

# Service Dogs Supporting Alabama



## Celebrating Alabama's Progress

Certified Public Manager Program

CPM Solutions Alabama 2023



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*The research, findings, and recommendations presented in this white paper do not represent the views of any agency or organization, but rather the collective educational research and analysis from a diverse group of participants in the Certified Public Manager® Training Program.*

## Acknowledgements

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The *Service Dogs Supporting Alabama* CPM Solutions Project team would like to acknowledge and thank the service dog organizations and dog trainers across the country for their devotion to providing individuals with disabilities these life changing services.

The team would also like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals, agencies, and organizations for providing their assistance and support throughout this project:

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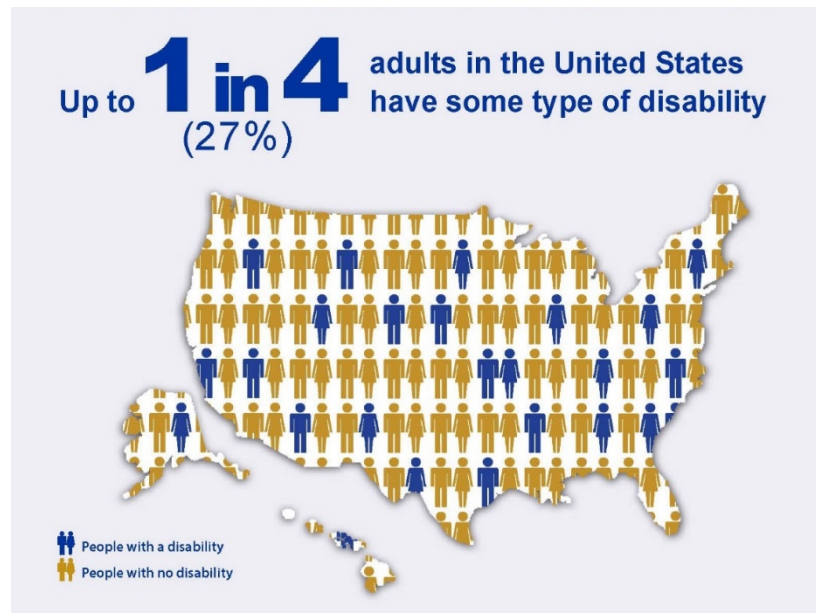
**KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc.**

**Mission Working Dogs**

## Introduction

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You likely know at least one person with a disability. What is a disability? “A disability is any condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities and interact with the world around them” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Disability and Health Overview*, 2020). In the United States, up to 27% of adults have some type of disability (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Disability Impacts All of Us*, 2023). Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is only slightly more common among Veterans than civilians. At some point in their life, seven percent of Veterans will have PTSD and in the general



population, six percent will have PTSD in their lifetime (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *How Common is PTSD in Veterans?*). A service dog can be a vital tool to give a person with a disability assistance with daily activities and support their independence. The utilization of a service dog can improve confidence and

self-esteem, decrease the need for assistance from others, and promote positive social interactions in public. Some individuals with a service dog have reported a higher quality of life and improved psychosocial health from having the service dog (Kerri E. Rodriguez, Jessica Bibbo, Savannah Verdon, & Marguerite E. O’Haire, *Mobility and medical service dogs: a qualitative analysis of expectations and experiences*, 2020).

Our CPM Solutions Project team will identify and highlight the vital progress being made by the non-profit organization *Service Dogs Alabama* in helping Alabama citizens with a disability

obtain a service dog. We will also explore opportunities to help Service Dogs Alabama grow their organization by:

- (1) Researching strategies utilized by similar service dog organizations across the country to increase volunteerism and funding for their organization.
- (2) Identifying ways for Service Dogs Alabama to increase their number of volunteers and partnerships.
- (3) Identifying ways for Service Dogs Alabama to increase their funding through partnerships, corporate donations, and individual donations.

## Service Dogs Alabama

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### Background

Service Dogs Alabama (SDA) provides medical and psychiatric service dogs to children, adults, and veterans with disabilities. Service Dogs Alabama also provides facility dogs trained in intervention and behavior disruption for schools, courtrooms, and state agencies where stress is prevalent. SDA was originally founded in 2010 as K-9 4 Kids under the non-profit umbrella of Easter Seals Alabama and was later incorporated as SDA, an independent non-profit organization with 501(c)(3) status, in 2015 (Service Dogs Alabama, *About Service Dogs Alabama*). During a presentation about SDA for our project team, SDA Director of Outreach, Caroline Sease, provided information about the



*Guice Slawson Training Complex*

Guice Slawson Training Complex which sits on 43 acres in Hope Hull, Alabama. Free lodging is available at the Guice Slawson Training Complex for all service dog recipients while attending

onsite training. There are two additional kennel facilities in Madison County, Alabama and Cullman County, Alabama.

