



Niko

Time for school!

Pupdate 4

Welcome to your October Pupdate

I hope that you and your family are well and enjoying these beautiful autumn months.

Thank you so much for supporting Guide Dogs by sponsoring a puppy. Considering the current economic challenges, we are so grateful for your continued commitment; you form an integral part of the Guide Dogs family. Your generosity is helping children and adults living with sight loss to live independent and confident lives.

Every day 250 more people join the two million already living with sight loss in the UK, and this number is set to double by 2050. Our services are needed now more than ever. Our guide dogs and buddy dogs really do change lives, and we couldn't breed and train these incredible dogs without you. Thank you.

I'm pleased to share your sponsored puppy's latest Pupdate with you and I hope that you enjoy reading it.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Allum
Puppy Sponsorship
Manager



Niko has arrived at training school



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**Hi, it's Nat
here, Niko's
trainer.**

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I recently joined Guide Dogs as a Training and Behaviour Advisor. I've come from a dog training background and I'm enjoying learning all about STEP (Standardised Training for Excellent Partnerships) which Guide Dogs has developed as a best-practice training pathway. STEP uses positive reinforcement to teach our dogs everything they need to learn to be successful and happy in their lives and careers.

A smooth transition

Niko's Puppy Raiser, Karen, did a wonderful job of raising and preparing him for this next stage in his training journey. I visited Niko several times whilst he was still with Karen, and he also came in for 'taster' sessions at the training school. This gave him the opportunity to get to know me and the new environment. Niko is quite a sensitive boy, so I felt that this was an important step to ensure a comfortable transition for him.

At training school, Niko's got a spacious pen in the office. Niko sometimes struggles to settle in his pen; he prefers being out and active. It's important that he's able to relax and unwind in a space that is his own so I'm working hard to help him feel comfortable. I try to ensure that he's always got something to occupy him and keep him entertained - his favourite is a tasty chew!

New skills

Niko's a great learner, and he gets so excited when I take him out for a training session; it's lovely to see how much he's enjoying it. Niko was a little bit uncertain when I first introduced him to his training harness, but I've built this up slowly with lots of treats and fuss and now he's doing really well!

One skill that I've been working on with Niko is platform training. This is an excellent tool to teach guiding tension as well as obstacle avoidance. Niko walks between two platforms, stepping ahead to create tension on the lead whilst moving around any obstacles in the way. He knows that when he reaches the second platform, he gets a reward!

Niko and I have a regular short walk that we practise in harness. The roads are straight and there are several crossings where we can practise kerb work: stopping at a lowered kerb and continuing when it is safe to do so. There is also a park along the way where we stop off for a free run. Niko is very sociable and loves to say hello to other dogs but is always polite and has great recall.



Find out how Niko is settling into training school by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or going to:

guidedogs.org.uk/puppy-niko

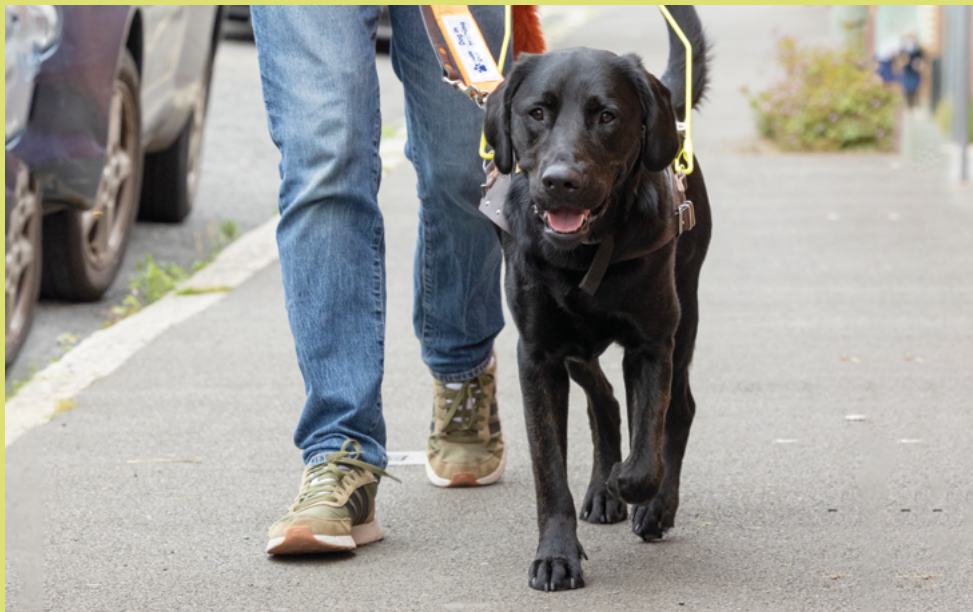


Looking forward

Niko can be uncomfortable with having his head touched. It's important that our dogs are comfortable with this so that we are able to perform physical health checks. I've been using the 'bucket game' to help Niko become more comfortable with me checking his ears and eyes. The bucket game allows Niko to communicate with me; when he looks away from the bucket, this is my cue to stop and give him a break.

Over the next few months, I will continue building on the skills that Niko has started learning. Niko is a pleasure to work with and I am excited to update you in your February Pupdate.





The matching process

Every person and dog is unique, so matching a guide dog to an owner is a complex and carefully managed process. Our trainers take into account a person's needs including lifestyle, walking speed and height.

Once a match has been made, our trainers spend several weeks training the guide dog owner and dog together, learning their common routes and making sure their partnership is a success.



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