



Autism Assistance Dog Guide Program Discovery Package

ABOUT LIONS FOUNDATION OF CANADA DOG GUIDES

Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides (LFCDG) empowers Canadians living with disabilities to navigate their world with confidence and independence, by providing a Dog Guide at no cost and supporting them in their journey together. Located in Oakville, Ontario with a breeding and training facility in Breslau (between Kitchener and Guelph), we are the only school to train Dog Guides in seven distinct programs.

From breeding to training with a lifetime of follow-up services, each Dog Guide requires an investment of \$35,000 to train and place. The Foundation relies on donations to provide these special matches and does not receive any government funding. Each client who is accepted into a program is matched with a Dog Guide at no cost.

LFCDG has been operating under the highest standards for over 40 years. We are a founding member of the Canadian Association of Guide & Assistance Dog Schools and a fully accredited member of International Guide Dog Federation, Assistance Dogs International, and Imagine Canada.

We are dedicated to fostering an inclusive and diverse environment that values and respects the unique perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences of our all stakeholders. We are committed to providing equal opportunities, promoting fairness, and eliminating discrimination in all aspects of our interactions.

We have matched over 3,000 clients to Dog Guides across the country.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Autism Assistance dogs are trained to assist children (ages 3-12) diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The Autism Assistance dogs are trained to help children enhance their quality of life and achieve greater independence by being taught:

- Visit: This skill allows the client to receive light pressure to help with self-regulation
- Hugs: This skill allows the client to receive deep pressure to help with self-regulation
- Halt: This skill allows safety to the client if they elope or wander by the dog acting as an anchor when attached to the child's waist belt. This provides the parents a few seconds to redirect the child to hold the dog's handle. The suitability of this skill is carefully assessed on an individual basis, taking into account the client vs. dog's weight to ensure the health and well-being of the Dog Guide
- Mat: This skill allows the client to place the dog on a specific mat during lessons at school and times at home. (Example – mealtimes)
- Under: This skill allows the client to place the dog under a table or chair to keep the dog safe and tucked away
- Fetch (optional depending on dog match): This skill allows the client to have the dog fetch items
- Touch (optional depending on dog match): This skill allows the client to have the dog touch a push light to turn on
- Wave (optional depending on dog match): This skill is to help increase socialization by having the child to have the dog wave which would increase interaction with friends/public
- School placement (optional depending on circumstance): A school placement is when the dog attends school with the child. It can decrease stress and therefore increase attention spans, contributing to an improved in-school experience for the child

Autism Assistance dogs can also provide a child with the following:

- Companionship
- Anxiety reduction
- Self-regulation
- Help with unpredictable sleep patterns
- Support the child with creating and maintaining friendships
- Increase self-esteem and communication skills



ABOUT OUR DOGS

At Dog Guides, we have established our own breeding program which consists of the following breeds:

- Labrador Retriever
- Golden Retriever
- Labrador Retriever X Golden Retriever
- Standard Poodle – these are reserved for clients with allergies to dog fur



Prior to dogs being matched with clients, the following health procedures are completed to ensure each dog is fit for life as a Dog Guide:

- Hips and elbows x-rayed
- Eyes are screened by an ophthalmologist
- Males are neutered
- Females are spayed
- Wellness exam

All of our puppies are raised by volunteer foster families until they are approximately 10-14 months of age, at which time they return to our training center in Oakville. Once we have determined which program a dog is best suited for, it will enter advanced training for 4-6 months. Training will focus on special skills intended to increase the confidence and daily independence of the client the dog will be matched with. Skills are unique in each program. Dogs are evaluated throughout training to ensure each dog has reached a certain standard before it can be matched with a client. The dogs are approximately 2 years of age when matched with an accepted applicant and placed into team training.

All of our Dog Guides are ambassadors for the organization, so their physical, emotional and mental well-being must be maintained for them to remain

working. If it is deemed that the Dog Guide is not being cared for or utilized for its intended purpose, staff will intervene and determine the best course of action for both the Dog Guide and the client.

