ADA Live!

Episode 76: United Disabilities Services (UDS) Service Dogs Training Programs

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Speaker: Kristina Smith and Lori Breece, United Disabilities Services (UDS) Service Dogs Training Program

Host: Stephen Kuusisto, University Professor, Director of Interdisciplinary Programs and Outreach, Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University

Lori Breece: Hi, I am Lori Breece.

Christy Conrad: And I'm Christy Conrad.

Lori & Christy: And you are listening to ADA Live.

Music: Yo. All right, let's go. Yo.

Barry Whaley: Good afternoon everybody. This is Barry Whaley, director of the Southeast ADA Center. We're a project of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University. I want to welcome you on behalf of the University and the ADA National Network to Episode 76 of ADA Live!

Our guests for today will be Lori Breece and [Christy] Conrad from United Disability Services, talking about service animals. And who better to help us with that than a guest host for today, our own Stephen Kuusisto, Syracuse University professor, director of interdisciplinary programs, and outreach for the Burton Blatt Institute. I want to remind you
before we move into our episode that you can submit your questions about the ADA at adalive.org. And Steve, thank you for being with us today. I know you've been a guest and now you're a host, so I'll turn it over to you.

**Stephen K.**: I'm really delighted to be here today because I am a guide dog user. Blind, I've had four dogs from Guiding Eyes for the Blind, a guide dog school located in New York State. And I've traveled the world with my dogs. And so service dogs, service animals are a subject very dear to my heart. And so I want to thank Lori and Christy a great deal for being our guests today.

**Stephen K.**: It seems that every time we turn around lately we are hearing another story about support or service animals in the news. From dogs to peacocks, many of us are confused about their purpose and place in public settings. For clarification, under the Americans With Disabilities Act, a service animal is defined as a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability. The tasks performed by the dog must be directly related to the person's disability.

**Stephen K.**: The ADA also permits the use of miniature horses as alternatives to dogs, subject to certain limitations. Emotional support animals, comfort animals, and therapy dogs, on the other hand, are not considered service animals.

**Stephen K.**: So today we are talking specifically about service dogs, and the fascinating topic of how they are trained from young pups to becoming trusted companions providing disability related work or tasks for their handlers. Perhaps a good place to start is to ask if you could tell us a bit about the United Disability Services, UDS Foundation itself.

**Lori Breece**: The UDS Foundation has actually been in business for 54 years. We are in 50 counties in the state of Pennsylvania, and we provide services for over 7500 individuals with disabilities, and seniors. We currently have 14 programs and services that are designed to help people remain in their home versus having to be institutionalized. Our vision is creating a world where everyone can live their best life. And our mission? Enhancing abilities and changing lives.
Stephen K.: So UDS provides a wide array of services. How long has UDS provided the service dog program?

Lori Breece: The program was actually created in 1997 by a woman named Sabina Hower. And she started the program that was then known as The New Life Assistance Dogs Program. In 2000 Sabina visited UDS, and she talked about possibly partnering with UDS and asking if they would take over the service dog program. It's really hard to believe that in 2020 the service dogs program will be part of UDS for 20 years.

Stephen K.: You know, as a guide dog traveler, I'm really... You can't tell but I'm smiling here. Where do you get your dogs?

Christy Conrad: We do get our dogs from breeders. We also work with a co-op. Our program is a part of Assistance Dogs International. As part of our membership of Assistance Dogs International, we can work with other service dog, or guide dog, programs to get purpose-bred dogs. So that's something new for us. We only joined that about eight months ago. We've gotten some really wonderful dogs through that.

Christy Conrad: Our other dogs do come from local breeders. We have certain requirements that the breeders must meet so we can put those puppies into training. We also have a small breeding program that I've done, and we're hoping to grow, over the next couple of years. So we have a variety of situations for how we acquire the dogs.

Stephen K.: For our listeners who may not know, when you're really producing and training service dogs, you need the capacity for repeatability, that you need to have dogs that are going to go into the training program who are going to be confident and have the kind of stamina and intelligence to do the work. And so a breeding program really matters. Are there certain breeds you prefer to train more than others?

