Nancy: Hi, everybody, we're just going to take a couple minutes before we get started. Looks like we have a couple of people rolling in still.

Nancy: Hello. We're really happy that all of you are here. So unfortunately, yes, we have to do this on Zoom. But fortunately one of the exciting things about this is that it's giving us a chance to not only record this meeting but also record it with closed captioning. And then what we're going to do is send this meeting off to be -- what is that word?

James: Transcribed.

Nancy: Transcribed. So that's really exciting. So James and I -- This is Nancy. James and I are sharing a computer here on campus. We decided to show up just in case anybody didn't get our email. And it looks like all of you get a big gold star for checking your emails, so thank you so much. And I got a lot of replies about people’s schedules for over the holidays, which is really exciting. And we also got a lot of feedback about future meetings.

So as some of you recall, the meeting before this, we did a little poll about what people are interested in learning about. And one of the things was Client Services and all things clients. So we have the awesome Toby and Jake here today, and they're going to do some presenting about some of our programs that we have for our clients. That's really exciting. And then our next meeting is going to be all things veterinary. That was a really popular topic, so things from how to administer medications to treatments to different conditions that our dogs might have.

And then it's also an opportunity to poll all of you to see if any of you want to specialize in any of our medical type situations for our dogs that go into foster care. If any of you are really interested in helping out maybe senior dogs or dogs recovering from injury or dogs that need some rehabilitation from surgery or dogs that need a weight loss program, it's a really good opportunity to explore that. And if you're interested in specializing in any of our medical type fosters, just let us know, and we'll get you pointed in the right direction and get you that training that you need. So we're shooting for March for a date for our next Foster Care meeting with our vet team. And that's really exciting.

Also we have a really exciting update for you. We have created a Resources Page online for all of our foster care providers. What that's going to entail is important updates. There will be a copy of the Foster Care Manual on there. There will be recordings of presentations available for you on there, health information, all of the forms that you might need, like the behavior record forms, or if you're a K9 Buddy foster care provider, the observation forms will be available there.

So there's a lot of cool stuff there. We're just wrapping it out, and we're going to roll it out to you and give you the link. It's not something that's readily available to anyone, so you will need the link to be able to access it. And that's going to happen here pretty quickly. So that's really exciting.

And then also, something that we're working on is offering specialized training like we were talking about the medical, which ties into our next foster care meeting where we're going to be talking about veterinary care. But also are you interested in becoming a really good dog handler? Do you want some extra training in behavior modification, in basic training, in fostering puppies, in fostering hospice dogs, fostering dogs that have extra special needs than just the basic dogs? So if you're interested in that kind of thing, please, please, please let me know. And we're going to start offering some resources and maybe even some private training for you to get real good at that.

So we've got -- for our Zoom meeting just for the purpose of this being recorded, we've got most of your videos turned off. And that's just because we want to keep everything pretty clean here for the recording. If you have any questions there is a chat box, and we'll be monitoring that chat. And then also Toby and Jake will offer some opportunities for Q&A afterwards. And again if you do have any questions between now and the end of the meeting or any questions for me, I'm always available, email, phone call, et cetera.

So without further ado, I think we could start with -- oh, you're welcome, Kathy. Kathy just said in the chat, “Thank you for recording this.” You're welcome. This has been a long time coming. We want these meetings to be accessible to everyone. And of course it's not going to come without hiccups. And thank you for bearing with us. This is actually a really good opportunity for us to practice this and try it out and see what works and what doesn't. So give us your feedback. It's super valuable. Yeah. So, Toby, take it away.

Toby: Hey, Nancy. Hi, James.

Toby: Hi, everyone. Thank you for having me here. I'm assuming everyone can hear okay. Nobody's saying unmute. I didn't actually initially plan to have any -- so any visual media. But because this switched to Zoom, I just real quickly put together a PowerPoint for this. And so it's fairly informal, but I'm going to go ahead and fire that up just so you have more than just me to look at.

And what I'm giving is a Field Services overview. And first of all, let me just reintroduce myself, Toby Contreras. I use he/him pronouns, and I am a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor -- and I’ll just go to the first slide here -- a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor. But I'm also a Field Service Support Specialist. I can't even really get my own mouth around that title. I always joke that it's -- the initials are kind of like a Tire Linc.

But just by way of background, I started with GDB in 1997, just a couple of years after the Oregon campus opened, and from ‘99, when I was promoted to apprentice, until 2016, I was doing what most people think of when they think of a guide dog instructor doing, the class training and the dog training. And then in 2016, I switched to the Support Center in this current role which I've been doing since then and enjoying quite a bit.

So what I'm here to talk about is Field Services. And the first bullet point here: Client Services versus Field Services. It's the same thing. We have gone through a recent transition where we've recognized that what the Field and Client Services team was doing, it's always been integrated or very closely connected with training. And so from a departmental standpoint, those two departments have been integrated within this past year.

That said, I might sometimes say Client Services versus Field Services, and that's just muscle memory. But the main goal of that is really recognizing how closely those teams are connected. But sometimes silos can make could make the communication a little bit more difficult. So by having all of these under the same umbrella, it's allowing the Field Service staff and the Training staff to be a little bit more closely connected and communicating more efficiently. The communication was always there, but maybe it was a little bit -- could be

a little broken up.

So when I'm referring to Field Services, these are the four main departments: VFA, that's -- sorry for the acronym -- Veterinary Financial Assistance. And the “ish” is referring to that it's typically or traditionally had been under the umbrella of Client Services and Field Services because it very much applies to the support that clients are getting when they're in the field, but it’s also very much under the umbrella of the veterinary department. So I work very closely with the Veterinary Financial Assistance staff. But I think that -- and departmentally for not necessarily an important -- they are referring or they are reporting to more of the veterinary side of things.

The main team, when you're talking about Field Services, are the Field Service Managers and the Support Center and then also the Psychosocial Support which is a team of one. And there's a -- I think I'll say this several times -- there's quite a lot of crossover between departments. The Psychosocial Support is working a lot with Admissions as well.

The Field Service Managers are staff that are located throughout the country. They are the ones that typically -- the entire country is broken up into – actually, excuse me, the entire continent is broken up into several zones, and the Field Service Managers each oversee a given area of that territory. We just, as part of this integration, streamlined and changed that, and I wasn't able to pull up a current map. But regionally, we have somebody that's based in Colorado, somebody that's based out of Atlanta, somebody down in Florida, somebody up in the DC area. And so they're on location -- a couple in California in different parts -- they're on location or in that area. So when it comes to being able to make visits to folks in that area, they're a little bit closer, maybe more of a shorter flight or a drive to be able to provide direct support.

More importantly, they are managing the support for everybody in that given area. So even if they're not the ones making the direct visits, any phone calls or reports or class appointments that are coming in for people that are in their zone, they're aware of it and they're keeping tabs on which of those clients might have specific requests, needs, asks, or maybe are scheduled to have some of our routine visits.

The Support Center is -- when it was conceived back in 2013, that was when the Support Center as this kind of call center developed -- was based primarily in or actually completely in California, where the idea was that any of our clients or constituents could call in and get a hold of somebody that would be able to provide them with support about any number of things. I'm going to get a little bit into what the day-to-day looks like. And the idea being with all of those folks in the same room, they would be able to maybe place the call on hold and turn to the desk next to them and say, “Hey, I got a question about such and such. Do you have any thoughts?”

Since then it's sort of branched out where a combination of when I started -- I remained in Oregon, so I was rather kind of remote and removed from the rest of the staff and would do my communication via phone and email. And then with COVID and most of us doing a lot of work from home, that kind of opened it up where we actually have myself in Oregon, we have somebody that's up in Spokane, and then the bulk of the staff is still down in California.

And Psychosocial Support. That, if anyone remembered or is friends with Kim Samco, she was filling that role as a -- I guess peer support would be one way of putting it. Both Kim and our current person in that position, Dr. Jason Dorish down in Texas, are guide dog users themselves. And so they are able to speak with clients about some of the more emotional, stressful side of things, whether that's adapting to a new dog, retiring a previous dog, some of the stresses that go with managing a dog, or just with some of the day-to-day challenges of being a person that's blind working with a dog in a world that is sighted and moving faster in in ways that can sometimes be hard to keep up with.

