

RECOMMENDATIONS

to help families who would like to acquire a neuro service dog for a loved one with dementia

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The goal of this project was to examine the impacts of dog assistance on both the person with mild to moderate cognitive impairment and their family caregiver. From 2019 to 2021, 112 participants were recruited, forming 56 pairs of people with cognitive impairment and family caregivers. Of these 56 pairs, 28 had a companion dog, 23 did not have a dog, and 5 had a neuro service dog. Acquisition of a neuro service dog was done through schools that can issue a public access certificate (Wilderwood service dogs in US and MSAR service dogs in Canada).

Soci t  Alzheimer Society

CANADA



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Promote education of the public and health care professionals about neuro service dogs and potential benefits of companion dogs (in terms of purpose in life and positive relationship)
2. Increase accessibility of companion dogs in selected public facilities
3. Increasing accessibility to dog training schools and related funding programs
4. Clinically assess whether the person is able to care for the neuro service dog on their own if needed, both in terms of mobility and cognition.
5. Neuro dog training should make sure the dog is not a fall hazard and can even help in that regard

Added value of the neuro service dog compared to a companion dog

The neuro service dog

Accompanies you to do physical activity (e.g. go to the gym)

Acts as a socializer in public places (e.g. shop, airport, clinic, church, restaurant)

Helps you sleep better

Contributes to meaning and purpose in life

Helps guide the person safely through the environment

Specific tasks

Provides reassurance and companionship when the person is anxious, going out, and at night time

Helps remind the person about routines and daily tasks

Safely guides the person back to a designated space if they become disoriented in public

Reminds the person about the task at hand if they become disoriented

Potential benefits:

- Access to indoor and outdoor public places
- Freedom for the caregiver to go out or keep an outside job
- Well-being and quality of life
- Positive focus on the dog (talks about the dog to people during interactions, takes care of his dog, etc.)
- Better routine
- Reduced stress
- Sleep monitoring

Considerations:

- Acquisition cost >\$15,000
- Time required for acquisition and training
- Occasional negative reactions from healthcare providers and members of the public
- Grief over the death of the dog or separation from the dog when moving to a long-term care facility
- Inappropriate focus on the dog (e.g., anxiety over the dog's wellbeing)