



**PLEASE Consider this article carefully** – not every puppy is suited for the job of Service / Assistance dog work and you may only find this out when the dog is older....causing many heartbreaking issues for the family and possibly the dog. Bonding will still happen with a young dog and even an older dog. The families we work with do not have the infrastructure or resources to allocate to a puppy, especially with the risk that things do not work out. We are working with CUSP (see our newsletter of August 2010) to be in a position to help you with reliable, well suited, reasonably priced dogs that have been selected and bred for these special tasks.

SDT/0910

## **IAADP**

### **International Association of Assistance Dog Partners**

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#### **FINDING A SUITABLE CANDIDATE FOR ASSISTANCE DOG WORK**

by Joan Froling

*Note: As author, I have decided to avoid gender preference by referring to a dog as "him," but either gender can be a fine service dog.*

#### **THE HIGH RISK GAMBLE - A PUPPY CANDIDATE**

It may seem to be less expensive at the outset to purchase a puppy than it would be to buy a healthy well bred adult dog that already has received OFA clearance on the Hips and CERF clearance on his eyesight. However, by the time you add in the cost of 14 months of veterinary care, x-rays, dog food, treats, rawhide bones or other chew toys, Puppy Kindergarten classes, Beginner & Intermediate Obedience classes and repairing the house after the chewing stage and juvenile delinquent stage, the adult candidate often proves to be a better bargain.

Some people say they don't care how expensive it is to raise and socialize and train a puppy candidate. They say they don't mind the months of hard work it will take to psychologically prepare a puppy for his adult role and keep him out of trouble. They believe the outcome will make it all worthwhile. They quite rightly point out that they can prevent a pup from developing a number of bad habits. They also believe the bond will be stronger if they start out with a pup instead of an adult dog, though this is arguable. The problem is they don't realize how big of a gamble they are taking. They are not prepared for the distinct possibility that all of their hard work, love, hopes and dreams will end disastrously.

Even the most experienced training schools with pups bred specifically for guide dog work and lovingly nurtured in the homes of foster puppy raisers only achieve a 50% success rate. Half the puppies "wash out" due to hip dysplasia or other health defects or temperament



defects before graduation. Schools which accept donated pups are probably doing well if 25% of the pups grow up to become successful guide, hearing or service dogs. Is an owner trainer likely to do better than the experts? Regrettably, too many have learned the hard way that there is no special magic to protect their puppy from all the genetic defects, injuries, trauma induced temperament problems and everything else that can go wrong. If the gamble is lost and the pup must be euthanized or given away, it is going to be emotionally devastating. The grief will be unlike anything ever experienced before, for this is not a pet you are losing, it is your future partner.

Certainly no one likes to contemplate the prospect of failure, much less plan ahead for it, but that would be the prudent thing to do if determined to go ahead with the idea of raising a puppy candidate. Line up a career change home just in case. Scout around for a suitable adult candidate just in case. Explore other alternatives for acquiring an assistance dog. By carefully working out a backup plan ahead of time, and resolving to go forward even if the first candidate proves to be unsuitable, the chances of achieving a successful outcome will not rest entirely on the fate of one small puppy. Hopefully the backup plan will not have to be implemented, but it would be a sensible, realistic way to approach this high risk venture.

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