



Assistance Dog Information Package

About Dogs with Wings (DWW)

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 has 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 five years to ensure we continue to offer best practices to our clients and produce the very best assistance 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 adult dogs in training work with highly-qualified Instructors to learn the skills they will need to work with and for our clients. Our dogs are in school for approximately two years before they are ready to be qualified as a “dog with wings”. More information about our Fostering Program 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 please visit: <http://www.assistancedogsinternational.org/>

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

Overview of Our Assistance Dog Programs

Assistance dogs are taught essential house manners, as well as how to behave in public. They assist people with physical disabilities to enhance their quality of life and achieve greater independence by:

- helping to retrieve objects
- opening and closing doors
- seeking out help
- supporting the client in moving from one point to another (ex: wheelchair to bed, etc.)
- assisting with balance and bracing



Application Process

Dogs with Wings has developed a detailed application process for our Assistance Dog Programs to ensure the success of each team. Applicants must first meet the following criteria: **For the criteria for each program, please review the information packages pertaining to each program or contact client@dogswithwings.ca for more information!**

- Be a permanent resident in Alberta.
- We prefer to place dogs in home environments in which the assistance dog is the only canine living in the home. However, exceptions may be made on a case-by-case basis.
- Must be able to meet the emotional, physical, and financial needs of the assistance 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 **DO NOT** specialize or train our dogs for clients with Anxiety, PTSD, Hearing Problems, Seizure Alert or Diabetic Alert needs.
- Please Note: Dogs with Wings is licensed to place dogs with Canadian Citizens ordinarily residing in the Province of Alberta only.

Follow These Steps:

- Read through relevant information in this handout and on the website, to make sure an Assistance 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 Assistance 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.

If we approve you for an Assistance Dog, please keep in mind 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 should we feel it would be more suitable or appropriate.



We work towards providing you with a dog that matches your needs, activity level, and personality. Please be aware this can be a lengthy process due to high demand for assistance dogs and our goal is 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, our waiting lists can be lengthy due to high demand, **and it could take two or three years before we have a finished dog for you.** Please keep us informed of any changes during this waiting 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
- advising our office if any pets are added to your family
- advising our office if your needs have changed

We'd also like to know if you have applied to any other assistance dog providers. Applying to other providers won't affect your application with us, but if you receive a dog from another provider, we need to know as you would then be removed from our waiting list.

Team Training

Once a match is made, DWW will give you 4-6 weeks' notice to prepare. We require the primary handler of the dog attend team training in Edmonton and/or your home. (Guide – 3 week duration, Service – 2 week duration, Autism/Facility – 1 week duration, Companion – 3 day duration).

DWW works directly with a local hotel that provides discounted accommodations for the duration of Team Training. Applicants are responsible for paying for their own food and accommodations during Team Training. Applicants are also responsible for paying a \$250 team training fee that provides them with all of the equipment for their dog.

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 (if applicable)
- connecting with a graduate family who currently uses one of our assistance dog.

At the end of Team Training, the handler/dog team will undergo the Assistance Dogs International (ADI) Public Access Test (if applicable). During the Public Access Test, we will assess your dog handling and problem solving skills, and your ability to safely use an assistance dog in public. These skills will be developed during Team Training, and we will work with you and the 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 (if applicable). 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 Assistance Dog?

Not everybody needs to have their dog accompany them into public places. Some applicants 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 assistance dogs provide, just within the home.

Feel free to contact us with any questions you may have about our companion dogs or 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 Assistance Dog, there are certain requirements that must continue to be met. Having an assistance 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 an assistance 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 you have any questions or issues you need help with.

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

DWW maintains ownership of the dog. If we feel our trained Assistance 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 may cost approximately \$1000-\$1500 per year to care for an assistance dog. Regular expenses include:

- Dog Food — we recommend suitable, high quality foods. Budget for approximately \$75 per month.
- Regular Veterinary Care — this includes check-ups and regular vaccinations, etc. Your vet may offer a discount for assistance dogs. We estimate the cost of vet care to be approximately \$300 per year for healthy dog maintenance.
- Replacement Equipment — this includes packs, leashes, and collars. DWW can provide these items for you at cost. Budget: \$50-\$100 per year.
- Toys and Treats — approximately \$150 per year.
- Pet Insurance — in order that you are able to plan for the dog's health care needs, **we require you to purchase Pet Insurance**. The cost may vary from \$25-\$50 per month, depending on your deductible. We are happy to provide you with additional information if desired.

Grooming, Health and Veterinarian Care

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

Having an assistance dog in the home means a little extra work, just like owning a pet dog. Clients need to be prepared to deal with day-to-day actions such as shedding, dog hair in the house, drool, and be comfortable picking up the dog's waste. Grooming and maintaining the assistance 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 to ensure there is nothing amiss with the dog. This will also help with shedding. Cleaning ears, teeth, bathing, checking eyes and trimming toenails are also important factors our clients 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 assistance dog, the longer they can work. We expect recipients to adhere to our feeding guidelines and keep the 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 ensure the dog has a veterinarian checkup at least once a year, and all vaccinations are kept up to date. It is important to have a veterinarian you can trust. We would be happy to make suggestions regarding veterinarian care in your area.



Continued Practice of Skills

In order that your assistance dog continues to work effectively, we expect recipients to continue practicing skills the dog has learned in training. Unlike a human assistant or mechanical assistive device, the effectiveness of an assistance dog depends greatly on the handler; a willingness to be firm, full of praise and consistency is essential. An assistance 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 they can continue to meet the family’s needs.

The life of an assistance 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.

Traveling with an Assistance Dog

Traveling with an assistance dog requires some extra effort and research beforehand. This includes:

- ensuring 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 you assistance dog, we would prefer they were left with a trusted friend or family member while you are gone. **Our assistance dogs are never to be left in a boarding kennel.**

Fundraising

DWW relies solely on the fundraising efforts of our Staff, Volunteers, Clients and the General Public in order to continue providing quality trained assistance dogs at almost no cost to families. The cost to breed, raise, train, place and provide follow up care for each dog is approximately \$40,000. If you are able to assist us in this important work, we would be happy to discuss fundraising opportunities with you. DWW Staff are available to assist in planning and executing your fundraising efforts. However, it is important to understand you are not required to raise money for DWW, and your inability to assist in this regard will not play a part whatsoever in assessing your application, or in the decision to place an assistance dog with you.