



Nancy Teague, founder and CEO of Putnam Service Dogs, with a puppy in training.

Volunteers Sought to Raise Puppies as Service Dogs

Putnam Service Dogs, a registered 501(c)3 corporation providing free trained service dogs and follow-up support services to those with physical disabilities other than blindness, is currently recruiting volunteer puppy raisers to raise a pup, and help change it into a service dog.

The organization will be hosting free informational lunches at three locations this month: Saturday, Jan. 20 from noon to 1 p.m. at Mill Plain Diner, 14 Mill Plain Road, Danbury; Saturday, Jan. 27 from noon to 1 p.m. at Putnam Diner, 2600 Route 22, Patterson; and Sunday, Jan. 28 from noon to 1 p.m. at Panera Bread, 6 Triangle Center, Yorktown Heights.

Putnam Service Dogs plans to start two new classes of puppy raisers this year, in February and October.

"I started as a volunteer puppy raiser at PSD because it seemed like a win/win/win," said one volunteer. "I can get my doggy fix without owning another dog, a rescue dog is saved, and a person will be helped... While it is definitely work to train a puppy, it is truly a gift to be part of PSD."

Service dogs are well-behaved dogs that can perform specific tasks for their recipients. The volunteer puppy raisers are critical to PSD producing effective service dogs, who have to trust and love their handlers, and Putnam Service Dogs' trainer will teach you how to build that relationship with your puppy.

What does a trusting relationship look like? The dog is engaged with you (eye contact), and there's willingness, contentment, connection, partnership, comfort and compliance from their dog. You'll learn how to communicate clearly with your puppy, and you and the puppy will learn awareness of each other's needs.

Volunteer puppy raisers are expected to attend weekly classes from the time they're given a puppy of 10 weeks of age until the puppy is 8 months old. When the pup turns 8 months, the volunteer attends classes twice a month.

Putnam Service Dogs' highly certified and experienced trainer, Donna Gleason, will teach volunteers how to raise and train their

pups.

Raisers will teach the puppy basic obedience skills to achieve a level of performance to pass the American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen Test. They will also teach the puppy some service dog commands, and be guided on how to take the puppy on outings to socialize him or her to new experiences.

Starting at age 16 months, PSD's trainer will take over the training, and will train the puppy to perform the tasks needed by their matched recipient.

The volunteer puppy raisers will be sharing their home and living with a great dog for about 20 months, if they make it to graduation. Being a service dog asks a lot of dogs, and most service dog schools have a graduation rate of only about one third.

Putnam Service Dogs maintains ownership of the dog, unless it's released and adopted out. This gives PSD the right to remove a puppy/service dog if neglect or abuse is discovered. PSD will cover the majority of expenses, including all adoption fees, all veterinary fees and medications, crates, and most other required supplies.

The volunteer will be asked to provide food, toys, and some supplies. If the puppy is released from the program and the raiser wants to adopt it, it's free if you've raised the puppy for six months or longer. If not, it costs \$550.

Putnam Service Dogs will adopt the puppies from Partner Rescue Groups just before a puppy raising class begins. Puppies learn the most between the ages of 3 and 16 weeks, so no time will be wasted waiting for puppy raisers to be ready. The puppies will be between 8 and 12 weeks of age, and will probably be lab or golden retriever mixes.

The recipients need dogs they can easily touch sitting in their wheelchairs, and good retrievers to fetch their dropped items.

Hearing alert dogs may be smaller dogs.

The application for being a volunteer puppy raiser is available at www.putnamservicedogs.org. For more information, call 917-449-5359.

Putnam Health Dept. Awarded \$55K to Fight Chronic Disease

The Putnam County Health Department has been awarded a total of \$55,000 through a competitive, state-wide program focused on the prevention of chronic diseases such as obesity or diabetes.

The New York State Department of Health chose to focus funds on preventing these types of diseases because they have surpassed communicable diseases, like influenza, as the leading cause of death and disability.

Nationally-accredited health departments – such as Putnam County's – were at an advantage with an automatic \$7,500 base payment. An additional \$5,000 automatic payment went to all agencies who competed due to the sheer work involved. The remaining funds were distributed to 20 health departments based on performance and county population, and Putnam received an additional \$42,500.

"Putnam residents can be reassured that our health department is among the best in the state with this award," said County Executive MaryEllen Odell. "Our health department should be proud."

Interim Health Commissioner Dr. Michael Nesheiwat thanked the staff for their perseverance.

"I am delighted that our staff decided to put in the extra work to compete for these funds," he said. "It was not an easy task, but having achieved national accreditation in 2016 helped to ease the submission process. No doubt it also helped us think more strategically and strengthen our partnerships with community members."

Only 50 percent of health departments vying for the funds were awarded competitive monies.

Putnam County received four perfect scores in the highest category and three near-perfect scores in the second-highest one. In addition, extensive documentation was required, including explaining health department activities in seven key areas such as engaging community partners.

The evaluation process the state health department used was similar to the process for national accreditation formulated by the Public Health Accreditation Board, since national accreditation may become mandatory in the future.

As with all performance-based awards, the funds must be used to support specified public health services. New York State-recommended activities include conducting campaigns to reduce chronic diseases, and to promote enhanced screening activities and follow-up care by individual providers. Funds may also be used for accreditation or reaccreditation fees.

The Putnam County Health

Department will work with community partners involved in the county's Community Health Improvement Plan to prioritize and develop ideas for the use of the funds.

Residents with ideas are invited to visit www.putnamcountyny.com/health/chronicdisease/ to learn more about chronic diseases. They are also encouraged to submit their own suggestions for prevention programs by mail to: Chronic Disease Prevention Programs, Health Education Unit, Putnam County Department of Health, 1 Geneva Road, Brewster, NY 10509; or by email to health@putnamcountyny.gov.

The mission of the Putnam County Health Department is to improve and protect the health of the community. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion, and health education.

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