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## A look at the training of guide dogs and the freedom they provide their blind partners

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# University Honors Program

## Capstone Approval Page

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## Abstract

In the United States there are approximately 14 million people with a visual impairment. There are several options for people with a visual impairment to use to increase their mobility. Dog guides can be one such mobility aid, and currently there are ten facilities in the United States that are members of the United States Council of Dog Guide Schools, and train dog guides to assist people with a visual impairment. In this paper each school will be briefly described, and similarities and differences between the schools' application process, breeding practice, puppy raisers, and formal training will be discussed. In addition, the effectiveness and impact of using a dog guide as a primary mobility aid will be discussed. It is hypothesized that using a dog guide will increase independence, confidence in addition to facilitating increased interactions with other individuals and boosting self-concept. Participants for the study were 14 dog guide users who volunteered to participate. It was found that participants did experience an increase in independence and confidence. It was also found that many participants did enjoy an increase in interaction with others, and some participants did feel and increase in their self-concept. Due to the nature of the open-ended questionnaire, numerous additional benefits of using a dog guide arose and are discussed.

## A Look at the Training of Guide Dogs and the Freedom They Provide Their Blind Partners.

The purpose of this study is to provide multi-dimensional information about dog guides. The first of two main points will be an explanation of the progression from puppy hood to dog guide. Within this point aspects such as breeding practices, puppy selection, puppy raisers and formal training of some schools will be addressed. Currently, there are 10 members of the U.S. Council of Dog Guide Schools. No attempt will be made to give comprehensive information about all the schools, or to rate them in any terms, but similarities and differences will be discussed. The second point the paper will make is on the impact dog guides have on the individuals they are teamed with.

In the original proposal for this study, interviews with master trainers were going to be included in the results of the study. Due to formatting and flow concerns, those interviews will be used in the introduction.

There is a great amount of ignorance in the U.S. in regards to individuals who are blind or visually impaired and the dog guides that some utilize as a mobility aid. This paper will provide the general public an opportunity to learn about how a dog becomes a dog guide and the importance of dog guides to the people who use them.

There are approximately 135 million people worldwide who have low vision, and in the United States 1 in 20 (or 14 million) people have low vision (National Eye Institute [NEI], 2002). The National Eye Institute (NEI) defines low vision as "a visual impairment, not correctable by standard glasses, contact lenses, medicine, or surgery, that interferes with a person's ability to perform everyday activities" (2002). Over \$22 billion is spent annually on services for people with visual impairments. These monies are allocated to services such as:

education, treatment, and associated costs including loss of personal income and Social Security disability benefits (NEI, 2002). These figures are predicted to increase due to mortality rates decreasing, and it is predicted that by the year 2030 the number of American's over the age of 65 with a visual impairment will double (NEI, 2002).

Visual impairments can be caused by a number of factors including diseases, disorders, and injuries. According to the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), visual impairments do not affect all races equally. Eighty percent of people with a visual impairment are Caucasian, while eighteen percent are African American (American Foundation of the Blind [AFB], 2002). Age is a factor that contributes to visual impairments, with 45% of people with low vision having macular degeneration (NEI, 2002). Diabetes is also a rising concern, affecting 12% of those with visual impairments (Milligan, 1998).

Lifestyle changes are inevitable for people who acquire a visual impairment. Not only does the physical impairment influence a person's life style, psychological and economic factors play a role as well (NEI, 2002). Losing a significant portion of vision affects daily living, leisure activities, and work related performance, which can result in a person feeling depressed, fearful and anxious (NEI, 2002). An increase in injuries and falling is another concern.

With just under 100,000 children having a visual impairment, education becomes an important factor (AFB, 2002). Only 45% of people with severe visual impairments or blindness graduate from high school, a discouraging number when considering 80% of individuals without a visual impairment graduate high school (AFB, 2002). This is also a concern because many children with visual impairments also experience loneliness, lack of self-esteem, and often have a hard time making friends (Young, 1997).

Lack of vision affects people in the workforce as well. Title 1 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 outlines that it is illegal to discriminate against a person because of a visual impairment, which includes discriminating against people who use a dog guide as their primary mobility device (Eames & Eames, 1994). Survey research done by The Lighthouse found that one third of people with a visual impairment reported that their vision created problem at their jobs, and one half reported a loss of income a result of their vision (NEI, 2002). There research was supported considering that 70% of people with a visual impairment are under-employed or unemployed (Eames & Eames, 1994).

During World War II many veterans were blinded which sparked the need for formalized Orientation and Mobility training, and in turn dog guide training (Skellenger, 1999; Eames & Eames, 1994). There are four basic modes for which a person with a visual impairment can travel: sighted guide, long cane, electronic travel aides and dog guides (Skellenger, 1999). Dog guides will be the focus this study, however, recently horse guides have also become a mobility device some people choose to employ.

Janet and Don Burleson are currently breeding miniature horses (that stand 24 inches high) to guide visually impaired individuals. The Burleson's believe that the horses will make excellent guides, especially for those people living in rural areas. Another benefit the couple cites for a horse as opposed to a dog is that these horses live about 30 to 40 years, while dog guides usually work about eight to ten years (Neill & Ballard, 2001; Southeastern Guide Dog [SGD], 2003; Guiding Eyes for the Blind [GEB], 2003).

People with a visual impairment need to evaluate their own needs and desires in choosing their primary mobility device. There are approximately 109,000 people using long canes to aid their mobility, and an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 people using dog guides as their primary

mobility device (AFB, 2002). Which indicates that less than two percent of the population of individuals with a visual impairment uses a dog guide (Eames et al, 2001; AFB, 2002; Young, 1997). There is literature that advocates for cane use and for dog guide use. Individuals with visual impairments are very similar to their sighted counterparts, and the mobility device they use may attract attention to their impairment. Of course, it can be argued as to whether a cane or a dog guide attracts more attention (and whether that attention is positive or negative) to the individual (Lambert, 1990).

Advocates for cane use assert that even with a dog guide a person must maintain their cane travel skills in the event that their dog is sick, injured or retired. Cane users are not dependent on another living creature, and therefore they can tuck their mobility device in the closet, unlike an animal. Individuals who use a long cane may also feel more in-touch with their environment, and gain confidence from their independent travel skills (Eames et al., 2001).

Dog guide advocates assert that a dog can navigate many obstacles more efficiently and quickly than a person using a cane. Another benefit is that dogs also increase social interaction and provide companionship (Eames et al, 2001). Individuals who use a dog guide report that the dog provides them with higher independence, confidence, and socialization (Eames et al, 2001). This is not to say that negatives are not involved when evaluating the usefulness of a dog guide.

Dogs, guides or not, are social animals, and therefore interactive mobility aids. A person's cognitions about their dog guide may strongly influence the teams' success (Lambert, 1990). It is also a possibility that a dog guide will interfere with a person's family dynamics. The handler will bond with their dog guide, and most likely will become less dependent on a caregiver, which may invoke negative feelings or displaced relationships (Eames & Eames, 1994). In addition to family concerns, the general public may also need consideration. Dogs are

very social and strangers may want to interfere with the working relationship of the team by distracting the dog guide (with food, petting, etc.) or by trying to take over the job of guiding (by trying to "help" the handler, who does not need their help) (Eames & Eames, 1994). However, some may view the aspect of strangers interfering as a positive because dogs may be a source of increased interactions with the general public. Another concern, although illegal, is denial to rent or lease to a dog guide user (Eames & Eames, 1994). Other issues to consider are the costs involved in owning a dog guide. Food can cost five dollars a week or more, and dogs must also have regular veterinary check-ups, toys, and treats (Eames & Eames, 1994). A person considering a dog guide must be willing to make the necessary time commitment to their dog guides to ensure that the dog gets plenty of exercise, play, opportunities to relieve themselves and adequate time spent on maintaining their guiding skills (Eames & Eames, 1994). Once a person has decided that a dog guide could be the optimal mobility aid for them, choosing a school at which to apply and train is the next step.

