



Assistance Dogs for Families of Children with Autism

Dear Sir / Madam,

Thank you for your interest in our Assistance Dogs Programme for Families of Children with Autism. We are delighted to present to you some relevant information regarding our Assistance Dog Programme.

Please take the time to read this information and if you are interested in progressing, complete the Application Form - Part 1 and return same.

Please complete this application only if you feel that the benefit to your intended recipient will outweigh the care, financial commitment, time and ongoing training an Assistance Dog requires.

Please note:

- **The primary disability must be Autism and we require written evidence of the diagnosis from an official body.**
- **Applications can only be considered for children up to a maximum of 8 years of age, as training children over the age of 10 is not generally successful due to the strength of the child, and due to the fact that our current waiting list is approximately three years.**
- **In the case of children who are 10 or older, you should refer to our recently established Companion Dog Programme (please request further information).**

Due to an overwhelming response to this programme, the waiting list is approximately three years.

Your place on the waiting list will be determined by the date of receipt of a fully completed Application Form – Part 1.

Please be advised that it is essential that you read through all documents carefully to ensure your family and child fulfil the necessary criteria to be able to pursue your application.

If you have any queries or require clarification regarding the criteria please contact the Client Services Administrator on 021 4878200 or lo-call 1850 506 300.

Assuring you of our best intentions at all times,
Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind



Overview of the Assistance Dogs for Families of Children with Autism Programme

The Assistance Dogs for Families of Children with Autism programme is designed to provide quality of life improvements to the Autistic child and their family. The intervention is based on the principle of providing a fully trained dog to the parents and the autistic child and providing them with the training and support to ensure that the dog works to the maximum of its abilities.

While no autistic child is typical, the behaviours exhibited can lead to isolation, (lack of interaction with family, siblings, other people), mobility issues, sociability issues, lack of awareness of danger and limits.

In these circumstances for the parents and family members the general feeling and quality of life is one of high stress, lack of "normality" in social situations, (not being able to go shopping, restaurant, travel, leisure.) There are real issues of safety with the children having a high tendency to bolt in open spaces.

Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind (IGDB) has the expertise in training guide dogs and providing training in their safe use to guide blind and visually impaired people. This expertise can be transferred to a dog for use with an autistic child. The dog is the same breed, age, and temperament as a guide dog but its training differs in that it is trained to work with and react to an autistic child and their family. The parents are trained in the use of the dog and how to get their child to interact with it and use it as a guide, support and stabilizer.

The pilot programme started at the beginning of 2005 when three families were trained at our National Headquarters & Training Centre in Cork. Based on the very positive results to date and the relative ease at which we have been able to develop and deliver the service, the success of the programme with the families and the impact it has on their lives, a decision was taken in December 2005 to offer the service full time, subject to available funding.

The impact of the Assistance Dog on the child and their family has exceeded expectations. Each Assistance Dog wears a special blue jacket, which has a small handle attached. There is a belt attached to the child's waist and short lead attaching the child to the dog. The parent, using an extended lead from behind or the side, then controls both the child and the dog. The dog responds to the verbal commands from the parent who controls speed and direction. Autistic children often lack a sense of danger so the fact that the child is attached to the dog means the parent can have confidence that the child is safe without hanging onto a sleeve or hood. If the child tries to bolt, the dog is trained to stand and wait.



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The dog brings independence not just for the children but for their parents. Parents participating in the programme have spoken of significant moderations in the behaviour of the children. The companionship, confidence and independence that an Assistance Dog offers an autistic child empowers the child to participate in education, social and leisure activities, reduces the stress associated with interacting with other people and getting involved in social situations. Parents have spoken of how the trained Assistance Dog has moderated their child's behaviours which has left them feeling less isolated in social settings.

IGDB raises almost 85% of its annual income from Fundraising. We receive Government funding of 15%.

In 2010 we will spend over €4.7million on services.

The Assistance Dogs programme is offered free of charge to all its participants, although all IGDB Service Users are requested to participate in fundraising and other appropriate functions.

