



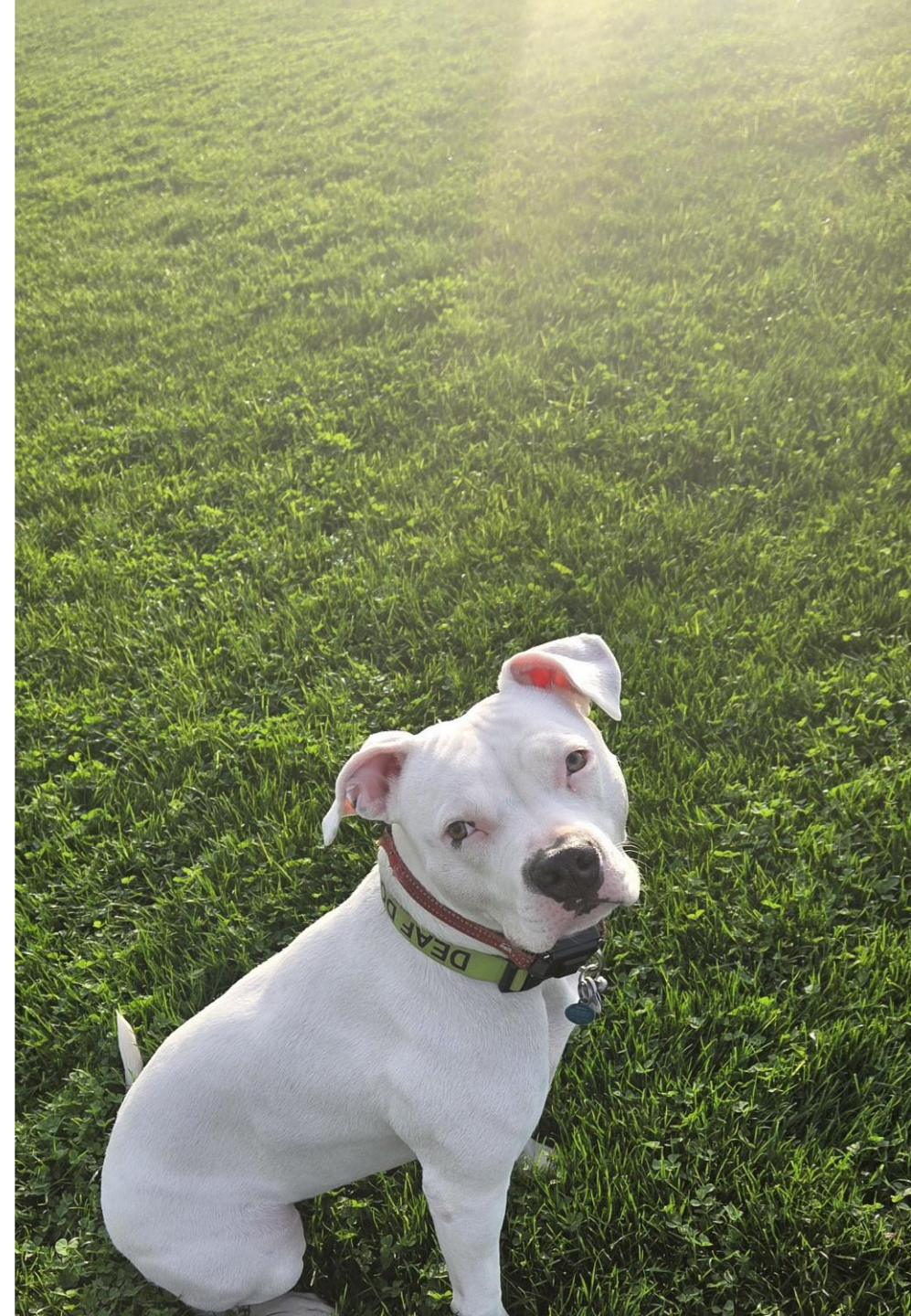
**SERVICE DOGS, DISABILITIES, AND THE DOGS WHO HELP US LIVE
BETTER LIVES**

Chris Zenner & Athena
Sunland Village East

MEET ATHENA

- Meet Athena
 - • Deaf American Pit Bull
 - My service dog
 - Balance & stability support

- “A partnership I never expected.”



