

2024-2025

ANNUAL REPORT

LEADER DOGS FOR THE BLIND



LEADER DOGS
FOR THE BLIND®



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MISSION MOMENT



Joan's path to the Paralympic Games began unexpectedly. "After only two seasons of athletics, I qualified for the 2012 London Paralympic Games," he recalls. "At 16, I was the youngest Spanish athlete." This early success was just the beginning of a remarkable journey leading him to the bronze medal for the long jump in Paris.

As the Paris Games approached, Joan trained six days a week and competed all over Europe. The bond between him and his Leader Dog, Cayden, proved invaluable. "Being with Cayden everywhere is fantastic," Joan says. "His work is impeccable and always gives me extra freedom to disconnect on my own before important competitions, without depending on anyone."

On the day of the competition, Leader Dog Cayden watched from the stands with Martinez's family. When Joan clinched the bronze medal, the emotion was enhanced by Leader Dog Cayden's reaction. "After the competition, I approached the stands very excited," Martinez remembers. "And when Cayden saw me, he threw himself towards me - giving me kisses."

Reflecting on his journey, Martinez is filled with gratitude. "Leader Dog has made me a completely independent person," he states. "I knew that my life would change after going there, but I did not imagine it would change in such a wonderful way."





Dear Friends,

Leader Dogs for the Blind continues to deepen our impact at home and around the world both in our client service provision and our global leadership in the field. Our expert team presented at blindness and low vision conferences around the country and the world. At the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) conference in the United Kingdom, Erica Ihrke, our director of client strategy, shared our innovative programming and success in integrating orientation and mobility (white cane) training into our historic Guide Dog program. Dani Landolt, our chief impact officer, presented on production planning within a complex guide dog organization.



This year, the number of applications to all Leader Dog programs was greater than ever before illustrating the critical need for these services. Our Orientation and Mobility program, which provides white cane instruction to clients, served a record high number of clients this year.

With a clear and purposeful roadmap informed by client feedback, we introduced our two-year strategic plan, Leading the Way this year. The plan prioritizes exceptional client outcomes, a focus on the wellbeing and enrichment of our canines, uncompromising program quality, and data driven growth so we can meet today's client needs while preparing for tomorrow. A critical part of this plan is to launch a capital campaign to renovate our client residence.

We also took decisive steps to bolster our breeding program and long term sustainability. Dr. Gail McRae, a board certified theriogenologist, now leads reproductive health strategy for our colony, bringing advanced clinical expertise and evidence based decision making to every stage, from selection through whelping and early development.

We launched our first client Alumni Board this year with national and international client representation to build community for our clients and increased peer support.

Enhancing the client experience remains at the heart of our mission. We added two roles that wrap care and support around every person we serve: Krista Oliver, our client support & wellness specialist, and a staff nurse focused on health education and continuity of care across programs. These additions strengthen our holistic, person centered approach before, during and after training.

Our volunteer community is a core source of strength and innovation. This year, we began hosting quarterly calls with clients, puppy raisers, breeding hosts, and on-campus volunteers to listen, learn and engage with these key constituencies. These conversations help us maintain strong relationships, streamline communication, improve programs and advance our mission.

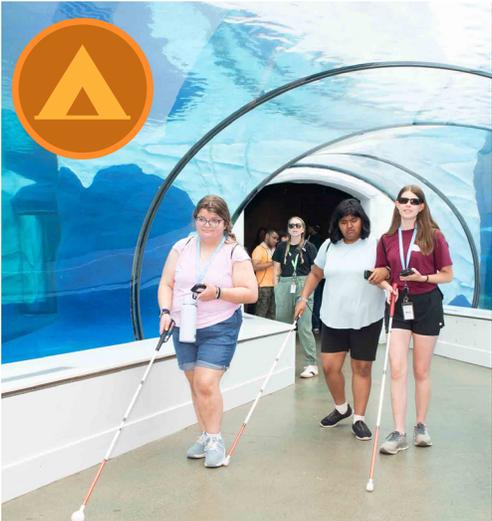
Looking ahead, we remain committed to pairing the highest standards in canine health and training with a deeply compassionate, accessible client experience. Your partnership makes this work possible. Thank you for your trust, your advocacy, and your belief in what we can accomplish together. We are, truly, leading the way for every client who seeks safe, confident and independent travel.

With gratitude!

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

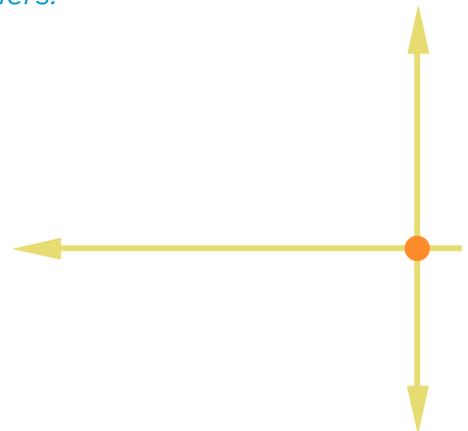
We partner to achieve goals and advance the mission.