But that's Jason's role is to be able to not only be somewhat of a peer that can relate to that on a more intrinsic level than maybe an instructor can but he is also very well connected with what support and what resources might be available in that person's area. And so that's where he is filling in that role.

So I thought I would talk a little bit about like what the client experience is and how Field Services is touching in on that. It's been my experience that when I tell people about what I do or people know about Guide Dogs, their initial understanding of that is obviously the dog and the client and what that looks like. But when they think about oh, you work at Guide Dogs? Are you a trainer? That's usually the first thing that comes up.

And I -- as an extension of that, I think that most people kind of understand, okay, well, the puppies get raised. That might be maybe where their experience is, having seen our pups in public. And they come to training and we train them, and then we train the people, and then the dogs go out. And so there's that kind of that general timeline is -- they're absolutely accurate.

But as you dig in a little bit deeper, you start realizing for the client experience that starts often maybe before the puppies are born and goes on after they've trained. And so these topics here are where I'm going to – I’m -- the next few slides are just getting into some of these in a little bit more detail. But these are the spots where the Field Service team, among others, is touching in with the clients. Both from the very beginning when they first have that idea that they may-- are -- maybe want to guide for themselves and know nothing about that, all the way through the application and training, through their career with their dog, through follow up and support, and then on through retirement, and hopefully adoption and keeping that dog, where we might continue to support the dog and the team.

So I'll get a little bit more detail in here. I think we'll just save questions for the end. I'm more than happy to talk and I can go at length, but certainly throw things in the chat if there's something that comes up. I think I might do a pretty good job of covering most things, and then we can get into the real Q&A.

So a little bit more detail about before training as I'm calling this. And this crosses over, like so many departments in Guide Dogs do, this is going to cross a little bit over with some of the things that I imagine Jake's going to be talking about.

But even before the application, it's particularly in the Support Center, but I think this is probably where folks in the Support Center are more likely to get that phone call because people are looking us up, and they see the 800 number, and they call. And they say, “You know what? I've been using a cane. And I'm thinking about -- people have said guide dog,” or “I met somebody that had a guide dog.” And “What do I need to do? What does that look like? What comes next?”

And some of that -- those discussions can be maybe clarifying what a dog does versus what the perception might be, a lot of questions about the training, a lot of questions about the veterinary support, which is a big reason that people reach out to us. So it's not uncommon that in the Support Center and as part of the Field Service team, we are having a lot of that conversation for somebody that's not technically a client yet. But we're hoping to make them so. And so that might even come, at least in the Support Center side of things, where we either help them by getting an application sent out to them or it's part of our role to submit an application for them. We can do an over the phone application and get them started in that process.

The – following an application going in that does kick over a little bit more to the Admissions side of things. I'm more than happy to answer questions about that. But that's not something that I'm as involved with.

The next part where the Field Services team gets involved would be the home visit. So somebody submits an application. Typically what happens is they'll have a conversation with somebody in Admissions and assuming that things are looking -- their current state is looking like it's a good possibility that they could be one of our clients, the admissions team kicks it back to Field Services for a home visit. And the home visit, typically with new clients and traditionally, had always been in person where we actually visit the person in their home area, follow them as they walk along some of their normal travel routes independently, get a sense of how they travel, how they problem solve, also do the simulated guide work. That is Juno. And that gives us a -- gives them a sense of what it's like to follow a dog versus a cane, as well as gives us a sense of what is their walking pace and what is their learning style, what is their management, what's their experience.

And we would do that not just with first timers, but all of our retrains because over the ten year gap maybe between dogs, a lot can change with them physically. And it's expected that a dog and a person, that team's going to fall into a rhythm and practically be able to read each other's minds. And so it's -- the Juno and the in person work can be a nice reminder for a retrain what a young dog is going to be like because they've gotten a lot of -- gotten into a nice groove with that veteran dog and just starting to give them those reminders of what adapting to a new dog in class and those initial months could be like.

During COVID we started experimenting with virtual home interviews initially for both first timers and retrains. We've scaled that back a little bit. We're focusing more on doing that with retrain people with whom we have a history and maybe a little bit better understanding of how they move and travel and what their needs are. But there is still some value to the virtual -- okay, good question there. There is still some value to the virtual interview where we asked them to submit videos of them moving through -- basically showing us their independent route, maybe showing videos of their home area to get a sense of how the dog -- where the dog would be living, where their rest and bed areas are, what their relieving area looks like. And it's not uncommon for us to do maybe a hybrid of that where we get some of the initial stuff via the virtual. And then, when either field service manager or a guide dog instructor is in their area, we can do the Juno work.

And I saw that there was a question in the chat, “What is Juno?” Great question. Juno is our fictitious dog -- I’m air quoting -- that we use. So it would be -- it's a trainer who has a harness and a leash, and we just act as the simulated dog. So we're just holding on to the harness, mimicking some of the moves that a dog would do giving the person a chance to hold onto the harness, put the leash away, follow the dog as they would a -- follow the harness as they would with a dog. And then we can do any number of practicing with foot work mechanics for turns, hand gestures, commands, problem solving.

So Juno is a great tool for the dog acting a little bit mischievous and giving the instructor, excuse me, giving the client or the handler a chance to practice that without using a real dog. I mean among other things, that would be a little bit confusing for a dog to be getting positioned and all of that. Plus just we don't want our dogs to misbehave, so we wouldn't really want that to happen. So it's a nice way to just kind of throw a lot of different scenarios where we can get a chance to see how they're moving.

So part of that is walking several blocks to get a sense of their stamina and their pace. And it also gives them -- sometimes following a dog can be a little bit weird. It's -- they're used to using their cane. They're used to finding an object to be able to avoid it. And getting that sense of being able to walk around that without even, maybe not even knowing it's there is a little bit different. I hope that answers the question, and please throw another chat question if needed.

So with the home visits, that's one of the last steps in their application. And assuming that the person is accepted and brought in for training, that is another part where typically that's the -- I think we're all familiar with the students coming into one of our campuses, going through the two weeks of training before they head back home.

You might be aware of the in home trainings, which is where we take the dog -- a trainer goes out and takes the dog out to them, and they do all of that same stuff, but they're doing it in their home area. For various reasons they -- if they just don't have the ability to be able to come back to Guide Dogs, for health, medical, maybe professional reasons, they’re just not able to have that time off, we can make that accommodation.

So commonly it's one of the campus GDMIs who’s going out with the dog and spends 8 to 10 to 12 days with the person in that area doing the training. It's not uncommon, though, and this is again -- this happens out in the field, so many people aren't aware of this. We're just getting the dog out to the Field Service Manager, and it's the Field Service Manager who is doing that in home training. They've really made an effort with Field Service Managers to do several in homes a year to try to accommodate that. So there's a lot of the actual training that we're familiar with that's happening out in the field with the Field Service Managers.

And the advantages of in home training are that they're on the client’s home turf. So rather than having to learn Gresham or downtown San Rafael, they are starting in on routes that they already know. And so the dog is the one that's actually doing more learning at that point.

Ah. GDMI. Sorry. I thank you for catching me on some of the slang. Guide Dog Mobility Instructor. And so it's a little bit more formalized way of saying the trainers.

So the instructors, whether it's the GDMI or the Field Service Manager, can do that training in home with them. And usually that's a little bit more accelerated. That's why it might be a little shorter than the traditional two weeks because that built in time to just get enough familiar enough with the working area as well as just living in the dorm that takes a lot of brainpower. And so being able to be at home and work on areas that are familiar with them allows that that training to be a little bit accelerated in the initial days when you're focusing more on working with the dog.

Another aspect of training that may not be as well-known are what we call transition visits. And so this is -- you might call this a little bit of a hybrid with some in home training. But it's not uncommon, for various reasons, that somebody completes a class program at one of the campuses but would really benefit from a few, two, three, four more days of some in home training with an instructor. And that might be maybe there was a dog switch late in class for whatever reason. And that's, if you haven't heard of that before, that sometimes that can occur where later in training for various reasons, it's just pretty clear that that initial dog that the client was placed with, for whatever reason, just isn't quite the right match, and they are paired up with a new dog. And now it's only a few days before they go home, so that might be one reason where there's a little bit of a benefit of having an instructor on hand to kind of help that initial transition with that dog while they're still learning the new dog and making that transition home.

