



# SUPPORTING PAWS

animals improving & enabling lives

## FOSTER CARER INFORMATION BOOKLET



## About Us

Supporting Paws is a Community Interest Company (CIC) that trains assistance and companion dogs for a variety of disabilities and needs.

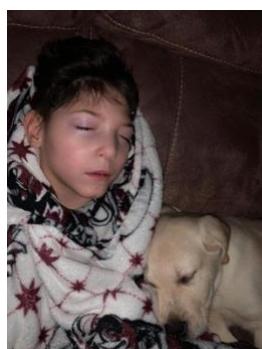
Supporting Paws has two directors, both passionate about how an assistance dog can enhance and change the lives of an entire family.

Kate is an experienced canine behaviourist and trainer, striving to get the best out of canine and human partnerships. Responsible for the training of our dogs, Kate ensures they all reach the required standards and remain happy and confident throughout the training process. Our dogs are trained using positive reward-based training only. Kate is a full member of the Institute of Modern Dog Training (IMDT).

Charlotte is the contact for families making applications and for those accepted on to our programmes. Charlotte has Autism and ADHD and is the parent of a young person with autism and complex and profound learning difficulties. As a teacher, Charlotte has experience of working with several children and young people with a variety of additional needs. Currently studying towards a master's degree in autism, Charlotte is also being trained in a variety of autism therapies and interventions.

We offer a high-quality service tailored to the individual needs of each client.

Supporting Paws is proud to have been awarded a government Disability Confident Committed Award. All the programmes listed on our website are to be used as a guide, as we always strive to cater for the individual needs of every person, family and dog we work with.



## Foster Carer Opportunities

### **Full Time**

This is an 8–12-month volunteering role, as our puppy would live with you in your home following completion of their first stage of training. You will be providing a vital foundation for its future role as a Supporting Paws Assistance Dog. There will be occasions when the dog will be seeing their family, but we will give you as much notice as possible regarding dates for their visit. There will also be at least one longer period when the dog will stay with their family, and again you will be advised of this.

### **Part Time**

This is an 8–12-month volunteering role but would differ to the full-time role as the puppy would spend regular amounts of time with their family. We will always have a fixed pattern for these stays e.g., weekends, or the first week of every month etc.

### **Short Term**

This volunteering role is offering short term placements when the dog's foster carer is on holiday, unwell or for other reasons that means they are unable to stay with their foster family.



## What is involved?

Foster Carers play a vital role in the socialisation and ongoing care of Supporting Paws Assistance Dogs.

- You will need to care for, feed and support the training of the puppy. This is time consuming, and our puppies cannot be left on their own for more than four hours.
- You will be expected to maintain their training levels and take them to their regular training sessions as agreed by their trainer.
- During their stay with you, the puppy must be familiarised with different environments and you will be expected to introduce the puppy to different people, sounds and situations. This will be a natural progression from the training they have received during their first stage of training with us.



## Support

Foster carers receive weekly face to face support from their puppy's trainer. In addition, new Foster carers will receive more regular virtual support. We set up WhatsApp groups with all our Foster Carers which enables you to have ongoing support, share photographs and keep us updated with your dog's progress.

This enables both the trainer and the volunteer to check in and discuss the puppy's progress. It also gives you an opportunity to raise any concerns you may have. The trainer will monitor the puppy's health, care, socialisation and educational development as well as ensure that they are being prepared for their future role with their families.



## Insurance

Whilst we carry full public liability insurance for any injury or accidents that might be caused by our dogs during their training, we will not carry out property insurance for our volunteers.

Puppies, by their very nature, can cause damage in the home unless they are carefully supervised. During the first stage of their training, they will be taught to behave in a home environment, and you would be expected to uphold these behaviours when they are living in your home.

## The Vet

Supporting Paws will pay all veterinary expenses whilst the puppy is in your care. If you have any concerns over the health of your puppy, please contact your trainer immediately, who will arrange veterinary care if needed. All of our dogs are registered at Vets 4 Pets in Sittingbourne.

