

## Assistance Dog Organization Expands

**NEADS/Dogs for Deaf and Disabled Americans opens new Illinois office to meet demand.**

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A new Illinois office for NEADS/Dogs for Deaf and Disabled Americans has been established to meet a growing need in the community, according to the nonprofit organization that trains and provides assistance dogs.

The organization was formed in 1976 to train and provide rescued dogs and donated puppies to help people who are deaf or have a physical disability in leading more independent lives at work, at home, and at school. Nearly 100 percent of Hearing Dogs are rescued from animal shelters throughout New England and the United States.

The Illinois office is the 22nd state office opened by NEADS. Spokesman John Moon said there are two main reasons for a higher demand in assistance dogs.

Sadly, he said, there's a growing population of autistic children. The organization provides Halter (Autism) Dogs, who are trained to stop children from putting themselves in danger.

In addition, he said there's also an increase in veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq who are in different disabled states and in need of assistance. NEADS runs the specialized Canines for Wounded Veterans program, which provides assistance dogs who are constant companions.

These dogs can alert to sound for those with hearing loss, retrieve and carry objects, open doors, help with balance difficulties, pull on socks and shoes, and provide a bridge back to society. In addition, the canines help relieve stress and reduce the sense of vulnerability wounded veterans may experience as a result of their injuries.

"There seems to be more of a need for these service dogs," Moon said.

Although the main training facility is in Massachusetts, the organization places service dogs with clients throughout the United States. The breeds most commonly raised as service dogs are Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Standard Poodles, and smooth Collies.