**Orientation & Mobility Immersion Program**

Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) is pleased to offer a free Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Immersion Program for people interested in developing the O&M skills that are most relevant to guide dog mobility. Traveling independently with a guide dog involves less tactile input than cane travel, therefore the program places a major emphasis on developing non-tactile travel skills by:​

* Increasing awareness of the environmental information available to a guide dog traveler.
* Developing an understanding of how to use auditory information like traffic sounds to remain oriented and to achieve correct alignment during general travel and street crossings.
* Using auditory information to analyze different types of intersections to determine the best time to initiate street crossings.
* Developing the ability to estimate the distance walked relative to the time taken (time-distance estimation).
* Participating in an exercise that simulates travel with a guide dog (known as the Juno exercise), and learning to apply sensory awareness and travel skills in a practical way. ​
* Walking a route with a guide dog and guide dog mobility instructor (available to clients who have never had a guide dog and dependent on location).​
* Learning proper scanning techniques, and how residual vision can impact guide dog travel. Clients who have useful residual vision will be offered and may benefit from instruction using visual occlusion to assist with learning auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic information.

O&M Immersion courses are held throughout the year. All courses start on a Sunday afternoon and conclude the following Saturday. The classes are conducted by O&M specialists on location at one of our partner organizations. Each partner O&M specialist has undergone training with Guide Dogs for the Blind to prepare them to instruct clients who have a guide dog mobility goal.

Our partner organizations include:

* Earle Baum Center (Santa Rosa, CA)
* LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired (San Francisco, CA)

**Who is Eligible?**

The O&M Immersion Program is open to current GDB applicants or graduates, or people referred for consideration by a GDB partner organization or other O&M/rehabilitation agency. Individuals can self-refer as well. It is preferable that applicants have received some basic O&M training in the past, and/or are currently using a long cane, but those with a guide dog mobility goal with little or no O&M services available to them will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The program is open to residents of the U.S. and Canada. In addition, applicants must:

* Have independent living skills.
* Be able to live away from home without requiring direct assistance.
* Function well in group settings, in an adult-learning environment.
* Meet current GDB medical and mental health requirements.
* Satisfy other GDB admissions requirements in regard to legal blindness, felony convictions, substance abuse, diabetes, seizure management, etc.

Please note: Clients of other guide dog schools can be considered, but they must have open applications on file for admissions to Guide Dogs for the Blind. Minor applicants are not eligible.

**What is Included?**

All aspects of GDB's O&M Immersion Program are provided free of charge to eligible clients, including:

* Transportation to and from one of our partner organizations where the training is conducted.
* Lodging and all meals.
* 25 hours of individualized O&M instruction.
* Assistive technology training (dependent on location).
* Other services such as low vision assessments, psychology services, and independent living skills training are also available and can be arranged at specific partner organizations (dependent on location).

**Want to Learn More?**

For more information about the program, or if you're an O&M professional and would like to refer a client, please contact Marc Gillard, Director of Orientation & Mobility Services at [mgillard@guidedogs.com](mailto:mgillard@guidedogs.com) or 800.295.4050, ext. 4061, or Stephanie Zabitz, Senior Orientation & Mobility Program Specialist at [szabitz@guidedogs.com](mailto:szabitz@guidedogs.com) or 415.488.2363.