

Director of Hospital Facility Dog Training

Senior Hospital Facility Dog Trainer / Director of Training

Position Type: Full-Time

Location: Greater Tokyo Area, Japan

Organization: Shine On! Kids (Certified NPO)

Reports To: Executive Leadership Team

Contract Term: 2–3 year commitment preferred

Compensation: Internationally competitive salary, furnished housing, vehicle, relocation support

Language Requirement: Japanese language ability is not required. Key members of the team are bilingual in Japanese and English.

About Shine On! Kids

Shine On! Kids (SOK) is a certified non-profit organization dedicated to supporting children with cancer and other serious illnesses throughout Japan, from diagnosis and hospitalization through treatment, discharge, and beyond.

Our mission is to improve the psychosocial well-being of children and families facing serious illness by providing innovative, evidence-based support programs that foster resilience, courage, self-worth, and a smoother return to everyday life.

Founded in 2006, Shine On! Kids has become one of Japan's leading organizations supporting pediatric patients and their families through programs including *Hospital Facility Dogs®, Beads of Courage®, Camp Courage for Survivors, Shine On! Connections, and other initiatives designed to improve quality of life during treatment and beyond.

** Hospital Facility Dog® is a registered trademark in Japanese and English in Japan*

About the Hospital Facility Dog® Program

Shine On! Kids introduced Japan's first Hospital Facility Dog® Program in 2010.

Unlike visiting therapy dogs, SOK's Hospital Facility Dogs® are specially trained to international service dog standards and work full-time in pediatric hospitals as members of the healthcare team. Each dog is paired with a dedicated clinician-handler and supports children undergoing medical treatment, rehabilitation, painful procedures, surgery, and end-of-life care.

Through rigorous training, strict infection-control protocols, and close collaboration with medical professionals, Hospital Facility Dogs® help children face treatment with greater confidence while providing emotional support to patients, families, and healthcare staff.

Today, Shine On! Kids operates Hospital Facility Dogs® teams at some of Japan's leading children's hospitals. Demand for the program is growing rapidly as hospitals, physicians, and local governments increasingly recognize its impact on the psychosocial health and development of children facing serious illness.

Shine On! Kids currently has multiple candidate dogs in training and an ambitious goal of expanding to 12 Hospital Facility Dog® teams by 2030.

Why This Role Matters

This is not simply a dog training position.

The successful candidate will play a central role in building the future of Hospital Facility Dog® training in Japan.

Working alongside an enthusiastic passionate team, international advisors, healthcare professionals, and canine experts, you will help establish the systems, standards, and trainer development pathways needed to create a sustainable national Hospital Facility Dogs® training program.

The impact of your work will be felt not only through the dogs you train, but through the trainers you mentor, the standards you establish, and the thousands of children whose hospital experience will be improved for years to come.

For an experienced Hospital Facility Dog, Service Dog, Assistance Dog, or Guide Dog professional seeking an opportunity to create lasting impact, this role offers a rare chance to leave a meaningful legacy.

Position Summary

The Director of Hospital Facility Dog® Training serves as the senior technical authority for Shine On! Kids' Hospital Facility Dog® Program.

The position combines advanced dog training expertise, trainer development, program leadership, and strategic planning. The successful candidate will lead the development of candidate dogs from puppyhood through hospital placement while simultaneously building the capability of Shine On! Kids' growing Japanese training team.

The role requires a highly collaborative leader who is passionate about positive reinforcement training, canine welfare, mentorship, and the integration of professionally trained dogs within pediatric healthcare environments.

Key Responsibilities

Training Leadership

- Lead the training and development of Hospital Facility Dog® candidates from puppyhood through hospital placement.
- Conduct and oversee behavioral and temperament assessments of candidate dogs throughout the training process.
- Develop and implement individualized training plans based on each dog's strengths, needs, and suitability for Hospital Facility Dog® work.
- Ensure training methodologies reflect contemporary, science-based, positive reinforcement practices.
- Establish and maintain training standards, evaluation criteria, and quality assurance processes.
- Monitor canine welfare and collaborate with veterinary professionals regarding health and behavioral needs.
- Support dog selection, acquisition, and candidate evaluation processes.

