



Gradients of Sight

Brief History of Guide Dogs

Synopsis:

Service Animals have been bred, trained, and in use for nearly a century. Engaged in a vast array of industries while serving very specific functions/duties, this combination of specialization and malleability is a priceless asset for the blind.

“... While there has been a long history of dogs assisting people who are blind, it was not until after World War I that a formal dog guide program was developed. A school in Pottsdam Germany trained German shepherds as guides for blinded veterans of the war, but did not stay in existence for very long. However, an American woman living in Switzerland learned of the program and ultimately advanced the modern dog guide movement in the United States. Her name was Dorothy Harrison Eustis and she was a wealthy Philadelphian experimenting with the training of German shepherds as working dogs...” Guide Dog History - [Muhlenberg College Companion Club](#)

Traits of Military Past in the Present

- Dogs are always placed on the left side, as veterans were accustomed to having their rifle on their right.
- Standard American Sign Language (ASL) is used to reinforce verbal commands with the dogs.
- Each dog is assigned a serial number, which has been tattooed on the inside of the left ear. This identification is based upon birth litter, which lineage used (Bitch/Stud pair) and year of birth. For example: 4V303 identifies Vince as the 4th V litter, using the 3rd line, of 2003.
- Maintaining a constant schedule (feeding and relieving).
- Obedience exercises to hold Alpha status over the dog.
- Paperwork - Annual work and health evaluation forms.

Proper Etiquette and Protocol

- Always ask before petting any Service Animal.
- Do not feed the dog treats or human food.
- Intentional and direct distraction weakens the dog's attention to guiding, and endangers the individual.
- When approaching directly and passing by, do not sidestep the dog. He/she will find a way around you.

Applying for and Obtaining a Guide Dog

The following application process will be adhering to the [Guiding Eyes for the Blind](#) standards.

[Application Form and Related Documents](#)

Evaluation Process:

1. A Guiding Eyes for the Blind representative will fly out to your location for a personal assessment and interview. This includes an introduction to the harness system in the form of a "Juno walk". Followed by a series of general questions.
2. The application and interview is then sent before a Board of Reviews for whether the decision to obtain a Guide Dog is appropriate.

Once Accepted:

Generally the turnaround period for enrollment into training is approximately three to six months. For more information on emphasis and general tour of training, go to the [Student Experience](#) section of Guiding Eyes for the Blind.