

GDNC NEWSHOUND

In support of
 Guide
Dogs

A newsletter for volunteers supporting
the Guide Dogs National Centre

ISSUE
22



In this Twenty second Edition:

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Welcome to the twenty second edition of GDNC Newshound

Hi Everyone

Welcome to issue 22 of Newshound for the staff and volunteers at the National Centre.

This time we are focusing on the real need to recruit more breeding dog mum holders into the fold. As a result several of our fabulous holders feature alongside their beautiful dogs in this issue.

We are meeting volunteers Glynis with GDM Cookie and Lesley who has retired GDM Annie and GDM to be Patchy. Both Glynis and Lesley are keen to encourage new holders and are happy to help anyone through the experience.

In this issue we are also highlighting our wonderful Reception staff who always give us a “warm welcome” and are essentially the face of the GDNC. Jane holds GDM Abbey who is a familiar furry face for our visitors and is our cover star this time. One of Abbey’s gorgeous pups kindly posed for photos too! (see photo). Jane too is championing the BDM holder role in this issue. Sally shares how she has taken care of many dogs down the years and what Guide Dogs means to her, while Rachel tells us all about lovely Yoda and his special role as an Ambassador Dog.

We also meet some other Ambassador dogs in this issue - Robin, Vita and BDMs Sophie, Connie and Nadia.

You will also find some interesting information about Dog Club kindly provided by Su Price and Vicky Worley and thank you for the useful training tips on recall from Mark Doggett.

I would like to thank everyone who has helped with this issue, particularly Eleanor Stephens and Verity O’Donnell. If there is a story, person or dog that you would like to see featured in Newshound, please don’t hesitate to get in touch at caroline.habberley@guidedogs.org.uk.

With many best wishes for a happy, healthy 2024 for you and your canine friends!

Best wishes, Caroline

**Newshound editor
January 2024**



Abbey’s pup

Hello everyone,

Since the last edition of Newshound, we're delighted to announce that Janine Dixon has been successfully recruited into the role of Head of Breeding Operations, as part of our Breeding Operations Team. As part of her role, Janine is responsible for our breeding volunteers, as well as our pups and breeding dogs onsite at our National Centre. She will continue to work alongside our Breeding Programme Team, which is managed by Head of Breeding Programme, Tom Lewis, to ensure our Breeding Programme is as successful as it can be in 2024 and beyond.

Since the last edition of Newshound, staff and volunteers from our National Centre have featured in two documentaries. The first, 'Puppy School for Guide Dogs,' was a four-part series which was aired in September on Channel 5. The second, A Dog Called Laura with Martin Clunes, aired on ITV1 on the 5th of October. In the documentary, Martin shares his journey to rehome retired guide dog Laura from blind fitness guru Jaina Mistry. When filming for the programme, Martin visited our National Centre and learnt about the work we do here. We've also supported with lots of other filming requests at the National Centre including CBeebies' Dog Squad and Peoples Postcode Lottery.



Martin Clunes holding two of Georgie's pups

In November, our annual People Awards were held at our North-West Regional Centre in Atherton, Manchester, hosted by BBC Breakfast presenter Jon Kay. National Centre staff and volunteers were well represented at the awards, with Head of Breeding Operations, Janine Dixon, winning the Optimistic category and The Breeding Dog Advisor Team coming runners up in the Expert category. Congratulations to all our staff and volunteers who were shortlisted for an award.

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Also in November, we ran the first Breeding Conference for technical staff working on our breeding programme and continuous professional development day for Breeding Dog Wellbeing Technicians and the Operation support staff for the breeding programme. Both events were an opportunity for professional development and a way to help strengthen collaborative working. In October and November, we also welcomed visitors from Japan Guide Dogs Association and Guide Dogs Australia - New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory - helping support our international collaboration work.

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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 2023, and we look forward to working together in 2024.

