



Autism Service 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 goals are:

- To train and graduate sufficient, qualified assistance dogs annually.
- To generate financial contributions in order to sustain and grow the organization.
- To build a reputation for excellence among people with disabilities, the public, our funders, training organizations and volunteers.

Our organization exists to serve people with disabilities. We work collaboratively, and in partnership with other organizations that provide assistance dogs to people with disabilities. We provide innovative services and opportunities for people with disabilities. Our staff and volunteers are essential in meeting our goals. Our assistance dogs are not just working dogs; they are valued family members.

Overview of Program

Dogs with Wings (DWW) is an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited school, who provides highly trained service dogs at no cost to families in need. We have our own extensive breeding program, and take pride in the fact that we raise our dogs from birth.

We depend on the support of volunteers to help us foster and train our dogs. At 10 weeks of age our dogs begin their career in a puppy raising home, where they begin to learn skills essential to becoming a service dog and attend weekly classes. Around 16 months old they move to an adult foster home. At this point they begin coming to our facility daily, where our trainers begin to hone in on their skills and prepare them for placement with a family. During this time our trainers assess the dog's skills, personality, needs, and determine which type of work and family they would be most suited for. Most of our dogs are ready to be placed around 2 years of age.

The breeds most commonly used by DWW are Labrador Retrievers, and Labrador/Golden Retriever crosses. Throughout the world of service dogs these breeds are the most popular due to their even temperament, willingness to please, adaptability, and kindness towards people. Their size and strength also make them suitable for autism service dogs.



Autism service dogs are taught:

- Essential house manners, as well as how to behave in public.
- To walk with a child tethered to them and to follow the cues of the handler.
- To anchor themselves if the child attempts to wander or bolt.
- Tasks taught to a traditional service dog can be taught to autism service dogs as well, if a family needs or desires such training.

Autism service dogs can provide:

- Sensory regulation.
- Companionship.
- Help with sleep disturbance.
- Anxiety reduction.
- Social facilitation with peers.
- Safety and independence.

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, as well as help with the development of empathy.

Individuals who are interested in acquiring a service dog are required to submit a letter of intent, which can be found on our website. Anyone interested in volunteering for our puppy/adult dog fostering programs is encouraged to attend one of our info sessions, or to contact us. More information can also be found on our website:

<http://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/>

Application Process

- Read through relevant information in this handout and on the website, to make sure a service dog is right for your family.
- Download and fill out a letter of intent.
- If you meet the necessary criteria, our Client Services Coordinator will invite you to fill out an application.



- Using the checklist in the application form, make sure application is complete, and submit all forms to DWW.
- **Once the application is complete and all forms have been submitted,** DWW will review information and contact references.
- You will then be contacted and may be invited 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 child for an autism service dog, the application will move forward and we will welcome you to our wait list. This approval is conditional: this means we will continue to assess your needs while you are in line for a service dog, as your needs or situation may change, or our ability to satisfy your needs may change.

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 service 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 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.

We'd also like to know if you have applied to any other service dog providers. Applying to other service 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 take you off our waiting list.

Criteria for Dogs with Wings Autism Dog Applicants

There is specific criteria that must be met before a family may qualify for a DWW autism service dog. This includes:

- Applicants must have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder at the time of application.



- Applicants must be within the ages of 3 and 10 years old at time of application. Applicants will only be matched with an Autism Service Dog when they are 5+ years old, as the typical wait is 2 years and to match the maturity of the child.
- If an applicant ages out at an age of over 13 the applicant will not be able to receive an Autism Service Dog.
- Applicants must demonstrate a safety or flight risk that an Autism Service Dog could help mitigate.
- We prefer to place Autism Service Dogs in home environments in which the Autism Service 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 Autism Service Dog and offer a stable home environment.

Team Training

Once a match is made DWW will give you 4-6 weeks notice to 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 week long training session in Edmonton (Sunday through Saturday).

