**Benefiting dogs and people through social entrepreneurship: an experimental approach to meeting the high demand for service dogs while improving canine welfare**

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*“Dogs have a way of finding the people who need them.” Thom Jones*

**Abstract**

 *"All his life he tried to be a good person. Many times, however, he failed. For, after all, he was only human. He wasn't a dog." Charles Schulz (cartoonist of Peanuts)*

AAT originated in developed, western countries, but has been successful in all countries since (Olmert, 2021, p.22).

Dr. Gerhard Stalling: founded the guide dog movement in Germany in the early 1900’s, after World War I, to assist soldiers blinded from mustard gas (CFAASS, 2020, p.33). Used German shepherds.

**Problems in canine welfare and service dogs**

 *"I'm a lot less cranky when it's just me and my dog." (Bob Peterson: animator, screenwriter, director & voice actor)*

Dogs needing rehoming

 Shelters and animal rescues have existed for years to take in strays that have either lost or are without a home or seized from neglectful circumstances. The popularity of dogs has led to a rise in puppy mills and backyard breeders; the dog population also can enter a surplus when people do not spay or neuter their animals. In many cases, dogs who end up in shelters are reunited with their owners, but there is an increasing number of stray dogs and owner surrenders that are in need of adoption, plus less people adopting dogs following the COVID-19 pandemic.

 Canadian animal shelter statistics from Humane Canada were mostly recently provided through their 2021 report. The survey collected data from SPCAs and Humane Societies across Canada and received feedback from almost half of these societies- however, there are more animals then these numbers reveal, as the survey also did not include other non-profit or private animal rescues (Humane Canada, 2021). Amongst all the humane societies surveyed in 2021, 20, 974 dogs were taken in, showing an increase over the past three years (Humane Canada, 2021). The number of dogs for adoption in actually residing in shelters was lower in 2021 then years past, largely due to the increase in placing dogs into foster care prior to adoption; social media use has also allowed missing dogs to be reconnected to their owners more rapidly (Humane Canada, 2021).

 A breakdown of the dogs taken in by Canadian humane societies and the SPCA in 2021 showed that: 37% arrived as strays, 30% were owner-surrendered, 15% were transferred from another organization, 6% were from cases of abuse, 9% were for other reasons, and under 1% were born in the shelter (Humane Canada, 2021). The outcome for these shelter dogs was generally positive: 44.5% were adopted, 31% were returned to their owners, 3% had other live outcomes, 10% were euthanized, less than 1% died or was lost, and 6% remained in the shelter (or were recording errors) (Humane Canada, 2021). There has been an increase of juvenile animals in shelters- in 2021, following the COVID lockdowns, 26% of dogs were juveniles as compared to 17% the year prior (during COVID) (Humane Canada, 2023). These juveniles made up a substantial amount of owner surrenders, and possible reasons for the increase in young dogs in shelters is the pausing of spay and neuter programs during the pandemic, and the rise in breeding and adoption of dogs during COVID-19 lockdowns… then the end of lockdowns and return to work (Humane Canada, 2021).

 Financial strain is also an increasing reason for owner surrender; in 2021, 15% of owner surrenders were due to being unable to afford veterinary care for their dog (Humane Canada, 2021). In one large urban shelter, half of the owners’ reason for surrendering their dogs was due to being unable to afford their care (Humane Canada, 2021). Another trend seen in shelter dogs is the larger number of already spayed and neutered dogs than previously, with one third of dogs acquired as strays and half of owner surrenders already being sterilized (Humane Canada, 2021). This suggests that a larger number of loved and cared for family pets are ending up in shelters. Over the past five years, trends from shelter animal data show that the impact of both COVID 19, the weakening economy, and higher costs of living are contributing to the increase in owner surrenders to shelters; this increase is also “a result of change in housing and challenges to find pet friendly accommodations” (Humane Canada, 2021). The rise in domestic violence is also leading to more dogs in shelters, as often people fleeing need additional support and are unable to take their dogs with them as they resettle (Humane Canada, 2021).

Since the 2021 report, the amount of dogs requiring rehoming has only increased (D’Andrea, 2022). Inflation is continuing to pressure pet owners, and humane societies are seeing an increased need for kibble from ‘pet food banks’ where these services are offered, and a growing waitlist of animals in need of medical support or to be surrendered to the shelter (D’Andrea, 2022). As shelters fill, shelters are beginning to turn away owner surrenders to save space for more dire cases (D’Andrea, 2022). Animal shelters have limited resources and are struggling to manage the higher case load. An interview with staff at a large Toronto animal shelter reported a “60% increase in the number of animals coming to shelters in the past 6 months compared to the same period in 2021” (D’Andrea, 2022).

 COVID 19 lockdowns began in March 2020, creating the ‘pandemic puppy’ phenomena, as people began to adopt dogs in “record numbers” (Pierce & Bekoff, Oct.26, 2021) to cope with social isolation, lockdowns, and take advantage of being off work and at home (D’Andrea, 2022; Shradden, 2023). People who had wanted a dog but been unable to have one used this time as an opportunity to finally bring home a puppy. Purina surveyed Canadians in June 2021, and found that “3.7 million Canadians newly adopted, purchased, or fostered a cat or dog during the pandemic” (D’Andrea, 2022). One research team found that “the pandemic influenced the purchase of two out of every five puppies bought” (Waters, March 5, 2021). The demand for dogs caused the cost of a pup to skyrocket; backyard breeders and puppy mills took advantage of this to indiscriminately breed dogs and cash in while it lasted. Now, post-pandemic, fewer people are adopting dogs, and the dogs surrendered to shelters are there for longer periods of time waiting for adoption (D’Andrea, 2022; Shradden, 2023; Bullock, 2022). When the pandemic lockdowns ceased, people were no longer able to spend the time with their new pet, leading to an increase in behavior issues in animals struggling to adapt, and people looking to rehome their pandemic puppies now that they no longer had time for them (D’Andrea, 2022) and because they were unable to handle their now “unruly adolescent dog” (Pierce & Bekoff, Oct.26, 2021). Dogs who had become accustomed to having their humans home were developing complex behavioral issues from the drastic change of being alone all day (Pierce & Bekoff, Oct. 26, 2021). The pandemic, changing economy, inflation, and housing crisis also exacerbated people’s inability to keep and provide for their new pets; currently, ‘cost’ is the number one reason cited for owner surrender (D’Andrea, 2022).

Dog euthanasia is increasing, as it is not possible to provide for all the animals especially with the increased vet costs (Shradden, 2023). With shelters having to turn away owner surrenders, and less people adopting, there is also an increase in animal abandonment (CBC News, 2022). The two main reasons found for dog abandonment, in order, were financial and behavioral issues (CBC News, 2022).

Long wait times and high demand for service dogs

 While researching the service dog industry for this project, the writer repeatedly read about the long wait times, high demand, and shortage of available dogs for service work. The demand for service dogs has been steadily growing since its start in 1920 Germany, but the 21st century COVID pandemic hit the industry hard, disrupting breeding, socialization, and training programs (Thorton, 2024) and as result, many service dog schools are no longer accepting applications for dogs. It just is not possible for them to keep up with the demand (Williams, 2017). For those fortunate enough to be approved for a service dog from a non-profit school, the waitlist is between 2-3 years for a dog on average- it takes 1.5-2 years to train a fully certified service dog, if the dog is able to pass all training requirements (Williams, 2017). After their foundational training, dogs need to be matched with a compatible human and trained to meet the needs of the individual they will be partnered with (Williams, 2017). The training and matching process are critical; steps cannot be missed to save time (Williams, 2017). An analysis of the service dog industry by The Canadian Foundation for Animal Assisted Support Services found that a large wait list was one of the biggest weakness in the industry (along with rising costs, sustainability, and systemic issues) (CFAASS, 2020, p.46). Service dogs cannot be mass produced.

 It is more than the shortage of trained dogs contributing to their scarcity. There is also a shortage of service dog trainers (Williams, 2017). Even experienced dog trainers may be deterred from service dog training due to the lengthy training time, and no guarantee that even with the best of training, that dog will become a qualified service animal. Dog training is a largely unregulated industry- in Canada, there may be few to zero legal requirements to become a dog trainer, but there also are very few formal training opportunities, and no accredited service dog training courses for those looking to break into the field.

Volunteer & donation shortage

*“No animal I know of can consistently be more of a friend and companion than a dog.” Stanley Leinwall*

 The 2023 Giving Report studied contributions of Canadians to non-profits and charities and found that both financial donations and volunteer hours are decreasing (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.3). The “percent of Canadians that give is down 5% in ten years, based on an analysis of the latest tax file data (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.3). There are numerous reasons for this, including inflation, economic shifts, and an increasingly precarious housing and labor market. The escalating inflation has increased the cost of living so now, “two in ten Canadians (22%) expect to use or are already using charitable services within the next six months to meet basic needs” and “82% expect their finances to be negatively impacted by inflation” (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.4). Canadians just cannot afford to donate money or time as much as they had previously (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.4).

 Unfortunately, the increased need for non-profits and charities, across many specialties, has caused more than half of charities to be unable to meet their current demands, and since the pandemic, 40.3% of Canadian charities have “experienced a lasting increase in demand” (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.5). 33.5% of charities raised less funds than they had in 2022, and 55.2% have less volunteers than they did prior to the pandemic (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.5). Many non-profits and charities rely heavily on volunteers to make up for having minimal paid staff members. The cost of inflation also affected non-profits overhead costs, with 80% of charities stating that their service delivery costs have been impacted (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.22). 17% of charities say this inflation is a strong factor in their decisions to further reduce paid staff members (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.22).

 ‘The Giving Gap’ refers to the predicted large drop in donations after the passing of Canadians fifty five years and older, when this “smaller group of donors is no longer able to donate” (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.12). The generosity of Canadians in this older demographic has helped sustain the non-profit sector for the past two decades (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.12). Now, giving is in decline across all household income brackets (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.15).

 The Canada Helps 2023 study findings find the top issues affecting charities today are those regarding inflation, staffing, funding shortages, and increased demand for services (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.19). The service dog industry is being adversely affected by all of these issues. Many non-profit service dog providers rely heavily on ‘legacy donations’, and funding from donors and charitable foundations to cover costs (Thorton, 2024; NSD, 2023). Many service dog schools also rely on volunteer puppy raisers and foster homes to provide one-on-one attention and care to dogs while they are being trained to be placed as service animals, so the volunteer shortage will be a hard hit to the industry (NSD, 2023; PADS, 2024; Thorton, 2024). There is also already a shortage of service dog trainers in the industry, which may further decline due to limited funds being available to pay staff (Williams, 2017). With the lowest levels of support for non-profits being seen in the current 18-30 year olds (Canadahelps.org, 2023, p.32), non-profits are going to increasingly need to turn to social entrepreneurship and generating their own revenue in order to continue their operations.

**Solutions for problems addressed & rationale behind them**

 *"When an 85-pound mammal licks your tears away and then tries to sit on your lap, it's hard to feel sad." Kristan Higgins (author of ‘In Your Dreams’)*

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Mixed background dogs for service and support work, and as trained companions

 Generally, large service dog schools have their own breeding programs, but there are smaller organizations and individuals who have successfully used mixed breed and shelter dogs for service dog work. Historically, the breeds most commonly used for service and guide dog work are labrador retrievers, golden retrievers, lab-golden retriever crosses, German shepherds, and poodles (IDGF, 2024). There has been an aversion to using dogs of unknown genetic background or rescue dogs due to beliefs that they may have severe behavior issues, past trauma, poor health, and other defects that make them unsuitable for service work, but there is a high failure rate even among dogs that have been bred specifically for service work (Grace, n.d.). The dog’s health and individual temperament and suitability for the job it is being trained for are in the end what contributes to the dog’s success in training (Rosebrook, 2020; Jimenez, 2020). Also, a review of shelter statistics from humane societies and SPCAs across Canada reveals that there are an increasing number of owner surrendered dogs, and that the main reason these dogs are in need of rehoming is due to their owner’s financial stress, rather than the dogs behavior alone (Humane Canada, 2021).

