



MFES FACILITY DOG FAQs

What is a Facility Dog?

Facility dogs are part of a specially trained dog/handler team that provides goal directed interventions which promote improvement in physical, social, emotional or cognitive abilities. A Facility dog is directed by a professional with specialized expertise and within the scope of practice of their profession. These dogs may work in a variety of settings, groups or individual in nature. When not at work, the dog lives with their primary handler as part of their family.

Facility dogs are trained for:

- Stress and anxiety reduction for children
- Companionship
- Relationship building
- Learning opportunities
- Canine-assisted education
- Canine-assisted intervention

A Facility Dog is trained by an organization certified by Assistance Dogs International (ADI). We are partnered with National Service Dogs who is certified by ADI.

The MFES Facility Dog graduated from a National Service Dogs (NSD) for the purpose of reducing stress and providing mental health support by enhancing the ability of people to speak openly while providing emotional comfort in a high stress environment. Unlike a Service Dog – a Facility Dog works with multiple people and cannot go into public spaces unless invited or given permission. Our Facility Dog is a WFI Committee strategy to positively impact stress management, self-care and overall wellness for MFES staff. The Facility Dog will be able to address a broad spectrum of mental health and is not solely focused on PTSD.

Why are we getting a Facility Dog?

As firefighters we face challenges every day that can impact our mental health. We deal with Occupational/Operational Stress on a daily basis. Our WFI Committee has been working for the past 11 years to create support systems for your physical and mental



health. We have created a Total Health plan that speaks to creating partnerships with outside organizations – and we have done so with Wounded Warriors Canada, Sick Not Weak and National Service Dogs. Supporting your mental health and being a leader in first responder mental health services is a very important piece of the WFI Committee and the Total Health Plan.

A Facility Dog also aligns with the MFES PTSD Prevention Plan submitted to the MoL in May 2017 under Bill 163 legislation. The WFI Committee is leveraging mental health resources with a first responder focus and attempting to reduce stigma associated with all mental health issues including PTSD. The acquisition of the MFES Facility Dog will be able to play a role in all three principles of the MFES PTSD Prevention Plan: Prevention, Intervention along with Recovery and Return to Work.

A Facility Dog supports our mental health by helping break down barriers and stigma to open communication with our Peer Support Team to comfort you when you need assistance. The Facility Dog would promote positive conversations around mental health, thus helping to reduce stigma. It is another layer of support to help our members. Our Facility Dog will complement the mental health services and training that MFES already provides to our members (Peer Support Team, R2MR Training).

What is Canine Assisted Intervention (CAI)?

Canine Assisted Intervention (CAI) is a goal-directed intervention designed to promote improvement in physical, social, emotional and/or cognitive functioning of the person(s) involved and in which a specially trained dog-handler team is an integral part. CAI is directed and/or delivered by a professional with specialized expertise and within the scope of practice of his/her profession. CAI may be provided in a variety of settings, may be group or individual in nature and may be implemented for persons of any age.

How did we get a Facility Dog?

At our last WFI Open House in May 2018, we invited National Service Dogs as a participant in our 'vendor' hall. A representative connected with WFI co-Chair Ryan Coburn and scheduled to attend the next WFI Committee meeting the following September. After meeting the steering committee, the representative asked if we would be interested in making an application to National Service Dogs. The Committee understood the value a



Facility Dog could bring to MFES. After consultation with the Association and Chief Beckett, Ryan started the application process for Mississauga Fire.

The Committee was originally given an approximate timeline of Fall 2020. However, we were accelerated through the queue and were told in February 2019 that we would most likely see a dog in the Fall of 2019. Approximately 3 weeks ago we were asked if we could receive the dog prior to the summer of this year. After several interviews, initial training and a home visit, WFI co-Chair Ryan Coburn was approved to be the primary handler by National Service Dogs.

Who owns the Facility Dog?

The Facility Dog remains the property of National Services Dogs.

What did the Facility Dog cost MFES?

Nothing. With the amount of time and labour that is invested into raising the dog and its training, the Facility Dog is valued at approximately \$30,000. It was generously donated to MFES by National Service Dogs for the benefit of our staff.

How would a Facility Dog help MFES members?

The Facility Dog will add a new tool for normalizing our environment, reducing anxiety and alleviating fears, and distracting from difficult experiences for short periods. The Facility Dog will offer a much-needed source of strength and support for firefighters and MFES staff who perform hard work every day.

Cortisol is a hormone that is released during stress, it triggers your fight, flight, freeze response. A Facility Dog can smell the cortisol being released by your system before you even know, before you even register that you are stressed. A Facility Dog will intuitively come to you and then use the skills that they have been taught to help people remain calm or ground them.