Another reason for a transition visit might be that there's something in that particular person's home area that -- we try to simulate what they're going to be going home to but just maybe weren't able to quite get it down correctly. And so this is giving the client, the new graduate now, an opportunity to practice that more complex area directly with an instructor. It's -- sometimes instructors, the class instructors, are able to be the ones to do that visit. But more often than not it's the Field Service Manager who's making a trip out for a few days to come visit them in that area and to do that visit. So again, that's another part of how the Field Services team is out there really doing a lot of client support that I think most people, when they think of Guide Dogs really aren't -- it's not one of the first things that comes to mind.

One of the things – I’m going to circle back to the very beginning. I will frequently tell people when people ask what I do or I'm even when I'm talking to clients -- so I often think that puppy raising and training and the trainers and the GDMIs, all of the bulk of what that part of our mission is doing is getting a guide dog team out the door. I think of the Field Service’s main goal is keeping them out the door as long as possible. So this is -- whether it's like getting them off to a good start or keeping that team sharp, that's really where the focus is trying to delay them coming back for another dog as long as we possibly can.

The after training. So now I guess you could say that the transition visit might be a little bit after training. But this is the bulk of the dog’s and the team’s career working together. So we recognize, like with anything, anytime you do something new, there's a transition period to try to get up to speed. And so what we like to do is be really, really proactive, going back to what I was saying about keeping those teams out as long as possible.

Class and the class training is -- it's very condensed, it's very intense, and there's a lot of information thrown out in a short period of time, and it can take a little bit of time to sort that out. And sometimes it's not uncommon that you get a lot of information thrown out and at you, and the interpretation of what was said might be a little off or just forgotten. So what our goal is with this is we want to -- rather than just, “Hey, congratulations. You finished training. Good luck have fun. We'll see you later,”-- is check in and make sure that they’re off to a good start, and that they're staying off to a good start. And rather than if they were left to their own devices, maybe they're doing their best effort, and everything is largely good, but they're just a little bit off track with one thing, with guide work or behavior or something. And if we don't have any understanding of that until a year or two later, it could be much further off track and could have been something we could have nipped in the bud early on with a few adjustments and a few conversations and a few reminders.

So what that proactive support looks like are we have a couple of built in phone calls where actually the class supervisor will be the one to call in after just a couple of weeks. They've been home a couple of weeks and get a chance to revisit a few different topics, see how the transition’s going, talk about relieving habits and behavior, and what some of the initial routes look like. And then the Support Center staff will do a similar, basically the same call, but about two months after that. And again, we're just trying to kind of do some initial check ins just to A, give them a chance to kind of talk it out a little bit, to maybe check if they have any questions, the clients, and then B, recognize either if they're saying anything that maybe on our end is kind of signaling, huh, that could be a little bit of a trend or may be something we need to look into.

Something else that the Field Service Managers are really, really good about are, is circling around and making a visit to those folks in person. I wouldn't necessarily call that part of the routine follow up, but they like to – again, it's a chance for them to introduce themselves. In a lot of cases, this is actually not so much an introduction as much as a hello. Because the Field Service Manager are usually the people that are doing those home visits during the application part, this is more like, “Hey, good to see you. Congratulations. Good to see you again. Here's your new dog.” And go out and have a route, and just get a chance to sort of -- almost like kind of closing that loop of that initial contact. But also providing a little bit of a reminder and a face to the name of who one of their main contacts is.

So for the clients once they graduate -- up to and through class, they have a lot of work and close work with the GDMI and their class instructor and their class supervisor. Afterwards, a lot of their -- the trainers are working with new dogs and getting ready for their next class and just don't have the availability to be able to answer questions. And so that's where being able to call their Field Service Manager or call the Support Center is a huge resource for all kinds of questions.

The -- talking about routine visits again before I jump on to the phone support. We do have annual visits, check-ins with all of our clients. And during the first couple of years those would be in person, follow up visits where we're actually going out and seeing them in their home area. And if everything's fine, that's amazing. But if they have questions, or maybe something that they want to work on that is non-urgent -- so it's like maybe there was some construction at a particular corner, and they're having a little bit of trouble negotiating it, or maybe a new cafe opened up that they'd like to develop a route to. And so they can work with that instructor to look at some of the nuances of that route. Things like that where it's not something they need for their day-to-day or it's like a safety issue, but it's something they'd like to make a little bit better.

A lot of times if things are going really well, and the client doesn't really need or want a direct, in person visit or have the time for that, we can just do what we call a phone visit where we're just checking in. I consider this more of a courtesy call if like an instructor or a Field Service Manager is planning to go visit that area and just checking like, “Hey, everything looks good. But did you have anything? Was there a new cafe you wanted to visit?” and just give them the opportunity to tell us if they need something. And if not, then that's fine. We can just have a quick little friendly chat and call that good.

In terms of phone support, this is ongoing as much as they want or need. This is primarily goes to the Support Center. Although Field Service Managers will get a fair amount of these calls as well. The Support Center staff like myself versus the Field Service Managers, we do largely the same thing. But the Field Service Managers are spending more of their time in the field, traveling and doing in person visits where we're based in the office. So we do a smaller amount of travel, but we do a lot more of the talking over the phone.

And so, we communicate a lot. Any conversations I have with somebody about something will go immediately to the Field Service Manager so we can work and monitor together. And there's times when I'm getting a phone call about something and I'm revisiting discussions that they had with the Field Service Manager or a visit they had. And we're building off of that. So the idea is that anytime a client calls for support, regardless of who they call, they are not having to start at ground zero and re-explain the whole situation from the start. We can all tap into the records and the reports and be able to pick it up and not just have to keep reinventing the wheel for the client.

The types of calls that we get, as you might imagine, primarily are about a dog's guide work or behavior. There is quite a lot that we can work on over the phone in terms of relying on the training that they've had and their experience and give them some tips and some ideas and thoughts about how to address some of their things.

As you can imagine, there's a fair amount of questions about access. So that's ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act access to public places. That can also include questions and unfortunately disputes, maybe with landlords or property managers, about whether or not a service dog would be allowed in a rental.

A lot of questions about flying and negotiating the regulations from the Department of Transportation and what's required to be able to fly with their dogs. And, unfortunately, sometimes questions about how to support them with disputes with an employer or a manager and how to be having access with their guide in their workplace.

The emergent visits -- and I have an asterisk there -- because this is where you folks as foster care providers are probably maybe more connected with what we do than some of the other parts of it. But the emergent visits are where we'll do a visit that is more urgent than just something that can wait until they have a routine visit a few months later. And that might be a safety issue. That might be a guide work issue where they're, for whatever reason, dog or person, things are -- crossings are maybe less than ideal or there are some health issues with the dog, with the person.

I'm going to circle back to that a little bit more. But those are things where rather than waiting, we're probably going to try to dispatch somebody, whether that's the Field Service Manager or whether that's myself or whether that's a GDMI from one of the campuses to be able to offer assistance on a shorter term basis or a more immediate basis.

And then retirement. Retirement is a very large topic that most people don't want to think about when they graduate which is fine, and it's a little early to do that. But there's -- as the dog gets older and the client is thinking about -- well, there's lots of questions that can come up with that like how can I keep my dog working as long as possible, what sort of support would I have when my dog retires, what are my options for placing the dog, and what's the process for reapplying for a new dog? And so even with long time retrains those questions can come up because they only have to think about it every eight to ten years, hopefully.

And we want to start that conversation and be available to that then, not just have that be a sudden like, okay, now, your dog needs to retire and this is all the stuff. Those are sorts of things where, whether that's phone calls to us or during the course of regular visits, initiating that conversation as their dog is getting older to sort of ease into the topic. Because, as we can all imagine, that is a little bit less of a fun topic for people to think about having to retire that dog, which in some cases might be saying goodbye to that dog.

So why a dog might come in for foster care. Going back to a lot of those emergent visits, this is -- we will bring a dog to one of our campuses for a lot of these reasons. It's not uncommon that client health, whether they've suffered an injury or having a surgery that's going to require several months, several weeks or several months of rehabilitation and they're just not in a position or they're social or personal support system doesn't really allow them to be able to have friends, family, neighbors help them care for the dog. That would be a situation where we might fly out and bring the dog back to campus to be boarded at GDB during that time. And we can go back and take the dog out afterwards.

