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## **Applicants Information Guide**

**A Guide to clients wishing to apply for an Assistance Dog**

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*This booklet will give you information about being an assistance dog user and how an assistance dog would benefit a disabled person. Please read carefully before filling out any of the Application form*

## FÁILTE - WELCOME

As a registered charity established early in 2007, our mission here at **Irish Dogs for the Disabled** is to assist people with disabilities to enjoy a greater independence and a better quality of life and where possible, to help them into education and employment, through the provision of specially trained Assistance Dogs. To improve the quality of life for individuals with special needs whilst at the same time promoting independence and providing social interaction for people in long-term residential care.

Our aim is to train assistance dogs to the required standard set by the Assistance Dogs International and through their support, develop this service throughout Ireland. Providing fully trained assistance dogs for both adults and children with a wide range of disabilities, free of charge.

Disability can lead to isolation, loss of confidence and feelings of low self-esteem. Irish Dogs for the Disabled trains dogs to assist with practical, everyday tasks to help a disabled person live life to the full. Enable them to take on new activities and become active members of their community. For one disabled adult it may simply mean being able to do a weekly shop, for another the ability to return to work or to allow a disabled mother to look after her children or even giving a disabled child independence from a parent by being able to help themselves.

Irish Dogs for the Disabled is a pioneering charity that trains specially selected dogs to carry out a range of practical tasks to assist disabled children and adults in order to achieve greater independence. We are a young charity and we see the first of our dogs entering into their partnerships, with over thirty dogs in training our future looks bright. Each dog is specifically trained to meet the individual needs of each client with physical disabilities.

An assistance dog can act as a great ice-breaker enabling our clients to break out of the isolation often experienced through disability. Every dog is trained to help with simple everyday tasks such as opening doors, picking up the morning post, emptying the washing machine, even retrieving dropped items such as a TV remote, keys or a wallet.

Many of our partnerships now feel confident enough to take on new activities and become active members of their community. For one disabled adult it may simply mean being able to do a weekly shop, for another the ability to return to work or to allow a disabled mother to look after her children. A disabled child can ask his dog to carry a bag home from school.

Every assistance dog trained by the charity offers practical help to the people we support. Our work with physically disabled adults and children opens doors to independence, giving a new sense of confidence and freedom, often long forgotten. Children too are benefiting from assistance dogs giving a new sense of purpose and hope for the future.

Irish Dogs for the Disabled currently receives no government funding so relies completely on voluntary contributions to further its work. By making a donation or sponsoring some much needed equipment for Irish Dogs for the Disabled you can help us to change the lives of many disabled adults and children.

## Working with an Assistance Dog

Who do we help?

### Adult Partnerships

Every dog is specially trained to help with practical tasks that many able bodied people take for granted. Each dog is assessed upon entering training to identify their individual strengths and weakness and based on this assessment; dogs are matched accordingly to the most suitable client, on our waiting list.

Below find some of the areas in which an assistance dog can assist you;

- Opening and closing doors
- Helping to dress and undress
- Barking to raise the alarm in an emergency
- Retrieving items such as mobile telephones or dropped articles like keys or a bag
- Emptying the washing machine

- Retrieving named articles such as slippers, gloves or a remote control
- Switching the lights on and off
- Brining in the milk and fetching the post
- Pressing a Pedestrian Crossing button
- Reaching up to shop-counters and carry a shopping basket
- Helping people to walk by providing a stable base and forward motion

A registered Assistance Dog with Irish Dogs for the Disabled provides an extension of the disabled person's abilities, and as such is allowed by law to accompany their disabled partner into public places such as shops, restaurants and also public transport.

Irish Dogs for the Disabled accepts adult applications from people with many different types of physical disability and assesses each application on how a dog could help, not on the type of disability. The strength of Assistance Dog ownership lies in the partnership created between disabled person and dog. Full training is provided to assist the new owner with every aspect of the dog's care. This includes everything from feeding and grooming, free-running advice, to the practical task-work the dogs provide.

### Children's Teams

Here at Irish Dogs for the Disabled we believe that by training a dog to have special skills will provide not just independence but also give therapeutic care and further enhance the development of a disabled child. A child's Assistance Dog will be trained in tasks such as retrieving dropped items, opening doors and helping remove a jacket or pair of socks and shoes as with our adult services. But a major contribution will be the unconditional love that a canine friend can provide.

