

# By My Side strategy update - May 2019

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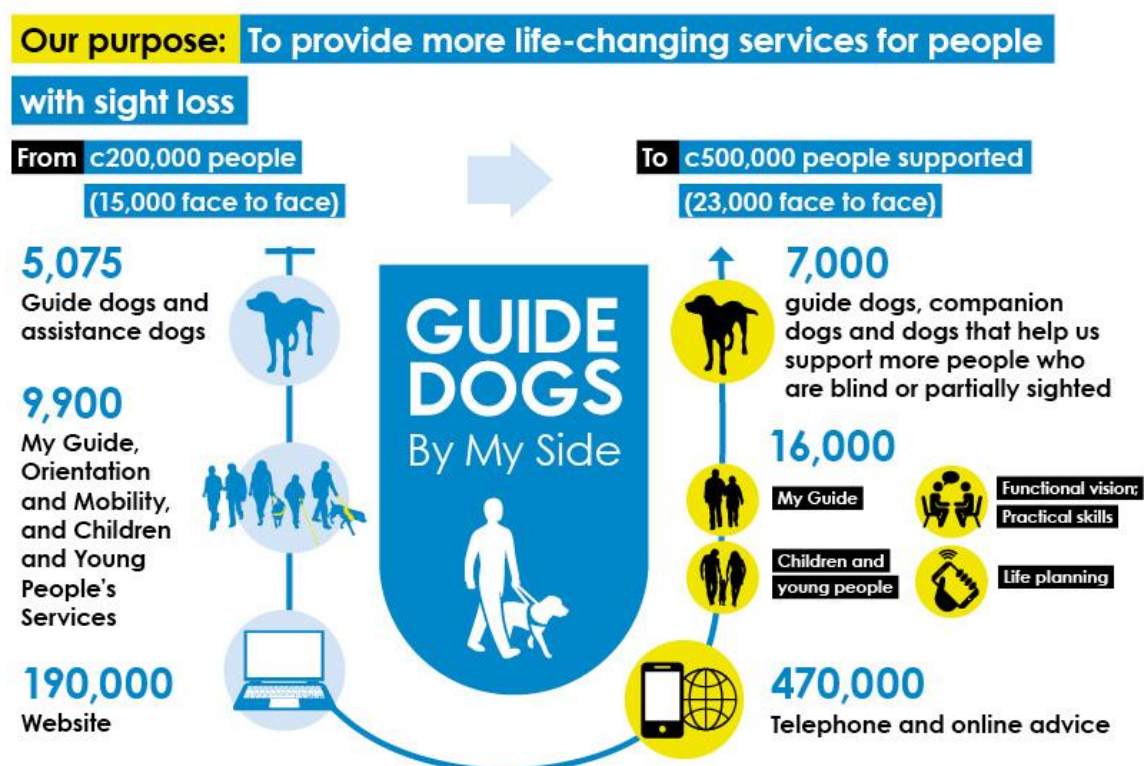
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## Guide Dogs By My Side 2018 – 2023

As a valued member of the Guide Dogs team, we want to keep you informed of how we're progressing with the By My Side strategy as well as introduce you to our new volunteering strategy called Inspiring Connections.

To remind you what By My Side is all about, the following graphics give an overview of the planned growth in our services and the seven key programmes that will help us reach more people with sight loss.

