

Powering Through the Pandemic

*DON WILLIAMS
AND DETROIT*



Guide Dogs
for the Blind



Guide Dogs for the Blind

A NON-PROFIT, CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION

CONTACT INFO

California Campus, National Headquarters:

350 Los Ranchitos Road, San Rafael, CA 94903
415.499.4000 | Fax 415.499.4035

Mailing address (donations only):

P.O. Box 3950, San Rafael, CA 94912-3950

Tax ID: 94-1196195

Oregon Campus:

32901 S.E. Kelso Road
Boring, OR 97009
503.668.2100
Fax 503.668.2141

800.295.4050 | guidedogs.com

In Canada: Guide Dogs for the Blind International

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1275 STN K, Toronto, ON M4P 9Z9

Canadian registration number: 83061 8682 RR0001

866.797.6603 | gdbinternational.ca

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Guide Dogs for the Blind follows the guidelines recommended by the Council of U.S. Dog Guide Schools and the International Guide Dog Federation for the humane care and training of our dogs, and the instruction and services offered to our clients.

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On occasion, GDB will share donor information with like-minded non-profit organizations to better fulfill our mission. If you do not want your information shared, please email us at donations@guidedogs.com.

GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

Greetings,

It's been quite a year, and despite the challenges we faced from COVID-19, your unwavering support enabled us to pivot our way through the pandemic to create so many positive outcomes at Guide Dogs for the Blind.

One recent success was with our K9 Buddy program, which matches children and young adults with special dogs to be their companions. For children who are blind or visually impaired, life can be especially isolating; having a K9 Buddy can open that child's world. *Nessa*, a Black Lab with soulful eyes, was one of those special dogs we paired with 6-year-old Hannah.

Hannah's parents say the bond that has developed between Hannah and *Nessa* has been beautiful to watch. Says mother Lauren: "I am crying with joy as I write this, to witness and know in my heart the difference and impact *Nessa* (and GDB) is already having on Hannah's life, and knowing the positive role she will continue to have for many wonderful years in Hannah's life is a gratitude Sean and I can never fully express."



HANNAH, LEFT, K9 BUDDY NESSA, AND SISTER EMMA

GDB's dogs truly are magical. Our Virtual Holiday Celebration held earlier this month, celebrated the magic of guide dogs. If you missed it, you can view the event online—details are on page 10. There's heartfelt client stories and plenty of magical puppies and dogs to see!

Thank you for being part of GDB's amazing community. You are changing lives!



With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Christine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christine Benninger
President and CEO

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR RECENT GRADS!



Congratulations to Alyssa Loftis and Don Williams who are our first clients to graduate with their guide dogs since the pandemic interrupted our guide dog training program last March. Six months later, both grads participated in our in-home training program where our guide dog mobility instructors provide free, personalized training in the client's home environment.

Alyssa, 19, says her guide dog *Diva*, was worth the wait. "Words can't convey how much I love *Diva* and how much she's changed my life. I am eternally grateful."

Alyssa knew she wanted a guide dog after spending two summers attending Camp GDB. The camp gives teens ages 14 to 17 the opportunity to meet other teens who are blind or visually impaired while providing educational opportunities to learn about the guide dog lifestyle and the importance of orientation and mobility skills as they relate to guide dog travel.

Alyssa says *Diva* has changed her life in ways she never thought possible.

"I used to be scared to walk around my neighborhood by myself, but *Diva* has given me so much confidence that going out is now an adventure," says Alyssa. "*Diva* makes everything memorable and fun. I can't believe all the doors she's opening for me. I feel so free." Alyssa has been taking remote college classes and looks forward to returning to campus in the spring with *Diva* by her side. "She's my eyes, she's my furry friend. I will never be alone. She makes me feel unstoppable."



DON AND DETROIT

Alyssa has only praise for her in-home trainer, GDB Senior Guide Dog Mobility Instructor Katie Anderson from our Oregon campus. “I couldn’t ask for a better instructor. Katie was so supportive and empathetic,” Alyssa says. “And GDB training is tremendously flexible and personalized. The instructors teach you what you need to know to fit your lifestyle.” And *Diva* has fulfilled all of Alyssa’s expectations and more. “She is who I was meant to be with. Guide dogs are amazing. She is a life-changing gift!”

Don, who lives near our California campus, had seen our guide dogs being trained in town and was interested in partnering with a guide dog to remain active as his sight continues to diminish. He had one week left of training with his guide dog, *Detroit*, when the pandemic hit and shelter-in-place orders were issued.

Don and *Detroit* were reunited in September, but poor air quality from nearby fires

postponed training again. Through it all, Don remained hopeful that he and *Detroit* would be back together.

“Back in March, we had hand-picked *Detroit* for Don—they were a perfect match,” says Training Class Supervisor Heather Foster. “Unfortunately, when the shelter-in-place mandates happened, we had to press pause on the partnership. Don and *Detroit* were off to a fabulous start. I can’t tell you how happy I was to reunite this team (in September)—Don and *Detroit* picked right back up where they left off.”

