



Israel Guide Dog Center

NEWSLETTER

FOR IDF VETERANS WITH PTSD, **THE BATTLE CONTINUES**

When Benzi Elkon left his elite Special Forces unit of the IDF he anticipated returning to normal civilian life.

He suppressed his horrific memories for years until in an explosive rage Benzi isolated himself in his bedroom for four months. Incredibly, Benzi found the strength to seek help and was introduced to the Israel Guide Dog Center, where he met his Service Dog, Lugo.

For veterans living with PTSD, like Benzi, their dogs are a lifeline to the outside world. That's why it's so troubling when these critical Service Dogs are refused access to public places.

So Benzi planned an Israeli cross-country bike ride called "Partners in Battle" to raise awareness of the need for PTSD Service Dogs and highlight Israel's new public access law.



The ride started in Jerusalem at the home of Israel's President, Isaac "Bougie" Herzog and his wife Michal, where they enthusiastically welcomed 30 cyclists. As Benzi anxiously awaited his turn to address the crowd, his right leg bounced nervously, and his head bent forward.

Despite the crowded setting, Lugo coaxed Benzi to the ground where they stared at each other and Benzi caressed Lugo's head. This extraordinary encounter enabled Benzi to rise above his fears and deliver a deeply moving speech.

Because of Benzi and Lugo, the Center successfully raised funds to train more PTSD Service Dogs, and they were able to raise awareness regarding these Service Dogs and the new law. 🐾

Seven percent of all IDF Combat Veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD.

Since 2018, the Center has successfully trained 30 PTSD Service Dogs for IDF veterans, in partnership with the Ministry of Defense.

On May 1st, 2023, the Israeli Knesset enacted Amendment No. 22, the Equal Rights Act for Persons with Disabilities. This legislation defines a Service Dog, and provides certification for Service Dog users. Furthermore, the legislation protects the rights of Service Dogs by granting them access to all public places.



At the Core of Our Unique Mission

Transforming lives has been our mission since we created our first partnership in 1991.

Israel Guide Dog Center's core mission is to breed, raise, train, and place Guide Dogs for people with visual impairments. Over time, we have expanded our work to provide PTSD Service Dogs for Veterans, and Emotional Support Dogs for children on the autism spectrum.

All our dogs transform lives by providing independence, safe mobility, companionship, and confidence.



PROFILE

DALIT POLLACK AND SUKI:

A Vision-Impaired Mother Faces Her Challenges



I spent two challenging years working in an IDF Transit Unit. Yet nothing compares to the challenge of raising my two young sons who are both under the age of five. I am always juggling cooking, cleaning, playing, and caring for them, along with my work as a makeup artist and hair designer helping others feel pretty.

As a young woman grappling with gradual sight loss, it has been so important to maintain my outer appearance. Over the years, I have often heard remarks like, "You don't look blind." Yet as my vision continues to deteriorate, it's become harder to help myself and others with their appearance.

From the moment Suki, my Guide Dog, entered my life this winter, I felt overwhelming joy. Her presence puts a smile on everyone's face—my family, my clients, even people on the street. Suki quickly became an essential part of our family. Witnessing her deep bond with my children brings so much warmth to my heart. Together, we embark on adventures throughout Netanya, strolling through its streets and using public transportation—a task once agonizingly difficult with a cane.

Thanks to Suki's unwavering companionship, I finally I feel my inner confidence matches my outer appearance. I no longer feel burdened by the label of an "invisible disability." Instead, I cherish the label of busy mom. 🐾

NOT ALL HEROES WALK ON TWO FEET

The life of a Guide Dog is nothing short of remarkable. From birth to retirement, our dogs change the lives of our clients, their families, and the community.



BEFORE BIRTH:

A Guide Dog's journey begins long before it's born. Each litter of puppies is bred for size, skills, and temperament.

BIRTH:

All births take place at our on-campus Puppy Center. Puppies spend the first eight weeks with their mother, puppy siblings, and our loving staff.

PUPPY KINDERGARTEN:

For the first two months, our puppies' education begins with exposure to a variety of experiences, sounds, and textures (including cats).

