

Enhancing Independence

Service Dogs for  
Dysautonomia!



**What is a Service Dog?**

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# What is a Service Dog?

- A service dog is defined in the ADA as any dog that has been *Individually task trained* to mitigate an individual's disability.
- Different countries have different requirements, however in the USA the Americans With Disabilities Act (1990) protects the rights of disabled Americans to be accompanied by their trained service dogs.



# What is a Service Dog?



- A service dog can be for any disability in which a dog can be trained to preform tasks or work to mitigate.
  - Most common types of service dogs include:
    - Guide dogs
    - Mobility dogs
    - Seizure response/alert dogs
    - Autism dogs
    - Hearing dogs
    - Psychiatric Service Dogs
    - Diabetes Alert Dogs
- A service dog can be any breed.
  - Most common breeds of service dogs are labs, golden retrievers, poodles, and German shepherds.

# What is a Service Dog?

- There is no legally recognized certification or registration of Service Dogs in the United States.
- Service Dogs may often wear gear or identifying markers that they are a service dog but ID, harnesses, vests or badges are not required.
- Gate keepers may legally only ask two questions: Is this a service animal required for a disability? And what tasks has this animal been trained to perform.



# What is a Service Dog?



- A Service Dog must perform tasks or do work that the disabled handler cannot.
- A dog that provides comfort or companionship (ESA) as it's primary role is not a Service Dog and does not have public access rights.
- Service Dogs are allowed by federal law to accompany their disabled handlers anywhere the public is normally allowed to go
  - With the exception of sterile environments, the kitchens of restaurants, and anywhere where the dog's presence would constitute a fundamental alteration



# Who Qualifies to Have a Service Dog?

# Who Qualifies to have a Service Dog?

- In order to qualify for a service dog you must be disabled.
- The definition of disability varies by country, but in the United States, an individual with a disability is defined by the ADA as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.







**Service Dogs for Dysautonomia!**

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# Service Dogs for Dysautonomia!

- Most important thing to consider when thinking about adding a service dog to your life is that they are not a panacea.
- Becoming “6-legged” is a huge adjustment and is a lot of work. It is not for everyone. Especially in the case of dysautonomia which can be an invisible illness, a service dog will make your disability very visible and you will get a lot of unwanted attention.
- Beware of the “Lassie Effect”

My handler thinks I'm great, but they don't want to be stopped every 5 feet to answer questions about me. Like you, they just want to grab a gallon of milk and go home.

Psssst.



# Service Dogs for Dysautonomia!



- Service Dogs can do many things to assist people with disabling dysautonomia symptoms.
  - Wheelchair pulling
  - Object retrieval
    - Less dizziness from bending
  - Balance assistance
    - Bracing, counterbalance, momentum pull
  - Syncope response
    - Getting help, standing over as a visual barrier, assisting to rise, tunneling under knees to increase blood flow

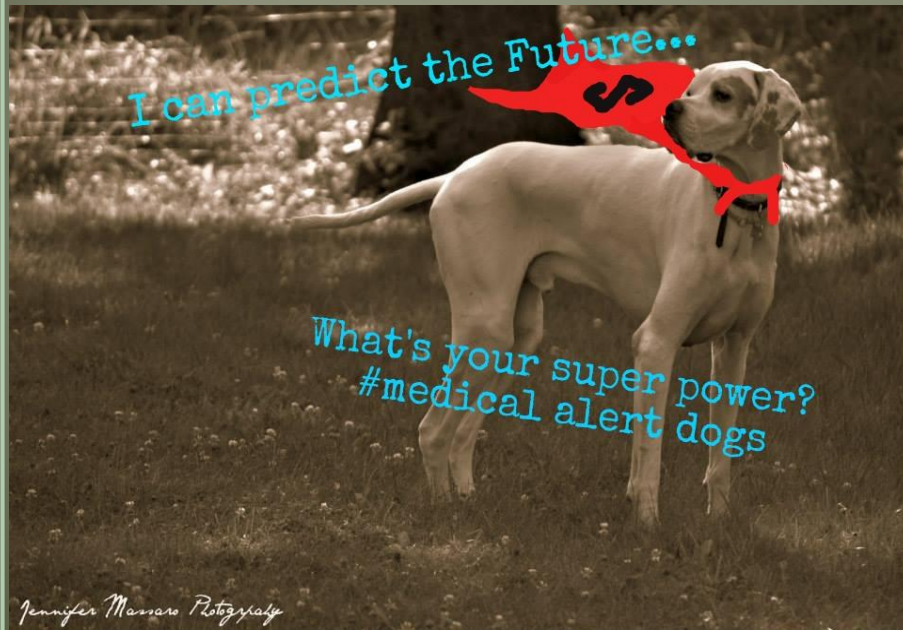
# Service Dogs for Dysautonomia!

