

Breeding Dogs Need Foster Homes

N.Y. nonprofit is looking for people to care for breeding dogs whose puppies will become seeing-eye trainees.

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Guiding Eyes for the Blind, a nonprofit organization that raises and trains seeing-eye dogs for the visually impaired, is looking for permanent homes for their brood dogs, who will give birth to a new generation of guide dogs.

"We don't keep our dogs in a kennel environment. That is why we're looking for more homes for our breeding dogs. We want them to live happy, active lives in loving homes, and return to the center periodically for breeding," Vikki Iwanicki, program manager at Guiding Eyes' Canine Development Center in Patterson, N.Y., explained.

"Their puppies will grow up to be guide dogs and allow safe travel, independence and new opportunities for vision-impaired people," Iwanicki said.

Most of the dogs in the program are Labrador Retrievers, although some German Shepherds and Golden Retrievers also participate. Prior to being placed in the brood/stud program, the dogs are born and socialized with other puppies at the center.

They're then raised and trained by volunteers who teach them basic obedience and house manners and socialize them in a variety of environments. Dogs with exceptional temperaments and good health are selected to participate in the program.

In order to qualify to take home a brood, volunteers must live within a 90-minute drive of Guiding Eyes' Canine Development Center and must agree to exercise the dog for three miles every day and follow some simple rules, such as keeping the dog leashed in any unfenced area.

Guiding Eyes provides free veterinary care, including all flea, tick, and heartworm preventative medication, free instruction in dog handling and obedience, and a 24-hour veterinary hotline. Once the dog is retired from the program, Guiding Eyes will neuter or spay the animal at no charge, and the foster family can adopt him or her as their own.

About 80 percent of the dogs in the brood/stud program are female, but there are males looking for homes, too. Volunteers interested in harboring a stud must live within an hour of Patterson, N.Y., given the short notice that they may have when their stud's services are needed. They are also required to exercise the dog three miles each day.

For more information on the program, visit <http://cdc.guidingeyes.org/bin/bsfoster>.