Christy Conrad: We use the common Labrador Retriever. I always say they're the tried and true breed for this type of work, for any type of assistance dog work. We have also tried Golden Retrievers, Labradoodles, and Poodles. We've had some successes there as well. About 85% of our program is Labrador Retrievers.
Stephen K.: Yeah, I've got one right here by my side, big Yellow Labrador named Kaitlin. They do make extraordinary service dogs, there's no question about it. Are there certain traits, temperament, health, ability, intelligence, that you look for in your dogs?

Christy Conrad: Well, you actually referred to one of the words I always describe when I'm talking to a new breeder. And I always say confident and calm are the two words I use to describe the service dog. Because a lot of times they need to be able to lay quietly so that they're not noticeable, but they also have to be ready when their client needs them.

Christy Conrad: We also do require that they have some health testing, so we start with the parents, and the parents need to be genetically health tested. And then we continue that on when the puppies are in training. Other than that, we want a puppy that's adaptable, ready to go with the flow in whatever is going to happen next for them.

Stephen K.: Yeah, that temperament issue is really critical. I remember shortly after getting my first guide dog, her name was Corky, she was a big Yellow Lab. I wound up having a book tour and I went to Venice. And my wife and I were moving through a big throng. And it turned out the big throng was a group of hotel workers on strike. If you've ever been in an Italian labor protest, it's really quite a circus, right? They were letting off firecrackers, and shouting, and gesticulating wildly. And of course Corky just worked through that throng with the firecrackers going off all around her without skipping a beat.

Stephen K.: It's the illustration of the kind of temperament issue we're talking about. These dogs can handle the unusual and the unknown with just absolute poise. I understand that UDS service dogs has a program working with inmates, and how does that program work?

Lori Breece: Although we placed our first four puppies at SCI Pine Grove in 2014, it actually took almost two years of research and planning to bring the program known as TAILS to life. Although Pups in Prison isn't a new initiative in the U.S., it was a huge step forward for our program, and I am pretty confident it was the start of our extraordinary growth.
**Lori Breece:** When we first started the program, we had our dog stay in the facility until our dogs were around 18 months. However, over the past two years, we have re-structured our Pups in Prison program, and our dogs stay for about 10 months. And one of the reasons is it's critical that our dogs get socialization. And obviously although our dogs do live with an inmate handler in their cell, they can't get out to the regular places, like going to the movies, or the grocery store, or the doctor's office, things like that, that are really critical for socialization.

**Lori Breece:** The handlers are required to complete weekly and monthly reports so that our trainers can stay on top of any issues that might arise. Our trainers also make quarterly visits. That gives them a chance to observe and really talk and work with the handlers, answer any questions, and provide support and additional training. Our dogs turn approximately one year old, we bring them back to Lancaster County, and they will live in a volunteer puppy home until they reach about 18 months.

**Lori Breece:** So for that six month period they're going everywhere. They're getting that really critical socialization that is really going to help them be a successful service dog. Now when they turn 18 months, they come back in the NR kennel, and they work one on one with one of our four trainers who will determine what their future is going to be.

**Lori Breece:** There are four possible outcomes for our dogs. Our goal is always a full service dog. However, as you know, you have to pretty much be 99% perfect to have a dog become a service dog.

**Lori Breece:** So the next opportunity is a facility dog, a dog that might work in a classroom. It might be a dog that works in a therapy office or an advocacy center. And then another opportunity for working as an in-home companion dog. Only after we've exhausted all possibilities do we have to release a dog, but that certainly is a very hard decision for our program to make.

**Lori Breece:** During the training that [inaudible 00:11:22], our dogs will learn over 50 commands in prison, and they also will learn an additional 30 to 40 commands when they enter the kennel. One of the strongest benefits to our Pups in Prison programs is the solid
foundation of obedience our dogs receive working with these incredible inmate handlers. You know, these guys truly embrace this opportunity, and they fall in love with our dogs from day one. And it really is a win-win situation, and we're really proud of the success that we've had through our Pups in Prison initiatives.

**Stephen K.:** So Lori, can you please differentiate between a service dog, a facility dog, and an in-home companion dog?

