

2023-2024

# ANNUAL REPORT

LEADER DOGS FOR THE BLIND







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## MISSION MOMENT



Growing up on a farm led Leader Dog Client Kiandra to pursue a degree in animal sciences. She always enjoyed the animals and was very active in 4-H growing up.

But her first year at a Big 10 university posed new challenges like making her way through the maze of tables and chairs in the dining hall. Kiandra added, “And I was lonely. When I went across campus with my cane, people very seldom spoke to me.”

Kiandra knew it was time for a change. She applied to Leader Dog and was paired with Leader Dog Nevaeh (heaven spelled backward). “After just a week with Nevaeh, I was already amazed,” said Kiandra. “I felt so free and independent. I knew she was going to impact my life dramatically.”

Kiandra’s guide dog mobility instructor (GDMI) made sure the team had the opportunity to train at a local farm and when it was time to head back to school, another GDMI visited Kiandra on campus which helped calm her nerves. “So far this year, with Navaeh by my side, I have talked to so many other students,” shared Kiandra. “I really appreciate everything that Leader Dog has done for me.”







## FROM OUR CEO

Dear Friends,

This was a significant year for our organization and community as we celebrated the 85th anniversary of Leader Dogs for the Blind. Founded by three visionary members of Lions Clubs International, we have grown since our inception in 1939 from a small farmhouse to one of the largest and most innovative service providers for people who are blind or have low vision in the world. In addition to our anniversary, we celebrated 1,500 weeks of Orientation Mobility services provided in the twenty years since the launch of that program.

As we look to the future, we continue to grow and evolve to meet the needs of our clients. This fiscal year we had significant accomplishments which moved the organization and our partnership with clients forward.

In our commitment to inclusivity, we announced a Spanish language option for our Guide Dog and Orientation & Mobility (O&M) programs. This initiative is particularly important as Hispanic and Latino communities face a higher risk of vision loss. By offering training in Spanish, we aim to bridge the gap and empower more individuals with the skills they need for safe and independent travel.

A critical development this year was the on-boarding of a psychosocial support manager to more holistically support clients. This enables us to offer counseling for clients at all stages of their journey with our programs. Additionally, we focused on our breeding program and hired the organizations first ever theriogenologist (a veterinarian who specializes in canine reproduction). This critical role will enable us to make more data-driven decisions in our breeding program.

This year, we hosted a highly successful canine behavior workshop in collaboration with the International Working Dog Registry (IWDR), bringing together 18 service and guide dog organizations on the Leader Dog campus from five countries to share knowledge and best practices.

We processed more client applications than ever before, and doubled the time spent on enrichment for the dogs living in our canine development center. In addition, we welcomed our first Guide Dog Exploration client on April 7. This initiative allows clients to determine if a guide dog is the right mobility tool for them, providing invaluable insights for both the clients and our training teams.

These advancements are a testament to the ever evolving and growing nature of the Leader Dog mission and there is much more to come as we enter our new strategic plan period. Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to Leader Dogs for the Blind, we are honored to have you as part of our community.

Forward!

Melissa Weisse  
President & CEO



# VISION, MISSION & VALUES

## VISION

Every person who is blind or visually impaired travels safely and independently.

## MISSION

To empower people who are blind or visually impaired with lifelong skills for safe and independent daily travel.

