



ORGANIZATIONAL FAQs

Q. How does Helping Hands get the monkeys?

A. The monkeys for the Helping Hands program have been bred in a closed colony that was first in Florida and then most recently, in Massachusetts. This has allowed Helping Hands to know the full health and behavioral history of every monkey in our program as we follow them through Socialization Homes then Training and finally Placement. At present, Helping Hands does not maintain an active breeding colony as we have enough monkeys in the program to sustain placements for the foreseeable future.

Q. How old are the monkeys when they come to The Monkey College?

A. It varies. The monkeys typically spend 8-12 years living with a foster family in a [Socialization home](#) where they become accustomed to being in a home, interacting with different people within the home environment, getting used to family pets, and basic training like learning the things they can and cannot touch within the home, taking a bath, etc. (This gives the monkeys time to mature and to have an active adolescence.) When it's time for their training, monkeys come to live at the Monkey College in Boston.

Q. Why is the training center (The Thomas and Agnes Carvel Foundation Center) referred to as The Monkey College?

A. We refer to the Thomas and Agnes Carvel Foundation Center as The Monkey College, because it has four levels or stages of training, ranging from very simple fetching tasks to more complex uses of home-environment objects. The formal training program lasts 3-5 years. Only positive reinforcement rewards (i.e. treats, verbal praise, and affection) are used to motivate the monkeys. If a monkey cannot perform a task correctly in any given training session, the lesson/task is revisited at another time. Perseverance, ingenuity, and praise are the key to training a service monkey.

Q. What are some of the tasks a monkey learns at The Monkey College?

A. Some tasks the monkeys learn are: fetching and setting up a drink of water; scratching itches; repositioning arms and feet after muscle spasms; turning on/off lights; loading DVDs or CDs; repositioning reading glasses; and turning the pages of a book. For "potty activities" the monkeys are trained to return to their cages. Most are also trained to wear a diaper as well. Monkeys typically spend between 3-5 years in Monkey College before being placed with a recipient.

Q. Do you have male and female monkeys?

A. Yes, Helping Hands monkeys are both male and female capuchin monkeys.

Q. Why did you choose capuchin monkeys?

Capuchin monkeys were chosen for their size (6-8 pounds as adults), their capacity to build a bond with their human caretakers/recipients, and their ability to manipulate objects commonly used in a home environment. They are known as the most intelligent New World monkeys and have been observed using natural tools in the wild to solve problems and accomplish tasks.

Established in 1979, Helping Hands, a not-for-profit corporation, breeds, raises, and trains capuchin monkeys to provide daily assistance to people living with spinal cord injury or other mobility impairments. Relying on private contributions, Helping Hands provides these specifically trained service animals and their lifetime support free of charge.

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Q. Are the monkeys placed only in the United States?

A. Helping Hands' monkeys cannot be placed outside of the United States (or in Hawaii) due to animal quarantine laws.

Q. Are there any other organizations like Helping Hands?

A. We are the only organization of our kind in the world. One of the main reasons for our success is that the training and placement of Helping Hands service monkeys relies on an interface of professional disciplines that few other organizations are able to coordinate. These disciplines include primatology, psychology, and complex training techniques, as well as extensive knowledge and skill in rehabilitation medicine, occupational therapy, engineering, workstation modification, adaptive equipment design, and other services that address the needs of adults living with severe physical disabilities. In addition, it requires a great deal of time, patience, and funding to raise, train, and successfully place service monkeys with eligible recipients.

Q. Do monkeys show affection for their humans?

A. Absolutely! The most important aspect of our program for many of our recipients is that this relationship is mutually beneficial and based upon trust and affection between them and their service monkey. A Helping Hands monkey views his/her recipient as a treasured caretaker, playmate, and protector. Monkeys show affection to their recipients by grooming them and cuddling together – some monkeys even enjoy gentle play “wrestling” with their recipients.

Q. How can I become a trainer at Helping Hands?

A. Most of our trainers have been hired after working at the Monkey College as a husbandry volunteer or through our work-study program at Boston University. For more information on those programs, see our [Animal Husbandry Volunteer Listing](#). Visit [Volunteer & Job Opportunities](#) for all current listings.