

Service Dogs for Patriots: Program Update

Our Continued Commitment

Service Dogs for Patriots is updating its mission and service model in response to the current economic climate and a significant slowdown in fundraising.

While we remain deeply committed to veterans living with PTSD, we **cannot offer free service-dog training to new participants at this time**. Grant funding remains available for veterans currently enrolled, and we will honor our commitment to their training.

Subsidized Training Going Forward

As grant and community funding becomes available—including support through the UF Campaign for Charities, local events, and individual donors—we will offer subsidized training to make the program more affordable.

Under this model:

- Subsidies reduce each training session by \$50
- Participant cost: \$80 per session
- Training an adult dog for PTSD service work generally requires about 45 sessions over one year

The estimated \$3,600 out-of-pocket cost is significant, but **substantially less** than the average \$20,000 cost of purchasing a trained service dog. We will also strive to maintain **no waiting period**—a goal we met until this year, when a 50% funding reduction affected our ability to enroll new teams.

Expanded Eligibility

We are expanding eligibility for subsidized training. In addition to veterans with PTSD, we intend to serve:

- First responders, including law enforcement, firefighters, and EMS personnel
- Health-care workers experiencing PTSD
- Teachers experiencing PTSD

Applying for Subsidized Training

We will no longer require the previous program application.

Instead, we are developing a clear protocol for requesting subsidized training. Once finalized, **it will be posted on our website and social media pages**. Subsidies are available only as funding is acquired.

Participant and Dog Requirements

Participants must have **their own dog**. Service Dogs for Patriots:

- Does not provide dogs
- Does not train dogs separately before placing them with individuals
- Does not offer group classes

Each participant attends **weekly, individualized training with their own dog** and works directly with experienced trainers throughout the process.

Our training is **personalized, trauma-informed, owner-led, trainer-directed**, and rooted in cooperative training practices. This approach builds the skills, confidence, and partnership needed to work effectively with a service dog. We remain neurodivergent- and LGBTQIA-friendly.

In the coming months, we will share guidance on our website and social media to help prospective participants adopt or purchase dogs with service-work potential.

Organizational Leadership and Funding

Michelle Dunlap currently serves as Program Director on an unpaid volunteer basis. Due to health issues, this arrangement is **not sustainable** long-term.

We are continuing our search for an Executive Director. This role will also remain volunteer-based until sufficient funding is secured to make it a paid position.

Sustainable funding for organizational leadership is an **urgent priority** as we navigate this economic downturn and work to ensure continued support for the individuals and families we serve.

Why This Change Is Necessary

This decision has not been easy.

For the past 10 years, our goal has been to provide free PTSD service-dog training to veterans in North Central Florida. Unfortunately, the **economic downturn** has **significantly reduced** community funding and limited many valued supporters' ability to contribute at previous levels.

How You Can Help

Leadership

We are seeking dedicated leaders to guide the next chapter of our organization.

As Michelle Dunlap steps down, we invite you to consider volunteering as **Program Director**. Under the Board of Directors' guidance, this role oversees the subsidy program and helps ensure vital services remain accessible.

We also encourage you to consider the larger role of **Executive Director**. The Executive Director serves as the organization's principal leader—advancing our mission,

building relationships with supporters and partners, guiding organizational growth, and leading fundraising efforts.

This is currently a volunteer role while we pursue sustainable funding to make it paid. Qualifying paid employment with a 501(c)(3) nonprofit may also count toward the **Federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program**.

If you are passionate about our mission and **ready to make a lasting impact**, we would be honored to have you help lead the organization forward.

Fundraising

We welcome and deeply appreciate fundraising efforts that support Service Dogs for Patriots and the veterans we serve. You can help by:

- Hosting a community fundraiser
- Launching a Facebook fundraiser
- Encouraging your veteran service organization to contribute
- Inviting your business to become a supporter

Business owners can make tax-deductible donations that directly support life-changing service-dog training while potentially **reducing taxable income**. Every contribution helps provide our **nation's heroes** with the training and support they need to move forward with greater independence and confidence.

Volunteer

We plan to bring back the **PupRuck 5K in March**, led by a veteran currently participating in our program. We will also attend fundraising events at **Gainesville Harley-Davidson** and strengthen community partnerships with **Graze Craze in Alachua** and **Gator Harley-Davidson in Leesburg**.

These events are entirely volunteer-run, and **help is needed** to organize, set up, and staff them.

We also look forward to continuing our collaboration with generous local partners, including **AmVets Post 88, Clay Electric Foundation, and Satchel's Pizza in Gainesville**, whose past support has made a meaningful difference.

Our Mission Remains the Same

Even as our model changes, our commitment remains unchanged:

Helping people affected by PTSD build greater independence, confidence, and support through trained service dogs.

Additional Resources

Although Service Dogs for Patriots cannot currently provide free training, and subsidized training is available only as funding permits, participants can still access the experienced trainers who support our program through Gainesville Canine Academy.

The service-dog training program is exactly the same and costs \$130 per session. Visit www.GainesvilleCanineAcademy.com for more information.