Dog medical evaluations. So the dog is having health issues that they're trying to work with and for whatever -- if it’s going to be something where it's -- both the medical and the guide work evaluations are considerations where we're bringing the dog in to be looked at either by our vets or our trainers and determine whether or not that's a dog that can continue to work as a guide for those reasons. So obviously medical reasons might be something that's chronic that that is just a little more to ask than -- is presenting more of a challenge than we can ask for our clients to deal with.

And then the guide work evaluation is just that, that they're having safety or challenges with their guide work or behavior in the field. And so a trainer is assigned to revisit that and see, is there some -- is this something that can be worked on and improved and returned to the person or is it a situation where yeah, this is an enough of a challenge that this dog can't return to work and in which case would be retired.

Another reason dogs come back, sometimes the person when they retire the dog isn't in a position to keep them. They maybe don't have the ability to care for more than one dog. Maybe their living situation only allows for service dogs, and so once a dog is retired, they don't have -- they can't actually keep the dog with them themselves. And they don't have somebody in their circle, a friend, family, friends, or family, that they are able to place the dog with to keep in retirement.

I think most dogs that when they retire are typically staying with the person or with that person's immediate family or are placed friends as a pet and so are staying out in the field. But, as some of you are aware, sometimes dogs will retire, and they come back to Guide Dogs. And we're going to help with the placement, whether that's going back to the puppy raiser or adopting out a senior dog. And that's just not a dog we want to keep in the kennel. Certainly those older retired dogs we want to give them in a nice, comfortable spot while they're waiting for their forever home.

And then one of the other unfortunate reasons the dog can come back might be because of their condition. In terms of behavior and work and all that, it's fine, but frequently this might be a dog that is obese, and we're bringing them back. And our efforts to make this better with the clients in the field haven't really been productive enough, so we want to bring them back, get the dog's weight back down to a little bit more workable condition, and then look to place that dog back in with the person.

I think one of the questions when Nancy approached me about this was what safeguards do we have to make sure this doesn't happen again? I think if we roll back all the things I've talked about, like we try to be really proactive with trying to keep tabs on that. When we have a situation where maybe the dog has been quite obese or had some other skin condition, something that like was arguably more controllable to have not happened in the first place, we're going to be even more proactive with that particular person. And that might be in the version of more frequent phone calls, more frequent visits. This might be a situation where on a routine, follow up visit rather than offering the telephonic, we would just assume that we're going to be doing a direct visit and get eyes on the dog.

And if it's a situation where this, maybe, is a little bit more ongoing and chronic, then that might be something where we're bringing the dog back and then having a little bit more serious evaluation of whether this is somebody that can continue as one of our clients. So a little bit less optimistic, but, as I said, the goal is to have teams safe in the field as long as possible. But we also --we're looking out for our dog safety as well.

So I believe that was the bulk of where I was at. Hopefully that wasn't too much all at once, and I'm more than happy to take questions. I'll stop the share so you can see me a little more closely.

Nancy: If you do have a question, you'll need to unmute yourself.

Toby: Thank you, Kathy.

Nancy: Kathy says, “Fantastic job, Toby.” And I agree. Well, if we don't have any other questions, we can bring Jake on board. We're going to add his video up to the screen. Toby, I really appreciate you taking the time to hang out with us today and talk to our awesome foster care providers. I know we've had a number of --

Toby: -- Sorry. On that note, yeah, I kind of had my spiel. I really, really, really appreciate what you all do for us in that role, that foster care role because -- getting off my clinical talk -- when these dogs go out in the field, they don't want to come back to the kennel. And I just -- and it really actually means a lot when I -- because I talk with the clients when I'm bringing these dogs back. And one of the things that I can tell them is like, “Oh, yeah, yeah. They're in a foster home.” And those -- the feedback that we get -- sometimes we solicit feedback -- I'm usually the one that's calling and talking to them and telling them. And so it means a lot when they hear it's -- whether it's the pictures or just oh, yeah, we took them for a walk, they're just being goofy. All of that feedback really means a lot to our clients. Because, as you can imagine, if they're recovering from a surgery and they're without their longtime partner, it's very meaningful to hear that they have -- that their pup’s in good hands and even though they miss them, that they know they're being well taken care of. So thank you.

Nancy: Yeah. And Toby got some kudos in the chat for everything he does from Colleen. Mary says, “Has the Foster Care Provider Manual been updated?” Mary, yes, we are actively right now working on updating the Foster Care Manual, and we're going to be rolling that out here shortly. Some of our emergency vet clinics have changed, and some of our procedures have changed. So yes, we're actively working on that. And then once it's finished, we're going to be uploading it to the Resources Page that we're going to send you all a link to.

Great. Thank you so much, Toby.

James: Thank you, Toby. That was amazing.

Nancy: We really appreciate you.

Toby: Thank you. I can hang out if questions come up. I’ll wait a little bit because I know Jake and I have a lot of crossover.

Nancy: Yeah. You sure do. Everybody, I’d like to introduce you to Jake, and he’s going to be talking to us about some of the programs that he offers.

Jake: Great. And quick sound check. Can you hear me, okay?

Nancy: Yes.

Jake: Excellent. Well hello, everybody. Good morning on this very wet and fall-like Pacific Northwest morning. Forley, my guide, definitely got soaking wet just taking her out to relieve. So anyway, glad to be inside today and glad to be presenting to all of you.

Echoing Toby's words of thanks, yeah, thank you for all your contributions to Guide Dogs for the Blind. Foster care is a very important role within the organization, and we really couldn't do it without you. So thank you for the work that you do.

So I'm going to just introduce myself a little bit more, give you an idea about what I do here as well as the department that I work in. So my name is Jake Koch. I am a Community Outreach Specialist here at Guide Dogs for the Blind.

I also have a visual impairment and am a guide dog handler. My eye condition for anybody that's interested in big, long words is called bilateral micro ophthalmia, which essentially means two partially developed eyes. So essentially, the front part of the eye is not fully developed. Hence the physical size of my eyes are smaller. They don't work properly, obviously. I see essentially tunnel vision so straight ahead and not in any sort of low lighting conditions. Even indoor lighting, if it's too low, can be -- essentially I’m traveling as a totally blind person. So, having a good mobility skills and a good mobility aid, i.e. my guide dog Forley, a nine and a half year old female black lab, is essential to my personal life.

But we're here to talk about the work that I do here at Guide Dogs for the Blind and the department that I work in and how all of that works. I'm happy to take questions as we go along, both on my, the professional front as well as if you have any questions about vision loss. I'm one person, one member of this community, but happy to share what I know and to provide insight.

So I work under a department at Guide Dogs for the Blind called Outreach. Now, if you've heard the word outreach in different contexts, you'll likely know that it means different things to different types of organizations. If, for example, you're in education, outreach might be going out to schools and providing education consultation to students that may need additional help. If you're say working for a hospital or an advocacy group, outreach might be working with a marginalized community members, et cetera, et cetera.

So outreach at Guide Dogs for the Blind, what it means to us is it's a strategic communications function of the organization. So we are laser-focused on the blind, low vision community, and we are driven by a strategy. So a lot of times people might assume that oh, you're just out there promoting GDB. Well, that's part of it. But everything that we do is tied back to a strategy, a communications strategy to be specific and with the goal of helping people who are blind or visually impaired make an informed choice about guide dog mobility.

So it's not a sales job. Sometimes people try to refer to my job as a sales job, even some of my coworkers. It drives me nuts because I'm not selling anything. I also want people to make an informed choice. And that's what the organization needs people to be able to do.

So the types of people that I work with are mostly pre-application. So that means even before they've called the Support Center, or sometimes when they call the Support Center, they’re working with us in Outreach.

So what does that look like? It can be a variety of activities. Oftentimes, if you've been a part of a presentation or a program, that's the output of outreach. So, for example, Camp GDB, it's a highly publicized event. That's one example of an outreach event. That's an output. So that's one type of event that we would put on to, again, try to educate the community. Ultimately, what we're trying to do here in Outreach is to help people make an informed decision so that we get the right amount of people applying for a guide dog at the right time.

The other part of the job is community education, so really helping the blind, low vision community. And when I say blind, low vision community what I mean is people who are blind are visually impaired and their support networks, friends, family members, et cetera, as well as other types of professionals in the field.

So at Guide Dogs for the Blind we're focused on all of the wonderful work that we do here. But outside of Guide Dogs for the Blind, we are one of dozens of blind and low vision organizations. You've got schools for the blind and visually impaired. You've got adult rehabilitation centers. You've got low vision eye care clinics. You've got membership organizations. The list goes on and on. So we're one type of blindness agency in this field. So a part of my job is educating professionals, other types of professionals, about our supports and services and all of the programs that we offer here at Guide Dogs for the Blind.

