



Companion Dog Information Package

About Dogs with Wings

Our mission is to foster integration and independence for people with disabilities by providing them with highly trained assistance dogs and aftercare.

Our goal is simple: to change lives for the better.

Dogs with Wings have been providing highly-trained guide and assistance dogs to Albertans since 1996. Our school is accredited by both *Assistance Dogs International* (ADI) and the *International Guide Dog Federation* (IGDF), which sets and maintains standards for organizations like ours around the world. We re-certify every 5 years to ensure we continue to offer best practices to our clients and produce the very best dogs possible.

We have developed our own breeding program to give us a steady supply of dogs of known health and temperament. We exclusively use Labrador Retrievers and some Labrador X Golden Retrievers. These breeds are chosen due to their even temperament, willingness to please and adaptability. Their size and strength also make them suitable as service dogs.

Right from birth, our dogs live with volunteer families who provide them with caring homes in which to grow and learn. Our adult dogs in training work with highly-qualified trainers to learn the skills they will need to work with and for our clients. Our dogs are in school for approximately 2 years before they are ready to be a Dog with Wings. More information about our fostering and other volunteer programs may be found on our website: www.dogswithwings.ca .

For more information on Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and the importance of accredited dogs: <http://www.assistancedogsinternational.org/>

For more information on other ADI certified service dog schools in Canada:
Canadian Association of Guide and Assistance Dog Schools <http://www.cagads.com/>



Overview of Our Companion Dog Program

Our companion dogs do not have public access, but are still able to provide many of the same benefits that our autism service dogs provide, just within the home. Outside of the home, their rights are the same as other pet dogs, and they can only access dog friendly areas.

Companion dogs can provide:

- Sensory regulation
- Companionship
- Help with sleep disturbance
- Anxiety reduction

Some parents find that having a dog as a companion may:

- increase self-esteem in their child
- encourage them to become more engaged
- increase their communication skills
- assist with the development of empathy in the child

Application Process

Dogs with Wings has developed a detailed application process for our companion dog program to ensure the success of each team. Applicants must first meet our criteria:

- You must be a permanent resident in Alberta
- Applicants must have a disability. Preference will be given to children with disabilities, but we will consider adults with disabilities as well
- We must determine that there will be a benefit to placing a companion dog with the applicant
- You and your family must be able to meet the emotional, physical, and financial needs of dog, and offer a stable home environment. This includes regular exercise and grooming, veterinarian care, food, as well as other necessary supplies and equipment
- We prefer home environments in which the companion dog is the only dog living in the home, but exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis



Follow These Steps:

- Read through the relevant information in this handout and on our website to make sure a companion dog is right for your family
- Download and complete all information on the application form
- Using the checklist in the application, make sure you submit all forms to DWW along with the non-refundable application fee
- Once the application is complete and all forms have been submitted, DWW will review the application and contact your references
- We will then contact you and may invite your family to take part in a preliminary interview, either at our facility or over the phone
- DWW will determine whether you and your family would benefit from one of our dogs, and will contact you with our decision

If we approve your family for a companion dog, please keep in mind that this is a conditional approval. DWW will continue to assess your child and your family's needs while you are in line to receive a dog. Situations, needs, and circumstances change, as well as our ability to satisfy your needs may change. DWW reserves the right to close an application at any time, or redirect clients to one of our other programs if we feel that it is more suitable or appropriate.

We work towards providing your child with a dog that matches your family's needs, activity level, and personalities. Please be aware that this can be a lengthy process, due to high demand for our dogs and our goal to make the best match possible. When a suitable dog has been identified, we will contact you and invite you to DWW as we begin to assess different dogs with potential families. Following that we will provide you with information regarding participation in team training, and the next steps to take.

Unfortunately due to high demand we have a fairly lengthy waitlist, **and it could take 2 or 3 years before we have a dog for you/your child.** Please keep us informed if anything changes during this time that may affect your application. This includes:

- Keeping contact information up to date
- Alerting us if there is a move or change in living arrangements
- Letting us know if any pets are added to your family
- Letting us know if your needs have changed



Team Training

Once a match is made DWW will give you 4-6 weeks' notice to prepare, take time off work, and arrange childcare. **Children do not attend team training.** We require that at least one parent, the main handler of the dog (but both parents are preferable), attend a 4 day long training session in Edmonton.

We work directly with a local hotel that provides discounted accommodations for the duration of team training, along with a comfortable training room for use during the day. Parents are responsible for paying for their own food and accommodations during Team Training.