## VALUES

Do what is right

*We act with integrity in every situation.*

Show respect and compassion

*We show empathy and kindness to every person and every dog.*

Demonstrate passion for the work

*We do more than just our job, we believe in our mission.*

Deliver a superior experience

*We exceed expectations for every person in the Leader Dog community.*

Work as a team

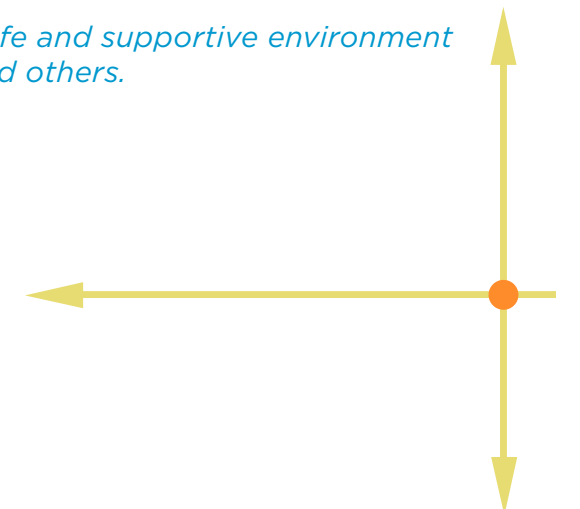
*We partner to achieve goals and advance the mission.*

Seek innovation

*We keep an open mind; we learn; we share our ideas; we drive change.*

Practice safety

*We provide a safe and supportive environment for ourselves and others.*





# HIGHLIGHTS 2023-2024

## New Breeding Options

To attract more people to be volunteer breeding hosts, we developed flexible options to suit a variety of home environments. Hosts can choose the traditional method of hosting a Breeding Mom and having her whelp in their home or choose to host a Breeding Mom without her whelping in their home, host a mom only for whelping and caring for the litter, or temporarily host a mom or dad for up to one year.



## Melissa Weisse Appointed New President & CEO

After 20 years of working for Leader Dog and serving as chief philanthropy officer (CPO) for 15 years, Melissa Weisse was appointed Leader Dog's new president and CEO. As CPO, Weisse grew Leader Dog's philanthropic revenue by 121% and estates revenue by 164% enabling greater client service provision. She led Leader Dog's largest capital campaign raising \$14.5 million for the canine development center. Weisse is one of just 117 people worldwide to hold the designation of Advanced Certified Fundraising Executive (ACFRE), the highest accreditation for professional fundraisers.



## First Guide Dog Exploration Client

Our first Guide Dog Exploration client arrived on April 7 to complete a week-long intensive program focused on identifying if a guide dog is the correct mobility tool for them. This exploratory program allows the client to experience life as a guide dog handler, while also allowing our Guide Dog training and O&M teams to gather critical information to support the client through their next steps in their journey with Leader Dogs for the Blind.



## Hosted IWDR Workshop

From May 30-June 1, Leader Dog hosted a very successful Behavior Checklist (BCL) workshop in collaboration with the International Working Dog Registry (IWDR). Attendees from 18 service and guide dog organizations from five countries participated in discussions and practical assessment sessions led by industry experts. The Behavior Checklist (BCL) is a behavior scoring system that provides a reliable way to describe aspects of behavior that are crucial for guide and service dogs. Most importantly, the BCL has been validated and shows the capacity to measure behavior consistently, which is essential for accurate analysis.



## Announced Spanish Language Option for Guide Dog and O&M

In order to further our vision that "every person who is blind or visually impaired travels safely and independently," we began offering Guide Dog and Orientation & Mobility (O&M) programs to people residing in the United States and Canada who prefer receiving training in Spanish. Because Hispanic and Latino communities experience a higher risk of vision loss, and because people learn best in their native language, offering our programs in Spanish allows us to meet this critical need and empower more people with travel safety and independence.



## Most Successful Major Gifts Year Ever

We reached an exciting milestone by surpassing \$2 million in major giving revenue for the first time in our 85-year history. This achievement highlights the growing support for our mission and was made possible by the incredible generosity of the Leader Dog community. Our team takes great care in stewarding our donors, providing them with impact updates and experiences which foster more meaningful engagement with our life-changing work.



## YEARLONG

➤ 16 veterinary externs for the year. ➤ Doubled time spent on enrichment for the dogs living in our canine center from 575k minutes to almost 1 million minutes. ➤ Processed more applications than ever in the history of the organization.



