



**SERVICE DOG
TRAINING**



Considerations When Applying for a Service or Assistance Dog

What do you want the dog to do for you?

There are many things a dog can do, but there are also many things they cannot. When considering a Service/Assistance dog, make a list of the things you want a dog to do for you, and then consider if the list is reasonable. Some tasks may be easy to teach, others may take many months of practice. Some tasks that you might wish for may not be a teachable element. One thing you can't expect from a dog is to change your emotions, for instance if you are feeling sad to make you happy. The dog may have this affect on you but this is not something they can be responsible for and it would be an unacceptable expectation. Talk over your task list with your family, with CUSP and with your Specialist Trainer.

Other than helping you with daily tasks and companionship what other affect will a Service dog have on or in your life?

Does your family/spouse/partner/flat mate approve of this decision?

The people you live with will understandably have some opinions about adding a dog to the household. If you live with a flat mate who does not want a dog around, you may be able to get a new flat mate or change accommodation, but your spouse or partner is a different matter. Do not underestimate any resistance to having a dog **in** the home, as a service dog lives with you 24 hrs a day. To do so may leave you and your dog open to very difficult situations.

Is the dog for a child, and are there other children who may want to be involved with the dog? How will the dog fit into the daily schedule? Who will supervise training? Who will be ultimately responsible for the dog?

Allergies may also be an issue, but this might be overcome by getting a hypoallergenic breed of dog unless the allergies are very severe.

Have you considered your friends?

You may lose friends over a decision to use a Service/Assistance /Companion dog. Not everyone feels comfortable around dogs. Friends may not understand why you are choosing to use a Service dog instead of other assistive devices. Your friends may not want you to have the dog in their homes or even around them. Talk to your friends before you decide to get a Service dog and see the affect it may have on your social life. You may decide that the benefits of using a Service dog are more important than keeping your friends who don't agree with your decision, but it is good to be aware of the potential implications.

Are you ready for the greatly increased public attention? You will draw attention to yourself (and your disability) with a Service dog.

A Service dog attracts attention, both to the dog and to you. This can really change how people perceive you, especially if your disability is invisible. By obtaining a Service dog, you will openly label yourself as having a medical disability. People who were not aware of your circumstances or did not consciously consider you to be disabled will suddenly have it drawn to their attention, and you may find that their perception of you changes when you get a Service dog.

You will also find that the many members of the general public will want to stop and talk to you about your dog and sometimes also about your disability. This can be constant and annoying. Small children will chase your dog and try to pat it or even hug it. If your dog is larger, small children may try to climb on it and ride it. A Service dog is probably not a good option for someone that cannot tolerate a lot of public attention. However if you like meeting new people your dog can a big bonus and gain you many "introductions".

One way around this is advised the public that you are the 'trainer' and are training the dog. This may redress the focus away from you and back towards the dog and because this *is* a DIY training program, where we help to train *you* to train *your dog* this is perfectly acceptable.

You may be criticized by people both in and out of the Service dog community for choosing to train your own dog. The Service dog community is resistant to owner trainers. They cite reasons which include the stability or temperament of the dog, the quality of the training the dog receives, and the validity of the partnership of the dog and handler that has not been evaluated by a trainer. Obtaining a dog from CUSP and continuing the training through a Specialist Training Centre such as Service Dog Training, invalidates these claims but, as an owner-trainer, you must still be willing to defend your right to self train. For this to be well received, your dog needs to be trained at least to the level of a dog from an organisation that trains Service dogs. Any dog that causes a scene, or acts aggressively or unacceptably increases problems for those with well trained dogs. It is *your* responsibility to make sure your dog does not reflect poorly on the industry nor make more difficulties for other Service dog users. If you cannot accept this responsibility and properly train your dog, you should not have a dog in public. If you are not willing to stand up for your rights as an owner-trainer, you should not attempt to train your own dog.

Can you handle confrontation?

Even if you get to the level where your dog is a fully accredited Service dog, some people will deny you access to places you have every right to enter. You will also have people tell you they don't think dogs should be in public places, or you may even be accosted by an animal liberationist for enslaving an animal. These confrontations can be emotionally exhausting and hurtful. They can also be time consuming. Are you able to stand up for your rights to business owners and insist on access? Will you feel totally intimidated by people of a different political persuasion? This is a very real and unfortunate part of Service dog use. If you are not able to deal with this, you probably should not get a Service dog.

What are some of the responsibilities of dog ownership?

Financial responsibility comes with dog ownership.