Staff at the National Centre

A Warm Welcome

The National Centre has a wonderful team of Visitor Centre Receptionists, warmly welcoming staff, volunteers and visitors to the Centre. Here we meet Jane, Sally and Jane's BDM Abbey whilst you can read about Rachel and Ambassador Dog Yoda in the feature "Meet the Ambassadors."

Jane and BDM Abbey

Jane both volunteers by holding BDM Abbey and works at the National Centre on reception. Abbey appears on Newshound's cover this time. Here Jane shares her story.

Jane



Jane started volunteering with Guide Dogs about seven years ago, when she joined as a puppy raiser. She successfully raised her first puppy Harriet, who duly went on to be a guide dog. She had what she describes as an "Empty moment" when Harriet left and a fellow volunteer suggested she join the tour guiding team to have some new experiences, which she thoroughly enjoyed. Soon afterwards, Abbey arrived on the scene and Jane puppy raised her hoping she would be accepted on the breeding program, but knowing that it wasn't definite. She was thrilled when Abbey was accepted, and has enjoyed two beautiful litters with her.

Abbey's most recent litter of four adorable black puppies have just moved on to their new puppy raisers. Jane says of the birth, "Abbey did it all herself. It was a very straightforward experience at home and bang on time. Between 11.30pm and 2.30am she was uncomfortable so I took her on little strolls outside as she had her contractions. I needed to go everywhere with a towel and eventually I heard a 'plop' and there was the first puppy by the cooker. It's exactly the same place she had her very first puppy!" She says of having the puppies in the home, "They can be a bit of a handful but it is so lovely and such a privilege. The family help me out and we have a gazillion people visit which is great for the puppies and their development."

Abbey is the perfect Mum and looks to Jane for reassurance only now and then. Jane says, "Seeing little life changers being born is very special and then being able to follow them on their journey through social media is wonderful. Abbey's first litter is now qualifying and I can see how they are getting on."

She describes Abbey as “A really good girl. She is quiet and sweet and easy to train. She is very food orientated and likes to plod along rather than rush around. She is a sensible lady and fits in with the family and our lives perfectly.” Jane would thoroughly recommend having a breeding dog Mum as “It is such a fabulous way of having a dog, with the best bit - having the puppies!” There is lots of support from your supervisors and Abbey has achieved her Good Citizens gold award, as well as undertaking the STEP training too.

Abbey joins Jane in her day job behind reception, where she enjoys meeting other dogs and having the occasional fuss. Jane says, “I’m lucky that I can bring her in with me and I love that it is such a fun job to do. I really enjoy meeting the volunteers and feel part of the group. The staff are great and all of us have a love of dogs in common. She says “For me, working here allows me to see why some of the decisions are made and to make informed sense of them, happy in knowing what the organisation is working hard to achieve.”



GDM Abbey



She says, “If you are thinking of either volunteering or working at Guide Dogs, just do it! You will be part of something wonderful, and you will find opportunities to suit your skills. Jane was a teacher and has studied biology and so feels Guide Dogs ideally suits her interests in animals and their behaviour. She says, “I really wanted to do something good in life that helped people but is rewarding to me as well and Guide Dogs has provided all of that and more.”



Sally

Sally says, "I had always had an interest in Guide Dogs but my real connection started when our family looked after ex Guide Dog Frankie for Puppy Raiser Elaine. She was constantly puppy raising, and he came to stay with us for respite, one to one fuss, attention, walks and whatever else was on offer! That set the seed for our family, and we went on the list. After eleven months patiently waiting, retired Guide Dog Grady arrived to live with us. He was a seven year old Yellow Labrador and adorable, so easy and laid back and when Helen the rehoming officer came back to check two weeks later, she said, he's obviously not had a problem settling in and we confirmed he was staying.

He soon learnt that being well behaved (with a little mischievousness thrown in) he could go virtually everywhere we went. He loved to meet people out and we would happily stop to chat and tell his story. Grady was well known in many shops in Hinckley town, in fact if there were any times we went to Wilko or B&M without him they would ask 'where is he?'