VOLUNTEER PUPPY RAISERS:

At eight weeks, we wean our puppies from their mother to be raised by volunteer Israelis who provide a loving home, socialization, and basic training supported by Puppy Raising managers.

CAREER DECISIONS:

At 12–14 months, puppies return to our Center to be evaluated as to whether they are suitable to become Breeder Dog, Guide Dog, PTSD Service Dog, Emotional Support Dog, or Ambassador Dog.

TRAINING:

Once our dogs have their chosen career path, they are given daily training focusing on essential skills. For Guide and Service Dogs, it's a four to six month training process.

MAKING THE PERFECT MATCH:

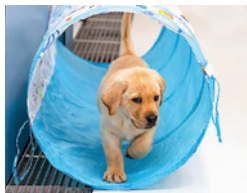
We individually match a dog with a person on our waiting list. After the first meeting and test-walk, the new partners spend three weeks training together at the Center and an additional week of specialized training at our client's home.

WORKING:

Dogs quickly become an important part of our client's family providing critical service for about eight years. The Center periodically visits clients and gives support as needed.

RETIREMENT:

At ten years old we retire our dogs to live out their lives as wonderful pets.





THE CHALLENGES OF A UNIQUE COUNTRY

Israel is loved by people around the world for its history, culture, food, innovative technology, and so much more. But what makes Israel so unique is also what makes it so challenging for our Guide Dogs.

URBAN LANDSCAPE:

Israeli cities are densely populated and boast crowded streets, heavy traffic, and a vibrant city life. These qualities can be overwhelming for Guide Dogs, as they navigate through busy intersections and crowded sidewalks.

EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS:

Anyone who has been to Israel in the summer knows about its uncomfortable and potentially dangerous heat. This is particularly challenging for Guide Dogs,

who rely on their physical endurance and well-being to assist their partners.

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY:

Israel's diverse groups have different values that influence how dogs are perceived. Some are uncomfortable or resistant to Guide Dogs in homes, religious institutions, or at community events.

SECURITY CONCERNS:

Israel faces ongoing tensions resulting in complex security protocols, increased checkpoints at public spaces, and loud

sirens indicating incoming rockets. Guide Dogs need to be comfortable navigating these protocols so they can guide their partner to safety.

LIMITED ACCESSIBILITY:

While efforts have been made to improve accessibility in Israel, there are still areas where infrastructure and public transportation systems may not be fully accessible to people with disabilities and those accompanied by guide dogs or service dogs.



One of Israel's biggest obstacles for the blind: SIDEWALKS

A routine walk down the block often presents obstacles and hazards that sighted people don't think about.

A Parent's Letter of Gratitude

Dear Israel Guide Dog Center,

A few months ago, we received a call from the Center that Panda was making a "career change" and might be suitable for our family.

We have a long history with the Center, even hosting a breeding dog named Nasha. Nasha was great for our family, especially for our child on the autism spectrum. Without prompting, Nasha taught our son valuable social skills, even how to play catch. Unfortunately, Nasha passed away about four years ago, and due to my health condition, it would have been too challenging for us to care for a new dog.

When I felt ready, we approached the Center to request a new dog. But our request was not simple. We needed a young, patient, yet energetic dog that loved children. I also required a dog that was well-trained for walking on a leash due to my mobility issues.

Panda was exactly what we were looking for, and she fit perfectly into our family. She is patient with all our children, and when I walk her to school, she receives a warm welcome from excited kids who want to pet her. We see firsthand that dogs like Panda provide companionship and acceptance for children with special needs who often lack social interactions and friends.

She also instinctively connects with our son with special needs. Even without any training, Panda seeks him out, eagerly looking at him or following him until he engages in play. Their relationship has been beautiful to witness.

Thank you for supporting families like ours!

Jacki Edry

"These incredible dogs use their unique abilities to help those in need and enhance the lives of everyone around them."





Mitzvah Interview

ZACHARY BERSSON

How did you first connect with Israel Guide Dog Center & why did you choose to do your Mitzvah project with us?

In 2019, I traveled to Israel with my family for my brother's Bar Mitzvah. My younger brother is visually impaired and going to see Israel Guide Dog Center was a priority for us. We saw how puppies were raised, trained, and cared for in order to be considered as guide dogs for those who might need one. I knew after the tour that I wanted to help the Israel Guide Dog Center for my Bar Mitzvah project.



