

Becoming a Supporting Paws Foster Carer

By providing a loving and caring family home for one of our Supporting Paws' dogs during their training, you will be helping an entire family on their journey to owning a fully qualified assistance dog. We are sure you will love every minute of it! We have created this pack to explain the key areas of being a foster carer so that you have a more detailed understanding of what is required.

If you wish to apply, please email hello@supportingpaws.co.uk. Once we have received a completed application form, we shall arrange to meet with you and one of our puppies in training.

We provide training prior to the placement of your first dog so that you feel fully supported in the process. The time between being accepted as a Foster Carer and having a puppy placed with you is between 3-6 months.

CRATE TRAINING

All of our Supporting Paws dogs are trained to use a crate. This training **must** continue when they are with their foster family. Crates are to be used overnight and for rest periods during the day. See daily routine section for more detail.

When living in an additional needs household, it is extremely important that our dogs are able to settle in their crates when asked. We make sure all of our dogs see their crates as a comfortable and safe place to be. Keeping up with a routine that allows them plenty of time to relax in their crate will help enormously when transitioning into their forever home.

The crate should only be used by the Supporting Paws' dog. Please make sure children and other pets do not have access to the crate. Always make sure the crate is used in a positive manner and never as a punishment.

On average, our dogs use their crates four to five times per day, ranging from 20 minutes to a couple of hours, depending upon the situation. Check the daily routine for your dog to make sure you are using it the correct amount.

PHOTOS

Our families are located all over the UK, which makes visiting their dogs during their training very difficult. For this reason, we send each family daily photos of their dog. This helps them to see how they are growing and progressing, as well as giving that all important feel of involvement even though they are far away.

Three daily photos must be sent via WhatsApp.

Please make sure there is variety in the photos, i.e. in jacket, off lead walking, around the house, on lead walking, and so on.

Photos of our supporting Paws dogs in jackets are not to be used on any business or corporate social media sites, websites or to promote any personal business.

WHISTLE

We train all our dogs to the recall whistle. Depending upon the age/level of training your foster dog is at whilst living with you, you may or may not be required to use one. A whistle and instruction will be provided if needed.

COMMUNITY ACCESS

By the time our dogs are ready to stay with a foster family, they will have started their Community Access training. This training needs to be upheld during their entire stay. For a dog that is training for community access a working jacket will be provided. This must be worn any time you are carrying out Community Access training/work. When in training, our dogs are required to go out in the community a minimum of 2 times per week. This can be a school run, a trip to the supermarket, a visit to a café/restaurant, high street shopping, etc.

Community Access training will be given to the main handler in the foster family.

WHATSAPP GROUP

Each of our foster families will be added to our “Supporting Paws Foster” group when they have a dog staying with them. This group is to be used for any general questions and sending the daily photos. Charlotte and Kate are always on hand to answer any questions or concerns privately should you not wish to post them in the group. Their mobile numbers will be provided if you are successful in your application. Please keep the chat in this group to a sensible level and focused on the foster dogs.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a great way for us to promote Supporting Paws and stay in contact with our families. We will put up daily posts using the photos from our foster families, which allow everyone to see how the dogs are progressing.

If any family should contact a foster person directly, this must be reported to us immediately. The families we are helping are in a very vulnerable place and can sometimes act in strange ways. For this reason, we would like to make sure there isn't any contact between foster families and supporting paws families on Facebook, any other social media or by phone.

AROUND THE HOUSE

Our dogs undergo a high level of training both in and out of the house. We would expect any foster family to maintain this level of training. With this in mind, please make sure the below is adhered to:

- No counter surfing
- No jumping up
- No feeding from the table
- No feeding of human foods, such as biscuits or crisps

Our dogs are trained to be part of the family, so they love cuddles and being involved with the fun. Having plenty of time to do this throughout their day is also an important part of their training. Playing ball in the garden or playing with tug toys in the house is a great way to keep their level of interaction up. However, try not to let things get too excited. If your foster dog starts to get a little over the top, then give them a time out in their crate. Always make sure this is done in a positive manner and never as a punishment.

EXERCISE

All of our dogs must have two off lead walks per day. The length of their walks will depend upon their age, which we will provide for each foster family on a dog by dog basis.

Allowing adequate time for our dogs to be off lead exploring and socialising with other dogs is an extremely important part of their daily routine. When they are off-lead they must not be wearing a jacket. This is time for them to act like a dog and not to be working.

It is also extremely important that they keep up with their lead walking skills. All of our dogs will be able to walk with a loose lead when they join their foster families. Keeping up with practicing this is vital for their training and progression. Should you start to have problems in this area, please contact Kate for some help with training.

PROVISIONS AND EQUIPMENT

All of the below will be provided by Supporting Paws. Should you start to run low on anything, or you have any problems with the equipment you have, please contact Charlotte.

- Bedding
- Feed
- Treats & chews
- Harness
- Working jacket
- Lead
- Recall whistle (if required)
- Crate
- Bowls

- Flea & worm treatments

DAILY ROUTINE

Below is an example of daily routine for one of our Supporting Paws' dogs. It is an approximate guide for a 6 month old puppy. Each dog will be provided with their own routine. This is just a guide to give you an idea of how structured their day needs to be. Whilst each of our dogs are treated like a family pet with plenty of time to be a dog, they are also there to carry out a very important role within the family. Adhering to the routines we provide you is a really important part of being a foster family. The most important elements of the routines are having adequate rest time in the crate, adequate exercise time (including community access) and adequate time to just be a dog.

7:00	Wake up and in garden for toilet
7:30	Breakfast
8:00	Walk (50 to 60 mins to include off lead time)
9:15	Garden for toilet
9:30	Rest time in crate
11:30	Out in to the garden for the toilet
12:00	Free time in the house/garden/playing/out and about
15:30	Rest in crate with something to chew
16:30	Walk (45 to 60 mins to include off lead time)
18:00	Dinner
18:30	Free time in the house/garden/playing
21:00	In the garden for toilet and then crate for bedtime

SUPPORTING PAWS' FAMILIES

Due to the delicate nature of our business and the stressful time our families are going through, we insist that none of our foster families make direct contact with any of our Supporting Paws families. This is not only to protect them, but to also protect you. Each of our families will have gone through an extremely tough time to get to the point they are at when they start on their Supporting Paws

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journey. Emotions are running high and as you can imagine, the whole process is a very delicate one. For this reason, Charlotte and Kate will be the main contact for all families. Any information that you need for the foster dog you have, will come through them. If you feel a family needs to know something about their dog, then please contact us, so that we are able to pass on the information accordingly.

WEEKLY TRAINING

Each foster dog must attend training sessions in either West Malling or Sittingbourne, on dates and times to be arranged with Supporting Paws and the foster family. This will allow us to monitor our dogs, advance their training and to also help you with any challenges or questions you have.

Whilst we ask our foster families to maintain the level of training the dog is at when they arrive, we won't ask you to teach the dog anything new. Specific training will be carried out by the Supporting Paws Team on dates and times arranged on a week to week basis. Each dog will be at a different stage in its training and will therefore require different levels of training.