



# Deborah and Niko

**Niko has qualified  
as a guide dog!**

**Pupdate 6**

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**Hello, I'm Deborah. I'm so happy  
I've been partnered with Niko.**

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## **Let me introduce myself**

I'm 52 and I have four grown-up children in their twenties. They kept me so busy when they were kids, but now I'm enjoying more free time.

I'm self-employed, and make personalised gifts with vinyl cutting and heat press techniques. I also personalise champagne flutes for weddings, and I'm always busy at Christmas making little presents for craft fairs. It started as a hobby, but as I couldn't continue with my previous job due to sight loss, it turned into my career. I feel so lucky to do a job I love every day!

I was born at 26 weeks and have an eye condition called retinopathy of prematurity. This means that my retina had not fully developed before I was born. It's an eye disease that gets progressively worse over time so as I grew up, my vision continued to deteriorate and I lost sight in my left eye. Over the years, I went from being registered partially sighted to registered blind.



## Discovering Guide Dogs

After being registered blind, my clinician told me I was eligible for a guide dog, but I didn't go ahead with it. I felt that my life was too busy already with kids in the house. I used a long cane, but in my thirties I was attacked whilst out on a walk and I completely lost my confidence. I felt like the long cane made me a target, so I stopped using it.

As my children got older and learnt to take care of themselves, I started to put myself first, and I applied for a guide dog. Two years later, I was partnered with my first guide dog Sandy. I waited all those years, now I wish I'd done it sooner! The way my life improved was unbelievable. I regained my independence, and finally I had my confidence and wellbeing back.

## Welcoming Niko

Sandy worked for quite a few years, then she retired as she has arthritis. I suddenly found myself dependent on other people all over again, it was a real blow. So when Niko came along, I was really hoping it would be a good match. Thankfully, after five weeks of training together, we qualified!

The first time Niko and I went out, I was excited and nervous at the same time, but I shouldn't have been, it was a fantastic first walk!

I really struggle in bright sunlight, any remaining vision I have disappears. It was an overcast day when I met Niko, so I was feeling confident as it meant that I'd be able to build up my trust in him slowly. However, as soon as I picked up the handle of Niko's harness, the sun came out and I couldn't see anything. I'm a strong-willed person and don't let much defeat me, but I was so scared in that moment – I had no choice but to put all my trust in a dog I'd only just met. Niko got me home safely and I burst into tears – it was very emotional. It still seems too good to be true, everything's worked out better than I ever expected. It's amazing!

## Life with Niko

Niko is so friendly – everyone is his best friend! He's met the whole family and he especially loves Amy, my daughter. As soon as he hears her car, he gets excited.

He's a bit quirky, he'll greet me by bringing soft toys anytime I come into a room, he's so happy when he sees you even if you've only been out of the room for two seconds! When I'm gardening, he likes to be involved too, and will dig and sniff around. Sandy's still living with us, so she just sits and watches. Niko moulded well into her routine, they love to play and cuddle together, they have the same calming nature.



Niko is a lovely companion, he's very loving and he enjoys working. He now wears the gentle leader whilst guiding: it's a type of head collar which doesn't hurt Niko but takes pressure off his neck. This helps him to walk with the correct guiding tension.

Thank you for supporting him on his journey. With Niko by my side, I feel confident and independent again. None of this would have been possible without your support, so thank you!



Meet Deborah and find out how Niko has changed her life by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or going to:  
**[guidedogs.org.uk/puppy-niko](https://guidedogs.org.uk/puppy-niko)**



**Scan me**



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**Niko is a lovely companion, he's very loving and he enjoys working. With Niko by my side, I can do what I want and live my life how I choose, without depending on other people. Thank you for supporting him on his journey to become my life changer!**

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Deborah, Niko's owner

Where is Niko  
on his Pupdate  
journey?



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## Thank you so much for sponsoring Niko!

We believe that visual impairment shouldn't stop people from doing the things they love. That's why we're here to provide life-changing support, skills and dogs to those affected by sight loss, helping them to live their lives exactly as they choose. This wouldn't be possible without kind people like you, and we can't thank you enough for your incredible support. Together, we can continue to train more pups like Niko and make a difference to the lives of even more people like Deborah.



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