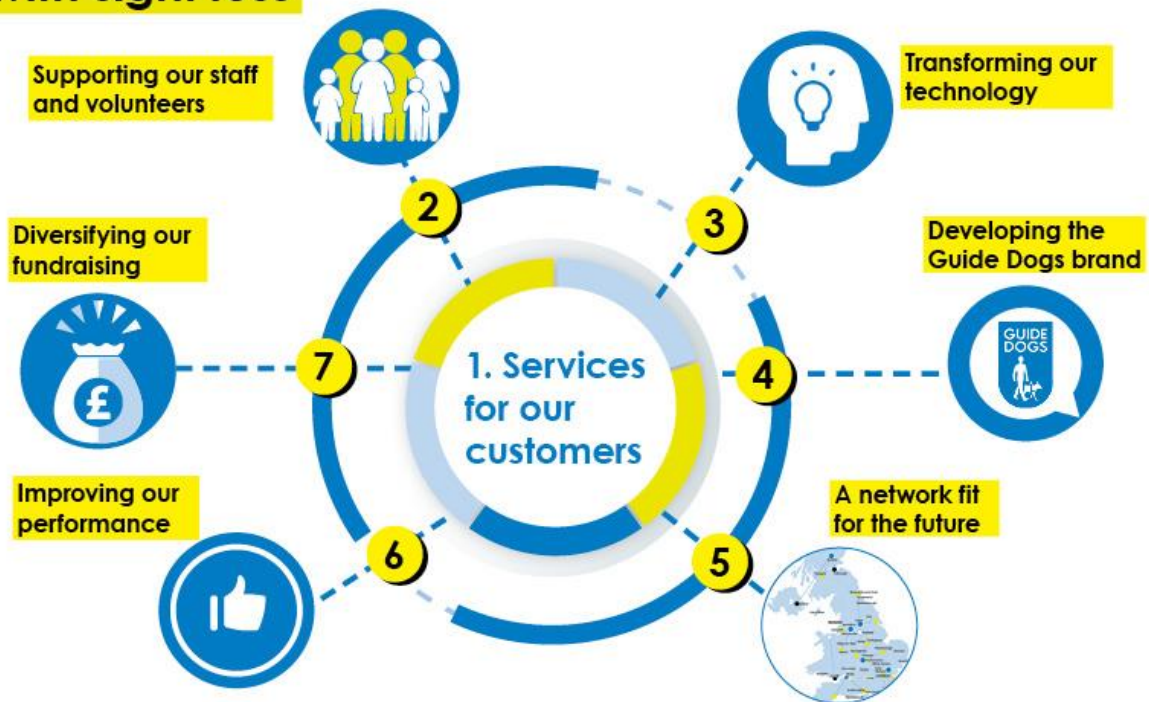


Our purpose: To provide more life-changing services for people with sight loss.

- From c200,000 people supported to c500,000 people supported.
- From 5075 Guide dogs and assistance dogs to 7000 guide dogs, companion dogs and dogs that help us support more people who are blind or partially sighted.

- From 9900 My Guide, Orientation and Mobility, and Children and young people services to 16,000 My Guide, Functional Vision practical skills, Children and Young People and Life Planning.
- From 190,000 website to 470,000 telephone and online advice.

## Seven key programmes will help us reach more people with sight loss



Seven key programmes will help us reach more people with sight loss

1. Services for our customers
2. Supporting out staff and volunteers
3. Transforming our technology
4. Developing the Guide Dogs brand
5. A network fit for the future
6. Improving our performance
7. Diversifying our fundraising

## Volunteering strategy 2019 – 2023

We are excited to share our new volunteering strategy – Inspiring connections – with you all. This is our new direction for volunteering taking us into 2023. We hope you enjoy reading it on [VIP](#).

To expand our services, we also need to grow our volunteer base. At the same time, it's really important to us that all our volunteers have a great

experience with Guide Dogs. The graphic below shows the planned areas of growth outlined in our new volunteering strategy.



(The following table consists of 2 columns and 4 rows.)

<b>Now</b>	<b>2023</b>
16,000 volunteers	22,000 volunteers
24,500 roles	33,000 roles
67 % of our volunteers would <b>strongly recommend</b> Guide Dogs as a good place to volunteer	80% of our volunteers would <b>strongly recommend</b> Guide Dogs as a good place to volunteer

### **Our vision is that by 2023:**

- Volunteers will be involved in every area of our work, recognising their importance to keeping Guide Dogs relevant in the communities we serve.
- Staff and lead volunteers will have the knowledge, skills and tools to ensure all volunteers are inspired, supported and valued.
- A diverse range of people will be gifting their time, expertise and energy.
- Guide Dogs will be recognised internally and externally as an exceptional place to volunteer, providing high quality and safe experiences.

Together, we will:

-  1. **Strengthen** our volunteering infrastructure
-  2. **Build** a volunteer positive culture
-  3. **Enhance** the volunteer experience
-  4. **Develop** new ways to get involved
-  5. **Grow** our lead volunteer programme

## Lead volunteers

A lead volunteer is a volunteer carrying out a role within Guide Dogs which involves responsibility for coaching, mentoring and/or supporting other volunteers. We have some excellent examples of where lead volunteers provide valuable support to other volunteers. For example, My Guide Partnership Support volunteers and Puppy Walking mentors.

We recognise that we can do more to support lead volunteers so they feel equipped to effectively carry out their roles. We're very excited that, over the next five years, we'll be developing and improving our lead volunteer programmes.

**“Sarah has been a Partnership Support volunteer with the My Guide service for two years. She has built a rapport with several partnerships and helped them to maximise the benefits of their My Guide match. Her valuable contributions have increased the capacity that My Guide staff have to create new matches and grow the service.”**

Volunteering Consultant

For the full version of the volunteering strategy please go to the [Volunteer Information Point \(VIP\)](#).

