

# Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind

Registered Charity No. 10684 6819 RR0001  
(Established 1984)

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*For Immediate release  
August 18, 2020*

*Media Release*

## **Guide Dog helping partner navigate the pandemic**

James Stainton, a resident of Sherwood Park, AB, received his first Guide Dog at the age of 15 from Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind (CGDB). Born without vision, James had exceptional mobility skills and maturity that made him a good candidate at a young age. James has been a client of CGDB for over 25 years now, and has had a Guide Dog with him for most of his life. He has walked side by side with a Guide Dog as he completed high school, university, trade school and most recently graduating as a Registered Massage Therapist (RMT).

James was scheduled to attend training to receive his newest Guide Dog in March, when the pandemic hit and drastically impacted his life. CGDB informed him, and the 5 other clients that were also scheduled, that the March class would have to be delayed. "I understood that it wasn't anyone's fault, but I was frustrated, emotional, and worried about what not having a Guide Dog would do", said James.

Jane Thornton, Chief Operating Officer at CGDB, has known James since he was 14 years old, and understood the profound impact of him not having a Guide Dog. Jane, and her team, worked tirelessly to adapt their protocols in order to safely pair clients like James with their new partner as soon as possible. "We have proudly served Canadians for over 36 years, and while COVID provided new challenges, it was important to promptly adapt and continue to help people with Guide Dogs", says Jane. "It affects every client differently, but not having a Guide Dog can mean loss of independence, mobility, safety, and even employment."

James was excited to receive the call from CGDB in June, informing him that he would be the first client to receive residential training at the center in Manotick since COVID hit. There were new safety protocols, distancing, and isolation of parts of the facility and a van for only him and his instructor to use. Though different from past experiences, James has now safely completed his training and returned home with Guide Dog Mollie, a yellow Labrador retriever.

One of the training sessions included a trip to the Massage Addict clinic in Ottawa, where Mollie had an opportunity to work with James in a work environment similar to his own. And of course, Mollie always so happy and eager to please, passed with flying colours. Now home, one of their most frequent routes is to the Massage Addict clinic in Sherwood Park, where he works as a Registered Massage Therapist.

James enjoys his current career as “he loves to help people”, and is very thankful for Massage Addict, the franchise owners and his colleagues. “They have all welcomed me with open arms. They have been an ideal employer for someone with a disability, accommodating my needs, thinking outside of the box, suggesting ideas to solve any challenges, being inclusive.”

Shaun Cassidy, Owner of the Sherwood Park Massage Addict clinics says “James has been an outstanding addition to our team here at Massage Addict Sherwood Park. As a member of the business community we are proud to be part of the diverse fabric of Sherwood Park, and as an employer we want to promote diversity and inclusion as well. We are pleased that James has chosen to work with us, and we look forward to welcoming all people, from all walks of life to our clinic to meet James, Mollie and all our other therapists.”

James was dramatically affected by COVID19, but with some support and a new Guide Dog he is able to maintain his independence and safety regardless of the obstacles the pandemic has put before him. As for Mollie, James thinks she is a perfect match, and she is getting the best of both worlds. “She loves to work and she loves to play. It’s been awesome.”

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#### **About Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind**

Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind is a registered charity that relies on public support and funding to be able to professionally breed, raise and train Guide Dogs that change people’s lives. They continue to support people that are blind and partially sighted, and have placed over 880 teams since our inception in 1984. You can learn more about Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind or donate online at [www.guidedogs.ca](http://www.guidedogs.ca).

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#### **About Massage Addict**

Massage Addict is the largest and fastest growing therapeutic provider of massage therapy, acupuncture and reflexology in Canada. Since 2008, the Canadian owned and operated healthcare franchise has offered high-quality, therapeutic treatments. Massage Addict has over 1,400 practicing therapists, and recruits only the highest caliber of Registered Massage Therapists, Registered Acupuncturists and Certified Reflexologists. Massage Addict offers a range of therapeutic services to help clients manage pain, stress, anxiety, injury, and muscle tension, as well as increase energy levels and enhance health.