



**WELLNESS WAGS ASSISTANCE DOGS**

**MOBILITY SERVICE DOG  
PROGRAM GUIDE**

JANUARY 2026

# Table of Contents

<b>ABOUT WELLNESS WAGS</b>	<b>3</b>
<hr/>	
<b>HOW OUR SERVICE DOGS ARE TRAINED</b>	<b>5</b>
<hr/>	
<b>MOBILITY SERVICE DOG PROGRAM</b>	<b>6</b>
<hr/>	
<b>EVIDENCE OF IMPACT: HOW MOBILITY SERVICE DOGS MAKE A DIFFERENCE</b>	<b>7</b>
<hr/>	
<b>WHO CAN APPLY?</b>	<b>8</b>
<hr/>	
<b>ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>HANDLER AND CARE REQUIREMENTS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>ON-GOING RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS</b>	<b>10</b>
<hr/>	
<b>THE APPLICATION PROCESS</b>	<b>11</b>
<hr/>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>15</b>
<hr/>	
<b>FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS</b>	<b>16</b>
<hr/>	



## About Wellness Wags

Wellness Wags Assistance Dogs is a Nova Scotia–based nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and communities through the life-changing partnership of professionally trained service dogs. We are one of only two organizations in Canada serving Nova Scotia, and the only one based in Nova Scotia, providing fully trained Mobility Service Dogs to local families. Our programs fill a critical service gap, ensuring that Nova Scotians have access to highly trained assistance dogs that enhance safety, independence, well-being, and inclusion for people with disabilities and vulnerable populations.



Our mission is dedicated to fostering independence, cultivating confidence, and enhancing overall well-being through the transformative companionship and essential assistance of highly trained service dogs. We enable individuals to regain autonomy, strengthen their sense of purpose, reintegrate themselves into society, and elevate their quality of life. We imagine a world where each wagging tail represents a thriving and genuine human-canine connection. We achieve this by providing comprehensive client education and prioritizing fear-free, positive reinforcement training methods, ensuring a relationship that benefits both ends of the leash.



We carefully plan breeding and whelping to give each puppy the best start, focusing on health, temperament, and early socialization for future job success. Early socialization is critical for rearing confident puppies, so from birth, they experience gentle handling and positive exposure to everyday real world sights, sounds, and experiences to prepare them adequately for their future roles. We proudly operate with a diverse volunteer base who are passionate about raising and supporting our future assistance dogs. Puppy raisers play a vital role, providing loving homes and real-world exposure starting at 8 weeks old for approximately 18 months. Rigorous training continues through puppyhood, with dogs typically graduating around 18–24 months of age, fully ready to transform lives.

Every dog that graduates from our program has been raised using positive reinforcement and fear-free training methods, with extensive socialization and exposure to a wide variety of real-world settings, ensuring they are fully prepared for their important roles. Graduates also complete a series of comprehensive veterinary procedures to ensure they are healthy, sound and cleared for service work, meeting all veterinary requirements for service dogs set out by the province of Nova Scotia. This includes orthopedic X-rays of the hips and elbows, spay or neuter surgery, a cardiac evaluation, and a thorough "head-to-toe" veterinary wellness exam confirming each dog is up to date on vaccinations and parasite prevention. Dogs who are found unsuitable for graduation due to medical or behavioural reasons are adopted into carefully selected pet homes, where they live out their lives as cherished and deeply loved companions.

## About Wellness Wags

### Wellness Wags currently offers three distinct programs:

#### Autism Service Dogs:

These dogs provide support to families in Nova Scotia with a child age 3-10 on the autism spectrum. These purpose-bred and expertly trained dogs perform key tasks to assist with safety, routines, sleep, and outings, while delivering life-changing benefits that support both the child and the entire family.