The International Association of Assistance Dog Partners is a non-profit organization, established in 1993, that provides information about multiple types assistance animals. The U.S. Council of Dog Guide Schools (USCDGS) was established as a resource for individuals with visual impairments seeking to obtain a dog guide. According to USCDGS, its 10 member schools "promote high standards for the training and placement of dog guides" (International Association of Assistance Dog Partners, 2003).

In the preceding sections, each of the 10 member schools (see Appendix A for complete list including contact information) will be highlighted. For each school, information regarding the school's history, application process, breeding and puppy raising programs, formal training and team training practices will be presented. There are additional schools that train dog guides,



however this paper will only focus on those schools that are members of USCDGS. In addition, this paper will make no attempt to rate the schools in any terms. This information is just an overview of each school's methods and is a starting point for someone interested in applying for a dog guide.

Although each school is unique, there are trends and similarities among them. Before individual school practices are discussed, an overview of how the process is typically carried out will be outlined.

All USCDGS member schools are non-profit organizations. The schools rely on private and corporate donations and receive no government aid. Most schools provide dog guides free of charge, although some request a nominal donation. It is important to note that training a dog guide is approximately a two-year process that is estimated to cost \$20,000-\$30,000 (Guide Dogs of America [GDA], 2003; Guide Dogs for the Blind [GDB], 2002; GEB, 2003; Leader Dogs [Leader], 2003; Fidelco, 2003).

Once an individual has researched schools they are interested in, the next step is to apply. All schools require that individuals applying for a dog guide must be legally blind. In addition to that requirement, there are several other factors that must be taken into consideration to ensure the successfulness of the team. Guide Dogs of America lists criteria needed to be eligible for a guide that encompasses what every school is looking for: motivation, leadership, maturity, physical ability, meaningful work, vision loss, and orientation skills (2003).

A dog is a living creature, and therefore applicants must be ready to take on the responsibility of providing a good life for their dog. Due to maturity, most schools will not accept applicants younger than 16 years of age, and many require applicants to be 18 years old. Lukas Franck, a master trainer at The Seeing Eye, expanded on why there are minimum age

limits. In addition to the maturity of the applicant, the high school environment may pose additional problems (Franck, 2002). A high school student may not use the dog enough to make the team effective. This would be true if the student takes a bus to school, and would rarely use the dog guide in other situations. Also, maturity of other students at the school should be considered because the students may tease or distract the dog guide (Franck, 2002). Jim Powers, the graduate services coordinator for Guide Dogs for the Blind, mimicked these sentiments (2003).

Once age and impairment issues are resolved the schools must evaluate the personal characteristics of their applicants. Many schools will interview the applicant at home and/or work to aid in assessing the applicants ability to work with a dog guide. Schools require that applicants already possess independent travel skills. A person and a dog guide work as a *team* to travel safely, the dog guide cannot have full responsibility of the teams travel (Powers, 2003). Schools also must ensure that an applicant has a sufficiently active life so that the dog will be able to maintain its skills, stay healthy, and remain happy and enthusiastic about working.

Each school must acquire and properly train each dog to become a successful mobility aid. For most schools this process starts in a breeding program. Many dog breeds possess the necessary traits needed to become a successful dog guide, yet Labrador Retrievers are the most frequently used breed (GDA, 2003; GEB, 2003). Other frequently used dogs are Golden Retrievers, German Shepherds, and Labrador/Retriever mixes (Eames & Eames, 1994). Boxers, Standard Poodles and several other breeds are also occasionally used. Both sexes have been found to be equally successful in dog guide work..

When puppies are born they are evaluated for any medical condition (such as hip dysphasia, allergies, cataracts) that would hinder them in becoming a successful dog guide. The

puppies are vaccinated and allowed to nurse from their mother and socialize with their littermates. Typically, at about eight weeks, the puppies are then turned over to a puppy raiser.

Puppy raisers can be individuals or families that are willing to keep a dog until it is anywhere from 12 to 18 months old. In the words of Lukas Franck, "Without [puppy raisers] there would be no guide dog program," (2002). If a family is considering becoming puppy raisers, the entire family must be involved with the process, although one specific member will be the primary care giver. Puppy raiser(s) play an integral part of the training process. A raiser has the responsibility of properly socializing the dog for its later work. Raisers are there to provide the dog with a safe, loving home until the dog is mature enough and socially prepared to begin formal training. Responsibilities of raisers include: teaching the dog basic obedience, socializing the dog to people and places that the dog may work in the future, providing a safe loving home where the dog sleeps inside and receives lots of love and attention. Most raisers are encouraged to attend puppy raisers meetings, because it is a good place to socialize the dog, as well as interact and network with other raisers. For the most part, puppies-in-training must be kept on a leash at all times while outside, and many schools encourage the raisers to only walk the dog on the left side (because guides work on the left unless a disability prohibits it). There are some schools that also require that puppies be boarded at the school while they are in heat.

Many of the schools require that the dog only eat high quality dog food, and table scraps are highly discouraged. The raisers' out of pocket expenses vary from school to school. There are schools that provide free food, veterinarian care, and supplies. Other schools allow for stipends to cover these expenses and some schools require the raisers to supply all the necessities for the dog. Other expenses that may be incurred include; travel to and from the school,

replacement leashes, toys and treats. Some states do, however, allow tax deduction for any expenses incurred during the process.

Perhaps the hardest part of being a puppy raiser is returning the dog to the school for formal training at approximately 14 to 18 months old. However, this can also be the most joyous part, in that all the time and effort the raiser puts into the dog will pay off when the dog becomes a guide, and enhances the life of their new handler. Some schools will also let the raiser take home a new puppy when they return their current dog.

Before formal training begins the dogs are re-evaluated for any medical, behavioral or social problems that could hinder him/her in becoming a successful guide dog. If the dog has not already been neutered or spayed while with the raiser the procedure is done before training begins. The dogs are also given some time to adjust to kennel life again before formal training begins.

Formal training usually lasts between four to six months and typically begins with harness and obedience training. At this time, the dog begins to learn their guide vocabulary. Dogs typically learn about 20 to 25 commands (Ulrey, 1994; Powers, 2003). Left, right, forward, follow, sit, stay and find are just some of the commands that dog guides learn. It is important to use commands regularly because the dog may forget the command, or perform inappropriately, or incompletely if the skill is not maintained (Ulrey, 1994). Dog guides are trained to lead from the left to allow the right hand to remain free for other uses. Schools will train dog guides to work on the right if impairment prohibits use of the left arm. The dog progresses in skills to work in more challenging environments and are most often taught using positive reinforcement. . Verbal and physical (pets, pats, scratches) praise is used to reinforce positive behaviors; only occasionally, and in specific circumstances, is food used (Powers, 2003). The dog should make

a mistake the trainer will typically use either a leash or verbal correction and then go through the obstacle again until the dog has correctly performed the task.. Dogs, like people, vary in their personalities, and the type and strength of corrections must be appropriate for each individual dog and handler. Due to the fact that dogs are pack animals, they desire a pack leader, and possess an innate drive to please the leader as well. The handler must establish, from the beginning, that they are the pack leader and the dog will happily work for the handler.

