



**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, valued approximately at \$40,000 each, at a cost of only \$1 to individuals and an annual fee for social service agencies. DWW is reliant on the goodwill of the community to fund its Assistance Dog programs and receives no sustainable government funding.

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 placed with a client. More information about our volunteer programs may be found on our website: [www.dogswithwings.ca](http://www.dogswithwings.ca).

For more information on Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and the importance of accredited dogs: <http://www.assistedogsinternational.org/>





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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 foster self-regulation 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 can provide:

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

### Criteria for Autism Service Dog Applicants

- Applicants must have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder at the time of application
- Applicants must be between 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 that bonding with a dog would help improve their wellbeing, and that they would be likely to bond with the Autism Service Dog.
- Applicants will **not** be prevented or alerted to bolting/eloping by the Autism Service Dog.
- Applicants will **not** be tethered to, or otherwise physically attached to or restrained by the Autism Service Dog besides voluntarily holding onto a handle or leash.
- The Autism Service Dog is the only canine living in the home
- Families must be able to meet the emotional, physical, and financial needs of the Autism Service Dog and offer a stable home environment

### Do You Really Need an Autism Service Dog?

Not every child will benefit from an Autism Service Dog, or have their dog accompany them into public places. Some families find that our Companion Dog adoption 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.



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## Application Process

- **Research** - Read through relevant information in this handout, to make sure an Autism Service Dog is right for you
- **Submit** an application. This application will then be reviewed, and you will be notified if you qualify for this program.
- **Interview** – If you qualify for this program, you will be invited to interview with our Client Services department to discuss your individual needs.
- **Selection Decision** – You will be notified if you are added to our Waitlist for an Autism Service Dog.

**Conditional Approval** is granted after the interview is completed. Situations, needs, and circumstances continually change, as well as our ability to satisfy your needs. We ask that you stay in contact with our office to provide any updates, news and relevant information. Please note a conditional approval does not guarantee an Autism Service Dog will be placed with you. DWW reserves the right to close an application at any time.

Please keep us informed of any changes during this time that may affect your application. This includes:

- Your contact information has changed
- You have moved or there has been a change in living arrangements
- You have added pets to your family
- Your needs have changed
- You have received an Assistance Dog from another organization

## Getting your Autism Service Dog

### Team Training

Once a match is made, DWW will give you 4-6 weeks' notice to prepare for training with your new Autism Service Dog. Team Training consists of lectures for the child's parents, and hands-on training for the child, parents, and dog. Team Training is tailored to each individual client's needs, and an in-depth schedule will be sent to you prior to your Team Training date. We require both parents (if applicable) to be present for team training.

We work directly with a local hotel that provides discounted accommodation for the duration of Team Training, if required. Team Training occurs at DWW, in your frequented public spaces, and in your home. Clients are responsible for paying for their own food and accommodations during Team Training. Team Training will include:



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- Bonding with your Assistance Dog, 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 assess your dog handling, 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>

### **Post Placement Expectations**

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, they are not being used for their intended purpose, or the client has breached DWW policies, DWW can 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.

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.

### **Autism Service Dogs 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, transitions, anxiety, and acting 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:



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- There must be a full-time aide present to take on the role of handler while the dog is at school. Aide(s) must attend Team Training.
- We will assess if the dog needs to accompany the child to school. The dog must be placed in a family for at least 6 months before we consider this.
- A School Protocol Information Package will be given to parents to help pave the smooth arrival of an Autism Service Dog.
- An Autism Service Dog at school will likely attract more attention than your child is used to receiving.
- 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 \$1,500-\$2,500 per year to care for an Autism Service Dog. Regular expenses include:

- **Application to DWW: \$50** (one-time fee)
- **Team Training: \$300** (one-time fee to cover initial dog supplies & equipment)
- **Dog food: \$60-80/month.** We recommend suitable, high-quality foods.
- **Regular veterinary care: \$300 - \$500/year.** May include check-ups, regular immunizations, etc. Your vet may offer a discount for Assistance Dogs.
- **Replacement equipment: \$50-\$100/year.** This includes gear, leashes, and collars. DWW can provide these items for you at cost.
- **Toys and treats: \$150/year.**
- **Pet Insurance: \$50-\$100/month.** Although not a requirement, we strongly recommend getting pet insurance.

### **Grooming, Health, and Veterinary 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 regularly.

Applicants need to be prepared to handle shedding and hair in the house, drool, and be comfortable cleaning up after their dog. Grooming and maintaining the Autism Service Dog's appearance is an important step in the daily care for a dog.

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 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. 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 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 preparation and research. 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 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 to continue supplying quality trained Assistance Dogs at no cost to families. It costs 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 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.

For more information on how to get involved in fundraising, contact [supportdogs@dogswithwings.ca](mailto:supportdogs@dogswithwings.ca) or check out our website <https://dogswithwings.ca/helping-us/donation-programs/>