



OUR MISSION

Transforming lives through partnerships with service dogs

Merger Explanation

Putting more dogs into the hands that need them

With the need for highly qualified service dogs continuously growing, in January of 2020, Guide Dogs of America merged with Tender Loving Canines. This new single organization, operating under the GDA umbrella, greatly expands the number of high quality service dogs that we can provide and puts more dogs into the hands of people who need them.

What is a guide dog versus a service dog?

A service dog is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual or other mental disability.

A guide dog is a type of service dog that is specifically trained to assist someone who is disabled by a visual impairment/blindness. A guide dog can help their visually impaired partner confidently navigate the world by avoiding obstacles, remembering common routes, stopping at changes in elevation and avoiding traffic.

Other service dogs can assist veterans, individuals with learning disabilities and other disabled populations. Service dogs that are not in the guide dog category may perform behaviors that interrupt physiological responses to stress. They can also assist with mobility limitations, retrieving objects, opening doors, etc.

Why Did We Merge?

Increasing demand for service dogs

Service dogs benefit a wide variety of people with disabilities. Our service dogs are highly trained to

perform specific tasks for veterans, people with autism, and facilities. Due to the cost and supply of service dogs, the demand far outweighs the supply.

How we help each other

TLC was a growing organization that could benefit from a campus and a breeding program. Guide Dogs of America was looking to expand its service dog program. TLC's vast expertise advanced the process.

Questions About Service Dogs

How long is the training period?

Our puppies spend weeks 1-8 on campus with our staff and volunteers. They are placed with puppy raisers or in the prisons at 8 weeks of age. Guide dog puppies return for formal training at 14-18 months. Formal training with our certified instructors lasts 4-6 months. Service dog puppies complete their formal training in the prison under the supervision of our certified instructors. Class with their partner is 3 weeks long.

May I pet a service dog?

A guide dog in harness is "on the clock" and should not be distracted. Always ask permission before petting them and be respectful if their handler declines.

How does a guide dog know where to go?

Guide dog teams are exactly that, a team. The handler's responsibility is to provide directions, while the guide dog's job is to keep them out of harm's way.

How long does a guide or service dog work?

The average working life for one of our guide dogs or service dogs is 8 - 10 years.

What happens to retired service dogs?

Service dogs typically retire because of health and age. The handler may choose to keep their dog as a pet, or give the dog to a family member or friend. If those options are not applicable, the dog may return to its puppy raiser or be adopted by someone on our extensive waitlist of loving homes waiting for a new companion.

Questions About Our Program

What is a career change dog?

A career change dog is a dog in our program that did not meet the medical or behavioral standards necessary to become a guide dog. The dog can be career changed from a guide dog to one of our service dog paths or simply become someone's pet.

Who gets a career change dog?

We currently have an extensive waitlist of loving homes waiting to adopt and are not accepting new applications at this time.

What is the success ratio?

Our program historically graduates 50% of the dogs that we breed.

What breeds are used?

- 80% Labrador Retrievers
- 10% Labrador and Golden Retriever Crosses
- 5% German Shepherds
- 5% Golden Retrievers

What is the cost of a service dog?

The cost to breed, raise and train each service dog is approximately \$60,000. Guide Dogs of America provides all of our services free of charge. Lifetime support services, training follow-ups, veterinary care at our on-campus clinic and boarding services are available for each graduated team, at no cost.

What is a facility dog?

A facility dog is a type of service dog that provides animal assisted intervention and therapy to individuals with disabilities, victims of crime and other vulnerable populations. Additionally, in educational settings, facility dogs can encourage children to attend class, motivating them to stay engaged. In healthcare settings, grooming, feeding and playing with our dogs can help facilitate the healing process. Our facility dogs can also help individuals feel calm and secure during a difficult courtroom trial or testimony.

May I get my dog certified as a service dog through you?

No. Guide Dogs of America only certifies service dogs that we breed, raise and train in our program.

Am I required to do any fundraising for GDA/TLC?

While we always encourage our recipients to participate in speaking and fundraising events, participation is completely optional.

Prison Program

Our prison program dramatically aids in the rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals, providing an opportunity for education and community improvement—while helping meet the ever-growing demand for service dogs.

How long is the prison program?

Carefully selected prisoners train our puppies in a 2-year training program. They meet twice a week, under the instruction of our certified staff trainers, where they learn and use positive reinforcement to teach puppies 40 different commands.

Do the puppies live in prison?

Yes, they live with the prisoners and, depending on which prison they are living in, their sleeping arrangements vary. As part of the rehabilitation program the prisons have created fenced in, off-leash yards for the dogs to use during the day for exercise and training.

What are the Assisted Tasks that Service Dogs Learn?

Service dogs for veterans can retrieve dropped items, open doors, carry objects, turn on/off lights and perform deep pressure behaviors in response to PTSD triggers that can help reorient a veteran. They can also interrupt behaviors of hypervigilance, assist with balance and remind veterans with traumatic brain injuries to take their medicine.

Service dogs for children or adults with autism can interrupt repetitive or maladaptive behaviors, perform behaviors that assist with daily living such as dressing and undressing, perform deep pressure behaviors in response to heightened anxiety or tantrums and deep pressure behaviors that help ground an individual to help with focus. Handle-led walking can also help with safety by encouraging a child to stay within close proximity of the dog and third-party handler.

Requirements for Getting a Guide or Service Dog

What is orientation and mobility?

Orientation and mobility is training that visually impaired individuals receive that helps them confidently navigate the world. O&M focuses on things like sensory awareness, spatial concepts, relationships which exist between objects in the environment, searching skills, independent movement, sighted guide, protective techniques and cane skills. Every potential GDA student must submit an O&M evaluation before being accepted into our program.

How long is the wait for a guide or service dog?

The application process for a guide or service dog varies from client to client but typically can take anywhere up to 6 months.

The wait time to receive a service dog can take up to 2 years.

What is the Americans with Disabilities Act?

The ADA became a civil rights law in 1990 and prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

In regards to service animals, the State and Local Governments, businesses and nonprofit organizations that serve the public generally must allow service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas of the facility where the public is allowed.

A service animal must be harnessed, leashed or tethered, unless the individual's disability prevents using these devices or the devices interfere with the animals safe, effective performance of tasks.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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