



## **Guide 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 guide 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](http://www.dogswithwings.ca).

For more information on International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) and the importance of accredited dogs: <http://www.igdf.org.uk>

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 Guide Dog Program**

Guide dogs are taught essential house manners, as well as how to behave in public. They provide safe mobility and independence to people who are blind or visually impaired by:

- Indicating road crossings
- Negotiating around obstacles
- Locating objects such as stairs, doors, and elevators
- Indicating curbs and changes in elevation



## **Application Process**

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

- Be a permanent resident in Alberta
- **Be at least 12 years of age at the time of application. Keep in mind we don't place dogs with clients under the age of 13**
- Have the mental awareness to be the sole handler of a guide dog, and be responsible for it in public places
- We prefer to place dogs in home environments in which the guide dog is the only dog living in the home, but exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis
- You and your family must be able to meet the emotional, physical, and financial needs of the guide dog, and offer a stable home environment. This includes regular exercise and grooming, veterinarian care, food, as well as other necessary supplies and equipment

## **Follow These Steps:**

- Read through relevant information in this handout and on our website to make sure a guide dog is right for you
- 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 we may invite you to take part in a preliminary interview, either at our facility or over the phone
- DWW will determine whether you would benefit from one of our dogs, and will contact you with our decision

If we approve you guide dog, please keep in mind that this is a conditional approval. DWW will continue to assess you and your 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 you with a dog that matches your needs, activity level, and personality. Please be aware that this can be a lengthy process, due to high demand for guide 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 clients. 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 1 or 2 years before we have a dog for you**. 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

**We'd also like to know if you have applied to any other guide dog providers. Applying to other guide dog providers won't affect your application with us, but if you receive a dog in the meantime we need to know so that we can remove you from our waiting list.**

### **Team Training**

Once a match is made DWW will give you 4-6 weeks notice to prepare. We require that you attend a 3 week training session in Edmonton and/or your home.

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. Applicants 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
- Education regarding taking a dog out in public (public access), and how to respond to attention
- Learning about legislation and your rights
- Connecting with a graduate of our program who currently uses one of our guide dogs

At the end of team training, the handler/dog team will undergo the Assistance Dogs International (ADI) Public Access Test. During the Public Access Test, we will be assessing your dog handling and problem solving skills, and your ability to safely use a guide dog in public. These skills will be developed during Team Training and we will work with you and your dog throughout this process to help you be successful.

After completing team training and the Public Access Test, the dog/handler team will be issued a guide dog identification card. Carriers of this card are protected by law in Alberta, by the **Blind Persons' Rights Act**, and are allowed access to services and public places. For more information on the **Blind Persons' Rights Act**:

<http://humanservices.alberta.ca/disability-services/blind-persons-rights-act.html>



## **Post Placement Expectations**

After receiving a DWW guide dog, there are certain requirements that must continue to be met. Having a guide dog can provide many benefits, 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 guide dog for the next seven to ten years.

DWW will continue to provide ongoing support after a dog has been placed, for the lifetime of the dog. We encourage clients to contact us if they have any questions or issues they need help with.

Part of your obligation as a recipient of a DWW guide dog, is to provide progress reports on a regular basis. DWW will also conduct home visits and do check-ins to make sure the guide dog/handler team is still working well together. After the first year, DWW will connect with families yearly, either in person, over the phone, or via an internet video call (ex: Skype). There is also the possibility of the guide dog/handler team will repeat the Public Access Test, at the discretion of the trainer and DWW.

**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 guide 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. Your vet may offer a discount for guide dogs. We estimate the cost of vet care to be around \$300/year for healthy dog maintenance.
- Replacement equipment: this includes harness, 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**

As recipients of a DWW guide dog, you will be ambassadors for our program within the community. As such our expectations are that appearance is maintained, and grooming be conducted on a regular basis.

Having a guide 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 guide **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 continue to meet your needs. We expect recipients 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 client 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 that your guide dog continues 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 guide dog depends greatly on the handler: a willingness to be firm, full of praise and consistent is essential. A guide 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.**

The life of a guide **dog isn't all work and no play; it is important to ensure that they get adequate "time off", to play and be** balanced.



## **Traveling with a Guide Dog**

Traveling with a guide 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 guide dog, we would prefer they were left with a trusted friend or family member while you are gone. Our guide 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 guide 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 guide dog with you.