#### Mobility Service Dogs:

Mobility service dogs support individuals with physical disabilities by performing practical tasks that restore independence, such as retrieving dropped or named items, opening/closing doors and cabinets, carrying objects, operating alert systems, and assisting with clothing removal like socks or sleeves. These dogs also bark to summon help during emergencies. While not formal tasks, recipients gain substantial emotional benefits including increased motivation, happiness, reduced stress, and less loneliness. These service dogs can lighten the load on caregivers; cutting paid caregiving hours by about 2 hours per week<sup>1</sup> and reducing reliance on family assistance<sup>2</sup>. Applicants for this program often desire greater independence from family and caregivers. The service dog bridges this gap by reliably handling essential tasks, reassuring loved ones while enabling the user's newfound self-reliance. Our program serves as that vital catalyst for families seeking balance between support and autonomy.

#### Facility Dogs:

Wellness Wags Facility Dogs are carefully matched and trained to work alongside professionals in settings like courthouses, hospitals, advocacy centres, and other qualifying organizations in Nova Scotia. Distinct from volunteer therapy dogs, Facility Dogs are integrated into an organization to support in a full time, life-long capacity. Like service dogs, Facility Dogs receive task-specific training for their work environment, providing targeted support that fosters engagement, promotes participation in challenging situations, minimizes distress, reduces stress, improves mood, and boosts motivation and focus<sup>3-5</sup>. They offer consistent, integrated assistance that enhances well-being and complements organizational programs. Our goal is to ensure each placement allows the dog to thrive in its role, supports the well-being of staff and the community, and enhances the effectiveness of the programs and services they assist.



# How our Mobility Service Dogs are Trained

At Wellness Wags, we have our own breeding program for our service dogs. We collaborate with other service dog organizations around the globe, to expand and strengthen our genetic lines, only using proven service dog profiles with comprehensive breed-specific health clearances including full genetic panels. This ensures our dogs are not only healthy and confident but also possess the friendly, kind demeanor essential for their work. Each dog is carefully selected for an innate ability to love and engage with many people without becoming stressed or overwhelmed. Our dogs thrive in busy environments, enjoy interacting with a variety of individuals, and approach their work with joy, patience, and enthusiasm, making them ideal partners for the specialized support they provide. Our accredited trainers ensure that every Wellness Wags dog is trained to the same international standards. Not every dog is suitable for this line of work, and it is pivotal to ensure that our dogs are exceeding expectations throughout their working career.

Our dogs begin their journey as puppies raised by volunteer foster families. These families, with our guidance and support, provide the dogs with foundational skills, socialization in real-world settings, and early experiences that prepare them for future careers as assistance dogs. We use evidence-based, reward-driven training techniques that create a relationship of trust, confidence, and joy between each dog and their handler.

When the dogs return from their volunteer puppy raisers to Wellness Wags for advanced training, we assess their temperament, strengths, and interests to determine their ideal track for training. In the Mobility Service Dog Track, dogs undergo specialized training, covered on the next page.



These dogs are carefully matched to each individual and trained to integrate seamlessly into daily routines, making them a life-changing partners that promote independence, safety, and emotional well-being.

# Mobility Service Dog Program

Our Mobility Service Dogs Program provides support to individuals in Nova Scotia with physical disabilities and limited mobility. Through our thoughtful matching and customized training process, we tailor each dog's skills to the individual's specific needs with tasks such as retrieving dropped items, providing balance support, opening doors, carrying belongings, operating alert systems, and barking for help, allowing recipients to gain independence.

Beyond task support, Mobility Service Dogs foster companionship that cuts paid caregiving hours, reduces reliance on family assistance, boosts motivation and happiness, and decreases stress and loneliness, enabling greater independence with confidence and dignity.

A Mobility Service Dog's working career typically spans 8-10 years, offering long-term stability through major life transitions. Integrated into daily life at home, work, public spaces, and travel, our program offers a lifeline to those seeking increased mobility and self-reliance.



