

The role of a **puppy walker**



Guide Dogs

The role of a puppy walker

Thank you for thinking about becoming a puppy walker for Guide Dogs. The information in this leaflet should give you a better understanding of what the job involves and help you with your decision. We are very happy to answer any questions you may have and can arrange for one of our Puppy Walking Supervisors to call you if you wish to discuss things further.

Puppy walking is a crucial part of Guide Dogs' work. Although done on a voluntary basis, it will take a lot of time, commitment and love from both you and your family. The end result, however, is a very special animal indeed.

Developing the puppy

As a prospective puppy walker, who will care for and develop one of our puppies, it is essential that you consider the following criteria and questions:

Essential criteria for puppy walking

A puppy needs to be welcomed into your home and understood by all the family. The puppy should be reared with the blend of affection, control and supervision normally given to a young child. As a prospective puppy walker, who will care for and walk one of our puppies, the following criteria are essential:

- You must be at least 18 years of age to be responsible for the puppy. Whilst any children at home can enjoy lending a hand, it is important that any puppy training, e.g. lead work, is only carried out by a responsible person. Children aged 16 -18 may walk the puppy with supervision.
- 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 3 hours maximum in the early days. Will you be able to commit the time required to look after a puppy?
- The puppy will need exposure to busy town conditions, traffic, shops and crowds on a regular basis. It will also need to be familiarized with car travel and public transport. Would you be able to provide a puppy with this range of experience?
- You need to have a suitable area in your home to accommodate the puppy with easy access to a hard surfaced or gravel toileting area. We can advise on this during the home visit assessment.

While it is not a problem for other pets to be in the home, any pet dogs must be of a suitable temperament.

Puppy walking should be fun and enjoyable for all the family. Having a household with children and a puppy can however be a mixed blessing! In these situations both puppy and child must learn



respect for one another.

Throughout the process you will never be without support. Your Puppy Walking Supervisor or representative will visit regularly to check on progress, give practical advice and assist with any difficulties you encounter.

All adults in the household who will undertake some of the care and training of the puppy will need to sign our Puppy Walking Agreement when first allocated a puppy.

“Being a puppy walker gives me an immense amount of satisfaction and pleasure. It can be very emotional when the puppy leaves but you know it is going to make a difference to the life of a blind or partially sighted person, and that makes it all worthwhile”

Costs involved

Equipment

You will receive leads, collars, grooming equipment, puppy identification discs and tabard, as well as a puppy walker identification card. We ask that you provide two bowls for food and water, a dog bed or blanket and a few safe toys that we can advise you on.

Feeding

Guide Dogs will cover the cost of feeding the puppy in your care. We operate a central ordering and delivery system with a top pet food manufacturer, and your puppy's food will be delivered direct to your door.

“I love the challenge. You get a tiny bundle of fluff and when it leaves you it is an intelligent and obedient dog who is going on to do a very important job.”

Additional Expenses

It is expected that the puppy socialisation and training will fit into your usual day to day routine. There are however some additional expenses associated with keeping and raising a puppy and a small fixed allowance is available to puppy walkers as a contribution towards these. All veterinary costs are fully covered directly by Guide Dogs.



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Your questions answered

The puppies

Guide Dogs is one of the largest breeders of working dogs in the world. Sometimes we accept donated dogs but we usually breed all our own would-be guide dogs. We most commonly use Labradors and Golden Retrievers or first crosses between these two breeds, with some German Shepherd Dogs, Border Collies and Curly Coated Retrievers. Labradors or Labrador-cross-Golden Retrievers have a very good success rate and it is for this reason that they are usually placed with first time puppy walkers.

Although some people express a preference towards a dog or a bitch, both sexes are used with equal success.

Our breeding stock is cared for by volunteers in their homes – coming to the Breeding Centre when it is time to mate. Pups are either born at home or at the Breeding Centre. When the puppies are approximately six weeks old they are moved from the brood bitch to our Breeding Centre. Here they are given a primary vaccination so they can start their training straight away. After a health check they are transferred to a placement with a puppy walker.