 There are some advantages to using a dog from a shelter. In Rosebrook’s article, she lists advantages to using dogs from shelters as their being “past the puppy stage…used to a lot of stimuli…come in all ages, breeds, and sizes… it helps reduce pet overpopulation… (and) breeds don’t matter as much as health or temperament” (Feb 10, 2020). Rescue and mixed breed dogs are usually inexpensive and at a lower risk of genetic disorders (Jimenez, 2020). Repurposing shelter dogs or young dogs up for rehoming both improves animal welfare and provides a dog in need with a home and fulfilling life (Jimenez, 2020). Unfortunately, some rescue dogs are so traumatized or injured that they would not be suitable for service work, especially those with fearful, reactive, or aggressive behaviors (Jimenez, 2020; Grace, n.d.). Purebred dogs also end up in shelters, so although their breeding is not known and they are at a higher risk of genetic disease due to potential inbreeding (Jimenez, 2020), shelters can still be a source of quality dogs.

 Some benefits of choosing a purebred from a breeder or shelter are that they have been bred for a specific temperament, as well as physical and personality traits that can make their behavior more predictable (Jimenez, 2020). The physical characteristics of certain breeds, such as size and athleticism, can make them more suitable for service work then others (Jimenez, 2020). During the assessment, dogs should be checked for structural deficiencies that could lead to medical or mobility issues in the future (Grace, n.d.). Purchasing from a breeder has the benefit of also knowing the animal’s breeding, upbringing, and medical history- shelter dogs require closer assessment, as their background is usually unknown (Jimenez, 2020).

Every dog needs to be assessed as an individual and screened for “health, temperament, and behaviors” (Jimenez, 2020). The dog’s temperament is foremost the most important to consider; assessors need to remember that “training and temperament are two very different things” (Grace, n.d.). All dogs, especially untrained, will exhibit typical canine behaviors and require training to suppress these (such as leash pulling, barking, and showing excitement) (Grace, n.d.). When assessing a dog, consider if the behaviors they show would be seen in a normal puppy- if the trait or behavior would be unusual in a balanced puppy, eliminate the dog as a candidate for service work as it is unlikely to be reliably trained out (Grace, n.d.).

In her article on evaluating shelter dogs for service work, Grace states that: “your job is to look at the dog’s core temperament, not their instincts or base behaviors, and work to evaluate a dog’s suitability based on who they are, not what they do” (n.d.). This is more important than a dog’s “breed, gender, or color” (Grace, n.d.). Service dogs perform unique and demanding work- the majority of dogs do not complete public access training, so to minimize time wasted training a dog not suitable for service work, it is important to be goal and detail oriented in the assessment and move on if there were any indication this dog would not make it through training (Grace, n.d.; Jimenez, 2020).

This proposed program, which sources most of its dogs from shelters or owners needing to surrender their pet, has restricted dogs taken into the program to those under three years of age, so they have a lengthy working life (Grace, n.d.). Although young puppies also have potential and are included in the program, dogs old enough to show an indication of their personality and structure are preferred (Grace, n.d.). Certain breeds or dog types would likely be referred to another program, as breeds with flatter skulls and short, squished noses often already have breathing and health complications (Grace, n.d.). Important traits that are looked for in dogs entering this training and placement program are: social and friendly, enjoying human companionship, responds well to training, motivation, and praise, not overly submissive or overly dominant, able to relax in a new environment and while travelling, and with low touch sensitivity, no resource guarding, and acceptance of boundaries (Grace, n.d.). Service dogs and their handlers need to form a working partnership; this requires close attachment between the dog and handler, so it is critical the dog *wants* to be near people (Grace, n.d.).

Dogs unsuitable for public access work can still provide benefits. They can still be excellent for companionship or be placed into families with disabled children as well trained pets. Therapy, facility, and comfort dogs do not need to be certified in public access and have less demanding dogs. Even if a rescue dog is unable to meet the criteria for service or guide dog work, they can still have much to contribute.

However, despite hopes of using dogs from adverse backgrounds or simply in need of a new and stable home, the high cost of the veterinary care required to rehabilitate dogs in need of treatment can well exceed program or client budgets, and lead to a more expensive dog than what would be obtained through a deliberate breeding program (Hill, 2024; Thorton, 2024). Most of the Canadian non-profit and charitable service dog schools have their own breeding programs and/or use pups from other breeding programs that selectively breed for optimal health and temperament (Thorton, 2024). BC-Alberta Guide Dogs has a high success rate of dogs from their program, of 68% on average (Thorton, 2024). Dogs already have a short life compared to humans, and as two years of training and a substantial amount of money and effort go into producing one service dog, the dog needs to be healthy enough to have an 8 year working life (Thorton, 2024). BC-Alberta Guide Dogs will pay for health conditions that appear in their dogs, because they are well bred and expected to remain in good health- this expectation is not possible with dogs of unknown breeding (Thorton, 2024). Having tried to train numerous breeds and mixed breeds, as well as spoken with programs that have used shelter dogs, Thorton of BC-Alberta Guide Dogs says that the success rate for these dogs in becoming fully certified is very low, ten percent or less (Thorton, 2024). Labrador retrievers and golden retrievers are the most commonly used breeds for service work and have the highest success rates compared to other breeds and mixes (Thorton, 2024; Hill, 2024). An interview with Donna Hill, of the Service Dog Training Institute, emphasized the importance of health and temperament when assessing a dog for potential service use, rather than assuming the success of a specific breed (Hill, 2024).

Generating Income through services

 Due to the decreasing amount of donations and funding available, as well as a smaller pool or volunteers and more competition for existing funds and potential volunteers, auxiliary services could be offered through the service dog agency. It could also connect with social services to collaborate and form a contracted AAI program that utilizes the therapeutic benefit of dogs for people with disabilities, in trauma or addictions recovery, youth at risk, or seniors… the benefits of canine companionship are diverse, so many pairings are possible.

 Related services, such as selling obedience trained dogs for companion, therapy, facility, or comfort dogs would further the goal of helping displaced or unwanted dogs find new stable homes. Individual and group training could also be provided for a fee, as well as long and short term dog board at the facility.

Hiring people with disabilities

*“I have found that when you are deeply troubled, there are things you get from the silent devoted companionship of a dog that you can get from no other source.” (Doris Day)*

 With less people being able to volunteer, service dog agencies could look to hire more staff… and they could look among their own clients. It would benefit individuals with disabilities who perhaps could not work full time or needed greater flexibility to receive paid employment through a service dog provider. Also, because of their lived experience, they could possibly provide more effective support to future clients who are adapting to life with a service dog. BC- Alberta Service Dogs is going to be hiring people with disabilities to work in their new neonatal building and other roles in 2024, for the first time (B. Thorton, personal communications March 8th, 2024). It provides them with much needed staff that they can train to work with the dogs consistently, plus provides them with rewarding work (B. Thorton, March 8th, 2024).

 Both the BC and Canadian Government have grants and funding available to incentivize employers considering hiring people with disabilities (Jobbank.gc.ca, 2024). There is also provincial support available to hire and train people with disabilities, and though the ‘enabling accessibility fund’, disability related modifications to the business may be tax deductible (jobbank.gc.ca, 2024). WorkBC has a new goal of creating more inclusive workplaces (Work BC, 2024). Approximately 334,000 British Columbians aged 15-64 “self-identify as having a disability”; of these, approximately half are employed (WorkBC, 2024). Research has found that people with disabilities have much to contribute to the work force; among disabled employees, the research found “very low turn over rates and high attendance, a safety rate that is as good as or better than average, no additional costs of employment, and a strong positive impact on workplace communities” (WorkBC, 2024).

**Relevant Legislature**

*“Great men have great dogs.” Otto von Bismarck*

As with dog training in general, service dog training is a largely unregulated industry. The legislature that service dog training businesses primarily have to concern themselves with involve those regarding the service dog team certifications, public access rights, and laws affecting the rights of their clients with disabilities. In order to support people with disabilities adequately and honestly, it is important to be familiar with legislature pertaining to service dog teams. The laws governing service dog certification are different in Canada versus the United States, but unfortunately there are misconceptions among Canadians regarding the rights of service animals, and what constitutes a service animal entitled to those legal rights and protection.

The legal definition for a service dog (also called an ‘assistance dog’) is “a dog whose presence and training mitigates the effects of a person’s disability… in Canada there is no unified legal definition of a ‘service animal’, and so this definition should be checked with the local regulations where required” (Prinold, March 28, 2021, p.5). Guide dogs are dogs specifically for the blind or visually impaired, but the term may also be used for hearing dogs, trained to assist the deaf or hearing impaired (Prinold, March 28, 2021, p.5). They have the same legal rights and protection as a service dog (Prinold, March 28, 2021, p.5). Although service dog policies vary across the country, a dog is not a service dog in Canada if it is “for protection and/or defence, an emotional support animal unless for a certified psychiatric disability confirmed by a medical professional (ESA’s only have legal standing in the USA)”; is a therapy animal or other well behaved dog used in group settings; or is a facility or working dog giving comfort in courtrooms or to help first responders (support for victims of crime), a search or cadaver dog, or any other working dog (Prinold, March 28, 2021, p.6).

Service dogs can be sourced through large service dog training schools, from private dog trainers, or can be trained by the disabled individual themselves (British Columbia, July 9, 2021; Guide Dog and Service Dog Act, 2015). However, all potential service dogs obtained from a source other than a training school accredited by Assistance Dogs International (ADI) or the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) are required to pass a public safety assessment conducted by the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) prior to being certified (British Columbia, July 9th, 2021) in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, and Nova Scotia (Panford, 2021). Other provinces and territories either do not have acts specific to service dogs, or they are included as being a right of a person with disability and do not require special certification (Panford, 2021). This business will be located in British Columbia, so only regulations pertinent to B.C. will be covered in this report. Due to dogs requiring ongoing training to maintain their skill set and prove that the handler can still control their dog, service dog teams in B.C. require testing every two years to renew their public access certification (British Columbia, July 9, 2021; Guide Dog and Service Dog Act, 2015).

 JIBC is the only institution where it is possible to be credited for public access in British Columbia; there are numerous ‘online’ or alternative options, but these are not legally recognized and a waste of time and money (British Columbia, July 9, 2021). This public safety assessment, or public access test, is intended to prove that the dog has been trained to standard, that the handler can manage their dog, and that the dog is safe to be out in the public with a calm and even temperament, and reliable in situations that are commonly experienced by service dog teams (British Columbia, July 9, 2021). Only regular collars are permitted for test (in line with trainers being encouraged to use humane and non-aversive strategies for training) and the test is comprised of forty tasks that must all be successfully completed, on leash, for the team to become certified (British Columbia, July 9, 2021). Currently the test costs $200, although the certification afterwards is free; testing sites include the lower mainland, Vancouver Island, the Cariboo, and the BC Interior (British Columbia, July 9, 2021).

