

What Is The Purpose of Teaching a Dog Class to Youth with Disabilities?

by L.M. Shannon-Chaillet
© 2001 - Update Thursday, January 19, 2012



Carefully analyze this question before you consider organizing a canine training class for youths with disability. Now is the time “to weigh and consider”¹ just why you want to teach a “special” canine class for youths with disability?

Is it because you want an ego and/or self-esteem builder for your students, your team and class instructors and yourself?

Is it because you wish to keep your canine(s) active in the therapy/service dog world, or because your dog(s) need a constructive job?

Is it because you have several canines and this is a way of getting help with the training and individual attention each dog deserves?

Is it because you have a child with disability who needs a constructive yet entertaining outlet for his or her mental and physical energy?

These are all good reasons for wanting to teach a “special” canine class. However, the first and foremost reason should be because you want to give the child who has disability or disabilities opportunities to increase and enhance his or her communication skills, as well as, provide them with opportunities for physical exercise in a safe and supportive environment.

Those of us involved with Best Friends 4-H Club have found that dog training class for the 4-H'er with disability creates a win, win, win situations.

The 4-H'er through interacting with their class coordinator, the other 4-H'ers, the team instructors, and the dogs, will have ample opportunities to expand his or her socialization skills, use tactile stimulation to encourage the dogs, communicate in both body and verbal language, and fine tune eye-hand and body coordination. The end result; the 4-H'er will be encouraged to use his or her body and brain while



¹ “Read not to contradict and confute, not to believe and take for granted...but to weigh and consider.” by Francis Bacon, Sr.

What Is The Purpose of Teaching a Dog Class to Youth with Disabilities?

by L.M. Shannon-Chaillet
© 2001 - Update Thursday, January 19, 2012

simultaneously having fun.

The 4-H'er will also have the advantage of working one-on-one with a Team Instructor who will adapt "conventional" training methods to meet his or her particular needs. Through positive reinforcement, the instructor will help the 4-H'er and the dog accomplish each new exercise. The end result; the student will be encouraged to function as a "Team" member.



The Team Instructor will have an opportunity to teach a sport he or she love; dog obedience and agility from a new perspective. The end result; the instructor will enjoy the challenge of adapting familiar techniques to fit the unique needs of his or her 4-H'er with disability.

The dog wins, also. It will have an opportunity to interact with two extraordinary people at every class. It will receive an abundance of love and attention from its teammates as well as some extra training. The end result; the dog will get an opportunity to reinforce its canine good manners.

Is organizing and coordinating a canine class for 4-H'ers with disability something you would enjoy doing? Are you prepared for the challenge?



If so, get ready for some hard work! But also get ready to contribute to the development of some great teamwork, to making some wonderful new friends, to building some self-esteem (not just that of the 4-H'er!), and to experiencing lots of joy and laughter.

It is our hope that you will take the knowledge we have gained through our experience, adapt it to your situation, and create a canine class for the youth in your own community who are disabled. Despite the difficulties and frustrations involved in such an endeavor, the rewards are boundless and the joys are immeasurable.