

## **Pawtism Society Summary Report**

### **Information about the Applicant**

Pawsitism Inc. is a 501(c)3 not for profit in Wisconsin that was developed to enhance the life of a child with autism. Our purpose is to provide a family with a personally and professionally trained ADA certified service dog that will enhance the life of a child medically diagnosed with autism and ensure the continued success of the family through continued training and education. We primarily serve Sheboygan County and the surrounding areas. We accept families with children between the age of 5-18 years old. Currently, Pawsitism has certified three families/teams (dog, handler, and child) that are working successfully within the community. Through the assistance of their service dog, each of their designated children have been able to experience areas of social settings that were not available to them in the past due to overstimulation or safety concerns. The organization partners with volunteers and Ruff Academy to raise and train each dog to swim, provide deep pressure therapy, perform gaze therapy, tether and anchor for a child who might run, and even track the child if they wander off. These tasks help increase a child's confidence, improve social interactions and relationships, expand their communication, build independence, and decrease stress for the child with autism and their family. They are trained to help a child whether they are in the comforts of their own home, at school, or experiencing a new place in the community.

### **Statement of Need**

In order to successfully train a service dog, our organization relies on our amazing volunteers and the donations and generosity of others. As a newer organization, we are working on becoming known within the community in order to secure regular donors. With rising costs of veterinary care, food, treats, gear for the dogs, and grooming, many of the smaller donations we have been fortunate to receive have dissipated quickly. We are looking to utilize the WisPact grant to cover the training of two dogs for one year at a cost of \$10,000. Our ultimate goal is to provide an autism assistance service dog to each family that makes it through our selection process at the lowest price possible. When all expenses are added up, each dog that goes through our program costs close to \$54,000. Some are more and some are less based on the dog's individual needs (amount of training, vet care, food, doggy daycare, and social experience/ desensitization trips). With our past donations, we have only had to ask the families to fundraise \$5,000 to be put back into our Pawsitism Inc. organization. This grant would help us continue to keep the cost lower for our families.

### **Project Goals and Expected Benefits**

The expected goals and benefits from our organization is to help families, whose lives are directly impacted by autism, have everyday life experiences. Our goal is: by March 2024, we will increase from three to five, certified dog/handler teams so two of our waiting families can be positively impacted by our autism assistance service dogs. Our first objective will be: by March 2024, we will provide quarterly family support group opportunities so our certified families, waiting families, and new families can come and share their hopes, fears, and receive support from each other or our multi-skilled board members. Our second objective will be to: by March 2024, we will increase to monthly check-ins for our puppy-raisers so they can share with the board what they need help with while taking the dog-in-training out into the public so the dogs can be better prepared for certification when they are done with the 18 months of training. The work we are able to accomplish with the service dogs and children is remarkable. From attending weddings, medical appointments, vacations and school, the families with children diagnosed with autism are able to experience societal norms with the support of our autism assistance service dog. With the grant, we will be able to evaluate and focus on the growth of the children who receive a service dog. We evaluate this growth yearly, testing the handler/family and dog's abilities to gain public access to areas that often cause distress for the families. The families will be able to focus on preferred activities and positive relationships with their child in everyday situations. As we work together, the families are able to report back on areas of the

program they feel need improvement as well as when life events happen, they can lean on Pawsitism to support a change and retrain the dog if necessary.

### **Project Implementation Plan**

Currently, there are four dogs being trained for waiting families with another coming during the month of August. Our plan is to continue training the four dogs with the help of our RUFF Academy trainers and the volunteer puppy raisers. We are fortunate to have our volunteer puppy raisers who take care of the service dogs until they are placed with a waiting family. As an organization we would like to provide more support and check-ins to ensure they feel supported and have their questions answered in a timely manner. They are truly the backbone of our organization. They are tasked with learning from our lead trainer and generalizing those skills to public places with our Pawsitism Inc service dog in training. Since they are a crucial piece in our puzzle, we will create a system to check-in on them monthly and report back concerns or things they see could become challenges. The next step in our project implementation is to provide additional support to the families in waiting. It is a long process from application to being certified with an autism assistance service dog and we want to make sure they feel supported in the process. We will be facilitating quarterly support groups where certified, waiting, and new families can come together and be themselves. Families who have a child with autism can feel alienated when their child has an "outburst" in public or does something that is not socially appropriate. This will give the families an opportunity to enjoy each other's company and share stories with each other. Some of the board members will also be present to answer questions or offer suggestions as many have a background in working with a child with autism. Our goal is to have these new procedures up and running by October 2022 and our additional two dogs certified by March 2024. Financially, we will continue fundraising efforts year round. These efforts help with the cost of training, health care and proper grooming of the dog, doggy daycare for socialization and some administration and transportation costs to events that educate the community on ADA laws and service animals. Attached is our current board of directors, who maintain and fulfill the day to day responsibilities of the organization. Any grants that we receive will be assigned to a board member to keep track of the areas of growth we see because of the generosity of the grant.

### **Evaluation Plan**

In order to document the benefits of the grant, we will utilize a few different methods. To certify our main goal which is to add two additional certified teams to our family by March 2024, we will continue to track the progress and success of the dogs and families. Currently, families have to pass an ADA knowledge test, and training skills test in a highly public place. Each year we recertify families, which could include traveling out of state (one family has moved). With the dogs being trained to hone in on the needs of their child, the trainers remain available to the families who are able to report back the gains occurring through this service. To document our progress towards our first objective, we will create a Google document with the dates, location, times, and summary of conversations from our quarterly, Family Support group. These notes can also serve as a guide for the board members to see where additional support is needed for our certified, waiting, and new families. To document our progress towards our objectives, we will create a spreadsheet with each of our puppy raisers' names on it. On this spreadsheet, we will track which board member reached out to the puppy raisers, when, and a note about the conversation. If the puppy raiser would like a follow-up conversation, we will email the appropriate trainer or board member to make that happen so they can feel supported. We will be able to evaluate that we touched base at least on a monthly basis with our volunteer puppy raisers.

### **Budget**

#### **Socialization Training**

Our 18 months of training is critical to the success of our service dogs. During this time, the dogs spend a few hours in the community with the dogs working on basic obedience, socialization,

desensitizing them to various situations, and working on their skills. Currently, we are receiving this service for free because our trainer is the founder of our program. We would like to grow as an organization so we can at least pay part of her training fees.

Expenses:

\$100 per dog per training session

\$1,200 per dog for training per month ( $\$100 \times 3$  days a week  $\times 4$  weeks)

\$14,400 per dog for training per year

\$4,800 per month for all four dogs

\$57,600 per month for all four dogs

### **Staff Recommendation**

The grant application can be recommended for approval of the requested amount of \$10,000.00. The proceeds will be applied to the cost of training the service dogs which directly benefits the persons with autism that will be matched with them. This aligns with the initiatives of the foundation.

