

Tails



2025 issue

**Transforming lives
with your support**



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the puppy selection process**

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From birth to brilliance



Every one of our playful puppies has an exciting future ahead of them. Most become life-changing companions to someone living with sight loss. Some, however, are chosen to become mums and dads, shaping the next generation of our wonderful guide dogs.

Our puppies are planned long before they are born. We're looking for healthy, calm dogs, who are good learners and respond well to training. We consider the family tree and history of each potential parent when planning a mating, along with eye tests, health checks and x-rays of their hips and elbows.

Puppies are monitored from the day they're born – their weight, skin and coat, teeth and motor skills. At seven weeks, they are microchipped and vaccinated, with further health checks before going to the home of their volunteer puppy raiser.

Tom Lewis, Breeding and Genetics Lead at Guide Dogs, explains what happens to the puppies that have been identified as potential guide dog mums and dads: "Throughout this time, we will carefully check for any serious health or behavioural issues. We conduct a detailed review of the puppies, going through their records, screening them for diseases such as hip dysplasia, we carry out eye and heart tests, and DNA tests for single gene diseases.

80%

of our dogs are Labradors and golden retrievers, which we cross to gain the best of each breed.



123

puppies joined our breeding programme as guide dog mums and dads in 2024.

If all is well, they're accepted onto the breeding programme at around 13-14 months. The earliest they could welcome their first pups is around 20 months, so at this stage they're 'on probation'.

Meet Claus

A new recruit to the breeding programme is two-year-old black Labrador Claus, who passed all his tests to become a stud dog. He's now living with his breeding dog volunteer family and fathered his first litter earlier this year. His family describes him as "a gentle giant with a loving, willing nature. He's calm in the house, and very friendly towards people and other dogs."

The perfect characteristics to become a guide dog dad to the next generation of guide dog puppies!



The brightest future for Mabel

At only four weeks old, Mabel was diagnosed with optic nerve hyperplasia, meaning her optic nerves hadn't developed as they should and she would never be able to see. Feeling alone, Mabel's parents, Max and Eboni, reached out to Guide Dogs for support. Thanks to our dedicated Habilitation Specialists, Mabel is growing in confidence and learning to get around independently.

Mabel's family had their first session with a Guide Dogs Habilitation Specialist when Mabel was 10 months old. Eboni says: **"After that first session I felt so much relief – we had been on our own for so long and now there was somebody who was going to help us."**

Guide Dogs was able to provide support at both Mabel's nursery and at home. As Max explains, it's important to help the whole family come to terms with vision impairment: **"I didn't know how to play with Mabel. Guide Dogs has helped us, as sighted parents, understand the world for Mabel."**

More recently, Habilitation Specialist Sunita has supported Mabel in her transition to primary school. She provided advice to the school before visiting with Mabel, where they explored the classroom, dinner hall and the outside spaces.

“

It's been a bumpy road, but the constant throughout has been Guide Dogs. I feel good about Mabel's future now. There's no limit to what she can do, and she can't be defined by her vision impairment. The impact Guide Dogs has had is immeasurable."

Eboni, Mabel's Mum (shown opposite with Mabel)

Sunita says: **"For any four-year-old school is a big step, but for a child who is blind or partially sighted, it can be that much harder. It was important Mabel was confident getting around the classroom independently."**

Mabel continues to have habilitation sessions, and Eboni says: **"Mabel is amazing and has the brightest future. Guide Dogs has had such a massive impact, not just physically for Mabel, but also emotionally for us all as a family."**

Did you know, in 2024:



5,991

We helped children with sight loss to learn essential life skills 5,991 times, so they can navigate the world around them confidently and safely.



6,852

We produced 6,852 bespoke, large print books, helping children with sight loss to enjoy reading just like their friends.



Gifts in Wills: Fact or Fiction

Did you know nearly two out of three life-changing guide dogs are only here thanks to gifts in Wills? Writing a Will is something many of us put off, but it's an important document to have. Let's clear up some common myths.

“
I can't imagine losing my sight, but I know how vital a guide dog would be. I love knowing my gift will give someone freedom, independence, and a best friend.”

Tanya,
Guide Dogs supporter

Myth: “Making a Will is expensive.”

Fact: Many people put off writing their Will, thinking it's a complicated and expensive process. It can seem daunting, but it doesn't need to be! In fact, Guide Dogs offers a free Will writing service.

Myth: “My family will inherit everything anyway; I don't need a Will.”

Fact: Without a Will, the law decides who gets what. Having a Will is the only way to make sure the people and causes you care about are looked after as you intend. It can also give you peace of mind and make things easier for your loved ones.

Myth: “You need to be wealthy to leave a gift in your Will.”

Fact: We're so grateful for every gift, no matter the size. You can leave a share of your estate, a cash sum, or items, such as jewellery, art or shares.

Find out more and request your free Gifts in Wills Guide: guidedogs.org.uk/giftinwill



Remembering loved ones

Our guide dogs are guiding stars, providing independence to people with sight loss. Our annual Guiding Stars appeal, where supporters can dedicate a star in memory of a loved family member, friend or adored pet, received over 3,000 stars for our Christmas trees and more than £100,000 in donations last Christmas. That wonderful generosity helps train puppies like chocolate Labrador, Robin.

Guiding Stars is just one way of supporting us in memory of a loved one or animal companion. Instead of flowers, many supporters set up an online funeral collection, whilst others may establish a Tribute Fund in the name of the person they've lost to donate on a longer term basis. Tribute Funds are also a great way to raise the money to name a guide dog puppy in memory, ensuring the loved one's spirit, and in many cases, their name, lives on in a life-changing guide dog.