## **New Canine Assisted Services**

### **STEP**

STEP stands for Standardised Training for Excellent Partnerships (STEP). It's a way of training our guide dogs using the power of Positive Reinforcement Training (PRT). PRT is recognised globally as the most effective and ethical way to train animals. In our context, it produces relaxed, confident dogs who are actively engaged in their work. We have always used PRT techniques, but STEP standardises the teaching process, using marker ('clicker') training to shape and encourage the behaviour we want to see. STEP embraces the highest standards of dog welfare, helps us get the best from the dogs and handlers, and makes us more efficient. Since its inception in September 2017, the programme has delivered great results to customers, staff and the dogs themselves. Several of our sites including Forfar and Maidstone are using STEP effectively and we're continuing to roll out the training to other teams.

### **Puppy development**

This year we are developing our puppy walking programme so that all Puppy Walkers have access to a clear set of advice and guidance. We'll use some of the principles from the 'Puppy Life Skills' framework created by world-leading canine behaviourists at Lincoln University to develop a bespoke programme for Guide Dogs, in conjunction with our puppy walking staff. This will draw on the huge amount of experience we have in Guide Dogs to ensure our pups receive the best possible preparation for their training as future life-changers. We plan to roll this out to volunteers in 2020.

## **New Canine Assisted Services**

We have a world-class breeding programme and dedicated Puppy Walkers who raise our pups through the first year of their life, but not every dog is suited to guiding. We are currently developing some new roles for our dogs, so that they can have an alternative career within the Guide Dogs family and help us to support even more people with sight loss. These plans have not yet been finalised, but meanwhile we have taken the decision to refresh our 'Buddy Dogs' service, which places specially selected dogs into homes with children who have a vision impairment. Buddy Dogs have been shown to deliver great benefits to the children and their families, but we identified opportunities to improve how we deliver this service. We look forward to launching our refreshed service later in 2019.

## **Skills, Information and Support Services**

Here are some of the key highlights from 2018 in this area:

### **Adults:**

Life Planning is a person-centered approach that empowers and enables an individual, in partnership with family, friends and other meaningful people, to identify their life aspirations and create plans to achieve them. All teams will be trained on this new approach by the end of 2019.

### **Volunteer Led Services:**

We are expanding our My Guide service and in doing so we have created new opportunities for volunteers through our “Lead Volunteer” model. This model creates opportunities for volunteers to develop new and existing skills. We have introduced a My Guide Partnership Support role that manages a small number of partnership volunteers, or part of the process. We also have the volunteer role of My Guide Promoter who helps to promote the My Guide service and volunteer opportunities and finally the role of My Guide Trainer who supports the delivery of training. We have also carried out staff recruitment to support further My Guide growth through partnerships, friends and family training and we have produced a range of short informative films highlighting key elements of sighted guiding.

### **Children and Young People Services:**

A key service for us in the By My Side strategy, is the new Children and Young People (CYP) Advice Line. This is a single point of entry for families seeking support from us. Family members will have conversations with people who understand and who can help them explore what’s important to them, and for them; what works and what doesn’t. We work in partnership with individuals to establish their goals and identify any challenges which might prevent them from achieving their aspirations.

These conversations lead to an action plan, which can link the family into our other CYP services such as Family Support, Education Support, Assistive Technology, Family Events, CustomEyes books or Habilitation (mobility and independence training). The new strategy will see our Family Events grow, so that more are delivered locally via community teams and we will be refining and updating our Habilitation service offer so that it focusses more on the very important pre-school age range.



## **Information & Technology Services:**

Working in our first strategic partnership with RNIB, we have co-developed the new Sight Advice FAQ portal. The portal has been developed by RNIB in collaboration between Guide Dogs and other sight loss charities to allow service users access to information and signpost to support so they can live independently and get the advice they need.

We have created a new volunteering role called Technology Ambassadors who will have a direct focus on assistive technology for mobility and will involve supporting our regional team to enhance their understanding and adopt technology that can help our service users. They will also help to create and deliver technology training for our front-line staff. If you would like further information on this new role please email Martin on [Martin.Ralfe@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:Martin.Ralfe@guidedogs.org.uk)

## **Engagement:**

We are pleased to have our first shared toolkit co-developed with RNIB which will launch in 2019. The toolkit has been produced in collaboration with RNIB and is designed to support customers who have been refused access to a service.

The toolkit also gives information on the Equality Act and the Disability Discrimination Act for Northern Ireland. It is designed to empower customers to challenge service providers by empowering them with the advice and information they need, knowing they are being supported by Guide Dogs and RNIB.

