



COMMUNITY DOG FOR SCHOOLS

Introduction

Dogs for Good* is an innovative charity, exploring the ways dogs can enrich and improve the lives of people and their communities.

As part of our Community Dog programme, we have been piloting a range of innovative new approaches to help adults and children overcome specific challenges and develop life skills. We have established partnerships with two special educational needs schools, placing a skilled dog and specialist handler in the schools with the aim of enhancing the learning experiences of students. The school dog and handler work with the educational and therapist teams to provide animal assisted therapy, animal facilitated learning and animal assisted activities for the students who have a range of complex learning disabilities.

We will be working with these two schools for a minimum of three years. We are currently evaluating our work to date and early results are encouraging. As a result, we are looking to see how this partnership approach could be replicated in other schools, thereby enabling us to expand our work and enable more young people to benefit from interaction with a specially trained dog.

How we work

We train activity and therapy dogs to work with our specialist handlers in special educational needs schools to help progress the educational, social and physical development of individual students and groups. Together, the school dog and handler become part of the fabric of daily school life, working in partnership with educational staff and trained therapists in the school.

The school dog and handler participate in classroom activities, work with individual students in structured and goal-oriented sessions and also support therapists in the school in a range of therapeutic settings.

The dog can encourage engagement in learning and help achieve learning outcomes by involvement in teaching exercises, such as concept learning and mathematics. The dog can also be engaged to help with specific behaviours, improve interactions with others and act as a focus or role model for group learning (eg diet, personal grooming). Additionally, the dog can be involved in speech and language and physiotherapy sessions with a view to improving therapeutic outcomes.

*Dogs for Good is the new name for Dogs for the Disabled.

When working in the school, the dog is handled by a professionally trained handler with strong interpersonal skills and a thorough understanding of dog behaviour and welfare. The school dog and handler work on an agreed timetable during school hours. The handler will lead the planning and design of sessions in conjunction with teaching staff and therapists, to meet the individual needs of students. It is their responsibility to ensure the safety and welfare of the dog and students at all times. The handler is employed by the school and trained by Dogs for Good.

The dogs matched with schools are trained by us and are selected from our puppy socialising programme for their nature and reliability and suitability for working with children. The dog's welfare during the school day is of paramount importance, so regular breaks for exercise and rest are scheduled into the timetable each day.

The potential benefits

The schools we have worked with report significant benefits for students and a positive impact on the working and social dynamics of the school. For students, we have seen:

- A greater enjoyment of being in the school environment and a greater willingness to learn and participate.
- Improved behaviour, social interaction and sense of responsibility in the classroom.
- More effective therapy sessions with goals being reached in a shorter space of time, or more complex goals being achieved.
- A better understanding of how to take responsibility for another living being, with potential better recognition of one's own responsibilities.
- Increased knowledge of dogs and how to behave safely and appropriately around them.
- Greater access to the community, with the presence of the dog giving students the confidence to go out on short trips outside of the school.
- A range of individual benefits for students with whom we have been working on personal goals (these range from road safety, to fear of immunisations or personal hygiene/grooming).

How our work is funded

It costs approximately £12,000 to breed, socialise and train a Community Dog ready to work in a school. These costs are funded by our charitable activities.

The operational costs of the Community Dog for Schools Service are met by the school. This includes:

- The training and employment costs of the handler, who is jointly recruited and selected by the school and Dogs for Good.
- The "living" costs of the dog (e.g. food, health/vet costs, insurance and equipment).
- The operational costs of Dogs for Good in establishing a service in the school and ongoing supervision and specialist advice and guidance.

Looking ahead

As we develop our work in this area, we hope to be able to work with more schools. Our experience to date has helped us have a clear view of what is required from both parties to develop a successful partnership. Schools interested in adding a school dog and handler to their team should consider the following:

1. Commitment to a three year partnership. It takes time to establish the school dog and handler in the school and the benefits increase significantly as the dog and handler become more and more engaged in the various aspects of school life. We therefore ask for a three year commitment to the partnership.
2. Preparedness and resources to fund the cost of the service. This would include:
 - Employment of a handler by the school.
 - Payment each year of the 'living' costs of the dog (eg food, health/vet costs, insurance, and accessories) and costs to cover the specialist input from Dogs for Good.
3. Provision of a suitable environment at the school for the dog, including:
 - A quiet space for the dog to rest where they will not be disturbed by students (ideally an office/room where the handler is based).
 - Construction of a suitable toileting area for the dog in the school grounds, which is fenced off and away from the main student play areas.
 - Space available at or near the school to exercise the dog.
4. Provision of appropriate boarding arrangements for the dog (this could be with the handler, another member of school staff or an independent person who can commit to the school timetable).
5. Development of a structured programme of handler/dog activity in the school, with agreement to an appropriate work/rest balance for the dog and priority being given to the welfare and wellbeing needs of the dog at all times.
6. Participation in a programme of evaluation of:
 - The impact of the school dog and handler in the school.
 - The welfare of the dog during its working life in the school.

For further information, please contact:

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You can also visit the Community Dog pages on our website: [dogsforgood.org](https://www.dogsforgood.org)