

PE1744/A

Dogs for Good submission of 1 November 2019

In response to petition PE1744, Dogs for Good would make the following comments:

1. Dogs for Good has been training assistance dogs for over 30 years with the primary focus on adults and children with physical disabilities, children with autism and people with dementia. We currently have around 300 active assistance dog partnerships across the UK. Dogs for Good is also doing a lot of pioneering work to bring goal-focused animal assisted therapy to people who cannot have a dog living with them 24/7, but who would benefit from interaction with a dog. This includes a collaboration with Alzheimer Scotland on the highly successful Dementia Dog project.

Dogs for Good are accredited members of Assistance Dogs International (ADI), the worldwide umbrella organisation for assistance dogs that has successfully created standards cover all elements of training assistance dog partnerships and an accreditation process for members. The Chief Executive of Dogs for Good, Peter Gorbings, is a past President of ADI (2007-2012), is on the current board and chairs the Standards Committee.

Dogs for Good was a founder member of Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAII) and Chief Executive Peter Gorbings sits on the AAII Board.

Dogs for Good has been actively involved in the following recent standards-related projects:

- Chaired the creation of standards for the Kennel Club's 'Bark and Read' programme.
 - Advisers to the Royal College of Nursing which produced protocols on access for dogs in healthcare settings.
 - Active in CEN 452 'Assistance Dogs' – a pan European project putting together standards for assistance dogs. The BSI CEN452 Assistance Dogs UK Shadow Committee is chaired by Peter Gorbings from Dogs for Good.
2. 'Psychiatric service dogs' is an American term and the appropriate UK terminology would describe these dogs as 'psychiatric assistance dogs' (PAD's).
 3. There is no legal impediment to training PAD's in the UK. There are several small organisations in the UK training dogs to support veterans with PTSD.
 4. To date, PAD's have not been trained in the UK by ADI accredited programmes, primarily because of the immense complexity in training dogs for these conditions. Dogs for Good is actively working with several small programmes developing PTSD programmes for veterans which are seeking to become accredited members of ADI in due course. However, no project focusing on mental health beyond veterans with PTSD has yet come to fruition under the ADI banner in the UK because of the complexities.
 5. The key issue that needs to be considered is the welfare and safety of dogs when working as PADs.

6. The petitioner states that these dogs have been ‘trained to deal with mental health problems’. This is not necessarily the case and dogs should never be regarded as a ‘tool’. Dogs can be trained to respond in certain ways to support the rehabilitation of people with mental health conditions. However, dogs should not be seen as part of the treatment ‘solution’ and we would recommend that dogs are only placed with people once the mental health condition has been stabilised and there is a clear ongoing support plan in place. In this case, dogs can be helpful in maintaining routine, providing support, increasing confidence and general wellbeing.
7. Dogs do pick-up on people’s emotions – stress, anxiety etc but it is unfair and against good animal welfare to put the dog in a position where it is being asked to ‘absorb’ a person’s difficult emotional state – quite simply, putting a dog in a distressing situation purely for human gain is unreasonable and not in the interest of the dog.
8. Assistance Dogs International (ADI) has done considerable research into the role of PTSD assistance dogs and has developed clear standards for this type of work. This includes clear guidelines on the vital role that healthcare professionals must play in the process of bringing a person with PTSD and an assistance dog together. Standards available on request.
9. PAD’s can be trained and successfully placed with people, but the process requires a number of skills to come together to ensure the wellbeing of both the person and dog – dog training, counselling support, ongoing support from other people in the community, support from care/support workers etc. All of these elements are vital to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the person and dog.
10. Under no circumstances would we recommend that rescue dogs are used in this work without the advice of highly skilled dog training and behavioural experts. For dogs to be resilient enough to deal with the emotional issues that they will encounter, it is vital that the dog has been carefully selected, socialised and trained over a significant period of time. Good socialisation of the dogs from puppyhood is vital to ensure the dog is able to cope with the issues it may have to deal with.
11. Whilst there are many excellent assistance dog owner-trainers in the UK, preparing dogs to work alongside people with serious psychiatric conditions requires significant dog training skills – primarily recognising the signs of stress, anxiety etc, and therefore, in the interests of the dog, we would not recommend this approach to training, unless the owner is a highly qualified dog trainer and trained to support people with mental health issues.
12. At present, there is no system in the UK for assessing assistance dogs that are trained outside of the internationally-recognised accreditation bodies – Assistance Dogs International (ADI) and International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF). There is currently a UK-wide initiative that is trying to rectify that situation and set up a charity that offers voluntary assessments for people who train assistance dogs outside of the ADI/IGDF system. This initiative is in response to demand and to bring the UK into line with a number of other countries and states. Further details are available on request.

13. Outside of the existing ADI/IGDF international self-regulatory systems, assistance dog training is a largely un-regulated activity in the UK and across the world. This is causing increasing concern across governments and business who want to meet their obligations and make services accessible to people with assistance dogs, whilst having some assurances that the dogs have been trained to the high standards required by equalities legislation.
14. Dogs should not be trained to provide any kind of 'protection' to a person e.g. guarding. Expert psychologists in the U.S. have stated that in relation to PTSD, they believe that protection tasks are counter-productive.
15. The petitioner might want to consider whether an equally effective route for bring dogs and people with mental health issues together could be via the Animal Assisted Intervention (AAI) route. This is where dogs and people come together for specific goal-focused interactions under the direction of human services professionals (e.g. therapists, teachers etc), but the dog does not live with the client 24/7. Dogs for Good is active in the field in England and has links with a number of organisations and local authorities to support people through canine assisted therapy.