



Helping Paws Inc. Volunteer Dog Trainer Guidelines

Helping Paws is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to further people's independence and quality of life through the use of Assistance Dogs. Our dogs in training stay with volunteer dog trainers for up to 2 ½ until they complete their training. We are proud of our dedicated volunteer dog trainers, who are the backbone of our organization.

Do I need to have dog training experience to be a volunteer dog trainer?

Yes, our requirements are:

You must have previously trained a Helping Paws service dog for the entire training process, from puppy to adult, through a successful placement OR

You must have previous experience training obedience, manners or other dog sports as evidenced by your personal pet dogs either in the past or present.

Where do potential service dog puppies come from and what breeds are used?

Golden Retrievers and Labrador Retrievers are used in our program due to their size, Helping Paws puppies are placed in foster home trainers between 7 – 12 weeks of age. We believe strongly in early education and the puppy will begin its service dog training classes by 12 weeks of age.

What is involved in the training process?

The training of Helping Paws service dogs begins with shaping behaviors that will develop into service dog skills. Training also includes socialization of the dog in training to a variety of experiences and public situations on a frequent basis. Both obedience skills and good manners are a big part of the training and fundamental to the success of the dog. Staff guides the training process.

Can I take the puppy with me wherever I go?

It is a common misconception that Helping Paws “service dogs in training” can go everywhere with their trainers. Training in public with a Helping Paws “service dog in training” is expected as part of your weekly homework. This process is guided by HP staff instructors. Only the designated volunteer dog trainer may take dog training in public. Acceptable locations for training in public begin with pet supply stores, veterinary clinics, parks, and other locations where all pet dogs are allowed access. As the “service dog in training” matures and learns more skills, additional public training locations are added. Taking a “service dog in training” to work with you is up to the discretion of your employer, and your Helping Paws staff instructor

Do I need to have a fenced yard?

Providing a safe environment for the dog is the priority rather than whether the yard is fenced. We prefer that volunteer dog trainers have a fenced yard for the safety of the “service dog in training” but we recognize that many people provide a safe environment for a dog without a fenced yard.

How much exercise do the dogs require?

Active puppies need physical activity in the form of play or walking. Volunteer dog trainers should expect to provide at least 25-40 minutes of exercise per day, accomplished by brisk walking or playing in a safe, fenced area, for example. For young dogs under one year of age, bones are still forming. Running, rollerblading, skating or bicycling with the dog is not allowed.

What equipment or supplies does Helping Paws provide?

- Helping Paws provides a Gentle Leader, a training pack and a kennel.
- Helping Paws provides training classes, manuals covering reference, veterinary and training topics, and a variety of training equipment.
- Helping Paws also provides ID microchips, spay/neuter surgery, heartworm screening, hip evaluations and eye exams at no cost to foster home trainers. Helping Paws provides heartworm preventative at a reduced cost. Occasionally, we receive donations of products and will pass this on to foster home trainers when available.

What does the volunteer dog trainer provide?

- Volunteer dog trainers provide dog tag with their contact information.
- If able, volunteer dog trainers provide appropriate basic veterinary care on a routine basis, as well as food. If costs are a barrier, Helping Paws has a scholarship program to cover veterinary care and food. If the scholarship program is utilized, all vetting must be done at Inver Grove Heights Animal Hospital.

Who takes care of the dog if I go out of town?

The Dog Sitting Coordinator is the person to contact if you need someone to care for the Helping Paws dog. Helping Paws has a group of volunteer dog sitters who provide “vacation homes” to dogs in training. Sometimes, Helping Paws will ask another volunteer dog trainer. We do not board our dogs at kennels.

Please remember, you must arrange dog sitting through the Dog Sitting Coordinator and you will need to allow plenty of notice when a dog sitter is needed. Summer, holidays and spring breaks are busy times for finding dog sitters. Please do not make arrangements without contacting HP first.

We like our puppies to become accustomed to new experiences and occasionally will ask volunteer dog trainers to exchange puppies for a week or two.

Graduation and Placement

When a dog graduates, they will move in with their forever partner. Helping Paws will:

- Host an official meet-and-greet with the graduate.
- Arrange for family photos with the dog and host home.
- Provide occasional updates, while respecting that the dog is now a working service dog.

We understand that this transition can be difficult, and we are here to support you through it. While you will not be directly involved with your host dog after graduation and placement, please know that as an ADI-accredited organization, Helping Paws provides lifetime follow-up with every service dog. This ensures that each dog continues to be happy, healthy, and successful in their work with their forever partner.

What if the dog I train is not placed as a service dog?

All service dogs in training are regularly evaluated at the Blue Coat Academy. If concerns arise regarding training, behavior, or temperament:

- The dog may be placed in another host home or with another volunteer to assess progress in a different environment.
- Dogs “career changed” (disqualified from service dog training) will be available for adoption within the Helping Paws community. Host homes may apply to adopt, but placement is not guaranteed.

Do I get to name the dog in training that stays with me?

No, dog names are determined by Helping Paws.

Thank you for your interest in our Volunteer Dog Trainer Program. We hope you will join us in our mission of furthering people's independence and quality of life through the use of Assistance Dogs!

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