



**Autism
Assistance
Dogs
Ireland**



2022 IN REVIEW

AADI Springs Forward



A Message from our President



Dear AADI Community,

It is a privilege in my role as chairperson of Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland (AADI) to present the Annual report for 2022.

Under Nuala's (Chief Executive Officer and Founder) continued leadership the number of assistance dogs placed grew to 19 but more importantly it was a pivotal year for the breeding programme, an essential part of the long term strategy to increase the number of assistance dogs placed every year. Income was maintained at just over €1M. The waiting list was opened to 25 new families.

I am proud to share that in 2022 AADI was successfully re-accredited by Assistance Dogs International (ADI). ADI is the global authority in the assistance dogs industry. This accreditation confirms that AADI adheres to the highest standards in all aspects of its operations, including ethical treatment and training of dogs, ethical treatment of clients, solid service dog training and follow-up care.

As we look to our 3 year plan the board is advocating a prudent approach to growth given the current challenging economic environment. The ongoing effort to ensure the long-term financial viability of AADI which is funded solely from donations is considerable. It is essential that AADI continue to expand and diversify its income sources in order to support the necessary long term Investments.

AADI remains committed to the highest standards of governance and complies with the legislation and regulatory frameworks governing charities in Ireland.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of our donors, individuals, corporates, trusts and estates. It is your generosity that enables AADI to change the lives of children with autism and their families through the placement of an assistance dog.

I also want to express my gratitude to all of our staff and volunteers, it takes the work of many to successfully breed, raise and train a puppy to become a successful assistance dog. You are instrumental to our continued success.

If you have not heard of AADI or are interested in finding out more about how we support children with autism and their families I hope this report will provide you with the necessary insights to the work we do and the potential that we have as an organisation to do more.

Equally, I hope that by evidencing our focus on governance, ethics and transparency you will trust us to use your kind donations to transform the lives of children with autism with the support of a trained assistance dog.

Sincerely,

Irene O Riordan,
Chairperson of the Board, Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland

A Message from our CEO



Dear Friends,

Together, we are transforming the lives of children with autism by providing specially trained service dogs that help keep them safe, enabling the entire family the freedom and independence they need.

Since 2010, we have partnered with our communities across Ireland to provide Autism Assistance Dogs to families who need us, without charging our families for this life-changing service. With your help, we trained and placed 19 Assistance Dogs in 2022. Thank you!

We have worked hard to build the foundations of a strong and sustainable organisation that is poised to deliver our mission now, and scale to meet the growing need. We developed a breeding programme to collaborate with Assistance Dogs International Breeding Cooperative and the European Breeding Centre to give us access to more high-quality pups to enter our training programme. This investment is paying off immediately by increasing the graduation rate of our puppies, meaning that fewer dogs are washing out. Efficiencies like this are replicated and reinforced by our investment in building a high-quality professional team. We are training our own apprentice instructors over a three-year period to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to train our dogs to the highest standards, while increasing staff retention and decreasing the disruptions caused by staff turnover.

Because the need for our dogs is growing and we hear from the hundreds of families across Ireland desperate for our support, we are acutely aware of our responsibility to deliberately and thoughtfully grow in alignment with our strategic plan. We were re-accredited by Assistance Dogs International and remain a Triple Lock Certified Charity by the Charities Institute Ireland, which reflects our commitment to the highest standards in dog care, training, and charity governance.

Thank you to our incredible staff, board members, volunteers, fundraisers and corporate partners for their exceptional work and achievements over the last 12 months. We can't do this important work without each and every one of you. We are so proud of our accomplishments this year, and are working diligently to ensure that every year will be more successful than the last.

As it stands today, our biggest barrier to fulfilling our mission is consistent funding. With everything going on in the world, we are grateful to those who prioritise our mission, understanding that an investment in our work pays off in healthier, happier, and more connected communities.

