

WHEELCHAIR GUIDE DOGS

Presented By: Michele Pouliot



WHY?

Our Motivation – Client Service



1975



1986



1995

Why?

Continued Client Service





What are the Challenges

- ❑ Instructor Training & Experience
- ❑ Requires special dog
- ❑ Equipment Investment (Power Chair, Transport, Harness)
- ❑ Double normal training time
- ❑ Instructor Maintaining Chair Skills
- ❑ Class Program includes In Home Training
- ❑ We thought teams would require more field support than “normal” team –
We were wrong

Rewards ?

Priceless



Wheelchair Teams 1, 2, 3

Wheelchair Guide
Teams

Guide Dogs for the
Blind

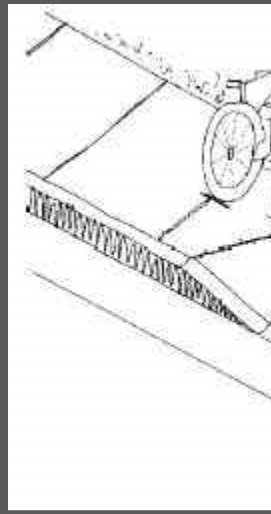
Special Considerations

- ❑ No tactile information through handler's feet hinders orientation
- ❑ Minor slopes or bumps on travel surface are amplified in wheelchair, greatly impacting chair operation.
- ❑ Wheelchair teams require more space (width) to travel.
- ❑ The wheelchair is an object the dog must protect itself from.
- ❑ Endurance for the handler vs. dog



Wheelchair Guide Program

POWER Wheelchairs Only



Wheelchair Guide Program

Client Assessment Process



Client Application

Initiated program for Retrains
Evolved to serving first time users

Initial phone interview with a wheelchair instructor

Readiness for home interview?
Suitability for wheelchair guide?

Home Interview for full assessment Video
footage of assessment

Qualified applicant placed on wait list

Dog identified / Begins training
Wait time - 8 months to a year



Client Assessment

- ☐ Need / Amount of use
- ☐ Motivation & Initiative
- ☐ Independent travel
- ☐ Upper body ability
- ☐ Chair operation skills
- ☐ Orientation / Degree of functional vision
- ☐ Accurately follows simulated movements of a wheelchair guide



Need (Amount of Use)



Motivation & Initiative

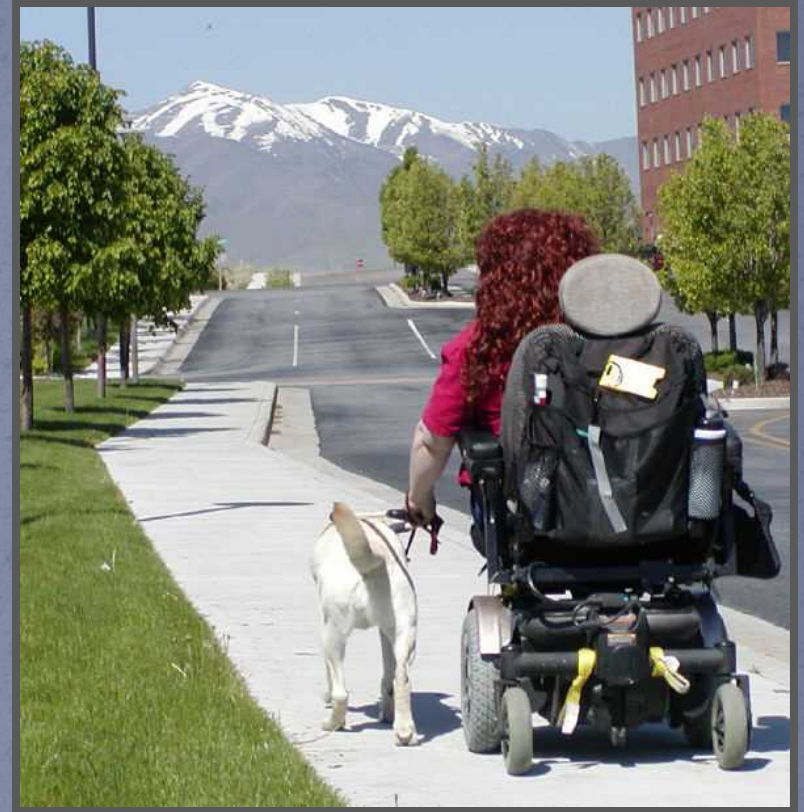
Requires a higher degree of both to be successful

- ❑ Acquisition of power chair
- ❑ Preparation for interview
- ❑ Hours traveling in chair