Benefits cited by parents include:

- After a child attempted to bolt, the dog did not move so the neither did the child. The parents simply guided the child back to hold his dog and he did so without any fuss. The child's mother noted that in the past, if the child ran off, it would have resulted in the child being dragged back kicking and screaming.
- Child gives his dog the command to wait when they come to the kerb. The child is now more aware of traffic and for the need to stop when they come to the kerb.
- Family used to find shopping and walking negative experiences so they would avoid them altogether. Now they say it is great to be part of the community again.
- Parents noted how much the child loves the dogs, saying that he helps them to get the dog's food ready every day. The child even brushes the dog's hair and now allows his parents to brush his hair, which would have been an impossible task in the past.
- Child found the concept of possessives (who owns what) easier to learn when his dog's items were introduced first as he knows his dog's items so well.
- Child is more adaptable to change since he received the dog. By giving commands through the dog, the child accepts redirection with minimal fuss.
- Parents noted how child's spontaneous speech has improved since being partnered with the dog.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The acceptance of the family and child to the programme will depend on various criteria being met from information gathered at interview/assessment and from the application forms.

The application process is as follows:

A. Application Form – Part 1:

Submit completed Application Form – Part 1, including documentation supporting the diagnosis of autism from an official body. Please note that your place on the waiting list will be determined by the date of receipt of a fully completed application.

We have a policy of acknowledging all received applications within 10 working days, so please contact us if you do not receive an acknowledgement.

B. Application Form – Part 2:

The current waiting list is approximately 3 years long. During this time you will be requested to complete Part 2 of the Application Form. Please complete this in full when requested. This will give us more in-depth information regarding your family's needs.

C. Child Assessment:

You will be invited to attend a one-day Child Assessment which will take place here at the Training Headquarters, Model Farm Road, Cork. One or both parent/guardian must accompany the applicant child. If this assessment proves to be successful, you will remain on the waiting list until a suitable dog has been found for you.

D. Home Visit:

A brief visit to your home will then be arranged to ensure that your home is fully prepared for a dog to be placed there.

E. Matching Visit:

When a suitable dog has been identified for your family a Matching Visit will be arranged to introduce the applicant child to the dog. This matching visit may take place at your home or you may be invited to attend the Training Centre. If the match is successful, you will then be advised of the Training Class dates.

SELECTION ACCEPTANCE CRITERIA

Need - Benefit - Use

1. The primary disability must be Autism and we require evidence of the diagnosis from an official body.
2. Applications can **only** be considered for children up to a maximum of 8 years of age, as training children over the age of 10 is not generally successful due to the strength of the child, and due to the fact that our current waiting list is approximately three years.
3. The Parents/Guardian are committed to be involved in the project and are happy to be interviewed during the assessment process by an instructor and an independent evaluator.
4. The Parents/Guardian must be prepared to provide periodic written information regarding the behaviour, interaction and development of their Child/ Family Unit and the Assistance Dog, as requested by IGDB in order to assist in the ongoing evaluation of the Assistance Dog Programme.
5. The Parents/Guardian must show commitment towards the training of the dog and be able to attend a 5 day residential training course at IGDB, Model Farm Road, Cork. This is followed by the child training at home during the following weeks.
6. The Parents/Guardian must be able to demonstrate that they have the commitment and motivation to care for and exercise the dog as taught by the instructor.
7. There must be one parent at home to look after the dog during the day. A dog can not be left unattended for more than four hours as it may become anxious and stressed.
8. There must be a safe and secure environment for the dog to live inside the Family home and have suitable facilities for relieving itself.
9. Prior to attending training at the Training Centre; permission must be given to obtain a medical report from the family doctor for the Parent/Guardian attending training.
10. Mobility needs: the child must be physically able to walk on short journeys and be happy to make contact with the dog and display no signs of fear.



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11. Motivation: The family must accept the responsibilities and disadvantages of dog ownership and use the Assistance Dog sufficiently to justify its provision.
12. The Parents/Guardian must be able to absorb and implement instruction and exercise control of the dog.
13. The Parents/Guardian must be prepared to comply with the terms of the Agreement and be aware that the dog may be withdrawn if it is not being cared for or is being used in an inappropriate manner.
14. Other pets: Families that already have a pet dog may not be considered for selection as the presence of another dog could cause training and behaviour issues.
15. Other children: Other children in the family must understand that this is a special dog and that they will not be able to treat it like a family pet, as initially the main bond must develop with the autistic child.

The benefits of an Assistance Dog are as follows: -

- Increase child's independence
- Control child by commanding dog
- Teaches the child responsibility
- Full public access to shops, restaurants, etc.
- Positive changes in behaviour, lower aggression level
- Comforts when upset

The provision of an Assistance Dog may be inappropriate in a family for the following reasons:

- Family member allergic to dogs
- Dog hair and muddy paws unwelcome
- Cleaning up dog faeces
- Family member afraid of dog
- Existing pets
- Lack of adequate facilities