**Lori Breece:** A full service dog is that dog that is 99% perfect. We don't have barking, we have confidence. We have a dog that easily goes from handler to handler and just is adaptable. Sometimes we have a dog that's pretty close to that, but we feel going to the same situation every day would be more beneficial, and have that dog be a happier dog.

**Lori Breece:** We also sometimes have dogs that aren't sure they want to pick up that pen for you, or they might rather get a snuggle. So those dogs are the dogs that we generally refer to as our facility dogs, and that snuggling is more important to them than working.

**Lori Breece:** We've had a few dogs that have had small medical issues. We will allow them to be facility dogs because it won't affect their day to day, and they can get rest time if they need to at school, or if they're off for a day. Those are the dogs that go from service dog to facility dog, or how a service dog is chosen.

**Lori Breece:** And then, our in-home companion dogs are generally our dogs that like to work, but they don't like the difference of going out every day. So we had one dog recently who was doing a really good job in his skills here at the office and our kennel, but you took him out and you saw a different side of him, and not confident side of him. So we allowed him to still use his skills, and he works in-home using those skills.

**Stephen K.:** Once the dogs began actual service training, what types of skills do you teach, and how do you determine the type services for which each dog may be suited?

**Christy Conrad:** So we teach three foundational skills. It can be advanced into many skills. The foundational skills are tug, retrieval, and push. Each of these commands can
be used for a variety of tasks. Tug is generally used for clothing items, that helping with
the laundry basket, opening and closing doors.

Christy Conrad: Retrieval is generally used for picking up anything from a dime to a jar
of laundry detergent. It also allows clients to have their dog put something up on a higher
surface that they're not able to reach as easily. And also, part of retrieval can be taking
things back and forth between the client and a co-worker or a family member.

Christy Conrad: Push is also used for closing doors. It can be anything from a small
cabinet door or drawer to a heavy door that they've opened. It also can be used for your
accessible door buttons and your elevator door button. Because pushes touch the nose,
there are certain light switches that, that push also becomes the type of services for which
each dog will be suited. It's just really what we see as their strengths. And if a dog can do
all of those things then full service dog work is for them. They struggle with certain things,
then it might not be.

Stephen K.: I was recently at Purdue University giving a talk about service dogs. And
they, of course, wanted to know what commands does your dog know, and I listed some
of them. We were in a classroom on one end of a certain floor in a rather large building. I
said, "She can, for instance, find things, like find the elevator." And they said, "Can she
find the elevator from this distance?" Because it was a great distance, and I said, "Yep."
And they were, of course, eager to see this. So I just said, "Find the elevator", and Kaitlin,
my dog, just went the length of the building to the elevator.

Stephen K.: And of course, that's the kind of thing that a service dog can really do. And
the general public, which often thinks, oh dogs are cute, but they don't fully realize how
much they really can do.

Stephen K.: ADA Live! listening audience, if you have questions about this month's topic
or any of our other ADA Live! topics, you can submit your questions at 1(404)541-9001,
or through our website, www.adalive.org. Let's pause for a word from our featured
organization, United Disability Services and their service dogs training program.
UDS: United Disability Services, also known as UDS, is a nonprofit organization based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. They're committed to helping people with disabilities lead more independent and fulfilling lives. In over 50 years, UDS has developed a wide variety of services and programs that improve the quality of life and expand boundaries.

UDS: One of the services provided by UDS is a service dog training program. UDS service dogs are trained from pups for over two years by a team of dedicated volunteers and professionals. The dogs are trained to obey and assist. These loving dogs help with daily tasks such as opening and closing doors, turning lights on and off, picking something up off the floor, balance, retrieving, and delivering, even getting something out of the refrigerator.

UDS: Clients participate in one on one trainings as well as group training sessions. For more information about the United Disability Service dogs and the Service Dogs Training Program, please visit udservices.org.

Stephen K.: Welcome back. We are speaking with Lori Breece, program manager, and Christy Conrad, program coordinator from the United Disability Services Service Dog Training Program. Lori, during our break, we learned it takes on average two years to train a service dog. Can you tell us more about the training?

