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On January 31, 2001 **Sweden** issued a set of four 5 kr. stamps on "Dogs – Man's Best Friend".

One of these stamps shows the head of a Labrador and in the background a blind woman walking along a street with her guide dog. This is the first time a guide dog has been shown on a Swedish stamp. The stamp artist, Ingemar Jacobsson used as a model for the stamp Bonnie, the guide dog of Gunnar Holmberg. There was one change he made in Bonnie and that was her color.

Guide Dogs in Sweden

Previous to 1938, some visually impaired persons in Sweden had trained dogs for as a private mobility resource. They did so on an informal basis – alone or with the help of others.

The organized training of guide dogs in Sweden was started in in 1938 by a German dog judge who had been invited to the country for that purpose. The training was a collaborative effort between The Swedish German Shepherd Club, the Swedish National Association of the Blind, the Crown Princess Margareta Foundation for the Blind, and a couple of training apprentices. During the subsequent three decades, the efforts of private instructors in the area of guide dog training were marked by varying success, uneven quality, and a lack of continuity. Compared to later decades, the number of dogs produced was small. The source of financing differed from case to case, and that proportion paid by the visually impaired themselves varied. The latter persons' organization met with difficulties in procuring instructors and dogs, and in one case encountered unexpected expenses in connection with guide dog production.

Since the state dog school started guide dog training in 1960, the quality and quantity of guide dogs have improved considerably. Since 1964 the public funds for guide dogs have been channelled through the organization of the visually impaired. The improvement in

training has found expression in a growing production capacity up to 1981, a more even quality of dogs, and a stable and continuous source of financing. Coincident with this expansion of production, user training has been expanded and intensified. The existence of a state training school and the channeling of financing through the visually impaired persons' own organization were clearly advantageous to the guide dog users. The number of placements of newly trained dogs fell throughout the 1980s after 1981, and then rose sharply again during the first four years of the 1990s (as a result of the fact that dogs were being purchased from a greater number of schools).

At the start of the 1980s, the expansion in the numbers of users with active dogs subsided. The numbers of active users fell after 1987, then rose again after 1992. The users' training period was shortened in the late 1980s, and later was lengthened again.

Aside from during 1938 and 1939, the Swedish National Association of the Blind (which changed its name to the Swedish Association of the Visually Impaired on January 1, 1977) has exhibited a ambivalent attitude towards the use of guide dogs. On a few occasions, the board of the organization has tried to transfer the responsibility for the costs of guide dog school operations to other institutions. After 1969, on the other hand, the National Association of the Blind established a special consultant office in guide dog questions. One reason for the ambivalent attitude seems to be that the board took the view that the guide dogs - which suited the needs of a minority of the organization's budget, and thus risked obstructing the allocation of funds to other activities. During the early 1990s, the Association of the Visually Impaired reorganized its guide dog operations under a marketing organization; this resulted in a distinct improvement in user training and an increase in the quality of guide dogs purchased and supplied.

Hännestrand, Bo *"Människan, Samhället och Ledarhunden. Studier i Lederhundensarbetets Historia"* (Man, Society and Guide Dogs: Studies in the History of Work with Guide Dogs). Acta University Uppsala; Uppsala Studies in Economic History 36 Uppsala, Sweden, 1995.

Today there are countless numbers of blind people all over the world who have found that guide dogs provide a means of safe travel and companionship which helps them lead productive lives.