

Certified Facility Dog Program vs. Therapy Dog Program: Why we chose a Facility Dog for the 13th Circuit, Tampa - FL.

1) Standardization of breeding of the dog (the differences in these animals begins at conception)

a) Therapy dogs begin as someone's pet. The idea for them to become a therapy dog is made by their owner because they believe that either their dog would make a good therapy dog or because they themselves would like to participate in this form of volunteer activity - or both. The DNA between canine breeds is vast and "mission specific". An example of this is when one observes a particular breed behaving in a way that is characteristic of their breed, such as a herding dog displaying a strong herding instinct. Therapy dogs are not specifically bred for the task of interacting with the public, more importantly, vulnerable victims of crime. Because of the sensitive and emotionally charged nature of what we do (with vulnerable crime victims and the need for impeccable and controlled courtroom demeanor), breeding is of utmost importance. Dogs may have excellent demeanor with their own families but that does not necessarily translate to excellent demeanor with the general population.

b) Most Assistance Dogs International (ADI) dogs have been specifically bred to be able to possess the demeanor and temperament needed for interaction with vulnerable populations. Dogs within the ADI system that are chosen for court/justice work are determined to be especially well-suited to serve victims of crime. Despite these careful breeding practices, sixty percent of puppies entered into an ADI training program "flunk" out as trained professional dog trainers observe them over time and determine that their individual personalities make them unsuitable for professional work and unable to pass the rigors of the public access certification. Due to the need for rock solid behavior, -CCI (Canine Companions for Independence) has begun participating in closed colony "purpose breeding" practices. Because this movement for ADI dogs in the field of justice and with crime victims is blooming, CCI has begun selectively breeding pups whose parents made excellent facility dogs. (Tibet has two sisters who were also selected to work in victim advocacy - so this litter's pups appear to be uniquely suited to work with this population).

2) Standardization of animal training/certification methods

a) There are numerous therapy dog certifying organizations. If a dog fails at one organization, the owner can go to an organization with lower standards to get their dog "certified" or "registered". Depending on the dog and their natural intelligence level as well as their personality, there may be little to no formal training of the dog prior to its certification. "Test requirements can vary between programs, but as all programs' priorities are with the patient and the dog, the requirements are fairly similar. Dogs must be at least one year old, healthy, and up to date on vaccinations. The handler must be of good character. A handler does not need to be 18 for the testing, but must be accompanied by an adult on visitations."

Read more: http://www.ehow.com/about_6632174_dog-therapy-training-certification.html#ixzz2njpo8yQJ

b) Assistance Dogs International has a standardized and stringent two year training program for the dog which includes a structured set of commands taught by both the puppy raiser and professional dog trainer. Upon graduation from a program, these dogs know more than 35 commands. These dogs must pass a rigorous public access test reflecting their ability to respond appropriately even in chaotic and stressful public scenarios. This control is especially important in legal and courtroom scenarios where disruptive behavior in an animal could result in a mistrial or similar poor outcome.

FL HB 251 states that "*The court may set any other conditions it finds just and appropriate on the taking of testimony by a child, including the use of a service or therapy animal that has been evaluated and registered according to national standards, in any proceeding involving a sexual offense...*"

No national standards exist for the evaluation and registration of therapy animals therefore this could be problematic in a court of law.

3) Method of handler selection

a) There may be little but usually no handler training for a pet therapy dog depending upon the certifying organization and the natural abilities of the dog. As stated above, the handler must be of good character. That is the only requirement. If the handler is under 18, the handler must be accompanied by an adult. There is no minimum age for a handler. Potential applicants are NOT required to take any Therapy Dog classes. Therapy Dogs International (TDI) does not sanction any therapy dog classes.

b) Handlers of an ADI graduate dog first had to submit an extensive application package with letters of support/recommendation. If the application passes, they are granted a telephone interview, approximately 45 minutes in length. If they pass that they are granted an in-person interview which can last between 4 and 6 hours. If they pass this, they report for two weeks of intensive training - with daily tests - both written and practical to assess the mastery of the material on an ongoing basis. Handlers must pass the public access test to graduate. This test is extensive and rigorous and involves having to think on one's feet to unpredictable situations.

For a full description of the ADI standards for facility dogs see:

<http://www.assisteddogsinternational.org/standards/assistance-dogs/standards-for-dogs/training-standards-for-facility-dogs/>

4) Follow up to ensure training standards

a) Once "certified" or "registered" a therapy dog may have no follow up requirements

b) ADI graduate teams must be evaluated at 3 months, 6 months and every 12 months thereafter - to ensure that training standards are being upheld

5) Ensuring safety around children

a) TDI (Therapy dogs International) states that due to liability reasons, therapy dogs cannot have direct contact with children during the testing process. "The last phase of the test shows us if the dog will be able to work well around children. The dog's behavior around children must be evaluated during testing. It is important that during the testing the potential Therapy Dog and the children are not in direct contact. This means the dog can only be observed for a reaction toward children running, or being present at the testing site. The evaluator must designate an area at least 10 feet away from the dog and handler. The dog may be walked, or put in a sit or down position. The children will be instructed to run and yell and do what children usually do while playing." (TDI test brochure)

b) The following link provides the standards for the ADI public access test:

<http://www.assisteddogsinternational.org/standards/public-access-test/>

The second down will be executed, and then an adult and child should approach the dog. The dog should maintain the down and not solicit attention. If the child pets the dog, the dog must behave appropriately and not break the stay.

ADI member organizations certify that the dog is safe to be in public. Pet therapy dog organizations only register teams.

6) Insurance

a) Therapy dog handlers are encouraged to have insurance for their dogs but this is not required unless a particular agency allowing the dog to interact with their clients requires it.

b) CCI was specifically selected by the 13th Circuit for this due to the fact that they insure their graduate dogs for \$1million. They can do this because they legally own the dog. They have utmost confidence in their dogs but also because of the continued oversight of the handler/dog team, they reserve the right to repossess the dog at any time if they determine that the training standards are not upheld. It is highly recommended that any dog working with vulnerable children in any environment be insured for liability. When you see the CCI vest, you know the animal is insured.

7) Leash contact

a) Therapy dogs must be in leash contact with their owners at all times.

b) After a suitable time that the handler/ADI - dog team have been working together, a child can hold the leash of a facility dog while testifying. A child and a forensic interviewer can be in a forensic interview room with the dog without its handler once that handler determines that the dog has enough familiarity and control within its work surroundings. For forensic interviews, it is most preferable that the forensic interviewer and the handler are the same person. For this reason, it is recommended that CACs obtain their own facility dog. A facility dog can be present in a room where a forensic medical exam is taking place without the leash contact of the handler. Again, best practices dictate that the examiner and the handler be the same person.

8) Work Capacity

a) The American Humane Society has established that a therapy animal should be restricted to two hours of work per day.

b) An ADI certified dog is a professional working dog that can work a 40 hour week with appropriate breaks as determined by the handler.

9) The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has taken the position that only graduate dogs of an ADI training can interact with traumatized veterans. It is our position that the same high standards must be applied to vulnerable victims of crime.