When Don completed training, he was all smiles. “It feels really good to be reunited with *Detroit*. I hung in there—I didn’t give up. He is such a good dog. It feels good to be walking with him. He takes care of me. He makes sure I’m safe. He’s my partner, and I love having him by my side.”



PUPPY CENTER

Young Heroes Academy Helps Puppies Become Tomorrow's Canine Heroes

Each year, approximately 850 puppies are welcomed into the world in the Puppy Center on our California campus. In their first few weeks of life, the pups are gently introduced to the world by staff and puppy socializers, who expose the pups to new situations, all in a positive, playful environment. Our Young Heroes Academy exposes puppies to new sights, sounds, and situations like stairways, grates, different surfaces, and unusual objects to help increase their confidence when they encounter something new. Take a video tour of the Puppy Center at guidedogs.com/puppycentertour.

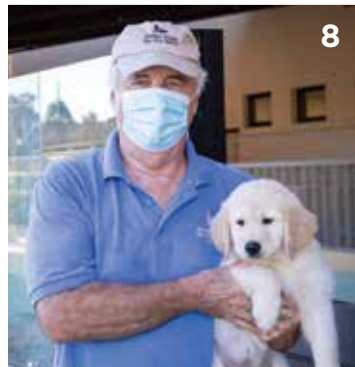


POWER A PUP ON A MISSION

Donate today to help our young heroes reach their full potential! Please use the attached envelope to mail your donation today or donate online at guidedogs.com/newsgift.

DONATE TODAY TO CREATE TOMORROW'S CANINE HEROES

- ▶ **\$50** goes toward supplying a skateboard to be used by our puppy socialization team to expose pups to different types of movement
- ▶ **\$100** helps provide a balance disc to help pups learn to stay steady on uneven terrain
- ▶ **\$250** assists with the costs of a leash, puppy coat, vet products, and equipment for puppies in the homes of volunteer raisers
- ▶ **\$500** helps provide initial vaccines and veterinary care for five puppies
- ▶ **\$1,000** goes toward the cost of a treadmill used in the early stages of training to teach young dogs the concept of pulling into a harness



PICTURED

1—A happy Golden Retriever puppy. 2—GDB Retail Supervisor and Operations Analyst Michelle McNew hands off a Golden Retriever puppy to Puppy Truck Driver Kent Castle. 3—Registered Veterinary Technician Taylor Sanchez with a yellow Lab puppy. 4—A yellow Lab puppy learning to walk down a flight of stairs. 5—Canine Welfare Neonatal Technician Libby Scott with a Golden Retriever puppy. 6—Canine Welfare Neonatal Technician George Bevins with a Golden Retriever puppy. 7—A Golden Retriever puppy. 8—Puppy Truck Driver Kent Castle. 9—A black Lab puppy getting a check-up with Registered Veterinary Technician Taylor Sanchez and Veterinarian Kris Gonzalez.

O&M IMMERSION PROGRAM

If there is one thing that 2020 has taught us, it's that the simple act of taking a walk in your neighborhood can bring a sense of normalcy, and perhaps a spark of joy, to our daily routines.

For Marta Van Leuven, COVID-19 was the ideal impetus for sharpening her travel skills using a white cane so she could safely enjoy her neighborhood while awaiting her next guide dog.

Marta enrolled in our Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Immersion Program, a free, five-day training course that has been offered as one-on-one, home-based training sessions during the pandemic. "GDB's O&M Immersion Program offered all the necessary protocols for staying safe—including wearing masks and staying socially distanced at all times."

Marta gained valuable travel skills such as learning how to hold and use the cane properly, to learning how to better listen to the traffic. "There were so many things I learned that are invaluable to me and my safety."

Orientation and Mobility Manager Marc Gillard and O&M Specialist Angela Smith provided Marta with the tools and skills for safe, efficient cane travel that translate to working with a guide dog.

"Marc and Angela inspired me to develop these new skills—like using all of my senses to their full potential while walking—something I had never fathomed I could

actually do. I am delighted to start moving through space more efficiently and with more relaxation at a nice walking pace. That was a huge gift to me."

With her now-solid foundational travel skills, Marta is eager to be paired with her fourth guide dog. "I cannot begin to describe what each of my marvelous guides have given me in every aspect of my life. They gave me joy, happiness, and freedom."

Congratulations Marta—we can't wait to see how far you'll go!



