

Children's Assistance Dog Programme

Our children's assistance dog programme is available to children aged between 5 and 12 years of age. Supporting Paws will train a Labrador Retriever to work with your child. The puppy starts its training with us between 8-9 weeks of age and you are given regular updates on the puppy's progress, as well as ample opportunity to meet the puppy and for it to stay with you during the training.

We understand the importance of bonding with your puppy and aim to arrange the initial meeting before the puppy reaches 12 weeks of age. The first meeting takes place in Kent and there will be a chance for you to ask questions as well as time alone for private bonding. Owing to the age of the puppy, these visits last between 60-90 minutes but are a fantastic opportunity to get to know your puppy as well as create some wonderful memories.

Following the assessment process, you will be given a training plan for your dog. Once we have started training your puppy, we will send you an updated plan along with a request for any recent information regarding the needs of your child.

Our children's assistance dogs are handled by the child's parent or carer. Handler training is conducted throughout the training schedule to make it a natural and gradual process, reducing pressure anxiety for the handler and dog.

For families who do not live in Kent, we will require at least one overnight stay for residential training. Before making an application you will need to consider any arrangements needed to look after any family members or pets whilst you are away, as this training is essential to the dog passing its assessment. It is possible for the whole family to come to Kent during the handler training, providing just the handler attends the training sessions.

Throughout the process we conduct ongoing assessments of the dog, as well as the relationship between the dog and their handler.

There will be two planned assessments. The first will be a skills test, ensuring that the handler and dog are confident in the full range of basic skills covered. This enables them to prepare for their public access test.

Following successful completion of the public access test the dog will be given a blue assistance dog jacket, replacing their green training jacket.

The public access test will not take place until the dog is at least 12 months of age.

