

# VANCOUVER ISLAND COMPASSION DOGS SOCIETY

## PROFESSIONAL REFERRAL INFORMATION

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Vancouver Island Compassion Dogs Society (VICD) is different from other service dog programs in that we do not give a fully trained service dog to a veteran. We expect the veteran to train their own service dog, essentially becoming dog trainers themselves. This requires a greater commitment than other service dog programs where they give a veteran a **fully trained** service dog. This training will bring up issues between dog and veteran because the dog usually has no training and will have come to us for a multitude of reasons of which we have no control over. Therefore, it requires extra work to fully train their own service dog.

This program involves two days of training in different locations (Nanoose Bay and Qualicum Beach) and on the days that the veterans are not in classes, they are expected to walk their dog for two forty minute walks. This is just the physical aspect of the training. Please note that the veteran will be expected to drive to Nanoose for the regular obedience training and to Qualicum Beach for regular VICD meetings each week, gas cards are provided for all those in the program. Getting to and from all of the training sessions and the daily training regime is a great deal to ask for many veterans who previously found getting out of the house was a challenge in itself. Many of our veterans cannot leave the house without support.

Although we do offer an application and assessment process for potential clients to bring their own dog into the program we strongly advise they use a dog provided by VICD that has been vetted for Service Dog and PTSD work.

The veteran needs to be fully prepared to commit to this amount of involvement; in addition the family or loved ones need to be aware that their roles will change significantly. This may present challenges in a relationship. The changing role for the significant other may come as a welcome relief or can create a great deal of tension and unrest in the home. The significant other has played a vital role in the veteran's health for many years and has been the sole support – we are now asking the significant other to let go of that role so that the dog can take that over, this can be very challenging for some relationships. We have started a support group for the spouses/loved ones of the veterans to help support them in some of these changes.

For some, this is too big of a commitment to make at this time in their life. They know we are always here and they are always welcome to come back to the program when they feel that they can commit to this amount of work.

In order to support the client through the program we require the veteran to be seeing a psychologist weekly for the first 6 months of the program as many issues can arise.

Hopefully this helps to understand the VICD program and the differences between us and other service dog programs. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Director of Mental Health at [vicdmh@gmail.com](mailto:vicdmh@gmail.com).

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Please cover the following points in your recommending your client to Vancouver Island Compassion Dogs:

- That the client has been diagnosed with PTSD.
- That the client is prepared to commit to this level of work.
- Will be willing to participate in the program and understand the magnitude of the task that is being asked of veterans with PTSD.
- That all those living with the veteran are on board and supportive for this type of program.
- A description of ongoing and planned treatment the duration and frequency.
- Any information you think would be helpful for VICD to know in order to assess for readiness and goodness of fit for the program.