The information below is from Lauren Kenney, Director of Client Services at GDB, regarding support services that we offer to all of our graduates across the US and Canada. Client Services is here to facilitate and support the partnership with a guide dog starting from the client’s first contact with our organization, throughout the application and training experience, and long after they return home with their guide dog. Our program is designed to offer information and advice at any time, adding to the client’s knowledge and skills while ensuring that the dog is working safely and meeting each graduate’s individual needs. Before concluding any class program, each student meets with their instructor to discuss plans for the new team’s transition back home. Later, the class supervisor will make calls to each graduate, approximately two weeks post-class. to touch base, see how the transition period is going, and offer helpful advice. About eight weeks after that, clients can expect a courtesy call from our Support Center sending greetings while offering themselves as an ongoing information resource for every guide dog handler.

The first component is our telephonic Support Center. Monday through Friday, from 8AM-5PM (Pacific Standard Time) GDB staff are ready and waiting to take calls from graduates. By calling the GDB toll free number 1-800-295-4050 for any question for the Support Center specialists regarding guide work, house behaviors or retiring a dog, or for any questions regarding canine health or veterinary financial assistance. During the conversation they may also recommend and facilitate a direct visit with the client from GDB staff.

The second part of the Client Services program is Direct Support. The Support Center may recommend and facilitate a direct, in person visit with the graduate to address a complex issue. We also schedule periodic home area visits to provide direct support at key times in the working team relationship.

**Direct Support Regions**

GDB has divided the country into eight support regions, each with an assigned field manager. These individuals are dedicated to providing direct assistance to the clients in their zone, conducting graduate visits and applicant home interviews. Additionally, the field managers coordinate the regional assignments of campus instructors who are regularly scheduled to travel into the field for these purposes. These experiences are doubly beneficial - as clients receive professional attention, GDB staff are noting practical challenges facing guide dog teams.

There are several types of Direct Support visits designed to support your success as a working team.

**Transition Visits** may be especially helpful during the period following class training, as recommended by the Class Supervisor.

**Emergent Visits** may be scheduled at any time. During a discussion with Support Center staff, if it is determined that in-person assistance is required, we will make arrangements to visit as soon as possible.

**Annual Visits** are automatically provided for experienced guide dog users within the first year with their new dog. For first-time guide dog users’ two visits are scheduled, one during the first and another during the second year with their new partners. These early visits with a GDB professional provide the opportunity for fine tuning the dog handling and customizing the client’s travel strategies.

As the client and dog develop a more established partnership, Client Services will continue to stay in touch. We will let them know when a staff member will be in their area, and they will have the option at that time of requesting a direct visit. If the partnership with the dog is going smoothly, and they have no questions or concerns to discuss with a staff member in person, they may opt to receive a telephonic visit instead. This process will continue until the dog reaches nine years of age.

At nine years of age, we will request that direct visits resume on an annual basis. We would like to help the client prepare for the eventual retirement of their guide dog and ensure that we are providing a continuum of service during this transition.

**RETIREMENT**

There is no set date for a guide to retire. Some dogs retire around the age of eight years, and other dogs are still working at thirteen; there is a wide range. The client will be the one to recognize when their dog’s work starts to lose some of its normal sharpness. When it is time for your dog to retire (and assuming that you have been working with the dog for a period of twelve months or longer), the client will have the first option to keep him or her in retirement or to place the dog with a trusted family member or friend. In other situations, Guide Dogs for the Blind can assist with re-homing the dog through our dog adoption program. In these cases, we will contact the dog’s original puppy raisers to offer them the opportunity to provide the dog a home during retirement. A Client Support Specialist, who is also a guide dog user, is available to support the client through the process of retiring the guide dog, and she is also available for emotional support as needed throughout the client’s relationship with GDB.

The Veterinary Financial Assistance program is in place to support any client who is in need of financial assistance in providing veterinary care for their guide dog. Our organization is obligated to use our financial resources responsibly; to maintain this program as our guide dog population grows and we ask all graduates to assist with whatever portion of their guide’s veterinary cost hey can.

After the first year post graduation, a graduate may request ownership of their guide. There is no cost to become the legal owner of the guide dog, and neither the Veterinary Financial Assistance Program nor the support program is in any way changed by taking ownership of the guide. The harness remains the property of Guide Dogs for the Blind.

1. The class supervisor of each graduating class will call each graduate, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

weeks after they go home from class.

1. What can you say about GDB’s direct support regions?
2. What can you say about the retirement process for the guide dog?
3. True or False: After the first year post graduation, a graduate may request ownership of their guide