

Written Submission: Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Federal Budget



BC & ALBERTA GUIDE DOGS

GUIDE DOGS • AUTISM SUPPORT DOGS • PTSD SERVICE DOGS

August 7, 2020

Submitted by William Thornton (Chief Executive Officer)
on behalf of
BC & Alberta Guide Dogs
Registered Charity 89131 1769 RR0001

Recommendations:

1. BC & Alberta Guide Dogs recommends that the Government of Canada provide funding in the amount of \$3 million for the construction of a Breeding & Training Centre of Excellence for Guide and Service Dogs in Delta, B.C.

BC & Alberta Guide Dogs
A Breeding & Training Centre of Excellence for Guide and Service Dogs

Headquartered in Delta, British Columbia, BC & Alberta Guide Dogs has been providing life-changing support to vulnerable Canadians since 1996. We were initially founded for individuals who are visually impaired. However, over the years, we have expanded our mandate to meet the growing need for support among children with profound Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); and veterans, RCMP, and first responders suffering from operational stress injuries (OSI) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

For over two decades, we have been professionally breeding and training service dogs under an internationally accredited program. Individuals and families are matched with a Guide or Service Dog and receive ongoing support in their home communities for the life of that dog – which is typically at least 8 years. **Most importantly – our dogs, which cost upwards of \$35,000 to train, certify and support through their lives – are always provided at absolutely no cost to the recipient.**

Like others, we have shifted our immediate focus during COVID-19 to ensuring that the around-the-clock needs of our guide & service dog users – all of whom have a significant disability or mental health challenge – are met during this time. As has been stressed repeatedly, those living with disabilities, underlying health conditions, and pre-existing mental health challenges are especially vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19 – both physically and emotionally. Post-COVID-19, there will be much work to both in sustaining and expanding our programs.

There is an unbelievable need for our services – and the demand only keeps growing.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, the National Autism Spectrum Disorder Surveillance System, and Veteran's Affairs Canada, autism and PTSD are on the rise. At BC & Alberta Guide Dogs, we receive phone calls every day asking for a Guide or Service Dog. With an existing waitlist of four years, the demand for professionally trained dogs only continues to grow.

In order to meet this ever-growing demand, BC & Alberta Guide Dogs is proposing the construction of a Breeding and Training Centre of Excellence for service and support dogs in Delta, B.C. We are requesting a one-time contribution of \$3 million from the Government of Canada, to be matched by the Government of British Columbia, to enable us to build this shovel-ready facility.

The Breeding & Training Centre of Excellence

The Centre of Excellence will allow us to train more than 1,600 guide and service dog teams over its lifetime – more than a three-fold increase from the number of individuals, children and veterans whom we currently serve, offering immeasurable benefit to Canadians whose lives are drastically changed with the use of a guide or service dog. A modest contribution of \$3 million from the Government of Canada is equivalent to an annual commitment of \$245 per Guide and Service Dog team over the 30-year lifespan of the facility. This facility would be the first of its kind in Western Canada.

This project is shovel-ready in every sense of the word. The Centre is to be built on a parcel of land we already own, mortgage-free, and we have secured the necessary permits from the City of Delta to proceed with construction immediately. BC & Alberta Guide Dogs has raised \$2.1 million to date for the Centre from the private sector, demonstrating the degree to which the local community is behind this project.

Life-changing support for vulnerable Canadians

The Breeding and Training Centre of Excellence is a shovel-ready project that offers the government an opportunity to signal ongoing leadership in championing inclusion, access, and mobility for persons with disabilities. A Guide or Service Dog transforms the everyday lives of Canadians living with visual impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Outcomes of our programs focus on reducing barriers, increasing mobility and promoting greater inclusion and access. Individuals and families are matched with a Guide or Service Dog and receive training and support for the life of that dog (typically 8 years) in their home communities, and in collaboration where needed with families, community facilities, workplaces, schools and other resources and services. **It takes 2 years and costs up to \$35,000 to produce each one of our Service and Guide Dogs, which we provide to recipients at absolutely no cost.**

Our Centre of Excellence will support the breeding and extensive training of over 1,600 of the following:

- **Autism Service Dogs**

An Autism Service Dog provides 24-hour support to children (ages 3-10) and their families, addressing their critical needs around safety and quality of life. Outcomes for the child include greater physical safety in their home and in public spaces leading to greater inclusion with family, school, peers and community, greater accessibility, and increased mobility for the child.

- **PTSD Service Dogs**

Our PTSD Service Dogs support former first responders, veterans, and RCMP officers with Operational Stress Injuries (OSI) or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These Service Dogs play a critical role in helping these men and women rehabilitate towards increased participation in society, helping to improve career and vocational prospects.

- **Guide Dogs**

Our Guide Dogs support individuals living with little to no vision. Guide Dogs enable the recipient to move around safely and independently, helping blind or visually impaired individuals navigate their surroundings. Using the handler's direction, dogs safely guide their partner around obstacles, through intersections, to stairs, doors and other landmarks.

Guide and Service Dogs remove barriers to participation in the workforce and offer a host of other contributions which further reduce strains on government programs, ensuring positive spillover for society at large.

Investing in the construction of social infrastructure, like our shovel-ready Centre of Excellence, is an opportunity for the Government of Canada to contribute to post-COVID-19 economic recovery while helping vulnerable Canadians recover from the mental health impacts of the pandemic.

About BC & Alberta Guide Dogs

Beginning as BC Guide Dog Services in 1996, BC & Alberta Guide Dogs continued to grow and amalgamate with like-minded organizations providing similar support dog services across Western Canada. Founded initially for the blind and visually impaired, an ever-expanding mandate led to the inclusion of myriad other unmet needs, including certified dogs trained for veterans and former first responders with PTSD, and children with profound Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). BC & Alberta Guide Dogs is Western Canada's largest producer of Guide and Service Dogs, all of which are bred for purpose and not for commercial sale.

BC & Alberta Guide Dogs is accredited under Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF), and as such, their expertise is recognized under existing provincial laws.

A small sample of our community partners across Western Canada include the Cities of Delta, Prince Rupert, Nanaimo, and Victoria; TransLink; the Pacific Autism Family Network; Autism Calgary; Reach Child and Youth Development Society; Inclusion BC; The Royal Canadian Legion/BC Yukon Command, The Royal Canadian Legion/BC Yukon Foundation and Wounded Warriors Canada.