SDA is accredited by Assistance Dogs International, Inc. (ADI), which sets the gold standard for service dog organizations. ADI was founded in 1986 and is a worldwide coalition of not-for-profit programs that train and place assistance dogs. ADI sets standards surrounding all aspects of service dog programs and their operation. ADI requires their members' program operations to focus not only on the ethical treatment and training of dogs, but also the ethical treatment of their clients (Assistance Dogs International, Inc., *Who We Are*). There are standards for administration; staff education, professional development, and trainers; client services; dog



training and behavior; health and welfare of the dogs; facilities and kennels; correctional facility and prison programs; psychiatric service dogs; and training and placement of facility dogs (Assistance Dogs International, Inc., *Accreditation Process Description*). To be an accredited member of ADI, service dog organizations must complete an accreditation process and must continue to comply with the

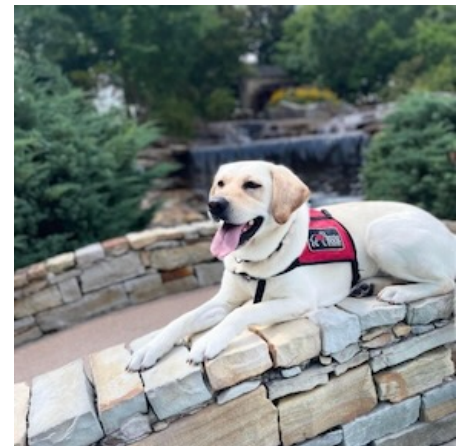
ADI standards outlined in the Accreditation Manual. To maintain ADI accreditation, all programs are required to be re-accredited every five years (Assistance Dogs International, Inc., *Summary of Standards*). SDA is the only ADI accredited organization located in Alabama (Assistance Dogs International, Inc., *Results for Members serving Alabama*).

Our Project team learned, through the presentation by SDA and through conversations with Caroline Sease, Amy Capps, and Summer Rogowski, that SDA breeds their own Labrador retrievers to ensure healthy dogs with the appropriate temperament for service. SDA places service dogs throughout all of Alabama and in bordering states within a 175-mile radius from the Hope Hull training facility. SDA has placed 150 working dogs since 2010 and invested over 3.5 million dollars towards changing the lives of the service dog recipients. SDA gives people the chance to live an independent and full life. For instance, when an individual has a seizure disorder, there is a constant fear of injuries from falling during a seizure. Having a service dog who can alert to an oncoming seizure allows the individual to navigate to a safe place and in a safe position to prevent

any injuries from falling. A service dog gives the individual the freedom and confidence to live independently. SDA would not be able to have this amazing impact without the help of volunteers and donations from the community.

## Training

Through interviews with SDA staff, our Project team learned that SDA has approximately 50 dogs in training at various levels at all times. SDA has two full-time finishing trainers, the Program Manager and Program Coordinator, and one full-time trainer, the Program Director, who works with dogs prior to the finishing phase of training. They also have a full-time kennel Director and a part-time kennel Coordinator who handle kennel care for the dogs. All training is based on positive reinforcement and all dogs are provided a gentle leader, leash, and SDA vest. According to the SDA website, Service Dogs section, SDA trains service dogs for the following types of service:



1. Seizure Alert Dogs – Seizure Alert and Assistance Dogs will attempt to rouse their handler and/or alert to a seizure. Dogs are trained to stay with their person in public areas if they should fall and have a seizure. At home, they can be trained to either press an alarm button or retrieve help.
2. Mobility and Wheelchair Assistance Dogs – SDA trains service dogs for disorders that require assistance for balance, walking, and wheelchairs such as multiple sclerosis, dysautonomia, joint and muscular disorders, and spina bifida. Mobility and Wheelchair Assistance Dogs can open and close drawers and doors, retrieve items that are out-of-reach and turn on lights. They are proficient in fall alert, assistance with walking (with a harness), balance, and stability. Their support allows a person with mobility issues to live an independent life and lessen their dependence on others, giving them new security and confidence.
3. Autism Intervention Dogs – SDA trains dogs for children diagnosed with certain types of Autism, including Asperger’s Syndrome. Service dogs for Autism are proficient at intervention techniques. These highly skilled intervention dogs alert to anxiety and stop the progression of escalating thought patterns that lead to disruptive behaviors, undesirable stem patterns, and panic attacks. Patterns that are consistently disrupted and unable to complete their cycle cause the brain to rewire itself to produce different outcomes. These consistent interventions can create sustainable change.
4. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Intervention Dogs – SDA trains service dogs to recognize anxiety through body language, heart rate, and hormonal

