



Companion Dog Information Package

About Dogs with Wings

Our mission is to foster integration and independence for individuals and social service agencies by providing them with highly trained Assistance Dogs.

Our vision is to transform lives and advance the Service Dog sector. Our dream is wellness and support for all.

DWW has been providing highly trained Assistance Dogs since 1996. Our school is accredited by *Assistance Dogs International* (ADI), 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 Assistance Dogs. Right from birth, our dogs live with volunteer families who provide them with caring homes in which to grow and learn. Our Advanced Dogs in training work with professional trainers to learn the skills they will need to work 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.assistedogsinternational.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/>





DOGS WITH WINGS
ASSISTANCE DOG SOCIETY

Overview of Our Companion Dog Program

Our Companion Dogs do not have access to public spaces but are still able to provide many of the same benefits that our public working service dogs provide, just within the home. Outside of the home, their rights are the same as pet dogs and they can only access pet friendly areas. Our Companion Dogs can be trained for children or adults living with a diagnosed disability.

Companion Dogs can provide:

- Sensory regulation
- Companionship and friendship
- Help with sleep disturbance
- Anxiety reduction and comfort
- Social/peer facilitation with others
- Encouraging movement and independence (if appropriate)
- Service and wheelchair skills (if appropriate)

Some parents find that having a dog as a companion for their child 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

- Read through relevant information in this handout and on the website, to make sure a Companion Dog is right for your family.
- Should you meet the necessary criteria, a member of our Client Services Team will invite you to fill out an *Application*.
- Using the checklist in the application form, ensure your application is complete and submit all forms to DWW. The application includes the application form, medical form, references, landlord agreement (if applicable), photos of your home, criminal record check(s), and other necessary paperwork.
- Once your application is complete and all forms have been submitted, DWW will review your application package and contact your listed references.
- You will then be contacted and invited to take part in an *interview*.
- DWW will determine whether you and your family would qualify for one of our Companion Dogs, and will contact you with our decision on whether to conditionally approve or deny your application.
- Should DWW conditionally approve you for a Companion Dog, the application will move forward and DWW will place you on our wait list. This approval is conditional: this means we will continue to assess your needs while you are waiting for a Companion Dog, as your needs or situation may change, or our ability to satisfy your needs may change.

DWW works towards providing you with a Companion 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 Companion dogs and our goal is to make the best match possible. When a suitable dog has been identified, we will contact you and provide you with information regarding participation in team training, and the next steps to take.



Due to high demand, we have a lengthy waitlist, **and it could take 2 to 5 years before we have a Companion Dog for you.** Our Client Services Team will keep in touch with you while you wait. 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
- Letting us know if new family members are added or if anyone else moves into your home.
- Alerting us if there are any new diagnoses or changes in diagnoses for the applicant or other family members.

Criteria for Companion Dogs

- Applicants must have a disability (assessed on a case-by-case basis).
- Child applicants must be over 3 years old at time of application and will not be considered for placement until they are over 5 years old.
- We prefer to place Companion Dogs in home environments in which the Companion Dog is the only canine living in the home. However, exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis
- Families must be able to meet the emotional, physical and financial needs of the Companion Dog to keep a stable home environment.
- Families must demonstrate the need for a Companion Dog and that they are not able to train their own pet dog to assist the applicant.

Team Training

Once a match is made DWW will give you 4-6 weeks' notice to prepare, take time off work, and arrange childcare (if applicable). It is preferred that children attend team training, but not required. We require two adults to be present at team training, including yourself. This could be a friend, a family member or a caregiver. Training with you. If the applicant is a child, we require both parents (if applicable) to attend a 2-3 day long training session in Edmonton.

We work directly with a local hotel that provides discounted accommodation for team training. Parents/applicant are responsible for paying for their own food and accommodation during Team Training.

Team Training will include:

- Bonding with your new family members, learning their cues and working together as a team.
- Education regarding health, nutrition, veterinary care of the dog
- Education on dog temperament and behaviour
- Working with and problem solving with a Companion Dog
- Connecting with a graduate family who currently uses one of our Companion Dogs, or a fellow family who is training at the same time as you in Team Training.
- After 4-6 weeks, an off-leash dog park session will be held

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 providing ongoing support after a Companion Dog is placed with a family for the dog's working life. 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 regular progress reports and veterinary reports. DWW will also conduct home visits and 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 a video call.

DWW maintains ownership of the dog for the first year that they are placed with your family. After a one-year period, DWW will decide whether ownership of the Companion Dog will be transferred to the family or if it will remain with DWW. Should DWW feel that the dog is not being well cared for, their optimal health is not being maintained, or they are not being used for their intended purpose, DWW can decide to remove the dog from the family.

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 \$60-80 or more per month. We recommend suitable, high-quality foods, which will be identified at Team Training.
- 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 the Companion Dog's leash, harness, Companion Dog identification tag, and collar. DWW can provide these items for you at cost. Budget: \$50-\$100/year.
- Toys and treats: approximately \$150/year.
- Pet insurance – in order that you can plan for your dog's health care needs, **we recommend that you get pet insurance**. This can cost anywhere from \$50-\$150 a month, depending on your deductible. We are happy to provide you with additional information if needed and our recommended companies will be discussed at Team Training.

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 maintenance such as shedding and fur 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 must be done daily. Daily brushing also allows you to examine the dog's whole body to make sure there is nothing amiss with the dog. This will also help with shedding, cleaning ears, teeth, bathing, checking eyes and cutting nails 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 regularly and will be checking in to ensure the dog is in optimal health.



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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

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.

The life of a Service Dog isn’t all work and no play. It is important to ensure the dog receives adequate “time off” as well, including play time to maintain balance and a healthy lifestyle for the dog. A dog that has sufficient work-life balance will help to increase the longevity of its working career and overall life.

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

If you cannot travel with your dog, we would prefer they are left with a trusted friend or family member while you are gone. Our dogs are never to be left in a boarding kennel.

Fundraising

DWW relies solely on the fundraising efforts of our staff and community 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 can assist us in this important work, we would love to talk to you about it. The DWW 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 DWW 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 Companion Dog with you.