# WHY I LOVE LEADER DOG REASON #443



“ We were especially drawn to Leader Dog because of the people who would benefit from the services offered. We’ve enjoyed serving in several roles together and love being a small part in enhancing the lives of the blind or visually impaired. It makes us feel good knowing we played a part in helping others. — SANDY AND GARY F., VOLUNTEERS ”

## PROGRAM INFORMATION

### GUIDE DOG



A three-week residential program matching hand-selected, highly trained dogs with people who are legally blind, or both deaf and blind.

118

- 4 DeafBlind
- 14 GPS\* devices issued

### ORIENTATION & MOBILITY



The only seven-day residential orientation and mobility program in the U.S., providing clients with cane skills to become safer, more independent travelers.

178

- 2 DeafBlind
- 9 Teen O&M
- 8 GPS\* devices issued

### TEEN SUMMER CAMP



A unique summer camp for 16- and 17-year-olds who are legally blind, combining fun outdoor activities and leadership training with an introduction to guide dogs.

20

- 17 GPS\* devices issued

*\*GPS technology empowers clients to identify their current location and plan their own travel routes. We did not offer GPS units to our guide dog and O&M clients for 2023-2024 as we have in the past.*

## VOLUNTEERS



**82**  
Breeding Hosts



**529**  
Puppy Raisers\*

\*Larger number than in years past due to new raising models, co-raisers & prisons have two raisers per puppy.



**463**  
On-Campus\*

\* Includes 26 Board Trustees



BJ B.

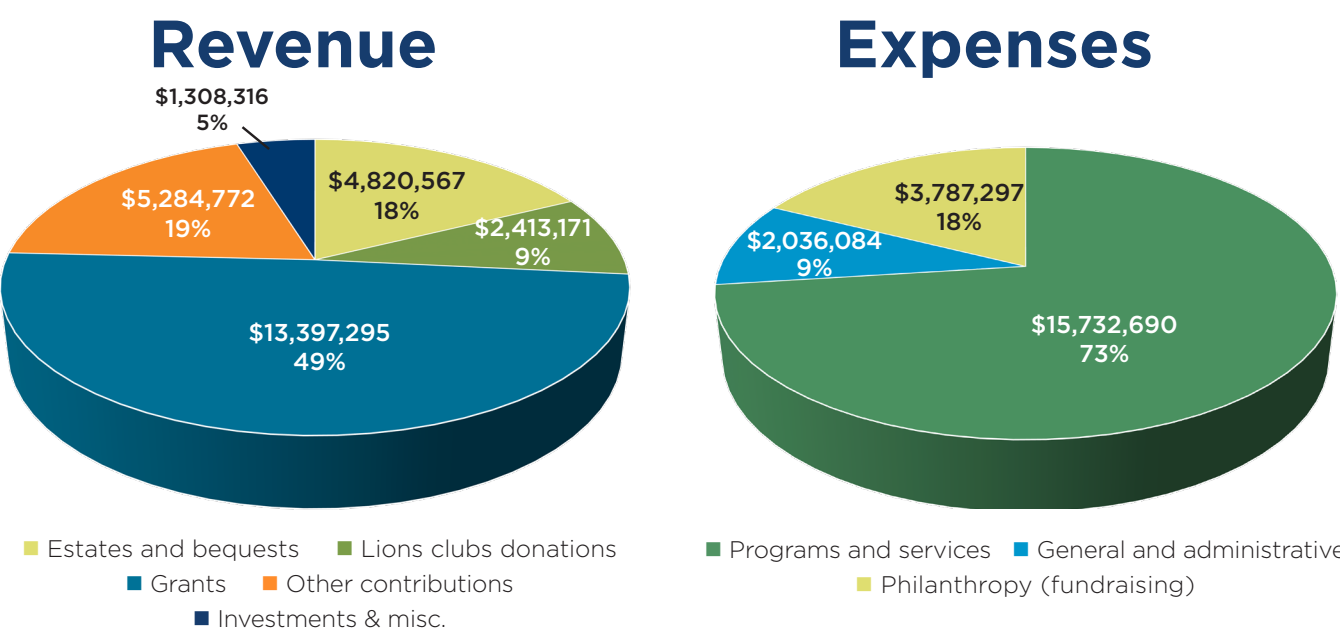
"I went to Leader Dog as a person of 'Why Me?' And after 21 days, I left Leader Dog thinking 'Why Not Me?' The training is more than just learning how to use a guide dog, it's about problem solving and building trust. Taking one step at a time and learning to navigate life through all its obstacles creates empowerment.