Other requirements to qualify for a service dog in British Columbia include documentation in the form of a GDSDA certificate for legal protection, or a valid ID card obtained through an accredited service dog training school (British Columbia, July 9, 2021; Guide Dog and Service Dog Act, 2015). Documentation required for a GDSDA certificate includes: a completed application for a guide or service dog (non-accredited), a medical form confirming the requirement for a service dog completed by a physician or nurse practitioner, written confirmation the dog is spayed/neutered, a copy of a photo showing the applicant’s face, and a copy of valid government ID with photo (British Columbia, July 9, 2021; Guide Dog and Service Dog Act, 2015).

As long as the dog is well mannered, a person with a service dog has the same access rights as any person without one; the service dog designation also allows the dog to be exempt from strata bylaws and rental terms that prohibit pets (British Columbia, July 9, 2021). No law applying to service dogs requires them to be perfectly behaved at all times- they are still individual, living things that will exhibit normal dog behaviors and can be unpredictable (Prinold, March 28, 2021, p.26). Any dog owner, including a service dog handler, can be sued for negligence “but only if there is foreseeability of harm and unreasonable conduct” (Prinold, 2021, p.26).

When in training, service dogs are not granted any special rights- it is up to the employees of stores and agencies to decide whether a dog in training is allowed into their establishment (British Columbia, July 9, 2021; Prinold, March 28, 2021, p.26). A dog-in-training or GDSA- in- training certification is no longer required- handlers and their dogs are governed by the same bylaws that pertain to companion animals (British Columbia, July 9, 2021). There is an application for service dog trainers, but this is only available through accredited non-profit service dog training schools for their staff and volunteers (Guide Dog and Service Dog Act, 2015, Sect. 2.4). A service dog also only has public access rights when with its handler- otherwise, it has the same restrictions as a companion dog (Prinold, March 28, 2021, p.26).

Guide and Service Dog legislation and policies to reference regarding the rights and restrictions for service dogs and handlers are the Guide and Service Dog Act, the BC Guide and Service Dog Assessment Outline, and the Guide Dog and Service Dog Policies (British Columbia, July 9, 2021).

Disability laws are also essential to understand, as the service dog training organization works closely with people with disabilities in matching them to a dog that suits their needs and helping them, and the dog form a working partnership. Canada does not have its own legal definition for disabilities, instead relying on the World Health Organization’s and the United Nations’ designation (CFAS, 2020, p.24). The 1975 UN Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons “defined a ‘disabled person’ as ‘anyone unable to ensure by himself or herself, whole or partly, the necessities of a normal individual and/or social life, as a result of deficiency, either congenital or not, in his or her physical or mental capabilities” (Prinhold, March 28, 2021, p.4; CFAS, 2020, p.24). As a greater understanding of the implication of and various forms of disability was achieved, the UN altered their definition of disability in 2006 to recognize it as an ‘evolving concept’ that includes people “who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (Prinold, March 28, 2021, p.4; CFAS, 2020, p.24). The World Health Organization does not define disabilities “in terms of specific categories of individuals, but rather as the interactions between people and the societies in which they live” (CFAS, 2020, p.24).

People with disabilities are protected from discrimination by Human Rights Codes: “Canadian and provincial human rights legislation protects the rights of equal access to all public places and businesses for persons with disabilities and prohibits discrimination against them, including those who use service dogs” (Prinold, 2021, p.30). The Human Rights Code protects anyone who requires a service dog for functioning and prohibits denying any person with disability access due to their disability or service dog (CFAS, 2020, p.24). Unfortunately, despite this Code, many businesses and Canadians are still unfamiliar with the legal rights of people with disabilities and service dogs, so service dog teams are still confronted by the public or denied access, especially in the case of invisible disabilities (CFAS, 2020, p.24).

The Canadian Human Rights Act includes the Duty to Accommodate (CFAS, 2020, p.23). Section (g) of the Canadian Human Rights Act covers accommodation as it relates to people with disabilities: “to be considered to have a bona fide justification, it must be established that accommodation of the needs of an individual or a class of individuals affected would impose undue hardship on the person who would need to accommodate those needs, considering health, safety, and cost” (CFAS, 2020, p.23). This is relevant to service dogs, in the event that there is a conflict between the rights of the two parties involved (e.g. One has a severe allergy to dogs).

**Certifying Bodies**

*“Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole." Roger Caras (author of’ A Dog Is Listening: The Way Some of Our Closest Friends View Us’)*

 Although service dog trainers are not required to be certified, there are some specific accreditation programs and training standards that have been created. Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and the International Guide Dog Federation (British Columbia, July 9, 2021) are the two governing bodies that are able to certify large service dog training schools. For dog training certifications in general, there are multiple organizations and online schools of varying legitimacy and value who provide certifications.

 Assistance Dogs International (ADI), a “worldwide coalition of non-profit programs that train and place assistance dogs, was founded in 1986 (ADI, 2024). ADI only accredits non-profits that meet their standards and require their members to be re-accredited every five years (ADI, 2024). In order to apply, organizations must already “be an ADI accredited member or a candidate program in good standing. Candidate programs must have been a candidate for at least two years and have placed at least ten assistance dog teams to be eligible to apply for an ADI accreditation survey” (ADI, 2024). ADI’s candidate program exists for non-profits and charities who are interested in and working towards ADI accreditation; they must pay annual fees, submit annual census and info documents, reach full accreditation within five years, and must be charitable (ADI, 2024). For-profits and individuals are unable to apply, regardless of their abilities.

 The International Guide Dog Federation (2024) was founded in 1989 and is a “95 member organization whose purpose is to serve people who are blind or have low vision around the world, by training and providing guide dogs” (IGDF, 2024). Only guide dog organizations are eligible for membership, and there are three classes of membership: applicant, enquiring, and full (IGDF, 2024). For full accreditation, guide dog organizations must have successfully placed at least ten teams, meet IGDF standards, pass an assessment, pay membership fees, and be approved by the board (IGDF, 2024). Applicant organizations interested in full membership must be actively working towards meeting the criteria for full membership, be a registered legal entity, be developing a guide dog service, have graduated at least one team that has been together for at least one month, provide proof of ongoing support to clients, plus have a three year business plan and financial plan for sustainability (IGDF, 2024).

 The long waiting list and cost of getting a trained service dog has led to people ordering fake certifications, harnesses, and patches from online sources. Numerous organizations offer ‘certification’ for service animals, but unless they are backed by law, these are generally invalid (Prinold, 2021, p.28). Despite their rising popularity in the states, ‘emotional support animal’ is not a legal designation under any Canadian law- any agency that claims to offer certification for ESA’s is fake (Prinold, 2021, p.28). There are only three categories that service dog credentials can fall into: “government regulated credentials, large service dog school credentials, and poorly recognized or fake credentials” (Prinold, 2021, p.28). The only certificates service dog handlers should apply for and pay for are those provided by a government department for a fee (Prinold, 2021, p.28). Service dog certification is unnecessary in most of Canada anyways, as only British Columbia, Alberta, and Nova Scotia require service dog testing- other provinces and territories “require only the disability of the person to be certified” (Prinold, 2021, p.28). Under the Americans With Disabilities Act in the United States, service animals do not require certification (Prinold, 2021, p.28).

 Although not a requirement, certification or accreditation through a professional association can contribute to the legitimacy of the guide dog training business, even if the credentials are for dog training in general rather than guide dog specific. In this industry, accreditation “does not refer to a third party contractual or government accreditation through regulatory requirements… but instead, an internal process suggesting a degree of self-attestation and peer reviews that determine an organization’s benchmarks or private company standards for brand performance and recognition (CFAS, 2020, p.29). There are advantages beyond marketing and self-promotion, such as increasing your ability to provide quality services and care for dogs that meet or exceed industry standards.

 The Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT) was established in 2001 and is now the “leading independent certifying organization in the dog training profession” (CCPDT, 2024). To receive certification through CCPDT, trainers must pass written and practical exams- the practical exam has been made accessible by allowing candidates to film themselves training dogs and then submitting the videos online (CCPDT, 2024). Members are required to use “humane and science-based practices” and continue their education through approved CEUs from other training schools to remain up to date on recent research and practices, as well as maintain their CCPDT accreditation (CCPDT, 2024). The two tests offered are the CDPT-KA, for knowledge assessment, and the CDPT-KSA, for knowledge and skill assessment (CCDPT, 2024). The CDPT-KSA is judged based on video uploads that demonstrate the trainer performing hands-on exercises with the dog over a three week training period, to teach the dog four different actions (CCDPT, 2024). Modern dog training is progressing beyond traditional, aversive, or punishing training methods to more positive based methods. LIMA is the abbreviation assigned to ‘least intrusive minimally aversive’ techniques required by the CCDPT, and the associated training principles are used for “effective behavior interventions” (CCDPT, 2024). Applicants must also show a minimum of 300 logged hours of hands-on dog training experience over the three years prior to applying for certification (CCDPT, 2024).

 The SPCA has created its own accreditation for trainers who practice humane and positive reinforcement based dog training (Drewa, Jan. 28, 2019). ‘AnimalKind’s’ standards were “developed after a thorough review of scientific research and feedback from international animal behavior and dog training experts (Drewa, Jan. 28, 2019). The AnimalKind website states that its mission is to “promote animal welfare and humane training methods, meet SPCA standards…” and is a science-based program produced from an understanding of dogs’ natural behavior and body language (AnimalKind, 2024).

 The Canadian Association of Professional Dog Trainers (CAPDT) is different from the CCDPT in that it does not test its members qualifications or provide them with a dog training certification but is still relevant in the industry due to its focus on education and encouraging the ethical treatment of dogs and use of reward based and LIMA training methods (CAPDT, 2024). Members pay an annual membership fee and have access to information through an online portal, including free webinars and training industry methods and updates (CAPDT, 2024).

**Example Organizations**

*“Some of my best leading men have been dogs and horses." Elizabeth Taylor (actress)*

The Comfort Dog Project of Northern Uganda

 BIF FIX Uganda, an American-based animal welfare organization, first began missions in Northern Uganda in 2012 to improve the well-being and health of animals in the region (Olmert, March 2021, p. 21). In Northern Uganda, due to ongoing civil wars and rebel violence, 90& of the population had to abandon their homes and move into Internally Displaced Persons camps, where they lived in squalid conditions and were vulnerable to victimization, through violence and kidnappings (Olmert, 2021, p.21). As a result of these horrors and “decades of violence… (there is) a wake of poverty and social instability that undermine the recovery of the trauma experienced in the war. The rising rate of suicide, substance abuse, and domestic violence is a measure of the enduring trauma and the need for more and better psychosocial interventions” (Olmert, 2021, p.21). This region also included thousands of dogs, many part of households who kept them around for hunting and protection, but otherwise regarded them as useless vermin and did not provide care for them- their lives were described as “brutish and short” (Olmert, 2021, p.21).

 BIG FIX Uganda opened the first veterinary clinic in the region, and Northern Ugandans brought their dogs there largely for vaccinations and rabies shots to protect themselves (Olmert, 2021, p.21). The volunteers treated the dogs well, washed and groomed them- something the Ugandans had not seen before (Olmert, 2021, p.21). These observations led them to reconsider their dogs, which led BIG FIX to consider combining animal welfare with human needs (Olmert, 2021, p.22). They recognized that bringing people “close to their dogs (could)… help nurture the social bonds that might improve the health and happiness of both” (Olmert, 2021, p.22).

 In 2014, the Comfort Dog Project ran for the first time as a pilot project and research experiment, and has run repeatedly in the years since, due to its enormous success (Olmert, 2021, p.22). The program is

“animal-assisted trauma therapy that combines weekly 90 minute group psychosocial counselling sessions with basic dog training and bonding instruction and exercises. It was modelled on the best AAT (animal assisted therapy) practice and a commitment to the interconnections between human and animal health that are highlighted in the One Health initiative” (Olmert, 2021, p.22).

