

Award winning volunteers help charity to success

Dogs for the Disabled paid tribute to its puppy socialising volunteers this 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.

Over 100 volunteers attended a special ceremony held at the charity's national training centre in Banbury, Oxfordshire where many of the volunteers receive awards for their dedicated service to Dogs for the Disabled. The charity which trains assistance dogs to help people with disabilities lead a fuller, more independent life and puppy socialisers provide a vital role in providing homes for the charity's young pups. A puppy socialiser also provides basic training such as toilet training, general obedience and plenty of experiences of the world around them to ensure each pup is a happy, confident and relaxed dog when it starts formal training at around a year old.

The charity used the award ceremony 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.

Jean Darlaston is a puppy socialiser for the charity and received an award for over seven years of service to the charity. She 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 the little golden retriever or Labrador puppy you look after will one day be helping someone else to live a more independent life. A dog can make such a difference to a person with a disability, helping them gain in confidence and provide new opportunities that bring a positive impact on every aspect of their life.

As a puppy socialiser we receive 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.dogsforthe-disabled.org.

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