Teresa Stern: Welcome to Central Bark, a podcast from Guide Dogs for the Blind. I'm Teresa Stern and I'm your host.

Teresa Stern: Hello everyone, and welcome to Central Bark. Today we have an awesome episode that I know you're going to love. Our guest today is Dr. Kate Kazminski. She is our medical director here at Guide Dogs for the Blind. Welcome, Kate.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Well, thanks Teresa. I really appreciate you inviting me here today.

Teresa Stern: Absolutely. So, Dr. Kate, tell us a little bit about your background and how long you've been involved with Guide Dogs for the Blind, how you came to this crazy, amazing community.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: I've been a veterinarian for over 20 years, and so at the beginning I was in private practice. I had my own practice. You might be able to tell as we go along here that I'm from Canada, so I owned a practice up in Canada following my graduation from vet school. I came to San Francisco just over a decade ago, and I've been working in nonprofit, the nonprofit aspect of veterinary medicine since then. I started at GDB at the end of 2018. GDB's Mission and our Veterinary Financial Assistance program really spoke to me. And being able to practice veterinary medicine and support and empower Guide Dog teams was really important to me as a human.

Teresa Stern: That's amazing. That's amazing. And tell us a little bit, like you talked a little bit about the empowerment and really being able to probably serve the client in the way that you wanted to. Tell us about how different that might be from private practice and how you've sort of found that here at Guide Dogs for the Blind.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: One of the most amazing things about being a veterinarian at Guide Dogs for the Blind is, I feel it is an incredible example of why we all went to vet school. It's about you and the patient. It's, I've said it a million times, it's veterinary medicine and it's purest form. It truly is just you and the patient and you get to do what is best for the patient and that person that's attached to that patient without worrying about providing estimates or the financial abilities to pay the bill. Obviously, as everybody is experienced, we just have these continually rising costs in veterinary medicine, which are warranted. Medical care is very, very expensive. For being able to just do what is right for the patient in front of you without all of that background noise is just exceptionally rewarding as a veterinarian.

Teresa Stern: It's amazing. I can really feel that every time I've had to go into the veterinary clinic at GDB with issues with one of my dogs and something that's always struck me and I think sort of what you just said sort of speaks to that is that there's the patient who's the dog, and then there's kind of the patient that's the person too.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: When you ask somebody why they went to vet school, nobody says it's because I love dealing with people, ever. No one's ever said that, but we go to vet school because it sounds so simplistic, but for the most part, people just really can't connect to animals. And yet that animal is always connected to a person and you learn really quickly how important communication skills are and supporting clients as well as the patient in front of you.

Teresa Stern: Wow. Yeah. Yeah. Goodness. And then you get to serve all these amazing Labradors and Golden Retrievers too, right?

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Yeah, it's-

Teresa Stern: No more hamsters.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: No more cats.

Teresa Stern: No more cats.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Don't get me wrong. I like cats, but it's something, the dogs that we see in our clinics are just magic. I have a shelter medicine background and shelter dogs I think are also magical. So magical. And then I came to GDB and it just increased that level of mysticism like a whole four more levels up. These dogs are incredible.

Teresa Stern: Yeah. They're so attuned. And I know in the vet clinic, you guys have this amazing way of working with our dogs that gives them, like I wish my doctor, regular doctor had. Can you talk a little bit about the positive reinforcement and what you guys do to make the dogs feel comfortable when they're being treated?

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Yeah, for sure. Guide Dogs for the Blind always relies on positive training. Techniques are really important. And thankfully within the veterinary profession, probably over maybe the last five years, maybe 10 years, has been a movement movement called the Fear Free Movement. That it's an understanding that animals that come into a vet clinic feel fear, anxiety, and stress. And there's actually education and certification for people who want to learn how to reduce fear, anxiety, and stress in their patients. And that is called Fear Free. And all of our veterinary team in both California and in Oregon and in our puppy center all are Fear Free certified. And it's about-

Teresa Stern: That's great.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Making the experience fabulous for the dog as well as for the client.