Independent Travel

- ❑ Regular travel routes
- ❑ Knowledge of route environment (ramp makeup)
- ❑ “Safe” power chair traveler



Upper Body Ability

- ❑ Lean forward / return upright, without hand for support
- ❑ Harness arm - freedom of motion
- ❑ Joystick hand is stable



Chair Operation Skills

- ❑ Refined ability to move chair
- ❑ Can quickly problem solve common situations
- ❑ Vast experience w chair



Orientation / Degree of Functional Vision

- ❑ Orientation regarding direction in a wheelchair is minimal
- ❑ Orientation to travel routes is strong and confident
- ❑ Consistent and precise following of the guide - **Imperative**



Ability to follow a wheelchair guide dog

Critical to success

Errors are catastrophic



Training Wheelchair Guides

Dog completes “normal” guide dog training (some modifications applied)

During “normal” training: Wheelchair behavior training (unrelated to guiding)

Class ready “normal” status = Dog begins training to guide a wheelchair handler

Approximately 4 months of wheelchair guide dog training / Total = 8 months training



Wheelchair Guide Dog Skills

Non Guiding

Behavior	Behavior Description
Right Side Position	Right Side Heel Position
Front Position	Faces handler, centered in front with front feet on the footplate
Back Away	In front position, dog backs away from the moving wheelchair while maintaining attention to the handler and wheelchair.
Back Behind Chair/Over	Dog backs from Heel position and moves behind the chair over to the right Side position.
Behind Position	Dog follows behind the chair in narrow areas.
Doorway Negotiations	Although following handler direction, dog is able to independently watch out for their own safety when the team is negotiating doorways and elevators.
Retrieve	Dog retrieves common dropped items and delivers to the handlers' hands or lap (wallet, keys, location cane, remote control, phone).
Chair Mount/Balanced Ride	Dog rises into handler's lap from Front position, placing both hind feet onto the footplate. Dog maintains its own balance and does not interfere with handlers' ability to operate the joystick.
Move Ahead /Turn and Face	Dog moves through an opening (commonly a doorway) on leash, turns around and faces handler, backs away as is necessary.

Non Guiding Skills



Non Guiding Skills



Non Guiding Skills



Retrieve

- ☐ Wallet
- ☐ Keys
- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Credit Card
- ☐ Folding cane
- ☐ Remote control
- ☐ Client requests



