

GDNC NEWSHOUND



In support of
 **Guide
Dogs**

A newsletter for volunteers supporting
the Guide Dogs National Centre

ISSUE
23



In this twenty third Edition:

- Trigger Bow Wows Out
- Puppy Midwife
- A Gift of Gold
- Twice as Nice
- Meet Yuko
- Let's Go Shopping



Welcome to the twenty third edition of GDNC Newshound

Hi Everyone

Welcome to issue 23 of Newshound, the newsletter for staff and volunteers at Guide Dogs National Centre.

This time we are celebrating some of our lovely breeding dog mums and one very special breeding dog dad. BDD Trigger aka "The Dog Father" recently retired after many years of faithful service culminating in 39 litters of beautiful puppies. He is our cover star this time featuring in a Newshound photo from a few years ago and in a fabulous puppy photo.

You can see what Trigger and his holder Sarah B. are up to now as well as meeting several of his offspring, all of whom are breeding dog mums in their own right. Sarah K. who holds daughter Pebbles shares how important Guide Dogs has been in helping her to find her true vocation. Trigger's Puppy Raisers also tell how they loved looking after him during his first year and there's another Trigger as a puppy photo for you to enjoy too.

Trigger and seven of his daughters met up earlier in the year at a special retirement gathering which also included his Fosterer, Puppy Raisers and of course Debbie Stanley (BDA). Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and celebrate at the National Centre. It was a wonderful morning and

Trigger was the perfect gentleman.

Also featuring is GDM Annabelle who gave birth to Trigger's last ever litter. Jo and Geoff her holders love their life with her and her beautiful puppies feature in the gallery.

In this issue we meet Chris and David with BDMs Tammy and Dory who give us a fascinating insight into BDM holding. Plus we also meet Japanese GDM Yuko who arrived recently as part of Guide Dogs international collaboration programme.

You will also learn all about the Guide Dog charity shop at the Midlands Regional Centre.

Many thanks to Eleanor Stephens, Liz Gilbert, Felicity Stratton, and Debbie Stanley for their help with this issue.

If you would like to contribute a story or idea to Newshound please contact me on caroline.habberley@guidedogs.org.uk I wish everyone a very happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous new year!

Best wishes, Caroline

**Newshound editor
December 2024**



Little Trigger

Hello everyone,

Welcome to the latest edition of Newshound.

It's been a busy year for staff and volunteers here at our National Centre. In June, the first caesarean section for our National Vet Team took place at the centre. Guide Dog Mum Bailey had whelped six puppies at home through the night but needed support with her last puppy. Bailey and her litter were brought to our National Centre and our team of nurses were able to deliver her remaining puppy safely.

A guide dog mum from Japan has been accepted onto our breeding programme. Two-year-old black Labrador Yuko was one of four pups who made the journey from Japan, leaving the Japan Guide Dog Association, to join Guide Dogs UK in 2022, as part of our international collaboration programme. Following health and temperament assessments, Yuko became the first female dog from Japan to be selected for our world-class programme. She had her first litter of guide dog puppies in August, five boys and four girls.

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To celebrate this year's Guide Dogs Puppy Appeal, ITV1's Love Your Weekend with Alan Titchmarsh has welcomed a new member to the Love Your Weekend family. Nine-week-old Golden Retriever cross Labrador puppy, Titch, was introduced to viewers of the show on Sunday 6 October, and is now a regular on the series. As part of Titch's introduction, ITV filmed at our National Centre and spoke to staff members from our Breeding Team.

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Yuko's pups

This year, our team have worked extremely hard to ensure the safe arrival of over 1000 guide dog puppies, who will hopefully provide life-changing support to people with sight loss in the years to come.

We'd like to say a big thank you to all our volunteers and staff who have supported us in 2024, and we look forward to working together in 2025.

Staff at the National Centre



Trigger Bow Wows Out

Beautiful Golden Retriever guide dog dad Trigger recently retired at the age of nine. He is famous both at home and abroad for siring the current largest number of puppies for Guide Dogs during his career, standing at 323. Included in this impressive total is being Dad to the Guide Dogs record breaking litter of 16 puppies with GDM Unity. He has been dubbed “The Dogfather” and recently hosted a retirement party with his Fosterer, his Puppy Raisers and seven of his daughters. Here Sarah his owner shares their journey.



