

Guide dogs are used to help people, but before they can help they have to be trained. Read the article to learn what it is like to raise a guide dog and answer the questions that follow.

Raising Her Sights

by Jessica Arce

Puppy Steps

- 1 The first step in getting a puppy to raise was educating myself. I attended three guide dog meetings and dog obedience classes. I received a puppy application that I filled out and sent to the Guide Dogs for the Blind School in San Rafael, California. A couple of months later, I received a letter from the school saying that my application had been approved and that I would receive a puppy at the next Fun Day.
- 2 Fun Day is a day when guide dog raisers and their dogs meet in one place and listen to talks and demonstrations from guide dog instructors. They go through an obstacle course so the instructors can help with any problems the dog might have.

Meeting Adriana

- 3 Finally, the day came to meet my puppy. Her name was Adriana. She was a tiny ball of dark red fluff. I had no idea how much work she'd be! For the next few months, I taught Adriana that she had to go potty outside instead of all over the house, and that the furniture was not her place to take a nap.
- 4 After Adriana had all her shots, I started taking her out with me to get used to different sights, smells, and sounds. She especially needed to get used to such distractions as food on the floor, loud noises, and people. We went to restaurants, schools, shopping, out of town trips, and the Fair. I also took her on stairs, elevators, boats, cars, buses, and trains. When she went outside, Adriana had to wear a green jacket that said, "Guide Dog Puppy in Training." Socializing gets a puppy ready for anything a blind person might encounter.



Is a Guide Dog Puppy for You?

As Jessica points out, raising a guide dog puppy can be fun and frustrating. It's hard work but puppy love is a great reward! Think you can give a puppy what it needs and say goodbye when it's time for her to move on?

The Next Step

- 5 Before I knew it, a year flew by, and my time with Adriana was up. She had grown to be a polite, well-behaved dog. Another letter came telling me it was time to return Adriana to the Guide Dog School, so she could begin her training.
- 6 Returning guide dogs are put in a group with three to four instructors. Some of the first things that Adriana and the dogs in her group learned were to stop for curbs and stairs and to avoid obstacles and distractions.
- 7 One day, a lady from the school called and said that Adriana had been pulled out of training because they wanted to use her for breeding, and that I was invited to her graduation. I was so excited that I started bouncing off the walls. After three long months of waiting, we set out for San Rafael.
- 8 Adriana lives with "Breeder Keepers." Breeder Keepers live within a 50-mile radius of the school and agree to keep a breeder dog in their home. The puppies that breeder dogs have hopefully become guide dogs.

Adriana is a Mommy!

- 9 A few months after I got back, Adriana's family wrote and said that Adriana had her first litter of puppies. I was excited, because I was going to raise one of Adriana's babies. The new puppy, Sahara, made me so happy. But the year with Sahara sped by, and soon it was time to return Sahara to the school for training as a working guide dog.



- 10 It isn't easy to say goodbye to these lovable dogs, but it feels great to know that I have played a part in helping train a dog who can help someone who needs assistance. A working dog can help them live an independent life.
- 11 And I know that there will always be another guide dog puppy in my future!

Did you know . . .

About half of guide dog puppies don't graduate as guide dogs.

But that doesn't mean they can't have a career! Some dogs trained as guide dogs become therapy dogs, search and rescue dogs, or breeder dogs. Others become wonderful family pets!

There are three kinds of "assistance dogs." Along with guide dogs for the blind (and visually impaired), there are also hearing dogs for the deaf (and hard of hearing) and service dogs for people with other special needs.

The average wait for an assistance dog is about two years. Dogs are matched to their new owners' needs. It takes anywhere from six months to five years to be matched with the right dog.

Not all guide dogs are raised from puppies. Sometimes the right dog comes from an animal shelter! These dogs are usually full grown, but less than three years old.

There are several breeds that make the best guide dogs. They are: Golden Retrievers, Labrador Retrievers, Golden/Labrador crosses and German Shepherds. Less common but sometimes used breeds are Flat or Curly coated Retrievers, Vizslas, Boxers, Standard Poodles, Smooth Collies, Australian Shepherds and Dobermans.

Hearing dogs are often rescue dogs. Friendly, small to medium-sized dogs from shelters often make great hearing dogs! Just about any dog can be trained to do this work, and mixed breeds are very common.

Assistance dog breeds vary. There are many types of assistance dogs. Some help physically challenged people with mobility. Others assist people with challenges such as autism, seizures, and psychiatric disorders.