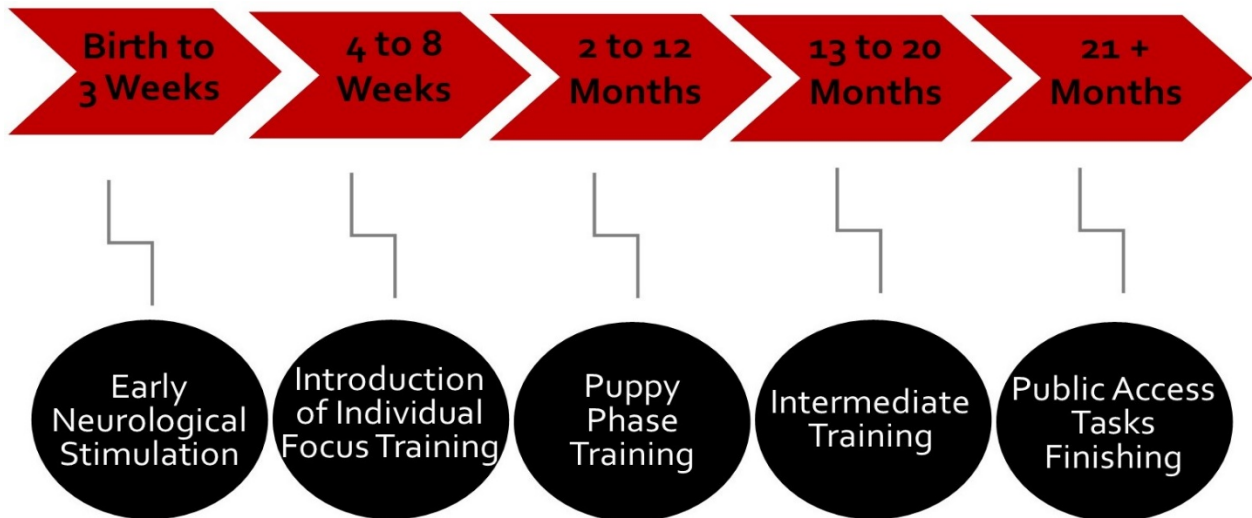


changes (like adrenaline and cortisol spikes) and interrupt their escalation. These dogs will wake their person from a nightmare, disrupt a flashback, and help to facilitate social integration. With more than 60 public access commands and behaviors, these dogs give their handlers their independence back.

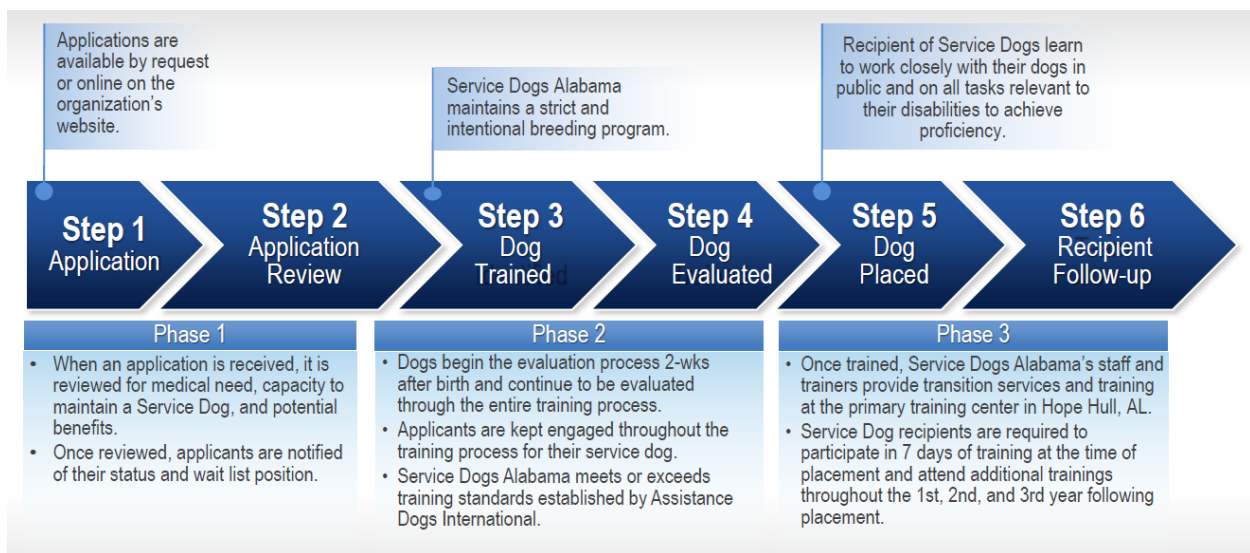
5. Facility Intervention Dogs – Facility dogs are trained for intervention tasks and to work with multiple people. They are chosen for this training when their personalities are confident enough to work off-leash without direction. They must be able to act independently of their handler when they seek out the children/people who need them. Facility dogs are awarded to schools, youth facilities, juvenile probation officers and judges as courtroom and interview dogs, and state agencies where stress is prevalent daily such as police departments, fire departments, and departments managing crime or human trauma.