So just to give you an idea about the breakdown of our department, how it's organized, we're one of the smaller departments within the organization. And we're made up of both remote, hybrid, and in person employees on both campuses. So at the very top we have our new VP of Client Engagement and Impact, Lynn Dubinsky, slated to start a couple weeks from now.

So she's the Vice President. So we have executive presence, which is super important, especially as a small department. Then we have Rabih Dow. He's our Director of Outreach and Advocacy. So he oversees the advocacy function of GDB, as well as overseeing the day-to-day operations of the outreach department and its functions and doing sort of director level work in between.

Then we have two specialists: myself, Community Outreach Specialist, and then we have Jane Flower, Youth Outreach Specialist. So Jane focuses a lot of her time and energy on our youth demographic. And I'll break down the demographics a little bit more in the next section. My job primarily focuses on the adult population. But there's a lot of crossover between those two positions. Jane and I, we meet multiple times a week on average. Apart from being excellent coworkers, we're also good friends as well. So we do work very close together in our department as two full-time specialists. She's based in San Rafael, and I’m, of course, based here in Boring.

And then we have two part time, outreach alumni representatives. So these are folks that assist us sort of as needed. They're kind of like a contract position or part time employee. So when we need extra assistance for an event, again, going back to those outreach outputs, if we need somebody to cover something, provide additional support, we bring them in, and they assist us as needed. So that's kind of the breakdown of the department.

In terms of guide dog schools, we are a school with one of the largest community outreach departments. Most schools at best might have one, two, or three people. We have a multiple -- double that. So that's a great privilege to have here at Guide Dogs for the Blind.

So in terms of demographics, we have -- as I mentioned, my job is to focus on the adult population. So I'm working with primarily adults who are blind or visually impaired and blindness professionals. I assist the Admissions Department. So Toby mentioned earlier in his talk when people call the Support Center, they sometimes call Admissions directly, and Admissions is another small but mighty team. And they may not have time to get back to all of our what we call inquiries, but we want to make sure that those people do hear from us, because that is one type of community outreach. Referrals are one of the big, most important and significant ways, probably the largest way, that people connect with our programs and services.

So oftentimes those calls will end up on my desk. And so I might respond and walk somebody through what it takes to qualify for a guide dog, what are our programs and services, and generally answer their questions, provide support, et cetera. So that's kind of where some of the phone work and some of the crossover comes in as well.

So and then Jane, as I mentioned, focuses on our youth outreach services. So what we've learned through our work here at Guide Dogs for the Blind is that there is a need to engage both types, both age groups, rather. So what we want to do in terms of youth is make sure that youth and families and the educators and other support professionals understand our programs and services in their entirety and that they're prepared. If a youth decides to apply for a guide dog or a canine buddy et cetera, that they're prepared, and that we, as an organization, are supporting that part of the demographic, that part of the community, I should say.

And so that's where you see things like Camp GDB, Careers & Canines Connections. We have a monthly youth panel called Ready Set Forward. That's – Jane brings on different types of professionals, guide dog handlers with lived experience. They have different topics throughout the year that they discuss. Again, the whole idea is to engage the community in different ways and to be strategic about our work.

So on the adult side, apart from admissions, I also do a lot of outreach out in the community. So for example, Guide Dog Experience Day, that's an event that we host on both of our campuses. That's where we bring people to our campus, and we give them sort of a deep dive experience into what life might be like with a guide dog. So that includes a campus tour, presentations about our programs and services. And what's probably the most exciting part of the day for everybody is we give them a chance to actually handle some dogs, so they get a chance to do some basic obedience and just generally enjoy having a dog next to them. And then we provide an opportunity for them to walk with that dog in harness under close supervision by a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor. So again, really trying to demystify what a guide dog school is and what this thing called the guide dog lifestyle is. So again, that's another type of an outreach event.

Our team goes to a lot of different types of conferences. I joke -- jokingly say that I spent half my life at an exhibit table in a windowless room in a hotel because I spend a lot of time at conferences. But this is really important work. Why is it so important? We want people to connect with us in the community, right? We can be on our campus. We can have a website. We can have a phone number. And all of those are really good things. We can have outreach events on our campus. But the blind community is a small, tight knit community. And in order to be seen or to be noted, you have to be a part of that community. And so Guide Dogs for the Blind is committed to having outreach service in the community itself.

So that means things like conference attendance, maybe for consumer groups. There are two main consumer groups within the community, and they are the American Council for the Blind and the National Federation for the Blind. These groups do wonderful work in terms of advocacy, their own types of outreach, but they oftentimes hold sort of chapter conferences and then two national conferences during the year.

We also work with about 75 partner agencies. So what a partner agency is is an organization like Washington State School for the Blind that's up in Vancouver -- Washington that is -- or it could be the Oregon Commission for the Blind. That's an adult, adjustment to blindness, rehabilitation center. So we have these spaces throughout the country. And what our goal with these is is to go in and work with their clients. We -- it's no pressure, but we would like the agency to see us or to become a referral source for our programs and services. Again, it's a pretty soft ask in that regard.

But there's a lot of relationship management work, program development and oversight, strategic communication mixed in with education and even, to be honest, a little bit of social work. I do not have a social work background, but vision loss is tough, and sometimes it's not always about this sort of happy go lucky, get a guide dog, everything's going to be great, like you see on -- what's the latest hallmark releases -- **Guiding Emily** and **My Christmas Guide**. Those are very cute and great, but the reality is sometimes in outreach we have to work with people who are overcoming other types of challenges. Maybe they had a bad experience at another guide dog school for whatever reason. And we're trying to help them understand what, how our program could be different. Maybe they've just lost their eyesight, and they're calling us and saying, “Forget the orientation and mobility. Forget having to get out there and go through the home interview. Just give me a guide dog. I need to get back to my life.” And so there's an art form in being able to help people understand why these services are so important, why do we have all of these process, why is there a wait time?

Another part of my job might be addressing a controversial topic which does come up sometimes. An example of that could be ownership policies. So there are -- just like in every community, there are a variety of beliefs in the blind, low vision community about ownership. Some people believe that you should own your dog outright. Other people say it's not that big a deal. Whatever. But to give you an example, Guide Dogs for the Blind’s ownership policy is after one year of service, a client can apply for full ownership. It doesn't change any of the services that we offer or how we provide those services, but it really gives the client peace of mind. But sometimes we have to get out there, and we have to address the community because it would be unfair, we'd be doing them a disservice them, excuse me, it would be doing the community a disservice if we didn't have something to say on the topic.

So what that means is there's a lot of strategy that comes into this work, and it's kind of an interdisciplinary job at Guide Dogs for the Blind. So it's more than just standing out there and sharing my lived experience and promoting GDB. And of course we do that, but we're also looking at these other avenues as well.

I like to say that my job is like an exam that never ends. Every time there's an email or an update on maybe a policy change or a program development, a lot of people go maybe don't need to read that today. I’ll just put it in my read later folder. I'm one of those people that sits down and reads it cover to cover because I have to. Because at some point someone may ask me about maybe if there was a change in in ownership policy or if there was a change in how programs are being developed or what's the latest wait time for a guide dog. Someone is going to ask me that question, and it's my responsibility to have an answer to that question. So it is kind of like the exam that never ends, but it's what keeps things exciting, I think.

Also, it's demystifying the organization, trying to take something that's highly technical in nature and describe it in a way that makes sense to people that are -- it's going to help people to make a decision for themselves.

I'm going to talk about my credentials for a second. This question comes up sometimes when I give these types of presentations. Well, how did how did -- how are you qualified to do this job? Or sort of things do you need? So I majored in public relations, graduated from Eastern Washington University. And so I'm drawing off of my own sort of education in the field. Before working for Guide Dogs for the Blind, I started my career working at a school for the blind teaching independent living skills, so cooking, cleaning, recreation, travel, all of those sorts of interdisciplinary skills, all of the other sort of adjustment to blindness skills that one would need before getting a guide dog.

