SERVICE DOGS: CLARIFICATION

Learning about service dogs, companion dogs and emotional support dogs has been an enlightening exercise. Thanks to the members who shared their family stories surrounding the costs, complexities and benefits that come to those who are supported by these highly trained animals. With the help of Greg and a friend who has worked as a certified trainer of guide dogs, I researched the requirements specific to British Columbia. Attached at the end are links to articles for you to peruse. The information is quite interesting, and the articles are not overly long.

There are many reasons and conditions why someone might qualify to have a service dog. These are comprehensively outlined in the link www.bcandalbertaguidedogs.com . Certified dogs participate in a rigorous and often lengthy and expensive training program, specific to the unique requirements of the individual they will serve. There are only a few organizations who are accredited to do this training. Owners and their families will participate in training. A certified dog MUST have the government accreditation papers, and these must always be with the owner for presentation to anyone who requests them. In the event you encounter a problem relating to a service dog, you should call the non-emergency police line to request an officer verify the documents the owner must be prepared to present.

"*Service Dog* " vests and cards are available for purchase online. It is clear how the subtle use of language can lead owners to believe this is all that is required. Unfortunately, these are misleading and do not comply with Service Dog requirements. In BC, and many Canadian, provinces use of these may lead to a hefty fine for misrepresentation of a vital service. In BC the fine is up to $3 000.

When you encounter an authenticated service dog, you are asked to remember that they are working dogs. They are typically larger dogs and should be only interacting with the prompts and signals of the person they are serving. Distracting them by feeding or chatting or petting is very detrimental to their ability to focus on the job they are tasked with doing. Owners of certified dogs may well ask you to refrain from this. Do not be offended but knowing this it is best to not put an owner in the position of asking you to step back.

Reading the articles below will help you differentiate between emotional support and companion dogs. These dogs are not certified and do not have the same access rights as a certified service dog.

For the purposes of our group, it should be clear that properly certified dogs cannot be denied access to posted public events such as our meetings. Events hosted at private homes. are different. Access to homes is always the choice of the host, who is voluntarily inviting guests into their homes. As a residential host, you have the option to refuse, if for any reason, you are unable to accept an animal into your home. You also have the choice to decline hosting. Members with a service dog should be checking with hosting members to allow time for a host to make their decision, and take the necessary steps of cancelling, or ensuring that other participants are aware there will be a Service Dog on site. We may need to consider having a declaration on the membership form along with a copy of the BC government issued documents. This might save confusion, misunderstandings or unnecessary hard feelings. To be determined...

Guide Dog and Service Dog Certification - Province of British Columbia

www.bcandalbertaguidedogs.com

Is that your service dog? We'll need to see some identification | iNFOnews | Thompson-Okanagan's News Source