Saint Francis Service Dogs

The Journey from Puppy to Service Dog

PUPPY PROGRAM

Up to 12 Months

- Puppy selection process begins with screening of temperament, conformation, aptitude for learning, and connection with people
- At 8 weeks old, puppies enter our puppy training program
- Puppies may work with our Bland Puppy Raisers, Volunteer Puppy Raisers, or a combination of the two

Bland Puppy Raisers

-Puppies live and work one-on-one with inmates at Bland Correctional Center

-Puppies stay with puppy sitters outside of the prison to help with socialization skills and confidence in a variety of settings

Volunteer Puppy Raisers

-Puppies live and work one-on-one with one of our volunteer puppy raisers

-Volunteer puppy raisers not only begin our dog's training, but are also responsible for socializing them in a variety of settings

- Bland and volunteer puppy raisers each work with our training team in weekly classes with a goal of teaching basic obedience and manners, providing socialization opportunities, confidence building, connection with people and beginning task work
- When puppy raisers feel their puppies are ready, at around 6 months of age and 10 to 12 months of age, puppies take their beginner and intermediate tests, respectively
- Puppies are evaluated in manners, social skills, obedience, and games, which are used as training, reward, and mental and physical exercise

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ADVANCED TRAINING

8 - 12 Months

- Dogs enter our advanced training program when they are around a year old and work with a Saint Francis trainer

Staff Trainers

-Staff trainers are full-time employees of Saint Francis

-Dogs live in our kennels and train during the day

-Dogs spend time in the homes of dog sitters to experience life in a normal home environment

Field Trainers

-Field trainers are contracted by Saint Francis

-Dogs live and train in the homes of the trainer

-Field trainers come to weekly training classes with our training staff, standardizing the training experience of each dog

- After 2 months of working with a staff or field trainer, dogs take their Level 1 evaluation to see how they are progressing and find out which tasks and commands may need more work before the Level 1 test

Level 1 Test

-Takes place around month 4 of advanced training

-Evaluates the dog's skill in over 40 tasks in both indoor and outdoor settings

-Skills include retrieving, holding, and giving items of various materials and from different surfaces, getting help, coming when called from a distance, settling for up to 30 minutes, and many other tasks

- At around 6 months of advanced training dogs take their Level 2 evaluation to see how they are progressing and find out which tasks and commands may need more work before the Level 2 test

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ADVANCED TRAINING CONTINUED

Level 2 Test

-Takes place around month 8 of advanced training

-Evaluates dogs on up to 50 different skills, in varied settings, both on and off leash

-Skills established in Level 1 are expanded upon, adding complexity in position, environment, length of time of task, and/or distance from trainer

- During each evaluation and test, the dog's overall behavioral and social progress and general health are monitored and reviewed
- Upon completion of the Level 2 test, dogs are ready for Candidate Matching

TEAM AND IN-HOME TRAINING & CERTIFICATION

6 - 8 Months

- Dogs are matched with partners based on the partner's needs, the dog's strengths, and the interaction between the partner and dog during their interview; a partner may interview with multiple dogs before finding a match
- After matching, the trainer will continue training the dog in task work and obedience, as well as begin to integrate partner-specific skills

Team Training and Level 3 Test

-Partners attend a 10-day long intensive training course in Roanoke to begin working and living with their dogs

-The second day of team training marks the beginning of their six month probationary period

-They learn commands, begin task work, learn basic healthcare and grooming, and begin to spend relationship building time with their dog

-At the end of Team Training, the partners and dogs will take the Level 3 test, demonstrating they are able to handle and command their dog

- After a successful Level 3 test, dogs will go home with their partner

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IN HOME TRAINING & CERTIFICATION CONTINUED

- Several weeks later, the Partner Program Manager will travel to the home of the partner to continue training and teach the partner to manage the distractions that public places provide
- The Partner Program Manager will provide less hands-on support as the team learns to work together and problem solve on their own

Level 4 Test

-When the Partner Program Manager and the partner feel they are ready, the Level 4 test is administered in a public setting

-The team will demonstrate safety and control at all times, working at home and in public

- After successful completion of the Level 4 test, the team will continue to work and live together for the remainder of the probation period
- During this time, our training staff will monitor the team's progress via phone and email follow up and visits to the partner's home and work, if applicable or necessary

Certification

-After the probation period, teams will travel to our facility and take their certification exam

-Ownership of the dog will be transferred to the partner

RE-CERTIFICATION & CONTINUING EDUCATION

Continues for the lifetime of the partnership

- Teams are re-certified after one year and every other year after that
- We provide ongoing one-on-one follow-up and support, as well as optional quarterly classes for our teams to keep their training sharp, troubleshoot any problems, and add new tasks to their repertoire

- **Career Change Dogs:** If at any time during their training, a dog demonstrates that they do not enjoy service dog work, or something about their temperament or physiology prevents them from completing the program, they are put into our career change program. Learn more at **www.saintfrancisdogs.org/career-change**
- **Volunteer Opportunities:** Interested in being a part of the journey? Learn about our puppy volunteer programs at **www.saintfrancisdogs.org/volunteer**