A Facility Dog would either provide some body pressure by leaning against you or by placing their chin on your leg and make their head heavy, which grounds you and brings you back to the present. It will allow you to realize that you are in a safe environment, which



will help release positive hormones like oxytocin and serotonin to assist in balancing your thoughts and emotions.

What is the Facility Dog like when it is working?

When the Facility Dog is in its vest, it is on-duty, working. Much like firefighters at an emergency scene, a dispatcher receiving a 9-11 call, a Fire Inspector working with a customer, a Training Officer teaching a class, or a mechanic making repairs on a truck – the dog is laser focused. Some of the tests that they have to pass include being able to ignore anything that may be dropped around them or loud, sudden noises. They are focused on you while working with their vest on. Once the dog is released and their vest is taken off, they are free to play and interact like a regular dog.

Is the Facility Dog part of the Peer Support Team?

No. The Facility Dog can be activated along with a peer, and there will be a Terms of Reference that will be developed to clearly articulate the procedure to activate the Facility Dog and what the roles and responsibilities are for handlers, support team members and peers.

The Facility Dog and handler do not replace the Peer Support Team member, the Facility Dog will support the peer support team member. The Facility Dog handler would not participate in the debrief or diffusing, unless they are a peer support team member.

Does any other Fire Department have a Facility Dog?

Vancouver Fire & Rescue & Services has 'Lola' as a pilot project. MFES would be the first Fire Service in Ontario that would have a Facility Dog. Ottawa Police's Victim Services received National Service Dog's last first responder placement with 'Canine West'.

There are other organizations like St. John Ambulance who have a Therapy Dog Program, where they have canines for first responders – but visits and activations would not be organized for MFES when debriefing or peer team and one-on-one connections are requested or needed with the Facility Dog.



How will the Facility Dog program work?

The Facility Dog will remain with the primary handler approximately 95% of the time. The dog will travel to work with Ryan every day he is working and will stay at the GWMC. The dog will 'work' Ryan's schedule. There will be a secondary handler who can perform station visits and will take the Facility Dog home with them to provide support for Ryan and his family. The secondary handler would build comfort and trust with the dog and their family.

There will be 'on shift' canine Support Team members who will also be able to take the Facility Dog to Mississauga Fire workplaces while the dog is on-duty. A schedule will be created by the WFI committee to ensure that the Facility Dog is inclusive to all MFES divisions and workplaces. The 'on shift' support team members would coordinate receiving the dog and taking it to the scheduled workplace.

The handlers and support team members will receive team training from National Service Dogs to educate and train the handlers to successfully utilize the Facility Dog for MFES.

All handlers and support team members will be required to complete mental health first aid training (MANERS), applied suicide intervention skills training (ASIST) and trauma informed training (through the Canadian Mental Health Association). The Facility Dog will have scheduled workplace visits throughout the month. After a critical incident, should there be a request for Peer Support services, there will be a follow up question if the individuals would want the Facility Dog to be activated as well. The Facility Dog would not attend after its regular hours of work. It is also not 'on call' on nights or weekends.

Who has 'approved' this Program?

The Fire Chief, Association and the WFI Committee have approved the Facility Dog program. City of Mississauga Legal has received contracts from National Service Dogs.

How can I get involved?

You can apply to be a secondary handler and/or a canine support team member by sending a resume and cover letter to WFO co-Chair Trevor Shea, or co-Chair Ryan Coburn by Thursday, April 11 at 17:00 hours.



When will we know more about the Facility Dog? (Name, Breed etc.)

Once the Secondary Handler is selected our application process will be officially completed. Once the process is over, we will learn more about our Facility Dog. With agreement by the Association, National Service Dogs will be sitting in the interviews for the Secondary Handler.

Who can I speak to get more information about the Facility Dog?

You can contact WFI co-Chairs Ryan Coburn or Trevor Shea to answer any questions that you have.



MFES FACILITY DOG

A FACILITY DOG WILL COMPLIMENT THE MENTAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE THAT MFES ALREADY PROVIDES TO ITS MEMBERS.

A FACILITY DOG IS ANOTHER WFI COMMITTEE EFFORT TO ENCOURAGE MENTAL WELLNESS, REDUCE STIGMA & SUPPORT TOTAL HEALTH AMONG OUR STAFF

IMAGES IN THIS SLIDE DECK ARE FROM NATIONAL SERVICE DOGS' VISIT TO MFES WITH THEIR AMBASSADOR FACILITY DOG CHARTWELL



WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A FACILITY DOG?