And thought maybe I wanted to be a teacher or an orientation and mobility instructor, that's a professional who teaches somebody how to travel safely and independently, often times nicknamed cane training. The cane is just the mobility tool that's used. Orientation and mobility is more than just teaching someone how to swing a cane back and forth. It’s about teaching somebody how to remain oriented in an environment, how to make safe street crossings, how to plan and execute routes, et cetera. So it's a very important job, and it's something that we draw off of here at Guide Dogs for the Blind. So I thought I maybe wanted to do that. Wasn't quite the right fit for me.

And that's sort of when I stumbled on Guide Dogs for the Blind as a possible career opportunity. And then I just kept knocking on the door until they finally let me in. Originally I started in the kennels as a summer intern. That was a fun summer. It was a very interesting summer. And then I was a freelancer for a while. So I worked part time at GDB while I finished my schooling and did some other social media work as well, and then went full time at Guide Dogs for the Blind doing community outreach.

So that's kind of what we do in Outreach and why we do it, right. It is a support service. It's a community-based service for the organization. Of course, we do leverage technology as well, doing things virtually. The pandemic taught everybody to do that. Outreach was no exception. The blind community is -- it's a hands-on community. You can't just throw a video up on a screen and say, okay, watch this and be inspired. Even with audio description, it's not quite the same perspective or effect, in my opinion. And so that's why we do all of this in person work and all of this sort of hands-on activities is because that's how -- that's what the community wants. When we do our, let's call it market research, we learn that. We learn that people want to be engaged with it. They want to see us in the community. They want to talk to us face-to-face.

So when the pandemic hit, we had to figure out how to utilize Zoom and other types of technology to help sort of continue our outreach efforts. And we did. Some of them we still use today. For example, we have a quarterly webinar called the GDB 101 webinar. Again, this is for potential applicants and their support networks to join and learn about the programs and services that we offer at Guide Dogs for the Blind. It's hosted by yours truly. And so again, we're trying to find ways to engage the community in different ways where they may not be able to get to our campus or places that we may not necessarily go.

And that's another question I get. How do you know where to go? How do you know how to create these partner agencies? Or what conferences do you pick? And this is where we get into strategy. So the version of strategic planning that I use is something I learned through the Public Relations Society of America. I went back a few years ago -- actually during the pandemic when things are kind of slow -- and did some community -- or sorry -- some continuing ed in this area because I wanted to see what are other types of orgs doing like outside of the guide dog field, outside of the disability field.

So when we're planning something, I put things into four buckets. And they’re research, plan, implement, and evaluate. So when we're talking about what kinds of events do we go to, we want to research those events. How many people are going to be there? How expensive is it for us to get there? Because, of course, like every department, we have a budget. We’re, of course, donor funded. We need to be good stewards of that money, so we need -- needed to make the biggest bang possible, right, get the biggest bang for our buck, so to speak.

So where is it located? How much is it going to cost? Is it -- what is the outcome? I talked about output. So output is the event, right. It could be standing at a table, an exhibit table. It could be giving a presentation at an agency. It could be Camp GDB. That's the that's the output. But then there's the other thing called outcome. So what is it that we want this to do for us? What are we getting as an organization? Are we educating people? Are we educating professionals? What is it that we're trying to do? And is our effort going to meet that goal?

Okay, then there's planning. So planning is, right, basically that, all of the logistics that go into these events. Camp GDB, for example, is very logistics heavy. Jane's working on it right now for next summer, and she has been for the past two months. So essentially, it ends in end of July, and she's starting in end of August to get ready for next year.

We need to plan cost effective trips. So we're looking at what's the best time of year to go to Arizona, for example, to go to Phoenix. Well, we don't necessarily want to go in July. One, we're really busy then, and two, it's really hot. But also, are we going to travel to the Midwest in January if we can avoid it? No. Because again, if there's a delay, a flight delay, it could cancel the event, right. We might miss our meeting time or whatever we're trying to do. And now we've spent a whole bunch of money and are stuck. And then we're basically just coming home. So we try to be thoughtful about when we're going places and how we're getting there, but also other types of logistics as well.

So anything you can think of when it comes to event planning, we are looking at. So if we're doing an on campus event, what other departments need to be involved? Are they able to help us? What works best for them? What rooms should we be using? All this sort of stuff is a part of my job as well, as well as Jane's job, too. So it's more than just showing up to the event, and everything's all planned for you. That would be amazing by the way. Most of my time is spent on the back end doing the logistics, doing the planning.

And then there's implementation, right? So that's the third part. How is it going to go? How many people are we going to have? All of that sort of thing.

And then evaluation. We have a post event outreach survey. So we collect data. We want to know things like, how likely are you going to -- I mean, what's the likelihood of you applying for a guide dog, for example? That's one question. How confident are you in making a decision about guide dog mobility, good, bad, indifferent? There's other questions like did you like the length of the event or the lunch or those sort of things.

But again, we want to try to measure our impact, because when I talk about my work to people in other industries, the first question they ask is, “Well, how do you measure outcome?” And I'm always like “Uh, good question.” So the way we do it is through some of these other sort of measures, right, like, again, the likelihood of someone applying. If we're running events and we find out that you know only ten percent of people are likely going to apply, okay, we need to parse that out a little bit more. Why is that? Right? Is it how we're presenting the information? Is it something that we need to change? So that's kind of -- those are the metrics that we use.

The reason we can't give a conversion rate like, okay, out of all -- out of the 500 events that we do over the course of 10 years, 75 percent of people come and apply for a guide dog. We can't do that because a guide dog and applying for one is a very personal decision.

So, for example, I could talk to somebody today, but they may not choose to apply for that guide dog for five years. So it's really hard to track the trajectory of somebody through the process because it's not going in and -- again we're not we're not selling iPhones or something, right. It's not going in and picking something off the shelf and or picking a dog out of the kennel and saying this is my guide dog. I want the black one, right. It's a very personal decision, and that's where the social service aspect comes in. It's like we're doing this as a service to the community. We're also doing a service to ourselves by making sure that people are aware of both the benefits and challenges and considerations of having a guide dog. So that when they apply, they're ready to apply. That reduces our denial rate, which is always a good thing. We never want that to get out of hand.

And so that's essentially what our Outreach Services here Guide Dogs for the Blind do. It's also why you don't see us at, for example, elementary schools. While that's a very valid, key public and certainly could be helpful to GDB, we have -- in outreach, the first rule you learn is you can't be everywhere all the time. So we do have to kind of draw a line. And we do have to follow a strategy. And so we’re laser-focused on the blind, low vision community to create referral sources, to create partnerships, to help people make informed choices about guide dog mobility and the guide dog lifestyle, and ultimately the programs we offer here at Guide Dogs for the Blind.

We also collaborate with other guide dog schools, and that might be a bit surprising, especially in this type of role. What? Are you kidding me? But let me give you an example. As part of my work, I sit on the External Disability Advisory Board with Alaska Airlines. And this is an interdisciplinary board that helps the organization, the airline rather, come up with solutions to its accessibility challenges. And what I've learned about being on this board is that when it comes to revenue and routing and all these other -- marketing, yeah, the airlines aren't going to talk to each other at all. Forget it. But if it's a safety issue, yeah, you bet they're all going to show up to the table, and they all know -- all the auditors, all of the safety specialists know each other.

And so it's kind of the same thing with outreach at the different schools. So I have colleagues and even friends that work at other guide dog schools in community outreach, doing the exact same work that I'm doing. Am I going to give them my contact list or my strategy? Absolutely not. But can we talk about trends in the industry? Absolutely. Or challenges that we're facing? Hey, what are you doing? How are you overcoming this? Yeah, you bet.

In fact a lot of times graduates assume oh, you schools don't talk to each other. You compete against one another. You hate each other. No. You go to a conference where there's multiple guide dog schools, we actually tend to run together. So you'll see us all hanging out after hours, kind of thing, which is really cool, because outreach can be kind of a lonely place. You're doing this work. You're helping all of these people. But it's like what are other people doing? There's not necessarily a community outreach conference that we could all go to every year, although that would be amazing. Maybe it's something I should do whenever I have time. But I should start.

But my point being that we do collaborate with other schools. And sometimes I need to refer potential applicants to other schools. For example, we don't have a running guides program, but Guiding Eyes for the Blind does. So if somebody's really focused on that and that's really what they want, of course I'm going to explain to them to drawbacks and benefits of a program like that, and why we don't maybe offer something like that here at GDB. If that's really what they want, it's who am I to stand in their way? So ethically, it's my responsibility to make sure that they are referred to Guiding Eyes or another guide dog school, and then off they go.