Studies on dogs with veterans and other PTSD sufferers have discovered that “this interspecies social engagement resulted in greater PTSD symptom reduction than standard evidence-based trauma treatment of the same duration” and improves patient attendance and perception of treatment (Olmert, 2021, p.22). Despite most of the Ugandans in the pilot project having been raised to fear or avoid dogs, they were open to the program’s efforts to encourage bonding with the dogs and receptive to the class given on dog care and health (Olmert, 2021, p.22). After the onloading process, participants were matched with dogs and began the 20 week program of canine bonding and trauma counselling (Olmert, 2021, p.22). The dogs used had been rescued or donated to the organization; participants were provided with food, a dog care package, and veterinary support that would continue after graduating the program, and volunteers did routine home checks (Olmert, 2021, p.22).

Interactions with their dogs included bonding and foundational training. Participants were taught to communicate with their dogs and train with patience and consistency and encouragement (Olmert, 2021, p.22-23). Dog training is a good exercise for people struggling with PTSD as it “requires mastery of the cognitive and emotional social skills that are often compromised by trauma”; it offered an experiential learning opportunity and a way to rebuild these skills as they adapted their verbal cues and body language to communicate with the dog and considered the dog’s viewpoint (Olmert, 2021, p.23). The dog’s reaction to them gave immediate and honest feedback (Olmert, 2021, p.23).

Participants’ dogs joined them in counselling sessions. They found that it was easier to share and recount traumatic memories when their dogs were with them (Olmert, 2021, p.23). They reported feeling better because their dogs were always happy to see them, and that their dogs “filled the social void experienced when they were stigmatized by their community for their actions during the war” (Olmert, 2021, p.23).

Following the pilot program, all but one of the program graduates reported that their dog reduced their loneliness, improved their happiness, and that “they considered their dog a sibling or a child” (Olmert, 2021, p.25). Participants were revisited annually after the pilot project until the COVID pandemic and found that three-quarters of program graduates no longer met the criteria for PTSD, and those who still did had their symptom severity halved and number of symptoms that remained reduced (Olmert, 2021, p.25).

Operation Freedom Paws

 Operation Freedom Paws is a non-profit located in central Vancouver Island that operates 28 weeklong programs for veterans, first responders, and civilians to train rescue dogs to become their own service animals (CTV News, March 31, 2023). The founder and executive director of Operation Freedom Paws, Barb Ashmead, says that “it’s a non-traditional program but we find it works really well and by the time they finish our training program they’re very well bonded with their dog” (CTV News, March 31, 2023). While people train their rescue, the organization also covers the cost for the animal and its care, food, and training (CTV News, March 31, 2023). An example of how the program helps both dogs and people heal is that at the time of the CTV Interview, six of the dogs in the program were rescued from Afghanistan, after they had been tortured and shot at by Taliban soldiers- during the program, they received the care and affection they needed to restore their health and trust (CTV News, March 31, 2023). Dogs are commonly sourced from rescues and humane societies, frequently with a history of abuse, neglect, or abandonment (Operation freedom Paws, 2024). There are five categories of service dogs that Operation Freedom Paws helps clients train dogs for: hearing dogs, psychiatric service dogs, mobility dogs, medical alert, and guide dogs (for the visually impaired) (Operation Freedom Paws, 2024).

Dogs for Better Lives

 Dogs for Better Lives includes animal shelters as a source for service dog recruits (Ifert, Feb.5th, 2024). While being trained by professionals, the dogs lived in the foster homes of volunteers who worked with the assistant trainer from DBL, to facilitate training as well as let the dogs live outside of a kennel (Ifert, Feb. 5th, 2024). The program goes through shelters and rescues to choose dogs with potential as autism-support, hearing, or facility dogs (Ifert, Feb. 5th, 2024). Two recent success stories are those of Walker, now a facility dog supporting elementary students at risk, and Annie, a hearing assistance dog, who had been in several homes before being back in a shelter, where she was discovered by DBL (Ifert, Feb.5th, 2024).

**Research findings**

*“A dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than he loves himself.” Josh Billings*

The benefits of assistance animals have been found to include ‘increased motivation and open communication, reduction of depression and anxiety; to encourage active living, bonding, motor skill development, playfulness, and living in the moment; to reduce the stigma associated with treatment, to focus on the bond rather than the problem, and to “alleviate or compensate for functional limitations” ‘(CFAASS, 2023). HABRI, the Human- Animal Bond Research Institute, is a non-profit organization that studies the impact of animal connection and pet ownership on human health and wellbeing (2024). HABRI continues to support research delving into the impacts of human and animal interactions and has links to numerous research projects on their website regarding the positive impacts of canine connection in everything from youth with disabilities to reducing their owner’s health care costs (2024).

Psychiatric Service Dogs for PTSD

*“There is no psychiatrist in the world like a puppy licking your face." Ben Williams (English philosopher).*

 Veteran’s Affairs Canada studied the impact of psychiatric service dogs on war veterans with PTSD (Gov. of Canada, Nov. 25, 2019). Although people may often say they have dogs for their mental health, the legal requirement for a mental health service dog, or any service dog, is that it has been “extensively trained to respond precisely to specific disabilities of their owners including individuals with mental health diagnosis such as PTSD…(they) are trained to detect and intervene when their handler is anxious, contribute to a feeling of safety for their handler; and promote a sense of relaxation and socialization” (Gov. of Canada, Nov. 25, 2019). The VA service dog pilot study involved 18 veterans who had PTSD, over the course of 18 months as part of The Veteran Affairs Canada Suicide Prevention Strategy Action Plan (Gov. of Canada, Nov. 25, 2019). The veterans symptoms of the first six months prior to being matched to a service dog were recorded to use for comparison; observations and input was then collected for 12 months after a service dog was placed with each veteran (Gov. of Canada, Nov. 25, 2019). After a year with their service dog, participants’ activity levels and social activities increased, their sleep time and quality increased, nightmares and flashbacks were reduced and PTSD symptoms overall were reduced; there was “a moderate, long-lasting reduction in depression symptoms”, and within six months of having the service dog, their quality of life was improving, and they were more comfortable in public spaces (Gov. of Canada, Nov. 25, 2019). It should be noted that the veterans still remained on the medication they were taking prior to being matched with a canine (Gov. of Canada, Nov. 25, 2019).

 Another part of this study interviewed a separate group of ten veterans who had had service dogs for between 2-4 years to learn about their experiences (Gov. of Canada, Nov. 25, 2019). The study’s interviews found that “the three main roles of the service dog reported were: acting as a socialization agent; contributing to a feeling of safety; and detecting and interviewing when the Veteran is anxious, depressed, or aggressive” (Gov. of Canada, Nov. 25, 2019). The service dogs primary tasks included “alerting a veteran to identify when he/she was experiencing intrusive symptoms (i.e. detecting and waking the veteran up before or during a nightmare); reminding the veteran of a task to be completed if he/she gets disorientated; identifying and informing the veteran about physical elements in his/her surroundings (incoming persons, perceived threats, etc.) and maintaining an appropriate free space around the veteran” (Gov. of Canada, Nov. 25, 2019). As a result of the dogs’ support, veterans were more involved in their community and with their families and increased participation in social activities as well (Gov. of Canada, Nov. 25th, 2019).

Dogs and People with Autism

*"I have found that when you are deeply troubled, there are things you get from the silent devoted companionship of a dog that you can get from no other source." (Doris Day)*

 Service dogs and trained companion dogs are being increasingly recognized and requested for both adults and youth on the autism spectrum. National Service Dogs was originally created to meet the needs of families of children with autism for service dogs, although it has since expanded to train dogs for other disabilities as well (NSD, 2024). Even if a dog in their program is unsuitable for public access work, NSD will often match the dog to a family with a child with autism or some other disability, who would like a well-trained pet to reduce stress and provide companionship (NSD, 2024). Research has found that dogs benefit people with autism by “alleviating loneliness, developing pro-social behaviors, improving family function, and reducing stress” (HABRI, 2024). ASD children have difficulty socializing and connecting with others, causing them to struggle with loneliness- a companion animal can relieve this feeling of isolation, and provide unconditional and non-judgmental affection (HABRI, 2024). A dog can also help develop proper social behavior and provide opportunities to connect, as their presence may facilitate conversation and help the child feel more confident when going out in public (HABRI, 2024). Dogs in “educational settings have also been found to increase socialization in children with autism, leading to more engagement in the classroom” (HABRI, 2024). Animals assisted therapy has been found to increase sociability in children with ASD and can ‘bridge’ a connection between the child and their therapist, whether the child is verbal or non-verbal (HABRI, 2024). Children, youth, and adults with high function ASD can also benefit from a therapeutic canine companion in reducing feelings of isolation and depression, and improving sociability (HABRI, 2024).

 Even if a dog does not qualify for public access work, it can still benefit the entire family. A study on the families of children with autism found that having a trained companion dog in the home reduced stress for the family overall, improving family functioning and child-parent relationships (HABRI, 2024). The cortisol levels of ASD children were also lowered when with their companion dog, but increased when their dog was removed from their home (HABRI, 2024). If the child has formed an attachment to the dog, it can also improve the child’s “calmness and compliance with their parents’ directives” (HABRI, 2024).

Canine Connection and Human Health

*"Dogs never bite me. Just humans." (Marilyn Monroe)*

 HABRI’s Health Care Cost Savings Report, despite studying the USA population, is still relevant to Canada as many chronic health issues seen in the USA also exist in other developed and westernized countries (obesity, diabetes, heart disease, etc.) (HABRI, 2024). This study found that in the USA, pet ownership saved “$22.7 billion in health care costs” when examining health care costs related to “physician office visits, obesity, treatment of C. difficile infections, mental health costs for anxiety in children 8-10 years old, mental health care costs of socially isolated seniors, and Veteran PTSD treatments (emotional support and service animals)” (HABRI, 2024; Clover & Thornton, 2023. In general, the study found that pet owners visit a doctor’s office less, are less likely to be obese if they regularly walk their dog and have young children that are 9% less likely to have anxiety HABRI, 2024;(Clover & Thornton, 2023. Having emotional support or service animals paired with people with PTSD reduces the spending on treatment costs for PTSD by $688 million (HABRI, 2024; Clover & Thornton, 2023).

**Business Planning**

*“Don’t you tell me that it’s love or money, I want both; Ain’t no way I let you take one from me, I want both” (Tiesto, 21 Savage, & BIA, 2023, BOTH)*.

**Sources/type of market research conducted**

 The research was conducted primarily through secondary analysis and archival study, reading through past and current reports on the service dog industry, as well as the connection between humans and dogs. Humans and dogs have worked alongside each other for thousands of years, but recently, research is confirming numerous physical and mental benefits to this partnership.

 A literature review was completed to identify needs in the service dog industry and issues affecting canine welfare post-COVID 19 pandemic and due to other changes in the 21st century. Reports from service dogs providers and humane societies were also considered, to identify demand, and future needs for both species.

 The writer of this report was able to connect with several people who have worked in the service dog industry and/or dog service industry, to receive insight regarding the unique niche that this industry fills and collect more information on market demand for service dogs, canine companionship, and other services dog owners may need that could be used alongside service dog training as a means to grow the business and enable it to continue to connect dogs with homes where they will be appreciated and cared for.