FACILITY DOGS ARE PART OF A SPECIALLY TRAINED DOG/HANDLER TEAM THAT PROVIDES GOAL DIRECTED INTERVENTIONS WHICH PROMOTE IMPROVEMENT IN PHYSICAL, SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL OR COGNITIVE ABILITIES. A FACILITY DOG IS DIRECTED BY A PROFESSIONAL WITH SPECIALIZED EXPERTISE AND WITHIN THE SCOPE OF PRACTICE OF THEIR PROFESSION. THESE DOGS MAY WORK IN A VARIETY OF SETTINGS, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUAL IN NATURE. WHEN NOT AT WORK, THE DOG LIVES WITH THEIR PRIMARY HANDLER AS PART OF THEIR FAMILY.



WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A FACILITY DOG?

FACILITY DOGS ARE TRAINED FOR:

- STRESS AND ANXIETY REDUCTION FOR CHILDREN
- COMPANIONSHIP
- RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
- CANINE-ASSISTED EDUCATION
- CANINE-ASSISTED INTERVENTION

A FACILITY DOG IS TRAINED BY AN ORGANIZATION CERTIFIED BY ASSISTANCE DOGS INTERNATIONAL (ADI). WE ARE PARTNERED WITH NATIONAL SERVICE DOGS WHO IS CERTIFIED BY ADI.



A 'CERTIFIED' FACILITY DOG MEANS A DOG THAT HAS:

- 1) GRADUATED FROM A PROGRAM OF AN ASSISTANCE DOG ORGANIZATION (NATIONAL SERVICE DOGS) THAT ATTEMPTS TO SET THE HIGHEST STANDARD OF TRAINING FOR DOGS TO ASSIST CLIENTS REDUCE STRESS AND PROVIDE EMOTIONAL COMFORT IN HIGH STRESS ENVIRONMENTS
- 2) RECEIVED 2 YEARS OF TRAINING; AND
- 3) PASSED THE SAME PUBLIC ACCESS TEST AS A SERVICE DOG



COMMON SETTINGS FOR FACILITY DOGS

- REHABILITATIVE SETTINGS
- COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH
- CHILD ADVOCACY CENTRES
- POLICE VICTIM SERVICES





FACILITY DOGS ARE THE SAFEST CHOICE



- FACILITY DOGS ARE SAFE BECAUSE THEY ARE PURPOSE BRED
- FACILITY DOGS ARE SAFE BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN INTENTIONALLY AND STRATEGICALLY RAISED FROM BIRTH
- FACILITY DOGS ARE SAFE BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED AND ASSESSED FOR SUITABILITY FOR THE WORK BY PROFESSIONALS IN ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR AND TRAINING



WHAT IS 'PURPOSE BRED'?

- THE DNA OF A FACILITY DOG IS SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO PRODUCE A DOG THAT IS LOW-REACTIVE IN EMOTIONALLY CHARGED ENVIRONMENTS
- FACILITY DOGS, THEREFORE ARE BRED FOR TEMPERAMENT
- A DOG THAT IS HIGHLY EXCITABLE OR IS KNOWN FOR AGGRESSIVE TENDENCIES, WOULD BE A POOR MATCH FOR A FACILITY DOG



A FACILITY DOG IS INTENTIONALLY RAISED

- BREEDER/CARETAKERS AND PUPPY RAISERS ARE INTEGRAL MEMBERS OF THE TEAM THAT PREPARE A FACILITY DOG FOR PROFESSIONAL WORKING LIFE
- THEY PROVIDE STRATEGIC EARLY LIFE EXPERIENCES TO IMPRINT THE YOUNG AND DEVELOPING NERVOUS SYSTEM TO BE DEEPLY BONDED TO HUMANS
- PUPPY RAISERS CONTINUE THIS INTENTIONAL EARLY LIFE EXPERIENCE BY SOCIALIZING THE PUPPY TO A VARIETY OF ANIMALS, ENVIRONMENTS AND PEOPLE
- PUPPY RAISERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR TEACHING COMMANDS IN BASIC OBEDIENCE



A FACILITY DOG IS PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED



- A POTENTIAL FACILITY DOG WILL UNDERGO 6-9 MONTHS OF DAILY TRAINING BY A PROFESSIONAL IN ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR AND DOG TRAINING
- A FACILITY DOG GRADUATES AFTER THEY ARE DETERMINED TO BE OF SOUND HEALTH AND CAN PASS A PUBLIC ACCESS TEST WHICH REFLECTS THEIR ABILITY TO BE SAFE IN A PUBLIC SETTING



IMPLEMENTING DOGS IN THE PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT

1) REQUIRES A PROFESSIONAL SOLUTION

- A PROFESSIONAL DOG FOR A PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT

2) REQUIRES BEHAVIOURAL CONTROL/EXCEPTIONAL DEMEANOR

- SO AS NOT TO DISRUPT PROFESSIONAL WORK GOALS

3) REQUIRES SAFETY FOR ALL

- SAFETY FOR CLIENTS, SAFETY AND LIABILITY PROTECTION FOR HANDLERS, AGENCY AND SUPPORT TEAM MEMBERS



A FACILITY DOG IS NOT...