Maybe somebody says they need a deaf-blind program. Well, there are two guide dog schools, Guide Dog Foundation and Leader Dogs for the Blind that both offer that service. So I'm going to give them the information to contact those schools accordingly and explore those options. So there is some industry collaboration between other guide dog schools. It's a highly collaborative role in itself, outreach. We don't operate in a vacuum.

So I'm going to pause here. I know this is a ton of information. Hopefully, it's not getting too dry for everybody, but I just want to pause and see if anybody has any questions or anything specific you would like me to address.

James: You should be able to unmute. This is James. You should be able to unmute if you have a question, or you can put it in the chat, and we will read it out if you do have any questions.

Karen: I just want to thank you for all the information. I had no idea how extensive your job was and how much contact you had with other guide dog agencies. So that that was fascinating. Thank you.

Jake: You're most welcome. Thank you so much for that comment. And yeah, it's grown over the years. I started in 2013. Theresa Stern, who's now retired, had just rebuilt the department, and so it was very small at the time. And it's grown kind of exponentially as it's gone along here and both in staffing and in in service delivery. So thank you for that.

And also to the person in the chat. Thanks for your comment. I got that as well. Other questions or thoughts about community outreach?

Nancy: Thank you. It's Nancy. Thank you so much for being here. Really appreciate you taking the time out of your day, both you and Toby. Our Client Services Department and Outreach have changed so much over the years. But it’s just awesome that our foster care providers can have a greater knowledge of what we're up to here at Guide Dogs. So it's absolutely wonderful that you presented. And I even learned some new stuff. So thank you.

James: Yeah, Jake, to your point, things are always changing. This is James. And Nancy and I were just commenting how much we learned from both your presentations. So we hope the foster care providers found that interesting as well, and the comments seem to support that idea and appreciate both of you guys really taking the time to enlighten our foster care providers on this important aspect of the organization.

Nancy: So there's a question in the chat. Are there ever one off or event specific needs for volunteers?

Jake: Yeah. Great question. So occasionally, that does happen. One great example I can give is Camp GDB. That's a pretty volunteer event or heavy event that we do draw on. So certainly when we need event support, the way it works is we'll reach out to either puppy raising or our volunteer manager, maybe even foster care to see about getting support. So we typically start internally to see what our colleagues, who have their sort of finger on the pulse in terms of services that that GDB has access to, we ask -- we start there. And then we might reach out to people individually and see how we can support.

There was a question in the chat about what if we're directed or approached by the member of public about services? Should we direct them to you? No. Please direct them to the website, guidedogs.com, or our 800 number. And the reason for this is my job is multifaceted. I'm either working from home, on the road, on campus, and so I never want someone to say, “Well, gosh. I called that number that you gave me, but the guy never called me back,” or “I've been waiting for a week to hear from somebody.”

So if you refer people to the website, they're going to get access to information immediately. If you refer them to the 800 number, they're going to get somebody almost immediately. If you give them my extension, they may hear from me. They will hear from me. They will, but it will be delayed, likely. So that's what I would recommend is just point them to the website. Give the, the 800 number, even social media, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube. All of those could be great resources for people as well.

And I wanted to touch on one other aspect of the organization -- sorry -- of Outreach that we provide as well. And that is we in Outreach are sort of the eyes and ears of the organization in terms of what's going on in the blind, low vision community. What are the major issues that are happening? What are some of the controversial conversations that are having -- people are having? What do people think about us as an organization?

So I might be standing there at an exhibit table, but I'm focused on what people are saying as they're walking by. I'm paying attention to what kinds of questions people are asking me because it does go in waves. There are definitely trends over the years or even sometimes on a monthly basis. For example, the big thing right now is everybody wants to know what the wait time is and why everything is taking so long. Unfortunately, that makes my job a little bit harder because it's not the most fun topic to talk about, but it is a very important one. And for people that have applied, maybe they've been waiting, and people don't always like to wait, I get that. So we, as a department, are also providing an internal service to GDB letting them know, letting our organization know what's going on out there. What are people frustrated about?

I'd like -- for example, a big hot button issue right now is the continued denial by rideshare towards service animal handlers. So trying to come up with ways to address that. There are people that have expressed to us, “Hey, look! I like the idea of a guide dog, but I don't like the idea of my dog getting denied every time I tried to take an Uber or Lyft.” That's a very valid point. So again, that's my job to try and help them understand what the reality is versus the anecdotal evidence that they're reading about because it can get -- it's very easy to get kind of get sucked into that if you're online especially and you're reading forums and blogs and every other day someone's posting about their dog or their situation, right. And I always have to tell people everybody's situation is unique. And so what you're reading, not that it's untrue, but it may not be the same experience for you.

So we do provide sort of an internal service in that we help people understand what's going on in the blind community. And we also take feedback back to the organization. So if there's a trend, if I'm seeing something from graduates that maybe they're not liking or that they really are liking, “Hey, I really liked that when I was in class last,” I'm going to make sure that the training department knows about that. I'm going to make sure the leadership knows about what's going on.

So that's another part of Community Outreach and, again, why it's so important to be out in the community and not just based on a campus or even just coordinating work for other people. Because if we're not out there, we don't know what's going on, so that would make our outreach efforts a lot more feeble than they are. So I wanted to share that other piece of the work that I do as well.

Other questions, comments, et cetera, et cetera?

Nancy: I think that's a no, Jake. It’s Nancy.

James: This is James. We've also got Toby on the line. If there are any other questions for either Toby or Jake, feel free to jump in, either in the chat or unmute.

Jake: Yeah. And you know, tip of the cap to the Support Center and to Toby. He's another person that I work pretty closely with as well. So thank you, Toby, for all of the work you do over the phone because I know that there's a lot of that that you do. And there is definitely crossover between Outreach and the Support Center. And I definitely can't answer all of those inquiry calls. So thank you for taking some of them. And I'm happy to take my share as well.

Nancy: Well, Toby and Jake, thank you so much. We’ve got -- Mary has a question.

*[Crosstalk 01:46:45]*

Toby: I was going to say, well, thank you, Jake, yeah, we do a lot of crossover. And a lot of times those -- I agree with Jake, the about if someone approaches you in the street asking about services, yeah, send them my way because I think I'm a little bit more plugged into where they need to go and which may or may not be Jake's area, but -- and so regarding that, that's a good question. And since I'm plugged into so many departments, I'm like looking at the people. I think maybe I would ask that like, what -- maybe if I could get a little bit more I context on that.

So in terms of foster care needs, so during the holiday season -- maybe I should explain that one policy change that we've done during this year was to scale back from nonessential foster care requests so like non -- what's that -- elective boarding, I guess, would be the way to look at it. So people that wanted to board at Guide Dogs in the past had that option to be able to say, hey -- the reality was that was becoming a little bit too much of a stress on our resources, one of the biggest resources being you all and needing to -- recognizing that we have this balance of dogs that need to be boarded and fostered for the medical and health reasons that I was discussing earlier. And so there’s a follow up -- not being trained or need to be out of the kennels.

So the nice thing about like, yeah, during the holiday season in terms of our training program, we still have our canine welfare staff is still on, and that's balancing the -- training operations might be a little suspended whether that's class, but trainers are usually still actually going out like the day before and the day after Christmas if it's not a holiday. And so the training train never, ever stops, and the canine welfare train never stops. So the needs in the holidays, at least for the kennels and the campuses, aren't really going to be coming from that front. And then maybe in the in the past year -- this will be the first holiday season we go through where the elective boarding isn't available. And so if you've had experience, Mary, where that was seeming to be in demand that maybe not -- less of a factor this year. I hope that answers your question.

Nancy: And, Toby, I can add to that. And thank you so much. Yeah. Oftentimes, when people travel for holidays that are, have an active working guide dog used to be able to board their dogs with us, and we just put them to directly into foster care because that's just ideal. We are going to send a notice out to the training staff, so that if any of them do travel or are taking vacation time over the holidays, the dogs that they will be assigned to, or are currently assigned to, those dogs, we would possibly seek foster care for. So there might be a bit of a need for extra homes. That's why we reach out and say hey, let give us your give us your availability.

