



STAGES OF
The Seeing Eye
JOURNEY



STAGE 3:

Training



Where we are in the life stages (3 of 5)



Age range of a dog in this stage
13-24 months old



Introduction

The Seeing Eye journey involves more than a wonderful dog. It takes an entire village of caring, dedicated professionals, volunteers and donors, as well as a tremendous amount of resources, time, energy and patience to help a puppy become a dog that will transform the life of person who is blind or visually impaired. Come along with us as we explore each stage of The Seeing Eye journey and the many contributing factors to a working guide dog team's ultimate success.

Big Dogs On Campus



Once the dogs have spent a year in the home of a volunteer puppy raiser, they come back to The Seeing Eye campus in Morristown, New Jersey for their professional training. Between three and five dogs arrive every day but Friday.

In all, these dogs will spend around six months with us back on campus.

Getting The Old Gang Back Together

The dogs have spent the past year living in a home with humans and perhaps another family pet. Suddenly they're back to kennel living with a big group of active dogs!

Naturally, there's a lot of frolicking and happy chaos. For a month we let them acclimate to their new surroundings. They play in the yard and take leisurely, leashed walks through downtown Morristown.



“*It's like recess and summer camp combined when these dogs reunite with one another. They have a lot of fun.*”

David Johnson

Director of Instruction & Training

Making Sure Dogs Are Ship-Shape

In their first month back, all the dogs are thoroughly examined by our veterinarians and observed closely by our kennel staff. They are evaluated medically to



make sure they are healthy. For example, we take x-rays to make sure their hips and other joints are in good shape. If any dog needs medical attention they receive it.

The dogs are also evaluated psychologically. For example, if a dog is anxious in her new surroundings and unable to adapt, that's a red flag that she might not make a good Seeing Eye dog.

Family Planning



During this first month, our veterinarians neuter and spay the dogs. The dogs spend a week or ten days relaxing and healing from the surgery. Dogs who are being considered for The Seeing Eye breeding program skip the surgery.

The Perfect Parents



At The Seeing Eye, we breed our own dogs for the program. We choose healthy dogs with just the right temperament, size, strength, stride, and energy.

We're not trying to produce the "perfect dog," but the most healthy, trainable, predictable, and reliable guide dog possible.

It Takes More Than Smarts

*m*any people think only smart dogs can be Seeing Eye dogs. In fact, intelligence has little to do with trainability.

We look for dogs who are “biddable.” In other words, dogs who enjoy working with and cooperating with people. Sporting, toy, and herding breeds tend to be easier to train than terriers and hounds, who have been bred to work independently.

After nearly a century, we have found that German shepherds, Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers and a cross of the Lab and Golden Retriever possess the kinds of characteristics that make the best Seeing Eye dogs.

Meeting Their Trainer

Each dog is assigned to a Seeing Eye instructor with whom they will train for four months. Each instructor trains a string of 7 to 9 dogs. The bond between Seeing Eye dogs and their instructors forms quickly and is a powerful one.

“ I meet them on their first morning at the kennel. I feed them breakfast and let them run in the yard. I’m watching their behavior, to see how they interact with other dogs, etc.



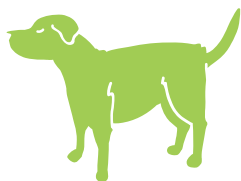
I take them out one at a time and start doing obedience. Each day we build on what they learned the day before.”

Barb Del Tufo

Master Instructor

Obedience 101

It Starts With Three Simple Commands



Come and sit:

calls the dog back to you



Down:

has the dog lie down



Rest:

has the dog stay

Meeting Their Trainer

Basic training takes place on The Seeing Eye campus before moving to the streets of Morristown.



“After a week on campus, dogs progress to routes in Morristown where training routes grow increasingly more difficult. Dogs learn they are as wide and tall as the handler when clearing obstacles in the environment. They learn to avoid distractions such as other animals and must learn to ignore their instinct to sniff.”

David Johnson

Director of Instruction & Training

Target Training



Formative training also includes the clicker. We teach the dogs to touch a target—a key chain wrapped in red duct tape with a bell attached. This allows the handler to hear when the dog hits the target with its nose.

