



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 up to 2 ½ until they complete their training. We are proud of our dedicated foster home trainers, who are the backbone of our organization.

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. To lessen the likelihood of a puppy developing a physical problem that would prevent its work as a service dog, we require OFA certification of hips, elbows, eye and heart clearances along with other DNA testing on the sire and dam of puppies that are brought into our program.

How old are puppies when they are placed in foster home trainers?

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 a service dog. Helping Paws staff guides the training process.

What is the time commitment as a foster home trainer?

- (1) attend weekly training classes at our Training Center,
- (2) train the “service dog in training” at home in several short sessions throughout each day
- (3) train the “service dog in training” in public as guided by Helping Paws staff.

You do not need prior experience in training a dog to be a foster home trainer. Our staff will guide you through the process every week, teaching you how to train the dog you are fostering. We use positive reinforcement training methods.

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 foster home 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 foster home 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. Foster home 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 foster home trainer provide?

- Foster home trainers provide dog food. Helping Paws will specify the brand. Any changes in brand must be approved by your HP staff instructor. We do not recommend “grain free” products.
- Foster home trainers provide appropriate basic veterinary care on a routine basis. Veterinarians may offer discounts to volunteer foster home trainers for Helping Paws dogs.

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 foster home 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 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 a Team Training course with their potential service dogs, and a meeting time is arranged during the course. Every year, we hold a graduation ceremony where we celebrate the accomplishments of all of our graduates and foster home trainers throughout the year. 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. Please contact our Foster Home Coordinator for updates regarding the dog that you trained.

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

Sometimes dogs in training are career changed due to health reasons, temperament or training issues. When a dog is withdrawn from the service dog training program, the placement of the dog is 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.

Puppy name guidelines

Each Helping Paws litter is designated by a letter of the alphabet and the name of every dog in that litter must start with that letter. Foster home trainers choose a name for their “service dog in training”. Generally, “service dogs in training” cannot be given a name of a previous Helping Paws dog. Potential names must be approved by the Director of Training.

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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