



Barney

Progressing at training school

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Welcome to your February Pupdate

The colder months are nearly behind us and spring is just around the corner.

The UK's first guide dog partnership qualified in 1931. Since then, we have matched over 37,500 people with a guide dog – that's at least one new partnership every day for the last 94 years. Our dogs help people with sight loss to get out and about safely, providing life-changing support every single day. They help people with visual impairments to enjoy the freedom and independence many of us take for granted.

1 in 5 people will live with sight loss in their lifetime. By sponsoring a puppy, you're helping us provide vital services, from mobility training to assistive technology and more, that enrich the lives of adults and children with visual impairments. None of this would be possible without supporters like you!

I hope you enjoy reading the latest news from your sponsored puppy. Thank you for being a part of their journey.

Yours sincerely,

Steph

Steph Potter
Puppy Sponsorship Manager



Thank you

for sponsoring Barney



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**Hello, it's
Sophie here,
Barney's
trainer**

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Over the past few months, Barney and I have developed a strong bond. Each morning he's so thrilled to see me, greeting me with such a happy face! We have complete trust in each other, and I'm very fond of him.

Ongoing learning

Barney's truly a bright boy. He enjoys learning and loves his positive reinforcement – food, praise, a good scratch behind the ears – and this makes training sessions productive and enjoyable for both of us. Lately, I've been transferring some of the skills he's learnt indoors to outdoor settings. Barney's guiding skills are great! He's doing well finding up-kerbs and down-kerbs in real-life settings. He can identify and avoid obstacles in front of him, such as people, bicycles, or other objects. To teach him about button boxes, I'm using the hand target. By placing my hand on the button box and rewarding him every time he indicates where the box is. Barney's not as tall as the button box, however he'll touch the pole with his nose. He understands that I want him to indicate where the box is.

Recently, he completed his first blindfold walk. I wore a blindfold, and he guided me while a colleague followed closely behind to ensure our safety.

These walks allow him to take on more guiding responsibility and make the right choices without my help. He successfully located his objective, which in this case was a bench in a park.

To expand his experiences, I've been introducing Barney to new environments. We've progressed from quiet residential routes to busier areas with shops, traffic, and noise. He's gradually getting used to the hustle and bustle of town centres, but I can see he prefers more residential areas.

Something to work on

One area I'm focusing on is Barney's vocalisation around other dogs. He's perfect at training school with dogs he has met before; he's very relaxed and at ease. However, he can struggle outside when he encounters unfamiliar dogs, especially small and vocal ones. Barney and I are working through this with a plan to help him build his confidence and self-control in these situations. As always, repetition is key – when he's relaxed, he does really well.

I'm also getting him used to the vet room and routine veterinary checks, making him comfortable with performing the chin rest.



Check out what Barney is learning with trainer Sophie by going to:

guidedogs.org.uk/puppy-barney

He'll rest his chin for a few seconds on a chair or on a towel, and I'm continuing to work on increasing this time. This skill is used for health checks in his ears and eyes or to help administer medication, like eye drops.

Barney's a strong boy, and I'm working on managing his strength and enthusiasm, so that he can create the right guiding tension. This refers to the slight pressure a guide dog maintains on the harness while guiding, helping the handler to follow. I'm focusing on building his awareness around his strength!

Barney is a clever dog who I love training. There's still a lot to work on, but his progress so far makes me proud of him.

Thank you for sponsoring Barney. I look forward to updating you on his progress at training school in his next Pupdate in June.





What is STEP?

Standardised Training for Excellent Partnerships (STEP) is the bespoke programme we use to train our dogs. STEP uses the same principles as Puppy Raising for Guide Dogs and adds in the 37 key skills that are required of every guide dog. It is a scientifically evidenced way of training which places each dog at the heart. It harnesses the power of positive reinforcement so our dogs understand that learning new skills is rewarding, meaning they're more eager to engage. STEP helps us produce more confident guide dogs, which improves the life-changing impact they have on their owners.



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