**Market research**

**Planning Model**

Feasibility Plan

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Vision for success | To reduce the number of dogs in shelters; connect dogs to homes that will give them a fulfilling a stable life; allow people to benefit from the emotional and/or mobility and/or medical support that is possible through canine interactions; help meet the demand for certified service dogs and reduce wait times for dogs; coach people to work with their dogs more effectively; provide trained companion animals to provide comfort to children and adults with disabilities  |
| Brief description  | This program utilizes dogs from multiple sources and backgrounds to train for service work. Dogs are assessed prior and during; those unlikely to succeed for public access requirements are rerouted into another training program based on their abilities and then matched with the appropriate home. Money from canine sales is going to be used to build the program; additional revenue from training and boarding fees will also cover operational costs for the program.  |
| Target population and community  | Dog owners and lovers are a varied bunch. This program targets people who have to give their dogs up for adoption but would like an alternative to a shelter or stranger that would help improve the dog’s future prospect. The service dog and trained companion programs seek out people of any age and gender who are willing to commit to the responsibilities of dog ownership and provide a stable home. Because of the mixed backgrounds of dogs in the program, it also targets people who would like a well trained supportive dog, but do not require it for public access work. The main demographics it is focusing on include families of children with autism, women who have experienced trauma, and adults aged 50 and up; people with disabilities are also targeted, depending on the service dogs available.  |
| Barriers to progress | The time and money required to care for and train a service dog until placement. Currently looking into properties suitable for the business and needing to increase start up fund (the founder has been in university the past four years straight): this business requires a rural acreage.High failure rate for dogs during service training. Costs of health screening in potential service dogs of mixed backgrounds. Getting attention and clients as a new start up. Requiring ongoing training and professional development; refinement of skills to produce quality service dogs and be able to coach individuals in training their own dogs  |
| Working model summary | This program begins as a ‘pilot project’ in it’s first two years, to refine the process and determine the most effective and efficient means of operation that will allow it to be ongoing in the years to come. Also, to ensure that what is being attempted is possible- and identify what needs to be changed before the program is expanded to reduce risk and financial loss.  |
| Assumptions guiding the venture  | That many people love dogs. That the trends in increasing spending on companion animals, as well as the growing interest in service animals for a variety of disabilities will continue. That the current policies and regulations governing service dog requirements will not change in the near future. That there are many people with disabilities or health issues that will be capable of caring for their dog. That people would be willing to purchase a young dog that has already received obedience training and been housebroken, so it can easily integrate into their family with minimal stress and behavior issues.  |
| Desired short and long-term outcomes from venture | Short term outcome: The pilot program would be used to demonstrate the potential of the programLong term outcome: Hopefully the pilot project will reveal that the program has the potential for wide reaching impact. Expansion could begin to include more jobs, greater community involvement, and expansion into social service programs with animal assisted interventions.  |
| Required resources (human, physical, financial…) | Start up funds (mortgage downpayment, insurance); funds and labor to build infrastructure (dog run, boarding infrastructure, whelping box/room); connection with a local vet for services; building website and have high traffic advertisements placed; competent dog trainer/handlers; kennel materials, dog supplies, puppy-proofing home |
| Timeline for start up and operations first two years  | Begin purchasing property and breeding female; take on several mixed background dogs of mixed age that meet the criteria for the program and begin to train them. After first four months when companion dogs are ready for placement, connect to agencies who work with people with disabilities, as well as organizations who are involved with target demographics, to begin connecting with people who may be interested in the dogs. When breeding female correct age, hire stud- raise puppies as if they will all become certified service dogs (socialization at early age, etc.) and get them involved in training program. By year two, the original mixed background dogs should have been successfully rehomed or completing service training if suitable; the pups from the first littler will be around six months old, so not ready for service dog placement but old enough to assess their aptitude for service work based on training and temperament so far.  |
| Evidence to prove effectiveness of program, and expected time of measurement | Income from additional streams of revenue (six months in and onward). Response of dogs to training (ongoing). Interest in community and agencies contacted (12 months in and onward)Number of inquiries received about dogs (from years 1-2). The length of time dogs are up for adoption after training (Between years 1 to 2) Consumer demand for auxiliary services (ongoing)Customer feedback (ongoing after the first 6 months).  |

**Organizational Structure**

The Canadian Foundation for Animal Assisted Support Services’ 2020 report on the service dog industry surveyed trainers across the country (CFAASS, 2020, p.45). Of service dog providers surveyed, 46% provided dogs and related services for free; 54% charged a fee-for-service (CFAASS, 2020, p.45). The most common business model was of a charitable organization (29%) (CFAASS, 2020, p.45). The remainder, in descending order, were non-profits (20%), for-profit businesses (20%), and independent trainers (6%) (CFAASS, 2020, p.45). Of these, the majority supplied trained service dogs (63%), and a lesser 37% helped people train their own service dogs (CFAASS, 2020, p.45). 37% of organizations were members of a service dog organization coalition (CFAASS, 2020, p.45).

 This business start up will be a for-profit sole proprietorship. The founder wants the freedom to be able to experiment with different models and approaches to the organization, and operating as a private for-profit allows for less restrictions on revenue-producing activities. However, as a for-profit, it will be limited as to what grants or other funding that it can apply for and is unable to request financial donations, so it needs to be entirely financially independent.

**Location**

 This business will be established in the rural area that surrounds Williams Lake, BC. This region was chosen because the organization’s founder as a full time job that provides a steady income to support growing the business. Affordable acreages are still possible to purchase around Williams Lake, and because of city bylaws, the business needs to be outside of city limits and have sufficient space so that the noise from dogs are not disrupting any neighbors. Buying an acreage out of town will also allow for future expansion and more infrastructure to be built.

 The majority of BC service dog providers are located on the Lower Mainland or on Vancouver Island. There are several in the south Okanagan, but north of Kamloops there are no recognized service dog providers. This new business could meet the service dog needs of people in BC’s Interior and Northern BC, particularly rural areas.

 Selling dogs is not limited to within the region, as dogs can be sold both nationally and internationally. BC, Alberta, and Nova Scotia are the only provinces that require service dogs to pass a public access test- trained to standard service dogs could be sold to clients in other provinces with less stringent public access laws. Trained companion pets can also be sold out of the region.

 Certain services offered would only be possible in-region, such as in-person coaching and training, boarding (for horses and dogs), and a volunteer puppy foster program (when/if established in the future as part of a breeding program). There is an online option for some services, such as coaching in canine skill maintenance and on-going support for clients.

**Products & services (service dogs, various placement options)**

*"Dogs have boundless enthusiasm but no sense of shame. I should have a dog as a life coach." Moby (American singer & songwriter, animal activist)*

 The business would like to work towards producing trained, fully certifiable service dogs for people with diverse disabilities. It would also like to improve animal welfare by providing training and find suitable placement for dogs in need of rehoming- ideally, dogs from various sources could be assessed for the program and then attempted to be trained for public access work. Recognizing the high failure rate and unique requirements for service dogs, the business will also have a small breeding program of its own to produce dogs with known health and genetics who are more predictable in their suitability for service work. Having dogs more likely to succeed will increase the number of dogs certified for public access work and reduce costs associated with training and caring for unsuitable dogs (B. Thorton, personal communications, March 8th, 2024). Many people still want and appreciate a well behaved dog, and as dogs are frequently surrendered to shelters due to lack of training (Burch, 2021, p.175) providing foundational training to dogs from diverse backgrounds will increase their likelihood of finding forever homes. These dogs still have a lot to contribute, even if they do not become certified service dogs. Meeting Canine Good Citizen standards or the equivalent is usually a prerequisite for therapy and facility dogs (Burch, 2021, p.171). These dogs do not have the same public access rights as a service dog but can potentially support and provide emotional comfort to many people (Burch, 2021, p.171).

Donna Hill of the Service Dog Training Institute identified a gap in need in the psychiatric service dog industry (D. Hill, personal communications, March 12th, 2024). She says she frequently gets requests from females seeking trained dogs to help them with their PTSD and anxiety (D. Hill, personal communications, March 12th, 2024). Existing service dog programs that provide assistance dogs for PTSD primarily serve veterans and first responders who are men; there is not much or anything available that meets the specific needs of women who have experienced assault, domestic or sexual abuse, and other kinds of trauma (D. Hill, personal communications, March 12th, 2024). This is a potential market for the business proposed; dogs could be trained for PTSD related tasks, as well as tasks specific to these women’s needs. These women also may not require a dog for public access, but just require in-home and outside support, in which case a mixed breed, well-mannered dog may be sufficient.

**Other streams of revenue (dog boarding, training classes, events?)**

*"The greatest pleasure of a dog is that you may make a fool of yourself with him, and not only will he not scold you, but he will make a fool of himself too." Samuel Butler*

 Although this business is focused on producing service dogs, there is value in other animal related services as well. A service dog takes between 1.5 to two years to produce to standard, if it even completes the required training. In the meantime, the business needs to produce income to meet operating expenses, including the costs of dogs who do not complete service dog training.

 Additional streams of revenue that the business could offer, dependent on where the facility is located and the amount of acreage, include short and long term dog and horse pasture-board, training and reselling rescued or unwanted horses, foundational training for young dogs so they can be rehomed as trained companion animals who can provide comfort and emotional support, dogs trained and suitable for therapy, facility, or victims’ service work, as well as individual dog training. The owner would like to continue to add to her knowledge and is interested in training dogs for specialized scent work, including hunting gun dogs and retrieving dogs that could be a good option for outdoorsy families who want a pet that will assist them come hunting season.

 Local dog training group classes could also be offered, such as training to meet the standards for the Canine Good Citizen test, trick or specific skills training, or a weekly dog and human fitness class or walking club (this walking club may be best used to promote the organization and raise awareness, rather than be for a fee). Online coaching for past clients could be considered to support them with adjusting to their new pet, as it is often more accessible and convenient than in-person meet-ups, depending on where the person is relocated and what their abilities are.

**Targeted demographics**

*“To his dog, every man is Napoleon; hence the constant popularity of dogs." Aldous Huxley (author of ‘Brave New World’)*

 The Canadian Foundation of for Animal Assisted Support Services survey of 2020 asked providers what age of clients they served. The majority (63%) served all ages; 29% catered to children and youth, and 8% focused on adults and seniors (CFAASS, 2020, p.45).

 The Canadian Service Dog Consumer Survey conducted through CFAASS netted 150 respondents across Canada, who either had a service dog, where the parent or support person of someone with a service dog, or seeking a service dog (CFAASS, 2020, p.7). 87% of respondents were between 18-64 years of age; 15% were children under 17, and 3% were seniors over 64 (CFAASS, 2020, p.7). 47% of respondents were employed in some capacity- 31% worked full time and 16% worked part time (CFAASS, 2020, p.7). 28% received income through long term disability benefits (CFAASS, 2020, p.7). Over half (65%) of respondents had only had one service dog; the other answers ranged from between 0 – 3 (CFAASS, 2020, p.7). Of the 143 participants that had dogs, 54% had lived with their dog between 1- 5 years (CFAASS, 2020, p.7). 80% of the dogs had been sourced from Canada, 4% from the USA, and 3% from other countries (CFAASS, 2020, p.7). Benefits experienced through service dogs reported by respondents include mental health (73%), mobility support (32%), and alert support (30%) (CFAASS, 2020, p.7).

 Interestingly, 79 of 120 respondents who currently had dogs said they had “acquired the dog as a pet and either trained them on their own or paid for training” (CFAASS, 2020, p.7).