Trigger



Trigger

Sarah's children had always wanted a dog and Sarah having been inspired by a friend who had taken on a breeding dog, approached and talked things through

with Guide Dogs. It was decided that a breeding dog dad was the best choice for the family due to space available and lifestyle needs.

Initially Debbie Stanley had two dogs in mind for Sarah and her family to choose from. Sarah's son was very young at the time and didn't like lively dogs, so when Trigger was presented to them, it was “love at first sight.” Sarah says, “Debbie saved the best until last as Trigger was so gentle and calm and my son took to him straight away. He was very big then and has got even bigger! Trigger and the kids have grown up together and we definitely picked the perfect one. He's so soppy and cuddly and likes to lie on your feet!” Trigger was matched often, sometimes once or twice a month. Sarah remembers, “I was very nervous the first time I dropped him off for mating, but I needn't have worried as he took to it straight away! At first it was a bit weird, but after a couple of visits it became normal.” Trigger's career has led to him siring many guide dogs, buddy dogs and several breeding mums for Guide Dogs. He is also father to French collaboration GDD Pierre,

and potentially another son, Billy from his last litter with GDM Annabelle, may be used as a GDD too.

Sarah feels that Trigger has a particularly lovely temperament. She says, "Trigger loves his cuddly toys and often will specifically pick one to take outside with him but sometimes they are all outside with him! He likes to suckle on them and is very gentle and has never torn any apart. He is no good at retrieving however, and often if a ball is thrown for him, it will hit him on the nose and he won't bring it back. He loves his fuss and I think the best thing about him is that he is so soppy, a real friendly giant."

Sarah recommends having a guide dog dad very much. "It is such a worthwhile thing to do and you get the best of both worlds. Everything is paid for including vet bills and food and then in retirement you have the option of a pet dog. I don't think that many people are aware of it. With Guide Dogs you have amazing initial training and you know the dog's history. It's a great thing to do if you have a family with children too."

Sarah's advice for potential holders is that "this is a great way to have a dog, particularly if it is your first time. You receive all the support you need and any worries you have can be solved with a phone call. An allocated person is always there. Debbie is fabulous and I have never felt alone. Guide Dogs definitely became part of the family and knowing the dogs are helping blind and partially sighted people to become independent, and buddy dogs are helping children, is a fabulous thing."

Trigger is now settling into his retirement. Sarah paid £25 for him and from now on her family will pay for his upkeep. She has also received four weeks free membership with Pet Plan and Trigger's microchip has been changed to reflect the new ownership.

Sarah is tentatively thinking about having another GDD in the future. She says, "Trigger loves being at home with us and enjoying lots of fuss and cuddles. We need to find the perfect match for him and I would quite like another Golden Retriever or a German Shepherd dog. Another dog might give him a new lease of life, a bit of a lift, as I know he misses his visits to the centre!"



Trigger



Trigger & his 7 daughters

Trigger hosted his own retirement party earlier in the year. Below you can see all of those family members who attended - both human and canine.

Trigger Statistics

Trigger and his brother, retired GDD Toby are half outside bred - their mum Honey was from Dogs for Good highlighting the importance of good breeding collaborations.

He has sired 39 litters with 323 puppies in total having been born.

Trigger retired aged 9.

Trigger currently has 96 qualified guide dogs and 13 accepted for breeding with lots more pups in the system.

He is the Father of guide dogs all over the country

Trigger's record breaking litter with GSD Mum Unity comprised 16 puppies, all of whom survived.

His last litter was with GDM Annabelle - Rita, Sandy, Indy, Jenny, Hermione and Billy were born February 2024. Guide Dogs is hoping puppy Billy will follow on in his father's footsteps as a breeding dog dad. Trigger's son GDD Pierre has already fathered many puppies.

Trigger's friends



Assistant Dog UK Collaborations

Dogs for Good (sired with Mum Zhenga),
Seeing Dogs Alliance,
Canine Partners and Dogs for Good

International Collaborations

Les Chiens D'Aveugles de l'Ouest -
Ecole d'Angers in France

KNGF Netherlands

Frozen semen has also been sent to South Africa to help with their breeding programme.



Trigger's First Year

- with Roger and Maureen

Little Trigger



Trigger arrived 31st March 2015. He was nine weeks old and our first Golden Retriever; the previous three pups were Labradors. So we had to learn how he would behave and how quick he would be regarding training. We needn't have worried.