Wheelchair Guide Dog Skills

Non Guiding



Blind Passenger with a Guide Dog
Lift Loading Techniques

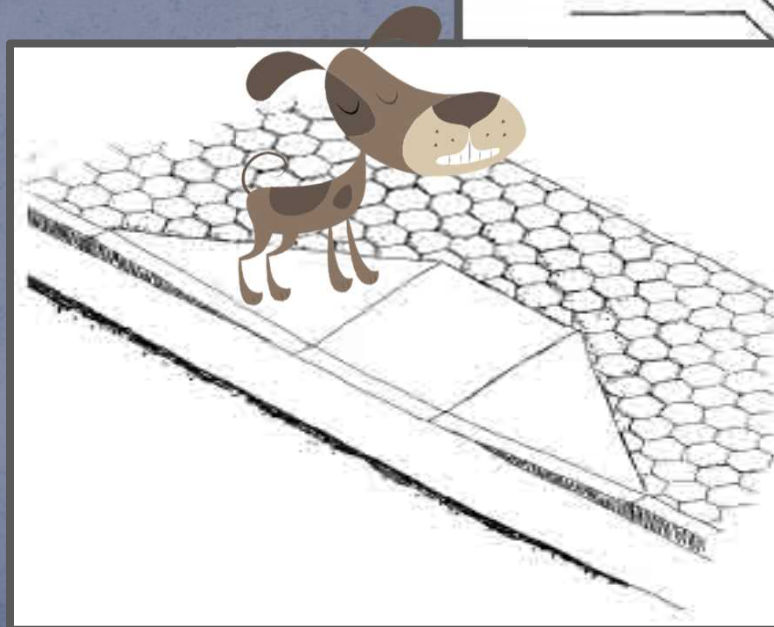
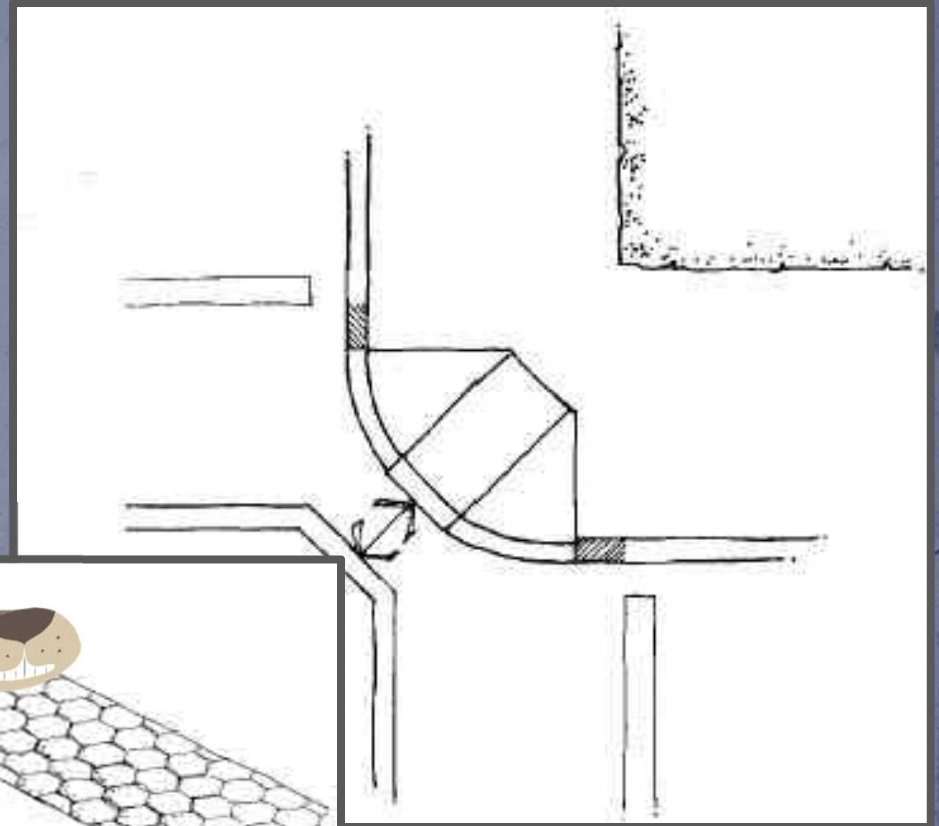
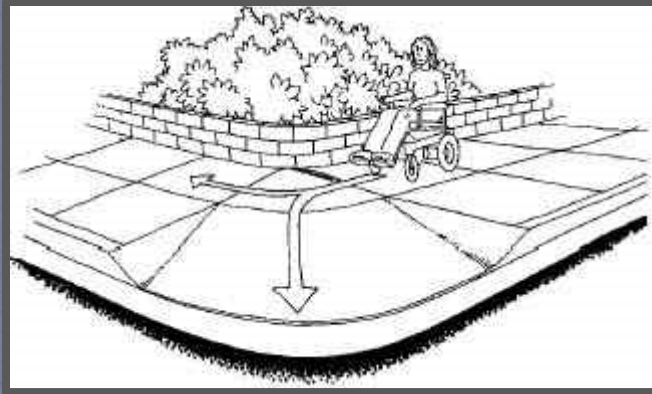
Wheelchair Guide Dog Skills