And there's also break weeks in the hard winter season, a couple of break weeks where dogs won't be in training. So if those dogs do need foster care we’ll certainly be reaching out, so I've already got a list of people -- thank you for your emails -- reaching out saying that they are available over the holidays. So if we do need that extra help, we'll have it.

I think there was another question in the chat. I'm just going to roll up here. Oh, a date for the March foster care meeting? We don't have that sorted out yet. What we like to do is kind of tie them to the foster care meeting for the San Rafael foster care provider providers, or the California foster care providers, so we can have similar topics. And then generally we like to have them a weekend apart from each other, so they're kind of tied together. So that's going to be a topic of discussion for our next meeting, and then we'll roll that date out to you as soon as we know. We also need to coordinate it with our folks from the vet clinic. They'll be joining us and talking to us.

James: If there are no final questions for Toby or Jake, Toby and Jake, thank you again so much for giving up time on your weekend and for really helping to educate our foster care providers about things. And thank you both for what you do on a daily basis for the organization, too.

Toby: Thank you all. The pleasure was mine and look forward to crossing paths down the road.

Nancy: Yeah. And if any of our foster homes want to stay on and have any questions or anything, feel free. We'll let things roll for a little bit. Jake and Toby, thank you so much.

Jake: Thank you guys for being here. And thanks for all your volunteer contributions.

Nancy: Yeah, thanks, Jake.

Jake: Bye-bye

James: Bye-bye.

Nancy: So we'll let this let this roll for a little bit and see if anybody has any other questions or anything, and then we'll sign off.

Karen: Nancy, I have a question. And it's about is there going to be any coordination and volunteer services for those of us who volunteer as docents and dog walkers and whatever? Because you're not on that Impact thing, that new thing that they've got scheduled for recording our hours and doing -- yeah, all that stuff.

James: Right. So this is James, Karen. And Better Impact is rolling out for the volunteer department. But you're correct, we're not on that. And in fact, we haven't really announced this yet, but we've kind of separated from the rest of the volunteer department to take full ownership of the whole volunteer process in foster care which means we're doing all the onboarding right from the get-go. If there's a new applicant interested in doing foster care, they'll reach directly out to Nancy. Nancy will get that notification. We'll start the process.

So the short answer is no, the two databases don't talk to each other. And because foster care is tied to dogs, right -- you guys are always fostering dogs -- we're in our other database, which is Salesforce. And Better Impact just tracks the other volunteers that aren't interacting with the dogs directly or needing to document that. So there is some hope down the road that those will communicate, but not for now. They're separate.

Karen: Okay. It makes it a little difficult.

Nancy: What is difficult about that?

Karen: I think it's in terms of the Impact thing seems to be wanting to track your hours. I don't know for what purpose. But it -- I don't know. If I have a foster dog, I'm probably not going to leave my foster dog here at home while I go walk dogs on a weekend. So it's just kind of hard. I just talked to Bonnie about it so -- that’s why I'm not doing the walking dogs on the weekend if I have a foster dog. So.

Nancy: That’s -- yeah. That that would be a great question for Bonnie. And you are welcome to bring foster dogs to campus if you walk dogs on the weekend or even during the week. We just need to know what day and what time you're coming, and then we can get a crate ready for your foster dog, so that they can come to campus. So we can certainly accommodate that.

Karen: Oh, cool. Great. That’s great to know.

Nancy: Yeah. No problem.

James: And thank you for all the volunteering that you do besides doing foster care. Thanks for those other roles that you do for the organization.

Karen: Oh, my pleasure.

Nancy: We just got a chat from Heidi, “Will new changes in puppy raising happen also in foster care homes?” Excellent, excellent question. So some of you might not know, puppy raising has rolled out a new program or changes to the program. And that's going to become fairly public information here pretty soon. They just need to put a tidy little bow on it for the public. And then we'll be able to share that.

The answer would be no. It's not going to change anything in our policies or procedures or care of foster dogs or how we do things. And for any of you that co-mingle foster care and puppy raising -- we've got a lot of you that do that, do both, and thank you for that. With the changes in puppy raising or if you ever look at puppy raising information or you're not a puppy raiser, we have very different guidelines for those. So we want you if it's a foster dog stick with the foster dog rules. If it's a puppy raising dog, stick with puppy raising rules.

James: The one situation I can think of where it might impact foster -- and this doesn't happen as much on this campus, but down in California -- we have puppies that need fostering, occasionally. And it could be that they're waiting to go to a raiser or that they're back on campus for some reason. So if anything for those foster care providers that are taking puppies, the rules might be a little bit more relaxed for the way you manage that dog in your home.

Nancy: Yeah. Yeah. Some of you got that opportunity. We had a handful of puppies here on campus we needed foster homes for. And certainly we didn't have the wherewithal to train you and puppy raising and gave you the basics. And I hope that was a fun experience for you. I sure liked carrying those puppies around. Any other questions?

James: One thing I wanted to announce very quickly, and I think Nancy made reference to this, but we have it up and running. We just haven't shared the link with you yet, but we will do so. We've created a Foster Care Resource Page for you. And it is on the website, but you can't get to it through the website. You have to have the link. So this is something we put together as a team that we're hoping will be a place that foster care providers can continue to go to to get updated information. We're going to have the Foster Care Manual on there. We have some educational videos on toothbrushing and ear cleaning that you might have seen before. We will put these recorded presentations on there as well, as well as some other foster care related info. And we just hope that this will be a place that you go to to continue your education to learn more about the organization. And we'd love to hear feedback about that once we launch that.

So that will be happening -- probably, I think it takes about a week or so after the recording to finalize some things, but once we get that finalized, we'll post it there, and then we'll share that link with you. And we'd love to hear any feedback that you might have about that.

Nancy: All right. And Sue has a question about “We haven't been charting our volunteer hours. Give us specifics as far as what the expectations are.” There's no expectation for you to chart volunteer hours for foster care. If for any reason we need to do that, we can easily look up each foster care provider, the dogs that they have fostered, the start date, the end date. We can do that all on our end.

James: And also, unlike Karen was mentioning for on campus volunteering where you're showing the exact number of hours you volunteer, we don't need that for foster care. They'll either count days or there's a formula that you can apply for each foster dog. They apply a certain number of hours. So you, we don't need that level.

Karen: Yeah. None of you will need to use Better Impact for foster care. Alison, “If we're interested in the additional training or specialization you mentioned earlier, do we just email you directly?” Yes, that would be great. Just send me an email. Let me know what you're interested in, and we'll certainly start a conversation about that.

James: Yeah, that's it. Thank you, Alison, for that. That's something that we've been talking about. Nancy and I just were talking about it right before this meeting. We've been talking about for a few years. There’s certain areas where we have some dogs that maybe have some specific needs, whether they be puppies or medical or seniors or dogs that are kind of at their end of life, which we affectionately refer to as hospice dogs, or maybe dogs with some behavioral issues. So the idea is that we will eventually offer some training to the foster care providers that are interested in learning more specifics about those types of needs so that you feel better prepared to take those kinds of dogs into foster care.

So I think with the next presentation around being around vet care for foster care providers, that's a good opportunity to maybe start with trying to look at an additional training to for folks that might want to specialize in taking dogs with some medical needs. So more to come on that, Alison, but thank you for that question, and thank you for your interest in that, too.

Nancy: So exciting.

James: Any other questions from anyone? Well, you all for joining us in this inaugural Zoom foster care meeting. We hope it went off without too many hitches and you were able to hear things and you found the presenters interesting. We will let you know when this recording is done in case you want to review it at any point. And thank you all for what you do on a daily basis for all of our dogs. You are all amazing. I say this every time, but we literally could not do this without you. And it's so great to at least virtually see you and talk to you. So thanks again.

Yep, I see you. Did you have a question?

Nancy: No. She came to party. That's great. Yeah. And also, you know, we're not going to continue forever doing Zoom foster care meetings. We want to hang out with you. We want the snacks. I get that. So but we are going to figure out a way to do the Zoom meeting also during an in person meeting so that can be recorded and shared later. So it's great. You're welcome, Cindy and Juan, Kenny. Thank you so much. Yeah. Y'all enjoy your weekend, too.

James: Yeah. And Colleen, I'm glad you're enjoying your new foster dog. They're all awesome. Some of them may be especially awesome. All right, folks. Have a great rest of your weekend. Thank you again, and we look forward to seeing you again at the next presentation. Bye-bye.

Karen: Bye.

*[End of Recording]*