

Leader Dogs for the Blind Talking Points for FY 2016–2017*

A Brief Lions and Leader Dog History

Thank you for inviting me here. I am pleased to share Leader Dogs for the Blind with you!

Lions have served more than 129 million people worldwide in the past 100 years. Seventy-seven years ago, three Lions club members had a colleague who was blind and wanted a guide dog but wasn't able to get one. In true Lions fashion, they decided to fill the need themselves by contacting a local dog breeder and asking if he could supply the dogs and train them. That's where it all began, with the first class of 4 graduating in 1938. It took only three Lions with "\$400 and a hatful of ideas" to create what Lions International magazine called one of the top ten brilliant breakthroughs in service.

Services Offered

Fast forward 77 years. Leader Dog empowers people who are blind, visually-impaired, and Deaf-Blind with the skills needed for daily independent travel. Independence to get to work, school, the store, the doctors, all those places we go every day, on their own. They do this through several programs:

Guide Dog Training

Leader Dog provides highly trained, friendly, qualified guide dogs to people who are legally blind, in reasonable health, have basic orientation and mobility skills, are at least 16 years of age, and are willing to use and care for a dog in the intended manner.

Each client is immersed in a 25-day on-campus program in Rochester Hills, Michigan where they learn how to care for and utilize their new guide dog. Training is personalized for each client. They are matched with a dog that best fits their lifestyle, travel pace, physical size, stamina and other considerations.

Clients and their Leader Dogs train in a wide variety of situations including urban, suburban and rural locations; college campuses; busy stores and malls; public transit and other environments.

Last year, Leader Dog graduated 166 guide dog teams (client with guide dog).

Deaf-Blind Guide Dog Training

In 1991 Leader Dog began the groundbreaking service of training guide dogs for those who are both hearing and visually impaired. Trained by guide dog mobility instructors fluent in American Sign Language, these dogs are taught to receive all communication through a series of hand signals. While these guide dogs are not "hearing dogs" for their client, they are cross-trained to respond to limited sounds such as a doorbell.

Much attention is placed on traffic awareness and proper street crossings since these can be extreme safety issues for people who are Deaf-Blind.

Last year, Leader Dog paired 6 Deaf-Blind clients with guide dogs. This is the first dedicated program of its kind in the United States.

Accelerated Orientation & Mobility Training (commonly known as White Cane training)

This 7-day residential program pairs clients and instructors on a 1-to-1 ratio designed to quickly help clients obtain the basic orientation and mobility skills needed to travel safely with a cane. The instruction is tailored to the client's capabilities and includes: using a white cane; navigating elevators, escalators and stairs; crossing streets safely; and solving problems along your route. Clients may choose to continue utilizing a cane or return to train with a Leader Dog.

Last year, Leader Dog trained 83 people how to travel safer utilizing a cane in their Accelerated Orientation and Mobility Program.

Specialized Training Environments

Each winter, Leader Dog staff and volunteers pack up and head south to hold a Warm Weather Training for clients who live in a temperate climate and would almost never encounter Michigan winter weather. This year's training will be in Naples, Florida. An additional, unique urban training is held twice each year in Chicago for clients who live in or travel to large urban environments that have extensive public transportation.

For clients who cannot attend training on campus, for reasons such as work or family commitments, they offer in home training by guide dog mobility instructors.

GPS Training

This revolutionary hand-held technology allows clients to know where they are, what direction they are going and even what businesses are close by. Previously, clients needed to rely on others for this information. All guide dog clients from the U.S. and Canada receive this device free of charge. Leader Dog issued 157 personal GPS units last year.

Summer Experience Camp

Leader Dog has a special weeklong summer program for kids age 16 and 17 which allows them to have new experiences designed to strengthen their independence and gives them the chance to interact with peers that face the same challenges. The kids receive a free GPS unit and learn how to use it to increase their travel independence. They also get to "test drive" a Leader Dog and take part in many physical activities like rock wall climbing, tandem biking and kayaking.

In July, 24 teenagers came from across the country to build skills and confidence by attending summer camp.

Over the past 77 years, over 15,000 people who are blind or Deaf-Blind or visually impaired have been matched with a Leader Dog or trained in Orientation and Mobility or other Leader Dog programs from around the world to our local community.

All of these programs are offered *free of charge* to the client with Leader Dog paying for travel expenses within North America, equipment, and room and board. This is only possible through the support of private donations, corporations and foundations, wills and estate giving and, of course, Lions Clubs.

Canine Development Center Renovation

This past fiscal year, with the help of Lions clubs, private donations and matching grants from LCIF, Leader Dog was able to fund the biggest capital campaign in their history. A \$14.5 million renovation of its kennel facility has transformed the 80,000 square foot space into a 100,000 square foot state of the art Canine Development Center to accommodate raising a quieter, calmer dog in an up to date facility. It features:

- An expanded puppy area that is better suited for the health and socialization of puppies.
- An enhanced lobby with a veterinary waiting room, adult dog intake, retail space and puppy viewing room for the general public.
- A centralized veterinary clinic plus a new breeding area to support our growing breeding colony and ensure that we have enough Leader Dogs to meet current and future demand.

We are excited to have built this legacy with the help of the Lions, Lioness, Leos and LCIF.

Are there any questions?

Thank you again for inviting me here. It's through the Lions support that these programs are available and remain nationally and internationally recognized as industry leaders. Your club or district can support Leader Dog in many ways. Through recognition programs like the Centennial Founders Tribute and annual donations, Lions financially support about 20% of Leader Dog's entire budget (roughly \$2 million annually) but Lions support Leader Dog in so many other ways: as puppy raisers and volunteers, by identifying potential clients, serving on the board of trustees and as Leader Dog chairs and champions. Visit their website at LeaderDog.org for client applications, success stories, a virtual tour of the campus and other ways to support this Lions' project. Many Leader Dog clients become Lions! For all of this, Leader Dog is greatly appreciative...thank you!

Resources and Special Notes for the Speaker:

All data is from FY 2015-2016. Leader Dog has the same fiscal year as the Lions from July 1 – June 30. For local statistics on clients per state, donations by clubs and districts, etc. go to www.Leaderdog.org/Lions and select “**Lions Reports**”.

Go to <http://www.leaderdog.org/frequently-asked-questions> for a comprehensive list of Frequently Asked Questions