

**Is a Service (Mobility) Dog right for you?** Working with a Service (Mobility) Dog could be one of the most rewarding and liberating experiences of your life. However, it can also be difficult and frustrating. The difference regarding [benefit vs burden](#) lies with you. The purpose of this document is to assist you in determining whether you really want or need a Service (Mobility) Dog for assistance with your disability or illness.

**It takes work....**You might have heard stories of incredible feats performed by service dogs for their human partner. The truth is these stories were possible due to an enormous amount of hard work and dedication from the foster parents, trainers and the recipient BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER the dog placement was made.

***Please read the questions below to have a better understanding of obtaining a Service (Mobility) Dog:***

**It takes time....**It takes hundreds of hours to train the skills that service mobility dogs uses. Many people, including trainers and puppy foster parents, who care for the dog for the 2-year training period, are concerned about the dog's next home. As the recipient of a Service (Mobility) Dog it will become your responsibility to continue the training that started at COPE Service Dogs. In addition, dogs require emotional stimulation much the same way that humans do. At this point you must ask yourself, "am I prepared to practice skills, reinforce behaviours and provide emotional and physical stimulation with a dog EVERY DAY for the next 10 years"? If you have answered NO to that question, you need not read any further . . . a Service (Mobility) Dog is not the appropriate help for you.

**Would you consider adopting a toddler?** For the first six months to a year having a new Service (Mobility) Dog can be much like having a toddler. The dog requires ongoing training and supervision, and you are responsible for providing it. The first year with a new Service (Mobility) Dog is a critical bonding period. It is best if you can give 100% of your time and attention to the new Service (Mobility) Dog. If you have just started college, recently moved or started a new job it may be best to wait until you are settled into your new routine.

**Can you spend two weeks at the training center?** The period at COPE's training center is referred to as "the placement period" or "team training". The two-week team training camp is usually held in July and is intense, stressful and exhausting. There are lectures, practice periods, plus written and practical tests. Training time each day may last up to seven hours plus homework prior to and during the team training camp. You must also provide your own transportation to and from the training center. You are also responsible for your meals and personal care. If the recipient is a minor, a parent must attend the training camp.

**Associated Costs:** The cost to our program for training, placing and providing follow-up services for one service dog is over \$30,000. COPE Service Dogs requires a non-refundable payment of \$3,500 plus mileage to cover our costs associated with the placement of the Service (Mobility) Dog. In addition, you are responsible for your travel to and from team training camp in Barrie.

COPE Service Dogs can guide those in financial need by directing the applicant to funding organizations to fully or partially cover the financial obligations of acquiring a COPE Service Dog. COPE Service Dogs appreciates successful applicants and clients working with COPE Service Dogs in raising funds to contribute to the cost of their service dog.

Once the Service (Mobility) Dog is in your custody you will be responsible for the costs associated with feeding, veterinary care, grooming, treats, toys and some equipment. These costs can easily average \$1,200 - \$2,500 annually. You must plan on how you will be able afford the Service (Mobility) Dog. See document "[Costs associated with receiving and maintaining a Service \(Mobility\) Dog](#)" for details.

**Living arrangements:** Who lives with you? Spouse, parents, children and roommates must be taken into consideration when applying for a Service (Mobility) Dog. How do they feel about sharing a residence with a dog? How does your family feel about you gaining increased independence? How will this affect them and their role in your life? Will it mean less responsibility for them or more? Individuals in your life who are not supportive of a Service (Mobility) Dog will most likely prove to be problematic in the application process. Be sure to talk the idea over with all those people who will be affected directly and indirectly in you having a Service (Mobility) Dog in your life.

Consider what type of housing and community you live in. Even if you have a fenced yard, you must find ways to provide enough daily exercise and stimulation for a 75-pound dog to keep them well balanced and happy to work for you.

What about employers, schools and public settings? Are you prepared to be a self-advocate for your public access rights? Are you prepared for the frustration of being denied access because of your Service (Mobility) Dog? You do have the legal right to be accompanied by a Service (Mobility) Dog, however at some point in time it most likely will be challenged. Will you be able to deal with confrontation?

**Hidden Disability? No longer incognito.** Anonymity is a serious consideration for some clients whose disabilities cannot be easily seen. Once you have a Service (Mobility) Dog with you that invisibility is gone. The general public are now educated, and they know that if you have a Service (Mobility) Dog you must also have a disability. You will be stopped, questioned and watched.

Many Canadians love dogs and many have dogs of their own. Be forewarned your Service (Mobility) Dog will draw the attention of every dog owner in the mall, on the street and in the workplace. They will stop to visit, to ask questions and to share stories of their dogs. If you are introverted this may prove to be annoying and, in some cases, even stressful. Think this through... your Service (Mobility) Dog will accompany you everywhere you go for up to the next 10 years.

**Do you really love dogs? ... REALLY??** Dog hair, slobber, drool, feces and urine are all a part of dog ownership. This means daily grooming, picking up after them and tolerating hair and saliva on you. If you are meticulous in cleaning and being clean, a Service (Mobility) Dog might drive you crazy. Taking care of your dog daily will keep them relatively clean, however you must be able to tolerate a certain amount of dirt in your home.

Through the course of the working life of a Service (Mobility) Dog, there will likely be toileting and vomiting accidents indoors, or the dog may become unwell at some point and need to be taken to the veterinary hospital. If not supervised the dog may get a hold of your new shoes or a prized possession and use them as a chew toy. You will go through life with dog hair as a permanent accessory to your wardrobe. A Service (Mobility) Dog is an educated animal that has been conditioned to live in a human society. Will you be able to handle the day to day aspects of having a service dog living in your home?

**High hopes and great expectations:** How will a Service (Mobility) Dog make my life better than it is now? What task(s) or skill(s) will a Service (Mobility) Dog perform that will provide positive assistance for my disability? Remember, a Service (Mobility) Dog cannot change your physical abilities but can help you with day to day tasks.

**Finally, what is your plan when the service dog retires?** A typical working life for an assistance dog is around 7-9 years. What would your plan be when the dog is ready to retire? Will you apply for a successor dog? How will you deal with the grief from the passing of your first service dog or the experience of guilt of no longer working with the retired dog? Are you ready to open your heart and your mind to put in the work with a new dog all over again? The first successor dog is the most difficult placement for a client as well as for the program. You must be ready psychologically to accept and bond with a new dog to qualify for a successor dog.

**Benefit or burden?** Do the projected benefits of a Service (Mobility) Dog outweigh the burdens? Use the chart below to complete the exercise and return the form along with other requested materials, once you have received the full application documentation from COPE Service Dogs. Attach additional pages if necessary.

**Burdens vs Benefits Chart**

The following chart is provided to assist you in realistically looking at a Service (Mobility) Dog as assistance for your disability. Does the value of the benefits outweigh the burdens?

<b>Expected Burdens</b>	<b>Perceived Benefits</b>
<b>Example: My service dog requires \$100 monthly expenses in food and vet bills</b>	<b>Example: Dog picks up an out of reach item</b>
<b>Example: Being stopped by people to ask about my service dog</b>	<b>Example: Being stopped by people to ask about my service dog</b>

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