

# GUIDE DOG NEWS

2022  
ISSUE 4



**COLTON MCCURDY AND  
K9 BUDDY, CAJUN**



**Guide Dogs  
for the Blind**





# Guide Dogs for the Blind

A NON-PROFIT, CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION

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# GREETINGS FROM THE CEO

Greetings!

I hope you and your loved ones are enjoying the holidays. During this time of year, I am especially grateful for all you do to empower our clients to live their best lives every day. Your support has been so important, particularly as we navigated our way through the pandemic while facing unprecedented challenges from COVID-19. Our ability to be nimble and innovative served us well as we adapted our business to continue to serve our clients, no matter what. I am pleased to report that our business operations are back to pre-pandemic levels!



On that note, I am thrilled to announce that our campuses are open to the public for graduations and tours! In addition, we are now live streaming our graduation ceremonies so you can tune in from home. Highlights of the tours include visiting the Learning Lab in our state-of-the-art Puppy Center on the California campus (complete with puppy viewing!), and stops in our kennel complex and veterinary clinic on the Oregon campus. Reservations are required for tours. Go to [guidedogs.com/visit](https://www.guidedogs.com/visit) to learn more.

## Looking Ahead

Your continued support will help Guide Dogs for the Blind:

- Train the world's premier guide dogs to serve hundreds of new clients and support 2,000 current guide dog and K9 Buddy teams throughout North America — free of charge.
- Enable more clients to receive the orientation and mobility skills needed to move through the world more safely and confidently with a cane or a guide dog — free of charge.
- Introduce more youth who are blind or visually impaired to the guide dog lifestyle through a variety of programs, camps, and workshops — free of charge.
- Serve as an innovative global leader in creating more inclusive communities through our advocacy and educational outreach programs.

Thank you again for all you do to support our mission. Together, we are unstoppable!

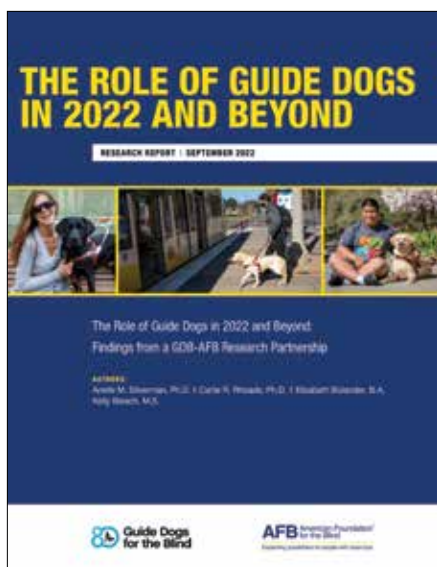
With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christine Benninger'.

Christine Benninger

President and CEO

# THE ROLE OF GUIDE DOGS IN 2022 AND BEYOND



Guide Dogs for the Blind and the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) have completed a landmark two-year research study examining the long-term outlook for guide dog use in the United States and Canada. Findings have been published in a report titled *The Role of Guide Dogs in 2022 and Beyond*.

The first-of-its-kind study revealed two key findings: a greatly expanded use of technology among travelers who are blind or visually impaired, and a shift to using rideshare services from public transit and walking.

While the convenience of rideshare has great appeal to travelers who are blind or visually impaired, the study also showed that rideshare access denials often played a devastating role in the lives of guide dog users.

Rabih Dow, GDB's director of outreach and advocacy, says the mixed findings highlight the need for greater advocacy and accountability to protect guide dog users' access rights to public transportation including rideshares. "Discriminating against guide dog teams is not just a matter of being denied a ride," says Rabih. "Many people who are blind or visually impaired depend on rideshare for work, to connect to public transportation, or take their child to a medical appointment on time. When a guide dog team is left waiting outside in



***"We are concerned about guide dog handlers' civil rights, and we are troubled by corporate social responsibility indifference."***

—Rabih Dow, director of outreach and advocacy



**CHRIS YOON AND  
GUIDE DOG, SADIE**

excessive heat or cold temperatures it can even be life-threatening. We are concerned about guide dog handlers' civil rights, and we are troubled by corporate social responsibility indifference.” He notes that the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division is tracking data on rideshare denials and urges guide dog handlers to report their concerns at [ada.gov](https://www.ada.gov).

GDB Alumni Association Board member and client Chris Yoon says the rideshare company Uber changed the way he traveled, freeing him from having to rely on public transportation. In July of 2022, he started working at Uber as a product manager advocating for equity and inclusion on the product equity team. “When I learned about the work of the product equity team at Uber, I knew I wanted to bring my lived experience to the table along with my professional experience as a tech product manager,” says Chris. “This is a great opportunity to educate people on the issues of equity facing our community, and I hope I can make an impact on how Uber empowers mobility, economic independence, and social opportunity for all of our users.”