## **Customer Insights:**

In 2018, research was carried out with service users, their families and friends. This research focused on listening to service users, friends and families to make sure we deliver services that respond to their needs. All of our services will now be designed and developed in “partnership” with service users at every stage.

## **Programme Funding:**

The Programme Funding Team focus on diversifying Guide Dogs' income. As well as the amazing support we get from the public with generous donations, we also look to secure income from organisations who want to use our expertise such as Local Authorities and we write funding bids to generate income that supports our work. The income we secure is for the day to day running of those services and means Guide Dogs can invest in other areas of work through the money saved.



# Fundraising at Guide Dogs



The above graphic is about diversifying our fundraising. It shows we will:

- Reduce the amount of new donors we recruit through direct marketing programmes.
- Grow income from businesses, Trusts and major donors.
- Grow income through increasing the number of fundraising volunteers – and engaging younger supporters with mass participation events.
- Continue to invest in legacy marketing and find new ways to engage with the older generation post General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

We are working towards increasing our net return to the business for service provision and reducing the reliance we have on two fundraising products – Sponsor A Puppy and Legacies.

In order to do this, we will be expanding our donor base, by reaching younger audiences and those motivated by our new services. We will also be aiming to reduce reliance on our two key fundraising products by building income from volunteer fundraising and income from companies and trusts. Finally, we will be testing new channels to reach donors due to changes in the market caused by the General Data Protection Regulation.

## 2018 review

In 2018, we raised more money than ever before by:

- Hosting over 900 attendees at our Christmas Wishes concert.
- Testing My Guide and Children's Services as a fundraising ask.
- Delivering 2.8 million emails, letters and calls to donors in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- Launching our first multi-million, multi-year corporate partnership.
- Engaging new donors in new ways including the Great British Dog Survey and the Guide to Good Eye Health.
- Processing 4 million Direct Debits and answering 75,000 telephone calls from donors.

Community Fundraising had a great year, reaching its highest income ever to fund our life-changing work. We are incredibly lucky at Guide Dogs with over 16,000 volunteers, 43% of which are raising funds. That's almost 7000 people giving their time, spending weekends standing in the heat, snow and storm conditions attending shows, doing collections, giving talks and much more. Thank you.

## **2019**

In 2019 we are continuing to work hard to diversify our income in order to reduce risk. We currently have a large percentage of our income coming from Sponsor A Puppy and Legacies. In 2019 we will continue to test new fundraising propositions to expand our donor base, fundraise for services outside of the guide dog service and look to increase funding from companies, trusts and volunteer fundraising.

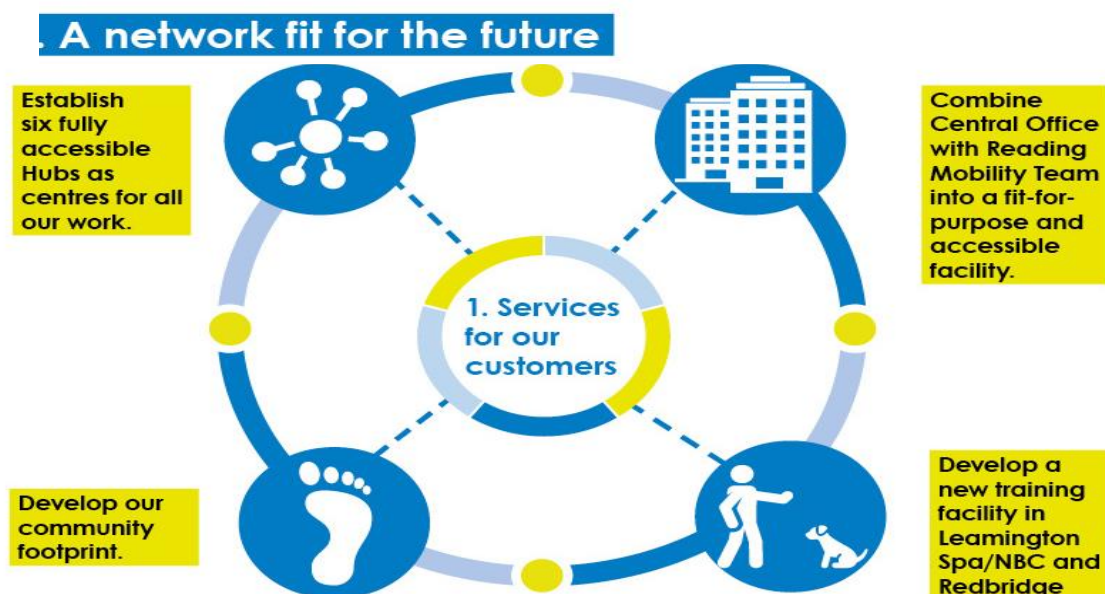
## **Brand update**

In March we launched our UK-wide brand marketing campaign, By My Side. It included an inspirational TV advert which was shown thousands of times and in primetime slots, such as Dancing on Ice, Coronation Street and The Great British Bake Off. This was supported by a major radio, digital and PR campaign.