- Service Dogs can help enhance a handler's independence.
- The best way to know if a service dog is right for your disability is to make a list of things that you have difficulty doing independently and speaking with a competent service dog trainer to find out if a dog can be trained to assist with those tasks.



# Service Dogs for Dysautonomia!

## Note on Alert Dogs



- Service dogs can develop the ability to alert to symptoms before the handler recognizes their onset. This is known as alerting. Dogs can alert to a myriad of conditions, such as syncope, seizures, migraine. These types of alerts (neurologic) cannot be trained. The dog has the ability instinctually, or it doesn't.
- Be wary of any program that tries to tell you otherwise.
- The only alerts that can be trained are diabetes, allergy and certain psychiatric alerts, as a trigger (scent or behavior) can be identified and mimicked to allow for training.



# Where to Acquire a Service Dog?

# Where to Acquire a Service Dog?

- There are three avenues to obtaining a Service Dog in the United States
  - Program trained Service Dogs
  - Owner-Trained Service Dogs
  - Facilitated Owner-Trained Service Dogs.



# Program Trained Service Dogs

- There are hundreds of organizations in the united states that train service dogs for the disabled.
- Each program generally has a specific focus (ie, guide dogs, mobility dogs, PSD, hearing dogs)
- Finding a program that will train for dysautonomia requires looking for programs that will cross-train, and will customize tasks for the individual's needs.
- Usually programs that train for mobility and seizure response are good places to start.

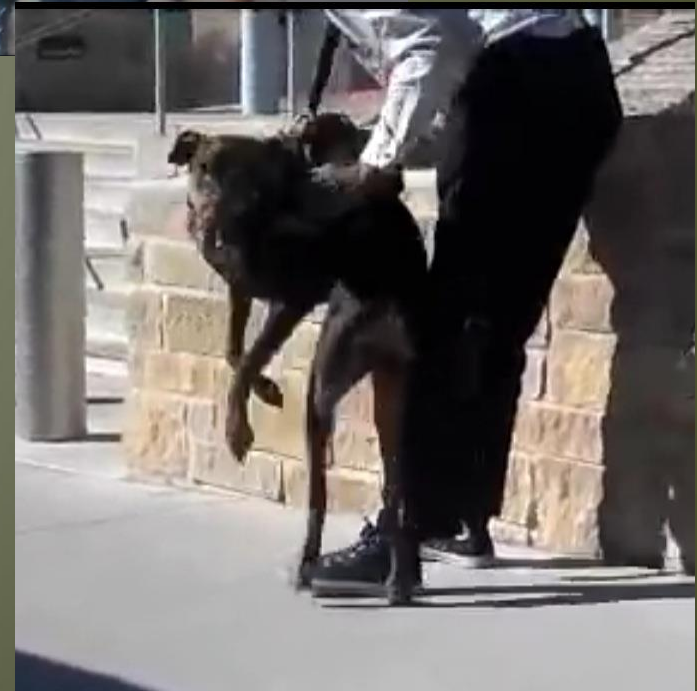
Some organizations are accredited by Assistance Dogs International, which is an international accrediting body for the service dog industry. Not all programs are ADI. There are many wonderful programs that are not ADI accredited, however, when looking for programs, the ADI program search can be a good place to start.