After the initial shock of being on his own, i.e. away from his siblings and mum, he soon came to realize he was in a safe and more importantly, loving environment.

Toilet training was completed by the second week. Nighttime routine was also complete by the second week, which involved him accepting a crate as HIS den. After getting him to accept a collar and lead, we started to introduce him to the local shops, which again, he took in his stride, with just the occasional accident. At thirteen weeks we took him to Meadowhall Shopping Mall, which involved riding on a tram and a bus, and when he got older on a train. Again, it did not phase him. Infact he rather enjoyed all of

the attention he got from many of the shoppers. We had gradually got him used to travelling in the car, opening up many possibilities like visiting family, friends, other Puppy Raisers and best of all, trips to the coast.

His first beach experience came a week or so after his final vaccination. This would be his first free run. He immediately loved it. We met up with another Puppy Raiser and her dog and it could not have gone better.

We took him fundraising in various places and he was an instant draw with the general public. It was also around this time that he went to his first puppy class, coming away very tired.

In the May we travelled to Cornwall for a holiday in our caravan. Once again he dealt with the long journey with no problems. Once he realised that every day meant travelling to one beach or another he couldn't wait to jump into the back of the car. Even before we arrived at the beach he would get excited, presumably he could smell the sea. He also would interact with other dogs that we would meet.

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In June, he had another new experience, the London tube. We went to visit our sons, who both lived there at the time. Our grandson was three, so it was an important milestone in both their lives. As usual Trigger excelled himself with our grandson, being playful but gentle. On another occasion while we were on holiday on Cromer beach, he took his first swim in the sea, much to our surprise, egged on by another dog he was playing with.

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By now Trigger was almost fully-grown and puberty was kicking in. His recall as a young pup had been very good, either by name or by the whistle. But now he was showing signs of wanting to do his own thing. His lead walk was also taking a backward step (excuse the pun). This is something we had experienced before and we knew we would have to work through it. At our September puppy class it was first mentioned he might be suitable for breeding stock, even though it was stamped on his record card, we had not really given it much thought. Another first was while we were on holiday in Dorset. We decided to take a ferry to the Isle of Wight, and again it didn't bother him one bit. In October a supervisor from Guide Dogs came to our house to assess his temperament. She very quickly came to the conclusion that he would be suitable to be a guide dog Dad. In December we took him to have his eyes tested, and again the result was positive.

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I should mention that from being a very young pup, we took him with us to visit my wife's mum, who was in a care home at the time. He was an instant hit with the rest of the residents and staff. He brightened up their lives and put a smile on their faces.

The one abiding memory for me was when we attended the Guide Dogs

Christmas party and Trigger and I took part in the party game of musical chairs. Anyone that knows me will tell you how competitive I am. I was so happy we won, much to the amusement of the rest of the gathering.

After reading the above, you could be forgiven for thinking Trigger was the perfect dog and most of the time he was. But he did have his moments, like the time we came back home to find he'd ripped his bedding apart and there was the stuffing all over the kitchen. Another time he'd been left at home and he ripped the doormat to bits, however he did grow out of this behaviour.

After having his hips checked and given the all clear, and his blood samples came back ok, it was decided Trigger would become a suitable dog to breed with. Then we were given the news we were dreading. He would be leaving us on March 1st, much earlier than we were expecting.

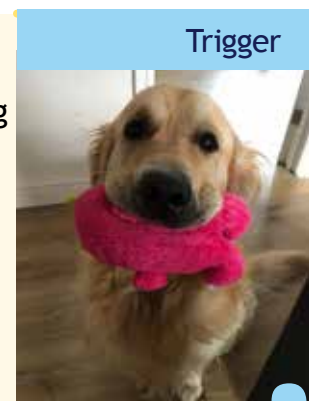
We were kept informed of his progress as a guide dog dad by his new holder Sarah and we have visited her and Trigger on a couple of occasions. We even had one of his sons, called Gilbey, and apart from being black, he was very much like his Dad.

We were so blessed to have had the chance to be part of Trigger's life and in a small way, his 323 puppies.