During the presentation and interview with Caroline Sease, SDA provided information about the prison-based dog training program they created at the Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, Florida. There are typically 15-20 dogs in the prison at a time. The inmate trainers must follow the SDA training manual, keep detailed records, and take excellent care of the dogs. This program is valuable for both SDA and the inmates involved. These dedicated inmates are not only providing training for SDA, but are also learning valuable life skills. Recidivism rates are low for inmates who participate in the inmate training program.

Each service dog will spend around two to three years in training. The following chart, provided by Service Dogs Alabama, illustrates the training timeline for a service dog.



Dogs begin the evaluation process two weeks after birth and continue to be evaluated through the entire training process. Once a service dog has been matched with a recipient, the recipient and the service dog will spend seven days at the Guice Slawson Training Facility in Hope Hull, Alabama, attending training workshops with training leadership. The pair will work together in public and on all tasks relevant to their recipient’s disabilities to achieve proficiency. The service dog recipient and the service dog will attend additional trainings throughout the first, second, and third years following placement. SDA will continue to do lifetime check-ins and provide support to the service dog recipient. SDA also provided our Project team with the following illustration of the step-by-step process for service dog placement with an individual with a disability.



SDA thoroughly assesses their dogs during training. If a dog is unsuccessful in the training program and is not suitable to be a Service Dog or Facility Dog, the dog will be placed for adoption and SDA will ensure the dog is placed in an excellent and loving home. In some circumstances, the dog may be placed as an Emotional Support Assistance Dog (Service Dogs Alabama, *Training*).

## Volunteering

According to information provided to our team during interviews with SDA and through the SDA website, SDA relies on volunteers to assist in the raising, socializing, training, transporting, and exercising of service dogs in training. SDA currently has around 24 volunteers. The volunteer opportunities are:

1. Puppy Raisers – Puppy raisers raise puppies in their homes for the sole purpose of preparing dogs to enter the formal training program (Service Dogs Alabama, *Volunteer Opportunities*). The volunteer is responsible for providing a crate for the dog and the dog food from the approved list of food. SDA pays for medical care and monthly flea and heartworm treatment. Puppy raisers typically keep a dog for three to five months. During that time, the volunteer will need to provide the puppy with plenty of love and affection; exposure to different people, places, noises, and new sights; safe chew toys and teach them what they can and cannot chew on; housebreak the puppy; and teach them to walk on a leash, sit, lie down, and stay. The volunteer will also be required to attend training sessions at least once per month.



2. Socializers – Once the dog completes phase one of their training at the correctional facility, they must be reintroduced to real world and everyday situations. At this point, the dog will be around one year old, be house broken, and know enough commands to be able to go into public (Service Dogs Alabama, *Volunteer Opportunities*). The volunteer is responsible for providing a crate for the dog and the dog food from the approved list of food. SDA pays for medical care and monthly flea and heartworm treatment. Socializers typically keep a dog for two to four months. During that time, the dogs will need love and affection as well as exposure to different people, places, noises, and new sights. The volunteer will also be required to attend training sessions at least once a month.

3. Transporters – Transporters are used to transport dogs statewide, to and from the training facility, and to and from the kennels (Service Dogs Alabama, *Volunteer Opportunities*).

4. Dog Walkers – Volunteers also assist trainers in exercising the dogs housed at the kennels.

## Funding

Approximately \$40,000 is invested in each service dog (Service Dogs Alabama). SDA has a \$10,000 Service Dog fee for non-veteran recipients. SDA relies heavily on grants, foundations, individual donations, and corporate donations to provide the remaining funds. SDA has received a grant from the Wounded Warrior Service Dog Program, a federally funded program, which



provides funding for the training and placement of Service Dogs with military service veterans. Under the grant guidelines, veterans are not charged any fees for these services. This grant has provided SDA with the opportunity to assist even more veterans in receiving a service dog.