Guiding

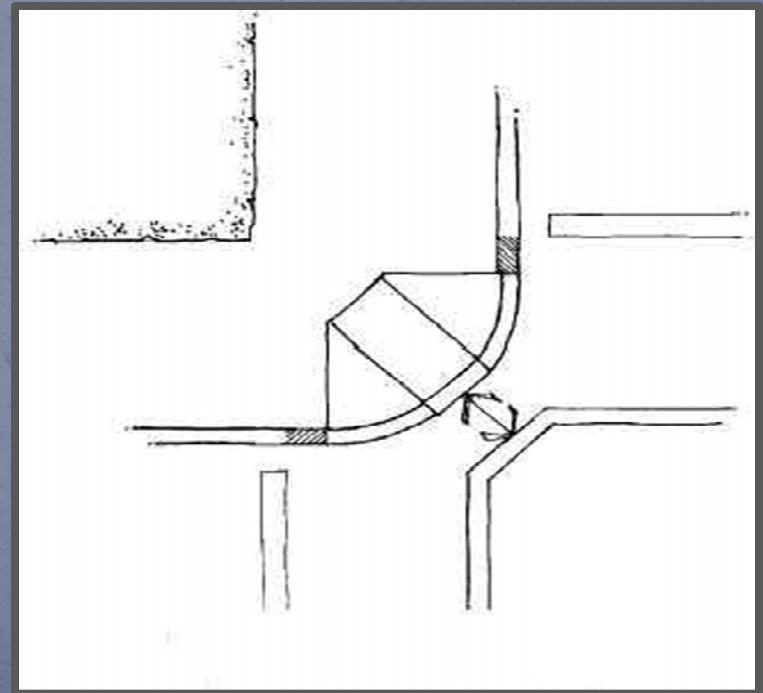
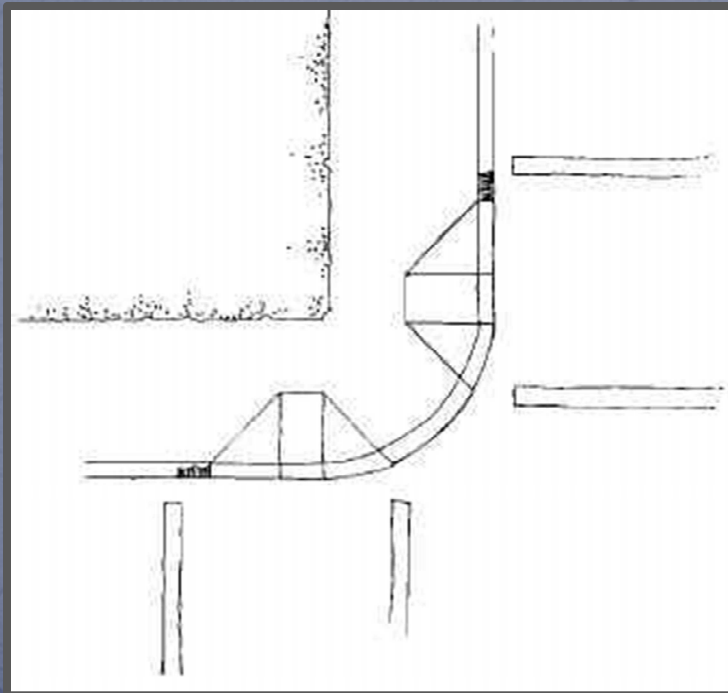
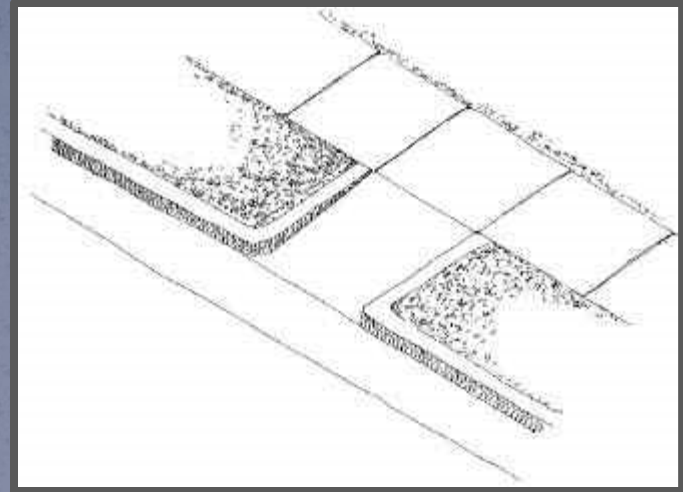
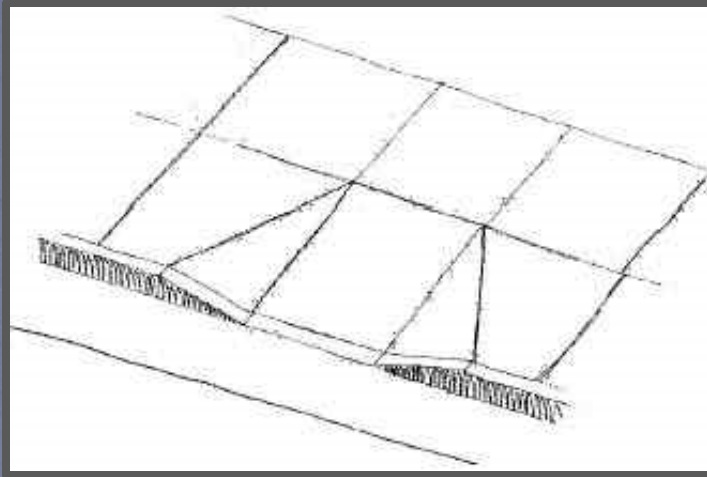
Behavior	Behavior Description
Ramp Location / Targeting	Dog seeks out the nearest down or up ramp, targeting the ramp so that the wheelchair rests on some part of that incline.
Refusal due to insufficient space or unsafe hazard Curb/Stair Refusal	Automatic right turn and/or refusal to move forward. Refusal to move forward = dog automatically comes to front position to inform handler of unsafe conditions.
Two Tracking Sidewalk path is too narrow for both dog and wheelchair but dog has room to guide with front feet on travel path	Front feet remain on the sidewalk or path while hind feet leave the sidewalk. Dog travels forward with front feet on the sidewalk until space widens to allow for both dog and wheelchair to resume travel on the sidewalk.
Backwards Guiding Narrow travel path of a few yards that allows for only the width of the wheelchair	Dog pivots in front of handler and continues guiding by backing through the narrow space. Once through the dog pivots into a normal forward guiding position and continues.
Pedestrian Crossing Button Targeting	Dog seeks the nearest pedestrian crossing button, nose targeting towards that button.