As the relationship between dog and child develops, it is expected that the dogs will help with physiotherapy. For children who need regular practice at moving their upper body or by improving their hand-eye coordination, a dog could be trained to 'mirror' stretching exercises or play a 'throw and catch' game of ball with a child.

An Irish Dogs for the Disabled Assistance Dog Team is comprised of a trained dog (Assistance Dog), a child with a physical disability (referred to as the Client), and a family member or someone from the client's close support network (referred to as the

Team Leader). By training a Team Leader to assist with handling, the team can reach its full potential. Team

Leaders are generally adult family members (parents, guardians) or primary Care giver whom lives with and interact extensively with the client. Team Leaders learn and become skilled in dog handling and facilitation techniques that promote responsiveness and interaction between the dog and the client. It's important to remember that like any child, support will need to be provided by an adult when controlling a dog.

### **Our Dogs**

We carefully select each of our puppies before entering them onto our puppy socialisation programme; this is to ensure the greatest level of success with each dog. Irish Dogs for the Disabled train mainly Labradors and Golden Retrievers and first crosses of the two, however we also consider other breeds from time to time. Each puppy is then placed with one of our puppy socialiser families.

### **The Role of a Puppy Socialiser**

Puppy socialising is a crucial part of Assistance Dogs' work. Although fun, it requires a great deal of personal time, responsibility and a commitment from the entire family. However raising an assistance dog puppy is truly an unforgettable experience, one that many find themselves repeating again and again. The end result, however, is life changing for the person whom receives, a very special companion indeed.

Our puppy socialisers are the most amazing people, playing a vital role in the early socialisation and education of Assistance dogs. The aim of puppy socialising is to produce a puppy that is socially well behaved, friendly and responsive to the handler. It is also important that the puppy is at ease in all environments, including town conditions, is relaxed and confident when using all types of transport and learns an acceptable standard of behaviour on the lead. As each puppy is an individual, our staff will advise on the best way to achieve good results and the most appropriate time to introduce the puppy to these new environments.

From about eight weeks of age, puppies start their early training in the home. Each family opens their home and hearts to a little puppy, raising it with lots of love and special training, so the puppy can go onto advanced training, where it learns all about

becoming an assistance dog. The socialisers are responsible for the puppy's care, safety, and behaviour in the home and out in public, as well as basic obedience skills. Puppy Socialiser is supplied with food, veterinary expenses and all equipment necessary to get the puppy through its first 12mths of development. They must also commit to monthly meetings for the association to assess the puppy's progress.

### Client Training Courses

Partnership training takes place on a residential course of up to two weeks. In the safe environment of the Nano Nagle Centre, partnerships begin with getting to know each other, learning every aspect of dog ownership. Our trainee partnerships will make visits to the local supermarket, shops and cafes, supported by an experienced instructor, helping to boost confidence in external environments. Back at home aftercare is continued, initially visiting three/four times a week, gradually reducing down to twice yearly. Aftercare is an essential part of the Charity's work helping the partnership to grow and to check on welfare this is also supported by regionally-based aftercare volunteers.

### Aftercare

The aftercare service is an essential part of our commitment to the development and welfare of our trained partnerships and teams. Following the initial training, regular aftercare visits are made by an instructor to provide training in the home and local area. As the partnership/team establishes these visits are reduced to annually aftercare visits, combined with twice yearly visits to the client's local vet. Often these are performed by trained aftercare volunteers with back-up support from our instructors. Additional aftercare support will be provided where necessary.

### Costs of Assistance Dog Ownership

#### Applicant's costs

The **Applicant** would be expected to meet the following costs:

Medical fee approx €75 - returnable on request if application is declined (GP fees vary)

Qualification fee - €10 - returned if partnership dissolved by Charity

Travel to Training Centre or other appropriate venue of the Charity's choice for assessment

All adaptations made to the home or garden to securely house a dog e.g. An average 10ft x 10ft panel fenced toileting run is likely to cost around €150

### **Dog Costs**

These should be taken as a guide only. Your Vet would be able to advise current costs.

Food - €600 per year (average)

Vaccination against disease - €100 per year (dependant on vaccinations received)

Anti worm treatment - €45 per year

Anti parasitic treatment (flea/tick) - €90 per year

Toys and bedding - €150 (at owner's discretion)

Bones, treats, rewards - €54 per year (at owner's discretion)

Bi yearly visits to our local vet - €120 average

Prior to applying for assistance dog, please makes sure that you have a suitable vet near your home and that this vet has the suitable veterinary facilities to fully care for an assistance dog. The vet must be aware of record keeping and the importance of keeping the organisation aware of the dogs on going veterinary health.