SDA is a non-profit organization that receives their funding through grants and donations. Currently, around 60% of their funding is through grants, six percent is from corporate sponsors or donors, and the remaining 34% comes from donations received from members of the public.

SDA spends around 90% of their funding on program expenditures, nine percent on administrative expenditures, and one percent on fundraising efforts (Amy Capps. Personal interview).

## Service Animals Under the Americans with Disabilities Act

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The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on July 26, 1990, in a ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House (National Archives, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act , 2022). The ADA “increases access and opportunity for people with disabilities” (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, ADA@30: The Americans with Disabilities Act 1990-2020). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, “the ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in several areas, including employment,



*President George H.W. Bush Signs the Americans with Disabilities Act, 07/26/1990. National Archives ID: 6037489*

transportation, public accommodations, communications, and access to state and local government programs and services.” “The ADA defines a person with a disability as someone who has a

physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a history or record of such an impairment, or is perceived by others as having such an impairment” (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act). In the United States, service dogs were not legally recognized prior to the passage of the ADA (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, ADA Requirements: Service Animals, 2020).

A service animal is defined by the ADA as “a dog individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. The task(s) performed by the service animal must be directly related to the handler’s disability.” Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort, companionship, therapy, or emotional support are not service animals under the ADA. There are no dog breed or size restrictions for service animals, and they are not required to wear a vest or anything else that identifies them as a service dog. Service animals are also not required to be registered, either nationally or locally, in a centralized database; however, if the service animal lives in a state that requires all dogs be vaccinated and registered, the service dog must also be vaccinated and registered (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, *Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA*, 2020). A service animal must be under the control of its handler and be harnessed, leashed, or tethered, unless the individual’s disability prevents using these devices or these devices interfere with the service animal’s safe, effective performance of tasks. If these devices cannot be used, the service animals must be under the control of the individual through voice, signal, or other effective controls (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, *ADA Requirements: Service Animals*, 2020).

A service animal is allowed to accompany a person with a disability anywhere the public is allowed to go, even if that business has a no pets policy (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, *ADA Requirements: Service Animals*, 2020). Service animals may only be excluded from an area when their presence would “fundamentally alter the nature of the goods, services, programs, or activities provided to the public.” A business or government entity may only ask someone to remove their service animal if it is not housebroken or is out of control and the handler cannot regain control. “Establishments that sell or prepare food must allow service animals in public areas, even if state or local health codes prohibit animals on the premises. People with disabilities who use service animals cannot be isolated from other patrons, treated less favorably, or charged fees that are not charged to other patrons without service animals” (U.S. Department

of Justice Civil Rights Division, *Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA*, 2020). Service animals are not subject to any pet fees or deposits an establishment may have unless the service animal causes damage. Allergies and fear of dogs are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to an individual with a service animal. In situations where it is not obvious that a dog is a service animal, staff may only ask two specific questions: (1) “Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?” and (2) “What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?” (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, *ADA Requirements: Service Animals*, 2020).

## **Team Survey**

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The Solutions Alabama Project team developed a short survey to gather information from service dog organizations across the country since there is no centralized database that collects information about service dogs. Each team member contacted service dog organizations through email and asked if they would be willing to participate in the survey. The service dog organizations who elected to provide information were given the option to answer directly through our online survey link or talk with a team member over the phone. We asked these entities questions about the barriers their organizations face when providing service dogs and the barriers their clients face when seeking to be matched with a service dog. The service dog organizations were also asked what the most beneficial fundraising effort for their organization has been and what strategies they have used to increase volunteerism for their organization. We received seventeen responses, either directly through our online survey link or by phone interview with a team member. The data gathered from this survey was used to identify the different barriers faced, by both individuals and organizations, when matching an individual with a service dog. The team also used the data to develop our recommendations for Service Dogs Alabama to increase funding and volunteerism as they seek to grow and expand their organization.

## Barriers for Obtaining a Service Dog

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Through our research efforts, we have identified several barriers that individuals may face when trying to obtain a service dog. The biggest barrier to obtaining a service dog throughout the United States is the limited number of trained service dogs available compared to the large number of individuals with a disability who may benefit from a service dog. Because of this supply and demand issue, some service dog organizations have a two-year waiting list.

