What Does A Guide Dog Do?

A guide dog is a specially bred and trained dog that helps guide people who are blind or who have low vision.

Puppies train for about two years to learn all the things they need to know to become a fully trained guide dog.

At 8 weeks old puppies come to live with their volunteer puppy raiser and their family. The puppy raiser will help the puppy learn that it needs to act differently than a regular pet dog. Some of the things the puppy will learn include:

* learning the vest means they are working
* not jumping on furniture
* not eating any people food even if it is on the floor
* not lunging or chasing after other animals
* not jumping on people

At about one year the puppy will go to guide dog school and learn the skills that will help guide a blind person.

Some of the skills they learn include:

* wearing a harness
* stopping at curbs
* navigating stairs and obstacles
* staying focussed on their work

At about two years old the trained guide dog will be matched with it's partner – a person who is blind or has low vision. They will learn how to work together and travel safely.

Some of the commands the guide dog team use include:

* left, right
* forward, halt
* find the stairs, door, or elevator

Because guide dogs are so highly trained there are laws that protect guide dogs accompanied by a blind person. These laws allow the guide dog team access to places and services that pet dogs and their owners would not have access to. These include:

* Restaurants, stores
* hotels
* taxis, public transportation and airplanes

Laws are different in each region of Canada, but in every region guide dog teams are protected under a Human Rights Act. Some regions have additional legislation such as the Blind Person's Rights Act or Service Dog Act.

Guide dogs don't always work. When the team goes home the guide dog's harness is taken off and they know they are not working. AT home a guide dog is just like a pet and they can play and relax.