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Boarding with Shauna (BDA)

“Trigger first came to board with me in April 2016 before being matched with his breeding dog holders. I had been looking after him in kennels at the National Centre. One look at those puppy dog eyes and home he came. He has been a pleasure to board over the years. A big fluffy ball of love. My favourite thing about Trigger is his 'happy face' and wagging tail when he's greeting you with a toy (or blanket). He loved nothing more than a cuddle and free run around the local fields.”



Trigger

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The Puppy Midwife

Volunteers Sarah and David love their roles as guide dog mum holders so much that they have two dogs - Pebbles and Echo. Pebbles is the daughter of GDD Trigger and GDM Abbey (who appeared in the last issue of Newshound). Here the couple share just how perfectly their dogs fit into family life.

Sarah's original contact with Guide Dogs came about when she won a competition to visit the National Centre. She had just given birth to her own son and felt immediately that once the time was right that she would volunteer in some capacity. By September 2022, her son was in full time education and she began

researching the different roles available. It became apparent that the breeding dog holder role was the perfect fit. Sarah says, "I am a very maternal person and the idea of having puppies appealed very much." Pebbles arrived in December 2022 and then after agreeing to board other dogs too, Echo arrived to stay in March 2023. She says, "it was love at first sight with both dogs and they settled in straight away. Our two children love them and they love the children."

Sarah, Pebbles (BL), Echo & family



Sarah's previous dog owning experience was growing up with a Golden Retriever and although not having dogs after that point, she says, "I have always remembered the love of a dog and the special connection and this is what I wanted for our family."

Pebbles had her first litter with guide dog dad Reeve in September 2023. It comprised seven pure Labrador puppies, both yellow and black. She says, "It was a very quick birth. We had four puppies in 45 minutes and although I helped Pebbles with the first couple of puppies, she quickly took to it and was very chilled and relaxed." Sarah took care of the whelping side of things whilst her husband David did the weighing and marking of the pups. Sarah found that she particularly enjoyed the whelping and the miracle of the puppies arriving within her own home. Sarah says, "our Breeding Dog Advisor Shauna was a fabulous support to us throughout the process, and our daughter wants to be just like her when she grows up!"

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She says, "Before this I hadn't done any whelping at all. We attended the reproductive training day and the advice was very informative, but in the end it is the physical experience that teaches you the most. We had lots of support from Guide Dogs during the process. It isn't for everyone, but for me it ignited something within me and I might go down the path of training to be a veterinary nurse in the future. I absolutely love it and if you asked me what my ideal job would be, it would be that of a puppy midwife! It is so special to witness the birth of the puppies and then to think what they will go on to do for blind and partially sighted people."

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Sarah feels that the role has been really educational and beneficial for their children too. "Our children have learned about giving, and that the puppies go on to help other people. They know all about Guide Dogs and were present at the birth. We gave them the choice to attend and they weren't squeamish. It was our own in house science lesson." David adds, "It also teaches them some life lessons. We are all sad when the puppies go, but the children have learned that life has ups and downs and it's good for them to see that some things are out of their control. The children are more interested in walking with and caring for the dogs than playing on their ipads!" The couple describes the role as "needing time and patience, as well as some space within the home to dedicate to the puppies. We have a very busy home with lots of activity and noise which is great for the puppies as they are not sensitive to sounds as a result."

Pebbles is due her next litter in Spring 2025. Sarah and David say, "we adore them and can't imagine life without our dogs. We are so privileged to have them and to have such a loving, trusting bond for us all to share."

Sarah and David would recommend the role "one thousand percent." They say, "for us, this volunteering role fits in with our work and family life brilliantly and we feel very lucky for that."



A Gift of Gold

GDM Annabelle, also known as Bella, gave birth to her very first litter of six puppies earlier this year. It also happened to be GDD Trigger's very last litter before his retirement. Here, Jo and Geoff, Bella's holders, share how exciting they found the experience and just what volunteering for Guide Dogs means for them.

Jo and Geoff's first involvement with Guide Dogs was through knowing member of staff Jane K. Alongside this, Jo's parents were volunteers already holding GDM Whitney. The couple completed a boarder training session so that they could help out with Whitney's care. This proved particularly useful during lockdown as Whitney had a litter and Jo and Geoff became part of a "bubble" so that they could visit and help to look after the puppies.

