Guide Dog Puppies Enrich Lives

The Situation
The guide dog you see walking with its blind handler was once a cute, cuddly, destructive, mischievous, wild, intelligent, and talented puppy. Ada County 4-H youth and adults in the White Pine Club are raising puppies to be trained as guide dogs. Puppy raisers take 12 to 14 months out of their lives to socialize a puppy for guide dog training programs. They spend nearly 24 hours a day with their puppy.

Our Response
The White Pine 4-H Guide Dog Puppy Club is currently raising seven guide dog puppies. Two volunteers and eight youth are responsible for teaching the Guide Dog Puppies how to behave in the house and in public. Raisers also teach a puppy how to be a person’s close companion - to trust and to be trusted.

The puppy raiser’s goal is to develop their Guide Dog Puppy into a mature, dependable dog. A Guide Dog must be:

- Well behaved in the house
- Socialized to the world and able to accept new situations in a calm thoughtful manner
- Relaxed when traveling in all types of transportation
- Well bonded with people, able to enjoy praise calmly, and eager to please
- Responsive to basic commands

This 4-H club has taken on the foundation training for the puppy’s future accomplishments.

Additionally, the White Pine 4-H Club has close contact with the visually impaired community. The 4-H’ers can see how a blind person benefits from a working Guide Dog.

Achievements
Ada County 4-H has raised 18 Guide Dog Puppies and returned them to Guide Dogs for the Blind for further training. The independence that a Guide Dog can give a visually impaired person is well documented. The less visible impact on the lives of the 4-H youth and adult volunteers during the 12 to 14 months of socializing their puppy is documented in these success stories.

Sarah, a very shy 12 year old, was overly conscious of her weight and reluctant to participate in activities with other kids. She felt inferior and afraid to be involved and was not comfortable to be in front of people. When Willette, her Guide Dog Puppy arrived, she joined the White Pine 4-H club. This membership bonded her with the other 4-H’ers struggling with the work of raising Guide Dog Puppies. When she was with the puppy, she realized that others were watching the puppy and not her. This allowed her to overcome
her self-consciousness and express herself more freely. She became a club officer. School became a more positive experience. Her grades improved and she was more involved. This shy, self-conscious 12 year old has blossomed because of her experiences in 4-H. She attended a special graduation ceremony for Willette who graduated as a breeder for the Guide Dog program. Sarah gave a speech to an audience of strangers! She continues to be active and outgoing in school.

Twelve-year-old Tiffany was withdrawn and moody. She wasn’t sure that she wanted to continue to live. She was a failure in her mind. Tiffany received her Guide Dog Puppy as a transfer pup to finish raising. The puppy gave her a reason to live; there were many important and exciting new things to learn and to teach to the dog. Tiffany ran for president of the 4-H club, stepping into leadership and enjoying the role. Her greatest joy is to contribute to her community through the Guide Dog program. Tiffany and her family attended her Guide Dog Puppy’s graduation. Tiffany’s mother describes her as “a totally different person”. She is excelling in soccer and trying out for cheerleader at school.

Adults grow and gain much from raising Guide Dog Puppies and mentoring 4-H youth raising Guide Dogs. Paula struggled as a parent of a child with serious substance abuse problems. Feeling like a failure, she found success with the 4-H youth who needed her talents. The special relationships she and the 4-Hers have developed enabled her to see that her son made his own decisions. She has even hired one of the 4-H youth in her business as a part time assistant. The work she is doing with the 4-H club helps her to see there is hope for the world in today’s young people. She continues to be active knowing that her positive influence is making a difference in a child’s life.

Raising a puppy to be a guide dog is so much more than a selfless, inspirational act. It is hard work, dedication, disappointment and tears. It is taking in and letting go, and taking in again and again. The work of the puppy raisers is deeply appreciated by those people receiving the dog that has grown from a silly wild puppy into a mature, responsible member of a team.

Co-operator and Co-sponsors

**Guide Dogs for the Blind, Inc.**
A nonprofit charitable organization supplies the puppies for 4-H youth to raise.

**Ada County 4-H Program**
White Pine Guide Dog Puppy 4-H Club, 8 members and 2 leaders.

The Future
Two new puppies will be arriving in Ada County in July. During the Western Idaho Fair, August 18, the Guide Dog Puppies will be evaluated.

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