Any dog is expensive. Medical emergencies may arise and those can be very expensive. The cost of maintaining a Service dog must be factored into your budget. It will cost approximately between \$2.00-\$3.00 per day. In addition there are health costs which include regular worming (every three months) and an annual health check with the vet.

CUSP requires you take out a health care insurance plan for your dog and that will add a couple of more dollars per week to your family budget. Further costs include leads, bedding, and service coat/jacket, toys,

grooming equipment, shampoo and council fees. (We would calculate that you budget at least \$100 per month). If you are not financially stable, a Service dog (or a dog at all) might not be the best move.

Check your local council regulations regarding the housing and keeping of dogs? This does need to be explored, particularly if you already own other dogs. Some council's restrictions are severe, others are more accommodating. All will require some form of licence.

Are you ready for the long-term commitment that comes with dog ownership?

Dog ownership is a commitment.

You will have a dog as a worker for probably 8-10 years if you are lucky. On retirement you must decide if you will keep the dog or find a new and suitable retirement home for the dog. What will you do if the dog develops behaviour problems or health issues and must be retired early? Will you be able to emotionally endure the eventual death of your dog? These are all things you should consider before you get a Service dog (or any dog for that matter).

What are the responsibilities of Service dog ownership?

Do you have the time and patience to work with a Service dog both in the initial phases of the partnership and the ongoing training that will continue during the dog's life?

It can take up to six months to become comfortable using a Service dog, and some feel that it can take up to two years before you and your Service dog are working smoothly as a team. Getting a Service dog, regardless of whether it comes as a fully trained Service dog from another organisation, or through CUSP for you to train under further under supervision, is a huge transition. Initially you will spend a lot of time working with the dog, earning the dog's trust and learning to work comfortably with a constant canine companion, learning to understand and "read" your dog and learning to work with your dog in public.

Later, the amount of time you spend on dedicated training may decrease, but a certain amount of ongoing training is necessary during the working life of the dog. If this training is not maintained, your dog's skills will deteriorate. A change in working patterns can even cause some dogs to develop behavioural problems.

Training is ongoing.

Training your dog to be a Service Dog is not something that can be done in a weekend or even in a month. It will be an ongoing process continuing for the whole life of the dog. However the most intense training will be in the early months/years. There will be days when you will feel you are not progressing and in fact you may think the whole process is going backwards. These days are normal as long as they only happen occasionally. Training requires consistent, daily effort even when starting with a dog that has already had significant obedience and socialisation schooling. If you do not have the time to do this, or you are not willing to spend time working and practicing with your dog on a daily basis, you may not be a candidate for a Service dog. You may decide a companion dog a more appropriate choice.

You need to understand the basics of dog training before starting to train your Service dog.

It is important to use humane, positive training techniques when training any dog. It is also important to prepare for your training lesson, so you know what you are going to teach and how you are going to impart the learning to the dog. Improper training techniques can at best decrease the dog's performance reliability

and at the very worst can turn your dog into a dangerous, unpredictable animal. A Service dog must be able to demonstrate a very high standard of behaviour in both public behaviour and task performance.

If you do not already know the basics of current best practice training methods, you should seek professional assistance and instruction before attempting any training. We recommend Service Dog Training in Melbourne, who runs training programs nationally, via Skype. www.servicedogtraining.com.au

A Service dog is still a dog.

Even the best trained dog in the world will not be a perfect dog. If you are not able to handle imperfection from your dog, you definitely should not train a dog, and probably should not work with a Service dog at all. While Service dogs are highly trained, they are nonetheless animals, and will make mistakes, have good days and bad days and may even have “off days”. A person who struggles with the ups and downs of dog training will not be an effective trainer and may compound the situation. If occasional errors that all dogs make cannot be tolerated, they should not work with a Service dog at all.

You should be willing to seek outside help if you need it. If at any point you realize that you are not succeeding with your dog, you must be willing to discuss this with your Specialist Trainer or seek CUSP’s help. This help could come in a variety of forms and it could be as simple as a telephone call to talk over the problem. If you are not the sort of person who is able to ask for help, even when you need it, you should not attempt to train your own Service dog.

Expectations that dogs will call for help, like Lassie & Rin Tin Tin are possibly unrealistic where they have been elevated into heroes possessing skills beyond the capabilities of most dogs.

Service dog training is a commitment and ongoing, but results and outcomes will vary and may be affected by the breed, age of the dog, the drives of the dog, training and delivery of the training, consistency in application and may other factors. Like humans, dogs are individuals and may or may not rise to the occasion. All we can do is help them get there.

