

Assistance Dog Affiliate programme

The affiliate programme allows more flexibility with regards to the breed used. The puppy will be owned by the family and the training is broken into stages with the dog needing to pass each stage before beginning the next. The training is intense and mirrors as much as possible the training we give our assistance dogs that are trained “in house”. It requires a lot of commitment from the family not only to attend regular training sessions but also to maintain training in between sessions. Before a family is accepted onto our affiliate programme, there will be an assessment to include advice on suitable breeds. It is important that the dog has the correct temperament and has the traits that are needed for an assistance dog. We will discuss finding the right breeder and what to look for in a puppy.

There are two training programmes to choose from.

Affiliate Programme Option 1

This programme is for families who live in Kent, no more than a 45-minute drive from either Sittingbourne or West Malling.

Stage 1. This is to start no later than 12 weeks of age. This consists of 20 x 90-minute sessions of 1:1 basic training in Sittingbourne or West Malling. This stage needs to take place over no more than 12 weeks to ensure that we are doing the correct training at the correct age and that the intensity of the training is right for the dog. This will include lead walking, recall, dog to dog socialisation and basic obedience. You will be provided with advice for within the home. It is essential that this advice is followed to ensure that your dog will be able to reach the standard required to be an assistance dog in the future.

Session 6 or 7 and 19 or 20 will take place in your family home to ensure that the dog is demonstrating good manners in the home and that there are no training issues or interventions required. You will have ongoing online or phone support during the training. There will be some socialisation in shops during this stage although there will be no jacket given to take home. Some of these sessions will take place with your dog and trainer whilst others will focus on the dog and handler partnership and training. You will be given a training record book to keep track of what happens during each session and to be able to make notes not only during the training, but throughout the time between sessions.

Successful completion of stage 1 will mean that monies raised through Tree of Hope will be able to be used for future training.

Stage 2. This stage is all focussed on community access preparation. There are again 20 x 90-minute sessions in this stage although the intensity is increased, and it takes place over 10 weeks. During this training stage you will be trained to take your dog to a variety of social environments, for example: café's, cinema, playgrounds, soft play centres, medical clinics etc. As with stage 1, there will be a combination of the dog being trained with their trainer and combined dog and handler training. After session 5 in this stage, you will be given a loan training jacket to allow you to practice between training sessions.

Stage 3. This stage will include 25 x 90-minute sessions. The training will focus on refining the skills learnt in the first two stages and training the dog to play 3 games that can act as therapy games and/or intervention. There will be a greater focus on practice between training sessions, so this stage takes place over 30 weeks. The 20th session is a mock public access test and then the remaining 4 sessions will be working on any areas that need improvement.

Stage 4. Stage 4 is your public access test. You are allowed up to two attempts of the test without any additional costs. Following successful completion of your public access test, your dog will be given its own Supporting Paws Affiliated Assistance Dog Jacket and a Supporting Paws Affiliated Assistance Dog ID Card. A spare jacket can be purchased if required. 4-6 weeks after your sign off you will have a 1:1 to make sure that everything is going well. You will have continued online and telephone support for 8 weeks after your sign off test.

Affiliate Programme Option 2

This programme is for families living over 45 minutes away from Sittingbourne or West Malling in Kent.

Stage 1. Residential Training: 12 weeks in duration. The puppy must be 8-11 weeks at the start of the programme. This covers everything in stage 1 and 2 of the Option 1 programme plus some of the requirements for stage three.

- Toilet training
- Crate training to aid with sleeping through the night and toilet training
- Positive association with children, cats, other dogs, noises, traffic, grooming etc.
- Regular video and photo updates of your puppy's progress as well as regular opportunities to meet up with the puppy in Kent.
- Sit on command
- Community access preparation
- Training around distractions
- Training in busy environments
- Verbal recall in busy environments
- Whistle recall in busy environments
- Training in a variety of environments to suit the needs of your family
- Loose lead walking in a busy environment
- Good manners in the house when meeting and greeting people and dogs.
- Impulse control.

- Two handler days (one to be the day of transition) The puppy then moves to your family home.

Stage 2.

There are 2 options to choose from in this stage.

Option 1: Zoom training x 20 sessions and 5 face to face training session in West Malling with our Head Trainer.

This will take place once a week at a time agreed with your trainer and will be a way of ensuring that your dog is maintaining the training that it learnt during the residential training. The face to face training will be spread throughout the 25 weeks of stage two and will cover dog and handler training.

Option 2: Zoom training x 10 sessions and 2 weeks Residential Training.

You will have weekly zoom training calls to ensure that the training is going well and that there are not any problems. Then in between weeks 12-18 there will be two weeks residential training before resuming the zoom training as your dog heads towards stage three.

Stage 3. 6 Weeks residential training, 3 handler days and skills sign off including one assistance dog jacket on successful completion of the community access test. Stage 3 training will focus on refining the skills learnt in the first two stages, training three games that can act as a therapy games and/or intervention. There will be a greater focus on community access and preparing the dog and handler for the public access test. There will be three days where the handler will be expected to travel to Kent to prepare for their community access test.

Training length and intensity of affiliate programme

During the training you can join unlimited training walks with Kent K9 in West Malling which will enable you to have additional support and training as well as getting your dog to focus when working with other dogs. The recommended minimum amount of training is 120 hours. Our “in house” dogs receive between 400-500 training hours. This affiliate programme gives the dog 97.5 hours training, it is expected that the shortfall in hours will be made up (and exceeded) by training done with the handler in between sessions. If a family decide to attend training walks in West Malling, then they will be in excess of the 120-minimum recommendation.

