



Our Program

Canine Companions for Independence

Founded in 1975, Canine Companions for Independence pioneered the concept of training dogs to assist people with physical disabilities. The achievements of these first Service Dogs and the increased independence they brought to their human partners came at a time in America's history when people with disabilities were charting new courses for their lives. Instead of being taken care of, they wanted opportunities to take charge of their lives. For hundreds of men, women and children since then, Canine Companions for Independence has opened the door to such opportunities.

The cornerstone of the CCI program is the Service Dog. These dogs assist independent adults by performing practical daily tasks that enhance independence. In the 1980's, the CCI program expanded to include two more categories of assistance dog: Hearing Dogs, trained to alert adults who are deaf or hard of hearing to key sounds, and Skilled Companion Dogs, trained for children with disabilities, or for adults with physical and/or developmental disabilities who require the supervision of a second individual. CCI also places Facility Dogs with professional caregivers and others in hospitals, hospices, nursing facilities, educational settings and other programs to improve the health and well being of those in their care.

Canine Companions come from CCI's own breeding program. They live with volunteer puppy raisers for

a year and a half to be socialized and to receive basic obedience training. The puppies are then returned to one of CCI's regional centers for formal training. After a minimum of six months of Advanced Training, each dog has mastered more than 50 specialized commands and is ready to be matched with a candidate from CCI's waiting list.

The matching of participants and canines takes place at Team Training. During this intensive two-week course, participants learn how to work in partnership with a dog, as well as training techniques they can later use to expand the range of commands to which the dog will respond. In addition, each student must demonstrate the ability to provide for the care and well-being of a canine before graduating with a CCI assistance dog.

Graduation ceremonies at CCI are inspirational and emotional events, signaling the beginning of a new phase of life rich with promise for the new graduate teams.

While CCI's Service Dogs, Skilled Companion Dogs, Facility Dogs and Hearing Dogs differ in the specific ways that they provide assistance, they have much in common. Canine Companions help their partners reach beyond the limitations their disabilities impose. The human-canine bond and teamwork that allows individuals to enhance their independence is a joyous testament to the program's success.

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