



Hazel

Advancing in training

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Welcome to your June Pupdate

We hope you've been enjoying the longer days and warmer weather that June brings. We're so excited to share what your sponsored pup has been getting up to!

Did you know that we breed and train more dogs than any other organisation internationally? We have a world-class breeding and training programme which focuses on dog health, behaviour and genetic merit. This helps us set our pups up for careers as future life changers. But none of this would be possible without kind people like you! By sponsoring one of our special puppies, you're helping us support the 1 in 5 people affected by sight loss in their lifetime.

Beyond our wonderful dogs, we also provide a range of services for people of all ages. From mobility skills to children's large print books, we're here for anyone who needs us. Your donations make this possible!

Yours sincerely,

Steph

Steph Potter
Puppy Sponsorship Manager



Thank you

for sponsoring Hazel



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**Hello, it's
Clare here,
Hazel's
trainer.**

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Before joining Guide Dogs, I spent 11 years training other assistance dogs. Now, three years into my Guide Dog Mobility Specialist (GDMS) role, I'm continually inspired. What I love most is witnessing the skills I teach the dogs become a lived reality for their owners. It's incredibly moving to see the powerful bond that owners develop with their guide dog, and the boost in confidence and independence that follows.

Strong foundation

Hazel's an absolute delight; her easy-going nature makes her incredibly adaptable to many different situations, which is a great quality for a future guide dog. She takes everything in her stride, plus she's exceptionally calm around children.

Hazel handles distractions very well – she walks past other animals showing minimal interest and instead focuses on what we're doing. When it comes to travelling, Hazel enjoys public transport; she also likes the Guide Dogs van, where she settles comfortably, with a Kong filled with kibble to keep her entertained.

Hazel's previous trainer, Mollie, did an excellent job introducing her to many guiding skills. My role now is to consolidate these skills, increase her confidence, and prepare her for the specific needs of her future owner.

New skills

I've recently started doing blindfold walks with Hazel; I put on a blindfold and ask her to guide me around a familiar route. There's always a colleague close by to ensure we're both safe, and we started in quiet areas before progressing to busier ones. Doing these walks lets Hazel make decisions on her own without any help from me, and allows me and my colleague to observe how she adapts to different scenarios.

I've been teaching Hazel to recognise high obstacles, such as tree branches, that could cause harm to her future owner. I do this by using a flag on a pole to simulate high obstacles. Compared to tree branches, flags are easier for Hazel to notice, as they touch my face when she guides me close to them. This helps her learn how to navigate around them, keeping me safe. As she progresses, I'll gradually add natural elements such as branches and leaves close to the flag, and eventually try this in real-life situations out and about.



Check out Hazel's amazing progress with Clare by going to:

guidedogs.org.uk/puppy-hazel

Another skill I'm teaching Hazel is intelligent disobedience, where she'll refuse to keep walking, even if asked to, if she senses danger like a fast bicycle or a car approaching. We use Guide Dogs vehicles for these sessions, starting with a car at a distance, which is easier to handle, and then slowly bring it closer. Hazel is doing great and making the right decisions!

What we're working on

Standard guide dog training involves teaching dogs to walk on the left; this is why I'm focusing on improving Hazel's confidence with right turns. I'm teaching her to maintain a fluid pace and consistent guiding tension while ensuring she doesn't cut off my stride as she crosses my path. This is a work in progress, but she is doing so well.

Thank you for sponsoring Hazel. I look forward to sharing more of her progress in your next Pupdate in October.





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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