 Service dog providers across Canada were surveyed to identify populations served (CFAASS, 2020, p.38). A high number of clients had invisible disabilities (CFAASS, 2020, p.38). This survey found that among the providers, 60% served people with visible disabilities, 93% with invisible disabilities, 47% with life altering injuries, 80% with PTSD, 40% with workplace injuries, 67% with chronic illnesses, and 20% categorized as ‘other’ (CFAASS, 2020, p.38). The ‘other’ category included autism and “challenging” cases (CFAASS, 2020, p.38).

**Market demand**

*“My fashion philosophy is, if you're not covered in dog hair, your life is empty." –Elayne Boosler (comedian, writer)*

The demand for well-trained service dogs is undisputedly high. This demand will likely increase with increased visibility of service dogs in public, as well as more research that is confirming the benefits of their support. The Disability Rights Movement that began in the late 20th century has led to greater use of dogs for support in public places, and allowing them public access rights (CFAASS, 2020, p.22). A consumer survey conducted by CFAASS found that “the vast majority of participants affirmed that service dogs improve the quality of their lives and also make their handlers and families feel safer” (CFAASS, 2020, p.9). Currently, there are “almost four million people with physical, sensory, and cognitive impairments- nearly 14% of the Canadian population” (CFAASS, 2020, p.22).

CFAASS states on their webpage that each year, they “receive hundreds of emails annually…concerning service dogs. Many people and family members feel intimidated and overwhelmed while trying to navigate this fragmented environment” (CFAASS, 2020, p.20). The service dog industry is largely unregulated, making it challenging and risky for those seeking service dogs to find reliable trainers and providers (CFAASS, 2020, p.20).

A large percentage of survey respondents had trained their own dogs independently or with a private trainer for support (CFAASS, 2020, p.9). The reasons for working with a private trainer for support rather than waiting for a dog through a non-profit was the extensive wait time for a service dog through a non-profit, prohibitive application processes or organizations no longer taking applications, or the applicant being denied if they would prefer to have their own dog trained rather than receive another one or had a different breed preference than those supplied (CFAASS, 2020, p.9). Even when choosing to train a dog on their own, future-service dog owners still needed the “resources, knowledge, training, and expertise” to support them, which is where private trainers provided support, lessons, and coaching (CFAASS, 2020, p.9).

A 2017 national survey found approximately one in five Canadians (or 6.2 million) over fifteen years old have been diagnosed with at least one disability that has limited their ability to function in daily life (CFAASS, 2020, p.25). Disabilities’ prevalence has been found to increase with age, although as of the 2017 survey, there were over 540,000 youth aged 15-24 years in Canada (13%) with at least one disability (CFAASS, 2020, p.25). 3.7 million, or 20%, of working aged adults (25-64 years) had at least one disability, and “38%, or 2 million seniors aged 65 and over” had at least one disability (CFAASS, 2020, p.25). Across all age groups, women were found to have a higher prevalence of disability than men, of 24% versus 20% (CFAASS, 2020, p.25). The greater the severity of the disability, the higher risk of unemployment and poverty and other adverse outcomes (CFAASS, 2020, p.25). 57% of disabled Canadians in 2017 were found to have a mild to moderate disability, and 43% were found to have a severe disability; “in all cases the disability was severe enough to limit them to some extent in their daily activities” (CFAASS, 2020, p.25).

Service and assistance dogs have been found to help reduce and remove barriers to access and participation among people with disabilities (CFAASS, 2020, p.26). With an ageing population and the recognition of the benefits of service dogs, as well as changes in policies that enable public access rights, it is expected that the demand for service dogs in the future will only increase (Hill, 2024; CFAASS, 2020, p.26).

**Marketing Plan**

**Website**

**Advertisement\**

**Paid advertisement on facebook (but not a facebook page)**

**Events- fundraising, advocating, promotion**

**Connecting with social services/ services that are connected to target demographic**

**Advertising to seniors, families with children, families with disabled children, single females, females with trauma background**

**Analysis**

SWOT Analysis

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| STRENGTHS* Dogs can be sold anywhere
* Able to diversify sources of revenue in a related field
* Research supporting benefits of human connection
* Founder is willing to work with animals considered less desirable
* No service dog training facility nearby; able to serve rural BC interior and Northern BC interior’s unmet needs
* Service dogs are in high demand; expected this demand will continue to increase
* Special skills required to train service dogs and support clients (not everyone can do it, the difficulty may deter other people from joining the industry)
* Founder currently has a full time job to provide income while starting up and building business
 | WEAKNESSES* There is a very high failure rate for service dog training, especially dogs of unknown backgrounds
* Need to earn back the costs of every dog that does not pass training
* Long training time per dog (1.5- 2 years)- there is no way to quickly mass produce service dogs!
* Ongoing cost of dog care, maintenance, vet bills
* Not all applicants will be suitable for dog ownership or the program
* Dogs require ongoing maintenance to be able to perform at necessary skill level
* Rescue/mixed breeds: genetics and history unknown, potential health problems, past trauma may make unsuitable for public access work and/or certain situations necessary for an assistance dog
* A third party is required to certify the dog and handler team (in BC, this is JIBC)
 |
| OPPORTUNITIES* Existing service dog providers are struggling to meet demand
* Greater awareness of the measurable benefits of canine-human connection
* Changes in public-access policies
* Service dogs serving more kinds of disabilities (not just for mobility or visual impairment), or able to be trained to address more than one disability at once
* Accessibility policies that include service animals
* Increasingly high demand for autism assistance dogs, and psychiatric service dogs
* Large number of people with disabilities across Canada, and more expected as the population ages
* Higher levels of psychiatric disorders
* Awareness that people can train their own service dogs
* Long wait lists at service dog schools; or service dog providers are no longer accepting applications for dogs
* Post-COVID- many young dogs coming up for rehoming as owner’s circumstances have changed
* Precarious housing and changing economy is leading to high numbers of owner surrenders seen in shelters
* People who are surrendering their dogs may want assurance of a good home and fulfilling life
 | THREATS* Established and larger service dog providers and dog trainers (non-profit and charity)
* Private dog trainers and for-profits
* Difficult clients
* Liability and potential lawsuits
* Dogs can be ordered nationally and internationally (nearby population not necessarily going to purchase because it is nearby)
* More people training their own service dogs
* Untrained, ‘fake’ service dogs risk public access rights to service dogs in the future
 |

**Contingency planning**

*"When we adopt a dog or any pet, we know it is going to end with us having to say goodbye, but we still do it. And we do it for a very good reason: They bring so much joy and optimism and happiness. They attack every moment of every day with that attitude." W. Bruce Cameron (A Dog's Purpose; A Dog's Journey; A Dog's Way Home)*

Managing liabilities – in the past there have been lawsuits against service dog providers, incl. non- profits (Hill, 2024). – have clients sign a waiver/ release of liability acknowledging that dogs are individuals and there is no guarantee for a living creature’s performance

Labour shortage- use workawayers? (Kull, personal communication, March 11th, 2024) or work exchange

Connect with families, seniors, empty nesters- volunteer puppy raisers, cost of dog provided and included training coaching

Foster homes for dogs

Collaborate with social programs for help when combined with therapy

health concerns in rescue dogs or dogs of unknown breeding: if dog passes basic obedience and seems to have potential to be used as a service dog/ public access certified, have a vet examination/xrays/full testing to check for medical soundness and identify any potential future issues that could be predicted

**About The Team: skills and background**

 Jami Crego is the hopeful- founder and sole proprietor of this potential business start up and social entrepreneurial adventure. She has a diverse range of interests including biology, behaviorism, training dogs and horses, nature, social issues, and business. Her biological mother was passionate about animals and dropped out of school in grade 10 because it ‘couldn’t teach her anything about horses’. Jami has inherited this love for animals and has been drawn to them since she was capable of conscious thought. Growing up, Jami was unable to have her own horse and dog due to allergies in her adoptive family, but she was mentored by one of her mom’s friends and got her first job at age 12 to pay for riding lessons. She would also sometimes smuggle in stray dogs and injured wildlife and helped raise and rehabilitate a variety of wild birds, plus volunteered at the Scout Island Nature Center on wildlife surveys and center maintenance.

 Jami is completing a Bachelor of Social Work degree and looks forward to enrolling in the Companion Animal Sciences Institute for the Science of Dog Training Diploma (CASI, 2023) when she graduates. She has attended natural horsemanship training clinics, completed a course in natural hoof care, trimming, and maintenance, and read numerous books on both dog and horse training and behavior. Jami experimented with training other people’s animals when she did not have her own and has worked at several horse boarding facilities and lived on a horse farm. She has also trained horses for resale, plus adopted, and trained her own two rescue horses, as well as several dogs who were reported as having behavioral or obedience problems. She believes in continually learning and applying knowledge about natural behaviors to humane training practices.

 Despite lack of formal experience and training knowledge, Jami has the stubborn tenacity that has enabled her to work on a broken foot, live out of the back of a pickup truck, save for and complete school while mostly living out of her vehicle and remaining employed. Jami has also struggled with severe PTSD and reconnecting with animals helped her overcome this. Persistence, creativity, and a strong work ethic are all required in entrepreneurs; Jami hopes that a combination of these, her ability to learn through experience, and her interest in improving both human and animal’s wellbeing will enable her to make this endeavor a success.

**Future Growth**

 The service dog industry has much potential for social innovation in the future. Like many social services, service dog agencies will need to adapt if they expect to meet the need for their services in the 21st century as, if a non-profit, they rely heavily on donations, grants, and volunteers. As both for-and-non-profit providers struggle to meet the demand, the service dog industry needs to find more efficient ways to produce dogs that are able to meet client needs. Whether a certified service dog, a therapy canine, or a loyal companion, the benefits that dogs can provide humans is indisputable, and this has the potential to work both ways. With more dogs being surrendered to the shelter or in need of rehome due to economic instability and other factors, rehabilitating and re-training this dogs to function as social support can improve animal welfare by ensuring these dogs end up in stable, caring homes.

 The plan for this social endeavor is to begin as a small private business. The first two years are primarily being run as a ‘pilot project’ to continue the founder’s education in service dog training and behavior assessment and retraining in dogs of unknown backgrounds. The program will purchase a female purebred labrador retriever or golden retriever from a reputable breeder that has selectively bred for long term health and a temperament that is compatible with service dog work. The program will also take in some dogs from mixed backgrounds: shelter dogs, mixed breed dogs and puppies with potential who are in need of rehoming, and donated dogs.

 The purebred female would be kept as a family pet (long term) and bred to another male of the same breed and agreeable temperament to start a breeding program. In the meantime, the dogs from other sources will receive ongoing behavioral assessments and training. Those suitable for public access and other specific tasks will continue training; those unlikely to pass or with health issues would complete basic obedience training and then matched with a home that best suits their individual traits. The program will try and locate homes for the dogs with families of children with ASD or other disabilities, seniors and ‘empty nesters’, or simply families who want a trained dog that they can rely upon. The hope is that even if not suitable for service dog work, the dogs will be more likely to be adopted into and stay in stable homes if they are housebroken, well behaved, and have all foundational obedience training. The CKC and AKC Canine Good Citizens Test will be used as the standard for their training (Burch, 2021, p.6).

 After refining the program and successfully placing at minimum ten fully certified service dogs into homes, that have reported success in follow ups, the business will consider expanding to include volunteers, such as a puppy foster program; contracting out therapy or facility dogs or a therapeutic canine socialization program that benefits *both* human and canine participants; hiring employees with disabilities to work with the dogs and support clients; foster programs for young adult dogs while waiting placement; and further research into better meeting needs in the service dog industry as it connects to human needs and canine welfare.

