



Assistance Dogs in the Spotlight

During November we passed a major milestone for the Assistance Dog Programme for families of children with Autism when we trained our 100th family. Eamon Hoey from Navan trained with our final class for 2009 and has taken Assistance Dog Kadey home to his seven year old son, Shane.

Eamon says: "At first I was really nervous. I'd always liked dogs but never had one before. Once I got to the Training Course, I got to see just how well trained these dogs are and what an incredible help they are to the people that depend on them. Initially, Shane didn't pay too much attention to Kadey but after a few days home, we were able to venture out together with Kadey. For the first time, we were able to get through a meal at MacDonald's as a family, without any incidence. In fact, previously an outing to MacDonald's would have been quick, but this time we stayed for 40 minutes. It was amazing."

The funding issue

In recent weeks, our Assistance Dog Programme has made headlines in various media, including RTE News, confirming the need for statutory funding.

Our Chief Executive, Pdraig Mallon, explains: "To date, the programme has been supported by a series of once off grants from

the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2005 – 2008) and the Department of Education (2008 – 2009) for which we have been extremely grateful. While lobbying continues, there is no statutory funding in place for 2010."

The cost of operating the programme in 2010 is approximately €1,5 million per annum with all training, aftercare and support offered free of charge. And while the team at Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind have always fundraised to support the majority of the revenue required, losing funding at this crucial time is a concern.

Pdraig continues: "The Assistance Dog Programme has exceeded our expectations in terms of its effectiveness and value to families of children with Autism. Our hope is that statutory funding will become available for this life changing service. With a two year waiting list, and an increasing number of families desperate to avail of the service, we are committed to an all-out effort to ensure that the programme remains in place. We remain focused on receiving statutory funds but as with all our services, we will continue to rely on public support and fundraising for 85% of our income. This money is used to support our services for persons who are blind or vision impaired as well as our Assistance Dog Programme. We are working hard to create public awareness for the Assistance Dog programme in the hope that people will support our work in this area just as they have our services for persons who are blind and vision impaired over the past 33 years."