Be realistic about expectations. A dog can never replace a babysitter and/or a respite care giver. Often a good monitoring device does a better job!

A Service dog is a big responsibility.

You will be legally responsible for the behaviour of your dog at all times. If your dog develops a behaviour problem, it will be your responsibility to make contact with your Specialist Trainer or CUSP for help. You are also responsible to maintain your dog's training at an acceptable level. You will probably be required by your Specialist Trainer to complete an annual training review.

Having decided that you are ready for a Service dog, here are some further questions to consider.

What breed of dog should I get?

There is no one breed of dog that is a better Service dog than other breeds. However, with this in mind, it is best to choose dogs from breeds that have a working heritage and/or from families that have good work ethics. Breeds of dog used are frequently **Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever and German Shepherd Dogs. The Collie and Standard Poodle** are also being increasingly used. CUSP’s core breed is Collies with both the smooth (short coat) and rough (long coat) Collies. Review the benefits of Collies as a breed on our website under About Us, the link is Why Collies, - A Dozen Good Reasons.

We are able to source other breeds if this is your requirement, however our research and quality assurance programs that cover our Collie breeding program do not cover other breeds.

People have had success working with breeds such as Pit-bull, Doberman and Rottweiler. The thing to be aware of is that **certain breeds evoke strong negative public feelings** (especially Pit-bull). In addition, these dogs may show over protective behaviour in case of a 'melt down' or similar, e.g. not allowing assistance to come to a person's aid.

CUSP may take extra time in sourcing some breeds due to finding a candidate who fills all the requirements of a potential Service dog. This could greatly increase your waiting time.

Even though many mixed breeds can make excellent Service dogs we do not offer mixes or crossbreeds, due to the uncertainty of their genetic makeup, which often makes training, health and even size issues unpredictable.

Whilst some may already have a dog, all dogs entering a Service dog program should successfully pass a socialisation and temperament test. All involved with the program will maintain this standard and a client's dog will undergo an assessment to check the aptitude and suitability for this specialist role.

Should your dog not meet the minimum standards and be a breed with a high social acceptance, you may opt to withdraw your application, and obtain an additional dog to be trained as your Service dog.

From where should I get my dog and what sort of dog?

We primarily seek dogs that are healthy, with the right temperament and suitable for the tasks you want the dog to do, plus it is a socially acceptable breed, so there are quite some opportunities.

Pounds at times have great dogs that are available for adoption because of unfortunate reasons that are not behaviour related. E.g., people downscale, death in a family, families expand etc. This may mean that a temperamentally great dog may become available. However there are also many dogs that are in the pound because they are no longer wanted, have issues, either in health and/or behaviour.

CUSP spends significant resources in using genetics and very stringent training to deliver the right dog for the right person, and obviously there are costs associated with this very important preliminary work.

A good Service dog is BOMB proof, and restores to its 'natural behavioural settings' in a very short time. This is very important as the dog needs to be able to cope (or learn to cope) with any situation, noise or visual stimuli, crowds or confined spaces etc.

A rescue dog brings risks in this area, as the history of the dog may not be known, so be careful. In addition, health risks exist as limited history of care and preventative treatment may be available.

Within breed groups there are also specialist re-homing services, normally operated by and for a breeders group to protect the breed and ensure that re-homing is done to the best possible homes. Often this may include more mature dogs, than puppies and dogs of about 12-18 months of age are terrific candidates, and being a breed related group, health and temperament information is more readily available.

Similar risks apply to puppies – their parents may be great, however puppies are an unknown, and therefore potentially a high risk gamble. Puppies need to progress through the puppy and juvenile periods, may be silly at times, push boundaries and may not make the mark.

The International Association of Assistance Dog Partners (IAADP) believe that around 30% of puppies out of well bred adults will make the mark to become a guide, hearing, or service dog. This is why CUSP dogs use a geneticist to help with the breeding ensuring that risks of health, and behavioural imbalances are minimized.

Another source to consider is dogs from the 'Show Ring' that failed to make the grade in that world, but are genetically and behaviourally very balanced. These dogs have reasonable social skills and are normally sound of health. The cost associated with getting a dog here may be higher than through a Pound.

Do you need a dog to perform retrieval based tasks?

Most dogs, with enough training, can be taught to retrieve - not just breeds with "retriever" in their name! However, some dogs love to retrieve and do it naturally or can be easily trained to do it. If you need a dog that can do a lot of retrieving, it would be in your best interest to make sure you point that out to us.

