



W.A.G.S. 4 Kids Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is W.A.G.S. 4 Kids?

A: Working Animals Giving Service for Kids (W.A.G.S. 4 Kids) was founded in 2004 and is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing mobility and autism service dogs exclusively for children throughout northeast and central Ohio utilizing an award-winning Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) accredited Step By Step Training Program.

Q: What ages do you work with?

A: W.A.G.S. 4 Kids works exclusively with children up to age 18. An individual can still apply for a service dog at age 18, however all paperwork and the fundraising process must begin before they turn 19. We will begin working with a child/family as soon as there is a need and an interest for a service dog.

Q: What areas do you serve?

A: W.A.G.S. 4 Kids currently serves 25 counties throughout Northeast and Central Ohio. Our unique in-home training never requires a family to travel to us, we come to them. Therefore, we serve the areas and counties where we currently have staff trainers (Cleveland/Columbus areas). Our enduring goal is to expand our reach to other areas of the state.

Q: Do you train alert or safety dogs?

A: We do not train seizure/diabetic alert dogs or safety dogs. Our dog training is based on commands – telling the dog to perform a task and it then performs it, which is different than alert training. When we ask our dogs to perform their task, 9/10 times they will do it. We equate it to a smoke alarm ... you wouldn't want a safety device (like an alert dog) to only be 90% effective.

Q: How long does it take to train a service dog?

A: It takes 18-24 months for a service dog to fully complete his/her training depending upon whether the service dog is being trained for mobility or autism spectrum service task work.

Q: How long does it take to receive a service dog?

A: The current waiting period for a W.A.G.S. 4 Kids service dog is approximately 24 months. We want our dogs to be 100% ready to help their child partner with that child's specific needs.

Q: Do you use rescue dogs?

A: W.A.G.S. 4 Kids does not use rescue dogs. Since we work with children, it's important we know the health and genetic history of the dogs in our program to ensure longevity in their service to their child partner.

Q: Where do you get your service dogs?

A: W.A.G.S. 4 Kids has partnerships with a few reputable breeders. Puppies from these breeders are evaluated by our Director of Program Operations and purchased by the organization.

Q: What breeds of dogs do you work with?

A: W.A.G.S. 4 Kids uses golden retrievers, labrador retrievers, poodles and poodle mixes. We use these breeds because they are what we refer to as “soft expressed dogs.” These dogs may go into school with their child partner where other students may not be familiar with dogs. Using fluffier dogs with soft expressions make it easier for weary classmates and other individuals in public who may be timid of dogs.

Q: Do you have a facility that houses the dogs?

A: W.A.G.S. 4 Kids does not have a facility. Our service dogs in training are housed with their inmate trainers at Grafton Correctional Institution and Mansfield Correctional Institution. They leave the correctional facility to go to the vet, to appear at a W.A.G.S. 4 Kids event, or to go through their transition training before they are placed with their child partner.

Q: How much does a service dog cost?

A: The total cost to train and place each W.A.G.S. 4 Kids service dog is \$28,000. During the training process, W.A.G.S. 4 Kids covers the cost of all food, housing, veterinary care, supplies and countless hours of professional training that go into preparing a service dog for placement with a child. Each partner family commits to fundraise \$9,000 of that cost, and W.A.G.S. commits to cover the additional \$19,000.

Q: Can you train the dog I already have?

A: W.A.G.S. 4 Kids does not train other dogs or personal pets that were not selected specifically for our program. Our Director of Program Operations evaluates each puppy for our program for temperament and qualities needed to be a service dog. These puppies begin training at 8 weeks old and remain in training until they are 18-24 months old.

If you are interested in training your dog using the same curriculum as the W.A.G.S. 4 Kids program, our “Step By Step: The W.A.G.S. Service Dog Training Academy” book written by our founder is available for purchase on our website (www.wags4kids.org/shop).

Q: Are service dogs the same as therapy dogs or emotional support dogs?

A: Service dogs are not the same as emotional support animals or therapy dogs. In each of these groups, the dog has a different job or goal. These terms are not synonymous. Service dogs are the only group recognized by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as having public access rights to provide task assistance to persons with disabilities. Ultimately it is persons with disabilities who are protected by the ADA and are entitled to have a task-trained service dogs with them at all times. Therapy dogs and emotional support dogs are categorized as pets. Therapy dogs provide emotional support and comfort to many people, while an emotional support animal’s primary function is to provide emotional support through companionship. Emotional support animals may also receive additional housing benefits.

Q: Can I volunteer with the dogs?

A: Since the service dogs in training are housed at Grafton and Mansfield Correctional Institutions, there are few opportunities to volunteer with the dogs. The majority of volunteer opportunities are event-based and can be found on our website (www.wags4kids.org/volunteer). We also have opportunities for families to volunteer to join our transition training team, where they would “foster” a dog for a period of time to get used to the real world before they are placed with their child partner. More information about our transition training team can also be found at www.wags4kids.org/volunteer.