# Program Trained Service Dogs

- Be an Informed Consumer!!!
- The service dog industry is a completely unregulated one.
- Do your homework
  - Find reviews from actual recipients.
  - If possible, observe their dogs in training, see how they behave.
  - If it doesn't feel right, it's probably not.
  - Make sure they aren't promising you things that do not exist.
  - Carefully examine any contract before exchanging any money!!



# Program Trained Service Dogs



- After picking a program, the process usually involves filling out the application which can involve forms for your doctor, references, and a personal statement
- If your application is approved, you will likely need to do an interview.
- Once you decide and the program decides they are a good fit for your needs, you will be placed on the waiting list until a dog finishes training that suits your needs
- Once you match with a dog, you will be notified when “team training” is.

# Program Trained Service Dogs

- During team training you will be taught to work with your already trained service dog.
- At the end, you will take their public access test and be certified as a graduated team from that program!



# Program Trained Service Dogs

## Pros!

- The best option for those with limited dog training experience.
- Support for the working life of the dog
- Often times less expensive in the long run depending on the program
- Less work overall
- No chance your dog will wash out

## Cons!

- Program costs can be large up front
  - Some programs provide free of charge, but these programs typically have the longest waiting lists.
- Service Dogs cost up to 25,000-30,000. Most programs provide them at a cost of 2,000-15,000 depending on the program
  - Larger programs typically have larger donation bases and can provide dogs at lower cost to the individual.
- Long waiting lists of anywhere from 2-6 years.
- Limited breed choices.

# Owner Trained Service Dogs

- Currently, owner training is legal in the United States
- Usually the process begins by identifying where you will get a prospect from.
  - Shelter/Breeder
  - Puppy/Adult
- Then you will narrow down what breed/breed types you will need.
- Typically for the most flexibility in tasks related to dysautonomia, a larger breed is preferable.
  - Mobility, wheelchair work, guiding, carrying objects, etc are all tasks that require a certain size.



# Owner Trained Service Dogs



- Once you decide on a breed/type/age, you must begin evaluating candidates.
  - Took me 8 months and evaluated well over 100 dogs to find Dexter
- Hire a professional behaviorist to evaluate candidates for you based on your selection criteria.
  - Do NOT attempt to pick one out yourself, 10 to 1 you will fail.
- Once you have the dog/puppy, you spend approximately 500-800 hours socializing the dog and training basic and advanced obedience.
- No dog should ever be worked in public that has not been evaluated for sound temperament and is not reliably housebroken and well under control.

# Owner Trained Service Dogs

- Correctly owner training a service dog takes approximately 18-24 months and between 800-1200+ hours.
- At any point in time the dog can be “washed out”
  - This happens when a dog becomes aggressive, unreliable with training, has a specific behavioral problem, or simply decides s/he does not wish to work. The dog’s health and happiness must always come first!
- Once socialization and basic obedience are obtained, advanced task training occurs.



# Owner Trained Service Dogs



- Before graduating any OT SD, the trainer must have self-evaluated that the dog is reliable with his/her tasks, is safe and temperamentally sound, and is healthy and physically sound for his/her job.
  - For mobility dogs, this means 60/40 weight/height ratio for bracing, 30/30 for counterbalance, x-ray cleared hips and elbows
  - It is advisable but not legally required that all OT SDs be able to pass the CGCa and the PAT in order to be considered full working dogs.



# Owner Trained Service Dogs

## Pros!

- Greater flexibility in breed choices
- Greater control in training methodology
- Strong working relationship from the beginning
- In very rare cases, a young pet dog that shows the ability to alert can be owner trained into a service dog
  - This is **EXTREMELY** rare that a pet can become a SD with enough training. The temperament for a SD existing in a pet dog is a rare find.

