

## Is a Hearing Assist Dog a Good Fit for your Family?

Hearing Assist Dogs can alert their owners to smoke detectors, a knock at the door, a boiling kettle, their name being called, and many other sounds. There are some potentially significant benefits to having a Hearing Assist Dog. However, it is a big commitment.

This article will outline some important points to consider before you decide to bring a Service Dog into your life. Despite the fact that many people benefit from having a Service Animal, it may not be the best choice for everyone. Instead, you might consider other resources or assistive technology. Even for animal lovers, there are some important considerations including the time, cost, and the emotional investment involved in caring for the animal. It is also important to understand your own needs and the needs/limitations of the particular type of Service Animal you are considering.

Please note that there is usually a minimum age requirement for Hearing Assist Dogs - if you have a young child, a Hearing Assist Dog might not be in your near future. Also consider that you can train your own dog or pet to perform some of the tasks you're wanting. You can do this by becoming familiar with ways to reinforce a dog (i.e. reinforcement training), taking local classes (i.e. Humane Society) or hiring a private trainer.

### Costs

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The initial cost may include an application fee, a fee for registration or equipment and a fee for the dog itself. There are also costs related to traveling to and attending training. For example, your family may have to travel to another city or province to attend training and/or obtain the animal. While some organizations have dorms or apartments for families to stay in, this is not always the case. Hotels in the area might be willing to offer discounted rates to

potential graduates. Check with the organization and other owners for ideas and suggestions.

A Service Dog is a working dog and therefore may require higher maintenance than a dog kept strictly as a pet. It is also important to consider how you will go about covering ongoing costs for the animal once you get it, such as food, veterinary bills, and other supplies necessary to care for the dog on a long-term basis. While the initial costs might be low, there can be significant costs involved in caring for the dog. Sometimes, veterinarians or pet stores will offer discounts for Service Animals.

## Care

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Having a Service Animal means caring for the animal on a daily basis, including walking, grooming, exercising, feeding, etc. Consider how a dog will fit into your lifestyle. Many organizations understand that a child may need assistance completing the tasks necessary to care for an animal, and do not necessarily require that all care be done by the recipient. However, they often stress the importance of recipients being involved in every aspect of caring for the animal.

## Expectations

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An important consideration early in this process is both your expectations of the dog and of the potential agency/individual trainer. What are the types of tasks you are hoping the dog will be able to perform? Don't be afraid to ask questions. It is important that you have a realistic goal of what a Service Dog might be able to do for you.

A dog is a living and breathing animal, not a piece of equipment that works flawlessly every time. Ownership requires a dedication that not everyone can add to their busy lives or health status. Service dogs are not pets. Reinforcement training cannot be allowed to lapse, even for 'minor infractions.' If you feel that the stresses of the responsibilities would be difficult for your/your family's

emotional or physical health, then you should reconsider the route of a Service Animal. The ultimate goal is to make your life easier, not more difficult.

The training standards many programs adhere to for Hearing Assist Dogs can be found online at Assistance Dogs International (ADI):

<http://www.assistancedogsinternational.org/standards/assistance-dogs/standards-for-dogs/training-standards-for-hearing-dogs/>

## Selecting and Agency/Provider

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There are a number of agencies throughout Canada and the United States that train all types of Service Dogs. Only some provide Hearing Assist Dogs. Providers or agencies you may want to investigate include:

Assistance Dogs International (ADI)

<http://www.assistancedogsinternational.org/>

Canadian Association of Guide and Assistance Dog Schools

[www.cagads.com/](http://www.cagads.com/)

Lions Foundation of Canada Guide Dogs

[www.dogguides.com/](http://www.dogguides.com/)

Pacific Assistance Dogs Society (PADS)

[www.pads.ca/](http://www.pads.ca/)

Historically, many Hearing Assist Dog programs have acquired their dogs from shelters, as well as from known breeders. As a result, many of the dogs used are mixed breeds. They come in all different sizes, shapes, and colours. The great majority of applicants request small to medium sized dogs, so most Hearing Dogs are Sheltie size or smaller. In addition to size, personality and temperament are important for a Hearing Assist Dog. They must be energetic

and ready to work in an instant when a sound occurs. They must be friendly and people-oriented. Because of these requirements, a lot of Terrier mixes are used along with various combinations of Poodles, Cockers, Llasa Apsos, Shih Tzus and Chihuahuas.

## **Application Process**

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The application process and applicant requirements (for example, minimum age) differs depending on the particular agency. Interviews may be required. This gives the agency a better idea of whether or not candidates are suitable. There may be an opportunity to tour the facilities, gather information from previous graduates, or see a Service Dog in action. This is the perfect time to ask additional questions. Once the application is accepted, the candidate's name is placed on a waiting list.

Once a dog has had both basic and advanced training, it is matched with his future owner. Each agency has its own process and criteria for making a match; however, the match is always made with both the recipient and the dog in mind.

While getting a Service Dog can change your life in wonderful ways, it is a major commitment. Careful planning now will ensure that you and your Service Dog will be a happy team for many years to come. Knowing all of your options is the first step. Do not give up if one provider does not accept you or cannot accommodate your needs, as each provider has different requirements and does things differently.

The following provider checklist contains many of the questions/items you may want to consider and ask the potential agency:

### **Questions:**

- Is there an application fee or any other types of fees?
- Is there a cost for the Service Dog?
- What is the minimum age?

- What geographical area does the provider serve?
- Where does the organization get its dogs?
- What breeds are used?
- What is the waiting period?
- How long is the dog in training before being placed with the recipient?
- Does the training occur at home or in a facility?
- Is the facility accessible to your child's physical needs?
- How long is training for the recipient and dog as a team?
- Will the program consider applicants with multiple disabilities?

If you still have questions or are unsure if this is the right path for you, ask the agency to speak with past recipients about their experiences. You may also consider reading the book *Crackers...Come Hear: A True Story About a Hearing Assist Dog* by Dennis Robertson. A copy is available from the Alberta Hands & Voices Lending Library, and as an Amazon Kindle e-book.

Adapted from:  
-[Shore Service Dogs](#)  
-[Assistance Dogs International](#)