Lori Breece: A general rule of thumb is two years. Since we bring the puppies into our program at around eight weeks old. Now, there is some flexibility, but it truly does depend on the dog. I can share an example. We had an 18 month old Labradoodle. Now we knew he wasn't going to do well in our kennel. He was just very sensitive. He's an outstanding facility dog. But the time of year, it was right around the summer, and his future job was going to be to work in the school. So we were okay in that situation with letting him live with the principal of this school, where she would bring him to training. She kind of finished that secondary phase of training. Now he's very popular, he's very successful, and he's very well loved.

Lori Breece: Now some of our dogs, on the other hand, might need a full three years, especially if it's a client that might need balance, or counterbalance, or stability. We want
to make sure that that dog is calm. We want to make sure that he's mature. We certainly don't want him to go running off when he sees a squirrel, so it's really important. And that's a hard job for trainers to really look at that dog and make sure that they are ready to go out in the world.

**Lori Breece:** And you know, we can do that. Our program can be very flexible. We want to do what's best for our dogs and the clients that are in need of a service dog.

**Stephen K.:** Why does training takes so long? And what does it cost on average to train a service animal?

**Lori Breece:** So over a two year period of time, the UDS service dogs program will invest between 23 and 25 thousand dollars for one dog. And I know that seems like a lot, and please understand that that amount does include everything. That includes our trainer's time and expertise, as well as the cost of the puppy, vet care, food, training equipment and supplies. So literally everything that touches that puppy from eight weeks until two years, or even beyond, is part of that cost.

**Lori Breece:** Now we realize that the clients that we work with certainly cannot afford that type of a cost to purchase a service dog. So we do ask for $5,000. That helps absorb some of the costs that we are investing. However, if you think about it, if we have to release a dog, we've already invested all of that money. We sometimes don't know that we're going to release a dog until maybe they're 12 or 18 months or even older.

**Stephen K.:** So Christy, how do you match up a handler with a specific dog?

**Christy Conrad:** We do what we call a Meet The Dogs, as we watch the dogs that are in training. And sometimes our clients will come to our training classes, our training classes that we provide for volunteers who are raising dogs. So we get to know the client a little bit better that way as well.

**Christy Conrad:** We also have a six month update form that we get from the clients, so we stay up to date on them that way. So between those, knowing that information and
knowing the dogs, we will say, okay, we think this dog might be a good match for our clients. And so we'll have that client meet that dog plus two or three others, to compare.

Christy Conrad: If at the end of the Meet The Dogs our feeling is still the same, then we can go on and continue training that dog for that person. We want to make sure that the dog's strength, and the person's strength and skills, meet the person's needs, want to make sure things like activity level are very similar. If we have a client that is very active then we need to put a little bit more of an active dog with them, so that the dog can keep up.

Stephen K.: So what about the dogs that are going to help someone with a particular task? Are there different things you would look for in making a match in that situation?

Christy Conrad: The biggest one that comes to mind is dogs that are working wearing a balance harness and doing stability work or counterbalance work. We need a really steady dog for that. Some of these labs, as we know, are very wiggly and friendly, and you can't have that so much when it comes to a stability dog. If your dog is going to get wiggly, then the chances are that your person is going to be thrown off balance, so it's really important. And those dogs are fewer than some of the other dogs. We try really hard to make sure that our dog's skills and personality meet the person's needs.

Stephen K.: You know, I know this is true from my experience with guide dog schools, but are there dogs that don't make the cut? What's the percentage of dogs from any one litter that don't, as a service animal?

Christy Conrad: Yeah, the percentage is low of that make it as full service dogs. That's 35%, it's the national average. And it's just a really special job for dogs, and takes a special dog.

Stephen K.: No question about it. So what becomes of the dogs that aren't cut out to be a service animal?

Christy Conrad: For us, if they were raised by somebody locally, then they have first option to adopt. If they were raised, say in the prison, often ask the sponsor. Once we go
through all those avenues, we do have a list of people that have come to us and said they’d like to adopt from us. It doesn't happen very often that we get to that list.

