

## **The Companion Dog Training Programme**

The main difference between a companion and an assistance dog is that companion dogs do not have community access training. The dog's initial training is exactly the same as our assistance dogs, with good basic obedience, good manners in the home, recall, roadside safety and loose lead walking all being taught and assessed throughout the dog's time with us. The companion dog's training is also shorter than an assistance dog's because they are not going to be working in the community.

### **Which dog is right for you?**

Some clients will know whether they want a companion or an assistance dog before applying. If you are unsure, we are happy to advise. Many clients are often looking for a dog to work with their child or teenager to help with anxiety. The way that autism impacts on a person's life changes a great deal during adolescence and so it isn't always easy to anticipate the long-term level of support that will be required. Some people want to have the friendship and companionship of a well-trained dog to share their life with, but they may not feel ready to have an assistance dog at that stage. Having an assistance dog can be a brilliant tool to build confidence and independence, however a child is not able to be the handler of an assistance dog so in order for the dog to be able to work in the community with that child, an adult will need to be present which could in fact reduce that child's independence. Also having an assistance dog in a jacket often creates a lot of attention from the public which may be unwanted or an added stress. If you are unsure, please talk to us and we are happy to advise.

### **Can a companion dog become an assistance dog?**

The transition from companion dog to assistance dog can never be guaranteed, however we are happy to assess the dog if you wish to see if this is possible. Following a successful assessment, we will create a training plan and quotation for you.

### **Companion Dog Training Programme**

The training of a companion dog is an intensive programme which takes place in two sections.

The first section of the training is 4 months long, starting from when the puppy leaves its litter. During this time the puppy follows the same training programme as our assistance dogs. This way they have the same socialisation and experiences so if later a family decide that they want to consider assistance dog training, it is a possibility. At 6 months of age they go to live with their family. At this age, we neuter our assistance dogs and would suggest that companion dog owners do the same. We are able to get this done at our vets prior to them transitioning to your home, although this will occur an additional fee. Please get in touch to discuss if you want us to arrange this for you. At the date that your dog transitions to your family, you will receive handler training and take a skills test so that we know that you and your dog are a confident and competent partnership. The dog is then transferred to your ownership.

The second section of your dog's training is carried out when they are between 10-14 months of age. During this time the dog will be trained in 4 games or interventions to help your child. We will discuss with the family the interventions that they would like prior to the dog beginning this training. The training can take place during a block of residential training or over a longer period with training sessions in Kent. Both options are available we will work with you to discuss the best route. During this training phase, the dog and handler will both be trained to work together on the bespoke interventions.

### **Getting to Know Your Companion Dog**

Our companion dogs come with a book containing information and photos of their life prior to their transition with you. We consistently post information regarding our dogs and puppies in training on social media so this is another way that you can "get to know" your dog before it joins your family. Once you have been matched to your companion dog, we actively encourage families to visit their dog at regular intervals during their training. This allows you to undergo handler training gradually, which means that you are then able to learn about your dog and get the dog responding consistently to you before they move to your family.

