

Assistance Dogs

by: Lianna B. Jones

A dog that works for the blind, deaf, lame, and other disabled persons is an Assistance Dog. These dogs are trained to do whatever their handler's disability requires them to do. Some dogs are trained by professional trainers, while others learn from chosen inmates in prison. A lot of times the inmates improve in socialization skills and in behavior.

Dogs in training who don't pass certain tests are not eligible to become a service dog and dropped from training. Sometimes citizens are able to keep these dogs.

While it is not allowed for pets to enter most stores and other public places, service dogs are almost always permitted to enter for the assistance of the disabled person. There are many different kinds of assistance dogs.

The most famous kind is the Seeing Eye Dog or Guide Dogs. But there are also other dogs that help the disabled, such as Hearing Dogs, Psychiatric Service Dogs, Seizure Response Dogs, Mobility Assistance Dogs, Children's Assistance Dogs, and Diabetic Alert Dogs.

The Guide Dog

Guide Dogs are made for the blind and are equipped to help their masters out by being their 'eyes' for them. The first guide dog schools were built in Germany, during WW1. The dogs were purposed to help the returning soldiers who had been blinded in battle. Golden Retrievers, German Shepherds, and Labradors are usually chosen to be guide dogs. However, other frequent Guide Dog cross-breeds are the Goldendoodle (golden retriever and poodle cross) and Labradoodle (Labrador and poodle cross). Usually the Guide Dog will wear a leash and harness and a sign which cautions people not to pet him, because he is working.

The Hearing Dog

The Hearing Dog is trained to help people who are deaf. They assist their master by notifying them of sounds like fire alarms, telephones, someone calling the person's name, etc. Training time for a hearing dog could be as little as three months, or as long as a year. The Hearing Dog might wear an orange leash and sometimes a cape/jacket to let people know that he is working.

The Psychiatric Service Dog

The Psychiatric Service Dog is trained to assist people with mental disabilities, such as autism, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders, and others. A Psychiatric Service Dog may be trained to remind a person to take their medication or to help stop repetitious behaviors that might cause injury. They can also lead people away from hectic, stressful places. They can retrieve objects, and also 'hold up' the person if he or she becomes dizzy. Organizations who train Psychiatric Service Dogs are always in need of dogs to train and give to people with their impairment.

The Seizure Response Dog

The Seizure Response Dog is trained to assist a person with epilepsy. They can be trained to call for help if needed, taking away possible unsafe things from the person, provide physical and emotional support, try to make its master wake up after a seizure, or blocking objects so that its master with absence seizures won't run into them. Sometimes a Seizure Response Dog, after a long period of time, can detect an impending seizure. Dogs who are being trained to become Seizure Response Dogs have to be perfect for the job. They must be capable of keeping control in any possible situation. It is difficult to train a dog to become a Seizure Response Dog, and even rare to obtain a dog who is fit for the job.

The Mobility Assistance Dog

The Mobility Assistance Dog is specially trained to do things to help a physically disabled person. These things include turning on light switches, opening and closing doors, picking up objects and taking them to the person, and sometimes even pulling a person in his or her wheelchair, depending on the weight of the dog. A different kind of Mobility Assistance Dog is trained to especially assist those who suffer from Parkinson's Disease, sometimes called "Walker Dogs." They help the person to keep his/her balance while walking, and even act as a support to hold the person up when he/she falls so that the person can recover position and balance. Sometimes a special harness made for pulling objects, such as wheelchairs, is worn by a Mobility Assistance Dog.

The Child's Assistance Dog

The Child's Assistance Dog is trained to especially help handicapped children. Loving Paws Assistance Dogs® was created to train dogs to help children with spinal cord injuries. They also help children who have Muscular Dystrophy (MD), Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, and others. For more information on how to get a Child's Assistance Dog from Loving Paws Assistance Dogs® go to their website, at www.lovingpaws.com.

The Diabetic Alert Dog

The Diabetic Alert Dog is trained to assist persons with Diabetes, usually Type 1. Diabetic Alert Dogs are trained to recognize and take action in the small scent changes that hypoglycemia (low blood glucose) creates in body chemistry, which humans cannot detect.

You may have heard the term "Service Dogs" more often rather than "Assistance Dogs." An actual Service Dog is a type of Assistance Dog that assists people in need other than the blind. There are many different kinds of Assistance Dogs, each being trained to do specific things according to the needs of a person. Assistance Dogs are wonderful to have if you are blind, deaf, diabetic, physically impaired, or have diseases such as Parkinson's disease, Muscular Dystrophy, or Epilepsy.