Guide Dogs breeds and cares for a vast number of dogs and it is vital to keep accurate records on each one. To help achieve this all puppies are individually identified at birth by letters of the alphabet. All the puppies in the same litter will have names starting with the same letter, e.g. Alice, Alec and Andy. They also all have a unique puppy number and are also microchipped.

House training

It is essential that puppies develop an appropriate relief routine so that they are clean not only in the home, but also while on training walks. Ideally at the end of the puppy walking phase, dogs should respond to relieving on request.

Good social behaviour

A guide dog needs to be well behaved as it will spend the majority of its time in social situations with its owner, be it at home, at work or, for example, in a restaurant.

Unacceptable behaviour includes begging or scavenging for food, jumping up at people, climbing on furniture and barking for attention. It is also important that the puppy is not destructive and is confident about being left on its own.

Exercise

Like children, puppies' bones are soft and fragile and strenuous, excessive exercise can be damaging to a growing pup. Although it is important for the puppy to have free exercise, this has to be balanced with education and lead work. We will tell you how to protect the puppy's health and how to ensure safe and successful off-lead exercise.



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Boarding

We appreciate that there may be an occasional need for the pup to be boarded elsewhere. In cases such as holidays, we will help you arrange accommodation for the pup with approved boarders or other puppy walkers.

Other pets

Dogs and other pets can have a positive influence on a developing puppy, although the puppy shouldn't become over-reliant on them. You need to have enough time each day to walk and spend time with the puppy on its own. Your pup also needs space in your home to sleep separately from pet dogs.

We consider each application to become a puppy walker on individual merit, although we would not normally place a puppy in a home where there are more than two other dogs. All other pets will need to be friendly and get treated regularly for fleas and worms, as well as receive annual boosters.

When your puppy comes in for training

As a general rule, the puppy will enter one of our four Dog Training Schools for formal training at about 12 to 14 months of age. This will probably be a day full of mixed emotions for you and your family as your puppy leaves you – but you should be proud that you have started its training for such a worthwhile role.

Once at the centre the puppy (now a young adult dog) will be allocated to a Guide Dog Trainer who will begin the next stage of its training. During this time you will receive regular training updates.

When the dog has completed this stage it will progress to advanced training with a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor who will complete the final stages by training the dog with a visually-impaired person.

We will tell you when your dog qualifies as a working guide dog and you'll receive a framed photograph of the dog presented with our thanks for your work. The new guide dog owner is asked to contact you, just to let you know how the dog has settled.

Not making the grade

Only approximately two out of three puppies we place with a puppy walker will go on to become a guide dog. Inevitably, for a variety of reasons a number will not make the grade as a guide dog. If this happens, we will try to transfer the puppy into a different working role such as the Dogs for the Disabled. If this is not possible you may be offered the dog back under our rehoming scheme. Alternatively, we have a very long waiting list of approved adopters waiting to give one of our dogs a loving home.



Guide Dogs

How we support you

Regular visits and support

Puppy walkers receive regular visits from their Puppy Walking Supervisors. These visits are normally carried out every four to six weeks, although new puppy walkers are visited more frequently, especially in the first few weeks.

These visits are designed to give both parties the opportunity to discuss the puppy's progress and any concerns. Puppy Walking Supervisors monitor the puppy's health, standard of social behaviour and educational development. They also provide practical support and advice on all aspects of the puppy's care and education, including feeding, grooming, worming and environmental exposure, as well as demonstrating the best way to handle and train a puppy. A puppy development folder full of information for your reference and training DVDs are also provided.

In many areas group puppy classes are run by our trained staff attendance at which is optional. They do provide a good opportunity not only to further develop your puppies training but also to meet up with other puppy walkers and share experiences. If required further peer support can also be provided by an experienced puppy walker.

Whilst it may seem daunting when you start to puppy walk, especially if you only have limited experience with dogs, we will also put you in contact with a volunteer Puppy Walking Mentor. They will be able to provide peer support and help you with your puppy's development.