### How to Receive a Mobility Service Dog:

1. Program Guide Book ← **YOU ARE HERE!**
2. Expression of Interest (EOI)
3. Formal application
4. Consultation
5. Acceptance & Matching
6. Team Training

More details on the Application Process on page 12

### Core Tasks:

- **Item Retrieval:** Picks up dropped or named items like keys, phone, wallet or medication kit beyond reach, delivering to hand or lap.
- **Opening/Closing of Doors, Drawers, Cabinets or Appliances:** Tugs ropes to open drawers, refrigerator, washing machine, or cupboards; nudges closed with nose.
- **Obstacle Clearance:** Can move objects to free up path for wheelchair, and can offer gentle tugs to free wheelchair from rugs, lips in flooring, or obstacles.
- **Give and Take Items:** Can deliver items to handlers hand or lap, or deliver an item to another person a short distance when requested.
- **Laundry Loading/Unloading:** Can assist with tugging baskets of laundry, and can assist with loading and unloading front loading washers and dryers.
- **Clothing Removal Assistance:** Tugs on sleeves, pant legs or socks to assist undressing.
- **Emergency Barking:** Barks on cue to summon help.
- **Alert Button Operation:** Presses alert or call buttons when handler cannot call for help on their own.
- **Locating Support:** Gets another person, nudges them, and prompts them to follow the dog back to the handler on cue.

## Mobility Service Dog Program

### Benefits Beyond Core Tasks:

- **Enhanced Daily Autonomy:** Improves independence by performing simple tasks and supporting personal care routines, including undressing assistance and picking up dropped or unreachable items.
- **Caregiver Relief:** Could cut paid caregiving hours and reduce family assistance needs.
- **Spontaneous Living:** With furry support by their side 24/7, spontaneous outings, shopping, and social events can be accessed without pre-arranged support.
- **Social Enhancement:** Reduced isolation, increased motivation, confidence, and emotional well-being through partnership and companionship.

### Evidence of Impact: How Mobility Service Dogs Make a Difference

The impact of Mobility Service Dogs is well-documented in peer-reviewed research on assistance animals for individuals with physical disabilities and mobility impairments. Studies show these dogs enhance stability, boost independence, improve psychosocial health, and elevate overall quality of life, benefiting handlers and their households. The statistics below summarize key outcomes from peer-reviewed studies, demonstrating tangible benefits in physical function, emotional well-being, social engagement, and daily living:

- Individuals with mobility service dogs showed significantly better psychosocial health, including higher social, emotional, and work or school functioning<sup>6</sup>.
- Handlers reported enhanced independence, confidence, self-esteem, balance support, and ability to perform daily tasks like retrieving items<sup>6</sup>.
- 100% of surveyed handlers reported positive impacts on quality of life, with 95% noting better overall well-being and independence<sup>7</sup>.
- 60% of surveyed handlers expressed their service dog provides unmatched social support through deep handler-dog connection and understanding<sup>7</sup>.



These findings show that Mobility Service Dogs provide far more than companionship; they actively enhance physical stability, independence, and overall well-being.

## Who Can Apply?

Individuals in Nova Scotia with a diagnosed physical mobility impairment may be eligible for a Mobility Service Dog.

Please review the following key sections to see if our Mobility Service Dog program is the right fit for your family:

- Eligibility Criteria
- Handler and Care Requirements
- Ongoing Responsibilities and Expectations



### Eligibility Criteria:

- Confirmed medical diagnosis of primary mobility-limiting condition. (Minimum 1 year since diagnosis).\*
- Applicant must be able to independently direct and handle a Mobility Service Dog.
- Applicant must want to actively pursue independence with a Mobility Service Dog.
- Applicant must be able to financially cover all ongoing expenses to care for the Mobility Service Dog for its entire career (8-10 years), including but not limited to supplies, food, grooming, and routine and emergency vet care.
- Dog must reside in a smoke-free home that is deemed to be a safe environment for the dog by Wellness Wags Assistance Dogs.
- Must be residing in Nova Scotia.
- Have not been convicted of violence towards, or cruelty, abuse, or neglect of animals or humans.

\*Primary mobility-limiting conditions include any physical disability or impairment that significantly impacts mobility or the ability to complete mobility-related tasks independently. This includes, but is not limited to, congenital conditions (present from birth), acquired injuries, neurological conditions, musculoskeletal disorders, limb differences, chronic pain conditions, or other physical disabilities affecting mobility. The primary need for a mobility service dog must be related to the mobility-limiting condition.