We worked with celebrities such as Sophie Thompson, Adrian Chiles, Alex Jones and Ryan Kelly. And we managed to secure some great coverage in a wide variety of print and online press as well as the ITV National News and The Victoria Derbyshire Show to raise the issue of what it's like to live with sight loss.

The response to our campaign has been overwhelmingly positive from people with sight loss and the public alike. Whilst we are still in the process of collating all the performance figures, we are thrilled with how it has gone so far.

## Location Guide Dogs update



### A network fit for the future

- Establish six fully accessible Hubs as centres for all our work.
- Combine Central Office with Reading Mobility Team into a fit-for-purpose and accessible facility.
- Develop new training facilities in Leamington Spa and Redbridge.
- Develop our community footprint.

Architects are working with us to develop our concept designs, these will inform the design of all our new regional centres. Bristol will be our first new regional centre, opening spring 2020.

Our Property Services team is working to identify how best we prepare land for sale that we no longer require. This will involve securing best value to ensure Guide Dogs maximises its income to help fund the work required.

Our Philanthropy & Partnerships team are developing capital appeal plans, with the aim of identifying donors who are prepared to support the significant investment required to develop our regional centres. (A capital appeal is an appeal to raise a capital sum rather than an appeal for ongoing costs of a charity, for example a set amount is raised to fund the construction of a building.)

We are in the process of developing a strategy for each of our current locations. This is likely to lead to either redevelopment of existing sites, or relocation. Further plans will be shared with volunteers once we have more detailed and confirmed plans agreed with architects and planners.

## **Infrastructure Transformation Programme**

In line with the Guide Dogs strategy, the IT transformation project will bring together the latest technology to enable fast, easy and secure access to Guide Dogs resources. This will mean access to Guide Dogs resources is simplified and can be accessed from multiple personal devices much easier than is currently possible. It will also mean that in future, where devices need to be provided for volunteers they will have a much lower cost than current solutions. This will be a much more cost-effective solution for the entire organisation.

## **Guide Dogs performance programme**

Guide Dogs is striving to cut waste and improve performance so that every £1 donated is spent in the most effective way. We have identified a number of initiatives so far including changes to our fleet of vehicles, how we purchase goods, and bill our veterinary partners. All of this is expected to save millions of pounds a year that can go directly into increasing our service reach.

## **Regional updates**

### **Scotland**

We hope you have all enjoyed hearing more about our new volunteering strategy and my thanks to all of you for the contribution and amazing support you continue to provide Guide Dogs. I hope you find the below update interesting.

It has been a busy start to 2019 in Scotland and I am pleased to report we are making good progress.

**Canine Assisted Services:** In the first three months of the year, we created 11 new Guide Dog partnerships. The service remains high in demand with 83 customers on our Guide Dog waiting lists across our three teams.

We are continuing to roll out our new STEP training programme for our dog training staff to support their professional development and we continue to have great success with our boarding schemes.

Our Puppy Walkers, many of whom are extra busy at present continue to do an amazing job preparing our future Guide Dogs.

**Skills, Information & Support Services:** Between the start of January and end of March we created 32 new My Guide partnerships, provided 86 mobility and orientation interventions and 227 habilitation interventions via our contracts with Local Authorities. We currently have 26 customers on our My Guide waiting lists. For the remainder of the year we will continue to focus our attention on growing these services, with particular attention on My Guide.

**Staff & Volunteers:** Our new By My Side strategy is about growth as we aspire to reach and support more blind and partially sighted children, young people and adults. To achieve this, we have recruited a number of new staff over recent months. This includes three new trainee Guide Dog Mobility instructors, three new trainee Orientation and Mobility instructors and four new My Guide Volunteering managers. These roles will be based across our teams within the region. We are also delighted to confirm between the 1<sup>st</sup> January and end of March we welcomed 156 new volunteers into our region. A warm welcome to you all.

In the months ahead, we will be continuing our hard work against our plans by growing our services, supporting our new staff and volunteers settle into their new responsibilities and reaching those customers who have been waiting the longest. To do this you, our volunteers remain critical. You are welcome at any time to visit or contact our teams should you have any questions or require support. We hope to meet many of you at events throughout the remainder of the year. Thank you again for all your hard work.