As time progresses the dog learns to guide in all types of situations: urban areas, rural areas, on sidewalks, without sidewalk, on buses, trains and subways. They learn to navigate through any environment that their partner may be in. A dog guide will accompany its handler to school, work, stores, restaurants, parties, church, plays, just about anywhere a person may want to go. The dog guide learns to walk in a straight line, stop at changes in elevation (i.e. a curb or sidewalk crack), maneuver their partner around high and low obstacles, and sit quietly and patiently throughout their handlers' day.

Another important skill, perhaps the most important, is that every dog guide learns is intelligent disobedience (Franck, 2002). This means that the dog guide will disobey a command if it will lead the handler or team into danger. For instance, a person may tell her dog guide to go forward, but there is a tree limb hanging low. At that point the dog guide should disobey that command, and wait for their partner to establish where and what the obstacle is before trying to move further.. Toward the end of the formal training the dog guide will lead his/her instructor (whom will be blindfolded) through some type of obstacle course, to ensure that the dog possess the skills necessary to safely guide an individual..

California is the only state that legally requires instructors to become certified before training dog guides. The California State Board of Guide Dogs for the Blind is the agency that

licenses instructors in addition to training facilities (GDA, 2003; Guide Dogs of the Desert International [GDDI], 2003). Someone interested in becoming a certified instructor must complete a three-year apprenticeship under a licensed instructor. After the apprenticeship, the person becomes eligible to take a written, oral or practical exam to receive their license.

Currently there are no federal regulations set for guide dogs and guide dog training facilities. Lukas Franck of The Seeing Eye recognizes that there are benefits to the system in place in California, however he does not feel that this country needs a national certification program in place (2003). Jodi Meyer, a master trainer at the Guide Dog Foundation, also feels that training standards and licensing of trainers should be the responsibility of each individual school (2003). Jim Powers of Guide Dogs for the Blind felt that consumers could benefit from some sort of testing and regulation of training practices, due to the fact that the training schools are incapable of establishing a minimum standard for all dog guides (2003). However, there is also the question of who would be the impartial judge and regulator of guide dog standards. At this point, the best thing that a consumer can do is research the schools that (s)he is interested in as much as possible. There are numerous organizations and internet chat groups that can assist a person in obtaining the most information possible to make an educated and informed decision.

"Career change" is a term used for dogs that do not meet the requirements to safely guide; this is most often due to behavioral or medical problems (Meyers, 2003). In the event that this happens, most schools will first offer the dog back to the raiser family to keep as a pet. If that is not an option than many schools have placement programs for the dogs to be retrained in another field such as; search and rescue, police work, agility, or pet therapy. Many dogs can have a very productive working life; they are just not suited for guiding people who are visually impaired. For instance, a dog that has a strong sniffing distraction may make an excellent police

dog, or a dog that is too gentle may excel in therapeutic environments. Training a dog guide, as opposed to training a dog for other assistance purposes, requires the dog to have nearly a 100% response rate (Powers, 2003). Dog guides cannot make errors, because many errors would put the handler or team in danger. If a drug sniffing dog misses a scent, theoretically no one is harmed, if a dog guide misses stopping at a curb the handler could be at a serious risk..

After the dog has the necessary skills to guide an individual with a visual impairment, it is time for the dog guide to be matched with his/her partner. Often this process takes place at the school.. Some schools will train at an individual's home, but most require that the person come stay at the school for 20 to 28 days. During this time the individual will learn everything that they need to know to become a successful handler of a dog guide. In addition to learning how to command the dog guide, the students learn everything about properly caring for a dog. At the end of the stay at the school there is usually some type of graduation ceremony where the handler and dog guide officially become a team.

All the schools offer some type of follow-up services for the teams they graduate. Occasionally, a team will have to return to the school or have a school representative come to their home to work through any problems they may be experiencing with their dog guide. Approximately ten percent of dog guides are returned during the first year due to health, behavioral or working problems (Eames & Eames, 1994).

### The Seeing Eye

In 1929, Dorothy Harrison Eustis opened the first American dog guide school, The Seeing Eye. In February, The Seeing Eye (TSE) graduated its first two teams, and by the end of the first year 15 other graduates joined them. This school has been operating from its 60-acre facility in Morristown, New Jersey since 1965. To date the school, a non-profit organization, has

trained approximately 13,000 dogs for 6,000 people from each of the 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Canada. There are currently 1700 active teams (The Seeing Eye [TSE], 2003). TSE requests a donation of \$150 for the first dog, and \$50 for preceding dogs. The school has asserted that no applicant will be denied based on financial restraints; the donation is taken as a good faith measure to validate that the student is determined and serious about the commitment they are about to make.

In 1941, this school began its breeding program, which now breeds German Shepherds, Labrador Retrievers, and Golden Retrievers. On rare occasion, TSE does accept Boxers and mixed breeds. Demographic information on each dog is entered into a database to assist in consistently turning out the best qualities for a dog guide. The Seeing Eye emphasizes, "intelligence, good health, moderate size, sound hips and gentle temperament" when assessing potential dog guides (TSE, 2003).

The puppy-raising program at this school was started in 1941 in partnership with 4-H clubs of New Jersey (TSE, 2003). TSE will provide veterinary care for puppy, as well as a stipend for food. However, the raiser will have some out of pocket expenses for supplies such as toys, leashes and bones (TSE, 2003).

Although dog guides are allowed in all public places, a puppy in training is not. This school encourages its raisers to call businesses ahead of time and get an okay to bring the dog into the establishment. "From the point of view of the ADA that any family raising a puppy has the right to bring that puppy into a restaurant we feel is, is stretching the ADA into a direction that's not really necessary," (Franck, 2002). The school requests the raisers to respect if no is the answer, and does not encourage raisers to bring the puppies to restaurants or food stores (TSE,



2003). In addition, the raisers are asked to keep the dog on a leash at all times while outside, and does not allow the raisers to use electric fences (TSE, 2003).

When the dog is approximately 14 to 18-months-old the raiser will have to return it to The Seeing Eye to begin formal training. After the initial training, raisers are offered an opportunity to watch the puppy they raised guide a blindfolded instructor, and once the dog is matched and released from the school the raisers will receive some information about whom the dog has been matched with, and where they are living. For privacy purposes, the new owner's name will not be released. In the event that the puppy is not suitable for guide work, the raisers will be given the first opportunity to keep the dog as a pet. If that is not an option some dogs will be placed in other areas of work including pet therapy (Franck, 2003).

Once a puppy is returned to the school it is matched with person with a visual impairment. In the majority of cases this school does not accept applicants under the age of 18 due to maturity reasons. For team training the person lives at the school for 27 days (or 20 days for a retrain), and they are taught everything they will need to know to properly work with and care for their new dog guide.

