Marti Goddard, Author

Tip Sheet 8

Library Accessibility – What You Need to Know
Accessibility for Patrons with Service or Support Animals

Overview

Children as well as adults may benefit by having a service or support animal accompany while at work, play or when visiting institutions such as the library. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a service animal as any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability. If they meet this definition, animals are considered service animals under the ADA regardless of whether they have been licensed or certified by a state or local government. The Civil Rights of Service Animals and the Department of Justice provides for a $50,000 fine for the first offense to anyone who interferes with a Service animal's right to public access .

Some service animals are easy to recognize. "Dog guides" or "Seeing Eye" dogs (assisting people who are blind or vision impaired) wear distinctive leather harnesses. Many "signal dogs" or "hearing dogs" (assisting people who are deaf or hard of hearing) wear bright orange collars, leashes or vests. Dogs trained by organizations like Canine Companions for Independence wear backpacks. Some dogs may have a special tag issued by a local animal care and control agency. Be aware, that, there are miniature horses and Capuchin monkeys in use as service animals. While special identifiers may be helpful, the ADA specifically states that service animals do not have to have a special license or tag.

Blind/Vision Disabilities

Dog guides keep their handler on a direct route and maintain a steady pace while ignoring distractions; stop at curbs and at the top or bottom of stairs until told to proceed; turn left or right, move forward or stop on command; disobey commands that would put their handler in danger; recognize and avoid obstacles, e.g. narrow passages and low overheads; and, bring their handler to elevator buttons. Recognize them by a rigid leather harness and leash.

Miniature horse guides are said to perform as their dog counterparts and though they are not in frequent use their rights receive the same protection. They also use a rigid leather harness and leash.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Hearing dogs alert people to sounds unique to their environment, e.g. smoke alarms, stove timers, alarm clocks, baby crying, ringing telephone, doorbell, unusual sounds that may indicate danger or emergencies; and, watch for dropped items. Recognize

them by an orange leash or vest.

Developmental Disabilities

Dogs trained to serve children with autism can guide them and protect them from danger, interrupt them from engaging in repetitive behavior (e.g. flapping hands in front of their face) and redirect their attention, draw attention to their name being called, get help when needed, calm them and help attenuate anger, aggression and mood swings, provide a focal point through “Deep Pressure” hugs, and provide comforting touch that makes it possible for the child to sleep quietly through the night.

Mobility/Dexterity Disabilities

Dogs may be trained to pull wheelchairs, assist handlers if they fall, assist with balance, carry or pick up things, open and close doors, cupboards and refrigerators, turn lights on or off, assist with dressing or undressing. Recognize them by vests. There are instances where Capuchin monkeys have been trained to perform the same tasks.

Psychiatric Disabilities

Emotional support animals help people regain the ability to venture out in public, sometimes to return to work by helping control panic attacks, agoraphobia and depression.

Tips

- If your library has a “no pets allowed” policy, you are required to make a reasonable modification to your policies, practices, and procedures, to ensure that people who use service or support animals are permitted to bring those animals into your library.
- Even if an animal is not wearing a distinctive leash, harness, vest, backpack or tag, it may still be a legitimate service animal. Begin by determining whether the animal is a pet or a service animal. Say something like, “We don’t normally allow dogs in the library.” You also might ask, “Is this your pet?” This gives the person a chance to explain the role of an animal without feeding them the “service animal” terminology. If a person says an animal is a service animal, take them at their word and let them bring the animal into the library with them.
- If your community has a leash law for dogs, you can tell users that their dog must be on a leash and must be under control at all times while it is in the library.
- You may ask a person to remove from the library any animal, including a service animal, when that animal's behavior poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others. For example, any animal that displays vicious behavior towards other users may be excluded. You also may ask a person to remove their dog if it is barking uncontrollably or if its behavior is disturbing other users. <u>Do not make assumptions</u> about how a particular animal is likely to behave based on your past experience with other animals. Each situation must be considered individually.

- Allergies and fear of animals are generally not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people with service animals. If another library user raises those issues, help them find a different place to do their work.
- Never pet or talk to a service animal when it is working.

For More Tips

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SERVICE ANIMALS IN PLACES OF BUSINESS. U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, 7/96. http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/animal.htm

ADA Business BRIEF: Services Animals. U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, April 2002. http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/svcanimb.htm

This Tipsheet is one in a series developed by the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, a division of the American Library Association. See: www.ascla.ala.org.