Insurance

It must be emphasised that puppies, by their very nature, can cause damage in the home unless they are carefully supervised. It is important that the puppy can be left unattended without causing damage. Guide Dogs do not carry insurance to cover such damage and so prevention is very important. Our staff will provide advice and equipment to prevent damage to the home environment.

We do carry full public liability insurance for damage or injury caused to a third party by our dogs .

“I've just heard that the last puppy I looked after has qualified to become a guide dog, and it is a fantastic feeling to know you have played a part in that.”



Guide Dogs

Your puppy's health

It is vital that you have access to a local veterinary practice with 24-hour cover which is close enough to be reached quickly in an emergency.

Guide Dogs will pay all veterinary expenses while the puppy is in your care. The vet will forward an itemised account to the appropriate Guide Dogs Centre for settlement.

Vaccinations

Our vaccination policy was drawn up under the guidance of our Veterinary Advisors. It is designed to ensure our puppies receive maximum protection in all situations, enabling us to start exposing them to the environment from a much earlier age than normal.

Before arriving at your home, your puppy will have been vaccinated against all the major diseases. The puppy will be vaccinated again later, in line with Guide Dogs' policies. Your Puppy Walking Supervisor will let you know when these vaccinations are due.

Worming

All guide dogs puppies are given treatment against roundworms before they arrive at your home; They are wormed again at two, three and six months of age. Your Puppy Walking Supervisor will provide the medication, together with instructions on how to give the treatment, as well as general advice.

Neutering and spaying

It is Guide Dogs' policy to neuter all dogs other than active breeding stock. Timing will depend on the pup but males are usually castrated at between eight and nine months of age, while the puppy is with its puppy walker. The operation will normally be carried out by your vet and the puppy will convalesce at home. Your Puppy Walking Supervisor will assist you in making all the arrangements for this.

Bitches are normally spayed following their first season, which can occur any time after six months of age. If the season happens whilst the pup is still being puppy walked, it is far better to leave her with you for the duration of her season (about three weeks) wherever possible. Where this is not practical, your Puppy Walking Supervisor will consider each case on its own merit and give advice and options accordingly.

“It is nice to know what you are doing is so worthwhile, and you get a real sense of achievement from it. When the puppy leaves, you know you've done your bit and it's going on to do the next stage of its training.”



Guide Dogs

The next stage

If you are interested in becoming a puppy walker and have not already done so, please phone the National Volunteering Office on 0845 371 7771. A member of the volunteering team will then tell you what if any opportunities there are in your area – however you should be aware that we are not able to support puppy walkers in every part of the country. If we are looking for puppy walkers where you live, we can then take your details and arrange a visit from a Puppy Walking Supervisor for an informal interview, which will last approximately one and a half hours.

This first visit will provide us with the information we require to make sure you and your family are able to cope with the demands of having a puppy. The Puppy Walking Supervisor will also be able to give you information and answer your questions so that a well-informed decision can be made as to whether you definitely wish to progress with your application. It is important that you and your family enjoy puppy walking and that all parties benefit from the experience – we hope the information in this booklet will help you prepare any questions you may wish to ask during this meeting.

Whatever the outcome of your interview we will let you know within ten working days. If you are accepted, your name will be added to the waiting list and you will be contacted as soon as a suitable puppy is ready.

“I also really enjoy helping Guide Dogs because it is a cause close to my heart, as my grandmother was blind and my uncle is partially-sighted.”

Thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet – and good luck in becoming a puppy walker!

Our Vision

We want a society in which blind and partially-sighted people enjoy the same freedom of movement as everyone else.

Our purpose

We will deliver the guide dog service and other mobility services, as well as breaking down barriers – both physical and legal – to enable blind and partially-sighted people to get around on their own.

Our core message

If you only tell people one thing about us, tell them this:

The ability to get around is vital in order to live a full life. We empower blind and partially-sighted people to do that and we rely on the support of the public to fund our services.



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