



## NEWSLETTER #1

### IS A SERVICE DOG RIGHT FOR ME AND DO I QUALIFY FOR ONE?

First things first. You **MUST** be disabled to warrant having a service dog.

If you are not disabled or your disability does not interfere with one or more of your daily activities, then under the ADA (US Federal Law) you do not qualify for a service dog. The whole point of a service dog is to physically mitigate a disability. You may already know this but, we always like to cover the bases.

If you qualify to have a service dog, then you need to decide what tasks (or actions) you'd like your service dog to perform to physically mitigate (or ease) your disability.

"Service Animals are not emotional support or comfort dogs, because providing emotional support or comfort is not a task related to a person's disability." - ADA.gov

Emotional Support Animal's (also known as ESA's) are not covered by ADA and do not have public access rights. For example, petting a dog is not a task. Things that are considered tasks are medication reminder, medical alert (diabetes, cardiac, panic attacks etc.), behavior interruption, assisting you after a seizure are all classified as common tasks. Once you have a list of tasks, there's 2 routes you can take with training your dog on how to perform these tasks: Owner training or Program training.

## **Owner Training:**

1. It is your responsibility to procure a dog and train it for service work. This could mean getting a puppy, adopting a rescue or perhaps train a dog you already have if that dog can handle service dog training. If you are considering a dog that currently resides with you, it would be beneficial to have the dog evaluated to see if has the potential to be a service dog.
2. A lot of owner trainer teams enlist the help of professional trainers that specialize in service dog training to help supplement their progress such as teaching tasks or solidifying public access work. Please keep in mind that it can take up to 2 years to fully train a service dog. If enlisting the help of a service dog trainer, they may require a doctor's note/prescription of a service dog officiating that you are disabled and advise that your quality of life would benefit from the treatment of a service dog. The reason for this is because training a dog for service work is a liability for the trainers. Service dogs are classified as medical equipment, same as a cane or wheelchair.

## **Program Training:**

1. You will need to search for and interview different organizations that specialize in service dog training and decide which is best for you.
2. There are many reputable organizations out there that will train a service dog for you and sometimes may even have service dogs that are already partially trained that may fit your needs. If so, they may only require the handler to provide or participate in additional and bonding training for your specific needs as not all disabilities are the same.

## **What about Certifications? How do you register your service dog?**

### **Answer: You don't.**

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, those sites that pop up claiming to offer registrations and certifications are scams. There is no legal protection for those certificates or registry cards and even using one to 'prove' or gain access is a federal offense. The only thing that makes a service dog, a service dog, is the rigorous task training they go through and their ability to perform in all public settings.

In many states, putting a service dog vest on a dog who has not undergone this specialized task training is highly illegal and punishable as a misdemeanor or felony and may result in thousands of dollars in fines and possible jail time depending on what happened while out in public while claiming the dog is a task trained service dog. Some program training organizations will give their graduates a certificate of completion and an ID simply as proof it passed their program but, this documentation cannot be used to gain access in public settings. Using any of these items as a form of 'proof' is illegal.

Making the decision to get a service dog requires the careful consideration of several factors so, let's explore some key points to help you determine if a service dog is the right fit for you.

1. **Financial Responsibility:** Owning a service dog involves additional expenses, such as high-quality food, grooming, and regular veterinary care, gear, training equipment, even a trainer to assist if choosing to owner train. It's important to evaluate your budget and ensure you can comfortably meet these needs.
2. **Physical Ability:** Taking care of a service dog requires physical stamina, as you will be responsible for activities like daily walks, exercise, feeding, the actual training and so much more. When it comes to owner training, you will need to be involved even more so to train your dog to be able to assist you in your daily life. If you cannot physically handle having a dog, then it might not be the right option for treatment.
3. **Public Access Challenges:** Having a service dog means navigating public spaces while adhering to access rights and handling guidelines. It's essential to be prepared for potential encounters with individuals who may not understand or respect your rights. You will experience access issues and possibly be denied entry into public facilities. Especially so if you have an invisible disability. You may be approached by random strangers questioning your dog and your need for one. This will happen to you as it does to most handlers, especially if your dog is for psychological disabilities (or invisible).
4. **Emotional Considerations:** The presence of a service dog often draws attention, which can sometimes lead to harassment or uncomfortable situations.

Dealing with public scrutiny and managing anxiety associated with these scenarios is an important aspect to consider. Those who have severe anxiety must consider this seriously. Having a service dog can be useful for individuals on the autism spectrum, as the service dog serves as a bridge for communication and encourages socialization. Opposite to this, there are those who do not wish to socialize or interact with the public. Unfortunately, in many cases, you will be forced to do so in some form or fashion and will need to have the ability to speak up and advocate for yourself and your service dog. Although you do not owe anyone explanations, words will still have to be spoken. Consider what type of situation this will put you in: will socializing cause an attack that could have been avoided?

**What is the average success rate of the prospect I chose even with a hired trainer?**

**Statistically, there is a higher fail rate than success rate.**

This is why researching your breed of choice and equally important the breeder in the initial stages of your search for a prospect is essential in setting yourself and your pup up for success. You should always require to see the lines health testing and OFA's. These tests can tell you a lot about your prospect. You want to set yourself up for success from the beginning.

A lot of dogs do well with training in the home and their environment but then shut down in public. Any form of protection, aggression towards you or anyone else or any animal is an automatic failure. Some dogs just start off with the potential and soon become bored of the 'work' and show that their mind just isn't in it. Then the decision some may have to make is, do you keep the failed dog, or do you re-home and start all over again? Many owner trainers go through this process, more than people like to admit. Some will even ignore the signs their dog shows they're not right for the job and continue to work them because they cannot afford to start the process over again with a new prospect. This scenario creates a disservice to the dog and the handler in the end and could cause serious risk to the public or put the handler in a dangerous situation over all.

We encourage you to reflect on these factors and think about how they align with your current lifestyle and needs. It's crucial to make an informed decision as it will have a significant impact on both you and your future service dog.

We would love to hear your thoughts on this topic. If you have any questions, comments, or would like to share your own experiences, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. Our team is here to support you every step of the way.

Thank you for joining us on this exciting journey. Stay tuned for our upcoming newsletters as we delve deeper into the fascinating world of service dogs.

Warm regards,

The Pup-Cessories Crafts Team