



DOGS WITH WINGS
ASSISTANCE DOG SOCIETY

Autism Service 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.

Dogs with Wings (DWW) is an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited school, which provides highly trained Assistance Dogs at a cost of \$1.00 to individuals and social service agencies.

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.assistedoginternational.org/>



Assistance Dogs
INTERNATIONAL
ACCREDITED MEMBER



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Overview of Autism Service Dog Program

Our Autism Service Dog Program is for children between the ages of 3 and 10 years old where our training techniques are tailored to provide greater safety and independence for children with Autism. Our dogs provide sensory regulation, companionship, assistance with sleep disturbances, stress and anxiety disruption, and social facilitation with others.

Autism Service Dogs are taught a variety of skills, which may include:

- Essential house manners
- How to behave in public
- How to walk with a child tethered to them or with the child holding a handle
- How to follow the cues of the handler
- How to anchor themselves if the child attempts to wander or run away (subject to client weight restriction)
- Tasks taught to a traditional Service Dog can be taught to Autism Service Dogs as well, if needed

Autism Service Dogs can provide:

- Sensory regulation
- Companionship
- Help with sleep disturbance
- Anxiety reduction
- Social/peer facilitation with others
- Safety and independence

Application Process

- Read through relevant information in this handout and on the website, to make sure an Autism Service Dog is right for you
- Download and fill out a *Letter of Intent*
- Should you meet the necessary criteria, our Client Services team will invite you to fill out an *Application*
- Use the checklist in the application form to ensure 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 may then be contacted and invited to take part in a *preliminary interview*
- DWW will conduct a final assessment on your eligibility to receive a dog from one of our programs, and you will be contacted with the final outcome
- Should DWW approve your child for an Autism Service Dog, DWW will place you on our wait list. **This approval is conditional* DWW will continue to assess your needs while you are in line for an Autism Service Dog, as your needs or situation may change, or our ability to satisfy your needs may change*



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DWW aims to provide your child with a dog that matches your family's needs, activity level and personalities. Please understand that this can be a lengthy process, due to high demand for Autism 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.

Due to high demand, **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
- Notifying us know if any pets are added to your family
- Contacting us if your needs have changed

We would also like to know if you have applied to any other Assistance Dog providers. Applying to other Assistance Dog providers will not 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 Service Dog Applicants

There are 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 between the ages of 3 and 10 years old at the 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 typically do not attend the entire Team Training, but we may ask that the child attends certain public outings if/when available.** We require that at least one parent, the main handler of the dog (but both parents are preferable), attend a week-long training session at our main office location.

We work directly with a local hotel that provides discounted accommodation for the duration of Team Training. Team Training occurs at DWW and in public places. Parents are responsible for paying for their own food and accommodations during Team Training.



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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
- After 4-6 weeks, an off-leash dog park session will be held

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 an Autism 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.

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 should DWW feel the dog is not being well cared for, their optimal weight is not being maintained, or they are not being used for their intended purpose, DWW can decide to remove the dog from the home.

DWW will continue to provide ongoing support after a dog has been matched with a family, for the working life 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.



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Part of your obligation, as a recipient of a DWW Autism Service Dog, is to provide regular progress reports. DWW will also conduct home visits and 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.

There is also the possibility of the Autism 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 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 most cases this is 2 days of training.
- 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 an Autism Service Dog.
- The presence of an Autism 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. Regular veterinary care: this includes check-ups and regular immunizations, etc. Your vet may offer a discount for Assistance 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. DWW can provide these items for you at cost. Budget: \$50-\$100/year
- Toys and treats: approximately \$150/year.



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- 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 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 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 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 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. A dog that has sufficient work-life balance will help to increase the longevity of its working career and overall life.

Traveling with an Autism 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.



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- 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. If a client is not able to take a dog with them travelling, DWW will provide boarding from our in-house boarders.

Fundraising

Dogs with Wings relies solely on the fundraising efforts of our staff, volunteers and clients in order to continue supplying quality trained assistance 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.