did you know?

- Nearly 2,000 Californians use guide dogs.
- Almost 20 percent of all guide dog handlers live in California.
- The handler uses about 20 different commands to direct the dog. The dog, trained through repetition and praise, will disobey a command and signal through its rigid harness when it's unsafe to proceed.
- You should never pet a working guide dog without asking the handler's permission.
- Puppy raisers are volunteers who care for, train, and socialize guide dog puppies. A puppy lives with a puppy raiser for 15 to 18 months.
- Guide dogs spend six months in training before meeting their human partners. Blind handlers spend about one month training with their dogs.
- Like all dogs, guide dogs enjoy playing when they're not working.
- Guide dogs work for about six to ten years. They usually start working at the age of two-and-a-half.
- Dogs that don't succeed as guide dogs are "career change" dogs. They become family pets, service or therapy dogs, or search and rescue dogs.

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guide dog schools

Specialized schools train guide dogs, teach legally blind handlers to use their dogs, are accountable for the teams they train, and prepare apprentice instructors for licensing. All services are free for students.

California has three licensed schools that together graduate about 400 guide dog teams each year.

Guide Dogs for the Blind
San Rafael
www.guidedogs.com
415-499-4000 / 800-295-4050

Guide Dogs of America
Los Angeles
www.guidedogsofamerica.org
818-362-5834

Guide Dogs of the Desert International
Palm Springs
www.guidedogsofthedesert.org
760-329-6257

resources

Guide Dog Users of California (GDUC) is a grassroots organization that supports guide dog handlers, educates the public about guide dogs, promotes acceptance of guide dogs, and advances the rights of working teams.

Guide Dogs Users of California
www.gdu-cal.org

guide dog board

Please contact the Guide Dog Board for more information about guide dogs and guide dog schools.

Guide Dog Board
1625 North Market Blvd., Suite S-202
Sacramento, CA 95834
www.dca.ca.gov/guidedogboard
916-574-7825

photos of dogs with their handlers courtesy of Guide Dogs for the Blind

What's So Special About Guide Dogs?

Guide Dog Board
Department of Consumer Affairs

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
dca
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

What's So Special About

Guide Dogs?

Plenty. Guide dogs are extensively trained so they can help people who are legally blind live safe and independent lives.

A guide dog is not just a well-trained family pet. Rather, a guide dog is a working dog—it and its handler are a team, bonded by love, trust, and respect.

The training process itself is a team effort involving the breeders, the volunteers who raise the puppies, the guide dog schools and instructors, and the Guide Dog Board that supports them.

who the guide dog board serves

We serve you:

- **If you are legally blind.**
  We make sure that guide dog schools and instructors meet high safety standards so you and your dog are a confident, capable team.

- **If you financially support guide dog schools.**
  We ensure that your money is used appropriately. All licensed schools must give us copies of certified audits of financial records and similar documents.

- **If you are a member of the public.**
  We ensure that guide dog handlers can manage their dogs, that guide dogs are properly trained, and that everyone—you, the dog's handler, and the dog—is safe.

frequently asked questions

What does the Guide Dog Board do?

We license and regulate guide dog programs in California, making sure that instructors are qualified, training is standardized, and schools are well-managed.

To become a licensed guide dog instructor, a candidate must complete a three-year apprenticeship with a licensed instructor at a certified guide dog school. (The school's curriculum is mandated by California's Guide Dog Act.) The candidate must then pass several exams. In addition, all licensees must take continuing education courses. California is the only state in the nation to require licensing of guide dog instructors and schools.

Why is expert training so important?

The knowledge, expertise, and commitment required to train guide dogs and their blind handlers far exceed the skill of the usual dog trainer. A guide dog must meet the highest standard of obedience and performance.

Dog handlers' safety—and sometimes their lives—depends on their dogs. The value of a guide dog becomes clear when the team negotiates everyday obstacles that sighted people take for granted—a speeding car, a truck backing up, or a torn-up street. High standards and rigorous training give both the dog and its human partner the skill to meet these challenges.

What is "legally blind"?

"Legally blind" is having corrected vision that is less than 20/200 or a corrected field of view of less than 20 degrees. Most people who are legally blind can see light or have partial field of vision. Imagine that you can't see the big **E** on the top of an eye chart, or that you are looking through a rolled-up newspaper. That is legally blind. A person who is legally blind may apply for a guide dog. *(See the back for a list of schools.)*

Are guide dogs restricted from public places?

No. By law, guide dogs can accompany their handlers anywhere the public is allowed, including restaurants, hotels, taxis, grocery and department stores, hospitals and medical offices, airplanes, theaters, health clubs, and parks.

Are other assistance dog trainers licensed?

Currently, there are no legally defined dog training standards for any assistance dog trainers outside the Guide Dog Act.