



# Helping Paws Inc.

## Foster Home 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 foster home trainers for the 2 ½ years it takes to complete training. We are proud of our dedicated foster home trainers, who are the backbone of our organization.

### **What is a foster home trainer?**

Foster home trainers are the volunteers who agree to raise, socialize, train, and love the dogs we bring into our program as potential service dogs. Foster homes train our service dog candidates in all the skills they will need as service dogs. Family members may participate in the training process; however, one family member should be designated as the primary trainer. Primary trainers must be 18 years or older.

### **What is a service dog?**

A service dog is trained to assist an individual with a physical disability by performing such tasks as retrieving dropped objects, opening doors, getting items that are hard to reach, turning lights on or off, and a variety of other tasks that assist in daily living. Helping Paws also trains dogs for veterans who could use the skills of assistance dogs. In addition, a service dog provides love and companionship on a daily basis.

### **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, natural retrieving instinct and their strong desire to work for and please people.

Generally, purebred puppies come from the Helping Paws breeding program. We require OFA certification of hips and elbows, and eye and heart clearances, on the sire and dam of puppies that are brought into our program. This is done to lessen the likelihood of a puppy developing a physical problem that would prevent its work as a service dog.

### **How old are puppies when they are placed in foster homes?**

Helping Paws puppies are placed in foster homes 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 puppy behavior, manners and socialization. Socialization involves exposing the puppy to a variety of experiences and public situations on a frequent basis, a process that will be guided by your instructor. Obedience skills are a big part of the training and fundamental to the success of a service dog. In addition, specialized service dog skills are taught.

In order to achieve this set of skills with the puppy you are training, as a foster home trainer you must commit to: (1) attend weekly training classes at our Training Center, (2) train the puppy at home in several short sessions throughout each day, and (3) train the puppy in public as guided by your instructor.

You do not need prior experience in training a dog to be a foster home trainer. Our instructors will guide you through the process every week, teaching you how to train the dog you are fostering. Our training methods are based on positive reinforcement, and we believe you will truly enjoy the experience.

### **Can I take the puppy with me wherever I go?**

It is a common misconception that Helping Paws puppies can go everywhere with their trainers. Training in public with a Helping Paws puppy will be expected as part of your weekly homework, and the process will be guided by your instructor. Only the designated foster home trainer may take the 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 also allowed access. Additional locations will be added as the puppy matures and learns more skills.

### **Do I need to have a fenced yard?**

For the safety of our dogs, we strongly encourage our foster homes to have fenced yards. Acceptance of a foster home without a fenced yard is done on a case by case basis.

### **How much exercise do the dogs require?**

Active puppies need physical activity in the form of play or walking. Foster home trainers should expect to provide at least 25-40 minutes of exercise per day. This could be accomplished by brisk walking or playing in a safe, fenced area, for example. Please understand that for young dogs under 1 year, bones are still forming. Exercise by running the dog alongside you while you run or jog, etc. is not appropriate for young dogs. Rollerblading or bicycling with the dogs is not allowed.

### **What equipment or supplies does Helping Paws provide?**

- ❀ Helping Paws provides a Gentle Leader, a training pack and a crate for crate training.
- ❀ Helping Paws provides training classes; manuals covering reference, medical and training topics; and a variety of training props.
- ❀ Helping Paws also provides ID microchips, heartworm screening, hip evaluations and eye exams at no cost to foster homes. Helping Paws provides heartworm preventative when a product donation is available, and we have several veterinarians who will donate spay and neuter surgeries.

### **What does the foster home trainer provide?**

- ❀ Foster home trainers provide dog food. Helping Paws will specify the brand. Any changes in brand must be approved by the class instructor.
- ❀ Foster home trainers provide buckle collar with ID tag, training leash, Flexi Lead, dog toys and treats.
- ❀ Foster home trainers provide appropriate veterinary care on a routine basis. Many veterinarians offer discounts to volunteer foster homes for Helping Paws dogs. We do understand that foster home trainers may not be able to donate the costs of procedures that are extraordinary or unexpected. Helping Paws will reimburse veterinary costs to foster home trainers on a case by case basis.

### **What are the responsibilities of a foster home trainer?**

- ❀ The puppy must live in the house with you. It is important that the puppy have access to most areas of your home (even the kitchen and carpeted areas) as it will need to learn appropriate behavior in these settings.
- ❀ You must be able to care for and socialize a foster puppy for a period of up to 2½ years.
- ❀ The puppy must be taught to eliminate on leash.
- ❀ The puppy must receive an appropriate amount of physical activity/exercise.
- ❀ Foster home trainers provide appropriate veterinary care on a routine basis.
- ❀ Attendance of weekly training classes at our Training Center in Hopkins is required. Transportation to classes, field trips, and training in public is provided by the foster home trainer.
- ❀ Foster home trainers must commit to train the puppy according to Helping Paws curriculum by working in several short training sessions throughout the day.

- 🐾 Foster home trainers must commit to train the puppy in public according to Helping Paws guidelines.
- 🐾 Foster home trainers must complete and turn in training records and veterinary records in a timely fashion.

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

Helping Paws will find a dog sitter for the dog you are fostering. Often this will be another foster home trainer, or Helping Paws volunteer. We do not board our dogs at kennels.

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

**Will I get to meet the individual who receives the dog I trained?**

Yes, as a foster home trainer you will have the opportunity to meet the individual, called a graduate, who receives the dog you trained. Applicants for service dogs must complete three weeks of Team Training with their potential service dog, and meeting time is arranged partway through the course. At the end of Team Training, graduation is held and you have the opportunity to celebrate reaching your goal of the dog graduating as a service dog. Once the dog is placed, we ask that you respect the boundaries necessary for the new relationship to flourish, and not communicate directly with the graduate.

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

Sometimes dogs in training cannot be placed as service dogs due to reasons such as health or temperament. If a dog is judged unsuitable as a service dog, placement of the dog will be determined by Helping Paws staff based on what is best for the dog. Helping Paws will give the foster home trainer consideration if they wish to keep the dog, but Helping Paws will make the ultimate decision.

**How do I apply to be a foster home trainer?**

Request the Foster Home Trainer Application from our website, complete and submit it to us. Upon receipt of your application, we will schedule an interview in your home with a Helping Paws representative. This interview gives you a chance to ask further questions about our Foster Home Trainer Program and gives us the opportunity to meet you personally.

Plan to visit a couple of our training classes to observe and to meet current foster home trainers. Call the Programs Department Administrative Coordinator at 952-988-9359 x65 to check current class schedules.

After you have completed these steps, we will review your application and notify you whether your application has been accepted or declined.

**Thank you for your interest in our Foster Home 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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