In 2020 their much-loved Spaniel passed away and they decided to have a breeding dog mum themselves. They particularly wanted a Golden Retriever and Bella arrived in February 2023. Jo and Geoff are both life long dog owners and have also had an experience of a menagerie of other animals down the years.

They met Bella for the first time at the National Centre in an outdoor space. They wanted an energetic dog as they like to go on long walks and Bella has fitted the bill perfectly. Jo says, "she interacts all of the time, always wanting to be with you and she loves people and our children adore her. She is also very good with other dogs and loves playing with them. We are so proud of her behaviour, she's so easy and wonderful with her puppies." Geoff agrees, "she's brilliant, great on walks with the occasional wander off, but she always comes back again.



Annabelle GDM

She's good around food, very confident and I think the only naughty thing she does is sometimes roll in the nasty stuff! She is also still coming to terms with the cat being in the house, but they are both getting better at living together."

Neither of the couple had any whelping experience before Bella. However, as they have both come from a medical background, they have delivered babies! Jo says, "we were so excited and we sat up all night with her. We absolutely loved the puppies being born. Bella fed them straight away and proved to be a brilliant mum. She bit the cords and cleaned them up and they all suckled well. It was quite a quick labour and she has proved to be a natural mum."

Geoff adds, “we made a great team during the whelping, taking it in turns to weigh and measure and so on. We are really looking forward to doing it again. We worried a bit about being restricted indoors as the puppies came in March when it was wet and cold, but we stayed in with the heating on and played with the puppies all day. We had lots of visitors and Bella wasn’t anxious at all and the puppies were very laid back.”

Jo and Geoff’s advice to anyone thinking of holding a GDM is “try to make sure you know what is in store beforehand. The dog needs to match your lifestyle and us being retired has helped with this. You need to be prepared to put in the time with walks and enrichment activities. Also be prepared to do lots of grooming and cleaning up. Bella for example likes muddy puddles so often needs to have a rinse down after walks. You also need to realize that sometimes the decision is not yours, particularly with health issues. There are certain Guide Dog rules, so it isn’t exactly the same as having your own pet dog.”

Jo and Geoff love being part of the whole Guide Dog community and say, “we have learned a lot especially about puppies. It doesn’t feel like volunteering, but more a way of life. It’s like a gift we’ve been given and we are so proud of Bella and her puppies. If you are thinking of doing this, just go for it. You will have loads of support and it is an absolute joy!”



Bella & Trigger pups

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Bella’s six puppies comprised Rita, Sandy, Indy, Jenny, Hermione and Billy. Hermione has been sponsored by Warner Brothers Studios and Billy is being considered as a potential breeding dad to help carry on GDD Trigger’s legacy.

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Five (half) Sisters

Guide Dog Dad Trigger has sired well over 300 puppies in his time. Several of them have gone on to be breeding dogs for Guide Dogs. Here we meet five of his daughters, all of whom are current breeding stock.

Avril, Brian and GDM Lottie



Lottie was born 18th September 2020. She was one of the Trigger/Lacey litter and was raised by Brenda and David in Cheshire. She came to us in February 2022 as a weekend boarding and never went back. She is a beautiful, calm and laid back dog and loves to lie on the lawn in the sunshine with her favourite toy in her mouth. In fact she always has a toy in her mouth, especially when she goes to sleep. She also loves to play with our withdrawn dog, Ellie, and they love to free run together, either around the garden or at the nearby country parks. Lottie had her first litter of seven little life changers in October 2023 together with Robbie, a black Labrador. Her pups were six black and one yellow

and they have all moved on to Puppy Raisers where they are doing really well. Lottie is a brilliant mum and are very proud to be Lottie's brood holders. We can't wait for her next litter!

Victoria, Dave and GDM Innes



Our family is privileged to have Innes with us. We've had the amazing experience of her first litter. The whelping went smoothly, and she took it all in her stride, and was an excellent mum. We've had the enjoyment of taking her to new places and seeing her be relaxed and happy. We've had the disaster of the chewed spectacles and phone cable. And we have the pleasure of seeing her excitement when she meets visitors, always accompanied by a blanket in her mouth. We're looking forward to more fun times and more puppies!

