



Guide Dog Development Program – Puppy Raising

At Guide Dogs, we work side-by-side with our clients, volunteers and donors to empower our clients with the freedom to live an independent life.

Our Dog Services Department provides support for people who are blind or have vision impairment, and children living with autism, and their families, to move safely and confidently in their world – with a companion they can count on by their side.

To breed, raise and train our highly-skilled Guide Dogs, Autism Assistance Dogs and Therapy Dogs, we rely heavily on the generous support and commitment of volunteers to care for, nurture and assist in the development of our pups and dogs. We couldn't do what we do without our volunteers. It takes a lot of dedication and patience to raise or care for a puppy. But for our volunteers, nothing compares to the feeling of knowing you're making a real difference in the life of a person with vision impairment or blindness, or a child living with autism, and their families.

Volunteers can assist Dog Services as a Puppy Raiser or Boarder. Please refer to separate information sheet for information on Boarder roles.

Puppy Raising

Volunteer Puppy Raisers care for a puppy from around 8-10 weeks of age, for a period of approximately 12-14 months, but may be moved for their developmental needs. This is a 24/7 role requiring attendance at regular training sessions (approx. 1 per week), less as the puppy matures. Applicants may work part time or less (preferred). However if applicants work or study full time and have flexible or other arrangements that could accommodate Puppy Raising, the Guide Dogs team are happy to discuss these arrangements and consider placement. Puppies are not to be left unattended for more than 4 hours per day (can be less for younger pups).

Puppy Raisers care for the puppies and teach them appropriate social behaviour to help produce healthy, socialised young dogs with good temperaments to be assessed for inclusion in our Guide Dog program and Autism Assistance Dog program.

Where Do the Pups Come From?

Pups are sourced from our own breeding program as well as other Guide Dog schools.

What is Involved?

We place puppies with volunteer families when the puppies are 8-10 weeks of age. During the time the pup is with the family there will be assessments and ongoing training. Then between 12-16 months of age, they will return to Guide Dogs SA/NT to enter training to become a Guide Dog or Autism Assistance Dog.

Each Puppy Raiser receives on-going support and instruction from Guide Dogs SA/NT. A staff member visits regularly and is available for telephone support. The scheduling of visits will depend on the progress of the puppy and volunteer family.

There are also group obedience, free run and travel sessions that you will be required to attend. On average, you can expect to have contact with a Guide Dogs SA/NT staff member on a weekly basis. This may require you travelling into the city so you will need to have a current drivers licence and continuous access to a car 24/7.

Socialisation

Pups are gradually exposed to all of the sights, sounds and smells that they are likely to encounter as working dogs.

If they are introduced to new things in a supported and positive way, they are likely to develop the confident, relaxed attitude essential for a working dog. Since Guide Dogs and Autism Assistance Dogs can go almost everywhere that people go, the puppies need to learn to feel comfortable in the presence of traffic, pedestrians, children and other dogs.

Puppies are conditioned to walk on steps and other unusual surfaces, and to be confident in noisy and busy areas. To develop a relaxed and confident attitude, the puppies must be walked daily on lead by a responsible adult. In the early days, the puppy will walk only short distances on quiet residential streets.

As the puppy grows and develops confidence, it can then be taken to various new environments and allowed to experience busier conditions – all under the supervision and recommendation of Guide Dogs SA/NT staff. Puppies are individual and will progress at different rates – the puppy is not exposed to more than it can comfortably cope with.

As the puppy's confidence grows, it will be introduced to more complex and challenging environments and situations like busy urban shopping centres, and travelling on public transport. All these socialisation experiences will be under the guidance of the Puppy Raising Advisor.

Does Puppy Raising Cost Anything?

Guide Dogs SA/NT provides for all the puppy's needs, including lead, collar, crate, bed, blankets, brush, food bowls, toys, food, veterinary costs and worming and flea control products. Costs to Puppy Raisers are therefore minimal. Sometimes Puppy Raisers provide extra toys if needed and you will need petrol to transport the puppy to and from training sessions that are held in a variety of areas, both close to your home and away from your local area.