#### Guide Dogs of America

Guide Dogs of America (GDA), with support of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, opened its doors in 1948. Joseph Jones established the school, originally named International Guiding Eyes until 1992, because as an older gentleman who was blind, he was unable to find a school willing to train a dog guide for him. By appointment, the general public is welcome to tour the facilities located in Sylmar, California, about 25 miles from Los Angeles.

This school's breeding program turns out approximately 230 puppies a year (GDA, 2003). In this program Labrador Retrievers account for 70% of the dogs, and Golden Retrievers and German Shepherds each compose 15% of the stock. To ensure the best stock possible, this school does not cross breed dogs (GDA, 2003). Occasionally, the school will train donated dogs if they meet rigid requirements to be a successful dog guide.

People living in central and southern California are eligible to be puppy raisers at GDA. Puppy raisers will receive the dog's essentials when they pick him/her up, and GDA will pay for all veterinarian bills. Food and other supplies are tax deductible in California (GDA, 2003). Raisers return the dogs at 18 weeks to begin In-For-Training. A barbeque is held for each class of dogs before beginning formal training.

Once the dog is ready to be a dog guide, it is matched with an individual with a visual impairment. Students at this school must be at least 16 years old, and they are not charged for GDA's services. The student and dog guide work together for 28 days at the school preparing to be a successful team. Although it is not that common, GDA has a career change program for dogs that are not suitable guides. GDA accepts applications from the general public to give a home to a career change dog, however the waiting list is four to six years long (2002).

#### Guide Dogs for the Blind

In 1942, Lois Menihew and Don Donaldson opened Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB), to bring a dog guide training school to the west coast (GDB, 2002). Since 1947, GDB has been located in San Rafael, California, and in response to demand, the school opened a second campus in Boring, Oregon in 1995 (GDB, 2002). Since opening, GDB has graduated more than 7,500 teams, with 1,870 active teams to date, serving people throughout the United States and Canada. This could not have been accomplished without the school's 700 employees and volunteers. The

school has provided more than 2,500 home visits and has had over 25,000 visitors to the campus (GDB, 2002).

GDB is funded solely from private donations, and there is no charge for individuals interested in a dog guide to apply or train at the school.. The school requires that applicants are at least 16 years old, legally blind with good mobility skills, and capable of working with a dog (GDB, 2002). The admissions department looks for good orientation and mobility skills, the student's physical ability, emotional stability, relatability to the dog, how much, where, and when the student travels, and the student's ability to learn to work with a dog guide (Powers, 2003). Once a written application is received, a Physicians Report Form will be sent to the applicants' physician to ensure adequate health. The last step in the application process is a home or workplace interview with the applicant..

Shortly after opening, GDB began its own breeding program to produce the most suitable dogs for guide work.. More than 400 "custodian" families have provided a home, as well as love, attention and food, to the breeding stock (GDB, 2002).

Labrador Retrievers are the most commonly bred dog at GDB, however German Shepherds, and Golden Retrievers are also bred. Labrador/Golden mixes are trained, however mixed breeds are not used in the breeding program. After puppies are born they are kept with the mothers for six weeks, and during that time they are monitored by the kennel staff. It is also during this time that the puppies are named (in alphabetical order), and tattooed inside the ear with an identification number.. At six weeks they are moved to the puppy kennel where they will stay for about two weeks until they are placed with a raiser family.

GDB has over 1,000 raiser families, located in eight western states, helping to socialize and prepare puppies for dog guide work.. To be a raiser for GDB the person must live in Arizona,

California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, or Washington, and be at least nine years old (GDB, 2002). The puppy-raising program is affiliated with 4-H Clubs, however there is no requirement to be affiliated with that organization. There are expenses involved in being a puppy raiser including food, toys, and transportation to and from GDB to attend training workshops and have progress evaluations. After the dog has been matched with its partner, the puppy raisers are invited back to the school's graduation ceremony to formally present their dog as a guide to its new handler. At this time the raisers can exchange stories and perhaps develop a friendship with the person who has received the dog they helped raise (GDB, 2002).

People living in GDB's service area are welcome to apply for a career change dog. In addition to being placed with private owners, many career change dogs maintain a working life. GDB has placed dogs in such careers as; pet therapy, search and rescue, tracking, agility, hearing or service dog training, and obedience work (GDB, 2003; Powers, 2003).

#### Pilot Dogs, Inc

In 1950, Pilot Dogs, Inc was opened with a combined effort of Stanley Doran, Charles W. Medick, and Everette R. Steece. As the owner of Perk Foods, Henry Staffel was able to financially contribute the effort and therefore play a substantial role in the establishment of Pilot Dogs. Since 1952, Pilot Dogs has been operating its school from the current location in Columbus, Ohio. This school's facility includes the main office, residence halls for students, and training and kennel facilities. Every year Pilot Dogs trains approximately 150 teams, for a total of over 5,000 for the school (Pilot Dogs [Pilot], 2003).

Pilot Dogs trains Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Doberman Pinchers, Boxers, Vizslas, German Shepherds, and Standard Poodles. The school does its best to accommodate

students' preferences, but must ensure that the dog will be properly matched and an effective team partner.

This school does not breed its own dogs; it relies solely on donated dogs. Only one out of every six dogs that is donated to Pilot Dogs is eligible to train to become a dog guide (Pilot, 2003). This school does, however, still rely on puppy raisers to socialize their dogs. Pilot Dogs will supply the raiser(s) with basic supplies, and reimburse the puppies veterinarian bills. It is the raisers' responsibility of supplying food, treats and toys.

Pilot Dogs services are free of charge to all students, and must be at least a junior in high school to apply. The school requires its new students to stay at the school for four weeks and returning students typically need only two weeks of training. Pilot Dogs estimates that its services run \$5,700 per student, including training the dog, student services, and transportation.

#### Guide Dogs of the Desert International

In 1972, Lafayette "Bud" Maynard established Guide Dogs of the Desert International (GDDI) which has been located in Painted Hills California, northwest of Palm Springs, since 1975. With the help of the Lions Club, Mr. Maynard wanted to supply dog guides for people who had a visual impairment in addition to other special needs.

Over the years, the school's campus has grown to 17 acres and supports student residence halls, kennels and breeding facilities, and the school's main office. Services from this school are provided free of charge to all students. GDDI lists no age requirements for applicants. Although the majority of the school's students are from the southwestern U.S., the school will train anyone from the U.S. or Canada. If an applicant lives close to the school a home interview will be conducted, students who live farther away must submit a video demonstrating their mobility skills (GDDI, 2003).

The breeding program at this school breeds Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, and German Shepherds. When a puppy turns about eight weeks old, this school utilizes its puppy raising program and places the puppy with a raiser. Raiser families are expected to absorb all costs associated with raising the puppy. The school offers discounted veterinary care if the raiser brings the puppy to the school's veterinary facility.

At about 16 to 18 months old the dog is returned to the school for formal training. Once the dog has been trained with the necessary skills is matched with an individual during a 28-day training session at the school. All services, including the dog and equipment, transportation, housing and follow-up services, are provided free of charge to the students.

This school has a fifty percent success rate in producing suitable dog guides. In the event that a dog is not suitable for guide work it will be first offered to other agencies that will retrain the dog to perform another service, and second the dog will be offered to the raiser's family.

#### Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, Inc

The Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, Inc (GDFB) was opened in 1946 with the original name Guiding Eyes, Inc. Civic leaders seeking to supply dog guides to the visually impaired free of charge founded the school. A few years after opening, the school moved to its current campus in Smithtown, New York, about 40 miles east of New York City. They currently operate on an 8-acre facility that is home to administrative offices, residential halls, kennels and breeding facilities. In addition to training dog guides, GDFB provides education about blindness, dog guides, and disability rights (2002).

GDFB trains students from all over the United States and the world. There is no specific age limit, but applicants must be of high school age. There is no cost to the student for the dog, transportation, housing or follow up services. The school recently began a program that would

provide \$200 worth of financial assistance to students who need it during the first year (Meyer, 2002).

This school breeds and trains Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers and Lab/Golden mixes. Once a puppy is born it is placed with a puppy walker in the northeastern United States. GDFB provides the walkers supplies to care for the puppy, and free obedience classes (Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, 2002). When the puppy is about 13 months old it is returned to the school for formal training.

Once the dog has been trained to guide, it is matched with a student.. The school does ask students if there is any type of dog they do not want to work with, however the school will match the individual with the dog best suited to their needs (Meyer, 2002). Students stay at the school for 25 days to train with their new dog guide.

Career change dogs from this school will be first offered to the puppy walkers. At one time, GDFB accepted applications for career change dogs but due to enormous demand, they have since stopped that practice (2002). GDFB places a few dogs a year with the Connecticut State Police, and approximately 25 dogs with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (Meyer, 2002).

#### Southeastern Guide Dogs, Inc.

Southeastern Guide Dogs, Inc.'s (SGD) main campus is a 24-acre facility in Palmetto, Florida that is home to the school's main offices, residence halls, kennels, and breeding facilities. In addition to this facility, the school has outreach programs in Atlanta, Georgia, and North Carolina (SGD, 2003). SGD has graduated over 1,000 dog guide teams (SGD, 2003).

Services are provided free of charge, however students at SGD are financially responsible for their transportation to and from the school, and all care for the dog guide after graduation. SGD estimates the cost of caring for a dog guide at \$700 to \$800 a year (SGD, 2003).

The majority of dogs trained at SGD are Labrador Retrievers, however this school also trains Golden Retrievers, Lab/Golden mixes, German Shepherds, Australian Shepherds, Hungarian Vizslas, Smooth Coated Collies, and German Shepherd/Collie mixes.

SGD uses a puppy raising program to socialize their dogs. Anyone within the vicinity of the school's campus is eligible to become a puppy raiser. At this school, puppy raisers assume all expenses of raising their dog. Raisers return the puppy to the school when the puppy is between 14 to 18 months old.

After formal training the dog guide is ready to be matched with its new handler. SGD will accept applicants that are at least sixteen years old, and capable of working with a dog guide. SGD also trains dog guides for people with a visual impairment in addition to special needs including people using a wheelchairs.

At SGD there are two options for training: school training and home training. School training requires students to stay at the school for a 26-day training period. Home training typically takes about two weeks, and is available for qualified applicants. This school also provides follow-up services in the home as often as necessary.

#### Guiding Eyes for the Blind

More than 5,000 teams have graduated from Guiding Eyes for the Blind (GEB) since its opening in 1954 in Yorktown Heights, New York (GEB, 2003). This school is a non-profit organization that provides dog guides free of charge, in addition to free room, board and travel expenses to its students. This school serves anyone who is legally blind, at least 16 years old, and



who is capable of using a dog guide. This school also trains dog guides for individuals with special needs.

Guiding Eyes primarily trains Labrador Retrievers, but also trains Golden Retrievers and German Shepherds. Student's preferences towards breed and sex of their dog are considered, yet the school must also match each student with a dog that is best suited to their needs.

A puppy raising program is in place at this school, but it is limited to those living on the east coast from Maine to North Carolina (GEB, 2003). This school pays for all veterinary expenses and a cage for the puppy, but food, toys, supplies and other expenses are the responsibility of the raiser. GEB requires that their puppies be leashed at all times, and socialized! exercised for a recommended three hours a day. In addition, this school requires raisers to cage train the puppies, and keep them caged when home alone. After returning the puppy between 13 and 22 months, the dog will begin a minimum of five months of formal training to become a dog guide.

GEB conducts home interviews with its applicants before acceptance. Once accepted to the program, students come to train at the school's facility for a period of 26 days. Only on rare occasions will this school home train with an individual.. Often the students will get the opportunity to meet their dog's raiser family at the graduation ceremony.

Dogs that are not successful guides will enter this school's career change program. GEB tries to place their career change dogs into other working environments, and many have gone on to aid the police force in bomb and drug detection (GEB, 2003).

#### Leader Dogs for the Blind

In 1939, a Michigan Lions Club founded Leader Dogs for the Blind, located in Rochester, Michigan, 25 miles north of Detroit.. Ten thousand people can attribute their dog

guide to the non-profit efforts of Leader Dogs (Leader, 2003). This school serves any legally blind adult, 18 and older, from across the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Europe. This school also trains dog guides for individuals who are deaf and blind.

Leader Dogs breeds its own stock in addition to accepting donated dogs (both puppy and adult). Leader Dogs breeds, and accepts for donation, German Shepherds, Labrador Retrievers and Golden Retrievers.

Puppies that are eligible to train to become a dog guide go to live with a raiser family. People from any location may apply to become a puppy raiser, but the school requires raisers to provide transportation to and from the school, and they must attend meetings or visit with their puppy counselor at least once a month. Financial responsibility of the dog is given to the raiser until the dog is returned to school. Leader Dogs requires that puppies be kept on a leash, or they must be supervised in a fenced in yard. They also request that raisers cage train the puppies.

Once applicants have been accepted, they come to the school and train with their new dog guide for four weeks or less for retraining. All services are provided to students free of charge, a generous gesture considering Leader Dogs estimates they spend \$17,000 to \$20,000 to train a dog guide team (Leader, 2003). Transportation is provided free of charge for students living in the United States and Canada.

#### Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation

The Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation's beginnings vary from most other schools. In 1960, the Fidelco Breeder's Foundation was established to donate dogs to other schools training dog guides. In 1981, Fidelco expanded its operation to become a dog guide team training facility. This school is a non-profit organization that is located in Bloomfield, Connecticut. At Fidelco,

students are requested to donate \$150 for their dog and training, a small amount considering Fidelco estimates that it costs the school \$20,000 to train a team (Fidelco, 2003).

Fidelco differs from the other schools in two other ways, as well. First, Fidelco only breeds and trains German Shepherds and considers its dogs to be a "breed within a breed" (Fidelco, 2003). In addition, Fidelco is the *only* school to *exclusively* home train its students.

After puppies are returned from their Foster families, at approximately 15 months old, they begin formal training at the school.. Fidelco spends approximately six months formally training their dogs. Once the dog is ready to guide, it *takes* approximately three weeks of daily training in the home environment for the team to be adequately prepared to work together.

Now that the process of obtaining a dog guide is understood, the current study will seek to identify the impact of using a dog guide to a person with a visual impairment. . To accomplish this, dog guide users will be recruited and asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire via e-mail.. It is hypothesized that dog guides will increase an individual with a visual impairment's independence and confidence. In addition, it is hypothesized that using a dog guide will increase social interaction and the self-concept of an individual who is visually impaired.