Trainer Development & Team Leadership

- Serve as mentor, coach, and technical leader for Shine On! Kids' dog training team.
- Develop structured trainer education pathways, competency benchmarks, and professional development plans.
- Build the skills and confidence of junior and mid-level trainers through hands-on coaching and formal instruction.
- Foster a culture of learning, collaboration, professionalism, and continuous improvement.
- Conduct performance evaluations and provide constructive feedback and guidance.
- Help develop future trainer leaders capable of independently sustaining and expanding the program.

Program Development & Quality Systems

- Collaborate with the Hospital Facility Dog® Advisory Board and international experts to strengthen program quality.
- Develop and document training protocols, standard operating procedures, assessment tools, and certification processes.
- Contribute to the development of Japan-specific Hospital Facility Dog® training standards aligned with international best practices.
- Assist in creating a sustainable long-term training infrastructure capable of supporting nationwide growth.
- Support research initiatives and evidence-based program evaluation.
- Contribute to strategic planning and organizational growth initiatives.

Hospital & Healthcare Collaboration

- Build strong working relationships with nurse handlers, physicians, child-life specialists, psychologists, rehabilitation professionals, and hospital administrators.
- Support the preparation and transition of dogs into hospital environments.
- Participate in handler training, matching processes, annual evaluations, and ongoing team support.
- Conduct site visits and provide consultation to active Hospital Facility Dog® teams.
- Ensure dogs and handlers maintain high standards of performance, welfare, and professionalism.

Organizational Leadership & Ambassador Responsibilities

- Serve as a senior representative of the Hospital Facility Dog® Program within Shine On! Kids.
 - Support donor engagement, grant reporting, annual reports, educational materials, and public communications.
 - Represent Shine On! Kids at conferences, site visits, media opportunities, and corporate gatherings.
 - Participate in international knowledge-sharing with the global Hospital Facility Dog and Assistance Dog community.
 - Act as an ambassador for the mission and values of Shine On! Kids.
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Qualifications

Required

- Significant professional experience training Hospital Facility Dogs, Facility Dogs, Service Dogs, Assistance Dogs, Guide Dogs, or comparable working dogs.

- Demonstrated experience mentoring, supervising, or developing other trainers.
- Advanced expertise in positive reinforcement training, canine learning theory, and behavior.
- Experience conducting behavioral assessments and developing individualized training plans.
- Strong leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills.
- Ability to work effectively in a multicultural and multidisciplinary environment.
- Valid driver's license and ability to drive in Japan.
- Willingness to relocate to Japan and commit to a minimum 2–3 year assignment.

Preferred

- Direct experience training Hospital Facility Dogs working in healthcare settings.
 - Experience within an Assistance Dogs International (ADI) accredited organization or equivalent.
 - Experience developing training curricula, standards, or certification frameworks.
 - Experience managing dog training teams or departments.
 - Experience collaborating with healthcare professionals.
 - Experience supporting research, program evaluation, or evidence-based practice.
 - Experience living or working internationally.
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What We Offer

- Internationally competitive salary commensurate with experience.
 - Furnished housing provided by Shine On! Kids.
 - Vehicle provided for business and personal use.
 - Relocation assistance.
 - Professional development opportunities.
 - Collaboration with internationally recognized experts in assistance dog training and pediatric healthcare.
 - The opportunity to live and work in Japan while helping build one of the world's most innovative Hospital Facility Dog programs.
 - Meaningful work that directly improves the lives of children with cancer and other serious illnesses and their families.
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Join Us

This is a rare opportunity to help shape the future of Hospital Facility Dogs® in Japan.

If you are an experienced assistance dog professional seeking a leadership role that combines technical excellence, mentorship, innovation, and meaningful social impact, we encourage you to apply.

Together, we can help ensure that more children facing serious illness experience the comfort, courage, and companionship of a Hospital Facility Dog® when they need it most.

To express interest or for more information, please contact Kim Forsythe, President Shine On! Kids: kim@sokids.org.