



BEFORE YOU APPLY

THESE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU APPLY TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE CVSDU.

There is no doubt that the benefits of having a Service Dog far outweigh the challenges but having a Service Dog is not the right choice for everyone who has a disability. If you are thinking about applying to be paired with a Service Dog, please consider the questions that follow carefully. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions. The questions do not have simple yes or no answers; they are meant to be thoughtfully considered over a period of time taking in both facts and feelings. These questions are meant to help you be honest with yourself and those you are close to about whether a Service Dog would be a good fit for you and your situation.

Having a Service Dog will have an impact on every part of your life including family, friends, work, recreation, and your mental, physical, and spiritual health and well-being. After reading this and taking time to answer the questions if you are not sure you are ready for a canine partner it is probably a good idea to wait before you start the process of applying to become part of the CVSDU.

1. If I apply to the CVSDU for a Service Dog, am I willing to wait up to two years before I am paired with my canine partner and then go through the months of training it takes to become a certified Service Dog team?

Being paired with a Service Dog can take a long time and then if you are paired with a dog it takes months more bonding and training before you will be a certified team. There are many reasons the process takes time including; the availability of suitable dogs, the time it takes to train them and the process of pairing them with disabled veterans and first responders. Do you have the patience and endurance to get through this process?

2. Am I financially able to take on the costs of caring for a dog 10 to 15 years?

Whether you are given a trained service dog from the CVSDU, or you apply to have your own dog trained by you and the CVSDU there is going to be real costs. The pandemic has dramatically increased the cost of any dog, let alone a dog that can be trained to be a Service Dog. Once you and your canine partner are a team there are many costs that will fall to you as a handler. Typically, Service Dogs are fed the highest quality food that suits their individual needs. There is the cost of equipment, kennels, collars, leashes, walking gear, and more. Your canine will have grooming needs that you will be responsible for things like teeth cleaning, nail trims, haircuts, washing, ear cleaning and other needs. There will be veterinary costs, including annual shots and check-up and as dogs age they may develop medical conditions that will need care and resources. Will you buy medical insurance or life insurance for your dog so that you can replace the dog if something unforeseen happens? For many of our members they budget to spend anywhere from \$4,000 to \$6,000 annually on their Service Dog. (Fortunately, many of the costs associated with your Service Dog can be deducted from federal income tax because you require the service animal to assist you with a medically recognized disability).

3. Are you ready to care for your Service Dog every single day?

Yes, your Service Dog will be a great support to you in ways you cannot imagine, but your canine is a living breathing creature who will need your constant care and attention. This means you will need to maintain a regular routine which includes: at least one nutritional meal a day; regular walks; training and stimulation; grooming and hygiene; and you will need to pick up and clean up after your canine partner. There are no exceptions when it comes to routine and care for your dog. If there is four feet of snow on the ground, or slush and salt, or rain coming down your Service Dog needs routine and care. Think about how that will impact your lifestyle, family and home life, work and recreation, hobbies, and friendships. And if for whatever reason one day you are not able to care for your Service Dog and keep them in their routine who will? There are also physical considerations: do you have enough space for a dog kennel; do you have access to a safe physical space where you can do training; do you have access to a fenced in space (i.e. a backyard); can your vehicle accommodate a Service Dog and can the animal safely enter and exit it? From our experience the degree of care and dedication you show your Service Dog is returned to you many times over through their attention and care of you.

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4. Are you prepared to always be the centre of attention?

There will be at least two audiences watching you when you are paired with a Service Dog. When you are in public spaces you will be stared at, pointed to, asked questions, and told long winded stories about beloved pets. You will be put on the spot by children and parents who want to pet your Service Dog even though the Dog's vest clearly says NO. Parents and teachers will use you and your dog as a teaching prop. You will be resented by others who do not understand why you have a Service Dog because they cannot see your disability. Others will come right out and ask you why you need a Service Dog. You will have to become an advocate for and protector of your Service Dog when others are not paying attention and they put you and your canine partner in jeopardy. You will have to explain to business owners, security guards, attendants, medical staff, and others why you and your canine partner have a right to access their space and services. You will have to deal with people who simply do not like or are afraid of dogs and that can be hard if you are in a small space with that person. Whether you like it or not you will represent and speak for the CVSDU and the whole Service Dog community in the places you inhabit through your week. And you will need to do it calmly, with insight, knowledge, and humility. As well your Service Dog will need to be well behaved, groomed, and happy to be with you working.