Clicker training is also used to enhance the dog's skill in targeting specific objects, a tool later used to teach the dog to identify specific objects for the handler, such as walk signal buttons.

Crossing The Street

One of the trickiest things we do is teach the dogs how to cross the street safely. As we approach the curb, the handler is responsible for listening to the flow of traffic and giving the dog the “forward” command.

The dog is taught to walk in a straight line from curb to curb and avoid obstacles such as cars that are turning right on red, running the traffic light, or otherwise entering the crosswalk.



Intelligent Disobedience



The concept of intelligent disobedience is the principle which separates guide dog training from other types of training. Seeing Eye dogs are taught to ignore a command that would jeopardize the safety of

the handler and themselves, such as crossing against traffic or a command to step off a vacant subway platform.

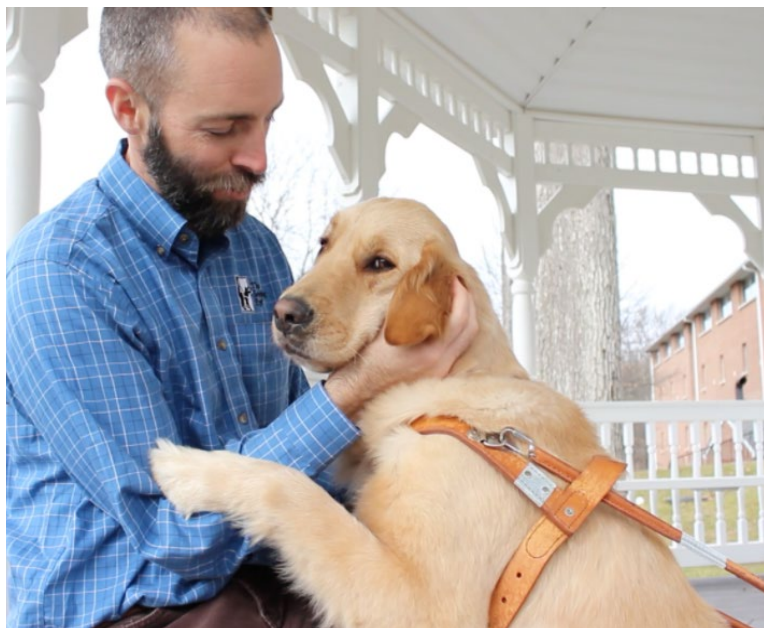
Raising The Bar



Little by little, we increase the distractions by exposing the dog to busier environments that have distractions such as toys, food and other irresistible things.

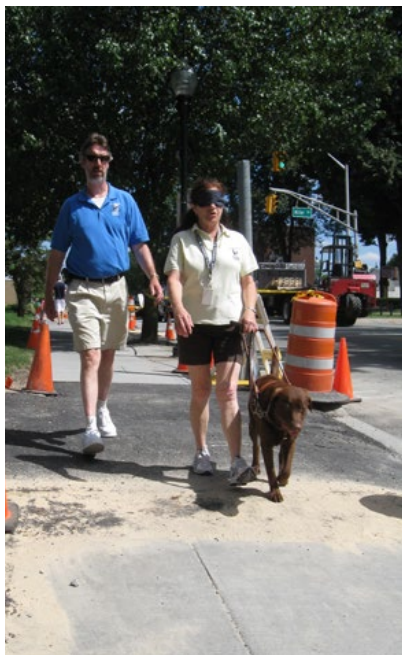


Our Secret Weapon



Our secret training weapon is no secret. It's our tried and true philosophy. The dogs are taught to guide with a combination of consistency, repetition and praise.

Midterm Blindfold



Half-way through the training period, instructors take a blindfolded walk with each of their charges to evaluate the dog's progress.

Why are the trainers blindfolded?

To make sure they aren't subconsciously giving the dog cues on

what to do. A training manager always follows close behind for safety, and to evaluate the team's work.

Freelance



The last two months of dog training is called Freelance. Dog trainers take the dogs just about anywhere, onto buses and trains, into department stores, schools, office buildings, restaurants and

grocery stores. Dogs are taken into New York City for subway training as the ultimate exposure to distractions.