 If successful, the program would also like to utilize the healing capabilities of dogs in animal assisted interventions (AAI) in social work practice. It would be best to have an ongoing, long term program due to the need for the dogs to have consistency in their training, and for their trainers to advance with them as they learn (B. Thorton, personal communications, March 8th, 2024). There are multiple ways this could happen. As with the Ugandan Comfort Dog Project, donated or shelter dogs could be matched with people who have experienced trauma, and who are then coached to train and bond with their dog while provided with weekly counselling by a qualified practitioner (Olmert, March 31, 2021). In both Canada and the USA, there are prison programs that have inmates giving basic training and socialization to rescue dogs or specifically bred service dog puppies (Burch, 2021, p.175). These dogs are then adopted out or placed with service dog trainers for finishing and placement (Burch, 2021, p.175).

 Depending on the size of the business, and whether appropriate directors and organizers can be found who will maintain the original mission and values of the business, transitioning to a non-profit model will be considered in the future if it would enable the program’s expansion to help more dogs and people.

**Areas for Further Research and Planning**

Budget & Prices for services & dogs

*“There are three faithful friends: an old wife, an old dog, and ready money." Benjamin Franklin*

**APPENDIX A.**

Definitions

Animal-assisted therapy animals: Can be a variety of species, although dogs and horses are most commonly seen. These animals are used as part of “treatment plans with intentional, goal-directed activities to compliment traditional interventions (Arkow, 2020, p.582).

Assistance dog: a term used synonymously with ‘service dog’ (Prinhold, March 25, 2021, p.5).

Comfort dog: These dogs are not public access certified service animals or trained for specific tasks but are well behaved and mild mannered dogs who are brought in to provide comfort to the victims of disaster or crime (Arkow, 2020, p.582).

Disability: What is categorized as a ‘disability’ is complicated, but reflective of interactions “between the features of a person’s body and mind and features of the society in which they live. A disability can occur at any time in a person’s life; some people are born with a disability, while others develop a disability later in life. It can be permanent, temporary, or episodic…it can be mild to very severe…” (CFAS, 2020, p.23). Canada does not have a set definition for disability; instead, people are referred to the criteria established by the World Health Organization (WHO) and by the United Nations (UN) (CFAS, 2020, p.24).

Emotional support animal: Canada does not have a legal designation for emotional support animals, so they do not have the same public access rights as service dogs and are treated as any other pet. Only in the USA are emotional support animals legally recognized.

Guide dog: Guide and hearing dogs (who may also just be called guide dogs) work with vision or hearing impaired people. If they have an approved medical reason for the guide dog, the guide/hearing dog has the same legal rights and protection as a service dog (Prinhold, March 25, 2021, p.5).

LIMA: Least invasive minimally aversive training techniques, recommended for humane dog training practices (IGDF, 2024) and required to become certified as a dog trainer through CCPDT (CCPDT, 2024).

Service dog: A dog trained specifically to help an individual during specific tasks related to their mental and/or physical disability (Arkow, 2020, p.582). They are sometimes called ‘assistance dogs’, even in legal literature (Prinhold, March 25, 2021, p.5). They are the only category of assistance animal that can be granted public access rights.

Service dog team: The service dog and the person with a disability that has become its handler, and whom it was intended to support (Guide Dog and Service Dog Act, 2015).

**APPENDIX B.**

Interview Questions: British Columbia & Alberta Guide Dog Organization

Website: <https://bcandalbertaguidedogs.com/>

Date of Interview: March 8, 2024, with Bill Thorton

1. Your website says you use labrador retrievers, golden retrievers, or a mix of the two in your program. Have you ever experimented with other breeds, and what were the results?

-There is a foundation in Connecticut that only uses German Shepherd dogs, but they are an anomaly.

-Service dogs have been utilized since 1929. German shepherds where the original guide dogs trained to serve blind or visually impaired German veterans. The breed is no longer used often for service dogs because although they are excellent working dogs, they can be protective of their owners or too dominant or aggressive towards other dogs, which can make them unsuitable for public access work. Because the breed needs a job, it can be difficult to find suitable homes for as they need to be kept working. They have been found to have one of the lowest success rates among breeds for service dog work, although they make excellent police and military dogs.

-Despite many breeds of dogs having been trained (or tried to) for service work, golden retrievers and labrador retrievers remain the dog breeds of choice. Specifically, they need to come from a well-bred lineage of which the genetic and medical history of the parents is known, and from dogs chosen for their temperament to meet the unique needs of the job. Dogs need to be able to work at least 8 years, and they need to be healthy to do this.

-Poodle crosses have gained popularity, but he does not recommend using them because they’re lineage cannot be traced.

-given the high failure rate of dogs to complete public access certification and reliably perform, he strongly recommends only using dogs specifically bred for that purpose; it is also the more cost-effective way, as more dogs make it through the program.

2. Your website says that dogs are sourced from your own breeder program, or from other guide dog organizations; also that you begin training dogs while in the early puppy stage. Have you/do you ever take in young adult dogs or dogs from shelters for training?

They have tried, and he has trained dogs from shelters and rescues himself, but typically they are unsuitable as fully certified service animals, and their working life cannot be estimated due to not knowing their genetics or history. He has talked to other programs who have tried to use shelter or rescue dogs, and of every hundred dogs, ten or less were able to become fully certified service dogs- he has encouraged these groups to start a breeding program if their goal is to produce service dogs. They could, however, still be placed as trained family or companion animals into homes who do not want a dog for public access work, at a reasonable cost.

3. What is the approximate success and failure rate for dogs in your program to become certified as service dogs competent for public access?

- Currently, they are a bit behind in their program due to lack of socialization during the COVID lockdowns. But currently their success rate is 68% (that become fully certified).

- BC-AB service dogs has very high standards for health, temperament, and breeding. Their success has risen through a diligent breeding program selecting dogs specifically with the traits for service work

4. What does your program do to rehome dogs who would be unable to pass public access training, or otherwise are unsuitable for the specific service dogs that you specialize in? Are there other streams they go into (like service dogs, facility dogs, comfort dogs, trained companion animals)?

a. They work to find appropriate homes that best suit the dog and prefer working homes where the dog will have a fulfilling life. They may become companion animals, therapy/facility/comfort dogs, etc.

b. This is a reason why they do not use German shepherds/collies- high energy dogs- they are hard to place into homes where they will be properly cared for, as they need a job and lots of exercise that the average person is unlikely to give them.

5. For a business start-up interesting in transitioning to a non-profit organization, would you recommend beginning as a private business (for more freedom in program development) or advise that they begin to develop themselves as a non-profit immediately?

-recommended starting as a for-profit, as it is just one individual (me) starting off and having to build a program and develop the skills and knowledge necessary to produce quality trained service dogs

6. Have you had any clients that expressed interest in a trained service dog for psychiatric assistance of support for autism, but as a companion animal without needing to go out in public as a fully certified dog?

\*did not discuss, mentioned in earlier question that there is still benefit in this and they place dogs into homes who are still good dogs, but not suitable for public access.

-says that their dogs that don’t make it through the program are still very good dogs, that make excellent companions even outside of working homes

7. Which type of service dog is in the most demand from your program?

\*Autism support dogs- cannot keep up with demand

- was able to increase the number of dogs produced for people with autism this year to forty (from 29 several years prior). He recognized that 85% of the training for autism support dogs and psychiatric support dogs was the same, so had the trainers who normally trained psychiatric service dogs train for autism assistance as well

8. Is there a particular demographic that you find your volunteers fit into more? For puppy raisers and dog boarding?

-they have not studied the demographics yet, but he thinks perhaps they should. They see a range of people who volunteer.

Most volunteers are puppy raisers: they are often families, empty nesters, or seniors. Families like the puppy raising because their child gets a puppy without them having to keep the dog for years (especially if the child loses interest) … the child gets the education and responsibility of raising and looking after the dog.

9. It sounds like you are established enough that people request dogs from you. But when the organization was starting up, how did you connect with people with disabilities who were looking for service dogs?

-Thorton himself had trained dogs prior to his career at BC-AB guide dogs and had an excellent reputation. The organizations he worked for before continued to want to match people with dogs from him.

-When they decided to start training service dogs for autism, reached out to organizations serving that community

10. What have you found to be the most successful in recruiting volunteers?

a. Most of their volunteers are puppy raisers. They have puppy raisers bring their pups to any events and conferences they go through. Word of mouth through the puppy raisers as they interact with people while going out with their dogs during their normal day is possibly the best form of recruitment; people are excited to talk about the pups and what they are doing to socialize and train them.

11. In your experience, do you think youth at risk, or marginalized groups would be able to help train and socialize young dogs for service work, with supervision and guidance?

a. It depends. For the dogs to thrive and learn, they need consistency, and the people need to have reasonable training skills with dogs or be able to develop them throughout the program.

b. You need to consider whether the program is set up to help dogs, or people. The people may enjoy it and benefit more from it then the dogs, if the program does not consider the dog’s needs.

12. What online training programs for aspiring guide dog instructors would you recommend?

-there are not service-dog training specific certifications, it is a skill developed through experience, effort, and continued learning

13. It mentioned that community events are a large part of your fundraising efforts. What kinds of events have you found to be the most successful in attracting participants and raising funds?

a. Legacy funds, donations, grants, and funding through foundations are their largest source of income

b. It is very hard to make substantial money through fundraising events unless the people attending are ‘very well – heeled’. It also takes a lot of effort, time, and uses financial resources to put on fundraisers.

c. Fundraisers they do or have done are galas, golf tournaments, and trivia nights.

14. What are the demographics that typically attend these fundraising events?

- difficult to host, not a set demographic

15. How often are canine and human client matches successful?

98%. Nothing will be perfect with imperfect creatures (referring to both)

16. What are some specific things you look for while screening applicants to check their suitability for caring for a service dog, while remaining inclusive?

a. They deal with people who are marginalized, restricted as part of the job

b. (asked about discrimination regarding people’s socioeconomic class and being able to afford a job and provide a g good life for the dog): The criteria varies based on the program. They need to be able to afford standard care and have a stable life, housing (not just relocating frequently). People need to be stabilized enough to care for the dog.

c. BC-AB guide dogs helps clients financially if the dog develops health issues. It is emotionally and financially better to help keep the service dog team together.

17. Other:

-They stopped taking applications for dogs around when COVID started. COVID hit the industry hard, as they had to curtail their breeding program and could not run classes or socialize dogs properly during the lockdown. The industry is still recovering, he predicts it will take at least three years to regain the ground they lost during the COVID pandemic. The demand for fully trained service dogs has remained high.

- He says it is unethical to pass off a dog whose health or behaviors are uncertain as a service dog. Dogs already have shorter lives then humans, he said you should be breeding dogs that are generally capable of an eight year work life with retirement at around ten years old. If any of their dogs later develop health issues, they pay to treat the health issues that developed themselves to keep the service dog team together.

-they only accept clients from BC and Alberta

**APPENDIX C.**

Interview Questions: Donna Hill at Donna Hill’s Service Dog Training Institute.

Date of Interview: March 12th, 2024

<https://servicedogtraininginstitute.online/>

1. When you were starting your business, where did you source the money required for start- up?

• Used own savings – she is frugal and risk-aversive with finances, using savings is the lowest risk and she did not want to get into debt. She started small with what she could afford and used the profits to grow.

• She has been running and growing her business the past 15 years

2. In the past, What other services have you offered to meet operational costs through your business, before you were able to focus exclusively on service dogs?

• Did not discuss

3. How many years did it take before you felt you ‘found your feet’ in the service dog training industry?

• Did not discuss

4. Have you found there is a greater demand for owner-trained dogs, or pre-trained dogs?

• She focuses on helping owners train their dogs. This way she is able to help people regardless of where they are at as she offers training through online coaching, online classes, and in person. She says in-person coaching certainly has an advantage, but people who follow and complete her program online have been very successful in meeting their goals- whether just for an obedient pet or to pass the public access training.