### **Applying for an Assistance Dog**

#### **Who can apply?**

Generally any person's who suffer from any kind of impairment which severely restricts the functions of a normal, healthy, active life, may apply to be considered as a possible beneficiary of the Charity. We do not provide assistance dogs for the visually impaired or for families of children with autism. Adult applications can be taken from the age of 16 and there is currently no upper age limit in place. Our Children's Assistance Dog service is for 7 - 16 year olds.

### **STANDARDS AND ETHICS REGARDING CLIENTS**

In keeping with our purpose of helping people with disabilities achieve greater independence and improvement to the quality of their lives.

Applicants have a right to be considered to receive an assistance dog regardless of race, sex, religion or beliefs.

Applicants have the right to be treated with respect and dignity at all times in their dealings with the association's staff and representatives.

### Eligibility Criteria

The following are the minimum that must be achieved by any prospective applicant before receiving and completing an application for an Assistance Dog. Compliance and achievement of the criteria does not mean automatic acceptance of an application for training with a dog. For a children's application the same criteria apply, with the addition of a parent/guardian also forming part of the team.

- The applicant must live at a permanent place of residence within a geographical area stated by Irish Dogs for the Disabled.
- The applicant must be able to travel to a venue of the Charity's choice to undertake an assessment of your physical capabilities and learning skills in accordance with the standards required for assistance dog ownership.
- The applicant must have an area accessible by themselves to a minimum of 10ft x 10ft at ground level that can be allocated to use for a dogs' toileting purposes.
- The applicants must personally be able to provide a means of feeding, giving water and grooming the dog.
- The applicant must be capable of independently completing two 40 minute walks/outings per day with the dog.
- The applicant must require three distinct tasks from at least three of the following task groups:

**Retrieve** - to include three different textured items

**Pull** - internal and external doors, clothes

**Push** - internal and external switches, doors and clothes

**Speak** - barking to alert attention

**Environmental walking/outings** - suburban, urban and rural

Prior to acceptance of the dog, the applicant will attend a training course on all aspects of handling the dog and its care. This course may vary in length of time, its format and its venue and the above being at the absolute discretion of the Charity.

The applicant must be able to provide access to a Veterinary Surgeon for routine preventative treatments and emergency treatment.

Whilst Irish Dogs for the Disabled constantly seeks to maintain the lowest possible costs for an applicant or assistance dog owner, if we are not financially able to meet the costs, then the applicant agrees to undertake all identified costs relating to Assistance Dog ownership i.e. insurance excesses; feeding, worming, flea treatment and equipment etc.

Please note that as part of the application process, eligibility will also be dependent on a home check, permission from landlords/housing associations etc (where applicable) and employers (should the applicants wish to take the assistance dog to work).

All application information received will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality and respect. However, Irish Dogs for the Disabled retains the right to use this information in relationships with Sponsors and Accreditation organisations.

### How to Apply

Applicants can apply by website, telephone, e-mail or letter. Unfortunately, as a small charity we have limited resources at present enabling us to only be able to train a small number of dogs each year. Once enquiries have been received the application form is sent out to the applicant.

On receipt of a completed application form, we will consider it along with all other applicants and, if successful, it will be progressed to the next stage. A medical form will then be sent to the applicant's GP and on its return it will be considered for suitability. If successful, we will then arrange an 'Assessment', which could be either at our Centre or at the applicant's home, depending on which is most suitable for both the applicant and the Charity. This assessment allows the opportunity to discuss fully the implications of dog ownership, the type of dog needed and the tasks it would be required to perform.



The charity will then consider the full application, taking into account all available information. Once a decision has been made about an application, the applicant will be informed. Where the applicant is accepted for training, their name is placed on a waiting list and the 'matching' phase then begins. Matching the needs of the applicant against the strengths of a dog in training is perhaps one of the key elements to ensuring each partnership becomes a success. Only when the Instructor is hopeful of a potential match do the client and dog meet and then if the match is deemed appropriate, training arrangements are agreed. The association is always willing to inform the applicant of the progress of their application, on request.

***Priority on our waiting list is given to applicants awaiting a replacement dog.***

Having read the eligibility criteria, if you wish to apply for an assistance dog then, please download an application form from our web site [www.dogsfordisabled.ie](http://www.dogsfordisabled.ie). Alternatively contact the charity directly at Irish Dogs for the Disabled at Acorn Business Campus, Mahon Industrial Estate, Blackrock, Cork.



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