The study also uncovered there is a substantial subset of potential guide dog users who have not acquired the prerequisite mastery of orientation and mobility skills (O&M) to qualify for a guide dog due to an extreme shortage of O&M services and instructors, particularly in the U.S.

“These robust findings will help us remove barriers so more people can enjoy the benefits of the guide dog lifestyle, especially in the areas of rideshare access, travel technology, and O&M training,” says Theresa Stern, vice president of interdisciplinary client services and engagement for GDB. AFB’s Director of Research Dr. Arielle Silverman agrees, noting there are several areas where AFB and GDB can collaborate with O&M professionals and people who are blind to maximize opportunities for independent, safe, and efficient travel. Study findings will be published in peer-reviewed research journals and will be presented at conferences focused on blindness. For a copy of the report, visit [guidedogs.com/study](https://www.guidedogs.com/study). To hear a discussion on the study, listen to episode 16 on *Central Bark* at [guidedogs.com/podcast](https://www.guidedogs.com/podcast).



# K9 BUDDY PROGRAM

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Our K9 Buddy program is expanding! The program matches specially selected dogs to become wonderful pets and buddies to people who are blind or visually impaired. Launched in the early 2000s, GDB first provided K9 Buddies to children and their families living in the western United States. In our ongoing efforts to serve clients more broadly, the K9 Buddy program has expanded to serve people of all ages throughout the U.S. and ultimately Canada.

“We believe that a dog can make a remarkable difference in any person’s life by fostering a sense of caring, companionship, and responsibility through the human/animal bond,” says K9 Buddy Program Manager Kelsey Gilbert. “This expansion enables us to be more inclusive and serve more individuals with visual impairments.”

Adults benefit from the companionship and increased confidence of having a dog by their side. For a child, a dog can contribute to sensory development, motivate learning, and enhance self-esteem. K9 Buddies can help prepare people for a guide dog if they decide to pursue the guide dog lifestyle, but they are not trained to perform the tasks of a service dog and therefore are not defined as service animals by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

K9 Buddies are provided free of charge, and clients are eligible for GDB’s Veterinary Financial Assistance program to support the ongoing health of the dogs throughout their lifetime. “Cost should never be a barrier to anyone who could benefit from the companionship of one of GDB’s exceptional dogs,” says Kelsey.

Steve Gomes recently received his first K9 Buddy. Steve previously had guide dogs, but at 67 years old, his needs changed, and he no longer had the skills to work with a new guide dog. But he was an ideal candidate for a K9 Buddy.

“I spoke with Kelsey and told her that I was hoping for a ‘love bucket’ kind of dog. It wasn’t long before she called and said, ‘I found a love bucket for you!’” That ‘love bucket’ was *Bill*, a black Lab.



**STEVE GOMES WITH  
K9 BUDDY, BILL**

“*Bill* and I bonded immediately. Thank you for realizing that the K9 Buddy program is so beneficial to people who are blind or may no longer need a guide dog. What GDB has done for me is priceless.”

Demarie McCurdy says watching her son Colton bond with his K9 Buddy, *Cajun*, has been amazing. “He truly is Colton’s best friend and helps Colton with anxiety and calming down when he is worried or upset.” *Cajun* walks Colton to and from the school bus every day, and Colton loves to greet him when he gets home. It’s been the best experience.”

Client Kaylin Driller says her K9 Buddy, *Callum*, is her best friend and has helped her grow as a person. “Talking to him has helped me to use my voice more and speak up more in everyday activities such as school or sports.” Says Kaylin. “I know I can come to *Callum* for anything, and he will listen. I am so grateful for him, and I look forward to having more adventures and memories with him.”



KAYLIN DRILLER WITH  
K9 BUDDY, CALLUM

## YOU CAN HELP SUPPORT OUR K9 BUDDY PROGRAM AND OTHER LIFE-CHANGING WORK!

- ▶ **\$50** helps provide a leash and grooming supplies
- ▶ **\$100** helps cover the cost of vaccines and veterinary care for one guide dog
- ▶ **\$250** assists with a “Puppy Raising Kit” for a volunteer puppy raiser
- ▶ **\$500** helps pay for an initial K9 Buddy visit and training session
- ▶ **\$1,000** helps support the cost of training a guide dog team

# GDB GRAD TAKES ON NEW CHALLENGE



**ARIA MIA LOBERTI AND GUIDE DOG, INGRID**

Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) graduate Aria Mia Loberti wowed attendees at our Canine Heroes Gala October 29th when she took to the stage to share her life story. Aria will soon be starring in the Netflix adaptation of the best-selling novel, *All the Light We Cannot See*, by Anthony Doerr. The four-part series is expected to air in 2023. Aria, who was matched with her guide dog, *Ingrid*, in 2017, is no stranger to new challenges and adventures.