WHAT IS A DISABILITY?

- Disabilities are not always visible.
- They can affect:
 - Movement
 - Hearing or vision
 - Balance
 - Neurological function
 - Medical conditions
- You don't have to *look disabled* to have a disability.



WHAT IS A SERVICE DOG?

■ A service dog is trained to perform **specific tasks** that help a person with a disability.

■ Examples:

- • Balance assistance
- Hearing alerts
- Seizure alerts
- Retrieving items
- Medical alerts

■ Athena's job:

Balance & stability support

■ .



COMMON MYTHS

- Service dogs:
 - DO NOT require federal certification
 - DO NOT require professional trainers
 - DO NOT need to wear a vest
- Handlers can train their own dogs.



THE TWO LEGAL QUESTIONS

- Businesses may ask only:
- Is the dog required because of a disability?
- What task has the dog been trained to perform?
- That's it.

TWO QUESTIONS

A BUSINESS CAN ASK A SERVICE DOG HANDLER

UNDER THE ADA

- 1.** Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
- 2.** What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

SERVICE DOGS IN PUBLIC: RESPONSIBILITY MATTERS

- Service dogs must be calm, under control, and housebroken in public.
- They cannot be aggressive or disruptive.
- Businesses may ask a team to leave if the dog is out of control.
- Public access comes with responsibility.
- A service dog is **working**, helping someone move, function, or stay safe.
- It's not special treatment — it's equal access.



Type	Purpose	Access
Service Dog	Performs trained tasks	Public access
Therapy Dog	Helps many people	Invited locations
Emotional Support Animal	Provides comfort	Limited housing rights

SERVICE DOG VS ESA VS THERAPY DOG

HOW TO ACT AROUND SERVICE DOGS

DO

- Ignore the dog
- Speak to the handler
- Give space

DON'T

- Call the dog
- Touch the dog
- Try to distract it



ASK

Ask the handler how the service dog helps them, and get permission before interacting with the service dog.



SPEAK

Speak directly to the handler, not to the service dog.



RESPECT

Be respectful of the service dog's space.



