

# Serving Survivors Who Have Service Animals

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# Goals for the webinar

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- Increase familiarity with survivors with disabilities and their use of service animals;
- Analyze the legal rights of service animal handlers;
- Explore complexities when working with survivors who have service animals.

# Poll

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In the chat pod, please answer the following question:

I have worked with a service user who had a service animal.

Yes

No

I don't know



# Background



# Limited research on survivors with disabilities

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- People with disabilities are 3 times more likely to be victims of violent crimes.
- Women who have experienced intimate partner violence are more than twice as likely to also report a disability.
- In 2008, intimate partners perpetrated 27% of violent crime against women with disabilities and 1.1% of crime against men with disabilities.
- In the United States, there are 500,000 service animals assisting people with disabilities.

# Unique dynamics for survivors with disabilities

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- In addition to the challenges that all survivors face, survivors with disabilities experience additional dynamics, including:
  - Systemic oppression of people with disabilities (isolation, exploitation, marginalization)
  - Lack of confidentiality
  - Fear of institutionalization
  - Loss of personal care services, accessible transportation, service animal assistance, and other necessary services
  - Barriers in victim services organizations

# Service animals bring independence, but also barriers

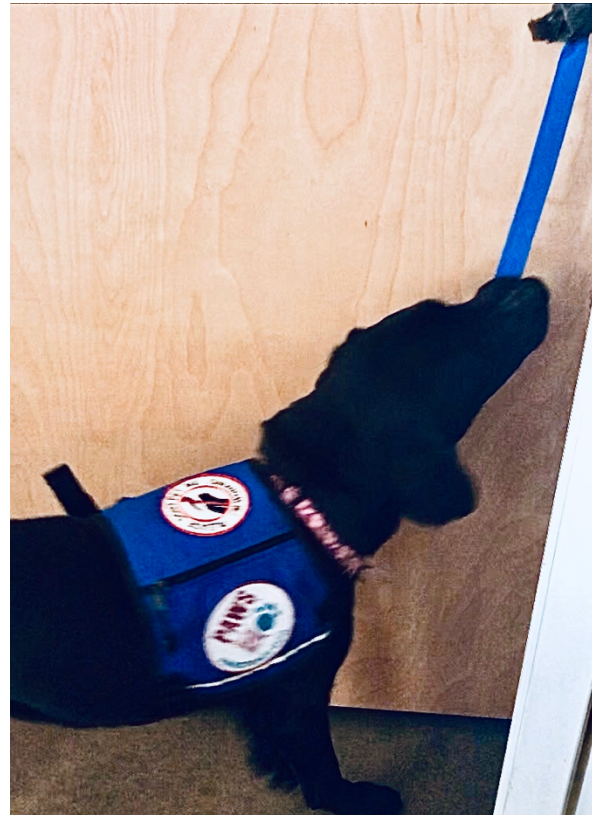
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- Service animals provide independence for people with disabilities by assisting them in their activities of daily living.
- However, when agencies do not know the role that service animals play, they can unintentionally create barriers for service animal users, such as:
  - Asking for unnecessary “certifications” or paperwork
  - Refusing access to spaces or programming.

# A service animal handler's experience

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Jennifer Decker, Program Associate, CVS





# Service Animals: The Basics

# Service animals

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A service animal is “a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability.”

- No other species of animal can be a service animal, except miniature horses (different regulations)
- Covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Apply to all areas of public accommodation
- No *formal* training (they can be owner trained) or certification required
- Service animals are not pets!

# Identifying a service animal

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Staff can ask two questions to “verify” that the animal is a service animal:

1. Is the animal (dog or miniature horse) a service animal required because of a disability?
2. What task(s) is the animal trained to perform for [the person with the disability]?

# Cannot ask

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Staff CANNOT:

- 1) Ask about the person's disability;
- 2) Require medical documentation;
- 3) Require "certification" or documentation that the animal is a service animal.



# Tasks service animals may do for their handlers

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Some example tasks a service animal might be trained to do are:

- Alerting to noise (examples: alarms, noises, smoke detectors, cars)
  - Alert to physiological changes (examples: blood pressure, blood glucose, seizure)
  - Interrupting behavior (examples: interrupting panic attacks or self-injurious behavior)
  - Opening and closing
  - Retrieving items
  - Getting help
  - Balance related tasks
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# Different than emotional support animals

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- Emotional support animals play vital roles in the lives of many people with disabilities... but they are not covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- ESAs are not specifically trained to perform tasks.
- If, however, you are an entity covered by the Fair Housing Act (FHA), it is important to know the requirements for ESAs, as you may be subject to both the ADA and FHA.

# Different than therapy dogs

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- **Therapy dogs** provide comfort, affection, and love to people in need.
- They are not trained to perform specific tasks for a specific handler.
- They can often be certified.
- They are offered access to spaces at the discretion of a facility/entity.

# Interacting with service animals

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- Service animals are trained to minimize interaction with others when working
- Never pet a service animal without asking for permission
- Do not talk or whistle or otherwise distract the service animal
- The key: Ignore working service animals to the extent possible



# Service Animals in Programming

# Key considerations for service providers

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- Consider the trauma both the survivor and the service animal have experienced
  - Abusers target service animals
  - Both the survivor and the service animal are in a new environment
  - There may be a changed relationship between the dog and the handler

# Service animals may play a role in programming and services

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- Service animals accompany service users in shelter and at programming
- Think about how best to make your space a programming accessible to them
  - Ensure a physically accessible space with minimal distraction
  - Reiterate best practices for interacting with service animals for staff and other service users
  - Establish policies and procedures that are responsive to the needs of service animals and their handlers

# It's a Service Animal... Now What?

## Frequently Asked Questions from Service Providers



# Where can a service animal accompany its handler?

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# Answer: Service animal access

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Service animals must be allowed to accompany their handlers wherever the general public is permitted.

# What happens if another service user is allergic to dogs?

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# Answer: Allergies

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The agency is required to make accommodations to serve both service users (the service animal handler and the person with allergies)...

- Agencies should develop a policy to ensure a uniform response
- Ensure equal service provision
- Some solutions:
  - Different areas of the facility;
  - Hotel room for one service user;
  - Separate groups and activities.



# What happens if the service animal is destructive or dangerous?

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# Answer: Destructive or dangerous

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- Service animals are expected to be well behaved and not destructive or dangerous. They should be in the control of the handler at all times.
- If the animal is a threat to the safety of others, it is within the service provider's rights to ask the *animal* to leave (not the handler).
- Do not leap to removal, explore other solutions, such as discussing a care plan for the animal with the owner and seeking additional supports.

# Who is responsible for caring for the dog?

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# Answer: Caring for the dog

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The handler is responsible for caring for the animal, but staff can assist.



# Other questions?

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