We also do what we call “country work” for areas where there may be no sidewalks. In this case, we teach them to walk on the left shoulder of the road.

A Final Blindfold Test

At the beginning of the fourth month, the blindfold test is given again on a more complicated route to ensure the dogs are ready to begin work as Seeing Eye dogs for their new owners.



“The final blindfold experience helps us to determine what kind of handler we will match the dog to.”

David Johnson

Director of Instruction & Training

The Students Arrive!

Students who are getting their first dog spend 3.5 weeks with us on campus training with their Seeing Eye dog. A student who has previously had a dog from us spends 2.5 weeks on campus to train and adjust to their new dog. (we lovingly call these students “RETRAINS.”) The students arrive on Monday. On Wednesday morning they meet their dog for the first time.

Did You Know?

Students pay \$150 for their first dog and \$50 for each successor dog. Veterans of the military pay \$1. Yet the costs involved in creating the partnership between a person and a Seeing Eye dog is \$65,000. How are we able to do this? We count on generous donors to make up the difference. You can help. Visit seeingeye.org/donate

A Typical Day For A Seeing Eye Student

Students rise at 5:30 a.m. to feed and exercise their dogs. After breakfast, the teams train on the Morristown routes that are already familiar to the dog.



Now the dog must learn to work with a new handler who is different from the instructor. The teams practice another route after lunch and most evenings, the students attend

lectures from Seeing Eye experts. Lectures cover everything from basic dog care to understanding the Seeing Eye team's right to public access under the law.

It's All About The Bond!








Bringing our students to Morristown for training is all about setting the dogs up for success. The dogs can adjust more easily to a new handler while in a familiar environment. In the time it takes to transition from kennel life to home life, the dog will quickly bond to its new owner.

Making A Match

Since there's such a huge variety of people and dogs, we ask a lot of questions and make careful observations before we suggest a match.

We talk to students about their lifestyle and their needs. We also evaluate the student in their home environment to get a feel for the type of dog that will best meet their needs.

Dog-Matching Questions for Students

-  Do you live in a city or a small town?
-  Do you travel on sidewalks or country roads?
-  Do you have other pets?
-  Do you work in an office?
-  Do you frequently ride buses, trains, subway, etc?

Role Reversal



Another important tool we use to match the right student with the right dog is the Juno Walk. All students have to

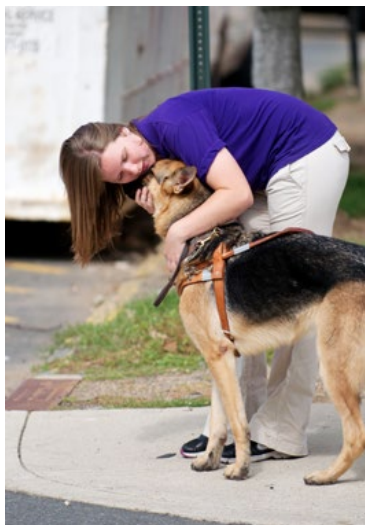
take a few Juno Walks. The instructor plays the role of the Seeing Eye dog (named Juno) and guides the person with the harness. From this, the instructor can evaluate how much physical pull a person needs from the dog and how fast they like to walk. Dogs who naturally meet those needs are considered during the matching process.

Did You Know?

Juno was the Roman goddess of match-making. The Juno walk was believed to have been named after her.

The More Things Change...

We started training dogs in 1929. Naturally, as we've learned things along the way we've built upon the foundational training we first offered. But the important things have essentially stayed the same.



We instruct the dogs and their new owners in what they need to know to be safe and effective travelers.

Did You Know?

We just celebrated our 17,000th match!

Graduation Schmaduation

Some people are surprised to learn we don't hold a graduation ceremony at the conclusion of training. This is intentional. We don't want to draw attention to this transition.



Instead, we'd rather place the emphasis on continuing to build and strengthen this new human-dog working relationship, which in reality, is still in its infancy. Although the formal instructional program is over, there is much work ahead for this newly formed team.

A New Life

Once the dogs and graduates leave our campus they begin a whole new adventure together.

That's Stage 4: Career!!