Targeting Ramps

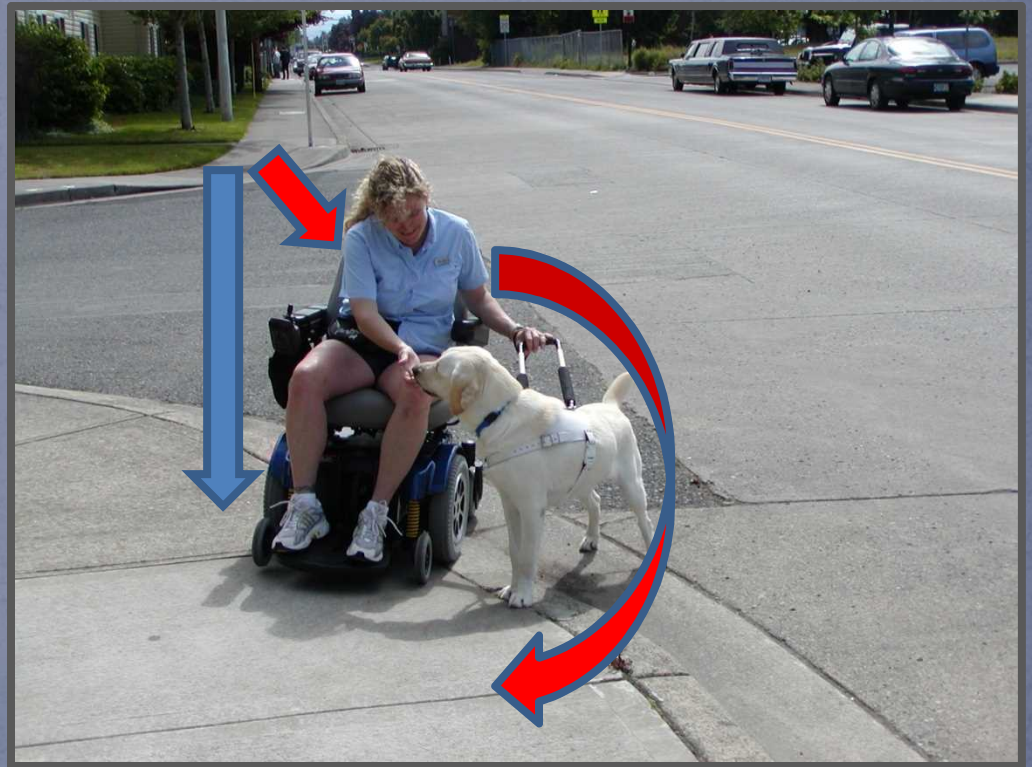
More Than Meets the Eye



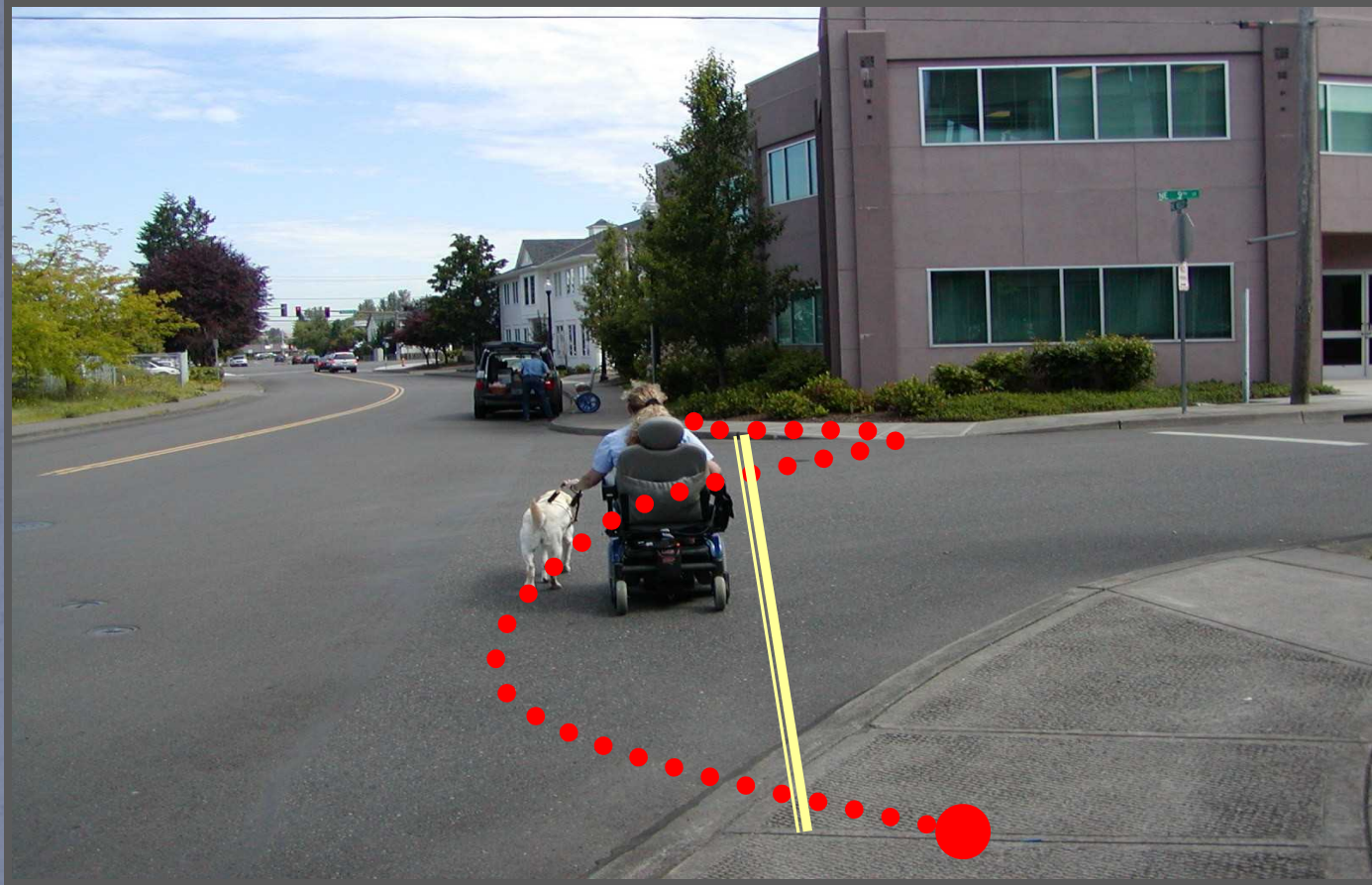
Large Variety in Ramp Designs



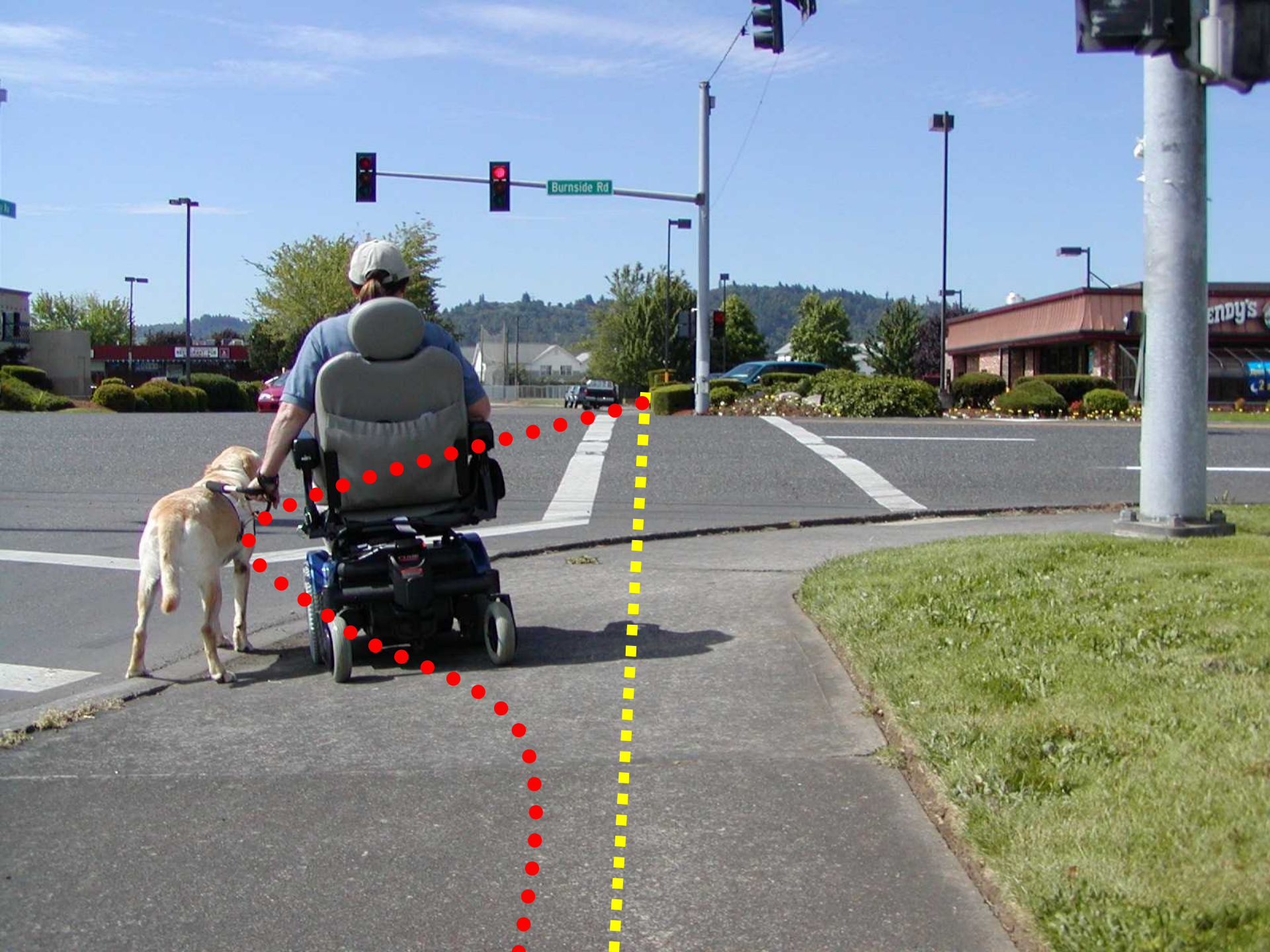
Ramp Targeting / Location



Heightened Line Concept



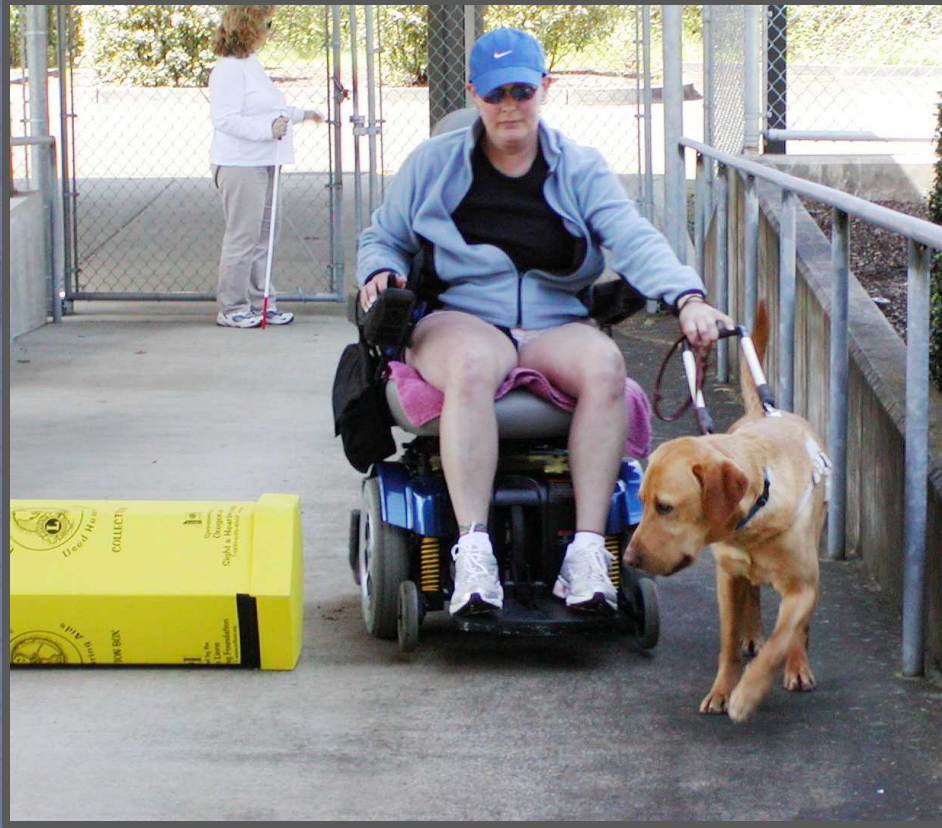




