



Skilled Companion Dogs

One category of assistance dog offered by Canine Companions for Independence is the Skilled Companion Dog. These dogs are trained to work with an adult or child with a disability under the guidance of a facilitator. The facilitator is typically a caregiver, spouse, or parent, who handles and cares for the assistance dog and facilitates the success of the primary human-canine partnership. Both the recipient and the facilitator attend CCI's two-week Team Training to learn dog handling skills and how to work as a team.

Skilled Companion Dogs can perform tasks that may be difficult for a recipient with a physical disability. They retrieve dropped items, open and close doors, turn light switches on and off, and perform a host of other helpful tasks common to daily living. With this kind of assistance, recipients can rely more on their trained canine and less on other people as they go about their day. Not only does this kind of assistance make their physical lives easier, it boosts confidence and feelings of self-sufficiency.



The facilitator's role in the team is to promote the formation of a strong bond and partnership between the recipient and the Skilled Companion Dog. At the same time, the facilitator provides the dog-handling support, dog care, and the behavior reinforcement the canine needs to maintain its level of training. Thus, a Skilled Companion Dog is especially focused on and responsive to its disabled partner.

One of the most powerful benefits of Skilled Companion Dogs is the non-judgmental, unconditional love and companionship it provides to its partner. Many individuals who are disabled experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. It can be very challenging to participate in the regular activities of people who are not disabled and to feel comfortable around others who are not used to interacting with someone with a disability. The Skilled Companion Dog often acts as a social bridge in these situations. It provides opportunities for positive social interaction with more people.

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About CCI Assistance Dogs

Canine Companions for Independence (CCI) is the oldest and largest non-profit provider of assistance dogs for people with disabilities. Established in 1975, CCI is recognized world wide for the excellence of its dogs and for the quality and longevity of the matches it makes between dogs and people.

All CCI assistance dogs are one of three types of canines: Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, or a cross of these two breeds. They are selected for their even temperament, desire to please, social nature, and adaptability. Each assistance dog completes a minimum of six months of rigorous training under a professional CCI Instructor and then undergoes a two-week Team Training with their future human partner.

Never aggressive or noisy, CCI's assistance dogs display perfect etiquette in public. There is no need, for example, to worry about "accidents" in public, as their behavior training and repertoire of commands prevent such occurrences. They take their work seriously and are recognized for their high level of training. Each has passed or exceeded the level of training required to earn public access under state and federal laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act. A certified CCI assistance dog team is readily identified by the special vest worn by the canine and an identification card carried by its human partner.

When not on the job, a CCI assistance dog enjoys its off-duty time just as any other well mannered dog would. Once the working vest is placed on the dog, however, the dog must stay alert to the needs of its partner. For this reason, it is important that others never pet, feed, or distract the dog while it is working. Instead, people should ask permission from the dog's partner to pet it or show it attention. Oftentimes, the team will gladly oblige with a paw-shake.

CCI is supported entirely by the generosity of donors who want to help carry out its mission. As a result of this generosity, we are able to provide these highly trained canines and ongoing follow-up services free of charge to people who seek the assistance and increased independence that a Canine Companion can offer.

If you would like to learn more about Canine Companions for Independence, or know someone who may be interested in a partnership with a CCI assistance dog, please contact us at:

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