Teresa Stern: Every time I go in and the way that I'm treated and the way my dog is treated, I'm always like, "Gosh, I wish the general practice physicians at the scope of training would be great." Oh my gosh. So I want to talk to you a little bit about something I think that's been on our minds for a while now as, gosh, just all these crazy weather conditions and earthquakes and fires and emergencies. What would be some tips that you might have, especially for maybe somebody who has a service dog being really prepared for the next catastrophe and hopefully then it won't happen?

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: It's a great question. And personally, I have a special interest in disaster preparedness, being a volunteer with the Sonoma County Animal Response Team and also Guide Dogs for the Blind Emergency team that prepares for disasters on campus and off. It is, regardless of where you live, for us here in Northern California, obviously the fires tends to be what we all often think about, but it might also be an earthquake, it might also be flooding, or it might be on the other side of the country where we have tornadoes or hurricanes. So I think the best way to prepare for these disasters is to actually prepare. And for me, being prepared involves three different steps. The first one is being aware of the risks for the area that you live in. So for us, wildfires, earthquakes, making a plan, what does your specific household require?

And that for our listeners who have guide dogs, having a service dog makes that plan a little bit different than it might be for someone who doesn't have a service dog. And then the third part of that plan is actually get ready. And that's when you get your go bags and you make your plans and it's in place. One of the main things that I think about when I think about emergency preparedness for service dogs is it's really important that everybody remember that during an emergency service animals are allowed to be transported with their handlers during evacuation.

If a handler needs to be evacuated the guide dog goes with you. And that's really different than somebody's pets. So when we talk about things that are different, that's important, I think for our listeners to be really mindful of. The situations are always anxiety provoking ways.

So I think it's important to try to be calm because we want our guide dogs to also to be able to do their job and the best that they possibly can at any time. And I think when we feel stress or we panic, I think it probably influences our guide dog's ability to do their job as well. So to the best of everybody's ability, being able to plan ahead so that everything is in place will go a long way to reduce the anxiety of those moments. I think one of the biggest things that I would suggest with people with animals is really making sure that they've prepared to have a go bag available and that it's in a place where it should be, which should be by the front door.

Having a plan in place, having a go bag in place, mapping out in your head where the route will be if you need to leave in an emergency and having a backup plan, your second route, what would that look like? Making sure that you have a list of people that you can call on, whether it's a neighbor to support you, if you need to have that support along the way. If you want to talk about what goes in a go bag, do you want to talk a little bit-

Teresa Stern: Yeah, what do we need? What's most important?

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Well, the interesting thing about go bags is that a few years ago we were talking about planning for 72 hours and now a lot of the emergency preparedness talks more about planning for supplies up to seven days, which is interesting. And that's been a bit of a transition. And I don't know if Covid brought the-

Teresa Stern: That's a bigger bag, Dr. Kate.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: A big backpack. I don't know, when I think of a dog's go bag, this is what I think about.

I think the backpacks work well because you can put it on and it frees up your hands for the most part. And being able to, again-

Teresa Stern: Super important for a guide dog handler to have those hands available.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: I think that might be important. And I think having it at the front door, ready, and the ready is super important. So we talk about food and water, and so I think somewhere between three days and seven days, let's just, let's say if I were planning it for myself, for my dogs, that's what I would plan for. A collapsible bowl works that can be used for food or water is really important and really helpful in those sort of situations. Veterinary records including vaccination record as well as a page that gets printed out that it has a bunch of contact information on it. So things like it identifies your veterinarian, it identifies a contact number at Guide Dogs for the Blind. It includes a contact number for your local veterinary emergency clinic. It includes as well numbers for emergency contacts, so people that might be in your area, but also relatives or friends who might not actually live right in your immediate area where the disaster is.

Teresa Stern: Gotcha. Okay.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: I think being able to have this in a printout form is important as well as I think making it a digital copy. So making the form and then taking a picture of it on your phone so that you can actually carry it with you. The medications. What else should go into your go bag would be medications the dog is on. Food.