## **Northern Ireland**

It has been a busy start to 2019 in Northern Ireland and despite some continued challenges, we are pleased to report we are making good progress in all areas.

**Canine Assisted Services:** We continue to focus on providing the guide dog service for those people waiting the longest for a guide dog and we have successfully matched some of our longest waiters in the first three months of the year. We plan to create 18 life changing guide dog partnerships this year and we are well on track to achieve that. Staffing has been a key challenge for us in recent months and continues to be a priority to resolve staffing in both the immediate and longer term. We have recruited a new trainee GDMI who we expect to commence training in August this year. This will increase our ability to create more

guide dog partnerships each year from next year and is therefore an exciting and important development for our team.

**Skills, Information & Support Services:** We recruited an additional My Guide member of staff in December 2018 and Paula McLarnon and Rebecca Harper are working together to deliver new My Guide partnerships, support existing partnerships and ensure we have the volunteers to meet future demand. Between the start of January and end of March we have 84 My Guide partnerships. We have also provided mobility and orientation interventions to 25 people and 125 Habilitation interventions via our children and young people's service.

**Staff & Volunteers:** We have been operating under difficult circumstances due to staff changes, vacancies and maternity leave since the latter part of 2018. This has impacted our ability to deliver services in a timely manner in some areas. However, we continue to focus on how we address those challenges. With the launch of the new strategy last year we are actively working on our team structure to ensure we have the staff and volunteers needed to deliver more services to more people in a timely and effective manner.

In the months ahead, we will be continuing our hard work to achieve our plans by growing our services, supporting our new staff and volunteers to settle into their new responsibilities and reaching those customers who have been waiting the longest. To do this you, our volunteers remain critical. Please feel free to contact our teams should you have any questions or require support. We hope to meet many of you at events throughout the remainder of the year. Thank you again for all that you do.

## **North West**

Firstly, we would like to pass sincere thanks to all our volunteers. You are such an integral part of the Guide Dogs team and we simply could not carry out the amazing work we do without your support. Thank you.

**Skills, Information and Support Services:** We are progressing well with introducing Life Planning - our new system to help us fully understand the needs of our customers. The "Person-Centred Approach" means that the customer is at the heart of what we do and allows us to provide support and services that are tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. Relevant staff have received training to work with this process and it is already under way in the Shrewsbury team with plans to follow soon across the rest of the region.

Our My Guide service is really taking off. Already in the first quarter of the year, more than 100 people have benefitted and demand is growing – over 60 people are waiting to receive the service and we are working hard to recruit volunteers to provide this life-changing support. Please contact your local team if you are interested in finding out more.

The Children and Young People (CYP) service is also extremely busy. We have several contracts with Local Authorities and schools across the region and have supported CYP over 230 times already this year.

We are also developing the Orientation and Mobility Service to offer another way to support adults, complementing our existing services. As you'll know from our strategy updates, we are really excited about helping people in a wide range of ways to make sure we can support as many people as we possibly can.

**Canine Assisted Services:** We have already worked with 20 new Guide Dog partnerships in the North West and our planning tells us that this will increase in the next few months. We aim to support over 125 new partnerships by the end of the year.

The document above gives you an outline of STEP. In the North West we are developing staff in the techniques and methodology.

**Staffing and structure:** We have been working for about a year now in our new regional structure and from the start of 2019, we formally transferred support for customers and volunteers in Cumbria into the North-West. Welcome to you all!

To support this further, several management roles now have a regional overview, ensuring that we work seamlessly and make sure every pound we raise is spent as efficiently as possible. You may know that Rachel Lloyd is our Head of Skills, Information and Support Services and Nick Mullineux is Head of Canine Assisted Services. Rachel and Nick now manage a specialist function across the whole region rather than local teams. And where required, there are also front-line management roles working regionally – we are advertising more of these to be confident that we have the right support for all staff and volunteers.

If you would like more information about anything we're doing, please make contact via your volunteer line manager or direct to teams. It's been a very busy but exciting first few months to 2019 and we look



forward to developing further our By My Side strategy, helping more and more people to live the lives they choose. Again, sincerely, thank you for all you do to help us in that ambition.

## **North East**

We would like to begin with a heartfelt thanks to our wonderful volunteers; without you we would not be delivering life changing services to nearly 2000 people across our region. We are humbled by your incredible support and love sharing your ideas and aspirations for our future work so please continue to let us have your views through any of our teams.

