

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

THE NEW ZEALAND EPILEPSY ASSIST DOG TRUST has been formed to help people who have severe Epilepsy with many seizures, to feel SAFE and not ALONE.

Our Dogs become a TRUSTED WELL TRAINED COMPANION and can go anywhere with its owner.

In many cases the Dog may become SENSITIVE to the persons seizures and in some way warn them before they happen. The companionship and bonding can be a life changing experience for someone who does not always feel safe and confident.

The training can take up to two years depending on the dog and client, before they are then ready to face the world together.

If you would like:

- MORE INFORMATION
- INTERESTED IN GIVING VOLUNTEER HELP
- MAKING A DONATION

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THE STORY OF A NEW EPILEPSY RELATED COMMUNITY SERVICE

THE NEW ZEALAND EPILEPSY ASSIST DOGS TRUST

This is the record of one woman's vision to provide a new style of support service for some people with epilepsy – in her own words, “an intention to help people with uncontrolled epilepsy feel safe”.

It all began back in ...

1999

Andrea Hawkless visited “Support Dogs” in Sheffield, England – an organisation which had been operating for 4 years – staff worked closely with the British Epilepsy Association.

Initially representatives of Support Dogs offered to come to New Zealand to assist in establishing Support Dogs NZ – however for reasons unknown this never eventuated.

2000

In May 2000 Andrea's son Richard died. Richard experienced severe, uncontrolled epilepsy and was very interested in the “dog” idea. Following Richard's death, his interest was to serve as a prompt to Andrea to “continue the dream for New Zealand”.

Andrea gathered a group of people around her and began researching the possibility of establishing a support dog service for people with difficult epilepsy in NZ.

Via the internet she commenced a dialogue with Sharon Hermansen who managed an organisation North Carolina Seizure Assist Dogs.

As one of those Andrea had “seconded” to work with her, I tapped the shoulder of a fundraising contact resulting in a donation sufficient to pay for a return airfare to bring Sharon to NZ in January 2002.

Sharon's visit resulted in the formation of the New Zealand Epilepsy Assist Dogs Trust.

The formal service aims of the Trust are to:

- *“aid people with epilepsy through the training of dogs with the goal that the dogs will, with association, pre-empt the person's seizure;*
- *Promote public awareness of the importance and role of epilepsy assist dogs;*
- *Provide support to people training and using epilepsy assist dogs”.*

Trust membership is currently comprised of:

Dr. Elizabeth Walker – Neurologist, Auckland

- Chair

Pam Cross

- Treasurer

Jana Avey

- Secretary

Brian Gubb

- Solicitor

Andrea Hawkless

- Settlor / Trustee

Frank Koszegi

- Trustee

Colin Reive

- Trustee

Leonie Ward

- Trainer

New Zealand is one of only four countries with an epilepsy assist dog service, the others being the UK, USA, and Canada.

Following representations made by Sandra Goudie MP, advice was received on 31 July 2006 that the Dog Control Amendment Act 2006 had been passed, resulting in a number of changes to the companion dog provisions of the Dog Control Act 1996 - specifically, under the amended

section 2 of the Act the terms “companion dog”, “guide dog” and “hearing ear dog” had been repealed and replaced by a generic term “disability assist dog”. The term “disability assist dog” had been defined as “a dog certified by one of a number of stated organisations as being a dog trained to assist (or as being a dog in training to assist) a person with a disability” – the NZ Epilepsy Assist Dogs Trust is one of the listed certifying organisations. This piece of legislation results in certified dogs being able to access all public places including public transport, restaurants, cafes, hotels, etc.

It is interesting to note that the organisation in Canada, while having been in operation for eight years, has not yet been accredited the status allowing their dogs access to all public places.

How do assist dogs help people with Epilepsy:

- by becoming a companion and friend;
- by increasing an “owners” sense of safety and security;
- by assisting an “owner” to develop greater self confidence and independence;
- by possibly becoming aware of impending seizures and alerting the “owner” in advance of the seizure onset.

The prediction of impending seizures naturally attracts the greatest interest. However it should be noted that not all dog/owner partnerships will develop this ability (Gerrard’s dog is alerting). How and why the ability to predict seizures develops is not scientifically understood – I understand there is some scientifically based investigative work being undertaken at the University of Florida – USA.

Current service profile:

- 3 dogs working (purple coats)
- 1 dog in training (grey coat)
- Waiting list for 2 dogs
- Contracted Trainer Leonie – in charge of training

Service specifications:

- Breed of dog – require non-aggressive, caring, dogs – therefore preferred breeds are Labradors and Golden Retrievers. Legal ownership of the dog remains with the Trust.
- Have formed a strategic alliance with the RNZF of B – Guide Dog Services resulting in dogs which have been partially trained but identified as not having strong enough leadership traits, being offered to the service. They are ideal for our purposes.
- Training – Can take up to two years to achieve required standard.
 - Both the dog and the person must be trained.
 - An annual assessment is required to confirm standards are being maintained for certification (Dog Control Act 1996) – if not, some training interventions may be required. Register maintained.
 - Purple Coat = Trained / Grey Coat = In Training.
- Service Dog Forum – Trust is an active member – Forum is comprised of working dogs agencies – meets annually – Trust will possibly be hosting the Forum meeting in 2008 in conjunction with Mobility Dogs.

Stories:

1. USA – Standard poodle – lived with a woman with severe epilepsy - has four children – a needs analysis was conducted – as a result of the pair bonding and training – resulted in :
 - Dog alerts 10 minutes before onset of woman’s seizure.

- *If children are in the bath at this time the dog has been trained to pull the plug out – if in the shower, to turn off the shower tap.*
 - *If children are in general play/activity – the dog has been trained to “round up the children” and ensure their safety until relieved of it’s duty.*
 - *As a result – the woman’s self confidence has improved and she socialises more.*
2. *NZ – Woman with epilepsy – employed – applied for a dog – needs assessment – trained with dog – results:*
- *seizure frequency reduced.*
 - *following a seizure the dog has been trained to care for the woman until recovery.*
 - *increased self confidence – dog goes to work every day with woman.*
 - *dog not alerting.*

Summary:

- *The service is not suitable nor intended for everyone who has epilepsy – e.g. age (maturity required for training); ID (level of cognitive functioning require).*
- *Generally for people who have “difficult”, uncontrolled epilepsy.*
- *Epilepsy New Zealand Auckland Branch assisted with the establishment of the Trust and works closely (e.g. Field Officer referrals, joint fundraising, joint epilepsy awareness projects) with it resulting in a win win for both (legally separate) organisations.*
- *The Trust offers a modern service option for those who wish to have a dog and are suitable candidates.*
- *Trust has a selection process – progresses to a formal inspection of the proposed environment where the dog will live – formal arrangement between the Trust and individuals.*
- *The service is attracting widespread, national public attention resulting in an increased awareness of epilepsy.*
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