What exactly did you do for your project?

I went door to door to ask community members, friends, and family to help me raise money to fund a puppy for someone in need.



To all those who donated to my fundraiser, I gifted them with small tokens of appreciation: a paw print with my initials to remind them of their IGDC donation.

What would you tell other Bar/Bat Mitzvah kids about us when they're looking for a Mitzvah project to do?

Israel Guide Dog Center was incredible to work with. They helped me understand what I needed to do to start my project and how to educate people on what IGDC does. I loved their constant

communication and support. They followed up with a website to update me on how "my puppy" is doing as he goes through training. They even sent follow up thank you notes to all my donors.

To those kids looking for a place to give support to and a place that truly helps others, I highly recommend IGDC because they work together with you to ensure that no matter how much you raise, you know you are helping people who truly appreciate it. 🐾



GREAT BAR/BAT MITZVAH PROJECTS

WE OFFER MEANINGFUL PROJECTS TO BAR/BAT MITZVAH STUDENTS.

To get a complete package including a list of projects other students have done, please email Joanne Levy: joanne@igdcb.org or call 215-343-9100

<https://www.israelguidedog.org/your-mitzvah-project/>

JULIA'S JOURNEY:

From remembering the past to preserving the future

Julia Taub-Katz, a child in Poland during the Holocaust, carried the unimaginable weight of loss and sorrow on her shoulders. When her remaining family moved to Israel for a better future, uncertainty and fear returned as Israel's War of Independence broke out. Yet, Julia and her family remained committed to their vision of a better future. She remembered this time in Israel with vivid memories, great pride, and gratitude.

She later moved to Australia to be closer to extended family and finally to the US where she married her husband and enjoyed a wonderful life. But she always kept Israel in her heart.

When Julia passed away, she left a generous gift to Israel Guide Dog Center in her will. Her gift was more than just financial. Her gift was the story of her life—an incredible reminder about the power of hope and resilience in the face of adversity.



You too can leave a legacy for the future by leaving the Israel Guide Dog Center in your Will.

CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE:

www.freewill.com/IsraelGuideDogCenter





STAFF PROFILE:

SHIRAN RACCAH



Shiran Raccah and her family live in Mazkeret Batya in Israel. She is a mother to three daughters and a one-eyed Golden Retriever named Utah. Shiran's life has taken her to incredible places.

She grew up in Arad in the Negev Desert and after her service in the IDF anti-tank missile unit, she lived in Africa for six months where she dabbled in photography and fell in love with the "incredible variety of nature." Later, she moved to Bologna, Italy for 15 years where she raised her family and studied to become a veterinarian.

At the Israel Guide Dog Center, Shiran manages the Puppy Center and supervises a team of seven volunteers. She manages all aspects of care of the puppies and mothers before, during, and after birth. It's a position where she is frequently on-call when whelping (birth) can happen.

This year 140 puppies were born on campus.

Shiran says: "One of the hardest things is managing the multiple births of our breeding females. The average is one litter a month, but we've had months where four litters were born in one month! Each puppy must be weighed and watched to make sure they are nursing properly, and we also follow up on the mother to ensure she is healthy." 🐾



BECOME A PUPPARAZZI!



TIPS FROM ELI BEN BOHER:

Israel Guide Dog Center Director of the Puppy Raising Department & professional photographer.

- Opt for shaded outdoor areas or well-lit indoor spaces. If necessary, shoot with the sun behind the photographer to evenly illuminate the subject.
- Capture still moments of the dog to achieve good results.
- Avoid photographing multiple dogs in action instead focus on poses of dogs and their masters in action.
- Fill the frame with the dog, covering at least 50% for better composition.
- Prioritize focus on the dog's eyes to prevent blurring against the background.
- Take photos at the dog's eye-level by kneeling or lying in front of them.
- Capture the dog's attention using interesting noises or placing someone behind the camera.
- Be mindful of the environment to avoid distractions or unappealing backgrounds.
- Most importantly, patience is key for successful photos of relaxed dogs looking at the camera.



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Proof Design

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