The second biggest barrier identified through our team survey is the cost of obtaining a service dog. Among the organizations surveyed, a service dog ranges from approximately \$30,000 to \$50,000. A service dog from SDA costs \$40,000. SDA covers \$30,000 for the raising and training of a service dog and the recipient must cover the remaining \$10,000 themselves. A recipient can pay their portion entirely themselves, through fundraising efforts, or by a combination of the two. Some recipients, or their families, may take out a loan to cover the upfront cost (Amy Capps. Personal interview).

The amount of care a service dog requires once placed is a significant barrier for some individuals. A recent study determined that 44% of participants with a service dog reported care and responsibility for the service dog as the most common drawback to having a service dog. Those with limited mobility may experience difficulty or an inability to clean up after a service dog in public (Kerri E. Rodriguez, Jessica Bibbo, Savannah Verdon, & Marguerite E. O’Haire, Kerri E. Rodriguez, Jessica Bibbo, Savannah Verdon, & Marguerite E. O’Haire, in their article *Mobility and medical service dogs: a qualitative analysis of expectations and experiences*, 2020). The service dog recipient is responsible for the cost of all food, toys, grooming, and veterinary care for their service dog once the dog has been placed with the recipient.

The 2020 study by Kerri E. Rodriguez, Jessica Bibbo, Savannah Verdon, & Marguerite E. O’Haire also identified that many individuals with disabilities experience significant societal discrimination, additional difficulties with public access, or negative attention from having a service dog. The added attention a service dog attracts can be a barrier. For someone who struggles with anxiety, having people constantly looking at you or approaching you in public can be debilitating. Those with invisible wounds or disabilities may face negative attention or have their disability called into question. Despite one in four adults in the United States having some type of

disability, the stigma of being disabled still exists (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Disability Impacts All of Us*, 2023). Many individuals, especially veterans, are reluctant to obtain a service dog because of the perceived stigma and attention it can bring (Team Survey).

Additionally, our Project team survey data also pointed to the lack of reliable and trustworthy information regarding service dogs as a barrier. Because there is no centralized location to learn about all things relating to service dogs, it can be difficult to discern legitimate service dog organizations, who properly train their dogs, from fraudulent service dog organizations that do not provide properly trained service dogs. Unfortunately, this has resulted in people falling victim to scams and a negative perception of the service dog industry.

## **Promotional Strategies of Other Service Dog Organizations**

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### **Strategies to Increase Volunteerism, Funding, or Both**

The following information, unless otherwise noted, is derived wholly from our Project team survey data. Service dog organizations across the country rely heavily on volunteers and donations to execute their mission and provide well-trained service dogs to individuals who need them. Through our Project team survey, we asked service dog organizations what strategies have been the most successful for increasing volunteerism, funding, or both for their organizations.

Multiple service dog organizations have developed internship or training programs with local college or high school students to increase volunteers for their organization. One organization has partnered with two local universities to assist with training service dogs. They have partnered with Bradley University for 14 years and Illinois State University for around 7 years. The students in the program are trained by the service dog organization and in turn, the dogs then live and train on their college campuses. Another service dog organization utilizes local high school Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H (Head, Heart, Hands, and Health) programs to recruit volunteers to help raise puppies. That same organization also partners with Kansas State University Veterinary Program for students to provide health screenings and eye examinations, monthly preventive care, spaying, and neutering dogs. Additionally, another service dog organization utilizes a summer camp program to involve youth, ages 8-18, with the training of



their service dogs. The students work directly with the service dogs-in-training under the supervision of a trained staff (Assistance Dogs of the West, *ADW Summer Camp*).

Many of the service dog organizations surveyed use social media to attract volunteers and solicit donations. Social media is a cost-effective way to increase an organization's visibility to the public (Adobe Communications Team, *15 benefits of social media marketing*, 2022). Social media provides many different opportunities to teach people the mission of the organization through highlighting a service dog recipient's story, advertising a fundraising event, posting educational content, or partnering with a social media influencer to increase the organization's reach. Traditional media such as magazine advertisements, editorials, and articles; television commercials or public service announcements; news broadcasts; and newspaper articles, both print and online, provide additional opportunities to increase volunteers and donations for a service dog organization.

Several of the service dog organizations surveyed attend events in their local communities to raise awareness about their programs and the need for volunteers. At these events, the organizations showcase some of their service dogs-in-training and demonstrate some of the tasks the dogs are being trained to perform. Attendance at these community events not only attracts volunteers, but also results in donations to the service dog organization.