## Methods

### *Participants*

The 14 *participants* (13 female, 1 male) in this *study* were recruited from a Guide Dog Users, Inc. (GDUI) list serve. The *return* rate was approximately 50%. *Participants* were primarily Caucasian, and lived all across the United States. *Participants* ranged in age from 20 to 62. In total, *participants* have had 47 dog guides from 8 schools, and 2 were owner trained. Each *participant* has had between one and nine dog guides, and 11 *participants* have retired one or more dog guides. Several breeds of dog guides were represented in this sample. Specifically,

there were 26 Labrador Retrievers, 9 Golden Retrievers, 8 German Shepherds, 3 mixed breeds and 1 Collie. Guide Dogs for the Blind was represented the most with 12 dogs trained at that school. Second to that was The Seeing Eye, which trained 10 of the dogs.

### *Materials*

The survey sent to dog guide users was developed after research on the subject matter was reviewed. Refer to Appendix B, C, and D for the recruitment material used, the informed consent, and the questionnaire completed by dog guide users, respectively.

### *Procedure*

A message was posted on a GDUI list serve asking members if they would be interested in completing a questionnaire about dog guides. Interested members of the list serve privately replied to the message. Once interest was established, an informed consent form and questionnaire were e-mailed to participants. Participants were given as long as necessary to complete the questions, and returned the completed questionnaire to the researcher via e-mail. All questionnaires were received within one month of being sent out.

### *Results and Discussion*

The majority of participants were born blind or with a visual impairment, and only one participant lost his vision as an adult. Retinopathy of Pre-maturity caused many participants' blindness, which was once believed the result of the oxygen used in incubators. Therefore, the majority of participants did not go through major lifestyle changes as a result of their visual impairment. Participants reported that their visual impairment has always been a part of their life and self-concept. One participant put it in these terms; "Being blind is a part of me just like being a woman is." However, the participants that progressively lost their vision reported that there were negative feelings and depression associated with their vision loss. One participant reported

that losing their vision was "the most terrible thing at the time I could think of," another reported, "I do not believe I am as good looking, talented or free as many people."

Many participants reported that they had supportive parents; however, some parents did not focus on the impairment, or actively pursue early intervention for their child. Some participants reported that, in a way, it was a positive experience that their parents did not expect any less of them, just because of their visual impairment.. One participant related a story of what her father told her on her first day of school.. He told her that he expected her to stick up for herself and "if someone starts something, you better finish it."

Almost all of the participants graduated from high school.. Some attended a school for the blind, others were in public school, and some were mainstreamed. Education was a factor that many participants viewed as an essential part of life, pushing many to receive bachelors and masters degrees. As one respondent said: "Vision loss really forced me to complete my college education as there simply were not as many opportunities open without a college degree."

Surprisingly, the majority of participants never received formal Orientation and Mobility training. Long cane use was the primary mobility aid employed by the participants before obtaining a dog guide. Although, a few reported never using a cane and relying on sighted guides and techniques they developed individually. The majority of participants decided early in life that a dog guide would be their optimal mobility aid.

The average age of obtaining a dog guide was 25 years old, and many participants applied right after graduating from high school.. Overall, independence was the distinguishing reason people wanted a dog guide, and all the participants reported being animal lovers. In addition to independence, participants reported they felt that a dog guide would increase their confidence, safety, travel accuracy and provide companionship. Many also stated that a dog

guide would make traveling to and from work, school, and around the community, much easier and more efficient. Participants reported that they felt using dog guide would also allow them to travel faster, with more grace and dignity.

For the most part, the decision to apply for a dog guide was received well by participants' family and friends. Those who did receive negative feedback, reported it was due to factors such as: lack of education and awareness about who is eligible to use a dog guide, dog guide effectiveness, a perceived fear that the presence of a dog would increase discrimination from the public, and apprehension about the individual's ability to care for a dog. Regardless of negative feedback, participants still felt that acquiring a dog guide was the optimal choice for them.

Most of the participants felt that the process of going to a school and training with a dog guide was an exciting and emotional experience. Some participants reported that at times they were not confident that they would be matched with the right dog, or capable of handling the responsibility that comes with owning a dog. Others reported it was hard to be away from their home, family and friends. Undoubtedly, any reservations were unfounded, and participants' felt training was a fulfilling, and rewarding experience. As one participant reported: "we were two young spirits enjoying getting to know each other and to work together." Another participant reported that after one of her first walks as a team she was "overcome with joy over the fact, that now that I had a dog, I could navigate these trails just as easily as a sighted person."

Although all the participants reported training to be a positive experience they also reported that it was very challenging. Several participants reported not initially being aware of how strenuous training could be, physically and mentally. They reported there was much to learn and remember about safely working as a team, and caring for the dog. Many participants

reported that they were nervous about forming a bond, and establishing trust with their new dog guides.

After in-school training is completed, it is time for the team to go home and begin to work in their home environment. . All the participants responded that coming home with their dog guide produced a wide range of emotions. Many participants report being simultaneously scared and excited. With the help of their dog guide they were finally able to be independent, but there was no trainer there to ensure the safety of the team. Participants had reservations about whether they could remember everything they had learned, and how their new partner would adjust to its working life. Excitement was felt by participants about continuing to build a bond with their new partner.

All of the participants have had a dog guide for a year or more, and can accurately describe what impacts their dog guide has had on their lives. In general, participants are extremely positive about their dog guides, and feel that choosing to use a dog guide was the best decision for them. This is reflected in the fact that every participant that has had to retire a dog guide has trained with a new one. One participant found using a dog guide to be so beneficial, that she has trained with nine dog guides over the years. Another participants reported: "I am comfortable working with dog guides and see myself doing this until I grow quite elderly."

The participants of this study overall found using a dog guide to be a very positive, rewarding experience. Best friend, security, independence, confidence, safety, freedom, love, magical amazing, partner, eyes, dignity, synergy, empowering equalizer, my partner, and my life were all phrases that participants used to summarize what their dog guide means to them.

A strong bond is formed between a person with a visual impairment and their dog guide. A few participants reported immediately bonding with their dog guide, however the majority

viewed bonding as a process that takes time and patience. Eventually, a bond will be formed when a person travels with, plays with, and cares for their dog guide. Participants reported respecting and admiring their dog guides and considered them to be a best friend. One person related that, "it's so nice to wake up to a happy puppy instead of a cane again!" Many participants noted the trust that has been acquired between themselves and their dog guide. As one participant put it "my dogs are [allies], friends and cooperative team members." Another reported that "[my dog guide] is first thing I think about in the morning, and the last thing I think about before I go to sleep. She is my other half."

As hypothesized, independence was an outstanding benefit of working with a dog guide. Every participant reported some degree of increased independence. One participant related that her dog guide gave her a reason to get out and be active in the community. Dog guides have eased the nervousness of participants' loved ones when the team traveled alone. "I needn't feel my needs or desires are an inconvenience to friends or family," one participant related. Dog guide users said they did more by themselves than they would have when using a cane. A participant reported that her guide gave her the confidence to live on her own, and not depend on her mother to help her take care of her business. Another participant reported feeling "more complete with a dog guide."

