

## **Accessible Customer Service: Use of Animals by Persons with Disabilities Policy**

### **Purpose:**

These procedures and practices have been established for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, ([O. Reg. 429/07](#)) (Use of Service Animals by Persons with Disabilities) and IASR ([O. Reg. 191/11](#)).

### **Scope:**

These procedures and practices apply where Strong Start provides its services on premises that it owns or operates, and if the public and other third parties have access to these premises. This policy is available in accessible formats upon request.

In situations where Strong Start operates its programming at a third-party facility (e.g. *Get Ready for School*™ program partner site), the Service Animal Policy at the third-party facility takes precedence.

### **Definitions:**

- **Guide Dog** means a dog trained as a guide for a blind person and having the qualifications prescribed by the regulations ([Blind Persons' Rights Act 1990 s1 \(1\)](#))
- **Service Animal** means an animal acting as a service animal for a person with a disability, if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to their disability; or  
if the person provides a letter from a regulated health professional confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability.

### **Policy Statement:**

Strong Start® Charitable Organization (Strong Start) welcomes and provides equitable access for persons with disabilities accompanied by a Guide Dog or Service Animal to its National Program Deployment Centre.

### **Procedures and Responsibilities:**

#### **Identifying Service Animals:**

Service animals may be any animal that assists a person with a disability. They provide a wide range of assistance including but not limited to, guiding a person who is blind, alerting a person who is deaf to certain sounds, opening doors and retrieving items for persons with mobility

disabilities, emotional support for persons with mental illness, and many other forms of assistance.

**Service animals may be identified by any one of the following methods:**

1. the animal may be wearing a service animal vest, harness or saddle packs
2. the animal may be observed providing assistance
3. the person may have a letter from a physician or nurse stating that they require the animal for reasons related to a disability
4. the person may show a valid identification card or training certificate from a recognized service animal training school.

When Strong Start cannot easily identify that an animal is a service animal, its staff may ask for documentation (template, letter or form) from a regulated health professional that confirms the person needs the service animal for reasons relating to their disability.

**A regulated health professional is defined as a member of one of the following colleges:**

- College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario
- College of Chiropractors of Ontario
- College of Nurses of Ontario
- College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario
- College of Optometrists of Ontario
- College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario
- College of Physiotherapists of Ontario
- College of Psychologists of Ontario
- College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered
- Mental Health Therapists of Ontario

**If service animals are prohibited by another law, Strong Start will do the following to ensure people with disabilities can access our services or facilities:**

- explain why the animal is excluded
- discuss with the individual another way of providing services or facilities

**Strong Start Responsibilities:**

Persons with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal will be permitted to enter Strong Start's National Program Deployment Centre, except where prohibited by law. If the animal is excluded by law, Strong Start will provide another means of accommodating the person. For example, if the animal is not permitted into a certain area by law, Strong Start may suggest providing services in an area where the service animal is permitted.

### **Responsibilities of Persons with Service Animals**

It is the responsibility of the person with the disability to ensure that:

- their service animal is kept in control at all times and is well behaved;
- the service animal is not a threat to health and safety; and
- the service animal's immunizations are up-to-date.

In rare circumstances a person may have a severe and debilitating reaction to an animal, such as respiratory distress. In these situations, Strong Start will suggest alternative means of providing the services to the person, by limiting exposure to the animal or by another reasonable method. Strong Start's Accessibility Committee members along with Strong Start's Senior Leadership Team, will consider all relevant factors and options in trying to find a solution that meets the needs of both individuals.

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Approved by Chief Executive Officer, April 30, 2024.