- A **SERVICE DOG**. A SERVICE DOG SERVES ONE PERSON WITH A DISABILITY TO MITIGATE THE FUNCTIONAL IMPAIRMENT(S) OF THAT DISABILITY
- A **THERAPY DOG**. BECAUSE THE EFFECT OF A FACILITY DOG IS HIGHLY THERAPEUTIC, THE UNTRAINED PUBLIC OFTEN REFERS TO THEM AS THERAPY DOGS



A FACILITY DOG IS NOT...

- A **'CAREER CHANGED'** DOG. 'CAREER CHANGE' INFERS THAT THE DOG 'FAILED OUT' OF THE ASSISTANCE DOG PROGRAM. THEY MUST PASS THE SAME PUBLIC ACCESS TEST GIVEN TO CERTIFIED SERVICE DOGS
- A **PET THERAPY DOG**. THERE ARE NO NATIONAL STANDARDS THAT EXIST FOR THE TRAINING OF THERAPY DOGS. THERAPY DOGS ARE NOT CERTIFIED, RATHER THE DOG/HANDLER TEAMS THAT PASS EVALUATIONS ARE REGISTERED AS TEAMS



HANDLER SELECTION & TRAINING

- THE OTHER HALF OF THE EQUATION THAT PROVIDES FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE FACILITY DOG IN A PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT IS THE SELECTION AND TRAINING OF THE HANDLER(S)
- THE FACILITY DOG IS TO BE HANDLED BY A TRAINED VOLUNTEER OR PROFESSIONAL
- NATIONAL SERVICE DOGS WILL PROVIDE SPECIFIC TEAM TRAINING TO HANDLERS THAT THEY HAVE CAREFULLY VETTED AND SELECTED TO RECEIVE ONE OF THEIR HIGHLY TRAINED CANINES



SAFETY AROUND CHILDREN

- INTEGRAL TO THE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF FACILITY DOGS IS THEIR ABILITY TO REMAIN CALM AND CONTROLLED AROUND YOUNG CHILDREN
- THE PUBLIC ACCESS TEST FOR FACILITY DOGS REQUIRES A CHILD TO APPROACH A DOG AND PET IT WHILE THE DOG REMAINS IN A 'DOWN' POSITION

FACILITY DOGS ARE PROFESSIONAL WORKING DOGS



- THEY CAN WORK AN 8-10 HOUR DAY/40 HOUR WORK WEEK
- CERTIFIED FACILITY DOGS HAVE BEEN INTENTIONALLY BRED AND PREPARED FROM BIRTH FOR A PROFESSIONAL WORKING LIFE



FACILITY DOG TESTIMONIAL

“NOMAD, OUR FACILITY DOG FROM CANINE COMPANIONS FOR INDEPENDENCE IS THE STRONG, SILENT TYPE. NEVER RUFFLED, NEVER UPSET BY WHAT HAPPENS IN THE FORENSIC INTERVIEW ROOM OR PLAY THERAPY ROOM. ALWAYS SUPPORTIVE, ALWAYS COMFORTING, ALWAYS PRESENT IN THE MOMENT FOR CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED THE TRAUMA OF ABUSE.”

DONNA CALLIS, PLAY THERAPIST CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER OF BRISTOL & WASHINGTON COUNTY, VA.





FOR MORE INFORMATION

NATIONAL SERVICE DOGS

[HTTP://WWW.NSD.ON.CA/](http://www.nsd.on.ca/)

ASSISTANCE DOGS INTERNATIONAL (ADI)

[HTTPS://ASSISTANCEDOGSINTERNATIONAL.ORG/LOCATION/CANADA/](https://assistedogsinternational.org/location/canada/)

ADI GLOSSARY OF TERMS

[HTTPS://ASSISTANCEDOGSINTERNATIONAL.ORG/FAQS/GLOSSARY/](https://assistedogsinternational.org/faqs/glossary/)

PLEASE CONTACT WFI CO-CHAIRS TREVOR SHEA OR RYAN COBURN IF YOU HAVE ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS.