



**Second Sense**  
Beyond vision loss

Because of you... Mobility instructors learn new skills, pg 1

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Laura's family joins her lesson, pg 4

Summer 2022

# Perspectives

## Training Professionals Improves Training for Clients



*Backchaining is a method used to teach guide dogs a new location — in this case the front door to a restaurant. Pam and her guide, Gumbo, start at a spot close to the target location. Pam gives the command to “find the door.”*



*Pam then moves farther away from the target and gives the same “find the door” command.*

Our Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists train almost 100 clients every year to use a white cane safely and effectively.

Many of these clients are learning to use a cane for the first time. But others are returning for training to refresh their skills, learn a new route or gain new skills — like traveling on public transit.

And, some of these clients now have a guide dog.

“Guide dog teams and white cane users may have similar goals, but the methods in which they reach those goals often vary,” Siobhan, our mobility instructor explained.

“For example, it’s important for a cane user to have strong tactile discrimination skills when using the cane to gain information from the ground. While for a guide dog team, the handler is more focused on auditory and other orientation skills because the dog is maneuvering around any obstacles or safety hazards.”

So, we invited Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) to Second Sense. They provide a free two-day training for mobility instructors. This training prepares them to work with clients who want to transition from cane to guide dog and clients who already have a guide dog.

The workshop included demonstrations featuring Pam, GDB Outreach Alumni Representative, and her guide Gumbo.

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Walking out their door. Jotting down a phone number. Sending an email.

## Helping Clients Prepare for a Guide Dog

Our mobility instructors train clients who are at different stages in their journey. Both their journey with independent travel and their journey to work as a guide dog team.

Sara has solid orientation and mobility skills. But, in order to complete the application for a guide dog at Guide Dogs of America, she needed an assessment from a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist.

So Siobhan spent a few hours with Sara, walking with her as Sara traveled a route, including street crossings. Siobhan also

shot a video of Sara using her mobility skills, provided her assessment and signed the application.

**Sara's application was accepted and she will meet her new guide dog this summer.**

Cyndi had never used a white cane when she started training. She also hadn't even considered a guide dog.

She worked with Rachael, learning cane skills from the beginning. Soon she was able to travel independently around her home and her neighborhood.

"I gained so much knowledge about orientation and mobility while learning to use my white cane," Cyndi said.

When Cyndi decided to transition to a guide dog, she attended the week-long orientation and mobility immersion program at Guide Dogs for The Blind.

"Both organizations taught me how to safely travel, both indoors and outdoors. I learned about self-awareness, safety precautions, and how to evaluate my surroundings using my white cane, echolocation, and other environmental clues.

"All of these skills were very important in helping me transition to a guide dog. Now Aaliyah and I are a team, and we keep each other safe as we



*Cyndi with her guide dog, Aaliyah.*

travel together.

"Aaliyah needs me to tell her which way to go, when I want her to cross the street, and when we have reached our destination. She helps me maneuver around obstacles and make sure there are no cars crossing our path, but ultimately, I need to tell her how to get there.

**"I would not be able to do this safely and confidently without first having had an extensive amount of O&M training. I am so grateful to Second Sense and GDB for teaching me independence so that I can live my best life!"** ●

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## Training Professionals

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*Pam and Gumbo keep moving farther away to build Gumbo's familiarity with the route to the target spot.*



*Each time Gumbo finds the door, he is rewarded to reinforce the behavior.*

“The GDB training was excellent,” one of the participants shared. It was “extremely comprehensive, not to mention friendly and engaging. I will confidently recommend their program to people I work with who want to become independent guide dog travelers. What

an experience!”

Your support allows Second Sense to provide ongoing training to our staff. So they can provide our clients with the training they need to reach their individual goals. ●

### Not Every Dog can be a Guide Dog

#### Training takes over a year:

**13 months**

At 8 weeks old, puppies go to live with a volunteer puppy raiser who teaches them good manners and socialization skills.

**3 months**

At 15 months, professional instructors take over to teach dogs the behaviors that a successful guide needs. 15-40% of dogs don't make the cut.

**2 weeks**

After a rigorous matching process, guide dogs meet their human handlers. Teams learn to work together under the watchful eye of an instructor for two weeks.

#### And, not every human is ready for a guide dog

- Guide dogs take their cues from their human partner
- The human determines the route and if it is safe to cross the street



- It is the human's job to know where the team is at all times
- So, the human must first have solid mobility skills

# Laura's Mobility Training Becomes a Family Affair



*Laura uses her cane to navigate the sidewalk.*

Laura has two small children. Like any mother, she wants to make sure they get to school safely.

**But, her vision loss made walking unsafe for her and her children.**

Laura started working with Rachael, one of our mobility instructors, in April.

**“In the beginning, it was really hard,” Laura said. “It was just panic — feeling unsafe. But now, after lots of practice, I learned how to use the cane. Now I feel comfortable and safe.”**

Rachael worked with Laura, teaching her the techniques to read the information the cane is providing about Laura's environment. Where the

sidewalk ends and the grass begins. Where the incline and truncated domes indicate the curb to the street. Where any cracks in the sidewalk, or other obstacles, need to be avoided.

Laura practiced these skill while walking the route from her home to the neighborhood school. She learned the street crossings, landmarks and potential hazards. Rachael also made sure Laura learned an alternate route, just in case.

Once Laura was comfortable traveling this route alone and with her children, she was ready for the next goal. Laura wanted to help her family understand how to help her. So, her husband learned how to act as a sighted guide.

Then it was her sisters' turn.

**“My sisters help me a lot. But, sometimes they don't know how to help. They don't know when to help and when not to help. I know it is hard for them.”**

So Rachael spent a few hours with Laura's sisters teaching them the Human Guide technique. This training shows the sighted partner how to guide the person with vision loss in a way that makes both feel safe.

She even had **Laura's sisters practice with a blindfold** to better understand how it feels to work with a guide. Especially the difference between the guide grabbing their arm to push them forward and holding the guide's arm to follow the guide's movements.

**“They were so excited to learn how to help. Rachael gave lots of details. Now they know why they can't put me in front.” ●**

***“The cane is bringing my life back again. I can now do a lot for myself using my cane.”***  
**~ Laura**