• She prefers having people involved in training their dogs, because a lot of people have unrealistic expectations with pre-trained dogs. There are lawsuits against dog training schools and service dog providers because people did not expect their dog to act like one, or the dog does not meet their expectations. This way, in being involved in or training their own dog, people can see first-hand the effort that goes into training the dog and learn about natural dog behaviors- they have a better idea of what to expect after training.

• Her training school is flexible- people can choose to receive support for what they need help with or what they want to work on, and tailor the program for their goals and where they are at. By offering online courses and Zoom coaching, she is able to help people train their own dogs internationally.

 5. When choosing your business model, why did you decide to stay a private for-profit, rather than become a non-profit like many service dog organizations?

• She has worked for other non-profits in animal welfare, and finds that overtime, as the board of directors and members are replaced, the organization tends to veer from its original mission and can become something else entirely that has compromised the animals’ welfare, in her past experience.

• Remaining private allowed her to remain in control and run the program as she chose.

6. You have different streams of revenue coming in through service-dog related activities. Which services provide the greatest percentage of your annual revenue, and which provide the least?

• Online classes generally provide the most income (per time, effort)

• Very specific, specialized in-person classes, such as preparing for specific airlines and flights, pay the least and are labor and time-intensive.

7. What type of service dog (specialty) have you experienced the greatest demand for?

• Anxiety and PTSD - psychiatric

8. What are the most common breeds in your training programs? Which are generally the most successful?

• The most common breeds seen are labradors and golden retrievers. She also frequently sees standard poodles.

• Health and temperament are the most critical traits in a service dog, above specific breed.

• Critical that a dog for service work is health tests- OFA, hips, shoulders, etc. and that they are healthy and mechanically sound for a long working life and to be able to complete their job. Also, vet care is expensive- you do not want people with disabilities to end up with a dog they cannot afford to provide care for.

9. Have you had experience training mixed breeds, rescues or shelter dogs, or owner surrendered dogs for service work? If so, what do you estimate their success rate is?

• Did not discuss, she has worked with a range of people with dogs of multiple breeds from multiple sources

10. Approximately what percentage of dogs pass the public access test after your program? Both trained by you and trained by their owners?

•Very hard to estimate because of the amount of people she supports online and internationally. Also, people who are mentally unstable will have lower success rate because of their inability to adhere to the program, rather than due to the program itself- they need to be able to be sufficiently consistent and stable to train the dog.

•People in the program also may not continue to complete public access work, whether it is not a goal of theirs or they do not follow through with the program.

•People who complete a full program, train their dog for and take it to the public access test are generally very successful

11. Which type of disability do you serve the most?

• Anxiety and PTSD

12. Is there much demand for non-public access certified dogs, for in-home support only, comfort dogs, or therapy dogs/facility dogs?

• The goal of her program is to get dogs trained to be certified for public access, so she doesn’t focus on training dogs for pets although sometimes dogs in the program end up being just pets and companions

13. What are the main demographics that you see in your customers- age, gender, disability, socioeconomic status?

• Mostly females

• Age varies, most range between 25-45 years

14. For how long after canine placement, or completing training, do clients need continued support with their service dogs? How often do you follow up with clients?

• She leaves this up to the client.

• She likes to have a ‘phase out’ at the end of the process, where support is reduced in frequency until the client feels competent enough to maintain the dog on their own, although they are able to book check ins and consults in the future after that point. Depending on the person’s ability to work with the dogs affects how long they need ongoing support. Her program is very flexible.

15. Have you already sold/placed trained dogs to people in other parts of the country (outside of BC/Alberta/Nova Scotia) where public access certification is not required?

• Did not discuss

16. What changes have you seen in the service dog industry over the past three years?

• Not just in the last three years, but on going; she has had more interest and clients as people learn that it is possible to train their own service dogs. Previously, the understanding of sourcing service dogs was limited, and common belief was that they had to obtained through schools.

• More demand for coaching to train their dog as a service dog and support in getting it certified

• Greater demand for psychiatric service dogs

17. What do you predict for the service dog industry’s future?

• She has received requests from people with PTSD/anxiety who are female and survivors of assault, domestic abuse, etc. that are generally excluded from other serviced offering dogs trained for psychiatric support, because programs providing dogs for people with PTSD are oriented towards men who are in the military, veterans, or other male first responders. There is not a service dog provider that is serving female clients with PTSD. She has most of her requests for services and dogs from females with PTSD and anxiety and predicts this will continue

• High demand will continue- people becoming more stressed, and with more complex anxiety from disruption of school and social life post pandemic and with all other changes happening in the 21st century

• Greater awareness, visibility, and policy changes enabling service dog public access has led and will likely lead to continued increase in demand for service dogs

18. Other

• She is not certified, because she did not train under an accredited trainer (required for certification). She learned independently, through life experience and hands on practice, and experiential learning. She loves trying new things and applying what she reads, but always uses positive reinforcement/ positive training methods, and uses a lot of clicker training. Her expansion into training service dogs came from her interest in teaching her dogs new tricks and seeing what they were capable of learning.

• She has a degree in education and zoology.

• The hardest part of preparing a dog for service work is getting them to the standard to pass public access training. If the dog has the personality and ability to consistently behave in public and pass public access training, then teaching the skills required to support the person they are matched with is just more training and less of a concern- actually easier to teach those then prepare for public access.

• Problems with the job: the human clients can be difficult and expect you to be a coach, dog trainer, psychologist, and social worker, all at once. It can be really discouraging, especially with rude or unreasonable requests and unrealistic demands from clients. Not everyone has the patience or attitude necessary to train animals and maintain that training. The people who are successful in the program realize that it takes ongoing work to have a well-trained dog. Also, while people with mobility/visual/hearing impairments are generally lower stress clients, she gets a lot of clients who have PTSD and anxiety, that are easily triggered or respond from a place of fear and are not thinking clearly- this can create a lot of stress and she has had to end relationships with clients because it just was not working out. She has experienced burn out- not from the dogs, but from trying to help people and manage their expectations (eg. people thinking she has no time off and they can call at any time, and she should respond right away).

• You will never ever please everyone. Some people have different learning styles, and some methods of teaching will not appeal to them or work for them.

**APPENDIX D.**

Interview Questions: Pascal Kull,

Date: March 11th, 2024

Operating a business in the dog industry (prior to exclusively working with horses)

<https://en.holistic-horse-training.com/?v=3e8d115eb4b3>

1) What areas of the dog service and training industries have you worked in?

• Boarding

• Vet technician

• Training

• Grooming

• Sled dogs

• breeding

2) Which services have you experienced the most demand for?

• Boarding and grooming

3) Client Demographics and specifics

• Typically, what sort of clients are most in demand for training? Is there a type?

i. Usually council beginners to intermediate (for lessons and training, incl. horses).

• Is there a specific client type you find who makes up most of your dog boarders?

i. People with disposable income. Targeted middle class and up. In Switzerland, they had a lot of clients who were international diplomats.

• How long do/have clients typically boarded their dogs for?

i. Average stay a week, next most commonly 2-3 weeks. Sometimes they only boarded their dogs several days; other times long term if for training/rehab. The business had a board-and-train option

• How many hours/sessions do clients typically expect for dog training?

i. Depends on their goals. For horses, usually people will have 10-20 riding lessons.

ii. Unfortunately, sometimes she helps people meet their goals too quickly… and then they don’t need to book more lessons, so she loses out (but is an excellent teacher!).

4) How much is/was your fee per hour/ day and which years did you charge this (would adjust for inflation for business in 2024)?

• One-on-one lessons for horses is $50/hour currently, was similar for dogs

• In Switzerland, animal welfare laws required a certain amount of space be giving per size of dog, so the cost per dog varied with the size of each dog.

• Est. cost per dog in Canadian dollars 2024: 40 kilo. Plus ($55); 20-40 kilo ($48); 10-20 kilo ($42)

• The cost included nail trim, all food, bathing, exercise, and grooming- not just board.

• They attracted many customers because they included additional services, were clean, had a great reputation, and always bathed and groomed the dogs before the owners picked them up

• Offered add-on services, such as urine and stool testing to save owners needing to go to the vet. They also offered dental cleaning. They could have their dog tested for worms and infection at the clinic. This may not be possible for a boarding service in Canada depending on licensing requirements.

5) Have you ever sold dogs to people?

• Yes- sold sled dogs, puppies, foals

• Did you notice a pattern in the types of people/ groups of people who would buy puppies?

i. A wide range of clients, often more females then men, older females, families

• Have you sold/do you think there would be interest among potential dog owners in purchasing a young (4 months to 3 year) old dog that is already house broken and obedience trained?

i. Have not sold, but think there would be interest, especially if the dog was cute. Cute sells.

6) What services have people requested the most from you, whether you provided them or not?

• Board and grooming/shampoo- people loved their dog was clean coming home

• People also loved they lived on-site, so there was someone around to check in on the dogs or be there in case of emergency

7) Have you offered training group classes?

• No- not for dogs

8) Have you offered one-on-one coaching/dog training classes?

• Always one-on one

• If so, what sort of people purchased these classes?

i. Typically beginners, or more intermediate riders (horses) looking to overcome a sticking point or meet a goal

• How many sessions did people typically purchase?

i. 10-20

9) Of the services that you have offered, which have been the highest in demand?

• Boarding

10) Of the services that you have offered, which have been the most lucrative per hour?

• Training- paid by the hour

• Grooming- paid by the hour

• Add on services, like stool/urine testing paid per piece

11) How have you recruited customers and advertised your services?

• For dogs, her parents went by word of mouth, client referrals, and building their reputation. To start their business, they advertised in golf clubs and where their target demographic frequented. They wanted people who had money to afford their services and who would want what was being offered

• For horses: facebook page, online classifieds, website

i. The website with search optimization tools used was the most effective for finding clients

12) How did you find purchasers for dogs (or horses).

• Word of mouth, ads, facebook, online, web site

13) How did you secure financing to start up your business?

• Had a full time job while building the business. Built the business at home, utilized help from family, expanded and built business with savings

14) What training have you had to work in this industry?

• What certifications do you have?

i. Many courses from Switzerland and Germany, but they did not carry over to Canada

ii. Had worked as an apprentice, have had horse coaching certification and training, dressage coach certification and beyond from Germany, trained and worked as a vet technician

15) Business and liability insurance:

• What considerations do you take when purchasing insurance for an animal-related business?

i. Consider every possibility

ii. She feels she is probably ‘over insured’ but does not want to take risk and needs to protect herself

iii. Working with people and animals is high risk

• What did you do for your insurance, and approximately how much did it cost to insure per month/year?

i. $90

• What insurance agency do you prefer to use in BC, Canada?

i. Uses Acera Insurance Services (previously called Capri) for her horse business in Canada

16) What services do you think will continue to be in high demand in this industry in the future?

• boarding- but with a focus on holistic health, giving dogs exercise and making it an enjoyable experience for them

17) You have a website for your business. Which software/provider did you go through to create your website?

• Greengeeks.com

• Wordpress (used for writing)

• Built the website herself

• Recommends learning search engine optimization so people can find your website

• Many hosting options available online to look into

18) OTHER

• Max. 10-15 dogs per staff at boarding kennel

• Focus on cleanliness! People like clean, will be turned off if the kennel is dirty so do not overlook the need to be clean, hygienic, organized, and aesthetic

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