We work directly with a local hotel that provides discounted accommodations for the duration of team training. Team training occurs at Dogs with Wings and in public places. 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.
- 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 family who currently uses one of our autism service dogs.

At the end of team training, the parent/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 service 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 service dog identification card. Carriers of this card are protected by law in Alberta, by the Service Dogs Act, and are allowed access to services and public places. For more information on the Service Dogs Act:

<http://humanservices.alberta.ca/disability-services/service-dogs.html>

Do You Really Need an Autism Service Dog?

Not every child needs to be tethered to a dog, or have their dog accompany them into public places. Some families find that our Companion Dog program is more than sufficient to meet their needs. 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.

Feel free to contact us with any questions you may have about our Companion Dogs or you can check out the different types of dogs we offer on our website:

<http://dogswithwings.ca/about-us/our-dogs/>

Post Placement Expectations

After receiving a DWW Autism Service Dog, there are certain requirements that must continue to be met. Having an Autism Service 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 an Autism Service Dog for the next seven to ten years.

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.

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.

Along with offering ongoing support and requesting progress reports, DWW provides follow up care to families with Autism Service Dogs.

Part of your obligation as a recipient of a DWW service dog, is to provide progress reports on a regular basis. DWW will also conduct home visits and do check-ins to make sure the Autism Service Dog/handler team, as well as the child, are 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 service dog/handler team repeating the Public Access Test, at the discretion of the trainer and DWW.

Autism Service Dog in the Classroom

While not all Autism Service Dogs are needed at school, many children benefit from the added presence of having their Autism Service Dog attend school with them. The dog may help with sensory regulation, preventing bolting or wandering, transitions, anxiety, as well as act as a social facilitator with peers. Dogs in schools, and their rights to accompany their child, are protected by law.

If you are hoping to have an Autism Service Dog attend school with your child there are a few things to keep in mind:

- There must be a full time aide present at all times to take on the role of handler while the dog is at school. Aide(s) must attend training in Edmonton at DWW. In most cases this is 2 days of training, and they are responsible for paying for their own food and accommodations.
- We will do an assessment to see if there is a need for the dog to accompany the child to school. The dog needs to be placed in a family for a minimum of 6 months before we will consider this.
- A School Protocol information package will be given to parents to help pave the smooth arrival of a service dog.
- The presence of a service dog at school is likely to attract more attention than your child is used to receiving while at school.
- Despite legislation allowing service dogs' public access, there can still be some difficulties when it comes to having an Autism Service Dog in a school. This includes allergies or fear of dogs from staff and students, as well as the extra effort it may take having a dog present. We can help you come up with strategies to overcome potential difficulties, and we will work with you and the school to ensure the success of the child and dog at school.

Ongoing Responsibilities and Expectations:

Expenses

On average, it can cost approximately \$1000-\$1500 per year to care for an Autism Service Dog. Regular expenses include:

- Dog food: Can be approximately \$60-80 or more per month. We recommend suitable, high quality foods (ex. Acanna).



- Regular veterinary care: this includes check-ups and regular immunizations, etc. Your vet may offer a discount for service dogs. We estimate the cost of vet care to be around \$300/year for healthy dog maintenance.
- Replacement equipment: this includes gear, 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: Although not a requirement, **we strongly recommend getting 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 Autism Service 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 an Autism Service Dog in the home means a little extra work, just like owning a regular dog. Applicants need to be prepared to deal with things such as shedding and hair in the house, drool, and be comfortable picking up dog poop. Grooming and maintaining the Autism Service 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 Autism Service Dog, the longer they can work. 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

As ambassadors for our organization, 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 an Autism Service Dog depends greatly on the handler: a willingness to be firm, full of praise and consistent is essential. An Autism Service 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 an Autism Service 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 Service Dog

Traveling with an Autism Service 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 Autism Service Dog, we prefer they are left with a trusted friend or family member while you are gone. Our Autism Service Dogs are never 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 would love 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 an Autism Service Dog with you and your child.