Assistance Dogs International & International Guide Dog Federation – joint position statement on the ethical training and care of guide & assistance dogs

Version: 1.0

Purpose of Statement:

In the world of guide and assistance dogs, the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF) and Assistance Dogs International (ADI) are global leaders. The welfare of our dogs is of paramount importance to us. Our aim is to enable people with disabilities to live fulfilling lives in a reciprocal and trusting partnership with an assistance dog.

There is growing evidence that the success and well-being of both the human and dog involved in an assistance dog partnership can be significantly impacted by the quality of bond shared between the two, and that assistance dogs work at their best when supported with good welfare.

This statement has been developed through collaboration with experienced practitioners, external experts and by reviewing current scientific literature. It is intended to support the ethical training and handling of all our dogs and puppies by our staff, volunteers, clients, and any external consultants. We believe that our activities can and must be delivered within a framework of high ethical standards.

This statement is a living document that can be expected to evolve over time in line with new evidence and practice.

Statement Principles

- We recognise that our dogs are sentient beings, capable of feeling emotional states such as pleasure, happiness, fear, and anxiety. We aim to manage our dog's physical and functional needs and experiences so that our dogs, at all life stages, have good physical, psychological and emotional health.

- We recognise our dogs as co-partners and accept our moral responsibility to meet their physical, psychological, and emotional needs, both as individuals and within their role as working dogs.
- We believe that the dog's work activities can and should enhance their quality-of-life experiences.
- We select for physical and temperamental suitability and provide our dogs with the life skills to be successful and content in their role. We recognise that not all dogs are suited to the role of assistance dogs and in these cases should not be used in that role.
- We advocate for the use the 'Five Domains' model to ensure that our dogs 'thrive and not just survive' (Mellor, 2020) and have a good quality of life throughout all life stages.
- We advocate for use of positive reinforcement (reward-based) methods as these have been found to be ethically appropriate and more effective than aversive, compulsive, punishment-based or mixed methods.
- We advocate for the use of the Least Intrusive and Minimally Aversive (LIMA) training model and encourage all our members to work towards a position where physical punishment is not used in the training of dogs.
- We believe the needs of the dog and our commitment to dog welfare must not be compromised by meeting the needs of people with a disability where this does not work effectively for the dog.

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ADI/IGDF joint position statement: ethical training and care of dogs 1.0

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ADI/IGDF joint position statement: ethical training and care of dogs 1.0