



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
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15th March 2021

Deputy Mark Ward,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: mark.ward@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Ward,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

PQ 12198/21

To ask the Minister for Health the process for a parent obtaining a companion therapy dog for their child who is on the ASD spectrum; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response.

Pet animals can enhance the quality of life for many people. A companion dog may be suitable for a child with autism who doesn't need a dog for safety when out in public places but may benefit from the companionship of a dog at home.

It is important to note that the Disability sector makes a distinction between Therapy and Assistance Dogs. Assistance Dogs are essentially working dogs and have to be accredited with Assistance Dogs International. There are Standards and Guidelines in place, which form the basis for ADI Accreditation.

Therapy/Companion dogs don't require the same level of training and are only placed for companionship. Companion dogs are dogs brought up in a foster care programme and are approximately 12-18 months old when they are placed with the child and their family. Companion dogs are dogs that are released from training programme early because, for one reason or another, they do not reach the high health and training standard required to fully qualify as an assistance dog and meet the standards of Assistance Dogs International (our accrediting body). Companion dogs do not have access to public places.

A Companion Dog acts as a constant companion to the child with autism in their home environment helping to give them a sense of responsibility, reassurance and support.

In Ireland there are four organisations that have accreditation with Assistance Dogs International, Inc. (ADI). These are:

- Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland;
- Irish Dogs for the Disabled;
- Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind
- My Canine Companion - Autism Service Dogs



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Níos Fearr
á Forbairt

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Assistance Dogs International, Inc. (ADI) is a worldwide coalition of non-profit programs that train and place Assistance Dogs. Founded in 1986 from a group of seven small programs, ADI has become the leading authority in the Assistance Dog industry.

Assistance Dogs organisations that pass ADI's accreditation process become ADI Accredited Member programs, and are regularly assessed to ensure they meet the highest standards in the industry.

The following link can be accessed to provide more information:

<https://assistancedogsinternational.org/>

Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland

With regard to children on the ASD spectrum, Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland (AADI) is an organisation that can provide assistance and companion dogs. This organisation was founded on the 26th April 2010 and is based in Quarters Mills in Mallow Co. Cork.

AADI provides trained assistance dogs for children with autism and their families. Funds are raised through donations, sponsorship, personal gifts and various fund raising events.

These Assistance Dogs help to control and improve the behaviour of a child with autism by promoting calmness and acting as a safety aid to the parents.

With the help of these dogs, family outings can become less stressful as the dogs allow families to enjoy greater freedom and mobility. Dogs are first trained as a safety aid to prevent a child bolting.

Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland quote the following benefits which include:

- greater aptitude for learning;
- improved participation in social activities;
- improved communication skills; and
- a greater sense of responsibility and improved confidence.

Parents can get more information regarding services and how to access a companion therapy dog at:

<https://www.autismassistedogsireland.ie/companion-dogs>

My Canine Companion - Autism Service Dogs

Another organisation providing services is My Canine Companion which is a national charity founded in 2011, whose main purpose is to provide highly trained and skilled assistance dogs to people with disabilities, particularly autism. The organisation relies solely on community, individual and corporate funding to provide Assistance Dogs to children and families living with Autism.

Parents can get more information regarding services and how to access a companion therapy dog at:

<https://www.mycaninecompanion.ie/>

Yours sincerely,



**Dr. Cathal Morgan,
Head of Operations - Disability Services,
Community Operations**