How active do you expect to be with your Service dog?

Your activity level and expected daily routine is an important consideration. Do you work at an office job where your dog will be sleeping under your desk for hours at a time? Do you have an active job where you are up and about for most of the day? Dogs are as individual in their activity levels as people. If you have a dog that needs frequent stimulation and activity and you sit behind a desk all day, the dog will not be happy. However, if you have a dog that enjoys his naps but is still ready to go when the day is over, then you have the perfect office companion. In the same way, if you are very active and your dog is not, you will find yourself dragging your dog along everywhere you go, and no one will be happy with that! Keep in mind though that all dogs need some level of physical activity to stay healthy and happy, and if that cannot be provided that either yourself or by arranging for your dog to get exercise you may want to reconsider getting a Service dog.

What kind of personality do you like in a dog?

Dogs are individuals, so the success of your partnership depends on the compatibility of you and your dog.

Some dogs are sensitive and responsive and are usually easily corrected and want your approval and praise. They work because they want to make you happy, and they are satisfied when you are satisfied. This is often (but certainly not always) a good type of dog for a first time dog owner, or a sensitive, quiet person who does not want to try and "talk" an independent dog into working. At the other end of the scale is a hard dog. They are stubborn, independent and self-motivated. They can be frustrating to train. They work because they want to, and because they like their jobs. They like praise, but don't necessarily need it. They are happy when they feel they have done a good job. Hard dogs are often the best dog for an experienced owner/trainer, or a handler that is more outgoing, loud and assertive or someone that wants a self-motivated independent thinker in a dog. Realistically, most dogs fall somewhere between the two extremes. Look critically at your preferences, personality and training experience as you do a selection process.

Like the difference between hard and soft, some dogs are of independent characters while others are more social creatures. Most dogs will have times when they need both their own space and close companionship. Some dogs prefer to be by your side at all times. These are the dogs that always want to be in the same room as you and share the bed with you at night. They are cuddly and close and crave attention. Some people like this, others find this really annoying. An independent type will wander off the second they are off duty and find a quiet corner to sleep. These dogs definitely need time alone to be dogs, and will not be happy if showered with constant attention. These dogs will not be begging for your attention and are usually pretty happy on the floor or even in another room or area at night. Some people really like having a more independent dog while others feel neglected or even insulted if the dog prefers solitude to their company. When evaluating preference between independent or social dog, take into account the preferences of other family members or house mates. If you like an extremely social dog, but others do not, it might be best to compromise.

Breed range to consider.

Whatever the breed, it is imperative that the dog comes from sound breeding, one who cares about the dogs they deliver and not just the money. Dogs from pet stores and/or puppy farms, the internet and papers like the Trading Post are to be avoided at all costs!

The IAADP list following breeds as 'universally acceptable' provided the dog has the right aptitudes and personality:

Labrador Retriever	German Shepherd*	Australian Shepherd*	Samoyed*
Golden Retriever	Lab x Golden Retriever	Flat or Curly coated Retriever	Springer Spaniel
Smooth Coated Collie	Labradoodle	Standard Poodle	German Pointer
Rough Coated Collie	Groodle		
* Ensure source is a reputable breeder			

When considering a dog, consider the size, where it will live - in an apartment or house, size of the yard, be required for mobility assistance (support when getting up or walking). Think about the longevity of the breed as some giant breeds have a very short lifespan. Medium sized dogs have a lifespan into their teens, larger dogs maybe 10-12 years. Think about the coat care, how much grooming is needed, how much clipping is required for the dog to cope well with the Australian climate? Some people are very concerned about doggy odour, and some breeds have more of it than others. This may cause irritation in a relationship or even with a very sensitive person. A Samoyed may be the best option here.

Finally please consider hereditary breed traits – dogs that are bred for guarding will have those genes – and whilst we can work on 'nurturing' our dog breeds through training, 'nature' can only be managed and not suppressed. If kids are involved and people with behavioural fluctuations this is a breed group to avoid.

Gender – Females are traditionally smaller, and when spayed are equal to a male dog in terms of competency as far as work and learning is concerned.

Age – ideally we start with dogs that are around 12 months old – as the bonding between handler and dog is the crucial base to a good service dog. However dogs between 18 months and 3 years are a very good prospect, remembering the older the dog the better the chance they will be more stable. However we need to look at the useful life of our dogs – most service dogs get retired between eight and ten years old.

These are not the only issues that need to be considered, but this document might help focus your ideas and expectations.

Please do not hesitate to discuss any questions you might have with CUSP or SDT.