In terms of mobility, participants have reported their dogs to be invaluable. Their dog guides have allowed easier, safer travel to and from work, school and the community. As predicted, participants reported that traveling with a dog guide has made them more independent, given them the confidence to travel, and increased their efficiency as a traveler. One participant reported still using a cane from time to time, but explains that "[my dog] is a different way of getting around, he makes the time more exciting and many times more interesting. He is a good



companion and gives much love." Another participant reported that "[my dog] has made going out a pleasurable experience not a dreaded one." With a dog guide participants reported being confident to go places that they would not have gone previously without a sighted guide. As one participant related, "I do things with my dog, like traveling to Australia alone, that I would never do with just a cane." Another participant reported that her dog guide has made her a more relaxed traveler, and the dog guide frees her mind from having to be so aware of surroundings. She is able to trust her dog to alert her to obstacles and dangers in the environment. . Another participant reported that traveling with her dog guide was simply fun.

Dog guides were reported to have a very positive impact in the work force and at school.. No one reported encountering any problems in the workforce or at school due to their dog guide, in fact participants reported the opposite. One participant summed up the impact of his dog in the workforce; "My dog guides have significantly augmented my adaptability to new environments and have improved my acceptance in the workplace." Dog guides have been well received and provide an "icebreaker" when working with clients. Participants report people remember them because of their dog guide. Dog guide work as a "stress agent" and have the ability to calm "irate clients." Many reported that their co-workers loved to have a dog working in their office.

At school, dog guides have been an asset in several ways, and no participant reported having any problem associated with their dog. One participant reported that her dog guide would know how to get to and from her classes before she did. Another frequent response was that having a dog guide at school made classmates more comfortable to talk to the individual, and many friends made at school can be attributed to the dog guide.

Dog guides are also an asset in terms of attitude and self-concept. . Most participants stated that having a dog guide has had a positive effect on their attitude and self-concept. . Some

participants reported that their dog guide had no affect on their self-concept, but one participant made the point: "I have always known who I was, but I think anyone gains from the flow of unconditional love we receive from our guides." Increased confidence was an overwhelmingly popular benefit of having a dog guide. A participant related that "[my guide] has made me more responsible, more patient, [and] opened up my eyes to more situations." Working with a dog guide made some participants proud and gave them a "good feeling." A sense of self-worth was attributed to a dog guide, in that the dog depends on its partner, and makes them feel needed. Having a dog guide has "boosted my self-esteem, because getting him showed me that I could do things, where I once doubted myself." Other participants have reported being more comfortable with themselves and more tolerant of others because of their dog guide. "My work with my dog guides has reinforced a positive, praising, can-do-outlook." Another participant reported that "[my dog guide] is a part of my self-concept, because of her I am a better person." One woman reported that her dog guide has made her a better parent..

Family and friends have received the participants dog guides well, and a few said that if someone does not like their dog then they would not associate with that person. Having a dog guide has made it easier for some participants to make friends. Participants related that they believe people feel more comfortable talking to an individual with a visual impairment when a dog guide accompanies them. The dog guide provides a means of beginning a conversation, an icebreaker. The dog guide also allows family and friends to feel more comfortable that their loved one is safe traveling independently. Participants reported that their family and friends are proud of the work the team does. Problems that people reported were more often due to a dog issue, than a dog guide issue. Some family and friends do not want their dog in their house or car

because of smells, shedding, and fear of dog concerns. The majority of participants said that they have worked through these problems, and generally people are very accepting.

When asked about how the team is received by sighted strangers, the responses were positive for the most part. Participants reported that, in general, strangers are very impressed with their dog guide, and the way the team works together. Strangers often comment or ask questions about the dog, which offers the individual a chance to meet, interact and educate people they may not have without a dog guide. However, several people noted that well-meaning strangers could be an unwanted distraction to themselves or their dog guide. Petting and feeding by strangers can be an occasional problem, but due to necessity, each person has found their own way of handling these situations.

According to participants, many sighted individuals have misconceptions about the work dog guides' perform. Participants have found that people believe a person must be completely blind to use a dog guide, which is not true. Many participants responded that strangers often think that the dog guide knows where to go, and the handler plays a passive role in the mobility of the team. Almost every participant noted that people often think that a dog guide can read traffic signals and knows when to cross the street. It seems that the public lacks the knowledge that using a dog guide is a *team* effort and only as a *team* can they be successful.

Participants were asked to address what skills their dog possesses that they find most useful and interesting. Responses to these questions were widely varied, but overall participants found their dog's guide work to be most important. However, many traits that were not specifically trained in the dog were reported to be very valuable. Almost all participants responded that it was amazing and useful how quickly their dog guide could learn new skills. Many report their dog guide learning new routes quickly and remembering them on subsequent trips. Another

participants reported that her dog could typically learn a new object or command within three repetitions of the word. Some people have trained their dog with the find command paired with an object, and report that there are countless objects that their dog is able to locate for them. Several participants responded their dog guides have the skills to take them outside from anywhere in a building. One participant even noted that her dog had mastered not only getting outside, but also finding the exact door that they had entered through, which was a convenient way for her to orient herself, and know where to go next.. Another respondent retrained her dog guide to guide on the right, and carry or pick up objects with her mouth. One participant reported the way that her dog guide could find her a seat: "He can locate a seat on a train, bus or subway even if he has to create it by staring at someone until they give it to us."

Many participants also highlighted the fact that as a team, they are very in tuned to each other.. Participants report that their dog guides can read their non-verbal signals such as: breathing rate, nervousness, pace, and excitement.. A few others related stories of their dog guide also working as a brace when they have lost their footing and would have fallen. Although not trained to guard, participants related a feeling a security of having a dog accompany them.

Although participants are overall happy with their decisions to use a dog guide, each has had his/her share of problems. Problems have been medically, behaviorally and socially influenced. Several participants had to retire guide due to physical ailments that prevented them from working such as allergies, tumors, and age related ailments. Behavioral and social factors have created problems as well. Included in behavioral problems was human error in not positively reinforcing the dog's good behaviors and not correcting negative behaviors. As one participant explained, a dog guide is still a dog, and has natural canine tendencies. Distraction was another issue that many participants reported having to work on with their dog guide.

Distractions included birds, squirrels, other dogs, cats, people and children, scents and food.

Other problems included a lack of confidence or focus.

Another problem associated with dog guides is attacks by other dogs. A few participants reported being involved in a dog guide attack, occasionally resulting in devastating implications. Due to being attacked, a dog guide may become aggressive, timid and/or refuse to work. It is important to note that an attack does not have to be the end of a dog guides working life, but will be something the team must work through.

Retiring a dog guide is an emotional issue that all dog guide users will have to face at some time. The average working life a dog guide is eight years, and some people will have to go through the process of retiring a dog guide several times. All participants that have gone through the process of retiring a dog guide have found it to be a heart wrenching experience with many emotions involved. Many respondents felt sadness, guilt, anger, and grief when retiring a dog. As one participant explained, "Like a person, you never forget those that love you or their unique personalities and quirks."

The participants explain that retiring a dog guide can be difficult on many levels. Aside from the emotional loss of the working relationship with their dog guide, participants also had to consider issues such as where to place the retired dog, how best to reward their retired dog for the much appreciated work it had done, and how to cope with everyday living without their dog guide companion. In addition, some participants were concerned that they would not be able to bond with another dog guide because they had loved the preceding one so much.