Thank you for your continued support and trust,

Nuala Geraghty,
CEO

Organisation Welcome

Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland blossomed in 2022. Buoyed by the generosity and outpouring of support from across Ireland, we invested in the organisation to grow our mission in a sustainable and proactive way. The following pages outline how we deliberately and strategically invested with one goal in mind: to deliver MORE professionally-trained Autism Assistance Dogs to families throughout Ireland. And we were careful to make sure that MORE also meant BETTER.

An Autism Assistance Dog provides reliable and consistent safety to families living with Autism, enabling them to live an open and integrated life again. For so many families living with Autism, safety concerns keep them homebound and insular. The introduction of an Autism Assistance Dog, a fully-trained, working dog whose primary concern is maintaining the child's safety, unlocks a family's potential. Children can go to school again, parents have more freedom and flexibility to work, extended families can celebrate birthdays and special events in public again. One dog matched with one family generates immediate and sustained positive impact on the family and the larger community.

Because this work is so important, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that we were not only delivering more dogs to more families to every corner of Ireland, but that the quality of the dogs and the training remains exceptionally high. The following pages describe our efforts, and tell the stories of the many people impacted by the work that we do, from children, to families, to community members.

Thank you for making this work possible.

Sincerely,



Jacob R. Harmon,
Head of Fundraising



AADI At a Glance

-  **19** Dogs Placed in 2022
-  **60** Puppies placed in training
-  **9,500** Hours of advanced training
-  **321** Total number of volunteers
-  **€1,033,508.39** Total funds raised
-  **300** Families applied for an Autism Assistance Dog

Difference your gift can make

- €50** Cover the Cost of Assessing 1 family for an Autism Assistance Dog
- €100** Cover the cost of a routine vet visit for one of our puppies in training
- €250** Cover the cost of an Aftercare Visit to ensure a families Autism Assistance Dog is working to its full potential
- €500** Cover the cost of providing one Autism Awareness Workshop to educate the public about the importance of our work.
- €1000** Cover the cost of providing one week of advanced training to a future Autism Assistance Dog.

Our Impact

It was as if Rebecca and Bella were meant to be friends. A few years before Bella came to live with Rebecca, and transformed her life, and the lives of her mother Elizabeth, father TJ and siblings, Elizabeth had been sitting on an aeroplane when a stranger handed her the newspaper and said, *"This might be of interest to you."* In the paper there was an article about Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland (AADI). Elizabeth had accidentally heard of AADI even a few years before that. She had bought a paper to read a notice about a dear friend when she stumbled across an article about how families were using highly-trained assistance dogs to help children with Autism. But now, sitting on the plane on her way to holiday, Elizabeth felt that it might be time to make the phone call.

After arriving on holiday, and finding the large garden was actually shared by several other families on holiday, Elizabeth was worried for Rebecca's safety. *"She would go into any one of those villas after a chocolate bar,"* Elizabeth said, *"and I wouldn't know where she'd gone."* Elizabeth was convinced that her daughter Rebecca needed an AADI Assistance Dog.

So, she called Nuala Geraghty, Founder and CEO of Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland, who had founded the charity in 2010, and got on the waiting list for an Assistance Dog.

Rebecca had been at a special school, but was in the process of integrating into the nearby national primary school. The new principal at the school suggested that an Assistance Dog might help Rebecca with the transition. So, Elizabeth called Nuala again. *"I had a proper meltdown on the phone, because Nuala told me that Rebecca was now too old to receive an Assistance Dog."* Because there are so many children who would benefit from a dog, AADI has guidelines to assess appropriate families. Now, it looked like Rebecca would miss out. Elizabeth was undeterred. *"If I win the lotto, I'll go about buying a dog,"* she said.

But, AADI saw the potential for Rebecca getting a dog, and when a good candidate became available, Nuala called Elizabeth with the news: they would be getting a dog, Bella. The wait was over, and Rebecca, Elizabeth, and TJ's lives were about to be transformed.