**Stephen K.:** So as a guide dog user, I know all about going to the guide dog school to train with the dog and the trainer of the dog. Do you have any sort of training with the handler and the dog before the dog is released to them?

**Christy Conrad:** That would be quite a disaster if we didn't do that. Wow. So all clients go through a two week team training. So that team training lasts two weeks long. At the end of the first week... So usually about Thursday night of the first week they start taking their dog home, bringing it back to training with them every day.

**Christy Conrad:** We also have monthly reports that they're required to do as a written report. And then they are required to do a public access test every year, with the first one about 30 days after they have their dog. Our clients are always welcome in any of our training classes.

**Stephen K.:** So Lori, I understand the UDS service dog program was recently awarded accreditation from Assistance Dogs International. So please tell us a little bit about that process and what it means for a training facility to obtain this endorsement.

**Lori Breece:** Well, I can start off by saying it's a very long process. It took us five years. We were considered a candidate program and basically what we had to do was make sure that all of our policies and our procedures, protocols, applications, all documentation, was compliant to the ADI requirements for accreditation. And there were many times where we didn't have a policy in place and we discovered, oh geez, we have to write one. And we did that.

**Lori Breece:** I have a notebook that's about three and a half, four inches thick, of all of the policies that we did right over those five years. So it wasn't something we just sat down and we worked straight through, it was definitely a process. And at the same time we were growing our program.
**Lori Breece:** Christy mentioned earlier in our conversation today that we had a door open to the ABC breeding co-op, and that has really broadened our pool for quality pups. And Christy has also kind of stepped outside of our normal thinking to try to find other breeders. And even though we may have to pay a little bit more, I think it's going to be worth it in the long run, because the quality is what's going to help us have a successful dog placement.

**Lori Breece:** Another great benefit is simply being able for our trainers to pick up the phone and maybe call an accredited agency on the other side of the country. This is an international organization. We also have been able to send our trainers to conferences all over the country. They get to network with trainers, and managers, and directors, from agencies all over the world. And that type of networking is just going to create more successful programs.

**Lori Breece:** Another benefit to our accreditation is our partnership with American Airlines Puppies in Flight program. And a very new and exciting initiative that ADI is working on is a trainers registration program. And these are just a few of the exciting and worthy benefits of our accreditation. And we're in our first year, so who knows what the next couple of years will hold for us, but we're certainly excited and looking forward to those new opportunities.

**Stephen K.:** Yeah, well congratulations on this important accreditation, and thank you Laurie and Christy. We've learned so much today about the UDS Service Dogs Training Program and appreciate you sharing this important information with us. Listening audience, you can submit questions and comments regarding the podcast to adalive.org. That's adalive.org, and they will be forwarded to Lori Breece and Christy Conrad for responses.

**Stephen K.:** It's been my pleasure to speak with you today, Lori and Christy. And listeners, our guests for this episode of ADA Live! have been Lori and Christy and from UDS service dogs. And as always we thank you for joining us for this episode of ADA Live!
Stephen K.: This episode and all previous ADA live episodes are available on our website at adalive.org, as well as on our SoundCloud channel at soundcloud.com/adalive. Every episode is archived in a variety of formats including streamed audio and accessible transcripts. You can also download ADA Live! on your mobile device podcast icon by searching for ADA Live!

Stephen K.: The 30th anniversary of the ADA will soon be here before you know it. You can check out the ADA anniversary toolkit from the Southeast ADA Center and the ADA National Network for celebration of the ADA anniversary on July 26, and of course year-round. The tool kit features a media kit, publications, and other resources to keep the celebration going at www.adaanniversary.org.

Stephen K.: And reminder, if you have any questions about the Americans With Disabilities Act, you can submit your questions anytime online at adalive.org, or contact your regional ADA Center at 1(800)949-4232. And remember, all calls are free and confidential.

Stephen K.: ADA Live! is a program of the Southeast ADA Center. Our producer is Celestia Ohrazda, with Beth Harrison, Mary Morder, and Barry Whaley. Our music is from Four Wheel City, the movement for improvement. See you next episode.

[ Music ]

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