## Who Can Apply?

### Handler and Care Requirements:

**Primary Handler:** The applicant must be the primary handler of the dog and should not require any support in handling the dog. Applicants wishing to have another person handle the Service dog on their behalf are not eligible to apply at this time. Although additional family members may support handler by assisting with occasional bathroom breaks, walks, or physically demanding tasks like grooming, the handler must be otherwise able to independently care for the dog.

**Parent/Sibling/Caregiver/Roommate Interactions:** To ensure the bond is given a platform to flourish, other people in the home need to be able to understand that the service dog is intended to support one person, and interactions with others will need to be limited and managed, to prevent the dog from creating stronger bonds with the other people in the home. Especially with handlers who may have limited vocal use, the bond may need some additional nurturing to thrive. This is most important in the first 6 months and we will walk you through how to do this during team training.

### Ownership and Responsibilities:

- The Mobility Service Dog must be housed in a smoke-free, safe home environment (including your vehicle). Families must be willing to meet all the dog's emotional, physical, and medical needs.
- Wellness Wags maintains ownership of all facility and service dogs from placement through to retirement (typically 8-10 years).
- Wellness Wags provides all of our assistance dogs at no mandatory upfront cost to qualified recipients, applicants must be aware that all recipients of a service dog are responsible for all aspects of care for the dog from placement throughout the entire career of the dog until the date of retirement (and beyond if they opt to adopt the dog as a pet in retirement). All aspects of care includes but is not limited to all required supplies, food, treats, routine or emergency veterinary expenses, grooming, and any other services needed to maintain the dog's well-being. These costs are mandatory for ALL recipients.
- Applicants must be able to generously demonstrate they have the ability to provide adequate care and support for the dog consistently for the next 8-10 years, or the dog's entire career.

**Financial Contributions:** Wellness Wags encourages all recipients of a Mobility Service Dog to make a recommended financial contribution, in the form of a donation, towards the \$40,000 value of the Mobility Service Dog and placement to sustain our training programs and lifetime support that each handler receives for the dog. The application process will ask you about a sliding scale financial contribution, however, they are **not mandatory** and **do not impact eligibility**.

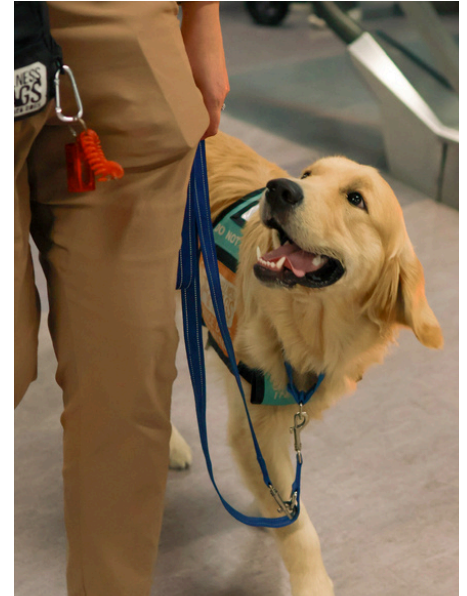


# Ongoing Responsibilities & Expectations

Once a Mobility Service Dog is placed, Wellness Wags remains actively involved to support the individual throughout the Service Dog's entire working career, approximately 8-10 years. Applicants should understand they are entering into a long-term partnership with Wellness Wags and agree to the following ongoing responsibilities to ensure the success, welfare, and sustainability of the placement:

- Follow all of Wellness Wag's requirements to maintain a safe environment for the dog at all times, including in the home environment, in public settings, while outdoors, and while in a vehicle.
- Maintain all training, veterinary care, grooming care, and exercise needs for the Mobility Service Dog for its entire working career. Ensure the dog's physical and emotional well-being is always prioritized.
- Ensure the dog's workload remains appropriate and sustainable, including adequate rest, enrichment, and downtime.
- Collaborate with Wellness Wags trainers and staff through regular follow-up, check-ins, home visits and problem-solving support as needed.
- Submit required bi-annual reports detailing the dog's health, behaviour, and workload, and participate in scheduled check-in visits.
- Notify Wellness Wags promptly of any unforeseen changes that may impact the dog's placement, including handler transitions, family unit changes, or concerns related to the dog's welfare or performance.