Ramp Location/ Heightened Line Concept

Ramp Targeting

Obstacle Clearance



Obstacle Clearance



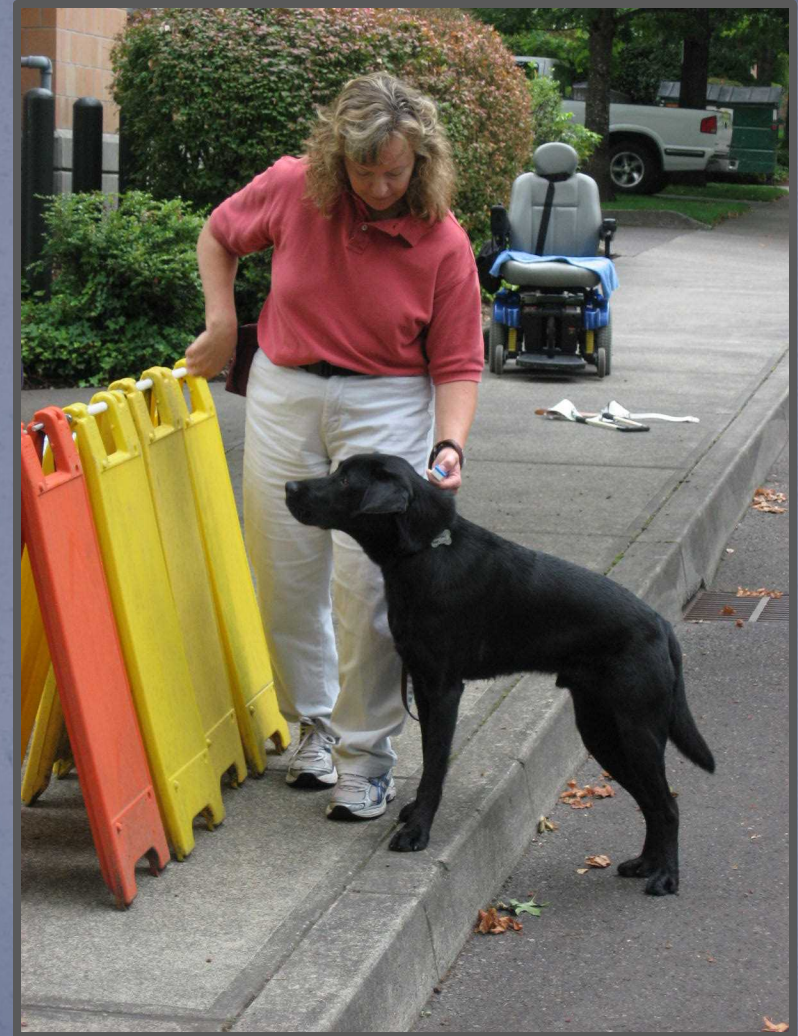
Pedestrian Crossing Button Targeting



Two Tracking



Two Tracking



Obstacle Clearance

Obstacle
Clearance

Doorways



Backwards Guiding



Backwards Guiding