Rosemary and GDM Unique



Unique (Uni), is a pretty, very gentle girl who loves to be with people and people love to see Uni. She goes with me to the dentists by special request and whenever I meet friends for coffee, lunch or WI meetings, Uni is there. If not, I have to explain where she is! When out she will always want to go up to people to say hello and get some fuss from them and they love her. She knows exactly what she wants, and what to do to get me to understand her. She loves being out and about and her favourite walks are where there is water for her to paddle in and fetch her float. When Uni is around water, it is as hard to get her away as it is children and she particularly loves a beach!

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Sophie, Jan and GDM Vixen

It is an honour and a privilege to be the volunteer holders for Breeding Mum Vixen. She arrived into our lives as a tiny yellow ball of fluff at the age of 6 weeks and we have watched her grow into the most gentle, kind and loving companion anyone could wish for. Originally we signed up to be Puppy Raisers but as our Journey progressed with Vixen it became clear she was a special puppy, destined to bring her own life changing puppies into the world. We were asked if we wanted to keep her as Breeding Dog Holders and after meeting the requirements for the role, we embarked on the

wonderful journey of delivering 27 beautiful puppies from 3 Litters. Vixen is a fabulous mum and our supervisors have often said if they could bottle her milk to give to other puppies they would! Her special “Gold Top” milk feeds them so well that they seem to grow in front of your eyes! She is patient and kind with them and if left to her own devices she would feed them until the day they left even though they no longer need her milk. Vixen is also fully trained in the co-operative care behaviours which are now being rolled out by the Breeding Dog Advisors in a “new look” dog club especially for our breeding mums and dads.

When she doesn't have a litter to raise, Vixen is a member of the Guide Dogs Demonstration team, providing demos at the breeding centre to volunteers, members of staff and VIP's. She enjoys this role very much as she adores any opportunity to participate in training as to her, it's all just a big game.

Vixen has enriched our lives. Words cannot describe the moment when a puppy born in your home, opens its eyes for the first time and you are the first person they see. This is all the more poignant, knowing that those little eyes will one day help to guide someone else. These are memories we will treasure forever.

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Pam and GDM Flossy



Flossy came to live with us when she was 14 months old. We met her at the National Centre and immediately bonded with her and fell in love with her. She was going nowhere apart from coming home with us! We took our retired breeding dog Echo with us and as soon as they were introduced to each other, they bonded. Flossy settled into our home straight away, as though she had lived there for years. She is such a chilled out dog and will lay down and sleep whenever she has the chance. Why sit when you can lay! Her temperament is lovely and she is always up for cuddles and belly rubs. Flossy has just had a litter of eight puppies. She was a fantastic mum from the start until they left. She was more than

happy to let Echo help look after them. Flossy is just a lovely girl and I am so happy she is part of our family.

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Twice as Nice

Two beautiful guide dog mums, Tammy and Dory, live with their volunteer holders Chris and David. Here Chris shares how their dogs have opened up a whole new lease of life for them.

Chris, who retired around eight years ago, was looking for a volunteering role. Guide Dogs offered Tour Guiding at the National Centre which fitted the bill perfectly and consequently Chris now enjoys meeting lots of different people. Chris and David had lost their own beloved pet dog at the age of nineteen and didn't want another of their own. However, after meeting fellow volunteer and GDM holder Sandra they discovered that holding a guide dog mum seemed like a perfect solution for them. By the next Summer, and after an assessment by Helen Freeman, a lovely yellow Labrador called Tammy joined their family. Chris says "she arrived like a lightning bolt, and we got on immediately."

Tammy is now eight and has had four litters. Her first litter arrived on their first Christmas together. She had seven puppies and then two more were fostered

from another litter. After a little persuasion, she accepted them and everything turned out beautifully. Tammy's second litter arrived at the latter end of the Covid period. She had five puppies on that occasion. Chris remembers that during Covid it was a little tricky given that they lived in one of the "restricted" areas so couldn't walk Tammy very far.

Chris and David's second guide dog mum is Dory. Chris says, "although Dory has had a little of an unsettled background and is a bit highly strung, she has settled happily with us. She and Tammy get on well together too. In 2023, Tammy was mated for the final time with Guide dog dad Poodle Ulster and Dory then came into season simultaneously. She was mated with Guide dog dad Squire. Tammy gave birth first and then Dory, so three months of puppies ensued."

