

Date: 06 February 2008

Assistance Dog Owners take discrimination message to Downing Street

Five guide and assistance dogs, with their owners, have been to Downing Street (Wednesday, 06 February), campaigning against the discrimination they face from service providers; despite the Disability Discrimination Act.

Canine Partners, Dogs for the Disabled, Guide Dogs, Hearing Dogs and Support Dogs are working together as Assistance Dogs UK (ADUK) to promote rights of access to restaurants, shops and other services for assistance dog users.

2008 is Year of the Assistance Dog, and the delegation met Phil Hope MP, Minister for the Third Sector, to give personal accounts of the problems they face when attempting to travel by taxis, or use services and amenities.

The group comprised of:

Visually impaired Desi Veeran (with guide dog, Zally), from Hackney, London; Dogs for the Disabled client Jack Pegram (with his assistance dog, Berry), from Hertfordshire; Profoundly deaf Tracy Lewis (with hearing dog, Budgie) from Westbury, Wiltshire; Tony Brown-Griffin, from Kent – representing the charity Support Dogs – with Ajay, a Seizure Alert Dog; Claire Graham (and Canine Partner dog, Ulli), from Eastbourne.

During the visit, Phil Hope MP was presented with Dog Star Awards on behalf of Downing Street and the Cabinet Office, in recognition of the accessibility for guide and assistance dog users.

In coming months, assistance dog users will nominate retailers, leisure facilities, public premises, and transport operators for similar Dog Star awards, giving service providers an incentive to make their premises assistance dog friendly.

Dog Star Awards will be symbols of excellence, given in recognition that premises and services meet the needs of all assistance dog users. For example, provision of Braille menus for blind and partially sighted people, induction loops for customers with hearing impairment, wheelchair access, and of course - water bowls for the assistance dogs!

Alan Brooks, Chairman of ADUK, explains: "Although there are many examples of good practice, assistance dog users continue to encounter problems accessing a variety of environments from shops, hotels, pubs, and restaurants, to public transport and high street pedestrian areas.

"This discrimination is both unacceptable and against the law, so by highlighting good practice, we hope it will become the norm, and that in future, our vision of doors always being open to all assistance dog users will become reality."

Phil Hope MP said: "I'm very pleased to accept the Assistance Dogs UK award on behalf on the Cabinet Office and 10 Downing Street. The Government wants to achieve full equality for disabled people by 2025 but to do this we need to hear the views of people who are affected. I thank Assistance Dogs UK for giving voice to the people they represent and will certainly discuss what I have learned today with ministerial colleagues."

For further information, and links to ADUK member charity websites – where Dog Star nominations can be made – log on to www.assistancedogs.org.uk

Note to Editors

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Background

Since December 1996, it has been unlawful for hoteliers and restaurant owners to refuse to serve a disabled person or offer a lower standard of service for reasons related to the person's disability. Since October 2004, the law also requires that service providers make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of their premises to overcome the barriers to access.

Taxi drivers-since 31 March 2001 (31 March 2003 in Scotland) – are required to carry, free of charge, all registered assistance dogs travelling with their owner. A similar duty has applied since 31 March 2004 to drivers and operators of private hire vehicles (private hire cars in Scotland).

Additionally, since 4 December 2006, under Part 3 of the DDA, it has been unlawful for them to refuse service to a disabled person, or offer a lower standard of services related to the person's disability. The law also requires them to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people in the way that their services are provided - although that does not include physical alterations to the vehicles.

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