



Community Dog

Bringing the benefits of specially-trained dogs to a wider community.



**LIFE CHANGING
DEVOTION**

COMMUNITY DOG

For people who are unable to have a dog of their own, spending time with a dog can bring significant benefits. Our Community Dog service brings dogs into the lives of adults and children with a range of individual needs, helping them to overcome specific challenges and develop life skills.

The service is based on the principles and techniques of Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI), with a specially-trained dog and specialist practitioner working alongside a human services professional (eg therapist, social care practitioner, teacher, support worker or healthcare provider). Together, they create a programme of engaging activities with the dog designed to meet specific goals to support each person's needs.

We work on a variety of goals: from improving self-confidence and helping people interact with others in the community, to improving road safety, changing patterns of behaviour and overcoming fear of medical procedures. The applications are wide-ranging.

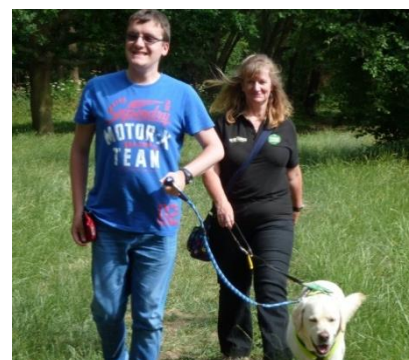
AAI is a well-established practice in many parts of the world, but is less advanced in the UK. We are at the forefront of its development in the UK, building on the knowledge and experience we have gained through our Assistance Dog and Family Dog services, and our collaboration with international partners. We are a founder member of Animal Assisted Intervention International, a new international practitioners' organisation, which has created global standards of best practice.

We train Community Dogs and professional handlers to work with people with a range of needs in a variety of community settings. This includes children and young adults in special educational needs schools and colleges, adults with autism and learning disabilities, children with an acquired brain injury, people with spinal injuries, older people who are socially isolated, and people with dementia and their carers.

COMMUNITY DOG – WORKING WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Forward thinking local authorities and other agencies are beginning to explore how specially-trained dogs and specialist practitioners can play a role in meeting complex health and social care challenges.

We have conducted a trial with the Adult Social Care team at Bracknell Forest Council to explore how we can help people with autism and learning difficulties to become more independent, improve wellbeing and develop new skills. Our Community Dog Handler worked with Occupational Therapists and Social Care practitioners on goals linked to each person's wider care and support plan. Where this intervention is successful, it can bring benefits for the individual, their family and the local community. At the same time, this may also bring potential cost benefits for the local authority. For example, where a person becomes more independent, their need for specialist support may be less; and improvements to wellbeing can mean that respite/crisis care is no longer required.



Our early work has been successful and we are now working towards the launch of a longer term partnership with Bracknell Forest Council, which will extend the programme to other social care groups, eg older people, those with physical disabilities, sensory needs or mental health conditions.

COMMUNITY DOG – TACKLING A RANGE OF SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

We see the opportunity for structured intervention programmes with specially-trained dogs to play a role in addressing a range of challenges facing our society. For example:

- Social isolation
- Dementia
- Autism
- Mental health
- Obesity/increasing physical activity
- Skills development

We are conducting a pilot programme with Nescot College of Further and Higher Education to explore how we can support young people with a range of special needs who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or who are in education but at risk of becoming NEET.



Working with the college team, their feeder schools and the local authority, we aim to help these young people overcome some of the barriers and challenges they face in attending school or college and accessing the community for employment. Early results are encouraging as we seek to help them realise their full potential, thus reducing their need for specialist care and long-term financial support.

This programme is funded by The Communities Fund from the Department for Communities and Local Government.

COMMUNITY DOG – WORKING IN HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENTS

We have conducted a pilot with patients at the National Spinal Injuries Centre at Stoke Mandeville Hospital to explore how specially-trained dogs can help patients in their recovery.

Working alongside the Occupational Therapy team, we have developed a programme of activity with the dog to support each person's occupational therapy goals. Through a series of tasks such as throwing a ball, playing with a tug toy, giving treats and grooming, one client, Charlotte, has made rapid progress, seeing improvements in leaning forward and sideways and a greater range of movement in her arms.

With positive feedback from both pilot participants and our occupational therapy partners, we see significant potential in this area, with the dog bringing additional levels of motivation, engagement and enjoyment to the occupational therapy sessions.



"I found it worthwhile and rewarding. I achieved more in my therapy sessions with the dog and it revealed abilities that I didn't know I had."

Charlotte – pilot participant

COMMUNITY DOG FOR SCHOOLS

We have been excited to see the benefits in special educational needs schools.

The dog and handler become part of the fabric of school life and an integral part of the staff team. They work alongside teachers and therapists, to maximise the positive benefits for students and the wider school environment.

How can dogs help in schools?

The dog and handler engage students in the classroom, helping them to learn and focus on individual tasks. Activities with the dog can also be designed to help students overcome specific individual challenges, address specific behaviours and improve interactions with others. The dog can also act as a focus or role model for group learning (eg diet, health and personal care) and be a source of emotional support for students.

Additionally, the school dog works alongside the handler and therapists to engage and support students in therapy sessions, eg speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. Here the dog can act as an important motivator and partner in a session, boosting engagement and ultimately improving therapeutic outcomes.



"Students seem like they want to do better for Patience and in turn better themselves, as it gives them something else to aim for."

School Physiotherapist

COMMUNITY DOG – PARTNERING WITH SPECIALIST CHARITIES

We work in partnership with charities and other organisations to design tailored Community Dog programmes for the people they support.

Adults with autism

Our partnership with Autism at Kingwood, a charity supporting adults with autism, is a great example of the wide-ranging nature of what can be achieved. Examples include: managing anger/frustration; improved communication and speech; reducing anxiety; taking greater personal responsibility; reduced fear of medical procedures; and gaining the confidence to go out and engage with others in the community.



"Her confidence continues to grow and she's doing a lot of things for herself – fills her bath and washes herself, brushes her hair, makes her own drinks."

Autism at Kingwood Support Manager

Children with an acquired brain injury

We worked with the Child Brain Injury Trust in a pilot programme to help the children and families they support. Results include children improving their road safety, becoming more confident with others, coping better in busy environments, taking instruction from parents and developing skills to care for a new family puppy.

We've also seen benefits for the whole family. For example, a child's heightened awareness of road safety means a parent can be more confident to take the whole family out for a walk, something that perhaps wasn't possible before.

"He is happier to go out into a busier place with us and he is not so anxious."

Parent



THE FUTURE

We're ambitious about the future. There's huge potential for dogs to help people in a range of community settings.

Dogs can be great motivators and role models, supporting adults and children to learn and develop in so many ways. We want to keep exploring the possibilities and the ways in which bringing people and dogs together can bring benefits to individuals, their families, local communities and wider society.

At the heart of what we do is the health and wellbeing of our dogs. We take special care in selecting our partner organisations and in the design and scheduling of activities to ensure that the dog's needs are always met.

Looking ahead...

We're keen to talk to prospective partners who'd like to work with us. We're also eager to showcase our work so that the benefits are better understood and recognised.

The day to day operational costs of the dog and handler in providing this service are met by our partners and form part of our developing social enterprise activities.

Find our more...

See more about our work, our partners and the people we are helping on the Community Dog section of our website.

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