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## Service Dogs

*Specific Purpose:* To inform my audience about three major kinds of service dogs.

*Central Idea:* Guide dogs, assistance dogs, and seizure-alert dogs make a huge difference in the lives of their owners.

### *Introduction*

- I. Most of us hardly think about simple tasks such as turning on the television or walking across the street.
  - A. But for many Americans with disabilities, these tasks are anything but simple.
  - B. They could not be accomplished without service dogs.
- II. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a service dog is any dog specially trained to assist and individual with a disability.
- III. In researching this speech, I learned how indispensable service dogs are for millions of Americans.
- IV. Today I will introduce you to three types of service dogs – guide dogs, assistance dogs, and seizure alert dogs.

(*Transition:* Let's start by looking at guide dogs.)

### *Body*

- I. Once referred to as seeing-eye dogs, guide dogs help the visually impaired navigate their surroundings.
  - A. As explained in the 2010 *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy*, guide dogs receive intensive training.
    1. Professional training lasts at least 5 months.
    2. Another month of training occurs after a dog is assigned to its owner.

3. The result is a dog worth from \$15,000 to \$50,000.
- B. Guide Dogs of America is a major trainer of U.S. guide dogs.
  1. Its Web site says the group provides 50 trained dogs free of charge each year.
  2. It also notes that there are 7,000 guide dogs currently working in the U.S.

(*Transition:* Like guide dogs, assistance dogs are invaluable for those who need them.)

- II. Assistance dogs perform routine tasks for people with physical disabilities.
  - A. These dogs' skills are truly amazing.
    1. They help people put on clothes, unload the washing machine, and pick up items on the floor.
    2. They also open and close doors, gather the mail, and manipulate keys and cell phones.
    3. In fact, they can do almost anything that is needed to help their owners with daily tasks.
  - B. Assistance dogs are invaluable to their owners.
    1. Dr. Alice Blue-McKinnon, of the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine, notes that these dogs help their owners achieve a new sense of freedom and independence.
    2. Phil Day, owner of a black Labrador provided by Dogs for the Disabled, says: "I wouldn't be without an assistance dog; they help on so many different levels."

(*Transition:* Now that we have looked at guide dogs and assistance dogs, let's turn to seizure-alert dogs.)

- III. Seizure-alert dogs warn owners with epilepsy when a seizure is about to occur.
  - A. These dogs can sense a seizure from several seconds to 45 minutes before it occurs, says John Ensminger, author of *Service and Therapy Dogs in American Society*.
  - B. How seizure-alert dogs acquire this ability is a mystery.

1. Dogs cannot be trained to anticipate seizures.
2. Some are born with the power and some are not.
4. There are two major theories to explain the dogs' power.
  - a. One theory holds that dogs anticipate seizures through their sensitivity to slight change in nonverbal behavior.
  - b. Another theory says they detect minor chemical changes through their acute sense of smell

### *Conclusion*

- I. As we have seen, service dogs provide vital support for people with physical disabilities.
- II. I have focused on guide dogs, assistance dogs, and seizure-alert dogs.
- III. For their owners, these dogs are much more than "man's best friend"—they are a new way of life.

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