families with sight-impaired children and guide dog holders (participants from Latvia, Estonia and Finland)
- participating in a cross-country hike in Finland on the second weekend in September
- training for new guide dog holders
- participation of four blind children and two teachers at the European Summer School (about EUR 1,800);
- training for assistants to people with functional disabilities

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 Service Dog Association expresses their deepest gratitude to those who already support the service dog movement in Latvia, including our Finnish partners. We are asking you to continue this cooperation in order for the movement to attain even better results.

Yours sincerely,

Service Dog Association TEODORS