Chris says, "I have whelped dogs in the past and have also seen horses being born. Dogs are very tolerant of you being around them and they take care of their

GDM Tammy



GDM Dory

Chris, Dory and Tammy



puppies very quickly. We find the first four weeks fairly straight forward but it gets steadily messier as they get bigger. With puppies you can feel a little nervous at first as you don't know how your dog might react to them but we found our dogs to be good mums - Tammy more so than Dory. I would thoroughly recommend the whole process as it is so exciting and puppies are such fun to watch and to see them growing."

Chris and David handle the whelping side of things in their dining room where they set up their equipment and where they can watch them from the lounge. Chris says, "puppies are very clever so we barricade areas with baby gates and block plugs and so on. Labradoodle puppies seem to be particularly inventive and like to get inside things and chew what they aren't supposed to! We have a set routine to get them in and out for cleaning and vinyl to protect the floor. It's a bit like having toddlers - you can't be precious about anything."

Needless to say, the couple have lots of visitors when there are puppies in the house. Apart from the grandchildren, who help out with puppy care, friends and neighbours also come around. Chris says, "we had some visually impaired visitors and discovered they had never held a puppy before. It was really wonderful to see their experience. They had only ever handled a fully grown guide dog so it was magical to share that moment of understanding about what a puppy feels like."

The couple have also been involved in various other roles at Guide Dogs. They have puppy raised one of Tammy's puppies previously and David drives blind and visually impaired owners and their dogs to different appointments. Sometimes he will transport a dog that needs rehoming or who is poorly. He says, "as a network, Guide Dogs works well to support every person's situation and I really enjoy what I do." One of their favourite fundraising activities is attending concerts at venues such as the NEC to raise awareness. Chris says, "so many doors have been opened to us as a result of volunteering and we have met so many lovely people through the fundraising at events."

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They say, "if you are thinking of being a guide dog mum holder, just enjoy it. Don't expect it to go exactly to plan, just have fun. It's thrilling to see the puppies being born and remember you have always got someone by your side as Guide Dogs is so supportive. It is very much about common sense and getting it to apply to your individual circumstances. Where you can, celebrate being part of a team and take part in all of the learning opportunities. You never know what will come next, it's so exciting!"

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Meet Yuko

Meet Yuko, a Japanese guide dog mum who's just given birth to nine guide dog puppies in Balsall Common

She's the first female dog from Japan that Guide Dogs UK have accepted onto their breeding programme, and she's travelled over 5000 miles to take on her prestigious new role

A guide dog mum from Japan has given birth to her first litter of guide dog puppies, five boys and four girls, in Balsall Common, Solihull.

Two-year-old black Labrador Yuko was one of four pups who made the journey from Japan, leaving the Japan Guide Dog Association, to join Guide Dogs UK in 2022, as part of the charity's international collaboration programme.

GDM Yuko



Following health and temperament assessments, Yuko became the first female dog from Japan to be selected for the charity's world-class breeding programme, becoming a guide dog mum to future generations of guide dogs here in the UK.

She now lives permanently with Guide Dogs' Breeding Dog Volunteers Eric and Hanlie, who had her first litter of puppies living with them for their first eight weeks.

Eric, Yuko's Breeding Dog Volunteer, said: "Friends of ours had a guide dog mum living with them, and we liked the idea, so signed up as Breeding Dog Volunteers.

"Yuko is the second guide dog mum we've cared for, but her litter are the first we've had born in our home.

"The birth went really smoothly - Yuko has been an excellent mother right from the start.

"Having her puppies at home with us has been absolutely lovely - as you can imagine, we're getting lots of visitor requests.



“It’s great that Yuko is the first guide dog mum from Japan to join the charity’s breeding programme, and that we’ve helped by caring for her, and her first litter.”

Tom Lewis, Breeding and Genetics Operation Lead at Guide Dogs, said: “Exchanging dogs with partner guide dog schools in other countries is an important way to help preserve genetic diversity in our breeding programme and, when we do exchange dogs, their health and wellbeing is paramount.



Yuko’s pups

“It’s fantastic that Yuko has had her first litter, having been selected for our breeding programme, and we look forward to seeing how her puppies develop as they start their guide dog journey.”



Let's Go Shopping!

There is only one official Guide Dogs charity shop and it is based at the Midlands Regional Centre in Leamington Spa. Open six days a week all year round, it is an ideal stop off for good quality recycled items and merchandise.