Disobedience



Disobedience



Custom Equipment



Custom Equipment



Class Training

- ❑ Combination of both Campus and in-home training
- ❑ In residence at GDBs Oregon campus
- ❑ In Home = 7-10 days for retrains; 10-14 days for new handlers
- ❑ Individual cases, entirely In Home training
- ❑ Field Managers assist wheelchair instructor team with the in-home training portion when applicable
- ❑ Extended use of “light line” during wheelchair team training



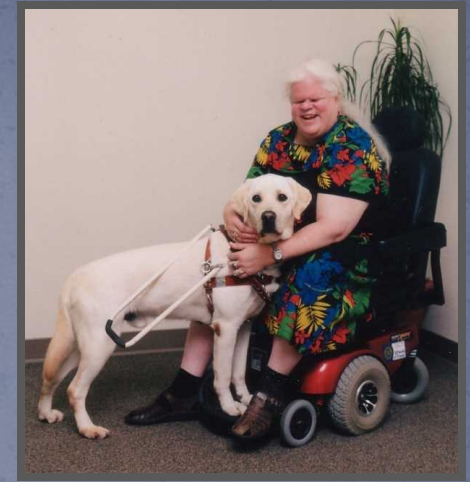
Class Training



GDB Wheelchair Teams

2004 – 2009

All Remain Active



Thank You!

