



Trustee recruitment pack

Darwin Dogs

June 2026

Introduction from the founder

Welcome from Julie –

This is a really exciting time to join Darwin Dogs as we aim to grow our charity beyond what we ever imagined.

Darwin Dogs was founded in 2014 to fill a gap in Assistance Dog provision. At that time there was no provision for clients whose primary disability was a mental health condition or for adults diagnosed with autism.

Since then we have worked tirelessly to amend that situation, and have been accredited by Assistance Dogs International ensuring we work to the highest globally accepted standards.

To date (June 2026) we have qualified a total of 54 Assistance Dog Partnerships.

Our service, and our approach, has proved to be hugely popular and we are massively over-subscribed. We have ambitious plans for growth, with support from ADUK and other funders.

This all starts by growing our Board of Trustees.

This could all start with **you!**

I look forward to working with you,

Julie Wassell

Co-Founder and CEO



About Darwin Dogs

Darwin Dogs exists because of one lady's request, around 2010, for help in training her dog. We now support some of the most vulnerable people in our communities: adults and young people whose lives are affected by diagnosed mental health conditions or autism. Many of our clients experience severe anxiety, isolation and difficulties accessing education, employment, healthcare and community life. Some are unable to leave their homes independently.

Our client-led programme enables people to train their own dog to become an accredited assistance dog. Each client is matched with a professional dog trainer who works alongside them in their own home and local community to train their dog to Assistance Dogs International (ADI) standards.

Delivering training in familiar, safe environments removes barriers to participation, reduces anxiety and enables clients to progress at a pace that suits their individual needs. Unlike many assistance dog organisations, we work with clients' own dogs rather than providing a pre-trained animal. This creates a stronger bond between the person and their dog and allows clients to choose a dog that best suits their lifestyle, preferences and circumstances, leading to a more successful and sustainable partnership. It also means our trainers have to be experienced in training different breeds, after all not all assistance dogs are labradors.

Over the next five years our priorities are to make training available to many more people and to make it more accessible to those who can't afford to pay. To achieve these aims we are firstly recruiting more dog trainers and training them in mental health and autism awareness. This will enable us to take on more clients; on average each trainer has 2 clients.



We also want to start Trainer's Weekend Workshops, providing the basic mental health and autism training for new trainers as well as task training workshops for looking at new ideas and approaches to customising what each dog does for its owner. It would also present an excellent opportunity for a get together for trainers, who normally lead a very solitary working life.

About the Board

Our trustees have ultimate responsibility for the charity – they are responsible for providing strategic leadership, support and oversight to ensure the charity continues to

grow and succeed. They work closely with, and support, our CEO to ensure we deliver what we set out to achieve.

We are committed to having a diverse Board with the breadth of skills and expertise that we need to help us grow sustainably to meet the needs of our beneficiaries, and to maintain strong governance and good decision-making.

Some of our trustees have experience themselves of autism and mental health – either through their own personal experience or from people close to them. We greatly welcome and value this experience.

There is no need for trustees to have previous experience of being a trustee, or even having been on a Board – we will provide support and training as required.

The most important thing is that you are committed to support our goals and passionate about what we do.

We are particularly looking for expertise in the following areas:

- Business experience
- Fundraising
- Finance

We are also looking for a Chair of the Board who may also have one or more of these skills.

There are some additional responsibilities for the Chair and Finance Trustee, and these are detailed in the role descriptions in this pack.

We welcome interest and applications from individuals of all backgrounds – including people with disabilities. If you are interested and would like a chat with us to find out more about the role, please do get in touch – we would be delighted to have a no-strings conversation to let you know more about Darwin Dogs and the role of the trustee.

