



## Selecting Your Own Service Dog Prospect

### A Resource Guide for Owner-Trained Service Dog Teams

#### Introduction

Choosing your own dog to train as a service dog can be an exciting and rewarding journey. Owner-trained teams have the opportunity to build a strong partnership from the beginning and customize training to their individual needs.

One of the most important decisions you will make is selecting the right dog. A service dog is not simply a well-trained pet. Service work requires a dog with the appropriate **temperament, health, structure, resilience, and trainability** to perform reliably in many environments.

The best training in the world cannot overcome genetics that are not suited for service work.

#### Before Choosing A Dog Understand the Commitment

Training your own service dog requires:

- ✓ Time and consistency
- ✓ Financial investment
- ✓ Professional guidance and education
- ✓ Commitment through the puppy stage, adolescence, and adulthood
- ✓ Understanding that not every dog will successfully complete service training

A dog can be loving, intelligent, obedient, a wonderful companion, and still not have the qualities required for service work.

A responsible owner-trainer understands that the goal is not simply to train **a dog**, but to develop a reliable working partner who enjoys working alongside them.

#### Choosing a Breed

While many breeds can do wonderful things, some breeds are more commonly successful in service work because of their temperament and historical roles.

Breeds commonly selected for service work include:

##### Labrador Retrievers

Often valued for:

- stable temperament



- food motivation
- willingness to work
- adaptability
- resilience

## **Golden Retrievers**

Often valued for:

- social temperament
- sensitivity
- cooperation
- strong human connection

## **Standard Poodles**

Often valued for:

- intelligence
- trainability
- lower-shedding coat
- adaptability

The individual dog matters more than the breed alone. A well-bred individual from appropriate lines is much more important than choosing a breed based only on reputation.

## **What We Recommend Looking for in a Breeder**

The internet is a powerful tool. Spend time doing your research on breeders, reading reviews, and asking questions.

A responsible breeder should prioritize:

### **1. Health Testing**

Breeding dogs should have appropriate health clearances completed before breeding.

The sire and dam of each litter should have extensive health testing, and the breeder should not rely on lineage testing or pedigree because it can't measure individual physical health, catch hidden recessive traits, account for pedigree errors, or evaluate functional temperament.



For Labrador Retrievers and Golden Retrievers health testing of the dam and sire should include:

- ✓ Hips
- ✓ Elbows
- ✓ Eyes
- ✓ Relevant genetic testing

Ask breeders:

- “Can I see the parents’ health clearances?”
- “What health testing has been completed?”
- “Are results publicly available?”

## **2. Stable Temperament**

Temperament is one of the most important factors for a service dog prospect.

Look for parents who have been raised in homes (not kennels) and who have undergone training similar to what a service dog has and have spent time in dog friendly public spaces.

Other important considerations to consider:

- ✓ Confidence in new environments
- ✓ Ability to recover from surprises
- ✓ Appropriate social behaviour
- ✓ Calmness around people and novel dogs
- ✓ Ability to settle in the home
- ✓ Ability to work despite distractions

## **3. Breeders Who Match Puppies Carefully**

A quality breeder does not simply allow families to choose the “pick of the litter.”

Instead, they evaluate puppies and consider:

- confidence
- resilience
- engagement with people
- recovery from stress



- adaptability
- energy level
- environmental sensitivity

The puppy that is best for a family pet may not be the puppy best suited for service work.

#### **4. Early Development Practices**

Ask breeders about their puppy-raising program.

We recommend breeders who provide:

- ✓ Early neurological stimulation (ENS)
- ✓ Early socialization
- ✓ Puppy Culture
- ✓ Exposure to household environments
- ✓ Positive handling experiences
- ✓ Appropriate exposure to surfaces, sounds, and environments

Ask your breeder for videos and photos of current litters undergoing ENS, puppy culture, and socialization, saying they socialize their litters isn't enough.

#### **5. Questions and Red Flags**

A reputable breeder should welcome questions and ask interested client's questions.

Red flags include:

- ▶ No health testing
- ▶ Refusal to provide documentation
- ▶ Constant availability of puppies. An ethical breeder should have a waitlist, not litters of puppies available.
- ▶ Marketing puppies as "guaranteed service dogs"
- ▶ No questions asked about your lifestyle
- ▶ Focus on colour, size, or appearance
- ▶ No contract or lifetime support
- ▶ Breeders who participate in a MLM dog food program and void a contract if a buyer switches food. Ex. Life's Abundance or TLC.
- ▶ A breeder that advertises their lines make good hunting dogs, service dogs, & pets. A dog bred for all those jobs at once rarely does any of them well. Breeding for different tasks requires very different traits.

#### **6. Questions to Ask a Breeder**

Before committing to a puppy, ask:



### **About the Parents**

- What health testing has been completed?
- What are their temperaments like?
- Have they produced previous service or working dogs? If so, for which organizations. Reach out to these organizations for feedback on the breeder's product.
- What public environments have they been to? How do they respond in public environments?
- Have they been raised in a home or kennel?

### **About the Puppies**

- How are puppies evaluated?
- How are puppies matched with homes?
- What socialization experiences do puppies receive?
- What support is provided after placement?

### **About the Breeding Program**

- Why was this litter planned?
- What traits are you trying to preserve?
- Do you have a waitlist for your litters?
- How do you decide which dogs should be bred?

### **Puppy Temperament**

While no puppy temperament test can predict the future perfectly, promising service prospects often demonstrate:

- ✓ Curiosity
- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Recovery after mild stress
- ✓ Interest in people
- ✓ Ability to engage with a handler
- ✓ Ability to settle after excitement
- ✓ Appropriate motivation



## The Reality of Owner Training

Even with excellent genetics and early development:

- Some dogs will not complete service training.
- Some dogs will become wonderful pets instead.
- Some dogs may excel in one type of work but not another.

A responsible program or trainer will prioritize the wellbeing of both the dog and handler when making these decisions.

## Summit Service Dogs Owner Trained Support

Summit Service Dogs supports individuals pursuing owner-trained service dog partnerships through:

- ✓ Education and guidance
- ✓ Training support
- ✓ Behaviour development
- ✓ Public access preparation
- ✓ Task training guidance
- ✓ Team development

Our goal is to help create confident, capable teams built on a strong foundation.