

## **Harness & Leash**

### **Edition 35**

#### **Message from David Locklin, Director of Programs**

I am delighted to tell you that we have already welcomed more than 50 clients back to campus for Guide Dog and O&M Training! We have also been doing home deliveries of both programs.

Our July class consisted strictly of people who were able to travel directly to our campus by car. We have since opened to clients traveling by plane and are clearing them for training on an individual basis depending on where they are coming from. We look forward to the day when we can welcome everyone back to campus, but until then we need to keep people safe.

One highly anticipated day during training is when clients get to meet their dog's puppy raiser. Since volunteers are not allowed on campus, we came up with another way to accomplish this activity—it is taking place via Microsoft Teams! Everyone involved, clients and puppy raisers, have been enjoying getting to know each other in this manner.

The next article highlights some of the many safety precautions we have put in place to ensure everyone stays as safe as possible during training.

Remember, the client services department is always your first point of contact with questions or concerns. You can reach our

client services coordinators at 888-777-5332 or [clientservices@leaderdog.org](mailto:clientservices@leaderdog.org).

## **On-Campus Safety Precautions**

We have put many Covid-19 related protocols in place to ensure the safety of our clients and staff during training. Below are some of these new protocols. Clients scheduled for class will receive a complete list of our safety precautions with their acceptance information.

- Our first classes will have smaller class sizes with the residence being at or lower than 50% full.
- Our guide dog mobility instructor to client ratio is reduced to 2:1. It is usually 4:1.
- All staff and volunteers have been trained on all safety guidelines outlined by the most recent State of Michigan executive order. We are following all CDC guidelines and other relevant best practices available to us at this time.
- All staff and volunteers must wear facemasks in common areas or when working within 6 feet of each other or clients.
- All clients must wear facemasks in common areas or when working in close proximity to their GDMI or COMS. We will provide a facemask to you or you may bring your own.
- Our dining room has been extended into a much larger area. There will be at least 6 feet between chairs. You may also choose to eat your meals in your room.

- If human guide is needed, we will utilize a cane or modified harness between the guide and client to create more distance.
- Hand sanitizer will be readily available throughout the residence, downtown training center and on vehicles.
- Staff and clients must complete a health screening survey every morning prior to breakfast.

### **Simple Ways to Safely Social Distance**

It can be hard to stay 6 feet away from people when you don't know where they are sitting or standing, and what about when you need human guide assistance? Here are a few helpful hints to keep in mind:

- Always use auditory/verbal directions first. Make it easier to follow someone by having the person talk continuously so you know where they are and can maintain a safe distance.
- Ask for verbal acknowledgement when you enter a room where other people may be present. Asking, "Can anyone in the room please announce their presence?" will help you identify their location, so you don't accidentally sit next to them.
- If you must get human guide assistance, use your cane to distance yourself from the individual. You hold the handle and they hold the tip to maintain contact and distance. Be sure to disinfect your cane afterward.

- Follow standard health guidelines of wearing a mask when you go out and frequently disinfect your hands, cane or harness handle.

## **O&M Corner**

Welcome to the first O&M Corner in Harness & Leash! Our goal is to provide helpful suggestions and help spread the word about our one-of-a-kind O&M program.

Since January 2002, we have offered O&M Training. This five-day program has had a few different names over the years, but its purpose has remained the same; providing clients with individualized O&M skills.

Our certified O&M specialists often tell clients that O&M Training is not a "one and done." O&M is ever changing, and clients may consider more training in the future if things change (vision loss, hearing loss, a move or the environment you live in changes, etc.).

O&M Training at Leader Dog is customized to meet the clients' needs, therefore some training options include Introduction to O&M, O&M Brush-up, Guide Dog Readiness and Advanced O&M. Introduction to O&M is ideal for individuals who have received little to no training or have never traveled with a cane. O&M Brush-up is for individuals who have had formal training in the past and wish to increase or refresh their independent travel skills. Guide Dog Readiness is ideal for individuals who want to

learn more about the O&M skills required to successfully work with a guide dog. Please note, that this class does not guarantee acceptance into guide dog training. Advanced O&M is for individuals seeking to travel more confidently in complex environments or travel in unfamiliar environments. A combination of these goals, or others that a client may have, can be put together to make training individualized for each person and their needs.

If you've been wanting to work on your O&M skills or know someone who does, please email our client services department at [clientservices@leaderdog.org](mailto:clientservices@leaderdog.org) or call 888-777-5332 extension 1. Our client services team will be happy to answer your questions or get you started with an application.

### **Start Your Application Process Early**

If you think you may be retiring your Leader Dog in the next six months to a year, now is the time to start your application process. Applications are good for two years. For more information on deciding whether your dog is getting ready for retirement, go to our online toolkit at <https://www.leaderdog.org/programs/current-clients-graduates/dog-retirement-toolkit/>. If you'd rather discuss your situation with someone, contact our client services department at 888-777-5332 extension 1 or email [clientservices@leaderdog.org](mailto:clientservices@leaderdog.org).

## **T.O.M. Talks**

Leader Dogs for the Blind announces a new, free virtual learning experience for people 18-24 years old—T.O.M. Talks!

T.O.M. Talks focuses on technology, orientation and mobility. The seminar is free and will be held January 17–30, 2021.

Participants will develop skills needed to thrive in their career including increased independent travel, professional readiness and networking. A variety of experts from Leader Dogs for the Blind will present including guide dog mobility instructors and orientation & mobility specialists. The seminar is partially self-guided and partially live to better fit busy schedules. There are four required live ZOOM sessions and two optional weekend sessions. The self-guided portion of the curriculum includes videos and activities supported with materials sent prior to the T.O.M. Talks.

To apply for T.O.M. Talks go to [leaderdog.org/programs/tom-talks/](https://leaderdog.org/programs/tom-talks/). Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. (EST) on Monday, December 14, 2020.

## **Gift Shop Offers Discount**

All clients receive 15% off from our online gift shop. Enter code "15OFF" at checkout to claim your discount. If you have questions or issues with the gift shop website, contact Kim Thomas, gift shop coordinator, at 888-777-5332.

## **Contact Us by Phone, Email or Text**

Your first point of contact for assistance is always the client services department. You can reach them by calling 888-777-5332, or email or text them at [clientservices@leaderdog.org](mailto:clientservices@leaderdog.org).

## **Questions, Comments or Suggestions**

Please send comments to UpdateEditor@leaderdog.org or call 888-777-5332 ext. 1158.