



WINTER IMPACT NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2022

LEARN ABOUT THE TOOLS WE USE TO TRAIN ASSISTANCE DOGS



TOOLS OF THE TRADE

WHAT'S IN THE TOOLBOX?

Helping Paws Assistance Dogs spend two and a half years training in class and at home to become life-change working dogs. As with most jobs, you need specific tools to hone your skills (and in our case, we call them "Cues"). Here are some of our tools that our Foster Home Trainers use to practice the cues.

DRAWERS, BASKETS, & ROCKER LIGHT SWITCHES: **CUE: "PUSH"**

We use hand-held light switches to help teach our dogs in training to target an object and "Push" with their noses. This foundational cue is used to teach the dogs in training to close cabinets, drawers, and doors. Eventually, we expand the behavior by introducing a hand held Rocker style light switch, which the dogs will learn to push the switch on and off; a cue our Graduates may use on a daily basis. Graduates often tell us they use "Push" to bring a laundry basket closer to the washer/dryer, or to "Push" an item so it's within reach. Our intuitive Assistance Dogs are always pushing to learn something new...

TOGGLE LIGHT SWITCHES

CUE: "LIGHT"

We use hand-held toggle light switches to teach the dogs how to flip a light switch up and down. This mechanism is more challenging than the Rocker light switch as the dogs need to gently use their mouth to pull the switch down. When we introduce this cue, the dogs first learn to do this where all four paws remain on the floor. When the dogs are able to successfully turn on/off the cue "Light", we shift focus to practicing with wall mounted light switches. At first, the switches are parallel with the dogs' heads. Then instructors and Foster Home Trainers pair "Light" with a "Rise" cue (The act of putting their front paws up onto a surface is called "Rise"). This combination allows the dogs to reach higher light switches on the wall.

Imagine, a veteran with PTSD who has difficulty entering dark rooms can now rely on their service dog to turn on the light before they enter. An individual with a physical disability can turn off their bedroom light once they've entered bed. These scenarios are all possible because of these cues and tools taught by Instructors and Foster Home Trainers during the training process.



"PUSH"



"LIGHT"

“TARGET STICK”



TARGET STICK

CUES: "AROUND", "BEHIND", "FORWARD", "FRONT", "HEEL", "SIDE", "TOUCH", & "UNDER"

Collapsible target sticks are used to help move the dog into different positions without our Foster Home Trainers always pointing with their hands. This helps prevent the dogs from becoming too fixated on what their handlers' hands are doing. This undertaking ensures the dogs will move into specific positions by verbal cue alone. Because many of our Graduates have limited hand function and/or mobility, we teach specific cues using the target stick. Instead of leaning forward to point under a table, we teach "Under". To change positions while walking or moving, Graduates can say "Heel" or "Side". The dogs in training are also taught to touch their nose to the end of the target stick and eventually follow the tip of the stick to move their body away from the Graduate ("Go Ahead", "Around", "Under"), closer to them ("Closer", "Forward"), or to a specific spot ("Front", "Heel", "Side", "Behind").

"The training stick is a key tool used to teach the Helping Paws dogs heel, side, front, behind, around, forward and loose leash walking. It is easy to teach the dog how to touch its nose to the tool. Jagger and I are using the training stick right now in class."

*- Lloyd Hagemo and Jagger
Foster Home Trainer & Service Dog-in-training*

“GET THE DOOR”



DOOR OPENER STRAP & HOOK

CUE: "GET THE DOOR"

A door opener strap and hook is a nylon loop attached to a hook used to teach our dogs to open doors, cabinets, refrigerators, drawers, etc. This complex skill involves using several cues chained together. The dogs need to learn to grab the door opener strap, hold it in its mouth while pulling backwards, fully open the door and then hold the door open until they are "Released". Once they put together all of these steps and properly execute them, we name the cue "Get the Door". The independence our Graduates gain from this cue means no door is ever closed.

ABOUT US

Helping Paws is a Minnesota volunteer-based non-profit 501(c)(3) organization with 33 years of experience training and placing service dogs with individuals with physical disabilities or veterans and first responders with PTSD as well as facility dogs. Our mission is to further people's independence and quality of life through the use of Assistance Dogs. Since 1988, we have placed over 250 people with a service dog, giving individuals the gifts of dignity, independence, peace of mind and companionship.

Helping Paws is an accredited member of Assistance Dogs International. We train and place Golden Retrievers and Labrador Retrievers as hard-working partners and companions. Foster Home Trainers take a puppy into their home for approximately 2½ years, during which time they oversee the dog's training and development. Foster Home Trainers and dogs attend weekly service dog training classes led by our professional staff and develop the dogs' repertoire of more than 80 cues.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Helping Paws Online Auction**

Friday, February, 4 - Sunday, February 13, 2022.

Over 90 items with all proceeds supporting the Helping Paws mission to further people's independence and quality of life through the use of Assistance Dogs.

- **Tail Waggin' Dinner**

- Saturday, September 10, 2022
More information to come!

Photo Credit: Jonathan Kramer



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