## Cons!

- **EXTREMELY DIFFICULT!!!!!!**
- Not a good option for anyone who has not trained dogs to advanced competition level obedience.
- Is very time consuming
- High likelihood you will end up with one or two washed out pets that you have to either rehome, or keep as pets.
- Is not shorter than a program often, especially if you have a dog washout halfway thru and have to start over again.
- Very little training support
- Can be just as costly when you consider purchasing the dog, paying for a trainer to help you, and paying for vet costs

# Facilitated Owner Training

- Some programs offer owner training options that allow an individual with a disability to train their own service dog, with assistance from the program.
- Facilitated owner training is a good option for those hopeful handlers who wish to owner train but do not have the extensive experience needed to do so.



# Facilitated Owner Training



- Facilitated owner training follows the same process as owner training, with the exception of having guidance along the way.
- You have the same pitfalls, of having a high wash-out rate, needing to put in a lot of time and energy, and having to do all your own health testing.
- Facilitated owner training however you are not left to figure out how to train the tasks and obedience yourself.
- You must be willing and physically able to commit to going to classes and doing the homework however.

# Facilitated Owner Training

- Facilitated owner training is also useful for individuals who may not know much about the service dog community and the level of training a service dog should be trained to
  - There is a bit of a problem within the service dog community of dogs that are not well trained causing problems in public, leading to a push to require “certification”
- Facilitated owner training is also useful for individuals who may need to travel internationally, where ADI certification is mandatory



# Facilitated Owner Training

## Pros!

- Can usually get started as soon as a candidate is found.
- Greater breed choices.
- Guidance for training
- Strong bond.
- Ability to determine if dog has alerting ability before beginning serious training.
- Ability to travel to regions where service dogs must be “certified”

## Cons!

- Can be hard to find programs that will work with owner trainers.
- Takes just as long as owner training and has all the same costs.
- Is just as difficult, however you have more support.
- Just as high a likelihood for wash-outs.

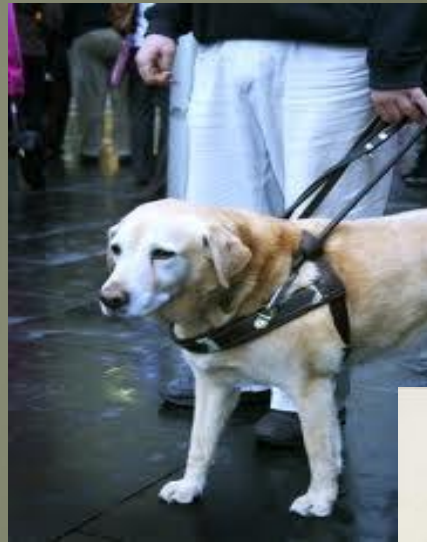


# Service Dog 101

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# Gear

- Service dogs are not required legally to wear gear, however many do.
  - Harnesses that allow the dog to it's job
    - Wheelchair pulling
    - Guide
    - Mobility
  - Vests to identify dog as a service dog to reduce access challenges



# Behavior

- Service Dogs should be almost invisible
- They should be 100% non aggressive towards humans or other animals
- Should be extremely well trained and obedient
- Should never cause a disturbance and should not be a nuisance to the public
- They should be housebroken and trained to toilet on cue and only at appropriate locations



*This would be a good example of what \*not\* to do as a Service Dog 😊*



# Behavior



Businesses are completely within their rights to remove a service dog acting inappropriately or dangerously.

They must offer the handler the ability to return without the dog.

Businesses can not refuse a team based on behavior of a previous team.

# “Registration or Certification”

- There is no such thing as registration or certification of service dogs in the United States.
- There are a plethora of scam websites looking to sell you an expensive product that has absolutely no legal weight and actually makes life very difficult for other service dog handlers.

Totally looks like a legit thing....It's not a thing, I promise...



# Service Dog Fraud



- Because the laws are intentionally vague to allow the greatest amount of access to the greatest number of disabled Americans, there are admittedly gaps in the system.
- Many pet owners purchase products online that make their pets look like legitimate service animals, however they are not trained which causes huge...enormous problems.



Questions?