



# Fern

## Fern's news

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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 Fern



“  
**Hello, it's  
Kat here,  
Fern's  
trainer**  
”

A few months ago, Fern completed her early training. However, just before she moved to advanced training, her trainer Neil noticed that she had started to limp and appeared to have sore joints when walking. He took her to the vets, and they diagnosed her as lame. Because of this, she took a short break from training while we monitored her. Fern spent this time with her fosterers and enjoyed short, loose lead walks, puzzle games and good naps. She had regular vet check-ups and visits from Guide Dogs staff during this time – she loved all the extra fuss! None of Fern's check-ups revealed anything worrying, and she soon seemed back to her old self again.

### **Back to training**

I'm pleased to say that Fern is still well and is back in early training! I'll continue to monitor her, but she is so excited to get back to learning. Training school was already a familiar environment for her, however I gave her some time to settle back into the routine. Fern and I are building a bond while having fun; she loves mental stimulation through play. She enjoys playing tug, and using her nose to find kibble hidden in her snuffle mat.

I'm gradually reintroducing skills to refresh Fern's memory, taking everything slowly to ensure she feels comfortable. Neil provided a great foundation, and she's quickly picking up everything again. We started with relaxing walks on a loose lead, and focusing on tasks like stopping at kerbs. Fern is so much fun to train; she just loves to learn! I teach using positive reinforcement and reward her with food or fuss whenever she performs a skill correctly. I've reintroduced the brown training harness too, and so far she seems comfortable with it which is great. To encourage her to put her head through it, I use the cue 'touch': when she hears this and sees my fist, she will touch my closed hand with her nose, through the harness. With practice, I'll gradually introduce the verbal cue 'head in'.



## Something to work on

Fern's training is progressing well, and I'm focusing on her self-control. The training site can be quite stimulating; when she sees a staff member saying hello, or another dog in training approaching her, Fern struggles to contain her excitement.



Hear how Fern is doing with trainer Kat by going to:

**[guidedogs.org.uk/puppy-fern](https://guidedogs.org.uk/puppy-fern)**



To help her focus, I'm using platforms to get her used to stationary positions and navigating past distractions: I ask her to walk towards a low platform, then step up and stop with all four paws on it. This gives her an objective to concentrate on, encouraging her to ignore other dogs on site, or kibble on the floor. With practice and a consistent routine, I'm increasing her confidence and focus. I'm so proud of her; she's doing her best and continues to learn every day!

**Thank you so much for sponsoring Fern. Find out how she's progressing in her next Pupdate in June!**





## Key skills

Did you know our dogs need to learn 37 key skills to qualify as a guide dog? These range from those designed to help with health checks to those more specific to guiding. Chin rest (where we ask the dog to rest their head on a surface so that their ears or eyes can be checked) is an essential welfare skill, while learning to walk with the correct guiding tension is important to ensure they can guide their owner around obstacles safely, without pulling.



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