



"Guide Dogs of the Desert provides mobility, companionship and independence for the blind with custom trained guide dogs."

P.O. Box 1692, Palm Springs, CA. 92263 Phone: 760-329-2375
Fax: 760-329-2866 admissions@gddca.org www.gddca.org

The Necessary ILS and O&M Skills for a Guide Dog

In seeking to enhance your best chances for a successful training experience at Guide Dogs of the Desert, GDD wants to know that you have the aptitude and technical skills for the confident performance of Independent Living Skills and Orientation & Mobility Skills (ideally in practice for a year).

ILS Skills: Your training at Guide Dogs of the Desert will require an understanding and experience of many of the skill areas of independent living that you currently use on a daily basis in your everyday life. In applying for and ultimately working with a guide dog, you should review the following list of skills that contribute to a successful guide dog team. Look for the areas you are doing well in and explore what areas you may need some skill building. Your goal should be the ability to perform the required Independent Living Skills independently, confidently, and efficiently.

These include:

- **Advocacy**-for understanding the laws and requesting reasonable accommodation, asserting your rights, clearly expressing your needs, etc.
- **Calendaring**-for scheduling vet and grooming appointments, keep track of medicine giving, incorporating dog's needs into your daily schedule, etc.
- **Cleaning**- for sweeping/vacuuming up after the dog, doing laundry and dishes/bowls, regular grooming, etc.
- **Financial Skills**-for money and bill management, saving for emergency and non-emergency dog costs, etc.
- **Labeling/organizing**-for identifying medicines, dog accessories, food, setting up place for dog, storing supplies and equipment, creating/maintaining "go kit" with necessary dog things for the day, filing important documents and communications.
- **Measuring**-for dispersing dog's food, water, medicine, etc.
- **Note-taking**-for collecting info in training lectures, access technology for this collection, tracking vet information, etc.
- **Pet first aid training**-for handling minor medical needs, dog supplies in "go-kit" and household emergency kit.
- **Problem solving and critical thinking**-for thoughtful, solution-based response to situations.
- **Shopping**-for preparing shopping list, on-line shopping, soliciting assistance, etc.

- **Spatial awareness and sensory skills**-for monitoring the dog's behavior and location, throwing their toys (not hitting things or people) for play, taking pictures of your dog, etc.
- **Systematic search patterns**-for recovering dropped items (including the dog's poop), cleaning up after the dog, grooming your dog, monitoring the dog's physical condition, retrieving the dog's toys, etc.

Evaluate these ILS skills we are looking for in training for a guide dog at GDD. Do you find your own ILS skills in need of development or quick review? May we suggest you contact your local blind services agency to schedule an assessment (we have an assessment for your Blind Services provider to complete). Developing and maintaining effective technical independent living skills will help you grow into a confident and assertive partner of the guide dog team.

O&M Skills: Your training at Guide Dogs of the Desert will also require that you have the aptitude for technical training and confident, independent cane travel (we have an assessment for your Orientation & Mobility instructor to complete). You need an understanding and experience of many of the skill areas of orientation and mobility, including:

- Using the white cane
- Utilizing a human guide
- Sensory awareness (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory)
- Using orientation skills (cardinal directions, route planning, re-orientation)
- Problem solving
- Outdoor travel skills (intersections, traffic controls, crossing streets)
- Residential, small & large business districts, mall & rural travel
- Use of public transportation

Many of the technical O&M skills you use for independent travel are also necessary for training with a guide dog. These include:

- **Alignment**-taking direction from environmental features such as curbs, shorelines, traffic sounds & landmarks.
- **Auditory skills**-listening to the sounds around you to help you navigate.
- **Relative distance estimation**-understanding the distance between one point and another and the duration of time it takes to complete.
- **General proprioception**-knowing the placement of your body in space.
- **Line of travel awareness**-ability to maintain a straight line of travel.
- **Ongoing focus**-staying on task regardless of changes in time, environment, or distractions.

However, when working a guide dog, the emphasis of the skills shifts from seeking physical contact with objects in the environment, as with the white cane, to the negotiating around and through obstacles without touching them with the guide dog. So, it becomes important that you understand and master:

- **Concepts of faraway and near**-where you are on the route in relationship to your destination goal.
- **Navigating familiar and unfamiliar intersections**-understanding how to gain the information needed for completing signaled, stop signed, and unmarked intersections.
- **Judging when to cross**-interpreting traffic controls, traffic sounds, traffic speed & direction for determination of all clear "safe to cross".
- **Relative time and distance**-knowing the distance between one point and another and the duration of time it takes to complete.
- **Remaining oriented over varying lengths of at least three purposeful routes** -being able to stay focused on the route despite missteps, distractions & detours.

Besides mastering these skills, you also need to possess the necessary strength to manage an appropriately matched guide dog with the necessary motor skills, range of motion, reflexes, flexibility and coordination to work with the dog. You must have the ability to maintain balance while negotiating curbs and steps, traveling over varied surfaces, managing the guide's behavior and executing the body movements required when completing turns and following the guide dog.

Effective communication with the guide dog requires that you be attentive to the dog and your own actions. You are the one responsible to know the starting and end points as well as the landmarks along the way of your routes. You must develop the technical skills to direct the dog where you want to go and make certain the dog goes the way you are directing. You will need to provide praise and corrections effectively in order to have a good working relationship with your guide dog.

We are keen to support your success in developing ease and mastery of the ILS and O&M concepts and skills discussed here. So please feel free to visit our website www.gddca.org or contact the Admissions Team at **760-329-2375** if you should have questions or concerns.