**Leader Dogs for the Blind – Talking Points 2018-2019**

In the United States, 1.3 million people are legally blind and every year 75,000 people become blind or visually impaired. When this occurs, people who were independent must now rely on others for assistance.

Due to travel limitations, a startling 60% of working age adults who are blind in the United States are unemployed or under-employed. This causes financial hardship and can have negative psychological effects. As a result, 90% live in low income areas.

People with vision loss have a greater risk of health and wellness issues, both mental and physical. 43% live with depression. Many stay at home out of fear resulting in social isolation, little physical exercise, family stress and multiple health conditions.

When someone loses their vision, the impact is far reaching. Family and friends often fear for their loved one’s safety and wellbeing.

What’s more surprising is only 10% of people blind or visually impaired travel independently with a guide dog or white cane.

At Leader Dog our mission is to teach people who are blind, visually impaired or Deaf-Blind, to travel independently with a white cane or guide dog. We help our clients regain their sense of independence and confidence. People who were afraid to walk down the sidewalk alone now travel without limits.

After completing orientation and mobility or guide dog training, it is easier for our clients to live a healthy lifestyle. Their newfound confidence and ability for unlimited travel encourages mental and physical wellbeing.

Also impacted is their ability to use mass transit to go to school or get to a job interview. Leader Dog programs position people to join the workforce or advance their career.

When people who are blind can travel safely and independently, the burden of care lifts from family and friends and their peace of mind is restored.

Clients who were isolated before receiving Leader Dog services are now able to actively participate in their communities.

PHOTO DESCRIPTION: Annette Bateman and her second Leader Dog, Stanley (Labrador retriever) – Texas

**Leader Dog Programs**

Founded by three Lions in 1939, Leader Dogs for the Blind has been providing Guide Dog Training from the very start. Recognizing that our client’s needs change throughout their lifetime, we have added Orientation and Mobility Training and a Summer Experience Camp. Now we can serve our clients independent travel needs whether they choose to travel with a white cane or a guide dog. All services are provided free of charge.

**Guide Dog Training**

Our free, up to 25-day residential program welcomes clients who are legally blind, at least 16 years old, have good orientation and mobility skills and are able to care for a dog.

Training is personalized for each client. Thanks to sophisticated breeding, puppy raising and dog training programs, we are able to match clients with a dog that best fits their lifestyle, travel pace, physical size, stamina and other considerations. Clients have the opportunity to train with their Leader Dog in a wide variety of situations to fit current and future needs, including urban, suburban and rural locations; college campuses; busy stores and malls; public transit and other environments.

We were the first guide dog organization to offer a dedicated program for clients who are both deaf and blind. Leader Dog offers warm weather training in Florida for those who live in warm climates and urban training in Chicago for clients who live or travel in large city environments.

For those who can’t be away from home or work for the extended 25-day training, we offer in-home delivery and will soon be offering “flex” training that is highly tailored to each client’s personal needs.

PHOTO DESCRIPTIONS: (left) Guide Dog Mobility Instructor Jenny Sanderson with Deaf-Blind client Jill Gaus and LD Twinkie (Labrador/golden cross) - Michigan; (top right) Client Bob Justin (Vietnam Veteran - Marine) and LD Lego (golden retriever) - Iowa; (bottom right) Client Gui (pronounced “Gee”) and LD Emma (Labrador/golden cross) - Florida

**Orientation and Mobility Training (White Cane Training)**

Our free orientation and mobility (O&M) training is learning how to use a white cane to effectively know where you are, where you want to go and the skills to get safely to your destination.

Orientation and Mobility Training is a one-week residential program. Our clients stay on our campus and training takes place in a wide variety of environments, such as residential, semi-business, business, city and rural settings. The majority of instruction takes place outdoors with some indoor training focused on how to navigate elevators, escalators and moving sidewalks.

Our O&M training provides individuals with white cane skills in a much shorter time frame than traditional O&M programs. The one-on-one instruction is tailored to each client’s capabilities, allowing individual needs to be met.

During training, skills learned may include:

Utilizing a human guide

Using cardinal directions (i.e., north, south, east, west) to know where you are, where you want to go and how to get there

Solving problems along your route, such as barriers, crowds, etc.

Crossing streets

Re-orientating yourself when you get lost

Shopping, soliciting assistance when needed, and more

O&M Training is provided to people who are legally blind and at least 16 years of age, regardless of whether or not they plan to train with a Leader Dog. Classes are ongoing throughout the year.