Elizabeth said, *"When Bella first arrived, it was like giving birth to a child. Everyone was so excited! But, then reality hit."* Bella was now a member of the family, and she had to go everywhere with them. Suddenly, Elizabeth and TJ had three children to mind, and a dog! AADI provides a tremendous amount of support for families during this transition, to ensure that the family is taking care of their Assistance Dog, and that the dog is living up to their two years of intensive training.

Rebecca didn't immediately connect with Bella. It took a few days, and with the support of AADI staff, Bella and Rebecca were soon inseparable. The effect was immediate and exceeded all expectations. Bella not only helped Rebecca be more independent, but also created opportunities

to be included in the larger community. Bella went to school with Rebecca every day, and as the other children got to know Bella, they got to know Rebecca too. Because Rebecca is non-verbal, people would avoid her because they didn't know how to

communicate. With Bella at her side, approaching Rebecca became easier, and the school accepted Rebecca in ways that would never have been possible otherwise. The entire school, and the small, rural community in Galway as a whole, began to learn more about Autism and began changing to be more welcoming and inclusive.

Elizabeth and TJ's lives started opening up too. It was now so easy to pop down to the shops, attend mass, go on holiday, even trips to Croke Park were now possible because Rebecca was safe with Bella, and calm. Elizabeth recounted a moment when Rebecca attended the first mass at her new secondary school and Rebecca was noticeably anxious. As they sat in the pews, Bella looked up at Rebecca and licked her hand. Then lay down next to Rebecca, with her head on Rebecca's feet. Elizabeth got emotional recounting how she could see a peace and calmness wash over Rebecca, as if Bella had said, *"No need to worry. I am here, and you are safe."*

"Bella has made the whole community better, more understanding, and more welcoming," Elizabeth said. Community members are raising money for AADI without even telling the family. She will get invitations to parties or notices of fundraisers to benefit Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland, *"I didn't know that this was going on!"* she said.

And that's the beauty of Bella's relationship with Rebecca. She has opened up their lives, made living their authentic lives easier and more rewarding for Rebecca. The whole town knows her, and interacts with her because Bella opened up those emotional possibilities for people. Having Bella as a constant companion has helped Rebecca's attention and focus, helped her build healthy habits, and improved her confidence and independence. Rebecca and Bella *"don't need to talk."* They just know what each other wants and needs.

Now, more than 8 years after Bella arrived in their lives, and her working days are over and she is nearing retirement. *"I don't want to even consider what it would be like in this house without Bella,"* Elizabeth said. Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland is working furiously to provide a successor dog for Rebecca, so that Bella can retire and become the pet, instead of everyday working hard to be a life-changing support for the family. But, with over 200

families on the waiting list for an Autism Assistance Dog, it is by no means a guarantee. The only barrier to a successor dog for Bella, and dogs to each of the 200 families on our waiting list is a lack of resources.

Autism Assistance Dogs is entirely funded by the generosity of our communities. AADI receives no government funding, and 90% of our funds come from donations from individuals and businesses who see the transformative value of what we do. We literally cannot do this important work without the support of the communities across Ireland. It takes 2 years and costs more than €25,000 to train and match an Assistance Dog to a child like Rebecca.

You can help create these possibilities for every family in Ireland who needs an Autism Assistance Dog. It is meant to be. As Elizabeth put it, *"Bella is a special dog. She was meant to be here."*



Journey to Assistance Dog

1. Breeding Programme

By breeding our own dogs, instead of purchasing them from breeders, we reduce costs and increase graduation rates.



2. Puppy Programme 8 weeks to 1 1/2 years

Our puppies begin their training under the watchful guidance of one of our 315 volunteers, who are trained and supported by our professional Puppy Supervisors. During this time, AADI puppies learn basic commands and are socialised so that they are ready for Advanced Training.



