

ASSISTANCE DOGS



Choosing an assistance dog prospect

by PAWtected CIC

Introduction

Who are we?

PAWtected CIC is a non profit organisation in the UK supporting owners to train and work their own assistance dogs. We were founded in 2017 and have worked with many teams during this time. More information about our services can be found on our website at www.pawtected.co.uk

About this booklet

This information booklet refers to British law. Please be aware that information relating to the handler's rights and responsibilities will differ in other countries.

We have designed this booklet to be accessible and easily understood. For further information, please consider our "Assistance Dog Awareness" course which goes into more detail.

Introduction

This booklet is a guide on how to choose an appropriate prospect for assistance dog work. Please ensure that you do additional research to choose the right puppy for you.

Choosing the perfect puppy does not guarantee that the dog will be a suitable assistance dog in future. Please do not get a puppy you will not be able to take care of a dog in the event the dog is unsuitable for assistance work.

Choosing a breed

There are many considerations to take into account when choosing the right breed.

Size of dog

To perform some tasks, dogs will need to be a certain size. It is important that the breed you choose will be able to safely perform the tasks that you need.

Also consider the ease of working.

Large dogs are less likely to fit into small gaps.

Small dogs are more likely to get tripped over.

Health of breed

Some breeds are prone to health problems.

Assistance dogs should be as healthy as possible, so avoid breeds with serious health problems.

Choosing a breed

Life expectancy

It is important to consider the life expectancy of different breeds and how long they will be able to work. Generally, giant breeds will have a shorter working life than small breeds.

Purebred/cross breeds

Purebred dogs are often more reliable in terms of expected traits, but cross breeds can have less health problems due to the diverse gene pool.

Temperament

Dog breeds were created so that dogs could perform different jobs, so they'll have different traits that allow them to perform those jobs effectively. These can be helpful for assistance work, or they can be a hindrance. Consider the expected temperament and behaviour traits.

Choosing a breed

Success

Certain breeds, such as the labrador retriever, have a long history of success as assistance dogs. These dogs may have an increased chance of success.

Some breeds are also widely recognised as assistance dogs and this can make access easier.

Experience

Training can be easier with a breed that you have experience with. Equally, your experience may tell you that the breed is unsuitable for this work.

Appearance

While not the sole decision, it's important to consider a if the breed's appearance is what you are looking for.

Choosing a breed

Grooming

Every dog will need grooming throughout their life, though different breeds will need different types of grooming.

Exercise

Consider the amount of work and exercise that you'll be doing on a regular basis and if this will be appropriate for the breed you're choosing.

Learning

While every dog is capable of learning, some breeds can be easier to teach than others.

This is a guide to get you started. Be sure to complete your own research to ensure that you're choosing the ideal breed for you.

Choosing a breeder

Once you know which breed you want, it's time to look for breeders. Be aware that good breeders may have a waiting list for their puppies.

Lineage

Consider the history of the dogs that they are breeding. What areas, such as working or show, have the dogs been bred for? What activities have the dogs been successful at in the past? Are there any health problems that frequently occur?

Health testing

The breeder should test the health of all their breeding dogs and should never breed from dogs with known health problems.

They should be able to provide you with documented proof of health testing.

Choosing a breeder

Rearing

A significant factor in the success of an assistance dog is early socialisation and careful rearing.

Ensure that the breeder has a good socialisation and rearing program in place and that the puppies are happy, healthy, and confident.

References

Ask the community for references about where they got their puppy from and if they would recommend the breeder. Always do your own research too.

Environment

Check that the puppies are being kept in a clean and appropriate environment, free from excess stress.

Choosing a breeder

Focus

Good breeders will usually focus on breeding a select few breeds. Be wary of breeders who are offering a wide variety of breeds.

Collection

Always see the puppy with the mother and always visit the place where the puppy is being raised. Never collect a puppy from another location.

Health care

Speak with your vet to find out what health care the puppies should have received before coming home, and ensure that the breeder is providing this.

All puppies in the UK must be microchipped prior to sale at 8 weeks of age.

Choosing a breeder

Contract

Some breeders will require you to sign a contract when you purchase the puppy. This can be a sign of a good breeder (depending on what the contract includes).

Experience and registration

Look into if the breeder has past experience and any registrations. This can be a sign of a good breeder.

Questions

Every good breeder should ask lots of questions about where the puppy is going. This is really important.

Choosing the right breeder can make or break your puppy. Take your time and don't rush.

Visiting a breeder

Always visit the breeder and litter prior to making any commitments.

Environment

The environment the puppies are kept in should be clean and organised.

Health

All of the puppies and parents should be alert and healthy. Be sure there is no discharge, bald patches, or signs of illness.

Stimulation and socialisation

Find out about the early neurological stimulation and socialisation that has been performed with the puppies. This is a key component for successful dogs.

Visiting a breeder

Paperwork

The breeder should be able to provide paperwork for their breeding establishment and the litters that they have.

Puppy farms

Be very cautious of puppy farm dogs!

Questions

Be ready with a list of questions to ask the breeder. They should be happy to answer your questions and they should ask you lots of questions in return.

Visiting a breeder can tell you a lot about the puppies. If something doesn't seem right when you visit, go with your gut and leave.

Questions

It can be really helpful to go with a list of questions that you are going to ask. You may also want to write down the answers for future reference.

Questions for the breeder

- Do the puppies have paperwork?
- What health tests have been done on the parents? (check what is expected for the breed)
- Do the parents have any allergies/illnesses?
- How many previous litters have the parents had?
- How big is the litter?
- Why did they breed this litter?
- Can I meet mum and dad?
- What diet are the parents and puppies on?
- What have they been doing with the parents so far?

Choosing a pup

Each pup in the litter will be unique. Visit the litter a few times before you decide on a pup to ensure they are the best choice for you.

Recommendations

The breeder will know the pups best. It is important to discuss with the breeder what you are looking for and they may make recommendations from the litter.

Interactions

How the puppies interact with you can be a good indicator of if you're likely to bond well together. Also consider the interactions the puppy has with others in the litter and the mother. You are looking for a puppy with good social skills for their age.

Choosing a pup

Socialisation

Watch the puppies explore their area. They should be inquisitive and interested in exploring.

Assessments

Some people choose to use puppy aptitude tests or assessments. These can help, but they can be misleading. Use these with caution.

Questions

Every good breeder should ask lots of questions about where the puppy is going. This is really important.

Always meet the puppies several times and do your research.

This publication and more are available for
download at:
www.pawtected.co.uk

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