What do Guide Dog Puppies Eat?

The puppies are fed a diet of Pedigree Advance (dry food). A supply of food can be given to you on your visits or it can be collected from our office. It is important that puppies have only their own food at mealtimes and no snacks or treats.

Where do I Take the Puppy to the Vet?

Guide Dogs SA/NT has its own Vet Nurse on site who will arrange vet visits for vaccinations and health checks etc.

Puppy Raisers should contact their relevant Puppy Raising Advisor initially for advice on health problems.

For all after-hours emergencies Puppy Raisers and Boarders need to contact guide dogs SA/NT and follow the after-hours emergency process.

For a life-threatening emergency the puppy should be taken to the 24 hour Adelaide Emergency Vet situated at 119 Anzac Highway, Kurralta Park.

Do I Need to Register the Puppy With My Local Council?

Guide Dogs SA/NT will register the puppy with the council and provide the council ID tag which must be placed on the puppy's collar.

What about Holidays?

Guide Dogs SA/NT has a short-term boarding program where families look after puppies of any age while their Puppy Raiser is on holidays or sick. Our boarding families are supported in the same manner as Puppy Raisers. Staff will visit a puppy in boarding to check on its progress and continue its training.

Where Can I Take the Puppy?

Our puppies do not have legal access rights to public places. Many public places still permit their entry however there are certain places they are not allowed to visit such as animal sanctuaries (including the zoo) and certain hospital environments (such as the burns and intensive care units). Our puppies in training are identified by a yellow coat and Puppy Raisers are provided with an identification card to assist with community access.

Puppy Raisers are guided by staff in choosing suitable locations for socialisation at the various stages of development of the puppy.

What Happens after the Puppy is Returned to Guide Dogs SA/NT?

Guide Dogs SA/NT confirms a handover date with Puppy Raisers about two weeks before the puppy enters training. The puppy will be assessed over a 2 week period by training

staff and those who are successful will begin a 6 month training program. A dog may be reclassified or withdrawn at any stage throughout the program.

What Happens to Dogs that are not accepted for Guide Dog or Autism Assistance Dog Training?

The qualities required in a Guide Dog or Autism Assistance Dog are so specific that only about half of our specially bred and raised dogs will be accepted for training on these programs.

Those dogs not accepted for training on these programs may be re-classified as a Pets and may be offered for sale to the public.

What if I Have Other Pets?

Any other pets in the home need to be compatible with a puppy. Generally, households that have more than one dog will be reviewed on an individual basis for suitability.

If there is already one dog in the house, a staff member will visit and assess whether your dog will be compatible with one of our puppies.

Pet dogs that are approximately 12-18 months of age or older, de-sexed and immunised, and of a quiet, gentle, placid nature can be a good influence on the puppy.

The puppy will need to be socialised and walked separately from your own dog, so that the puppy learns to be self-confident and does not rely on the older dog for security and support.

Children and Teenagers in Puppy Raising Households?

It is beneficial for puppies to be exposed to children. However, due to the level of commitment required for the care and training of a puppy, Guide Dogs do not recommend families with children under school age volunteer for this responsibility. Older children and teenagers can assist with the puppy at home by grooming, toileting, feeding and playing.

Children and teenagers should not walk the puppy and young children should always be supervised when near the puppy.

Who Can Apply To Be A Puppy Raiser?

Puppy Raising volunteers need to meet the following criteria for acceptance into the program.

Location

Puppy Raisers must live in metropolitan Adelaide or surrounds, to enable easy transport to training sessions and regular visits by Guide Dogs SA/NT staff. These visits occur on a weekly basis initially and will progress to fortnightly as the dog develops confidence and matures.

Some applications are also accepted from Gawler, Mt Barker, and Victor Harbor areas, provided people are prepared to do some travelling. All Puppy Raisers are required to attend regular group sessions, regardless of where they live.