3. Advanced Training 1 1/2 Years to 2 Years

Our future Assistance Dogs work 5 hours a day, 5 days a week to learn the important skills they need to be a life-changing Assistance Dog. They learn to remain calm, recognise dangers, and focus on their handler, among many other skills.



4. Working Dog 2 years to 10 years

After they are matched with a family, our Assistance Dogs begin their 8 year working career being an indispensable safety support for families with children with Autism. For 6 months, we provide frequent professional support to families to ensure that the dog and child are thriving, and routine training support throughout the rest of the dog's working life.



5. Retirement 10 years on

After our Assistance Dogs work for 8 years, they retire within the same family's home as a pet. Their service dog jacket comes off and they live peacefully, with great satisfaction knowing that they changed their family's lives forever.



More and Better

After more than a decade, we are intent on getting more qualified assistance dogs into service than ever before. We get puppies from breeders, but those puppies frequently fail out of our rigorous training programme. The failure rate of purchased puppies is approximately 6 in 10.

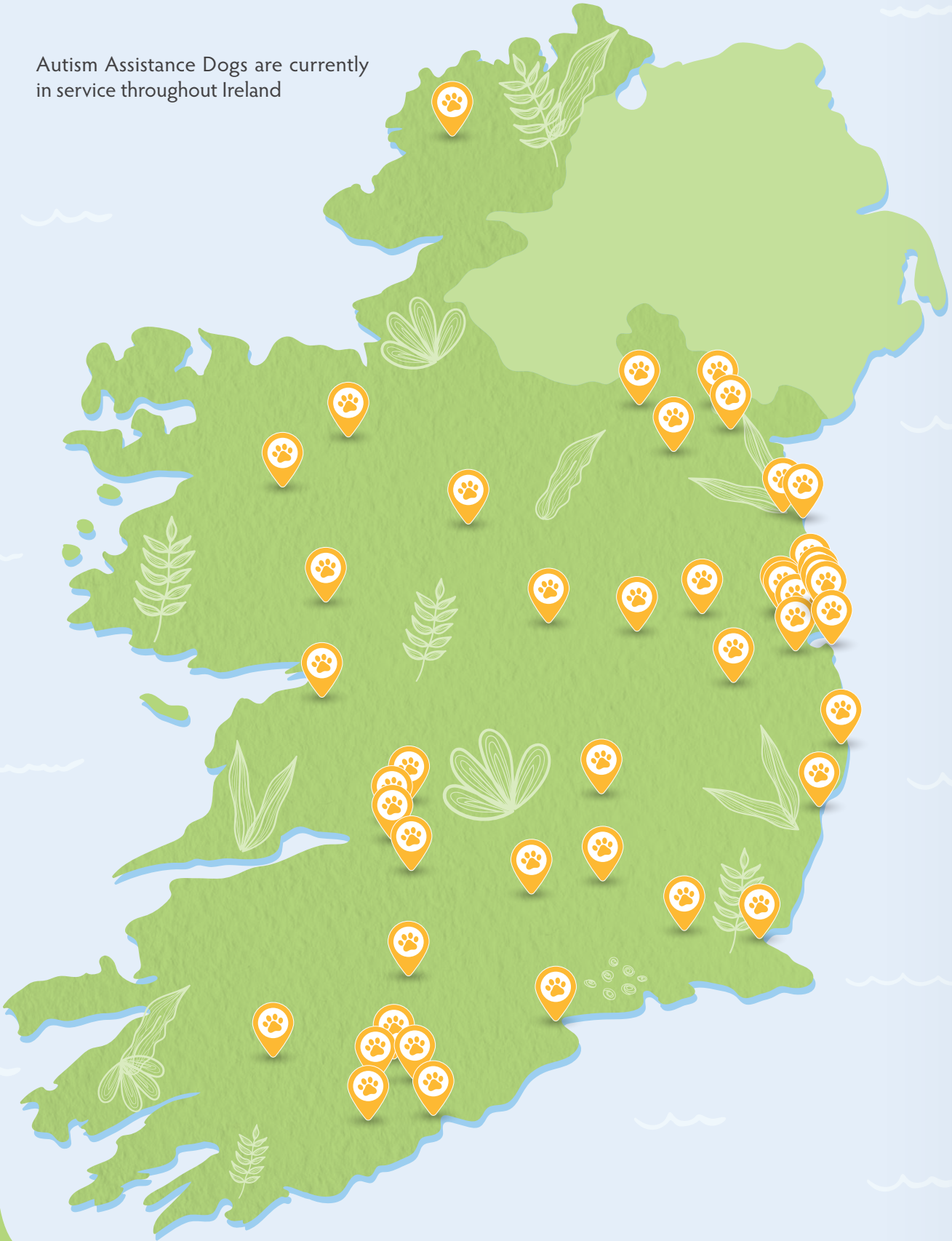
However, when we breed our puppies, we are able to select for traits that make a great assistance dogs, temperament, health, and constitution. That means that we can decrease the failure rate of puppies by 50%. Puppies that we breed fail out of the programme at a rate of only 3 in 10. Our breeding programme reduces costs and increases the effectiveness of our assistance dogs!