Participants also found it difficult to know when the appropriate time to retire their dog guide was. One participant said, "You find yourself watching for a sign that the time has come to retire them or put them to sleep if they have multiple problems, but they are so loyal and so stoic

that it is not easy to make that final decision." Many others mimicked the remarks of this participant. . Participants found that they had to balance their feelings of wanting to continue to work with their dog guide, and knowing that it was time for their dog to retire due to physical or mental issues, or both.

Often medical reasons were cited for retiring a dog guide. Some participants had feelings of guilt for not being aware or able to prevent their dog's medical problems. Others could not afford mounting veterinarian bills, and were forced to put their dog to sleep. While one participant was experiencing watching her dog's medical condition deteriorate, she likened her emotions to losing her father.. The experience of giving the okay to put their dog to sleep was the most difficult part for participants.

Once the decision was made to retire their dog guide, where the dog should live is another issue. Some participants chose to keep their dogs as pets after they were retired. However, some found that their retired dog guide was having difficulty adjusting to not working, and decided that the dog would be happier in a new environment. . Others found a friend or neighbor to take their dog. One woman said that a she found a neighbor that has taken two of her retired dog guides, and since she and the woman have developed a deep friendship.

Retiring a dog guide can also have positive consequences. Many participants remarked that after they moved through any grief associated with their dogs' retiring, that it was also exciting to be getting a new dog guide. Some people who retired dog guides due to behavioral problems felt relief in ending the strained relationship. Others participants felt that they were rewarding their dog for years of service by allowing him/her to become a pet, devoid of responsibilities.

In addition to data that supports the hypotheses of this study, additional information about the effectiveness and dynamics of using a dog guide were found. Although no specific hypotheses were set forth, the researcher found the information to be valid and relevant to the study.

Although hypotheses were supported, the procedure of this study leaves problems with the generalizability of the study. The participants of this study are not a representative sample of the population of people using dog guides. The participants came from a specific organization and all were computer users. In addition to limitations of the obtained sample, there was also an uneven amount of men and women who participated in the study. Because there was only one male participant, this study cannot confidently generalize to both genders.

In the future, it may be beneficial to employ quantitative methodology. If this was done, participants could be randomly assigned, and the researcher would be able to use sophisticated statistical programs to analyze the data. Perhaps that would add power to the findings. In addition, a representative sample would allow the researcher to generalize to the larger population.

## Appendix A

### *Dog Guide School Contact Information.*

Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation, Inc.

P.O. Box 142

Bloomfield, Connecticut 06002

(860) 243-5200

[www.fidelco.org](http://www.fidelco.org)

Guide Dogs for the Blind, Inc.

P.O. Box 151200

San Rafael, California 94915-1200

(800) 295-4050

[www.guidedogs.com](http://www.guidedogs.com)

Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, Inc

371 East Jericho Turnpike

Smithtown, New York 11787-2976

(800) 548 4337

[www.guidedog.org](http://www.guidedog.org)



Guide Dogs of America

13445 Glenoaks Blvd.

Sylmar, California 91342

(818) 362 5834

[www.guidedogsofamerica.org](http://www.guidedogsofamerica.org)

Guide Dogs of the Desert International

P.O. Box 1692

Palm Springs, California 92263

(760) 329 6257

[www.guidedogsofthedesert.com](http://www.guidedogsofthedesert.com)

Guiding Eyes for the Blind, Inc

611 Granite Springs Rd.

Yorktown Heights, New York 10598

(914) 2454024

[www.guidingeyes.org](http://www.guidingeyes.org)

Leader Dogs for the Blind

P.O. Box 5000

Rochester, Michigan 48308

(888) 777 5332

[www.leaderdog.org](http://www.leaderdog.org)

Pilot Dogs, Inc.

625 W. Town Street

Columbus, Ohio 43215

(614) 221 6367

[www.pilotdogs.org](http://www.pilotdogs.org)

The Seeing Eye, Inc

P.O. Box 375

Morristown, New Jersey 07963-0375

(973) 539 4425

[www.seemyeye.org](http://www.seemyeye.org)

Southeastern Guide Dogs, Inc.

4210 *ti*<sup>h</sup> Street East

Palmetto, Florida 34221

(941) 729 5665

[www.guidedogs.org](http://www.guidedogs.org)

## Appendix B

*Recruitment Material Posted on the GDUI List Serve*

Hello everyone!

As many of you know, and I'm sure some of you don't, I am a senior at NIU and I am finally starting to write my Honor's Capstone! It has a title now: A Look at the Training of Guide Dogs and the Freedom they Provide to Their Blind Partner. It will be a qualitative study on the impact of guide dogs. The purpose of the paper is to provide a resource for the general public to learn about where guide dogs came from and how they affect the people who use them. As part of my research I would like to administer surveys to guide dog users. If anyone would, please, be interested in helping me out by filling out a survey I would really appreciate it. Everything would be done via e-mail, so if you are willing please reply to this message and I will send you the survey right away. Once the paper is finished (probably sometime around April 2003) I would gladly send anyone who is interested a copy. I hope to hear from you soon! Take care, Sarah

## Appendix C

*Informed Consent for Dog Guide Users*

I agree to participate in the research project A Look at the Training a Guide Dogs and the Freedom they Provide to their Blind Partner conducted by Sarah Dietz under the supervision of Dr. Gaylen Kapperman at Northern Illinois University. I understand the purpose of this study is to provide general information about the training and use of guide dogs.

I understand that by agreeing to participate in this study I will be asked to complete a survey, via e-mail, and possibly answer any follow questions via telephone.

I understand that with my permission a telephone conversation may be audio-taped.

I am aware my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and if I have any additional questions concerning this study I may contact Sarah Dietz at 815 748 0697 or Dr. Kapperman at 8157538453. I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at 8157538588.

I understand that the intended benefit of this study is to promote awareness about guide dogs.

I understand that my name could be used in the study unless I request it to be kept confidential.

By completing this survey I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

## AppendixD

*Dog Guide User Survey*

1. Name?
2. Age?
3. Sex?
4. What state do you live in?
5. Race (optional)?
6. At what age, and under what circumstances, did you become blind/visually impaired (VI)?
7. What impact did that have in regards to:
  - Job?
  - Mobility?
  - Independence?
  - Attitude?
  - Education?
  - Self-concept?
  - Family and friends?
8. What methods have you used to increase your mobility?
9. At what age did you get your first dog?
10. Why did you decide to get a dog?
11. How was that decision received by family and friends?
12. How many guide dogs have you had? (please include name, breed, where the dog was trained, years you had the dog, age and reason for retiring your dog)
13. (Skip if you never retired a dog) Describe what it was like to retire your dog.
14. Describe your experiences and emotions during the training process
15. How did you feel about coming home with your dog?
16. How do you maintain your dogs skills/training?
17. What problems have you had with your dog?

18. What is your dogs most useful skill?
19. What is your dogs most interesting skill?
20. How do you reward your dog for working for you?
21. Describe the bond you have formed with your dog.
22. What impact has your dog had on your:
  - Job?
  - Mobility?
  - Independence?
  - Attitude?
  - Education?
  - Family and friends?
  - Self-concept?
23. How do you feel you and your dog are received by sighted individuals?
24. How do you feel about people petting your dog?
25. In your opinion, what is the most common misconceptions sighted people have about blind individuals and dog users?
26. How do you feel about public services/accommodations for blind individuals?
27. Describe in two words or less what your dog means to you.

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