After graduating with honors from University of Rhode Island in 2020, she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship that took her and *Ingrid* to the UK where Aria received her master's degree with distinction from Royal Holloway in 2021. She returned to the US to pursue another life-long dream: earning her Ph.D. at Penn State. *Ingrid* has been by Aria's side through it all, and Aria credits *Ingrid* with giving her the confidence and increased independence that she has needed to take on new adventures in her life.

As for her latest accomplishment as an actor, Aria says: "Not in a million years did I think anything like this would ever happen to me." Aria had auditioned for the central role in the film despite having no previous professional acting experience. She says she has enjoyed working with the creative team who insisted on finding an actor who was blind or visually impaired for the role of a young woman who is blind and living in occupied France during World War II. "They are the stuff dreams are made of. I am massively lucky. More lucky, and humbled, and grateful than I can express."

Aria says she takes her responsibility in the role seriously, knowing what her character means for people who are blind and disabled. "A blind lead portrayed by a blind actor. This is a significant leap forward for disability inclusion, rights, and representation on screen and beyond. I will never not feel the weight of that, and I will bear it proudly and use it as a catalyst for positive change, equity, and breaking down barriers."





# CANINE HEROES *Gala*

**CELEBRATES GDB'S  
80TH ANNIVERSARY!**

We were thrilled to gather in person for our gala at the Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco, in October. The record-setting event raised more than \$700,000 for our life-changing programs! Special guest Aria Loberti shared her life story, and we paid tribute to actor, philanthropist, and GDB supporter, Betty White. Attendees also enjoyed a special performance from Grammy- and Emmy-winning film composer and music producer, James Newton Howard, accompanied by Grammy-winning violinist, James Ehnes.

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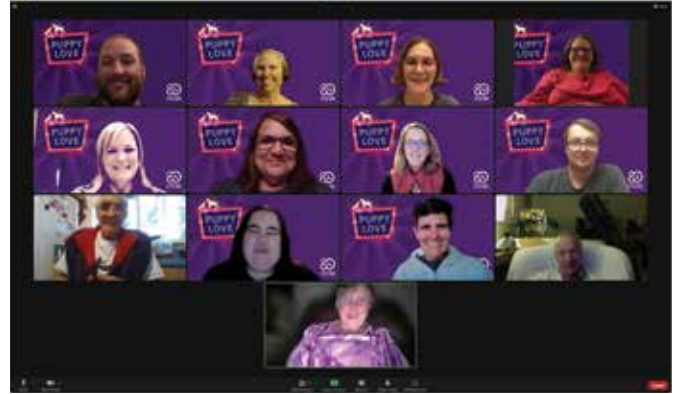
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At Guide Dogs for the Blind, we believe that we are stronger as a community. That's why GDB's Alumni Association offers alumni chapters throughout North America that provide clients with opportunities for mentoring, networking, and advocacy work. In October, more than 400 GDB alumni and volunteers participated in our weeklong Virtual Alumni Reunion celebrating 80 years of powerful partnerships.

"The ability for our clients to connect with each other and the wider GDB community is such an important part of our culture," says Theresa Stern, GDB's vice president of interdisciplinary client services and engagement. "By holding the reunion virtually this year, even more people could participate. It was an opportunity to support and learn from each other, as well as have a lot of fun!"



**PARTICIPANTS IN GDB'S "PUPPY LOVE" GAME SHOW AT THE VIRTUAL ALUMNI REUNION**

Several presentations focused on educational support around technology such as GPS and wayfinding apps, or how to navigate the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and how it is applied in the areas of employment, public services, and recreation. Other presentations explored lighter topics such as bread baking, hiking with a guide dog, and creating handmade books.



***"What a successful reunion! You could just feel the excited and joyful mood of every audience. Kudos and thank you!"***

**—Candy Weinper, reunion attendee**

Participants also enjoyed open mic sessions, virtual mixers, and games like *The Puppy Love Game*, the guide dog version of *The Newlywed Game*. Guide dog handlers were paired with the volunteers who raised their guide dogs, and each duo competed for points as they dispensed juicy truths, alternate realities, waggable stories, and more about the pooches.

"GDB's Alumni Association has provided endless opportunities for learning and support," said GDB client and reunion attendee Candy Weinper with guide dog, *Beta*. "Being connected to my fellow guide dog handlers as well as the staff has made losing my vision feel far less scary. What a gift you've provided!"



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75	6.0%	75/80	5.5%
70	5.3%	70/75	4.9%

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