- ▶ If we purchase 10 pups it costs the organisation €10,500 and 4 of those pups will graduate from training to change a life. That's a cost of €2625 per pup.
- ▶ If we breed 10 pups it costs us €3658 and 7 of those pups will graduate from training to change a life. That's a cost of €523 per pup.



National Charity

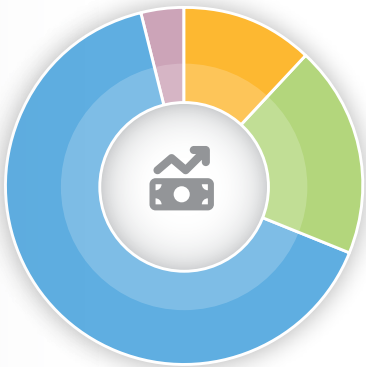
Autism Assistance Dogs are currently in service throughout Ireland



Financials

As the need for Autism Assistance grows throughout Ireland, AADI continues to scale our operations to meet the demand for our service. During fiscal year 2022, AADI made significant strategic investments, to grow our capacity to deliver more and better Autism Assistance Dogs.

The effects of the pandemic and economic uncertainty had a direct impact on AADI's income in 2022 which meant the charity had to draw on its cash reserves to supplement income during the course of the year. AADI has implemented appropriate monitoring steps on budgeting and expenditure to manage and mitigate risk, positioning the charity for long-term growth and success. Looking forward, we are confident that between further investment in our fundraising efforts and the benefit of a generous legacy gift our cash reserves will be replenished and we will end 2023 in a stronger financial position.



Revenue

Individual Giving	€125,428.80
Corporate Giving	€197,000.34
Online Giving	€671,065.25
Grant Awards	€40,014.00
TOTAL	€1,033,508.39



Expenses

Staff Salaries	€616,016.29
Puppy Expense	€255,334.03
Breeding Programme	€14,258.81
Operating Expenses	€181,764.86
Fundraising Expenses	€302,988.95
TOTAL	€1,370,942.65



When we first got Oddie I knew he was going to be amazing for Paige, but I didn't expect how amazing he would be for the whole family.

When we go out and about, people see him and they instantly become more patient, understanding and kinder towards us. People often come up to ask us questions about him and I always give Paige the opportunity to answer if she is comfortable, so in turn Oddie has also helped her with her speech and social skills.

Oddie is the best boy when he is working and when he takes off his jacket he turns into the most playful, fun loving dog! We get to have so much fun with him... Its the best of both worlds! We are so lucky and eternally grateful he is in our lives.

– Faye Walsh, Parent

**You can transform the world for a child with autism.
Learn how by visiting www.aadi.ie/fundraising**



**Autism
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Ireland**



Best Practice in Transparency and Accountability

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