

Guide Dogs for the Blind 'O&M Immersion'

Pilot Program



Marc Gillard Grad Dip. (O&M) COMS, GDMI
O&M Services Manager – Guide Dogs for the Blind

Katt Jones MA, COMS
O&M Specialist – LightHouse for the Blind



Introduction

- In FY 2017, nearly 40% of all individuals who applied to GDB were denied
- **Primary reason for denial - lack of sufficient O&M skills**

| | FY 14 | FY 15 | FY 16 | FY 17 |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Potential applicants | 1114 | 1092 | 1140 | 1153 |
| # not qualified to move beyond the phone consultation, (NOQ) | 547, (49%) | 508, (46%) | 432, (38%) | 447, (39%) |
| # of NOQ's not qualified due to lack of O&M | 119, (22%) | 66, (13%) | 89, (21%) | 116, (26%) |

- Retrain applicants may need additional O&M skills before returning to GDB



What could GDB do to assist these applicants?

In FY 2017, GDB partnered with the LightHouse for the Blind

Launched a Pilot “O&M Immersion” program

Open to qualified applicants from across the USA and Canada

Free to students: transportation, lodging and instructional costs paid for by GDB



Instructional Objectives of the Program:

Develop O&M skills and strategies essential for guide dog travel including adapting to or preparing for a loss of residual vision

Service Objectives of the Program, (they evolved!)

Serve the following students as the top priorities:

- 1st time GDB applicants who lack the necessary O&M skills to qualify, (lack of skills or services)
- GDB graduates who may not qualify for a successor guide dog due to their O&M skills
- GDB graduates experiencing significant difficulties with their current guide dog due to their O&M skills
- Applicants accepted to train but can improve their O&M skills to assist in class and establishing their new guide dog at home
- (Graduates who want to improve their O&M skills)



Student Prerequisites:

Current GDB applicant or graduate **OR**

Clients who had received O&M services from the LightHouse
(In future – private agencies, DOR, or the VA and self-referral)

Strongly motivated toward independent travel with a guide dog

Motivated about living the ‘GDB guide dog lifestyle’

Basic O&M instruction in the past and/or currently using a cane*

*Clients who are self-taught and travel independently despite a lack of formal instruction

Independent living skills



Student Prerequisites:

Satisfy GDB medical and mental health requirements

Satisfy other GDB Admissions requirements:

Legal blindness, felony convictions, substance abuse, diabetes and seizure management etc.

Function within a group setting in an adult learning based environment



Pilot Program Dates and Numbers of Students Participating in Each Training Program

| Program Dates | Students Participating |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 9/18 – 9/23/16 | 1 |
| 10/23 – 10/28/16 | 2 |
| 12/4 – 12/9/16 | 3 |
| 1/22 – 1/27/17 | 3 |
| 3/19 – 3/24/17 | 2 |
| 5/7 – 5/12/17 | 4 |
| Total | 15 students |



Pilot Program Dates and Student Type (1st time applicants and GDB retrains)

| Program Dates | 1 st time GDB applicants | GDB retrain students |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 9/18 – 9/23/16 | 0 | 1 |
| 10/23 – 10/28/16 | 1 | 1 |
| 12/4 – 12/9/16 | 2 | 1 |
| 1/22 – 1/27/17 | 3 | 0 |
| 3/19 – 3/24/17 | 1 | 1 |
| 5/7 – 5/12/17 | 3 | 1 |
| Totals | 10 | 5 |

Retrain applicants - not an original goal

24% of GDB graduates have RP



Program Content: Typical O&M Immersion Program:

- Program takes place over six days beginning on Sunday and concluding the following Friday
- One O&M Specialist to each student
- Average number of instructional hours*: 20–25 hrs



Before Students Arrive:

- GDB refers selected students to the LightHouse, (Katt Jones)
- Meeting between O&M instructors and GDB O&M Services Manager
- Each instructor makes an initial contact with their student
- Develop personalized lesson plan
- Logistics related to transportation and lodging: GDB Admissions and LightHouse Director of Rehab Services



Weekly Schedule:

- Highly individualized for each student
- O&M assessment
- Indoor and outdoor cane skills, street crossing skills and intersection analysis
- Auditory skills
- Juno training
 - Recognize and respond to common guide dog errors
 - Stopping at an obstacle



