

Dogs in Vests Summary Report

Information about the Applicant

DogsInVests, has been training and placing service dogs with children and young adults with autism since our inception in 2017. We are currently training five service dogs that will be placed with individuals over the next 24 months. We will be adding three more puppies to the training program in Summer 2022. DogsInVests placed our first service dog with his client in July 2020 and placed a second dog in August 2021. DogsInVests specializing in the training and placement of dogs for individuals with autism in Southeastern Wisconsin. We are also the only organization placing these service dogs at no cost to the individuals or their families.

In addition to training and placing service dogs, DogsInVests also facilitates awareness- building presentations that educate children and families about autism, the benefits of service dogs for individuals with autism, and how to behave around a working service dog. DogsInVests has hosted several of these presentations in local schools, churches and community organizations reaching approximately hundreds of individuals since our founding. To ensure that we are reaching those who may be in need of a service dog at no cost, we engage and develop relationships with autism organizations, therapists and advocate agencies who then provide referrals to our organization.

Statement of Need

Individuals with autism can face social communication challenges and restricted, repetitive behaviors that interfere with their lives. A service dog can encourage development, provide protection from hazards, calm anxiety, and complete other traditional service dog responsibilities, such as opening doors and retrieving objects.

With the help of a service dog, an individual with autism and their family can integrate more fully with their community. DogsInVests works to raise and train service dogs in a way that is customized to meet the individual's specific needs.

Our dogs are usually placed with the client when they are approximately two years old. By that time our dogs have received over 200 hours of training both in class and reinforcement from their puppy raisers. Classes include Puppy Class, Adult Beginner, and Canine Good Citizen. They have all passed the required AKC Urban Canine Good Citizen test (formally known as the Public Access Test) and we are confident in their abilities to perform at the best level for their recipient.

In addition to funds requested from the Wispact Foundation, we have an annual campaign for our service dog training fund. In April we had a campaign observing Autism Awareness Month for our training fund. This campaign raised over \$2000. Our most recent year end campaigns which included Giving Tuesday and Matching Funds raised over \$80,000 . We are pursuing several additional grant opportunities to fund our organization. We also have ongoing support from local community organizations such as the American Legion and Lions Clubs and also local businesses.

Project Goals and Expected Benefits

The first metric we are measuring is the service dog's ability to perform specific behaviors with direct benefits to the specific recipient. Weekly evaluations are conducted to monitor progress.

The second metric we are measuring is the service dog's ability to sustain the specific behaviors consistently after placement. During the first year of placement several visits are made to the home/school environment. DogsInVests monitors this training consistency during the first year at the following intervals after placement, 1 Week, 2 Weeks, 1 Month, 3 Months, 6 Months, 9 Months, and 12 Months.

The final metric is an annual evaluation at the DogsInVests facility. After the first year the recipient is required to bring the dog in annually to be evaluated by our trainer and veterinarian. The dog and recipient meet with our trainer and are tested to determine if there are any training problems or inconsistencies that need to be addressed and that the dog is maintaining its training requirements for the recipient. Additionally, at the annual evaluation DogsInVests veterinarian performs a wellness check on the dog to determine overall health and fitness.

Project Implementation Plan

The training process to become a service dog starts with obedience-style classes. The first is Puppy Class, which is designed to train acceptable behaviors before problems or bad habits start to develop. The Puppy Class also introduces the dog to basic obedience commands. This class may be repeated, or an Adult Beginner training may be suggested for dogs over six months of age. The dog receives weekly assessments to determine when they can advance to the next level of training.

Once the service dog in training is ready, they begin training for the Canine Good Citizen Exam. This class is designed for strengthening home manners, improving off-leash work, and various therapy work behaviors. The dog must pass the AKC evaluation for Canine Good Citizen, which is a rigorous test in which the dog stays on task while facing many distractions without treats or rewards. Any deviation away from their focus on their handler results in an automatic failure for the test. Passing the Canine Good Citizen test gives us confidence that our dogs are properly trained and ready to meet the distractions of the outside world while maintaining their focus when working.

During their second year, DogsInVests service dogs in training meet weekly at our facility for more specialized training with their recipient. Our trainer and puppy raisers continue to reinforce the skills learned in Canine Good Citizen while also introducing and practicing behaviors specific to the recipient's needs. For example, children and young adults with autism may exhibit repetitive or self-harming behaviors, so their dog is trained to recognize the behavior and provide a distraction technique to redirect the individual. This could be something as simple as putting a paw on the individual or leaning against them to provide comforting pressure. In addition to recognizing various autism behaviors, some of our dogs receive scent training for recipient specific tasks.

Evaluation Plan

Progress is measured in our training process on a weekly basis. Each dog is also customized to each recipient's unique needs. All our applicants list a minimum of three specific tasks that they need the dog to perform. Our dogs must be able to consistently perform at least three tasks that aid the recipient to be considered service dogs. Our dogs work with our trainer and their puppy raiser to perfect the specific tasks for their unique recipient. Prior to graduation our dogs and recipients work together for several months before final placement. This allows for the bonding process to solidify and helps the recipient and their families perfect their dog handling skills. There are scheduled overnight visits and the recipient and their families are encouraged to work with the dog in number of environments.

Our training program which includes extensive "bonding sessions" with the recipient prior to placement provides a dog specific to the individual client's needs. We are able to get to know the recipient and their families so we are able to provide a custom dog tailored to their lifestyle.

Budget

Project: One Year Private Dog Training
Start Date: August 1, 2022 (Flexible)
Amount Requested: \$5,720.00
Total Project Budget: \$5,000.00

Expense	Cost	Funds from Wispact Grant
Client Specific Specialized dog training One Year (Private) 52 hours @ \$110.00	\$5,720.00	\$5,000.00

Staff Recommendation

The Grant application can be approved. The grant will provide \$5,000.00 to serve as a scholarship fund to sponsor the training of one service dog that will provide valuable assistance to a person with a disability.