By saving myself, I have been able to help others and become a contributing part of society. I now have the ability to motivate and inspire people all over the world through my words and actions. I have found my purpose and the drive to continue and help the next person, wherever they may be.

Going to Leader Dog was the best decision I ever made in my life (yes, my wife knows I say this all the time) because they helped show me how to be the person I always desired to be. They showed me how to be a contributor to society, and being able to help people has become a passion of mine. I was given a gift and being able to pay it forward has been a blessing."



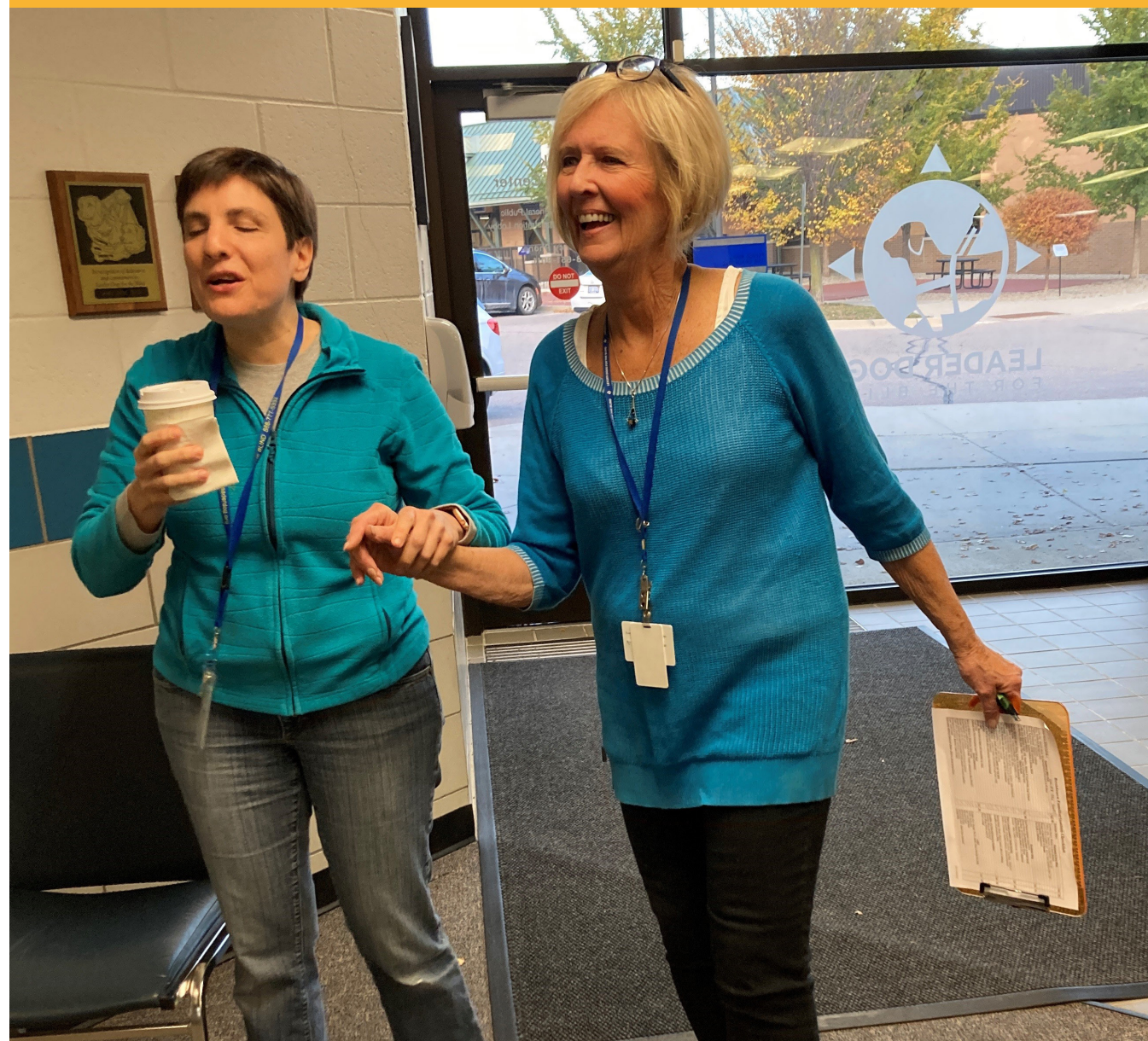
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW



LEADER DOGS FOR THE BLIND	
Summarized Statement of Activities	
For the year ended June 30, 2024	
Revenue	
Contributions	\$25,915,805
Investment & Other	1,308,316
Total revenue	27,224,121
Expenses	
Programs & Services*	15,732,690
General & Administrative	2,036,084
Fundraising	3,787,297
Total expenses	21,556,071
Total change in net assets	5,668,050
Net assets, beginning of year	16,646,122
Net assets, end of year	22,314,172



# WHY I LOVE LEADER DOG REASON #617



“Serving others brings JOY—joy to those who give and to those who receive. Seeing Leader Dog clients grow in enthusiasm, hope and confidence is all I need to know that my time at LDB is time well spent.”

— CAROL D.

## CURRENT BOARD MEMBERS

(as of 11.12.24)

### Executive Officers

Melissa L. Weisse, President & Chief Executive Officer  
Lorene Suidan, Vice President & Chief Financial Officer  
Dani Landolt, Vice President & Chief Impact Officer  
Missy Aupperle, Chief Philanthropy & Marketing Officer

### Officers

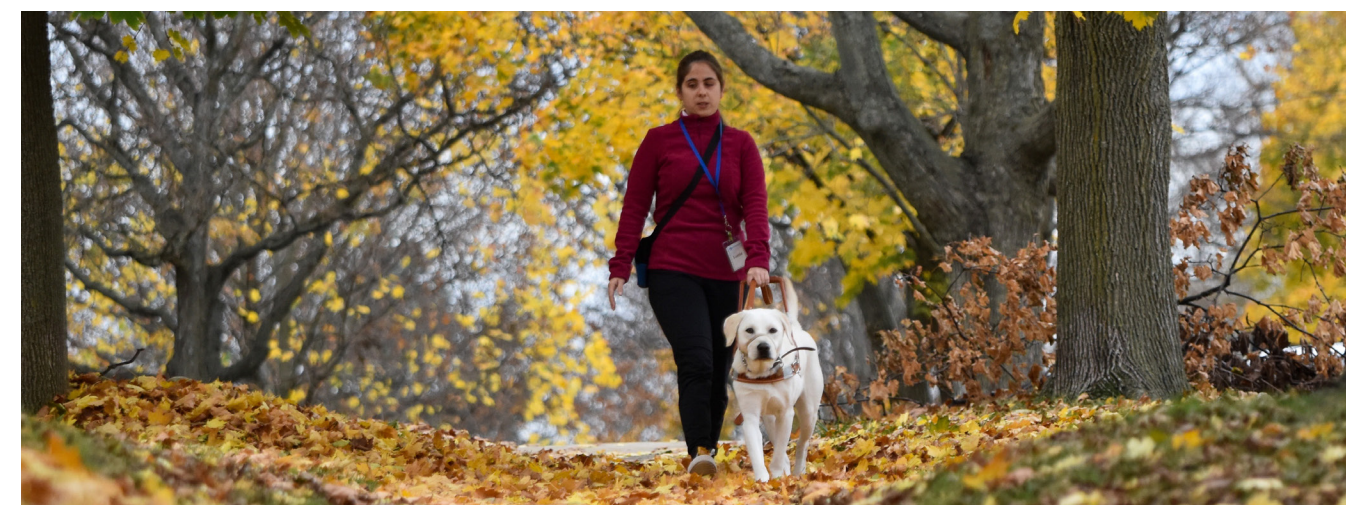
John Reed, Board Chair  
Kathryn Davis, Immediate Past Chair  
Mark Guthrie, Vice Chair  
Michele Honomichl, Treasurer  
Avril Rinn, Secretary