Having a Service Dog can be stressful. You can expect people to be interested in you and your canine partner, they will ask intrusive questions, take up your time and make you feel uncomfortable and even anxious. And while you must endure this you need to be an ambassador for the CVSDU and leave an outstanding impression no matter how many times you are challenged, interrupted, or judged. If you are not sure you can do this then you might want to think about an alternative to a Service Dog.

The second audience that will always watch you is your canine partner. There will be few moments in the day when your Service Dog will not be watching you or accompanying you. Are you ready to have your Service Dog watch you when you are taking a shower, bathing, or going to the bathroom, sleeping or spending time with loved ones and friends? Unless your Service Dog is kennelled up, they will be with you. Are you prepared for that much attention and are you willing to accommodate and ask others to accommodate your devoted canine partner?

5. Are you willing and able to accept the training and socialization obligations accompanying a Service Dog?

Bonding and training with a Service Dog to become a qualified team takes time, energy, commitment, and a consistent routine. If you are paired by the CVSDU with a dog that is already trained you will be asked to bond, learn to communicate with the dog, and learn to handle and maintain you and your partner's training. If you come to the program with your own dog, you will be asked to train and socialize your dog from scratch. In any case becoming a qualified team takes months to accomplish and it is not a one-time event; training and socialization must be maintained, and it is your responsibility to make that happen.

Service Dogs are not machines or computers that can be turned on and expected to run flawlessly until they are put to bed. Service Dogs have bad days to and it is your responsibility to discern what is going on and correct your dog or the situation. You cannot be so emotionally involved with your dog that you cannot discern a problem and then correct it in the appropriate way. You must provide the structure, guidelines, and boundaries necessary for your canine partner to thrive and be able to serve you to the best of his or her ability.

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You cannot be a pushover, and you cannot worry about “hurting his or her feelings.” Service Dogs must uphold very stringent standards, and sloppy or ill-behaved Service Dogs wreak havoc on the Service Dog community as a whole. You must commit to upholding your Service Dog’s training, skills, and behavior for the rest of his/her life. The CVSDU is not only committed to training Service Dog teams we maintain that training by offering monthly training events for members and their canines. The training event is usually about an hour with some socialization time as well. All members are encouraged to attend monthly training events. The CVSDU standard is that dog teams will attend at least three training events per year. If a member and their dog do not attend at least three training events their membership in the CVSDU could come under review by the Board of Directors of the CVSDU. A well-trained canine is not only a happy dog they are a joy to be around.

6. Are you prepared to deal with conflict?

People who have Service Dogs understand that when they are accessing public space, they may encounter people who do not know or understand what a service dog does, and they may try to restrict your access.

We all encounter this and we work to correct the situation. The conflict that catches us off guard comes from unexpected places like a friend, family member or loved one who does not understand why you need a dog. You must be prepared for some relationships to change and maybe even end because you have a Service Dog.

No matter what happens you must conduct yourself professionally and with poise just like you did when you served your country and community as member of the CAF, police, corrections, fire or ambulance services.

Are you emotionally and mentally ready to face the changes having a Service Dog will bring?

7. Are you ready to commit to the responsibilities and expectations of the CVSDU?

While having a Service Dog and becoming a member of the CVSDU may change some of your relationships it will also make you part of a much bigger community. Are you ready and willing to become part of a charity that will not only help you and your Service Dog become a team, but we also train together, administer the CVSDU together and work to educate and help others, especially those suffering with the affects of PTSD?

This is a veteran’s charity in the broadest sense of the word, and it is not to far fetched to say we are kind of like a second family. Are you ready for that kind of commitment? We try to be like a second family that is welcoming, helpful and non-judgmental. You’ll learn more about responsibilities and expectations when you review and sign our Member’s Agreement.

When it comes right down to it, no one can ask all the right questions. You and you alone know whether or not a Service Dog is right for you and your lifestyle, and at the end of the day, you are the one who is going to have to dig deep and accept responsibility for your choices. Service Dogs bring peace, independence, security, and a new degree of ability to thousands of people, and if you are going to be one of them, congratulations, and we hope maybe we will be able to welcome you into the CVSDU.