**Compliance and Oversight:** Wellness Wags verifies criminal background checks and 2 character references for the applicant. No past history or convictions of cruelty, neglect, or violence against animals/humans is allowed. Families must demonstrate a stable home environment and capacity to support the dog's lifelong care and tasks.



Consistent with service dog industry standards, Wellness Wags maintains ownership of all service and Mobility Service Dogs throughout their careers to guarantee consistent oversight and adherence to impact, behavioural, health, and ethical standards. Although exceptionally rare, this authority safeguards our dogs and the significant investment of time, training, and resources, allowing us to intervene or conclude any placement when necessary. Given the hundreds of families awaiting placement, we responsibly reassign dogs to partners who can utilize transformative 8–10 year impact of the dog's full potential.

# The Application Process

The journey to receiving a Wellness Wags Mobility Service Dog involves several steps to ensure a successful placement:

## Step 1: Learn About the Program

This guide is the first step in understanding how a Wellness Wags Mobility Service Dog works and whether our program aligns with your needs. Please read this guide thoroughly before moving on to Step 2.

## Step 2: Expression of Interest (EOI)

When the Application process is open, individuals have the opportunity to express interest in receiving a Mobility Service Dog through the EOI form on our website. The Expression of Interest helps us learn more about you, your needs, goals, your lifestyle, and whether a Wellness Wags Mobility Service Dog may be the right fit, before inviting you to complete a full application in Step 3. Please take your time answering the questions with as much detail as possible. We use this information to better understand your situation and how a Mobility Service Dog could make a meaningful difference.

Due to an overwhelming interest in our programs, please note that not all applicants will be invited on to Step 3 to fill out a formal application. Only a small number selected candidates whom we think we can serve well with the dogs we currently have in the program will be invited to fill out a formal application. As we work our way through the applicants, each applicant will either receive a letter of regret, or an invitation to complete Step 3 - Formal Application.

There is no set timeline for this step, please be patient with our small team. If you have not heard back, please feel free to check in for an update 60 days after the EOI process has closed by emailing us at [info@wellnesswags.ca](mailto:info@wellnesswags.ca).

When filling out the EOI you will be prompted to provide some basic information about you, and attest to understanding the program requirements as outlined in this guide, and successfully answer the pre-eligibility questions. After that, you will be able to answer the main expression of interest question.

Continued on the next page →



## Expression of Interest

To ensure you take the appropriate time to craft your response, we encourage you to carefully prepare and edit your written response to this question in a separate document rather than in the question field on the form. When you are ready to submit your application, paste in your written response when you complete the rest of your information gathering.

The main body of the **Expression of Interest** is the following:

“To help us determine if a Mobility Service Dog could be the right fit for you, please prepare a detailed, honest, written Expression of Interest for the Mobility Service Dog Program in the form of a letter, narrative, or proposal. Your response should be thoughtful and detailed — NOT brief/point-form/rough draft. (2000-5000 characters or 1-2 pages).

Please consider telling us about the following:

- Your story: Introduce yourself, including any current pets, and share information about your mobility-related condition(s) and how they impact your daily life.
- Your lifestyle: your home, and the environment (urban, rural, suburban, etc.), What life looks like for you, your routines, how & where you currently spend your time.
- Why do you require Mobility Service Dog? How could a Mobility Service Dog benefit you? What changes are you hoping to see with the addition of a service dog? What you hope to be able to do after the placement of a Mobility Service Dog that you are unable to do now?
- Tell us about your prior dog experience and your experiences with dogs.

Include any additional information that you believe would be important to know when considering matching a Mobility Service Dog to you and your lifestyle.

Although not required, at the end of the form, you will be asked if you would like to submit any photos or a video in support of your EOI. Videos can be informal point-and-shoot clips, no professional editing required. There's no set format, but footage highlighting you, your home or your lifestyle adds personality to help your application stand out, and helps us visualize the possibilities of a placement with you and how a service dog could support.