WORKING

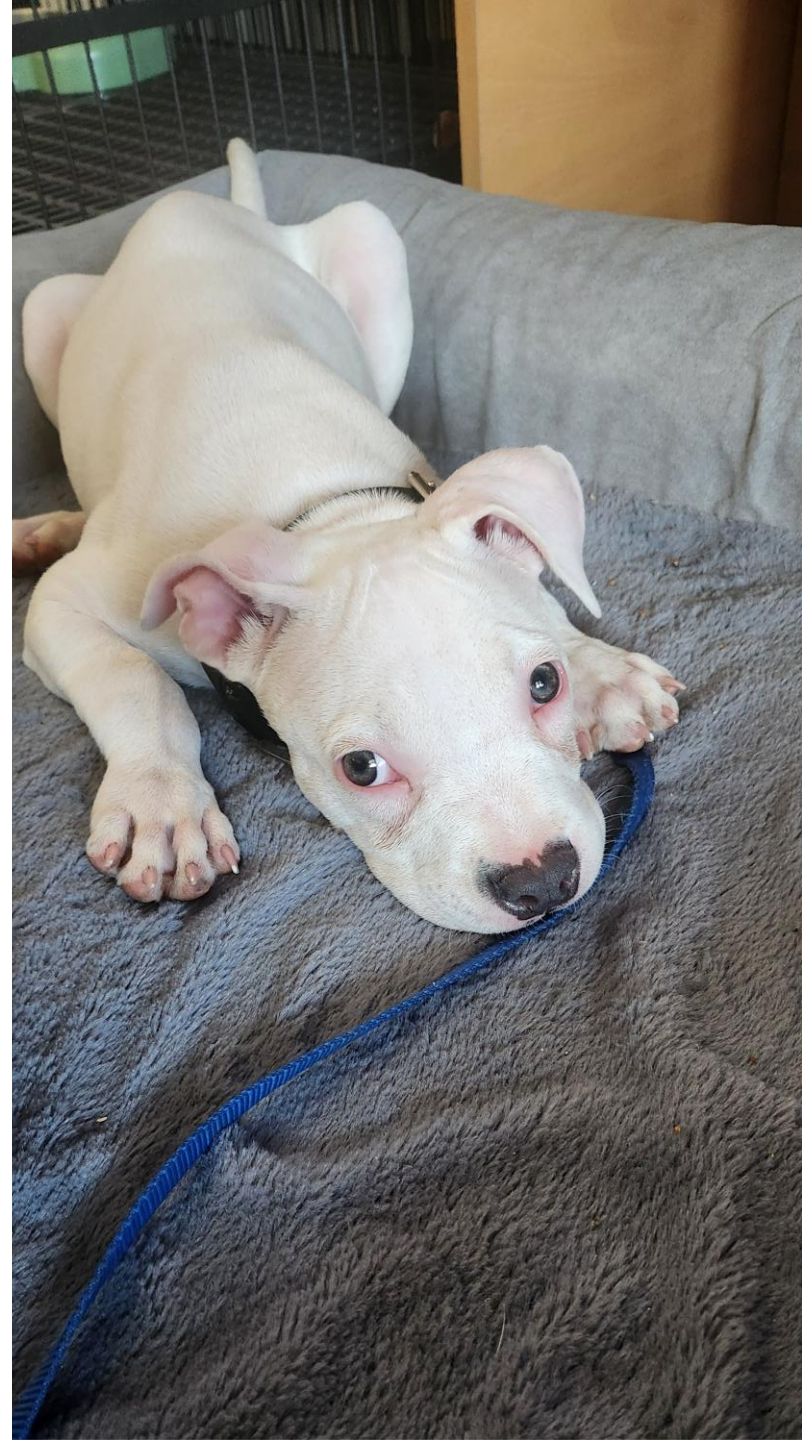
Always assume the service dog is busy working and isn't off duty.





ATHENA'S STORY

- Athena came into my life at 7 weeks
- I had just lost my two labs
- I wasn't planning on another dog
- But something about her clicked
- Calm. Curious. Focused on me.





DISCOVERING SOMETHING WAS DIFFERENT

- Athena didn't respond when I called her name
- At first I thought it was a training issue
- Then I realized... Athena was deaf
- How she experienced the world
 - • Touch
 - • Movement
 - • Close contact
- Sudden touch without warning caused panic.

THE TURNING POINT

- A police dog trainer helped me understand something important:
- Athena wasn't aggressive.
- She was overwhelmed.
- Once we switched to **visual communication**, everything changed.



TRAINING BECOMES PARTNERSHIP

All visual signals.

Stay

Come

Down

Athena learned incredibly fast.

Training became:

Communication

Trust

Partnership



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SOCIALIZATION FOR A DEAF DOG

Deaf dogs experience the world differently

Socialization had to be intentional

Familiar people and dogs-built confidence

Experience replaced uncertainty

The dog park let her just be a dog



THEN MY LIFE CHANGED

- Last April I had a stroke.
- I lost strength on the left side of my body.
- Walking became difficult.
- Athena began helping with **balance and stability**.



TODAY

- Athena helps me walk safely.
- She gives me stability.
- She gives me confidence.
- She gives me independence.



THE REAL MEANING OF SERVICE DOGS

- Service dogs are about **partnership**, not perfection
- They help people live with disabilities—**not erase them**
- Athena gives me **balance, confidence, and independence**
- A service dog team is **two lives working together**
- When you see a service dog, you're seeing **someone's independence**

A service dog isn't there to be noticed.
It's there to make life possible.

