

Service dogs are dogs that have been individually trained to perform a specific task for individuals who have disabilities. The disabilities can vary greatly, and so do the tasks that the service dogs perform. Service dogs can aid in navigation for people who are hearing- and visually impaired, assist an individual who is having a seizure, calm an individual who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and even dial 911 in the event of an emergency. Many disabled individuals depend on them every day to help them live their everyday lives.

### **Service dogs are protected under federal law**

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), an individual with a disability is entitled to a service dog to help them live their lives normally. The ADA protects disabled individuals by allowing them to bring their service dog with them to most places that the public is permitted, including restaurants, hotels, housing complexes, and even in air travel. Any dog can be a service dog, and service dogs do not have to be professionally-trained. The important thing is that the dog is trained to be a working animal and not a pet.

### **Identifying service dogs for the public**

Service dogs are often identified by wearing a service dog vest or tag, letting the public know that it is a service dog; otherwise, their handlers will find themselves having to explain everywhere that they go that their dog is a service dog. Some businesses, such as airlines, prefer to see an identification card or vest that indicates that the dog is a service dog.

The Americans with Disabilities Act has a specific definition of a disability, and it states essentially that a disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual.

Emotional Support Dogs and Therapy Dogs are not trained for specific tasks and so are not service dogs.

More information can be found here: [http://www.ada.gov/service\\_animals\\_2010.htm](http://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm)

As BGTS, we can still approach people with dogs to let them know that dogs are not allowed on the trail. If they tell us it's a service dog, we can mention that only true service dogs (and not therapy or emotional support dogs) are allowed on the trail. However, we CANNOT ask if it is a true service dog or what the person's disability is. We can then also let them know why dogs aren't allowed on the trail in terms of dangers to the dog and the owner. Just because service dogs are allowed, doesn't mean it's a smart move, so we can explain to them the hazards. After that, it's up to them.