Some service dog organizations invite corporations and foundations to visit their facility to see the day-to-day operations, learn about the organization's mission, and to see what it takes



to achieve that mission. This often results in a corporation or foundation providing a donation or a sponsorship. This can also develop long-term partnerships between the service dog organization and the corporation or foundation. In addition, several service dog organizations have been able to partner with a dog food company to donate food to their organizations.

Most of the service dog organizations surveyed hold some type of annual fundraising event like a golf tournament, a clay-shooting tournament, a gala, a dinner, or an auction. Some of the organizations hold more frequent fundraising events, such as partnering with a yoga studio for a yoga event, or partnering with a

local brewery for a “pint night” where a portion of each pint sold is donated to the service dog organization. Others provide opportunities to name a service dog-in-training with a designated donation amount.

Additionally, other service dog organizations have had success with direct mail and direct email marketing campaigns. These campaigns result in both increased volunteers and increased donations to the service dog organizations.

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## **Recommendations for Service Dogs Alabama**

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This report has highlighted the amazing work SDA does to provide individuals with a disability the chance to lead an independent life. The most important step to increasing both volunteers and funding for SDA is to increase the visibility and awareness of SDA and its mission throughout Alabama. To increase volunteers and funding for SDA, our team recommends that SDA (1) partner with Alabama universities; (2) host fundraising events and attend community events in the surrounding areas; (3) utilize existing cabins to generate funds by renting on Airbnb; (4) develop a partnership with a dog food company; and (5) update its website and increase its social media presence across multiple social media platforms.

### **Partner with Alabama Universities**

Partnering with Alabama universities’ disabilities services programs can expand SDA’s network to provide a direct connection to individuals that could benefit from a service dog as well as help SDA gain volunteers and donors. For example, Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University (Alabama A&M), through its Rehabilitation Counseling Program, has a program called Bulldog L.I.F.E. (Learning Independence, Fostering Education and Employment). The Bulldog L.I.F.E. program objective is to provide information to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their family members, and others to increase leadership opportunities and inclusive participation (Alabama A&M University, *Bulldog LIFE*). The University of Alabama has a similar program aimed at helping individuals with disabilities transition into college life, learn independence, and gain employment (University of Alabama, *Welcome to CrossingPoints*).

Additionally, Auburn University has the EAGLES (Education to Accomplish Growth in Life Experiences for Success) Program. The EAGLES Program helps students with intellectual disabilities achieve their employment and independent living goals (Auburn University, *EAGLES Program*). Developing partnerships with these programs and similar programs at other Alabama universities across the state will expand SDA’s reach to achieve its mission of providing medical and psychiatric service dogs to individuals with disabilities.



Partnerships with Alabama universities in the form of internships and cooperative partnerships can help SDA increase their volunteers as well as assist with some of the tasks associated with running a non-profit organization, like marketing or communications. For example, partnering with a university that provides a degree in marketing or communications could result in a mutually beneficial relationship that would help SDA revitalize its website and expand their social media presence while helping the intern gain valuable work experience in their desired career field. Through our research, we also learned that a partnership with a veterinary college could greatly decrease the amount of overhead

expenses SDA would spend on veterinary care for the service dogs in training (Team Survey). A partnership with a veterinary program could provide another mutually beneficial relationship with an Alabama university. Partnerships with local Alabama universities could significantly increase the number of SDA volunteers. While monetary donations may not be possible for many college students, the ability to volunteer is an excellent way for them to can give back to their communities.

Our Solutions Alabama team reached out to Auburn University at Montgomery’s Center for Disability Services Director and Tuskegee University’s Director of ADA Compliance, both of whom expressed interest in discussing ways to get their students involved with SDA.

## Initiate Community and Fundraising Events

Hosting annual or bi-annual fundraising events is an excellent way to increase donations and volunteers. Several of the organizations surveyed hold fundraising events, such as galas, that account for a significant portion of their funding. During these galas, dinner is served, there are speakers, and silent auctions of donated prizes take place. Other organizations host 5K races, golf tournaments, and clay shooting tournaments to generate funding (Team Survey). Based on our research, hosting fundraising events and attending local events to promote SDA are excellent ways to increase both the funding and volunteers for SDA.