## Vaccinations

Before arriving at your home, the puppy will be vaccinated with the appropriate vaccine covering all the major diseases.

## Worming & Flea Treatment

All our puppies are given treatment against roundworms before they arrive at your home and they are wormed again at six months of age. Supporting Paws will provide the medication, together with instructions on how to give the treatment as well as general advice as required. Flea treatment will be administered monthly during a training session.

## Neutering

It is Supporting Paw's policy to neuter all dogs. Timing will depend on the individual puppy, but males are usually castrated between eight and nine months of age. The operation will normally be carried out at Vets for Pets in Sittingbourne. Recovery is often very quick, and they return to their normal selves within a few days.



## **What skills or experience are required?**

- Great communication skills
- Excellent interpersonal skills
- Experience with dogs is a great advantage
- Ability to provide a loving and caring environment for the puppy
- Following instructions from your trainer

## **What training and support will I receive?**

- Informative induction to Supporting Paws and the role
- Regular and continued support from your Supporting Paws' Trainer.



## FAQ'S

- **How long will I have my puppy for?**

Your puppy will normally be placed with you for 8-12 months although every dog has a slightly different schedule. We will always keep you updated if this alters.

- **Can I work and foster a Supporting Paws Puppy?**

Yes, feeding, training and generally caring for a puppy's needs on a daily basis is time consuming and particularly when very young they cannot be left on their own for extended periods of time. Our general guideline is up to 4 hours maximum per day.

- **Can I take my puppy to work with me?**

Yes, you can, providing the work environment is suitable and the necessary provisions are made for the puppy. Your trainer can advise you on this during your induction period.

- **Can you foster a Supporting Paws dog if you already have a pet dog?**

Unfortunately, not. The reason being is that our dogs will live as only dogs and we want their foster home to replicate this.

- **Can you foster a Supporting Paws dog if you have a child with Autism or ADHD?**

No, as everyone with autism is different, we don't want to confuse the dog's training by them offering interventions to their Foster Buddy. It would also be difficult for the child to let the dog go at the end of their foster period.

- **Can I foster if I have young children?**

Yes, you can, however, fostering a puppy does require a huge commitment and time as do young children, and balancing the two can be very difficult. Children under the age of 14 are not allowed to walk the puppy but we encourage all families to be involved in some of the puppy's development. We ask all potential foster families to consider the impact of the puppy leaving at the end of the placement on any children before applying to become a foster carer.

- **What happens to my puppy when I go on holiday?**

Sometimes foster carers holidaying in the UK like to take their puppies with them - this is fine providing you check with your trainer first. If this is not possible then we will find the most suitable fosterer to take the puppy or ask their forever family if they would like their puppy to stay with them at this time, if that works within their training schedule.

- **What happens if I am unable to continue my foster placement?**

We ask foster carers to commit to the dog's entire stay which is why we have the selection process in place and ask potential foster families to think carefully before committing to becoming a foster carer. At the same time, we also appreciate that sometimes circumstances change. If this happens, we ask that you notify us as soon as possible and we will aim to have the dog rehomed with an alternative foster carer within 7 days.

- **What happens when my dog transitions to their forever family?**

We hope that you will want to foster another one of our dogs! We know that it can be difficult to say goodbye to a puppy you have had as part of your family. When you are 6-8 weeks from the end of your placement, we ask you to let us know if you would like to have another puppy.



## NEXT STEPS

If you would like to apply to become a foster carer, please complete our application form and we shall be in touch.

If we proceed with your application, then we will arrange to meet you for a walk with one of our dogs and tell you more about the role and answer any questions you may have. If after this walk we all want to progress with the application, then we will contact a referee and once all the background checks are complete, then we will be in touch when a suitable puppy is nearing the end of their first stage of training. We will then arrange for you to meet the puppy for a walk in Sittingbourne (this is where all our puppies are for their first level training) and then the puppy will spend a few hours at your house, if this all goes well, then the puppy will do a 3 night stay so that you have a clear idea of what the commitment entails, and all being well the puppy will then move to your family at the end of their first level training.

