



Sage

Practice means progress

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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 Sage



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**Hello, it's
Victoria here,
Sage's
trainer**

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Since your last Pupdate, Sage's confidence has improved, and she's mastered the 'head in' cue; she eagerly puts her head through the harness. We are using a brown training harness which is a piece of equipment, typically made of leather, and designed to be comfortable for the dog. It features a handle to teach the dog how to guide and create the right guiding tension.

Harness walks

Each day, Sage and I practise the skills she's learnt in real-life situations. I previously talked about the skill platforms which set the basis for Sage learning how to walk in a straight line and indicate changes in terrain by stopping at kerbs. On our training walks, Sage puts this skill into practice; she'll guide me along a footpath, stopping when we get to the end of a road. When it's safe to cross, she'll indicate there's a step down by pausing with her front two paws on the road and her back two still on the kerb. This helps me feel, through the harness, that there's a step down. Sage will also do this on the other side of the road when there's an up-kerb. She's a fantastic girl, and I'm amazed at how much she's learnt and how quickly.

New skills

Before moving on to advanced training, Sage will learn a total of 37 skills; some of these she's already learnt, and I'll teach her the remainder in the coming months.

She's fantastic and is picking everything up quickly. One new skill we're working on is called 'intelligent disobedience', which is when I teach Sage to refuse a cue because it's unsafe.

An example might be when I ask Sage to cross a road, but a car is coming. A guide dog owner decides when it's safe to cross, but Sage also needs to look out for unheard obstacles, such as electric cars. Sage will learn to refuse this cue by turning around to indicate that it's not safe to continue forward. It's called intelligent disobedience because Sage hasn't done what I've asked, but she's done it for a valid reason. It's tough to teach, but Sage is picking it up well.

Chill time

Every dog needs to have downtime as it helps to embed their learning and gives them a chance to relax. Sage loves to do this by having a 'sniff break'. When we reach an appropriate grassy area during a harness walk, I'll give her the cue 'go sniff'.



See how well Sage is doing with trainer Victoria by going to:

guidedogs.org.uk/puppy-sage

This lets her know that she can sniff the area, which is a relaxing and calming activity for dogs. The best way to describe it is like a breathing exercise for humans or popping on the kettle to make your favourite hot drink.

The highlight of any day for Sage is her free runs; she loves to run and play with her fellow dogs in training. They have so much fun chasing each other and playing tug with rope toys. It's like playtime during the school day: lots of running, chatter and fun to be had!

Up next

Sage is such a great girl, I'm so proud of the progress she's making. In the coming months I'll continue consolidating all her skills and improving her confidence in every situation.

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





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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