PHOTO DESCRIPTION: Client Shyanne Racey of Virginia learns the proper use of a white cane during Orientation and Mobility Training in Downtown Rochester. Certified O&M Specialist Maggie Winn (blond) follows closely behind. Shyanne also attended Summer Experience Camp and was a camp counselor the following year.

**Summer Experience Camp**

Our free Summer Experience Camp is a unique opportunity for teenagers who are 16 and 17 and are legally blind. To help them transition to the next stage of their lives, we offer leadership development, an introduction to guide dogs, and the opportunity to spend time with peers. Campers receive free GPS devices and learn how to use them in a variety of environments including on a college campus. Campers also experience tandem biking, beep kickball, rock wall climbing and more traditional camp fun.

Summer Experience Camp will be held Saturday, June 22–Saturday, June 29, 2019. Deadline for applications is March 31, 2019.

PHOTO DESCRIPTIONS: (left) For many campers this is their first experience at riding on a bicycle; (top right) Getting to meet, walk with and learn about guide dogs is a major bonus of our camp; (bottom right) A camper is coached on how to use a GPS device to navigate in new and unknown environments. Near the end of camp, the kids show off their GPS skills with a scavenger hunt.

**Every Year, Lions + Leader Dog =**

Days of independence equals the current number of active guide dog clients plus the number of O&M clients and campers we have served times 365 days in a year..

**How Leader Dog Does It Better**

We Innovate: When we see a need, we address it. We were the first organization to provide dedicated guide dog training for people who are Deaf-Blind, free GPS unit and training, a week-long orientation and mobility training to get people moving quickly using a white cane, and a leadership-based summer camp for teens - yet another opportunity for teens in multiple districts where a Lions camp exists!

We Improve: We believe that just because something works does not mean we cannot do it better. We strive for the most effective, up-to-date ways to train our dogs and serve our clients.

We Listen: Our services are not “one size fits all.” Our delivery models meet clients where they are. We customize services for clients who cannot leave work or family for an extended period of time.

We Collaborate: Working with others lets us achieve things we couldn't do on our own and opens the door for more creative solutions like partnering with universities to train their orientation and mobility students or working with correctional facilities to raise Leader Dog puppies.

Because we believe every person deserves equal opportunity, all programs are provided at no cost. This includes transportation, room and board and all equipment. Applicants range from 16 to 80+ years old…and yes, veterans too! Leader Dog is 100% funded through donations without government or insurance support.

PHOTO DESCRIPTIONS: (top left) Leader Dog issues HumanWare Trekker Breeze+ GPS devices which are used along with a white cane or a Leader Dog; (bottom left) Client Tina Gruchow along with LD Nellie (Labrador) walks her children to school; (top right) Guide Dog Mobility Instructor Meredith Bryde trains a dog on how to recognize and stop for overhead obstacles in the hallway of the canine development center; (bottom right) A group of students from Western Michigan University who are working to become orientation and mobility instructors spend one week at Leader Dog working with a client by the side of one of our certified instructors.

**How You Can Help**

That’s where Lions, Lioness and Leos come in!

Our largest donor base and referral group? You guessed it…Lions, Lioness and Leos from across the United States and Canada! Our clients come from all 50 states and Canadian provinces -- that includes your local community!

**Easy Ways to Help**

* Talk about Leader Dog with your family and friends. Post brochures around town!
* Encourage people to donate to support the mission
* Post about Leader Dog on your social media account or share ours. Leader Dog is on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Linked In – so follow us!
* Host a fundraising event
* Invite people to LeaderDog.org – success stories, applications and more on available on our website LeaderDog.org

PHOTO DESCRIPTIONS: (left) Members of the Walkersville Leo Club (Maryland MD-22) show off their $11,718.97 donation to Leader Dog at a local Lions meeting. They are the first Leo club to attain LDB Top Dog status.; (center) Client and Lion BJ Blahnik and LD Goober (Labrador retriever) give a working demonstration to a group of Lions visiting Leader Dog. BJ is from Wisconsin.; (right) Golf outings are great fundraisers.

**In Every Leader Dog Lies the Heart of a Lion**

Thank you for helping us spread our message and for helping us make people unstoppable.

“In every Leader Dog lies the heart of a Lion.” -PDG and Leader Dog client Len Quinn

PHOTO DESCRIPTION: Client and Lion William Graham and LD Gibson (golden retriever) relax during warm weather training in Naples, Florida. William is from North Carolina.