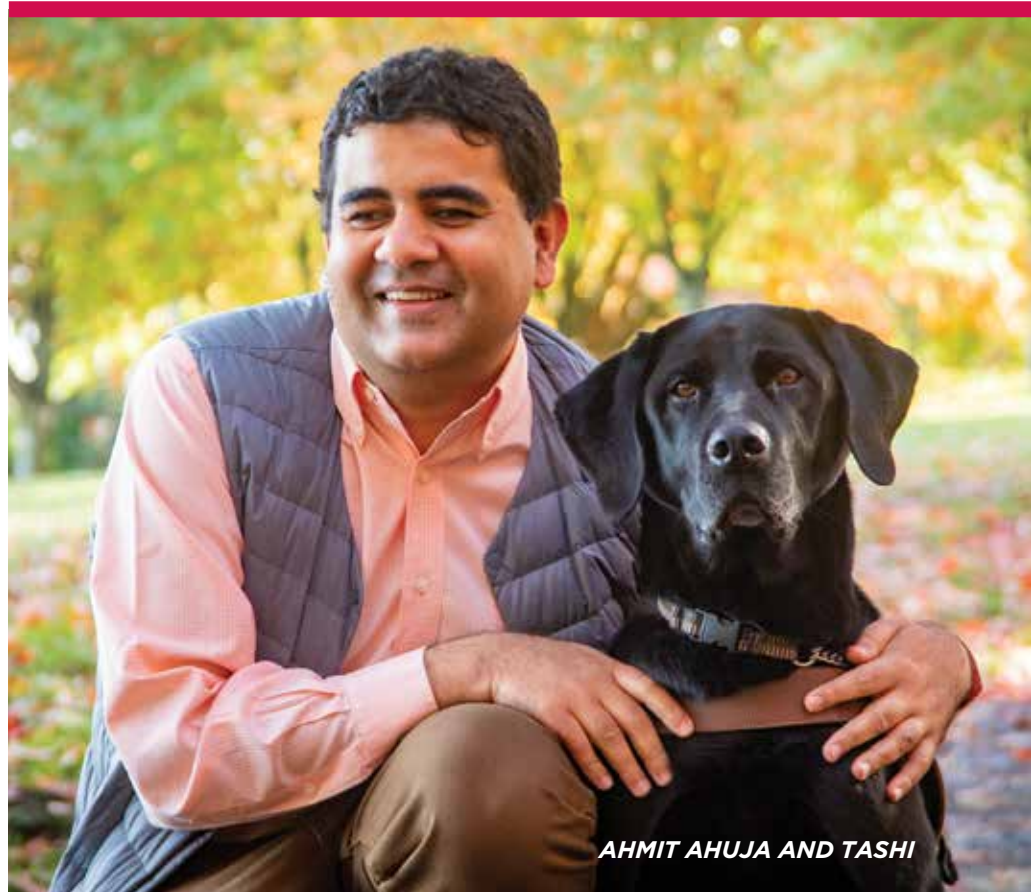
MARTA VAN LEUVEN

DIGGING INTO DATA

GDB and American Foundation for the Blind Launch Extensive Research Study

Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) and the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) have embarked on a two-year research study to examine the long-term outlook for guide dog use in the United States and Canada.

This first-of-its-kind study seeks to determine why guide dog ownership is much more prevalent among people who are blind or visually impaired in the United Kingdom, compared to the United States and Canada. Researchers will gather data from those with direct experience with GDB and guide dog schools in Europe.



AHMIT AHUJA AND TASHI

The study will also include extensive interviews with orientation and mobility (O&M) instructors across North America to assess their training, skills, and knowledge in evaluating whether a guide dog is a viable option for students and clients. O&M instructors are an important link between people who are blind or visually impaired as they often advise clients about whether a guide dog is right for them and teach them the skills to qualify for a guide dog.

“This is the most comprehensive research study we’ve embarked on, and we hope its findings will help us remove barriers for more new clients to experience the life-changing empowerment that a guide dog can bring to their lives,” said Theresa Stern, vice president of outreach, admissions, and alumni services for Guide Dogs for the Blind. The study’s findings will be published in peer-reviewed research journals and will be presented at conferences focused on blindness.



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Notice of Data Security Incident

Blackbaud, the data services vendor that manages Guide Dogs for the Blind donor contact information, notified us that it discovered and contained a data security incident earlier in the year. Blackbaud advised that no GDB credit card or bank account information, usernames, passwords, or social security numbers were stolen. While we have no indication that any personal information was misused, we want to notify you because we respect and value the privacy of your information and want to make sure you are fully informed. A full account of this security incident can be found on our website: guidedogs.com/datasecurity



VIRTUAL HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

Thank you to the more than 2,000 registered guests who joined us for our Virtual Holiday Celebration presented by Suburban Auto Group. Thanks to YOU, the December 6th virtual event was a real-life success, and on behalf of us here at GDB and our Canadian sister organization, Guide Dogs for the Blind International (GDBI), we are so grateful for the outpouring of support during these unprecedented times. In case you missed the event, don't despair! You can still view a recording of the festivities and support GDB/GDBI by visiting guidedogs.com/celebration2020 or gdbinternational.ca.

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