

CanineSidekicks Service Dogs, Inc.

Therapy Dog Development Program

Program Overview

The Therapy Dog Development Program prepares qualified dog and handler teams for safe, professional, and meaningful participation in schools, healthcare settings, libraries, community programs, long-term care facilities, and other approved environments. The program is built upon the CanineSidekicks Service Dog Development framework, with additional standards specific to therapy work and public interaction.

Team Eligibility Requirements

All therapy dog candidates must meet the same temperament, stability, environmental confidence, neutrality, training, and handling standards required of service dog candidates. In addition, therapy dogs must demonstrate a genuine enjoyment of social interaction with unfamiliar people, willingness to accept physical affection, relaxed body language during interactions, and comfort engaging with individuals of varying ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

CS Standards Manual, Section 3.1 & 3.2

Health & Veterinary Requirements

Health and veterinary requirements mirror those outlined within the CanineSidekicks Service Dog Development Program. Dogs must be physically sound, free from contagious illness, current on required veterinary care, and capable of safely participating in therapy visits.

CS Standards Manual, Section 3.4

Foundation Skills Requirements

All foundation skills requirements are identical to those established for service dog candidates, including basic obedience, impulse control, handling tolerance, environmental stability, grooming tolerance, and public behaviour standards.

CS Standards Manual, Section 3.3

Advanced Therapy Dog Skills

Dogs must remain calm and confident around emotional displays, including crying, grief responses, elevated emotions, and stressful situations. Dogs must demonstrate appropriate social engagement, controlled physical interaction, and the ability to provide calm companionship while maintaining safety and composure.

Community Exposure Training

Teams must meet or exceed the public access standards outlined within the Service Dog Development Program. Additional emphasis is placed on working around groups of people, frequent social interactions, crowded environments, and extended public visits.

CS Standards Manual, Section 6.0

Facility-Specific Training

Teams receive exposure and preparation for educational settings, healthcare facilities, residential care settings, and community-based programs. Training includes facility etiquette, safety protocols, environmental exposure, and professional conduct expectations.

Handler Communication & Professionalism

Handlers are expected to maintain professional conduct, appropriate communication skills, confidentiality, reliability, and adherence to all facility-specific policies and program expectations.

Welfare & Stress Management

Handlers must be able to recognize signs of stress, fatigue, avoidance, or discomfort in their dog and remove the dog from interactions when appropriate. Dog welfare always takes priority over participation.

Evaluation Standards

Teams must successfully complete a Therapy Dog Suitability Assessment evaluating sociability, emotional stability, handling skills, environmental confidence, public behaviour, and safe interaction with the public.

Certification Requirements

To become certified, teams must successfully complete all required training components, pass the Therapy Dog Suitability Assessment, and demonstrate safe, professional, and appropriate behaviour in therapy environments.

Annual Recertification Requirements

Certified teams must complete annual recertification to maintain active status. Recertification requirements follow the same standards and procedures established within the Service Dog Development Program.

CS Standards Manual, Section 9.10

Incident Reporting & Team Conduct

All incidents, concerns, injuries, behavioural concerns, or policy violations must be documented and reported according to program procedures.

CS Standards Manual, Section 15.3.6

Program Policies & Ethics

Teams must adhere to all CanineSidekicks policies regarding welfare, humane training, professional conduct, confidentiality, public safety, and ethical representation of the program.

CS Standards Manual