QUALIFICATION CRITERIA

- Child must have a medical diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder
- Child must be aged 3-12 years old at time of first application
- A parent or guardian must be able to independently direct and handle an Autism Assistance Dog Guide
- Family must commit to actively improving their quality of life and pursuing independence with an Assistance Dog Guide
- Dog must reside in a smoke-free home that is deemed to be a safe environment for the dog by Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides
- Must be residing in Canada
- Have not been convicted of cruelty, abuse, or neglect of animals or humans, crimes against humanity, or violence against animals or humans



COMMITMENT, RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

- The client (or in the case of a minor, a parent or guardian) must be willing to attend on-site training and be physically and cognitively capable of participating in the on-site training process, up to 19 consecutive days.
- There are no fees related to applying and training with your Dog Guide. If you are accepted, however, once you have graduated, you become responsible for all costs related to the care of your Dog Guide.
- Clients are responsible for maintaining contact with LFCDG staff and submitting all vet reports for the working life of their Dog Guide. Weight reports are required every six months, and vet reports are required once annually.
- Clients are responsible for keeping all their contact information (address, phone number and email) up to date with Dog Guides at all times.
- Dog Guides will contact each client monthly for the first six months after returning home to provide support, and once annually after the first year for the duration of the Dog Guide's career. Communication can take place via email, phone, video, or in person visits.
- The client is responsible for maintaining the skills of their Dog Guide and is expected to continually work on the dog's obedience and skills
- Applicants have the right to leave the process at any time for any reason after having informed Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides.
- Applicants are not required to undertake any public relations or fundraising activities.



JOURNEY

Step 1: Discovery

You are here! Learn as much about the program as possible to ensure you meet the qualification criteria, and are able to fulfill the commitment, responsibilities and expectations of being matched with a Dog Guide. Applying is an intensive and emotional journey you will be required to participate in if you wish to move forward. It is important to understand all you can before making this important decision.

Step 2: Expression of interest

At certain points in time, we will have room on our waitlists and will begin inviting individuals to initiate the application process. At this early stage, you will tell us a bit about yourself by completing our expression of interest questionnaire. If you meet the basic program requirements, we will arrange a phone interview to discuss your expression of interest, continue the discovery process and help us understand if we are able to move forward in the process. If we receive more expressions of interest than available spots on our waitlist, we will select a limited number randomly and process those expressions of interest only. Those who are not selected will need to wait for the next time Expression of Interests reopen to reapply.

Step 3: Application

If we determine you meet our program qualification criteria and feel you are able to fulfill the commitment, responsibilities and expectations of being matched with a Dog Guide, you will be required to complete a detailed application form. At this time, we will require supporting information from your healthcare providers. We will also schedule an in-home visit to meet with you in person, so that we can learn more about your daily life and see where the Dog Guide would reside. Once we have gathered all this information, it will be brought forward to our Acceptance Committee to determine if we are able to match you with a dog that will improve the quality of your life based on the training a Dog Guide receives. We will consider the benefits the Dog Guide will bring to your life, your means to care for a Dog Guide emotionally and physically, and your understanding of the commitment a Dog Guide requires.

Step 4: Dog and client matching

If you are accepted into a program, we will identify a great canine match based on your specific needs. Once this has happened, we will notify you and begin making arrangements for you to attend team training.

Step 5: On-site training

You will be our guest as we train you to work with the Dog Guide you have been matched with. You will stay with us at our Oakville, Ontario facility for up to 3 weeks of classes. You will attend class with other people who have also been matched with a Dog Guide. During this time, we will provide you with all meals, and will cover the costs of travel for you to come to Oakville. Training is intensive – your days will be filled with classroom learning, hands-on dog handling, excursions and lots of discussions.

Step 6: Ongoing support

we will stay in touch with you for the working life of the dog to ensure you have all the support you need, and that the dog maintains its skills and good health. You will always have access to skilled trainers should you require any help or advice regarding your Dog Guide.

Overall, the journey from discovery to receiving a Dog Guide could take up to two years. Not everyone who begins this journey will receive a Dog Guide. It is our responsibility to place Dog Guides with individuals who will receive the greatest benefit and can commit to maintaining the Dog Guide's skills and good health for its entire career.



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Lions Foundation Of Canada Dog Guides

Canine Vision • Hearing • Service • Seizure Response
Autism Assistance • Diabetes Alert • Facility Support