Inside shop



The shop accepts many donated items for sale including clothing, books, linens, toys, bric a brac, kitchenware, ornaments, small electrical goods and small pieces of furniture. It isn't able to accept duvets, pillows, children's car seats or harnesses, cycle helmets, candles, anything with a blade (unless brand new and boxed) and indeed any items which might compromise safety. The electrical items are PAT tested and any donated items that aren't suitable are passed on to other recycling agencies so very little ends up in landfill.

The shop works very hard to keep prices reasonable so that those who may be struggling are still able to afford basic items. Best sellers tend to be clothing, books and jigsaws and there are many bargains to be had. The shop has a

special book section to the side of the shop and any books that are not suitable for sale are recycled.

In order to keep things fresh, the volunteers have seasonal themes with a feature shelf and mannequin by the door which changes regularly. Current themes include Halloween and Remembrance Day before the Christmas display begins in November. Surprisingly a lot of people donate Christmas decorations which sell very fast once the season is in swing. The shop also sells some Guide Dogs merchandise and is a great place to get your Christmas cards and calendars.

Lesley has volunteered at the shop for ten years, combining this with part time work in the kennels at the training centre. She says, "we have seventeen volunteers at the shop and we are trained up for all of the shop tasks but some people enjoy particular areas. I like keeping the donated clothing displays fresh and interesting while other volunteers might enjoy arranging the front of house display or sorting the items. We are very inclusive here, so if a volunteer is not keen on a customer face-to-face role, then they don't have to do that. Volunteering is often a step to other things in life and it can build confidence."

Lesley loves that the shop is located in one of the original buildings on site and that it is itself recycled, having been used as a hospital block and chill out room down the years. She and her fellow volunteers would love to see more people come and visit. She says, "we have a very healthy level of donations so we always have good stock to show. Our mantra is good quality items at reasonable prices."

Although we have our regular customers visiting, we would like to spread the word and encourage more people through our door, including members of staff and guide dog volunteers.”

The shop has no external costs or overheads so all proceeds go directly to support the work of Guide Dogs.

The shop is open six days a week:

Monday to Friday - 1pm - 4pm

Saturday - 11am - 4pm

Sunday - Closed

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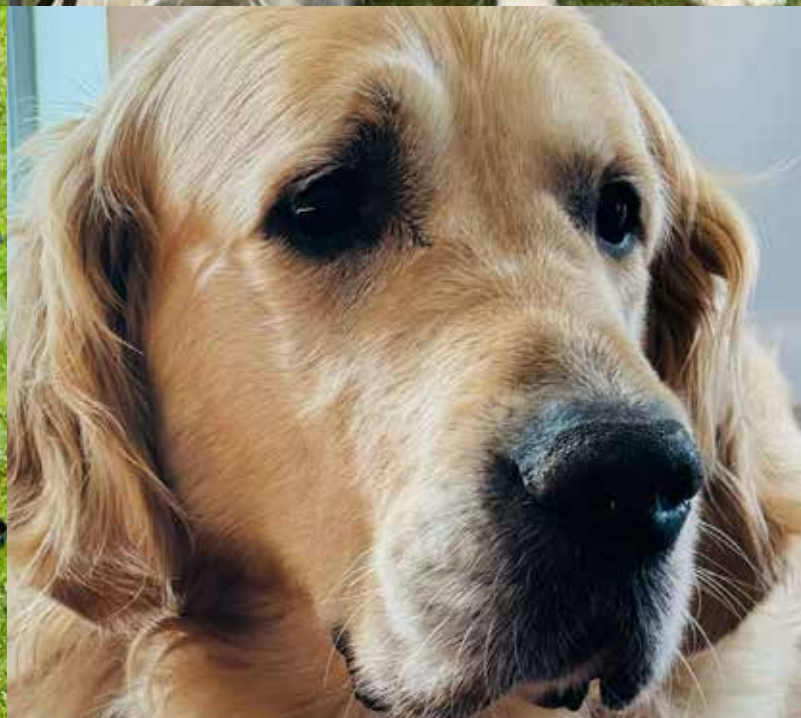
www.facebook.com/GuideDogsLeamingtonCharityShop

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Manny in the bookshed



Gallery



Trigger and Annabelle's puppies





For more information about volunteering opportunities please contact:

Verity O'Donnell@guidedogs.org.uk

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Guide Dogs is a working name of The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.
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