Limit to 5 photos and 1 video (no longer than 5 minutes).

Apply for open EOIs or  
subscribe to be notified  
when programs open:  
[wellnesswags.ca/apply](https://wellnesswags.ca/apply)



Continued on the next page →

# Mobility Service Dog Program Guide

## The Application Process

### Step 3: Formal Application

If you are not selected to proceed after submitting an Expression of Interest, you will receive a letter of regret. If the Expression of Interest indicates a potential fit, selected applicants will then be invited via email to complete Step 3 - Formal Application.

As part of this application, applicants must provide documentation to verify eligibility and readiness. This includes:

- Documentation of physical disability diagnosis (from qualified medical professional).
- Contact information for a doctor who supports the placement of a service dog and who can provide a prescription, and attest to the ways in which a service dog could help mitigate the disability.
- Contact information for 2 people to provide a character reference
- Contact information for a veterinarian reference (if you have owned pets before)

Wellness Wags will review the application and determine if you advance to the next step: consultation.

### Step 4: Consultation

If Wellness Wags determines your application demonstrates strong need and likelihood of success, and we may have a dog match for you, we will schedule a home visit to meet you, any other household members, get to know more specific details about your needs, and how to find the best match for them, as well as complete a home inspection to confirm that the dwelling is safe, suitable, and supportive of the dog's well-being.

During this stage, Wellness Wags will also meet with the applicant to assess baseline dog-handling skills. No prior experience is required, but understanding the handler's starting point helps ensure an appropriate dog match.



Continued on the next page →

# Mobility Service Dog Program Guide

## The Application Process

### Step 5: Approval & Matching

After a successful consultation and home inspection, your application goes to our Acceptance and Matching Committee for review to determine if we have a suitable dog match for you. Unfortunately, an applicant may be a wonderful fit for a Mobility Service Dog, but potentially not a fit for our Mobility Service Dogs that we are currently looking for placement for.

At this stage, you will receive one of three outcomes:

- **Letter of Regret:** Criteria for placement not met.
- **Reserve Letter (Pre-Approved EOI):** You met all criteria, but no current dog match available. We've added you to our pre-approved reserve list. Simply notify us when the next EOI opens—no full re-application needed. Pre-approved remain in consideration for up to three cycles to secure optimal match.
- **Approval Letter:** Confirmed intent to match a dog during this class of dogs, placed on the waitlist and will be contacted with an invitation to team training to begin the placement.

Most dogs will progress through advanced training and **placement with an handler within the same calendar year as the application**, however, all applicants should approach the process with flexibility, understanding the unpredictable nature of working with sentient animals. The Acceptance and Matching Committee carefully aligns each dog with the handler's skills and home, environment, and goals - maximizing impact and success by prioritizing perfect matches over speed.



### Step 6: Team Training

The primary handler will be invited to complete mandatory team training, where handler and the Mobility Service Dog first learn to work together. The handler must pass competency-based training—meeting specific criteria and goals rather than fixed hours (approx. 50 hours expected). This blended program includes on-demand modules, class-style lessons, in-person classes, 1:1 sessions, and practical hands-on training with our trainers during real-world practice in public places, and the handler's home to establish foundational rules and maintenance standards.

Team Training sessions may be scheduled any time or day of the week—including weekdays, evenings, and weekends—depending on class sizes, team schedules, and workload. Applicants should anticipate needing time off work to attend and prioritize placement with a service dog. Declining a scheduled Team Training invitation counts as declining the proposed dog match, returning you to the waitlist for the next match. Up to two declines are permitted; a third terminates pre-approval, requiring reapplication from the Expression of Interest (EOI) process.

### On-Going Support

Wellness Wags stays connected with each individual throughout the working life of their Mobility Service Dog, typically 8–10 years. We maintain ownership of the dog for its career, ensuring it continues to receive the support and oversight needed to perform its role effectively. We provide ongoing guidance, refresher training, and problem-solving for any challenges that may arise. Individuals are required to submit annual reports and participate in periodic check-ins to ensure the dog is working to its full capacity and meeting the handler's mobility needs. Our priority is the well-being of both the Mobility Service Dog and the individual, ensuring a safe, supportive, and meaningful partnership.