## Host a Social Impact Experience with Airbnb

Connecting people to the mission of the nonprofit organization by hosting an Airbnb Social Impact experience will help to increase funding (Airbnb, *Hosting a Social Impact Experience*). The purpose of social impact experiences is to put travelers in contact with voluntary associations and non-profit organizations in the areas they visit. According to Airbnb's Head of Social Impact, Kim Rubey, "[t]here's a strong universe of travelers who want to have the ability to give back and benefit local organization's" (Jess Ashworth, *Social Impact Experiences: Ethical Tourism According to Airbnb*, 2019). Airbnb typically has a 20% service fee; however, that fee is waived for social impact experiences. All funds raised go directly to the nonprofit (Airbnb, *Hosting a Social Impact Experience*). The beautiful Guice Slawson Training Complex in Hope Hull, Alabama has cabins on-site for training events. However, when a training event is not taking place, these cabins remain unused. SDA could use these cabins to set up an Airbnb social impact experience. While staying on-site, guests can learn about the important work SDA does, volunteer to exercise the dogs on the beautiful property, and assist with other activities needed for the daily

care of the dogs. This could also attract local corporate retreats. After all, nothing boosts morale and builds team bonding more than playing with dogs.

There are a few steps to setting up an Airbnb social impact experience. First, SDA must determine who will host the experience. Next, SDA will need to be verified with TechSoup Validation Services, which can take up to two weeks. Third, SDA must set up an organization profile and create the experience online (Airbnb, *Hosting a Social Impact Experience*). Here, SDA must determine what experiences they want to offer, how often they want to host, how many people can attend, and what to charge (Lisa Bennett, *Year Round Fundraising with Air BnB Experiences*). This step in the approval processes can take up to two weeks (Airbnb, *Hosting a Social Impact Experience*). Once approved as a social impact experience, SDA will need to promote the experience (Lisa Bennett, *Year Round Fundraising with Air BnB Experiences*). This experience can be promoted on social media platforms, emails to corporate sponsors, and promotion from volunteers, board members, and employees. All of the proceeds are paid directly to the nonprofit (Airbnb, *Hosting a Social Impact Experience*).

## Partner with a Dog Food Company

Through survey results, our Project team established that a partnership with a dog food company could significantly decrease operating costs. Dog food can be one of the largest expenses for training facilities, especially if the dogs are fed a high-quality diet like SDA's dogs. One organization that has a partnership with Purina gets two to three pallets of dog food each month donated to the service dog organization (Team Survey). We recommend SDA partner with a dog food company that produces a high-quality dog food meeting SDA's standards.

## Utilize Social Media

In 2022, the average worldwide internet user spent 151 minutes per day using social media. In the United States, the daily time spent on social media was 123 minutes (S. Dixon, *Average daily time spend on social media worldwide 2012-2023*, 2023). Social Media can be an organization's biggest promotional strategy to gain volunteers. It is also cost-effective as most social media platforms are free (Adobe Communications Team, *15 benefits of social media marketing*, 2022). These service dog organizations use social media accounts to not only promote

their organization, but to spotlight training and service dog recipients (Team Survey). Using social media to spotlight service dogs recipients who have benefited from their organization increases their credibility and builds brand awareness. A strong social media presence can also improve organization search engine results and boost website traffic (Adobe Communications Team, *15 benefits of social media marketing*, 2022).

## Conclusion

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As a relatively new, small non-profit, Service Dogs Alabama has already transformed the lives of many individuals. In addition to the strategies currently in use by Service Dogs Alabama, the strategies and recommendations illustrated herein will help Service Dogs Alabama succeed in growing their organization and continuing to provide service dogs to individuals with a disability. September is National Service Dog month in the United States. Help Service Dogs Alabama celebrate the amazing work they do by donating or volunteering your time.



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## Appendix

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### Team Survey Questions

- 1) What excites you the most about the mission of your organization? Any affiliations you are most excited about? Why?
- 2) What do you feel your organization does that has the biggest impact on the community you serve in relation to service dogs?
- 3) What are barriers preventing children, adults, and veterans with disabilities from applying and receiving assistance from service dogs? Is it harder for one demographic versus the others?
- 4) How many dogs do you train annually and types? How many do you place annually? What are the main disabilities the dogs are trained to assist with?
- 5) Cost to train service dogs (preparing/training dog to pair with individual and average yearly cost for individual after pairing)?
- 6) What strategies have worked best to increase corporate funding/sponsorships and help reduce expenses for your organization or the citizen receiving a service dog?
- 7) Successful promotional strategies or programs your organization has used to increase applicants/and volunteerism? How many part-time/full-time employees, volunteers & interns does it take on average to sufficiently operate your organization?
- 8) Do you receive any state funding for current programs or have you in the past?
- 9) What has been your best fundraising strategy or event to date? How often do you do this event?
- 10) Any additional comments?