Weekly Schedule:

- Thursday: 1st time guide dog students to GDB San Rafael, (Juno, experiential walk with guide dog)
- Retrain students stay in SF and continue to work on travel skills
- Other programs at the LightHouse: ILS, AT and GPS
- Friday: individual meetings



Education and Training of LightHouse Orientation & Mobility Specialists:

- Different levels of experience working with guide dog teams
- GDB training video and Mira/Louis Braille video
- Met with GDB O&M Services Manager on multiple occasions
- O&M instructors needed to be:
 - Open-minded
 - Open to receiving feedback
 - Comfortable being observed



Education and Training of LightHouse Orientation & Mobility Specialists:

- The program began gradually
- Three trained instructors and three students
- A year after the pilot program began:
Six trained O&M instructors
- Less support from the GDB O&M Services Manager



Developing the Curriculum

- Flexible week-long curriculum
- Basic O&M training (human guide, cane skills, street crossing skills, intersection analysis)
- Guide Dog related skills (auditory skills, time distance estimation and Juno)
- Intersections near LightHouse headquarters scouted out as possible lesson locations



Challenges for the O&M Instructors

- Fulltime caseload outside of the program
- One week away from students every two months
- Making sure there are enough instructors available to have coverage
- Students are coming from all over the US and Canada
- Need to find training locations similar to home area



Benefits for the O&M Instructors

- Program is unique: combined the two worlds of Guide Dog instruction and O&M
- Significantly better at preparing students to get a guide dog
- Improved ability to assess if a guide dog is the right fit for a student
- Better at teaching basic Juno and some more advanced Juno skills



Program outcomes

Benefits for Guide Dogs for the Blind

- Improved ability to qualify and prepare first time students for the guide dog lifestyle
- Assist retrains to continue to qualify for a guide dog
- Keep active teams together longer
- Thorough assessment of marginal applicants: can provide resources and information which may lead to a successful application
- Comprehensive details on clients' ability and learning styles: superior instruction during class



Program outcomes

Perspectives from the LightHouse:
Kathy Abrahamson, Director of Rehabilitation Services

- LH and GDB have a shared philosophy - **need for solid O&M skills**
- **Shared commitment** of training hours received by students and those provided by O&M Specialists
- The **partnership** with the student and teacher is just as important as the partnership within a guide dog team
- Learning through **immersion** provides:
 - **consistent, uninterrupted** training
 - **challenge** and **success** in areas that were unexpected
 - **support** and **connection** with other students going through the training
- No matter the outcome (referral to GDB or recommendation for more training), each student has become a more **informed, confident and competent traveler**
- Witnessing students understanding how powerful their cane skills can be:
 - **Ah Ha Moments!**



Program outcomes

- **Pilot was a success!**
- 4 students already graduated with guide dogs
- 3 students accepted and waiting for class
- 2 students still working their current guide dogs
- GDB Board of Directors approved the program becoming permanent for FY 2018
- Program expansion: funding approved for 40 students in FY 2018
- Programs will run every second month: 6 programs for FY 2018



Program outcomes

- Since July 2017, two additional programs with 10 students graduating
(6 x 1st time guide dog applicants and 4 retrain students)
- Pilot + permanent program = 25 students
- Next program at the SF LightHouse begins November 12th with a further 5 students enrolled
- **Exciting future!**
- **Program expansion** - GDB partnering with other agencies



Case Study: 'Luci'

- 44 years of age
- COB – RP
- Residence, Chicago IL
- 1st time guide dog applicant
- Assessed for a guide dog, 9/15/2016 and accepted **BUT**
- **Referred to O&M Immersion because:**
- A highly visual traveler
- Develop cane/O&M skills, (non-visual travel skills & confidence)
- Prepare for a future reduction in vision
- Completed O&M Immersion at the LH, 12/5/16 – 12/9/16
- Completed training at GDB, 8/19/2017



Luci & Katt during the O&M Immersion at the LH





Program outcomes

Luci & Starla in class and at graduation





Referral Information

- Referrals can be made to:

Danielle Velken, (Outreach & O&M Services Coordinator)
dvelken@guidedogs.com

cc. Marc Gillard, (O&M Services Manager)
mgillard@guidedogs.com



Thank you for listening!

- Questions?

