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Working Animals (Including Service/Therapy Animals and Service Dogs)

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Summary: Working animals help people in their day-to-day lives. They include service animals (typically a dog that helps others), as well as therapy animals ("emotional support animal").

What is a Working Animal?

Working animals help people in their day-to-day lives.
There are different types of working animals:

1. Service animal:	A service animal, which is usually a dog, is an animal that has been trained to help a person with a physical disability, brain condition, and/or mental health challenge. Service dogs can be trained to help their handler with specific tasks so that their handler can be more independent in their day-to-day lives. Service dogs carry special protections in the law, e.g. they can have access to places that other animals are not allowed to access. Most service animals are dogs: • Guide dogs: trained to guide people who are blind or have a hard time seeing. to see. • Hearing dogs: trained to alert a deaf or hard of hearing person to sounds like fire alarms. • Service or mobility dogs: trained to make life easier by opening doors, ringing doorbells and, carrying items for people. • Seizure dogs: trained to alert to an oncoming seizure, stand guard or get help • Psychiatric service dogs: trained to ease distress, get medication, activate medical alerts, lead the owner away from crowds etc.
2. Therapy animal:	A therapy animal (aka. "emotional support animal") is an animal that has been trained to provide affection, comfort and support to people. Unlike a service animal, a therapy animal has been trained to interact with different people, not just the handler.

Terms

"Assistance animals"

- The term "assistance animals" is a term used internationally, and means the same thing as "service animal".
- In North America the main term used is "service animals", such as "service dogs".

See a Service Dog? Do's and Don'ts

Do's

- Do remember that a service dog is a working dog -- it is not a pet or companion dog needing comfort.

- Do make your environment friendly for service dogs by having water dishes, poop bags, fleece blankets.
- Do respect the person with the dog. Do give them space. Do give them privacy, by NOT staring, and by NOT asking them about their disability.

Don’t

- Don’t distract the dog by petting, or talking to it.

I’d like to get a Service Dog

If you think a service dog could help you or your child, it's important to understand the different types of working animals and decide which is best for you, your lifestyle and your needs.
For example:

- Do you want a dog to keep you company during difficult times? Talk to your health-care provider about an emotional support dog.
- Do you need a dog to help you perform day-to-day tasks in your home? Consider a service dog.

How Can I Get a Service Dog in Ontario?

- Speak with your health-care provider and ask them to draft a letter indicating the medical need for a service dog — many training organizations will ask for a physician referral as part of their application process

- Do some research into reputable training agencies. Assistance Dogs International has listings of reputable training agencies.
  https://assistancedogsinternational.org/resources/member-search/

  Most people choose to work with a recognized training agency like Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind or Lions Foundation of Canada.

- Contact the agency. After you find a reputable agency, there will be application forms to fill out, and due to the high demand for service animals, you can expect to be placed on a wait list. Complete the necessary interviews required. Many organizations will conduct in-home interviews to determine if a service dog would be a good fit for your needs and lifestyle.

Complete any training programs to help you learn how to work with and care for your service animal — handlers need training too!

I Already Have a Dog -- Can I Train Him/Her to Become a Service Dog?

It is preferable to have your service dog from a reputable agency. On the other hand, many people do their own dogs and such dogs are called “owner-trained”. They are recognized in Ontario since the law only calls for a health care provider letter explaining that their patient has a disability and needs their dogs with them at all times. However, these dogs are often considered "in training" their whole lives. Not all dogs make good service dogs - even if their owner has a disability.
To be a service dog, a dog should:

- Show no aggressive behaviors at all time,
- Be trained to go to the bathroom on command,
- Answer all basic commands
- Be trained to answer their owner's needs in respect to their disability.

Most family pets have not been properly socialized as puppies or exposed to a sufficient variety of environments and stimuli to be a service dog. Reputable and recognize training agencies breed and provide their own dogs.

Be cautious, because there are examples of:

- Less than honest organizations that may say they can train the family pet for several thousand dollars, but

in fact they will not be properly trained or registered.
- Those that call themselves breeders that will charge people ridiculous amounts of money by promising that their pups will make great service dogs. Not all dogs who are pets can be trained for task-specific roles, nor do they have the temperament to be in that role.

Understanding the Laws in Ontario

If you're considering getting a service animal, it's important to familiarize yourself with Ontario provincial laws such as:

1. Bill 80, Ontario Service Dog Act - an act respecting the rights of people in Ontario who use service dogs
2. Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) - an act stating everyone who serves the public must welcome service animals

Registering a Service Animal

Once your service dog has been trained, training agencies will give you documentation or an ID card to show they are trained as a service animal. However, in Ontario there isn't a standardized registration program for service dogs. This will likely change in the near future to make it easier for handlers.
Even if your dog is wearing a service harness, restaurants, hotels and other service providers may ask for "proof" your dog is a service dog. You can show them a letter from a health-care provider and show the dog's training certification/ID card. Under the Human Rights Code of Canada, you don't have to say what your disability is.

About this document

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