



Latest News

• 450 people took part in the Bonfire Night celebrations at Hotel Caro on 4th Nov.



- 230 people attended the Caledonian Ball at InterContinental Hotel on 19th Nov (see www.sensotv.ro/sanatate/Eveniment-7442/caledonian-ball-2016-light-into-europe-charity)
- Petra Pintelei helped with Braille training at the British Council Romania Diversity Week event (21-25 Nov)
- Camelia Platt, Seve and GD Bramble visited schools for

blind and deaf children in Cluj (23-25 Nov) to promote Guide Dogs and independent daily living skills. Large print textbooks were distributed at Schools for the Blind in both Cluj and Bucharest

- Sean Dilley (UK Board Member) and GD Bramble visited Mega Image in Bucharest to investigate disability access issues
- ProTV produced a film on the story of Cati and Klint (<https://goo.gl/GzG4Dd>)
- Seve attended Eastern European Guide Dog Schools event in Prague (14-16 Nov)

Cati & Klint and the Caledonian Ball

by Ruth Rusby



Cati recently attended the Caledonian Ball at the Intercontinental Hotel, Bucharest, together with Klint her guide dog. She was afforded the chance to meet with fellow blind beneficiaries from Light into Europe. She wrote to Capt. Stan Platt after the event and what follows are excerpts taken from her letter.

“I was happy I could share my experiences with Adi and Vera, Cristi and Marta,” says Cati. “They also shared their experiences with me. We talked about guide dogs, how much this program helps us, and all the things we do now with our dog friends, both during the meeting and in the lounge with Sean (& Sammy).”

Sean Dilley (board member from the UK) had explained how he works with his guide dog Sammy, and how things are in the UK. Cati explained that things are gradually improving in Romania as more people get used to the presence of guide dogs and she gave some examples.

“Cristi said that in the summer he travelled to Italy by plane,” says Cati. “This was with Wizz Air. He was very

well received. In fact, the crew was glad to have a passenger like Cristi aboard the plane. They let Cristi and Hamish (his guide dog) stay on the first row seat, which has more space, so that Hamish would be comfortable.”

Cati went on to explain that Adi and Vera had also had a good summer. They had travelled to Saturn, on the Black Sea, and also to Baile Herculane all the way from Arad with Max (the guide dog) without any problems. On a daily basis they go to Lidl and the medical laboratory also without any access difficulties.

Marta has experienced a few problems in Craiova so far, but it's still early days and she was encouraged by the others to be patient and persevere.

“As for me,” says Cati, “things are moving along here in Alexandria as well. I am happy to tell you that people have noticed what kind of a dog Klint is and I have the patience to explain to them everything they need to know. The children are always the most interested.”

Cati has discussed this with Mrs. Camelia and would like to start an

(continued overleaf)

awareness campaign for blind people, guide dogs and other disabilities in schools.

She has already spoken to someone from her school and will visit them shortly, with a copy of the law for blind persons with guide dogs in her hand.

“People need to be educated,” she says, “and I am going to try to do it in Alexandria. I believe that, in time, we will get to everybody.”

“When I came with Klint in the winter to Alexandria,” she goes on, “people were looking at me as if I was from Mars. Now, seeing me everyday and having explained to them what

a guide dog does, things are better. I go to two restaurants, to all kinds of shops – shoe shops, mini-market, cosmetic shops etc. We go for a massage, to the doctor, to the Public Library. In fact soon we will have no new places in Alexandria to go to!”

Cati is extremely appreciative for all the help the charity has given her with Klint since they became a working partnership in early 2016.

“I can only say good things about my best friend Klinty!” says Cati, “and thank you for all the friends I found at Light into Europe, such as Seve and Doinita, Anca, Raluca, Rob and the

rest of the team, as well as Adi and Vera and the other guide dog users. I hope there will be more of us next year!”

Light into Europe charity is prepared to provide white canes free of charge (until 31 Dec 2017) to any Romanian registered blind person.

Walking with a white cane is a rare sight in Bucharest. For most blind people it can be fraught with difficulties. But it is not just here that there are problems.

“I saw in Brussels, close to the offices of the European Parliament,” says Capt. Stan Platt, “that there were rolls of barbed wire - so easy for a blind person to walk into!”

White canes are not only used as mobility aids for the blind, but they also help sighted people be aware that the person walking towards them is blind, so allowing them to step out of the way.

“This is of particular use in a theatre or concert hall,” says Stan, “where the blind person should carry a symbol cane.”

“The white cane is a really useful mobility aid that every blind person should be encouraged to use.”

In order to take advantage of the charity’s offer, each blind person needs to be measured for a white cane. They can make an appointment at our offices and after initial assessment they will be given training on how to use the right cane (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_cane). Daylong courses are available for busy sight-impaired people who wish to travel often, while longer courses are also available as needed.

There can be a certain amount of stigma associated with the use of the cane, as it sets you apart from the rest of the population and for some blind people this limits their usefulness.

“In my opinion, the cane is a helpful tool,” says Petra Pintelei, “even if as an adolescent I found it difficult to accept the fact that everyone could see my disability. Now I see it differently: not as a stigmatizing object but as a tool that shows how independent and brave I actually am. It is a mark of strength and growth of self esteem.”

In Romania, the sighted guide is the main mobility aid for a blind person, but it is hard to be dependent on one person all the time. The cane offers more independence, but some people lack the feeling of security needed in going out.

Ultimately guide dogs perhaps provide the best aid to mobility but few blind people use them. They can provide life-changing experiences for the guide dog users. They give the blind person more confidence, friendship and security. The users have to have a strong character to be able to fight for the rights of themselves and the dog and they have to trust the dog and be willing to work hard.

“Picking up the poo when you are blind takes a strong will,” says Stan, “but a guide dog opens the door to “ice-breaker” conversations almost better than any other subject!”



➤ Misty gave birth to 8 healthy black Labrador Retriever puppies on 22nd Oct. They are all growing fast and will move into new volunteer Puppy Walker homes around 17th Dec. We are always looking for new volunteers!

➤ Tommie & Tyler, the guide dogs from Sweden, are now 5 months old and are busy practicing their skills in shops, public transport and ignoring birds in the UK!

➤ Basil & Betty are being trained by Seve and Bobby, Bryony & Wesley are being trained by Anca.

➤ A “Buddy System” is being launched and Bridie will become the first Buddy dog for a young sight impaired man.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- ◆ **Christmas Bazaars!**
Watch out for us at various schools and business events in Dec
- ◆ **Burns Supper,**
*InterContinental Hotel,
21st January 2017, 6.30 PM*



White Cane Offer