

## **Seizure-Response Dog FAQ's**

### **What types of dogs are used as seizure-response dogs?**

They can use any type of dog provided the dog has the right temperament for it. Successful seizure response dogs are people-oriented and very responsive to human emotions and feelings. Their ability to observe and respond to their owner's behavior makes them successful at seizure response work. If a dog is to be used as a guide dog in public places, it must also be friendly, and not dog-aggressive, overly protective of its owner, shy, or nervous.

That said, The Lions Dog Guides do primarily train Labrador and Golden Retrievers and Standard Poodles (as a hypoallergenic option). These breeds, while being highly trainable, are considered to be the most adaptive to their frequently changing environment.

### **Where do the Lions Dog Guides get the dogs?**

The Lions Dog Guides have their own breeding program, although they also have dogs donated by generous breeders.

### **How are they trained? How long does it take to train them?**

Once the puppies are weaned, they are sent to foster homes in the community to live, being socialized in different environments for their first year.

When the pup reaches about one year of age he is returned to the school for assessment. Dogs who pass the program assessment and medical examination are selected to begin an intensive 6 month training program.

The seizure-response dog trainer, the dog and recipient work together for a three week period to master techniques and permit bonding. The recipient stays at the school in Oakville, Ontario for the duration of training. At the end of training, the dog and recipient graduate together as a seizure-response dog team.

After the dog team goes home, the Lions Dog Guides keep in touch over the phone, email and with periodic site visits to ensure that the bonding process continues and provide any required assistance.

### **How much do they cost?**

The sponsorship cost of a seizure-response dog is \$10,000. Although recipients are never asked to pay for their dogs, they are provided through sponsorships and other fundraising initiatives.

### **How does someone get a seizure-response dog? Are they right for everyone with epilepsy?**

When referring to service dogs, the emphasis is usually placed on how well the dog can assist the recipient. Yet, the relationship between canine and human is a reciprocal one. Hence, just as the dog must meet certain criteria so must the person

selected to receive the dog. It is very important for the person who is thinking of getting a seizure dog to understand what a significant commitment it is.

Not everyone is a suitable candidate for a seizure-response dog, they must experience seizures frequently enough (~10/month) for the dog to be able to learn how to react to them. Additionally, the recipient must be physically, emotionally and financially able to be the primary care giver for the dog.

The individual must complete an application process to ensure that a seizure-response dog is right for them. This process includes filling out forms, providing medical information and meeting with a seizure-response trainer. This process ensures that and that qualified recipients are successfully matched with a dog.

### **How do they detect seizures?**

This isn't well enough understood, or studied to say for certain. Several hypotheses have been proposed as to what a dog recognizes when a seizure is going to occur. Some people think that the dog detects very subtle changes in a person's body odor prior to a seizure. Another hypothesis is that the dog perceives slight changes in a person's body language or behavior before a seizure and this is the trigger. It is a well-known fact that dogs are very perceptive at reading human body language. Whatever the mechanism, this is an ability that the dog develops over time while in contact with a person who has seizures. The ability in dogs to detect seizures seems to be fairly common – numerous people with seizures report seizure alerting behavior in their dogs. Lacking scientific proof, it appears that a dog's perception of oncoming seizures is not a behavior that can be "trained" in the traditional sense; rather, it can only be identified and encouraged. As such, the The Lions Dog Guides training focuses on responding to seizures.

### **How do they alert their owner to a seizure?**

This varies by dog; they may act restless and pace, they may bump up against or nudge the individual, lick their hands or face etc. Essentially, they behave in a way that is uncharacteristic and are persistent even if their owner tries to correct the behavior. Just as the dog has learned the cues from their owner to alert them to a seizure, the owner has to learn the dogs signals as well; if the dog is behaving strangely and they have a seizure shortly afterwards, after a few instances, the owner picks up on that connection. It's helpful if others are around to witness the dog's behavior and seizure as that can speed up the process of connecting the dots.

### **Do they "work" all the time?**

No, just like people, dogs need some down time to unwind and relieve stress as well as take care of some of the body's basic necessities. So the dogs do get playtime, walks, and bathroom breaks. When a dog is "off-duty", they don't wear their harness (jacket).