### Trustees

Franklin Carmona, DVM	Brian Hock
Anthony Costanzo	Justice Marilyn Kelly
Paul Edwards, MD, FACS	Maria Kristic
Jill Gaus	Thomas O'Masta
Kim Gorman	Daniel Spriet
Steve Guarini	Kurt Terrien
Diane Henderson	Marc Wisniewski

### Honorary Trustees

Celia Domalewski	Daniel Markey
Lon Grossman	James Platzer
Paul Hemeryck	





# BOARD COMMITTEES

(as of 11.12.24)

## Audit Committee

Oversees the organization’s annual external audit and its system of internal controls over financial reporting.

## Ethics Committee

Ensures that the Leader Dog mission is executed with the highest ethical standards and in alignment with organizational values and to review, interpret and monitor the organizational Code of Ethical Standards.

## Executive Committee (Board Officers only)

Conducts such business as is necessary or desirable during those periods when the Board of Trustees is not in session.

## Finance Committee

Oversees fiscal accountability and budgetary affairs.

## Governance Committee

Establishes and maintains a dynamic, diverse, engaged and knowledgeable Board of Trustees.

## Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility Committee (IDEA)

Ensures organizational commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility at the highest level and throughout the organization.

## Marketing Committee

Assures that marketing strategies support the organization’s mission and ensures effectiveness for all constituents.

## Philanthropy Committee

Oversees development and fundraising activities, ensuring that the case for support is strong, current and based on the organization’s mission and goals.

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# TASK FORCES

## Assistive Technology, Accessibility and Advocacy (AAA)

Oversees the organization’s use and implementation of assistive technology, ensures adherence to Leader Dog’s accessibility philosophy and makes recommendations to Leader Dog on matters relating to client advocacy.

## Information Systems

Serves as a strategic partner for the Leader Dog team, focusing on the alignment of core business and technology so that the organization remains in the mainstream of continually evolving technology and IT solutions.

## Medical Advisory

Provides an avenue of collaboration and outreach to expand awareness of Leader Dog programs and services within the vision-related medical community and ultimately grow the number of client applicants.

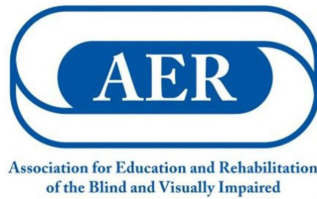
## Mission Assurance & Quality (MAQ)

Oversees performance metrics, outcomes, quality, continuous improvement and strategic plan progress and ensures alignment with the mission statement of Leader Dogs for the Blind.



## Accreditations

Assistance Dogs International (ADI)  
Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER)  
International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF)



## Member

Council of North American Guide Dog Schools  
American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)  
International Working Dog Registry (IWDR)  
VisionServe Alliance

## Leader Dogs for the Blind

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## LeaderDog.org

FOLLOW THE LEADER    



**LEADER DOGS**  
FOR THE BLIND