Teresa Stern: Oh yeah, food. They're definitely going to want the food.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Food. Including a photo of yourself and your dog is really important. And it's important for identification reasons. Because if anybody get ever gets unintentionally separated from their dog, it is recommended to have a photo of yourself and your dog in your go bag or on your phone. Somewhere that's been documented. I think also on that form, it would be helpful to include allergies. With regard to a service dog, are there any action words? What's the word that you use to ask your dog to relieve? Because sometimes dogs do get separated and sometimes guide dogs have different terms than sometimes [inaudible 00:12:12] dogs-

Teresa Stern: Good point. Yeah. Kind of all the things that you would want someone to know about your dog. So in case something happens to you or you get separated, the dog is comfortable and understands what the person's talking about. Yeah, makes sense.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Exactly. I think having a backup caller with an ID tag and a phone number's important. Extra leash, those sort of things. And probably some poop bags.

Teresa Stern: Poop bags are good. I was also thinking the booties might be good too, because depending on what kind of emergency it is, keep their little paw protected.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Yeah, that's a great suggestion, Theresa. And also, depending on what part of the country you live in, your emergency might be in the middle of winter.

Teresa Stern: That's true too. And it sounds like, it seems like all these things could also be super helpful for folks who have pets at home as well, wouldn't you say? Or is there anything else different that you would suggest for people with pets?

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: No, I don't think that there's anything else that I would recommend that would be different. The one thing that I think is helpful also, which I didn't mention, is having your dogs micro chipped. Our dogs, our guide dogs are micro chipped. So people who have pets, having a microchip would be helpful as well as maybe a caller. Those callers that have, they're actually their name embroidered into it and the phone number of the home.

Teresa Stern: Okay.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: So I think in those situations where the potential for animals to be separated from their person, that those means of identification are really important.

Teresa Stern: Yeah. No, that totally makes sense. I think, like you said, just having this stuff together can really help bring down that anxiety. If you just put it together, so everybody get it together this week, and we're all going to make a commitment to put these things together. I think that's huge. It's just having that ready to go so that in the instance that something happens, our pets are safe, and we're safe too.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Every year for the last four years here in California, every May I go through the situation of getting the go bags for all of our family together, all of our dog go bags, all of our important documents. I put them up near the door in front of the house and every fall. And sometimes we've had to be evacuated. Absolutely [inaudible 00:14:41]-

Teresa Stern: You have in the fire area.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Yep. And no matter how prepared you are, it still takes you so much time to get out of the house, which was really interesting for me. And then every fall I unpack it all and I put it all away. So it's a bit of work, but I know someday it will be worth it if we really need it.

Teresa Stern: Absolutely. Absolutely. So tell me about your dog family and your animals. Do you have some animals at home, Dr. Kate? I always like to hear about people's animals.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Oh, do you really want to know about that Teresa?

Teresa Stern: Or one or two of them, maybe.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Yeah, I love animals. So we have a few farm animals here that are pet pet pigs.

Teresa Stern: You do?

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Yeah. We-

Teresa Stern: You do. Like real big pigs?

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: They are big pigs. They're not pop belly pigs. Oh, they're all Covid animals. So they're all animals that during, when covid hit, all of the slaughterhouses had to depopulate and animals needed to find homes. So we have two sheep and we have two pigs who are about 400 pound pigs. And we also have two livestock guardian dogs who live outside and care for them and protect them because we live out in a country where they're mountain lions and whatnot. And they're amazing dogs.

And then as far as house dogs go, I have three dogs. None of them are career change from GDB just yet. But these are all dogs that have found us over the years.

Teresa Stern: Aw. Lucky dogs and lucky pigs and lucky sheep. I just trying to picture the go bag for the pig.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: That one is challenging.

Teresa Stern: Yeah.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: That's a big go bag.

Teresa Stern: That's a big go bag. Oh my goodness. Well, thank you so much Dr. Kate. Thank you so much for what you do for Guide Dogs for the Blind, for all of us clients. Thanks for all this great advice. I think we'll all feel a little bit safer having this information.

Dr. Kate Kazmin...: Thank you so much for inviting me today. It was a pleasure speaking with you.

Teresa Stern: And also, I just want to say for all of you who are part of our Guide Dogs for the Blind Community, if you are ever in a situation, an emergency situation, or anything that you're anxious about, please feel free to reach out to our support center and we'll have people who are ready to talk to you and give you some great advice.

Speaker 4: For more information about Guide Dogs for the Blind, please visit guidedogs.com.