

Leader Dogs for the Blind Animal Welfare Statement

Responsible Care, Raising and Training of Dogs

“At Leader Dogs for the Blind, our mission is empowering people who are blind or visually impaired with lifelong skills for safe and independent daily travel.”

In order to successfully and responsibly sustain and fulfill our mission, we are committed to the humane care and welfare of all our dogs at all programmatic stages including breeding, raising, training, placement of graduate dogs with clients who are blind, alternative service opportunities or as adoption candidates.

Our Approach and Policy

Leader Dogs for the Blind maintains a high level of excellence as reflected by our continued International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) accreditation status. We voluntarily sought accreditation in 1999 and have successfully maintained this status with site visits occurring every five years for programmatic review.

Our canines are cared for and observed routinely every day of the year, several times each day, to monitor health, overall care and safety, in addition to oversight of their training and potential for guide dog performance achievements. All employees and volunteers working with our dogs undergo training to ensure they will uphold the highest standards for canine care and welfare. Our animal care technicians undergo training in dog handling and transport, behavioral and health observation, sanitization and operational methods for working in an animal facility. Our guide dog mobility instructors (GDMI) complete a formal application and review process, followed by an intense three-year apprenticeship before graduating as a certified GDMI. In order to support optimal canine health, our recently constructed on-site veterinary clinic, utilizing modern diagnostic equipment, is staffed with American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) compliant veterinarians and licensed veterinary technicians to provide exceptional canine health care, maintenance and breeding of our dogs.

All employees and volunteers must comply with our Code of Conduct and a Canine Well-Being Policy to remain in good standing with the organization's mission, values and the humane treatment, care and welfare of our dogs. These policies include an ethical mandate to report violations of humane canine care involving Leader Dog clients, puppy raisers, breeding stock hosts, on-campus volunteers or employees. Reports should be made to Leader Dogs for the Blind management and/or human resources for investigation. Retaliation towards any person reporting such incidents is not condoned nor tolerated.

Our Canine Enrichment Program

Environmental enrichment is the provision of stimuli that encourage appropriate behavior and satisfy an individual animal's physical and psychological needs. Leader Dogs for the Blind provides appropriate enrichment for our dogs. A dedicated animal enrichment team explores, monitors and evaluates effective and appropriate enrichment resources to support a variety of canine needs. Enrichment facets include structural, behavioral and foraging/exploratory elements.

Our dogs are housed in our new state-of-the-art **canine development center**. Our adult and puppy canine suites were intentionally designed to provide dogs with comfortable, spacious, temperature-controlled, sanitizable living quarters with unrestricted access to water and resting beds. These spaces also provide sensory impact to include visual stimulus allowing dog-to-dog and dog-to-human line of sight, tactile co-housing opportunities, auditory enrichment and exposure to natural sunlight. Social interaction spaces support supervised play and exercise time both indoors and in safe, fenced outdoor spaces. In addition, a multitude of enrichment devices and processes are employed as approved by the enrichment team and through veterinary health directives.

For further information on the IGDF accreditation organization, please visit:

<https://www.igdf.org.uk/>