At Wellness Wags, we believe a highly trained Mobility Service Dog transforms lives for individuals with physical disabilities. These dogs provide consistent support, independence, and safety during daily challenges—retrieving items, opening doors, and operating emergency alerts to help you maintain independence and confidence in everyday life.

By partnering with individuals like you, our Mobility Service Dogs deliver reliable physical assistance when other options fall short. They enable greater mobility, reduce care requirements, and allow you to navigate work, school, errands, and public life more effectively with a specialized canine partner.

We look forward to exploring how a Wellness Wags Mobility Service Dog could become your essential companion!



### References

1. Winkle, M., Crowe, T.K. and Hendrix, I. (2012). Service Dogs and People with Physical Disabilities Partnerships: A Systematic Review. *Occup. Ther. Int.*, 19: 54-66. <https://doi.org/10.1002/oti.323>
2. Singleton JK. Benefits of Being Teamed with a Service Dog for Individuals Living with Visible and Invisible Disabilities. *Healthcare (Basel)*. 2023;11(22):2987. Published 2023 Nov 19. doi:10.3390/healthcare11222987
3. Beetz A, Uvnäs-Moberg K, Julius H, Kotrschal K. Psychosocial and psychophysiological effects of human-animal interactions: The possible role of oxytocin. *Front Psychol*. 2012;3:234. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00234
4. Jensen TL, Jensen L, Clemmensen MH. Animal-assisted interventions in hospitals: a systematic review. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2020;17(19):7011. doi:10.3390/ijerph17197011
5. Barker SB, Knisely JS, McCain NL, Schubert CM. Measuring stress and immune response in healthcare professionals following interaction with a therapy dog: a pilot study. *Psychol Rep*. 2005;96(3 Pt 1):713-729. doi:10.2466/pr0.96.3.713-729
6. Rodriguez KE, Bibbo J, Verdon S, O'Haire ME. Mobility and medical service dogs: a qualitative analysis of expectations and experiences. *Disabil Rehabil Assist Technol*. 2020;15(5):499-509. doi:10.1080/17483107.2019.1587015
7. Kline K. What are the psychosocial effects of service dogs on handlers with disabilities? Portland: Portland State University; 2024. <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorstheses/1578>.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the difference between a Mobility Service Dog and a Therapy Dog?

A Mobility Service Dog is a highly trained assistance dog that lives and works full-time with an individual to perform specific physical tasks—such as retrieving dropped items, opening doors, or operating an emergency alert system—to support their handler with a physical disability. The Mobility Service Dog is considered medical equipment for their handler and has public access to nearly all public places, serving as a consistent support tool across all environments. Mobility Service Dogs often accompany their handler to school, work, therapy, medical appointments, errands, and outings.

### 2. How much does it cost to receive a Mobility Service Dog?

All applicants are required to cover all ongoing expenses to care for the Mobility Service Dog for its entire career (8-10 years), including but not limited to supplies, food, grooming, and routine and emergency vet care. Wellness Wags provides Mobility Service Dogs at no mandatory upfront cost to families approved through our application process; however, we encourage applicants to contribute toward the \$40,000 value of the Mobility Service Dog through personal donations or fundraising efforts. Wellness Wags supports handlers in fundraising efforts with dedicated fundraising pages that accept digital payments and track progress toward your fundraising goal. We encourage you to set a fundraising goal that feels attainable and justified by the impact the service dog will provide.

### 3. Will our family receive training? What if we encounter challenges after placement?

Yes, comprehensive training is provided for all handlers of a Wellness Wags Service Dog, fully trained through the team training process. The handler must complete mandatory "team training" (handler and dog learning to work as a team), which is competency-based—meeting specific criteria and goals together rather than a set number of hours, though approximately 50 hours can be expected. This blended training includes on-demand modules, class-style lessons, in-person classes, 1:1 sessions, and real-world practice with the dog in public places, and in your home to establish foundational rules and maintenance standards. This training ensures consistent dog responses across environments, builds handler confidence, and meets program standards for public access. Post-placement support continues through training refreshers, ongoing guidance, follow up visits, additional handler training for extended family and school support staff placements for the entire 8-10 year career of the Mobility Service Dog.