Following agreement around our regional structure, we have now completed the transition of services in South Yorkshire into the Northeast and Cumbria to the Northwest, so a warm welcome to everyone in South Yorkshire! Reaching this point has had its challenges as we sort data and other issues so thank you for your understanding.

**Location:** We have moved our Hull Community Team into a new office with more space for everyone and we are planning the development of our Newcastle office so that we use our space more effectively. We are considering options for our regional centre to be based in Leeds and will have news on this within the next few months.

**Skills, Information & Support Services:** Our My Guide service has attracted further funding in Newcastle so that we can reach more people and we are supporting this service across the region through six dedicated staff who support an ever-growing band of volunteers. We know there is so much demand for this service so, if you feel you can help, please contact your team.

**Canine Assisted Services:** We have been focusing on developing a regional view of our services so that we harness our resources to deliver consistent services across the region. We have over 100 people waiting to be trained with a guide dog, 15 waiting for more than 18 months, so tackling this challenge is a key priority for all of us. Working together as a region, we will address these challenges together.

Finally, we are delighted that we have been able to appoint two Heads of Service who will work with me to enable the delivery of exceptional services with your continued support. Becki Issott, Head of Canine Assisted Services Operations is already deep into planning the future

delivery of these services and Louise Bellsom will shortly join us as Head of Skills Information and Support Services Operations.

## **Midlands**

It has been a busy start to 2019 in the Midlands region and we are pleased to report we are making good progress.

**Canine Assisted Services:** In quarter one we created 22 new guide dog partnerships. The service remains high in demand with 114 customers on our guide dog waiting lists across our four community teams.

We are continuing to roll out our new STEP training programme for our dog training staff to support their professional development and we continue to have great success with our boarding schemes. Our Puppy Walkers, many of whom are extra busy at present continue to do an amazing job preparing our future Guide Dogs.

**Skills, Information & Support Services:** Between the start of January and end of March we created 213 new My Guide partnerships, provided 159 mobility and orientation interventions and 266 habilitation interventions via our 14 contracts with Local Authorities. We currently have 103 customers on our My Guide waiting lists. For the remainder of the year we will continue to focus our attention on growing these services with particular attention on My Guide.

**Staff & Volunteers:** You will have noted that our new By My Side strategy is about growth as we aspire to reach and support more blind and partially sighted children, young people and adults. To achieve this, we have recruited a number of new staff over recent months. This includes six new trainee Guide Dog Mobility Instructors, three new trainee Orientation and Mobility Instructors and two new My Guide Volunteering Managers. These roles will be based across our teams within the region.

We are delighted to also confirm between the 1<sup>st</sup> January and end of March we welcomed 287 new volunteers into our region. A warm welcome to you all.

In the months ahead, we will be continuing our hard work against our plans by growing our services, supporting our new staff and volunteers to settle into their new responsibilities and reaching those customers who have been waiting the longest. To do this you, our volunteers remain critical. Do at any time visit or contact our teams should you have any questions or require support. We hope the summer is a good one

for you all and hope to meet many of you at events throughout the remainder of the year. Thank you again for all that you do.

## **South West**

**Staff:** We are pleased to welcome Simon Lynn as Head of Canine Assisted Services for the South West region. Simon has a wealth of experience and will develop our guide dog and other canine assisted services regionally. We have a full complement of My Guide staff in each of our community teams in Southampton, Reading, Exeter and now Bristol. We are growing our service teams with Trainee Guide Dog Mobility Instructors; Trainee and qualified Orientation and Mobility Specialists and Habilitation Specialists, all joining the South West team.

**Canine Assisted Services:** By the end of March 2019 we created 23 life changing guide dog partnerships. We will start rolling out our new STEP training programme for our dogs in training and partnership training at Reading and Bristol teams in June, beginning with intensive training for staff. Demand for guide dogs remains high at 111 people regionally awaiting training and everyone's continued support in raising funds to meet this need is greatly appreciated.

**Skills, Information & Support Services:** In the first 3-months of the year we achieved 122 My Guide partnerships; 175 orientation & mobility programs for clients, and 204 children & young people have been supported by our service. Each serving our customers in a variety of ways through guiding partnerships, training for themselves or friends & family, or providing advice and support.

As we welcome more Orientation and Mobility Specialists and Habilitation Specialists, we are steadily embedding our new structure and ways of working to support delivery of By My Side. This includes delivering our new Life Planning approach to initial service delivery at all regional locations, embedding a person-centred approach.

