

Community Dog Programme



**Irish
Guide
Dogs**
for the blind

What is a Community Dog?

Community Dogs are trained to work with either adults or children with autism or different individual needs, in a range of community settings and facilities (including schools, care facilities and therapy rooms).



Community Dog Teal in St Raphael's College, Loughrea, Galway

They are not Assistance Dogs and therefore do not have the same public access rights in public buildings and shops. Each Community Dog is trained to work well in one type of facility but not all. They are invited to work in a particular facility with a regular trained handler. There are different jobs for different dogs, depending on who the dog enjoys working with.

A Community Dog has generally been originally trained as an Assistance Dog or Guide Dog. They may not have been suitable for the Assistance or Guide Dog Programmes due to being uncomfortable in a guiding harness or lacking the confidence to navigate obstacles for example. Therefore, they were selected for the Community Dog Programme due to their social nature and gentle disposition.

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Community Dogs in Schools

The Community Dog, along with their trained handler, becomes part of the essential learning process within the school. The dog and handler work alongside the educational staff and educational therapists in the school to help reduce stress and increase the learning potential of the students by goal directed interventions. Together, the trained dog and handler participate in classroom activities and work with individual students and groups.



Community Dogs for Adults

The specially trained dog and handler work alongside either a therapist, social care practitioner, support worker or healthcare provider. The dog may be used as a supportive, calming influence for a patient in a session. Alternatively, the human services professional may require the dog to help motivate a person to engage more in activities and direct a session towards meeting specific goals to support each person's needs.

What is expected of the applicant for the Community Dog?

The dog will live in the applicant's home and the following criteria must be met:

- The dog lives and sleeps indoors
- There is an enclosed garden
- There is one main designated carer for the dog
- The candidate must be available for training

Handlers will be trained in positive reinforcement handling as well as dog learning theory, first through online learning then through practical training.



Community Dog Travis is based in St. Peter's College, Dunboyne, Co. Meath

“Travis is on duty every morning greeting students, either in the ASD unit or at the front gate. He is the focal point in the Animal Care class which is a short Junior Cert course with the ASD class. Quite simply he brings joy to the school.”

Donncha McCarrick, teacher

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Applicants must be available for training at our National Training Centre in Cork and ongoing training at home and within the facility.

Assessments of the dog's suitability must be continuous and ongoing. The trained individuals who are responsible for the well-being of the Community Dog must ensure that the dog is healthy, well rested, comfortable, and cared for during and after the sessions.

Things to consider, amongst others:

- Who will cover the costs of having a dog? e.g. food, vet bills
- Do you have a safe home environment for a dog? e.g. enclosed garden
- Do you have the time to exercise the dog and provide mental stimulation outside of the dog's working hours?
- If the dog has diarrhoea or is sick and needs to have the day off, have you made a backup plan for these days? Is there anyone else who can check up on the dog at home during this time?

Community & Therapy Dog Nala is based in The King's Hospital School, Palmerstown, Dublin

“Nala brings a sense of joy and healing with her everywhere she goes. Students who are anxious can come up and sit in the counselling space and just pet her, which brings a natural calming presence. She is a ray of sunshine every day to all she meets.”

Clair Breen, Wellbeing Co-ordinator and Psychotherapist



What is expected of the facility in which the Community Dog will be working?

The facility in which the dog will be working will need to be fully on board with the concept and practicalities of having a Community Dog onsite. The board of management and all personnel within the facility should have full knowledge of the initial application and follow up assessments.

As Community Dogs are working dogs, they need limitations put on the number of hours worked per day. Is there a suitable place for the dog to settle while working and where he/she can have uninterrupted sleep breaks in-between sessions?

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Is there potential on the facility grounds for a designated area where you intend to allow the dog to use for spending (toileting)?

The facility must agree to initial training and suitability assessment by Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind. This will take time out from their working role while training is taking place.

Has everyone (those individuals studying/working/receiving care onsite) been notified about the consideration of a Community Dog? Is anyone allergic to dogs or has a phobia of dogs? Is there a way you can warn and avoid situations with people who have phobias/allergies or have not given consent?

How to apply?

The first step is to contact us at 021 487 8200 or email info@guidedogs.ie.

The next step will be a Zoom assessment to allow a full discussion for both parties – the applicant and IGDB – to ensure all conditions mentioned above have been satisfied.

Following this online assessment, an inspection of the facility will take place.

Care is taken to select the correct Community Dog for a facility. This will be determined by:

- the dog's temperament;
- the applicant's home circumstances;
- the applicant's role within a facility; and
- the planned role for the Community dog within the facility.

Availability of suitable dogs as part of our Community Dog Programme cannot be guaranteed. Our priority will be for dogs to succeed on the Guide and Assistance Programmes. Our Community Dog Programme is dependent on the availability of suitable dogs. Based on our current supply of pups we estimate that we will not have more than 15 dogs maximum to place on this programme over next 2 years. The acceptance of an application does not guarantee the provision of a dog. Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind reserves the right to refuse an application.