### 4. Can the Mobility Service Dog accompany me to work to school or public spaces?

Yes. Our Mobility Service Dogs are trained to work in a variety of environments, including home, school, therapy sessions, and public spaces. They remain calm, focused, and responsive to their handlers' needs. Access to public spaces like malls, restaurants, and medical facilities is legally protected, widely accepted, and requires no preapproval for each outing. For integrating the dog into work, handlers should contact their employer when they are approved for a service dog, so their employer can begin creating any policies or procedures around integrating the dog into the workplace. On rare occasions, a workplace might not be considered safe for service dog integration, so discuss any concerns with Wellness Wags. When travelling, discuss plans for integrating service dog in your plans with Wellness Wags as early as possible, as travel mode and destination can significantly affect booking processes to approve travel with a service dog, which may take time.

# Frequently Asked Questions

### 5. How long does the process take, and when will we get a dog?

Our programs are very popular, and we expect to get hundreds of applications for each cohort of dogs, (between 5-15 dogs). When application cycles are open for EOIs, this means we are planning for the matches for the dogs in our graduating class of each given year (e.g., Class of 2026). Most dogs will progress through advanced training and placement within an applicant within 6 - 12 months of the EOI/Application. While same-year placement is our goal, timelines are approximate and may not align perfectly with calendar years. Our 6-step application process prioritizes finding the optimal match for each of our unique dog over anything else. Most dogs graduate around age 2, with planning for their applicants and matches beginning around 1 year old.

### 6. Why is the process so unpredictable? What if we encounter challenges after placement?

Most dogs graduate around age 2, with planning for their applicants and matches beginning the year before that, around 1 year old. Just like a Grade 12 high school student starting the year has no idea if they'll graduate, get into university, thrive in their major, or land their first "adult job," our dogs go through a similar (condensed) decision-making track during that one-year period between your application and their placement readiness. Asking for an exact timeline is like asking the Grade 12 student what their first big job will be—there are a lot of unknowns and a lot can change! During the last 6-12 months of our dogs training, we determine if they'll qualify for the Autism, Mobility, or Facility Dog track and which "major" best suits their skills. They complete advanced training, developing specific niche abilities for their future placement. After "theory" learning, they apply skills in real scenarios to prove readiness as a Mobility Service Dog and identify key criteria about the environment where they'll best thrive long-term. On top of that, variables like illness, injury, behavioural growth, or disqualification can disrupt intended matches. As soon as we confirm a dog match for a specific placement, we communicate transparently with accepted applicants about matches and timelines—flexibility required for optimal outcomes. All applicants should approach the process with flexibility, understanding the unpredictable nature of service dog placement with sentient beings. Our ultimate goal is to ensure the best fit for the dog and the handler—we will ultimately prefer you wait longer for the perfect match rather than experiencing the disappointment of not having it work out with a match that was not quite right for the role.

### 7. How do you select which dog goes to which person/organization? Can I pick my dog?

Wellness Wags will determine eligibility for the program based on each of our unique and individual class of dogs in the program in that given year. Each Wellness Wags dog has distinct personality, strengths, skills, training, and behavioural needs that each require a specific environment to thrive. Some dogs would be capable of doing any work, anywhere; others may thrive in a very specific setting. Our 6-step application process allows us to narrow down the pool of applicants to find the best placements to set each current dog and recipient up for success. Statistically speaking, most applicants will not be matched the first time they apply, but we do encourage applications in future years as notably, the pool of dogs and their personalities changes year to year, and therefore so does what we are looking for in our applicants. We carefully match each dog to a recipient equipped to provide them the ideal setting and support to thrive, ensuring the best possible outcome for both the dog and the program. Recipients are matched with the dog based on the quality of match, not the preferences for breed, sex, or colour. If you have had a negative experience with a certain type of dog in the past that would impact your ability to bond with and trust a new dog, please include that information on your EOI.