Responsibilities of the Board of Trustees

- Ensure Darwin Dogs is carrying out its purposes for the benefit of its clients, dogs and the wider public
- Comply with Darwin Dogs' Constitution and the law – including employment, pension, equality and health & safety laws
- Act in the best interests of Darwin Dogs
- Manage the resources of Darwin Dogs responsibly
- Act with reasonable care and skill
- Ensure that Darwin Dogs is accountable

Further information about the duties of a trustee can be found [here](#)

Individual responsibilities of Trustees

Governance

- To understand Darwin Dogs' aims and objectives as set out in our governing document and ensure that we operate in accordance with them.
- To help set the strategy for the organisation, including the financial strategy, and ensure implementation and progress is monitored.
- To use your skills, knowledge and experience to further our work, putting aside any personal interests, and declaring any conflict of interest if/ when they arise.
- To identify any risks to Darwin Dogs and ensure they are monitored.
- To contribute towards an annual review of the board's performance.
- To help identify, recruit and induct new board members and the Chair.
- To attend and contribute to meetings of the board as relevant, and undertake agreed tasks between meetings.
- To uphold any policies and procedures relevant to the trustee role including confidentiality, safeguarding and data protection.
- To uphold and contribute to our approach to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Working with staff/ volunteers

- To understand and maintain boundaries between the governance perspective of the board, and the work of any staff and volunteers.
- To provide support and challenge to the CEO and other staff to ensure they are carrying out their roles and achieving the set objectives for Darwin Dogs.
- To help with the recruitment and/or induction of the Chief Executive/senior management as required.

Representing Darwin Dogs

- To represent the board's agreed position when speaking publicly on behalf of Darwin Dogs.
- To act as an ambassador and champion for Darwin Dogs at events and online.

As well as the statutory duties above, each trustee should use their specific skills, knowledge and experience to help the board reach sound decisions.

This may involve:

- reviewing board papers
- leading discussions
- focusing on key issues
- providing advice and guidance on new initiatives
- advising on any issues where the trustee has special expertise.

Person specification

- A commitment to the organisation.
- A willingness to devote the necessary time and effort.
- Strategic vision.
- Good, independent judgement.
- An ability to think creatively.
- A willingness to speak their mind.
- An understanding and acceptance of the legal duties, responsibilities and liabilities of trusteeship.
- An ability to work effectively as a member of a team.
- A commitment to Nolan's seven principles of public life:
 - selflessness
 - integrity
 - objectivity
 - accountability
 - openness
 - honesty
 - leadership.



Role description for Finance Trustee

In addition to the role of a trustee, the Finance Trustee would have some additional responsibilities:

- liaising with the CEO and other relevant paid staff to maintain an overview of the organisation's financial affairs
- helping to prepare and present budgets, accounts and financial statements (alongside the relevant staff member)
- ensuring that proper financial records and procedures are maintained, including reserves

In addition to the person specification for a trustee, the Finance Trustee should also have the following qualities:

- Financial qualifications and experience
- Ability to analyse proposals and examine their financial consequences
- A willingness to be available to staff for advice and enquiries on an ad hoc basis
- Some experience of charity finance, fundraising and pension schemes (desirable)

Role description for Chair

In addition to the general responsibilities of a trustee, the Chair would have some additional responsibilities:

- Providing leadership to the organisation and the board, ensuring that everyone remains focused on the delivery of the organisation's charitable purposes to provide greater public benefit
- Chairing and facilitating board meetings
- Directing board policy making
- Checking that decisions taken at meetings are implemented
- Bringing impartiality and objectivity to decision-making
- Representing the organisation at functions and meetings, and acting as a spokesperson as appropriate (optional)

With the chief executive

- Planning the annual cycle of board meetings and other general meetings where required - for example, the annual general meeting
- Setting agendas for board meetings and other general meetings
- Developing the board of trustees, including induction, training, appraisal and succession planning
- Addressing conflict within the board and the organisation

Where staff are employed

- Liaising with the chief executive to keep an overview of the organisation's affairs, providing support as appropriate
- Leading the Chief Executive appraisal process and providing support where needed
- Sitting on appointment and disciplinary panels

In addition to the person specification for a trustee, the Chair should have the following qualities:

- Leadership skills
- Tact and diplomacy
- Good communication and interpersonal skills
- Impartiality, fairness and the ability to respect confidences.

It would also be desirable for the Chair to have some knowledge or experience of autism, mental health and assistance dogs - and potentially wider involvement with the voluntary sector and other networks – but this is not essential.

Next steps

To apply for any of these roles, please send your CV and a covering letter/email, explaining how your experience matches our needs and what you would bring to the organisation, to: julie@darwindogs.org.uk

We welcome you to get in touch first to have a chat with us if you have any questions about the role – please contact us at office@darwindogs.org.uk to arrange this.



Thank you for reading