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 2024-2025

Collaborated Internationally

In our continuous pursuit of innovation, Leader Dog team members attended the International Guide Dog Federation Conference in Warwick, United Kingdom, in June 2025. Chief Impact Officer Dani Landolt collaborated with Rachel Goldammer from the International Working Dogs Registry (IWDR) to present on Production Planning for Operational Success. Director of Client Strategy and Experience Erica Ihrke partnered with Marc Gillard of Guide Dogs for the Blind and presented about Barriers Impacting Guide Dog Readiness and Exploring Partnership Solutions. Additionally, Erica represented Leader Dog and the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (AVCREP) at the Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia Conference 2025 in March, where she presented on Certification, Recertification, and Advancing Professional Competency.



Developed and Launched Strategic Plan

Leader Dog's two-year strategic plan "Leading the Way" is organized around six pillars: client experience & support, canine welfare & training, marketing & communications, philanthropy, team development & inclusion, and technology & innovation. This plan was created both through direct feedback from clients in an extensive national survey and in collaboration with our team and board of trustees. Over forty team member experts representing all functional areas within Leader contributed to the plan in focus groups attended by members of the Board. The lived experience and voice of Leader Dog clients was prioritized.



Welcomed First Theriogenologist

Dr. Gail McRae joined Leader Dog's veterinary team as our first theriogenologist—a veterinarian specializing in animal reproduction, breeding and obstetrics. Dr. McRae's expertise is revolutionizing our breeding program by optimizing reproductive health and ensuring the genetic excellence of our future guide dogs. Her specialized training and extensive clinical experience provide invaluable insights to our entire team, advancing our mission to provide exceptional guide dogs to those who need them.



YEARLONG

➤ We continued to expand canine enrichment efforts resulting in more than 5 million exercise minutes for our

More Focused Approach on Client Wellbeing

Two new positions were added, with a special focus on client wellbeing and care. Krista Oliver is Leader Dog's client wellness and support specialist—a role designed to help meet clients' psychological and emotional needs as they participate in our programs and navigate the transitions of life with blindness or low vision. And our new on-site nurse, Jeannene Goodwin, utilizes her medical knowledge to anticipate and meet clients' medical needs and advises the team on how to better support a client in their goals for independence.



Fostered Engagement

President and CEO Melissa Weisse began holding virtual, quarterly calls with clients to build community, elevate client voices, and provide an opportunity for them to share their evolving needs for services and support. To help engage the volunteer community in new ways, quarterly calls with puppy raisers, breeding hosts and on-campus volunteers, have also been established. Volunteers share feedback, ask questions, and receive updates and information from the leadership team.





LAUREN | PUPPY RAISER & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT VOLUNTEER

“ I started volunteering with Leader Dog because of the puppies, but as I have become more involved with the organization, I have made many great new friends among other volunteers, staff and clients. I enjoy the family feeling and comradery behind the united mission of helping people who are visually impaired to feel safe and independent. ”

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.

107

- 4 DeafBlind

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.

194

- 2 DeafBlind
- 11 Teen O&M

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.

22



We received more than 800 program applications in this fiscal year.

VOLUNTEERS



89

Breeding Hosts



627

Puppy Raisers*

*Larger number than in years past due to increase in co-raiser model & additional prisons (with two raisers per puppy).



478

On-Campus*

* Includes 19 Board Trustees



DAVE W.

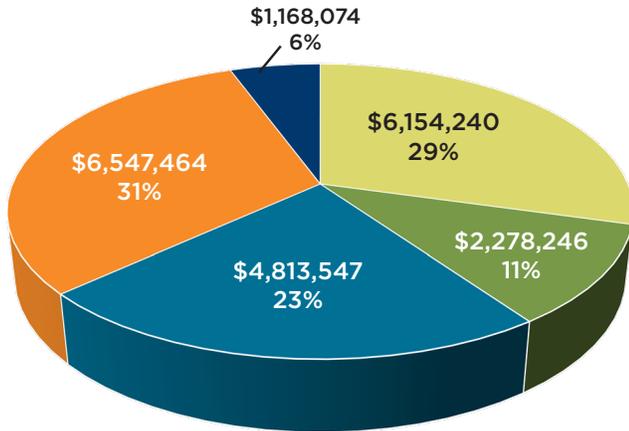
“ The staff and clients at Leader Dog were wonderful—great people. My guide dog mobility instructor knows her stuff; she’s very informative and has lots of tricks that are really good. I’ve always had good experiences at Leader!

Freedom is what I will have with Leader Dog Obi.

