**COVID-19 Return to Full Mission Action Plan: Client Update​**

**August 2020**

To GDB’s Clients and Applicants:

In early July, GDB entered stage one of our multi-stage return to full mission action plan. We appreciate your continued support as we navigate this complex process and would like to provide an update on our progress and anticipated next steps.

In the early days of stage one, staff and dogs began returning to campus in preparation for resuming dog training. Our team has demonstrated creativity, flexibility and innovation in adapting training and instruction techniques as necessary to comply with recommended Coronavirus preventive measures. All adaptations have been made while upholding the highest guide work standards. In addition to dog training, our team has been working diligently to fine tune safety related protocols necessary to resume direct client training. We are utilizing mock instruction exercises and client focus groups to ensure that these protocols successfully translate from theoretical practice to practical, hands-on application. The safety of staff, clients and dogs remains our highest priority.

We are aware that many applicants are anxiously awaiting further details on when client training will resume and what, specifically, it will look like once instruction re-commences. We are making significant progress in this area and would like to share available details to help you know what to expect.

When client training resumes, we will initially be implementing a 1:1 instructor to client ratio. This will facilitate smaller class size for residential trainings and minimize risk associated with larger gatherings. Rigorous disinfecting and sanitizing protocols are being implemented by our residence staff to support the well-being of everyone on campus. Prior to arriving for training, each client will receive additional information on safety measures being taken. This will include discussion of personal requirements and expectations put in place for the mutual well-being of clients and staff alike.

To balance smaller residential class sizes, we anticipate conducting a greater number of in-home trainings than in previous years. Similar to residential training, updated protocols are being implemented to promote safety while also providing an individualized, high quality training experience within the client’s home environment.

One of the primary challenges of resuming client training while Coronavirus risks continue is staff and client travel. While under usual circumstances clients coming into class would potentially travel from distant locations, we are aware that this currently poses inherent risks for Coronavirus exposure and the possibility of becoming ill while far from home. Similar risks exist for staff travelling long distances to conduct in-home trainings. With safety as our continued priority, we have an obligation to mitigate these risks to the greatest extent possible. With this in mind, the “first wave” of trainings we will conduct in stage one of our return to full mission will be to clients in close proximity to our Oregon and California campuses for residential trainings or local to Field Service Managers for in-home trainings. This approach will allow both staff and clients to remain within minimal driving distance to their homes throughout instruction. Please be assured that our intention and commitment is to serve all clients in as timely a manner as possible. We will continue to closely monitor the most up to date information available from local and national health officials and expand client training beyond these initial parameters as soon as is safely possible.

We understand that any delay to training, no matter how well reasoned, can be stressful for you. We will continue to provide you with updates on progress as often as possible and will begin reaching out to clients individually with specific information regarding their training as it becomes available. Of course, plans must remain tentative and subject to change based on the course of the pandemic. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we work together to continue forward during these unpredictable and challenging times. Like you, we are anxious for GDB to get back to doing what we do best: creating and supporting exceptional guide dogs teams. We are moving closer to this goal every day and are confident that the thorough, thoughtful approach we are taking is preparing us well to return to full mission safely.

We appreciate your trust as a valued member of our community and, as always, we welcome any questions you may have. Please call our Support Center at 800-295-4050 if we can be of assistance.

Thank you, from all of us at GDB.