**DEPARTMENTS**

**ADMISSIONS AND GRADUATE SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

**Criteria for Admission:** The following criteria are necessary for obtaining a Guide Dog:

* **Legally blind** in both eyes (20/200 best corrected vision or less than 20% field of vision). Another way of saying it is “Legal blindness is 20/200 or worse in the better eye with correction, or a field restriction that is less than 20 degrees”.
* Must have completed Orientation and Mobility Training
* Most of our clients are over the age of 16, however we accept applications from clients of all ages
* Independent Travel Qualifications include: The applicant must be currently traveling independently (without the assistance of another person) on at least three meaningful routes that are a minimum of ½ mile, including street crossings. An applicant must be getting out and independently traveling at least four times a week.
* Physically capable of participating in our training program, and working a Guide Dog on a daily basis
* Mentally and emotionally stable
* Able to provide a Guide Dog with a loving, safe and stable home
* The applicant must be using a long cane for the majority of their independent travel
* Personally committed and motivated to get a Guide Dog

Orientation and mobility (O&M) skills are critical in order to work with a Guide Dog. O&M training is provided free of charge, either by the state department of rehabilitation (in the state where a person resides) or by other non-profit agencies that serve visually impaired. The goal of O&M training is to teach the client proper cane techniques, how to read traffic and cross streets safely, and to develop independent travel. Although this training is done with a cane, O&M is the foundation of guide dog travel. Once an applicant is traveling independently with a cane, the idea is that a guide dog can take the place of the cane. Both with cane travel and guide dog travel, the client must know how to get where they are going and how to problem solve if a mistake happens.

Additionally, an applicant must meet the following independent travel criteria:

* Consistent use of a mobility aid, such as a long cane (as opposed to sighted guide – using a sighted person)
* Have at least three routes they are traveling independently that are a minimum of ½ mile and include street crossings.
* An applicant should ideally be out independently traveling every day, with a minimum of four times a week.
* An applicant should also possess the ability to determine traffic flow at controlled intersections and be safely crossing streets without assistance

**Home Interview:** Qualified candidates are visited in their homes by a representative of our school for an interview and assessment. The home interview gives an applicant a chance to gain a clear picture of our program and the responsibilities involved in living and working with a Guide Dog. It also allows us to obtain a good understanding of the person’s lifestyle and mobility needs, which helps us to make the best match possible with the dog that will be the graduate’s partner and guide for years to come. The applicant demonstrates their independent travel and orientation and mobility skills and gets the opportunity to do a “Juno Walk” (simulated guide work exercise.)

On average, the application process takes 3 months.  If accepted, the time to get into class can vary from a few months to a year depending on our current class fill and the client’s needs. The only waiting list we have is when people require dogs outside the average.  This could be a very fast or very slow dog, or a Golden Retriever.  The wait list is not “first come, first served” – we need to match all the dog and people characteristics, so some people are only on the list a very short time, some a long time.

**Graduate Services:** We have field service managers who provide comprehensive support services in communities throughout the US & Canada. In addition, The Support Center on the SR campus is responsible for providing a high level of service, professional advice, education and advocacy to all graduates. They offer phone-based problem analysis and development of individualized assistance plans and recommendations in response to the widely varying circumstances and complexity of graduate needs, including the work and behavior of guide dogs, and the safety and wellbeing of graduates.  The Support Center offers a broad range of phone-based assistance to external and internal constituent groups including potential applicants and professional organizations.  They provide extensive phone support, problem resolution and action plans for graduates in highly varied circumstances with routine to complex problems or crises in guide work, behavior, care or retirement of their guide dogs, as well as personal, physical, and emotional issues, access issues, and other concerns.

The Veterinary Assistance Program for graduates:

1. We will reimburse up to $250 per year for a wellness exam, flea/tick preventative and Heartgard
2. We will reimburse for vet expenses (from routine care, to major surgery, prescription diets, and more.)
3. The Veterinary Financial Aid continues for retired guide dogs if they are adopted by their handler or if an immediate family member of the handler adopts the guide.