Find out more: guidedogs.org.uk/inmemory



Meet Jen Howie

Guide Dogs Partnership Operations Manager

Jen leads a team of specialists who develop and support partnerships between guide dogs and people with sight loss, to enable them to live the life they choose.



Q: How would you describe your role?

A: I oversee a team that completes the final stages of guide dog training, finds the right match, and provides support until the end of the partnership (usually around 8 years). It's a hands-on role.

Q: What's the biggest challenge you face?

A: Finding the perfect match, sometimes it takes longer than we'd like. The dog must suit the person's lifestyle, and the owner must be able to support their training and welfare. Getting it right is crucial for a lasting, happy partnership.

Q: How do you maintain high-quality training?

A: We practise blindfolded walks to ensure dogs are fully prepared. Each new partnership trains for at least five weeks with a Guide Dog Mobility Specialist to build confidence and safety. I observe sessions to check progress, and we offer ongoing support as their journey together evolves.

Q: What's the best part of your job?

A: Seeing the impact a guide dog has. Even after 20 years, I still get goosebumps watching someone walk confidently with their guide dog, living their best life.

Win big, give back

“Wow! I can't believe it, it's incredible to win! I'm very happy and proud that I support Guide Dogs, it's such a wonderful cause.”

Mrs Edwards, Autumn Raffle 2024 £10,000 winner

We run five very popular raffles every year, and in 2024, they raised over £4 million for Guide Dogs!

Taking part in one of our raffles gives you the chance of winning some incredible cash prizes. You can dream about that once-in-a-lifetime holiday and know that you're raising funds for a good cause too. Tickets cost £1 each and the top prize in the most recent Christmas Raffle was £15,000. That was won by Mrs Adams, a longstanding supporter, who said:

“I've been a supporter for many years and give every chance I'm able to. I think it's a wonderful cause and so inspiring as I have family members who have guide dogs, and I know how much it means to them. Thank you so much. I'll have to have a think about what I will spend the prize money on!”

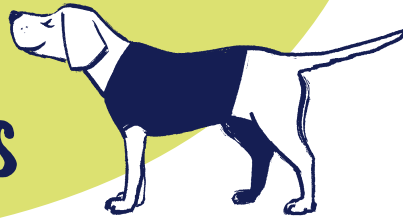


The Lucky Lottery

Another fantastic way to support Guide Dogs on a weekly basis is our Lucky Lottery. It costs just £1 per chance, and you could win one of 210 guaranteed weekly prizes, with a top prize of £1,000. Every quarter, that's increased to a big jackpot prize of £10,000!

To find out more: [guidedogs.org.uk/winbig](https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/winbig)

Incredible homes for incredible dogs



Sometimes, our incredible dogs need a new forever home. While most become life-changing guide dogs, some don't complete training due to health or behavioural needs, making them better suited as pets or to an alternative career. And while most guide dogs who have reached their well-earned retirement stay with their guide dog owner as a pet, this isn't always possible.

Our dedicated Rehoming Officers work hard to match each dog with the right family, one that can provide the care, patience, and commitment they deserve. With thousands of applications each year, they carefully screen potential owners through interviews and home checks to ensure the best fit. While guide dogs are highly trained, they each have their own unique personalities.

Let's meet some of our recently rehomed dogs.

Lively Labrador Kai is living his best life on a farm in rural Scotland, where he can use up some of his boundless energy. He needs a lot of mental stimulation too, so his new owners, Jen and Craig, have started taking him to search and rescue training. Jen says: **"Kai's training takes him all over Scotland and they'll do about 10 to 12 practice searches throughout the day. He really enjoys it and it's one of the only things that will tire him out!"**



Jay was withdrawn from training due to a skin allergy and is now a much loved family pet, helping five-year-old Rocky overcome his fear of dogs. That's important because Rocky has Usher Syndrome, which causes deafness and could ultimately take away his sight, meaning one day he might need a guide dog to get around. Rehoming Officer Emma Rogers says: **"Jay now has a wonderful home with a family who can manage his medical needs, plus a little boy who is no longer scared of dogs."**



Guide dog Una's owner sadly passed away, so we needed to find Una a new home. She undoubtedly missed her owner but has found happiness living with Aileen and Tom, who had already rehomed retired guide dog Krista. Aileen says: **"When we met Una it was love at first sight. She got along with Krista straight away. When you come home, open the door and see their little faces welcoming you, it's just perfect. They give us so much pleasure."**



As we continue to find incredible homes for these incredible dogs, we are reminded of the profound difference they make. Each rehomed dog brings joy, companionship and a unique bond that enriches both their lives and those of their new owners.

If you're interested in finding more about how you can rehome one of our wonderful dogs, please visit guidedogs.org.uk/rehoming

Your support makes all the difference

Thank you for supporting Guide Dogs. Every penny you give makes a difference to children and adults living with sight loss.

Did you know...

Training a guide dog costs **£38,110** from their first day at Guide Dogs school until they qualify as a new partnership with someone with sight loss.



How your donation can help



£6

could support a guide dog partnership for a day.



£26

could fund a My Time to Play session, helping children develop key skills.



£60

could provide a puppy raising kit for volunteers.



£134

could cover an Education Review to ensure a child gets specialist support and equipment at school.

Find out more about how we manage and respect your data at guidedogs.org.uk/privacy or call **freephone 0800 953 0113** to request a printed copy. Please use this number to tell us if you have changed your mind about how we contact you; including telling us that you do not wish to receive occasional direct mail about Guide Dogs.