Team Training will include:

- Bonding with your new family member, learning their cues, and working together as a team
- Education regarding health and veterinary care of the dog
- Connecting with a graduate family who currently uses one of our companion dogs

Post Placement Expectations

After receiving a companion dog, there are certain requirements that must continue to be met. Having a companion dog can provide many benefits for families, but it is also a big responsibility and a long-term commitment. Applicants must be prepared to care for and meet the needs of a companion dog for the next seven to ten years. DWW will continue to provide ongoing support after a dog has been placed with a family, for the lifetime of the dog. We encourage families to contact us if they have any questions or issues they need help with.

Part of your obligation as a recipient of a DWW companion dog, is to provide us with progress reports on a regular basis. DWW will also conduct home visits and do check-ins to make sure everything is going smoothly. After the first year, DWW will connect with families yearly, either in person, over the phone, or via an internet video call (ex: Skype).

DWW maintains ownership of the dog, and if we feel that the dog is not being well cared for, if their optimal weight is not being maintained, or they are not being used for their intended purpose, we can decide to remove the dog from the home.



Ongoing Responsibilities and Expectations:

Expenses

On average, it can cost approximately \$1000-\$1500 per year to care for a companion dog. Regular expenses include:

- Dog food: Can be approximately \$60 or more per month. We recommend suitable, high quality foods
- Regular veterinary care - this includes check-ups and regular vaccinations, etc. We estimate the cost of vet care to be around \$300/year for healthy dog maintenance
- Replacement equipment: this includes leashes, and collars. Dogs with Wings can provide these items for you at cost. Budget: \$50-\$100/year
- Toys and treats: approximately \$150/year
- Pet insurance – in order that you are able to plan for your dog's health care needs, **we require that you get pet insurance.** This can cost anywhere from \$25-\$50 a month, depending on your deductible. We are happy to provide you with additional information if needed

Grooming, Health, and Veterinarian Care

Having a companion dog in the home means a little extra work, just like owning a pet dog. Applicants need to be prepared to deal with things such as shedding and hair in the house, drool, and be comfortable picking up the dog's waste. Grooming and maintaining the dog's appearance is an important step in caring for a dog, and needs to be done on a daily basis. Daily brushing is a good opportunity to conduct a health check, and make sure there is nothing amiss with the dog. This will also help with shedding. Cleaning ears, teeth, bathing, checking eyes, and cutting toenails are also important factors that applicants need to be prepared for.

Along with maintaining the dog's physical appearance, it is also important to look after the health of the dog. The healthier the dog, the longer they can be a part of your family. We expect recipient families to adhere to our feeding guidelines and keep their dog within a certain weight range. We require progress reports on a regular basis, and will be checking in to make sure the dog is in optimal health.

It is the responsibility of the family to make sure that the dog has a veterinarian checkup at least once a year, and that all vaccines are kept up to date. It is important to have a veterinarian you can trust; we are happy to make suggestions regarding veterinarian care in your area.



Continued Practice of Skills

In order for a companion dog to continue to work effectively, we expect recipients to continue practicing skills that the dog has learned in training. Unlike a human assistant or mechanical assistive device, the effectiveness of a companion dog depends greatly on the handler: a willingness to be firm, full of praise and consistent is essential. A companion dog cannot be “turned off” and tucked away when not needed. They require daily care, training, exercise and affection. This helps keep their skills fluent and sharp, so that they can continue to meet their family’s needs. It is also important to ensure that they get adequate “time off”, to play and be balanced.

Traveling with a Dog

Traveling with a dog requires a bit of extra effort and research beforehand. This includes:

- Making sure appropriate vaccines are up to date
- Acquiring preventative medication for internal and external parasites for the specific region you are visiting
- Having an International Health Certificate if travelling outside of Canada
- Researching what the different airline requirements may be

In the event that you cannot travel with your dog, we would prefer they were left with a trusted friend or family member while you are gone. Our dogs are not to be left in a boarding kennel.

Fundraising

Dogs with Wings relies solely on the fundraising efforts of our staff, volunteers and clients in order to continue supplying quality trained service dogs at no cost to families. It can cost approximately \$40,000.00 to raise, train, place, and provide follow up care for each dog. If you are able to assist us in this important work, we are anxious to talk to you about it. The Dogs with Wings staff are always available to assist you in planning and executing any fundraiser venture. However, it is important for you to understand that you are not required to raise any money at all for Dogs with Wings, and your inability to assist us in this regard has played no part whatsoever in assessing your application, or in the decision to place a dog with you.