



Fern

Learning new skills

Pupdate 4

Welcome to your October Pupdate

I hope you're enjoying the start of the new season, as the leaves begin to change and the air turns crisper again.

Did you know that every day, 250 people in the UK start to lose their sight, four of which are estimated to be children? Nearly half report feeling isolated and cut off from the world around them. Together, we can change that.

Your support goes beyond helping puppies become life changers; you're also making a multitude of vital services possible. We're dedicated to breaking down barriers by providing information, advice and support for adults, children and families. None of this would be possible without supporters like you.

Thank you for your invaluable and continued support of Guide Dogs. Your generosity directly impacts the lives of people with sight loss, ensuring everyone can live actively, independently, and well. You are making a massive difference!

Yours sincerely,



Steph Potter
Puppy Sponsorship Manager



Thank you

for sponsoring Fern



“
**Hello, it's
Neil here,
Fern's
trainer.**
”

Fern's settled really well into training school since your last Pupdate. She's such an enthusiastic dog with endless energy; she doesn't stop moving from the moment she wakes.

Daily routine

Fern's dropped off at training school each day by her volunteer fosterers, who she stays with when she's not at school. When she arrives, she gets excited and becomes a little bouncy. So, I'm helping her learn that she'll be rewarded when all four paws are on the ground. I patiently wait for her to calm down and then give her lots of fuss; it's a work in progress.

Each morning, I'll take Fern to a city centre or a quiet village where we'll practise some of the skills she's learning. At lunch, we head back to training school so Fern can rest, which helps her consolidate the training she's learnt that morning. In the afternoon, it's back out again for more training and a free run. Fern has the best time on her free runs; she races around, sniffing all the fresh smells.

New skills

Some dogs can take a little time to get used to the brown training harness, but not Fern. She put her head straight through the harness and was ready to train.

One of the skills I'm working on with Fern is obstacle avoidance, which teaches her how to guide me safely around anything that's blocking our path. Objects range from street signs, plant pots, and parked cars to bikes and skateboards. One of the trickier things that Fern's learning is how far around the object she needs to go, so I don't bump into it, but she's doing well. She's mastered stationary objects like bins, and we're working on navigating around moving obstacles like people or scooters.



Fern's been learning other skills, such as indicating button boxes at pedestrian crossings. Fern's a small dog, so her nose doesn't reach the button box, but she'll touch the pole with her nose. This skill will help her future guide dog owner feel up towards the box and to cross the road safely at busier junctions.



I've also been teaching Fern how to find a seat. She'll guide me to a bench and rest her head on it. This will allow her future owner to feel where the seat is, and enable them to sit down safely. This skill would be used in more unfamiliar areas, such as cafés or when looking for public benches. Fern loves learning, and she's picked up these skills really well. I'm so proud of the progress that she's making.



Watch Fern locate crossing boxes and seats for trainer Neil by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or going to:
guidedogs.org.uk/puppy-fern



Scan me

Next on the agenda

In the next couple of months, I'll be preparing Fern to move on to the next stage of her training with a Guide Dog Mobility Specialist who'll match her to her future owner. I'll teach her the remaining skills she needs to learn, and then it's practice, practice, practice. Lots of the STEP training is about repeating skills in many different places. This helps Fern build up her experience, which will help her to guide confidently in new places.

Thank you for sponsoring Fern. I'm enjoying training her! Look out for your next Pupdate in February to find out how she's progressing.



Where is Fern on her Pupdate journey?



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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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