

Guide Dogs & Assistance Dogs

Definitions, Welfare, Accreditation, Regulation & Legislation ?



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Guide dogs for the blind :

A brief history

- Dates back to First World War when blinded German soldiers were helped by specially trained GSDs
- Developed during the 1930s with centres in UK , USA, Switzerland
- Irish guide dogs founded 1976



From pup to Guide Dog

- Puppies sourced through own breeding programme (120 pups per year)
- From 8 weeks to 12 months fostered with puppy walker family : basic obedience
- At 12 months returned to centre for advanced training (8-12 months)
- If successful then paired with client
- If unsuccessful either enter Autism programme or rehomed.

Weakest link :



Links

Breeding stock
Matings

Puppy walking

Potential problems

- X breeds , few pedigree details of more than 3 generations
- Phantom pregnancies & reabsorption
- Not enough education or systematic development of volunteers

Weakest link :



Links

Training

Client assessment

Retirement

Potential problems

- Unified training programme
- Too high a standard leading to unnecessary failure
- Assessment procedures & reporting
- Conflict between end user and organisation : dogs used as social companion rather than guide dog /overweight health issues

Assistance Dogs

- In last 15 years there has been a growth in the Assistance Dog sector which include :
- Dogs for the disabled
- Hearing dogs
- Epilepsy seizure Alert
- Dogs for Autism



A growing sector

- Positive economic and psychosocial aspects of canine interventions.
- Demographic changes, an increasing elderly population, will increase need for such animals.
- As awareness of the sector grows, so will demand.
- This growth in demand in turn will raise issues

Issues

- Definitions
- Transparency
- Research
- Welfare of clients and animals
- Accreditation
- Standards of competency
- Regulation and legislation

What is a service dog?

- Numerous and various terminologies of
- Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI)
- Animal Assisted Activity (AAA)
- Assistance Dogs

Emotional support dogs : have fewer legal rights

Companion/Pet

Why definitions are important

- Reduces confusion for the public.
- Reduces confusion for legislators.
- Allows for international comparison:
 - research
 - protocols.
- Best practice
- evaluation and results

Useful definitions

- Animal assisted intervention (AAI)
- "a goal oriented intervention intentionally includes or incorporates animals in health, education and human service for the **purpose of therapeutic gains in humans.**"
- Animal assisted therapy (AAT), Animal assisted education (AAE)
- *"sessions are usually evaluated and documented."*

IAHAIO white paper final report

Animal assisted activity

- Activity that involves interactions between people and animals, but **not** goal centred, or designed to meet an individuals specific needs
- Informal interactions / Visitations often occur on a volunteer basis by the human animal team eg. Hospital visits, school visit,

Assistance dogs

- **“Assistance Dog”** means a dog that has been or is being trained as a **Guide Dog, Hearing Dog, or Service Dog**. Such terms are further defined as follows:
 - **“Guide Dog”** means a dog that has been or is being specially trained to aid a particular blind or visually impaired person.
 - **“Hearing Dog”** means a dog that has been or is being specially trained to aid a particular deaf or hard of hearing person.
 - **“Service Dog”** means a dog that has been or is being **specially trained** to aid an **individual with a disability** other than sight or hearing.

- Correctly defining the type and role of dog has an impact on access and disability rights of the individual with the dog.
- There are cases in the USA , where the status of service dog is under threat because of companion dog owners claiming the privileges associated with highly trained assistance dogs
- Applying the correct definition also has legal repercussions in terms of transport, housing and other social provisions.

Source of dogs

- Should be responsibly sourced according to best welfare practices (including age at which sourced, environment from which the dog comes, environment to which the dog goes)

Breed suitability: Ease of care

Trainability / Signalling behaviour

- Breeder :
- The Irish Kennel Club has many members, experienced breeders with working lines with a consistency of temperament and personality

Dog selection Tests

- No Standardised tests for suitability:
- Problems of reliability: Consistency varies as does reliability
- Validity-Does the test actually test the traits of interest ?
- Standardisation required to minimise variables in the test procedure
- However, **Shyness-Boldness** is predictive of working ability and is stable across time.
- Bolder dogs achieve success at a younger age

Accreditation and regulation

- Standards of competency of those involved in this sector : anyone can call themselves a trainer or behaviourist, No legally protected designation
- UK code of practice for AAI *"those involved should work within their existing capabilities. They must be honest, transparent and accurate about their competence and experience and qualifications/training."*
- (Society for companion animal studies 2013)

CEN proposal

- European Working Party

**Creation of a new Technical
Committee - Assistance Dog & Guide
Dog Teams
Standards and Instructors
Competences**

**IKC has expressed interest on sitting on this working
committee**

Some see this as an financial opportunity!!

- Already in Ireland , there are:
- commercial enterprises offering to train dogs in a variety of roles from seizure alert, diabetic and hearing autism and stability for the same flat fee.
- Hypnotherapists who claim expertise in animal behaviour and are willing to provide psychiatric support dogs.
- The sector is too valuable to too many people to allow it to be hijacked by people whose competency is not assured.
- Many duplications by splinter groups.

IKC role

- Has the knowledge and expertise already established to help in this sector
- Established a working group of all charities in this sector to speak with 1 unified voice
- Offering input into the health testing and breeding regimes
- Help with training issues

Public Access Test

- Test of dog's ability and safety in public places ignoring food and other distractions whilst performing obedience commands (walk , sit down stay recall etc)
- Similar to IKC's Good Citizen scheme (proposed Bronze level)
- IKC affiliated Training groups and Testers / Judges already in place.

Accreditation cont.

- What about own trained or commercially sought service dog ?
- Requirements of airlines, ferry companies
- *“It is required that the passenger carries a cert confirming the dog is a **registered** assistance dog ...”*
- Aer Lingus Special Assistance 2014

Dog welfare and advocacy

- Important to remember that the dog is not a tool but a sentient being.
- Important for those involved how to assess the dog for signs of stress and how to manage that stress.
- Demands made on a service dog are considered reasonable and appropriate

Physical Stressors

- lack of rest or recovery time after working
- unintentional maltreatment eg. prodding by children with autism
- lack of predictability in daily routines
- insufficient opportunities for recreational activities.

overview

- service dogs should be carefully socialized and tested for aggression long before they are placed with the families
- Responsibility therefore falls on a well structured puppy walking scheme and later training programmes.
- Important that puppy walkers have instruction in dog behaviour.
- Important that puppies are regularly tested and evaluated, so that any necessary interventions can be timely. Such interventions need to be documented and recorded.

Transparency

- Transparency by organisations required in the sector.
- **Failure rates are important** : indicative of success, areas for concern, ultimately leading to adoption of best practices for all organisations .
- Such **transparency** also builds **public confidence** at a time when charities are under pressure

Conclusion

- Important and growing sector
- Issues of **definitions, Competency Accreditation** and **Welfare** need to be addressed