”

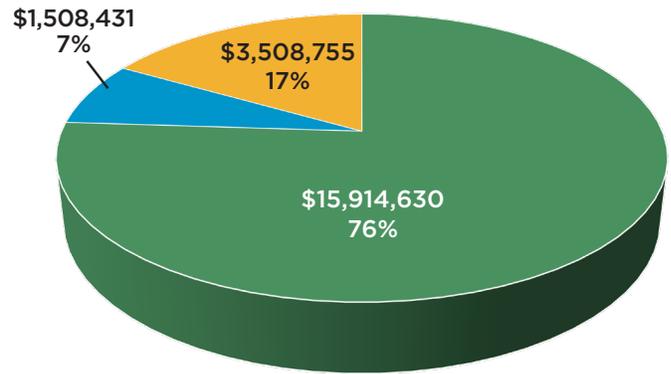
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Revenue



- Estates and bequests
- Grants
- Investments & misc.
- Lions clubs donations
- Other contributions

Expenses



- Programs and services
- General and administrative
- Philanthropy (fundraising)

LEADER DOGS FOR THE BLIND Summarized Statement of Activities

For the year ended June 30, 2025

Revenue

Contributions	\$19,793,497
Investment & Other	1,168,074
Total revenue	20,961,571

Expenses

Programs & Services	15,914,630
General & Administrative	1,508,431
Fundraising	3,508,755
Total expenses	20,931,816

Total change in net assets **22,755**

Net assets, beginning of year 22,314,172

Net assets, end of year **22,343,927**

AVRIL RINN

APPOINTED BOARD SECRETARY



Avril Rinn was named secretary of the Leader Dogs for the Blind Board of Trustees, becoming the first board officer with the lived experience of low vision or blindness. A longtime client and volunteer, Avril joined the board in 2006 and has contributed valuable perspectives, professional expertise, and leadership to the organization. We are deeply grateful for her generous service to Leader Dog's mission.

CURRENT BOARD MEMBERS

(as of 12.17.25)

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	Diane Henderson
Calvin Choi	Brian Hock
Anthony Costanzo	Justice Marilyn Kelly
Paul Edwards, MD, FACS	Maria Kristic
Jill Gaus	Daniel Spriet
Kim Gorman	Kurt Terrien
Steve Guarini	

Honorary Trustees

Celia Domalewski	Daniel Markey
Lon Grossman	James Platzer
Paul Hemeryck	



BOARD COMMITTEES

(as of 12.17.25)

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)

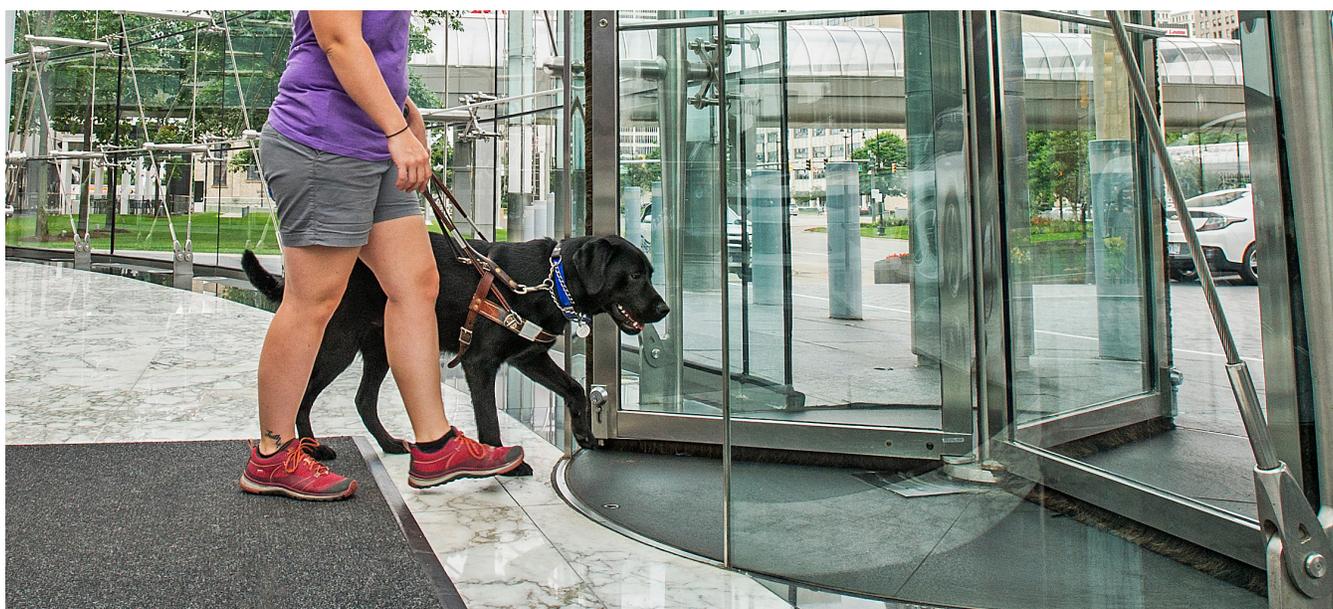
Ensures organizational commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility at the highest level and throughout the organization.

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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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

1039 S. Rochester Road • Rochester Hills, Michigan 48307-3115
Phone: 248.651.9011 | Toll Free: 888.777.5332
Email: leaderdog@leaderdog.org

LeaderDog.org

FOLLOW THE LEADER    



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