**Location:** We are investing in the refurbishment of our Bristol site to become our new regional centre. Staff will relocate to temporary offices at the end of May until Spring 2020. The new centre will bring much improved facilities to deliver and develop our services. Our Southampton community team will also relocate to more suitable accommodation in September and Exeter team have taken on more space at their site.

**Volunteering:** This year we are thrilled to have already welcomed 193 volunteers to new roles regionally. Thank you to all new and existing volunteers for your continued invaluable support.

## **Wales**

Firstly, a very large heart-felt thanks to all our volunteers supporting us across Wales. You are such a key part of the Guide Dogs Cymru team doing some amazing and very varied work and we simply would not be able to continue without your support. Thank you.

**Canine Assisted Services (guide dog service):** We are busily working with dogs and clients which will see us complete over 20 new guide dog partnerships in the first half of the year. The document above gives you an outline of STEP. The Welsh team are at the forefront of developing staff in these techniques and methodology; we are producing strong and successful partnerships with both happy dogs and happy customers. Demand for the guide dog service remains very strong in Wales and we are actively developing more trainee Guide Dog Instructors, with one now qualifying, one completing her first class at the moment, and two being recruited for the Autumn and early 2020 respectively.

**Skills, Information and Support Services:** We are progressing well with introducing Life Planning - our new system to help us fully understand the needs of our customers. The “Person-Centred Approach” means that the customer is at the heart of what we do and allows us to provide support and services that are tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. Relevant staff have received training to work with this process and all will now start to be rolled out to service users in the next few months.

Our My Guide staff are presently working closely with other providers in the Newport area as we look to build a hub of key volunteers to support a localised approach to this work. Additional partnerships are being supported across Wales. Many people are benefitting from the service and we are working hard to recruit volunteers to provide this life-changing support. Please contact your local team if you are interested in finding out more.

The Children and Young People (CYP) service is also extremely busy. We have several active contracts with Local Authorities in the region. There is some great work in Welsh first schools supporting children through the Welsh medium in the Gwynedd area; with further contracts now active in in South and West Wales

We are also continuing to offer Orientation and Mobility Service as another way to support adults, complementing our existing services. As you'll know from our strategy updates, we are really excited about helping people in a wide range of ways to make sure we can support as many people as we possibly can.

If you would like more information about anything we're doing, please make contact via your volunteer line manager or direct to teams. It's been a very busy but exciting first few months to 2019. We look forward to developing further our By My Side strategy, helping more and more people to live the lives they choose. Again, sincerely, thank you for all you do to help us.

## **South East**

We would firstly like to thank all of you for your hard work and commitment – without you all none of the following work would be possible.

The development of the South East region is progressing well. The Redbridge, London, Maidstone and Welwyn teams are working together and benefiting from the sharing of resources, expertise and support. As many of you will have already heard we are progressing our plans for the Redbridge centre with the aim to have a regional centre that is up-to-date and fit for purpose. There will be more information on this as the year progresses.

### **Skills, Information & Support Services:**

**My Guide service:** We have recently recruited a My Guide Volunteer Manager in both the Welwyn and Maidstone teams, and have developed a recruitment and training strategy that reaches across the region. There is a real buzz around this service and we expect to see the development of more volunteer led activities within this service throughout 2019.

**Orientation and Mobility:** We are investing in the development of this service, recruiting three trainees within the region. These new members of the team will be joining us and starting their apprenticeship training in September at Birmingham City University. Whilst this is a two-year training programme these members of staff will be working in the teams and will be expanding the work they do as their course progresses.

**Children & Young People:** We have a number of Habilitation Specialists across the region, all doing great work with children through the delivery

of local education department contracts. We are just embarking upon a recruitment exercise in which we aim to recruit two more Habilitation Specialists based in the London team. This will enable us to offer more children the support they need at the vital stages of their lives.

**Canine Assisted Services:** The biggest challenge for the South East region is the growing number of people on our waiting list for a guide dog. So far this year we have trained 28 people of the 95 we expect to train by the end of the year. We are very much focussed on people who have been waiting a long time and with the introduction of eight new trainee Guide Dog Mobility Instructors into the South East we are resourcing for the future. We're also getting support from other teams to help train more partnerships from our waiting list.

We are moving into an exciting time at our Redbridge Hub and the development of the site over the next few years is long overdue. One of our focuses over the next year is to grow the number of volunteer Boarders to get as many dogs in homes as possible.

We'd also like to thank our Puppy Walkers who have recently had to hold onto some the pups longer than usual. We are working to improve this situation so thank you.

Finally, a great big thank you goes to all our volunteers, no matter how long you have been volunteering for us. You truly are an inspiration to us all.