

# Dogs for the Disabled award-winning volunteers are key to success

Dogs for the Disabled paid tribute to Banbury-based volunteers Fred and Jean Nicholls at an awards ceremony last week, telling the dedicated helpers that they have made such an outstanding contribution to the charity's work that they could do with another fifty volunteers just like them. Fred and Jean Nicholls are one of a select number of the charity's puppy socialisers to receive an award for their long-service to Dogs for the Disabled. The pair have given seven years of service for the charity which trains assistance dogs to help people with disabilities lead a fuller, more independent life. Puppy socialisers take a young pup for its first year of life giving them basic training such as toilet training, general obedience and plenty of experiences of the world around them to ensure they are happy, confident and relaxed dogs when they start their formal training at around a year old.

The charity used the award ceremony, which took place at Dogs for the Disabled's national training centre, to launch an appeal to find more volunteers to take on a puppy. Chris Allen is dog training manager for Dogs for the Disabled: Over the next three years we are looking to train more assistance dogs than ever before, in order to do that we need to find homes for more pups to be socialised now.

Chris explained why the role of puppy socialisers is so important. Taking a puppy into your home for a year isn't a decision to be taken lightly, but these volunteers provide a vital service for the charity to continue its work. One day these pups will assist a child or adult with disabilities with simple tasks that many of us take for granted. An assistance dog can help a person to grow in confidence, ensuring they feel less isolated and give them the chance of independence. You can't put a price on the difference an assistance dog can make.

Fred Nicholls was delighted to receive his award and urged more people to get involved: Looking after a young pup for Dogs for the Disabled can be a very rewarding experience. It's great to know that this little golden retriever or Labrador puppy will one day be helping someone else. The charity offers lots of advice and support to help you with caring for the puppy and you get to meet lots of other people as a result of looking after your pup. While it's difficult to say good-bye to the puppy at the end of a year it's also really exciting to have the chance to do it all over again with a new little bundle of fur.

The charity does not ask its puppy socialisers to have previous dog handling know-how although it can be an advantage. Chris Allen again: What is required is that your circumstances are stable and if you do work it is for no more than four hours per day (including travel time). You also need to be prepared to have a fully fenced garden and live within one hour's drive of Banbury.

All costs for the puppy are paid by the charity and include food and vets bills. There are also opportunities to meet other volunteers and share experiences. For more information on volunteering opportunities with Dogs for the Disabled visit [www.dogsforthedisabled.org](http://www.dogsforthedisabled.org).

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