Lifestyle and Experiences

Puppy Raisers must consistently provide the puppy with a lifestyle that is conducive to positive social interactions, and exposure to a variety of environments. This is to ensure that as a trained Guide Dog or Autism Assistance Dog, they are able to work effectively in all changing environments. It is also imperative that the puppy is not left alone for more than 4 hours a day (can be less for younger pups).

Care and Supervision

Puppy Raisers must be able to provide appropriate care, attention, supervision and leadership, in accordance with Guide Dogs SA/NT standards. Because of the time that needs to be invested into one of our pups, it is preferred that Puppy Raisers do not work full time or have any on-going commitments that may require them to leave the puppy unattended for more than 4 hours per day (can be less for younger pups). However, if a Puppy Raiser does work or study full time and can be flexible or make suitable arrangements, the Guide Dogs team are happy to discuss further.

Physical Fitness

Puppy Raisers need to be physically fit and strong enough to control a large dog particularly in terms of back, upper body and leg strength. Labradors grow quickly. They can weigh up to 20kg at 6 months of age and some will mature to 30kg by 12 months. At times, they will be boisterous and may pull strongly on the lead. Some activities will involve: regularly lifting of food bags or pups from a bath or the car, bending down to the ground many times a day to pick up faeces, toys, bowls and for training purposes, and walking up to an hour at a time over a variety of surfaces.

Transport

Puppy Raisers need to have continuous access to a car and hold a current drivers licence, so they can transport the puppy to the vet, and to training sessions, including into the Adelaide office when required.

Fenced Yard

Puppy Raisers must have a securely fenced yard in which the puppy can toilet and play. Swimming pools, spas and ponds must be securely fenced. Fences must be at least 1.5 metres high.

Indoors

Guide Dogs and Autism Assistance Dogs are “inside dogs”. Puppies must sleep inside the house and spend time inside during the day. They will need to be housetrained. You will be provided with a puppy crate for the pup to sleep in and instructions on how to successfully housetrain the pup.

Becoming a Volunteer

Our volunteers know and understand that they are helping to give our clients the freedom of mobility and that they carry a large responsibility to prepare the pup or dog for its intended role.

To ensure that we find the right volunteers for our puppies we go through an important application process. When you decide that you would like to learn more about becoming a volunteer, please contact Guide Dog Services, Human Resources staff on (08) 8115 6050 or email volunteering@guidedogs.org.au

Next Steps

Information Session

Once you have expressed interest as a Puppy Raiser, one of our staff members will contact you and let you know when our next Puppy Raising and Boarding Information Session will be. These sessions may be held in our office on Morphett Street or online.

The session is conducted by Guide Dog Services staff to ensure that you understand the criteria and the role you are looking to applied for. This will also provide you with an opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Application

After attending an information session, we will send you the relevant paperwork to complete, including a medical declaration stating you are fit and healthy for the role.

Completed documentation can be returned to:

Hr.volunteer@guidedogs.org.au

Or

Attn: HR Department
Guide Dogs SA/NT
251 Morphett St
Adelaide SA 5000

Suitability will be determined by our Guide Dog Services staff in accordance with the listed criteria. Once suitability is assessed we will send you a National Police Clearance

application to complete, applicable to everyone living in the house who is 18+ years of age.

House Inspection / Handling Session

Once you have submitted your application to apply for a volunteer role, one of our staff members will contact you by phone to arrange a time to visit at your home and also undertake a practical handling session. This allows our staff to ensure there is a suitable home/living environment. The handling session is undertaken to view your current skill level relevant to the volunteering role, identify areas in which you may require further training and assistance and help us match you up with an appropriate puppy for raising.

When will I receive my Puppy?

Once your application is approved and all paperwork completed, you will go onto our volunteer contact list and we will advise you once a puppy becomes available. Often we are unable to provide you with an exact time frame of when you can expect a puppy. In the meantime, there may be training sessions and workshops that we ask you to attend, to upskill you and support you in your role. You may also be asked to do some short-term boarding whilst waiting for a puppy.