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Our family shared such a great friendship with Grady, rewarded with fuss and fun times, free runs, especially with his friends Frankie & Jumble; holidays, parties, bbq's, coffee mornings, Scout events, camps & parades. He was the Mascot for Hinckley rugby team and Mascot for the University hockey team, attending numerous games, home and away, wearing their team colours - neck scarves, knitted by Grandma. I guess you're thinking what about the crossfire of the balls? We had it covered as the team happily turned the spare goal around and he had his bed set up protected in there until the end of the match when the whole team would join him!

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GD Grady

One of our special memories was Grady's gentleness and patience. Most Saturdays we attended our local Methodist coffee morning. A little girl who regularly attended was very wary and frightened of dogs, including Grady. It took weeks but after shortening the distance between the girl and Grady and her watching his friendly interaction with others, gradually she was near enough to touch his back. It went on from there, a new friendship in the making; a month later they were best friends on a Saturday morning.

Personally, my interest in Guide Dogs just grew and following 30 years in a family retail business, I decided I wanted a change, some called it a midlife crisis! A role more rewarding and something I was passionate about.

I took one look at the application and nearly gave up there and then; and a CV, 'eek' I hadn't done one of those for years! I was determined though and here I am, Receptionist at the National Centre, enjoying a very interesting and varied job role with my friendly colleagues, and of course the dogs.

We felt truly blessed with Grady joining our family and the times shared with him. It made us realise what friendship, trust, and understanding a user and Guide Dog partnership must share together too. That's the organisation I wanted to be part of, even if only a tiny 'cog in the wheel.' I can contribute to the inspiring process of aiding visually impaired people to maximise their independence.

Grady sadly went over the rainbow the week before I started my new role. He was fourteen years old, but what wonderful memories we have. We decided not to re-apply for a dog permanently but were able to sign up for fostering, the perfect solution for us. Guide Dogs offer such a variation of volunteering roles, if you have an interest and a little spare time, hopefully there's something to fill that gap.

Since Grady we have homed 'Princess' Jumble (came for 2 weeks in lockdown and stayed 3 months!), and Kayleigh, Sonny, Pierre, Jade, Abbey, Smartie, Spencer, Gerry and Jess have all been to stay, be it day, B&B or longer term - hopefully with more to follow.

“My role here at the National Centre is an interesting, learning adventure. After three months of starting we went into lock down and like for many the role adapted to the restrictions we encountered. Working on reception is so varied and sometimes spontaneous, which I enjoy, along with meeting many people, staff, and visitors, sharing information and stories. Apologies for 'not remembering names', if that was stipulated as a specific Receptionist role, I wouldn't have got the job!

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A True Privilege

Volunteer Holder Lesley has been involved with Guide Dogs since 1997. She appeared with now retired Breeding Dog Mum Annie in an early edition of Newshound. Here she tells us how much being a breeding dog holder has meant to her and what the future holds, for Annie and her new BDM, Patchy.



Lesley with GDMs

Lesley's journey with Guide Dogs began after attending a couple of open days as well as taking some advice from a colleague who had worked for the organisation. She had always had pet dogs and had thought about kennel work in the past. After meeting BDA Kelly at an open day, she decided to take on her first breeding dog mum, Labrador Vicky. Vicky had several litters with Lesley.

Following a short period of time looking after another mum temporarily, BDM Annie arrived in the family. Lesley says, "When we met her it was love at first sight. She was very lively and running

around and we said yes immediately." She says of Annie, "she has a very independent streak but can be very cuddly and affectionate too. She likes a fuss when it suits her, but equally will go and find a quiet spot to be on her own." Annie had five litters in total and bounced back very quickly from each one, her last being five years ago. She had 39 puppies in total with the largest litter being nine puppies. Lesley says, "she is a good mum but she does it all on her own terms - so feeding when she wanted to for example. Two of her puppies, Vicky and Velvet, have gone to be breeding stock too."

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On Annie's retirement, Lesley decided to keep her as her own pet dog. Lesley wasn't planning on any more dogs until her own retirement, but fate had other ideas. She met breeding dog mum Patchy when she was temporarily boarding with her friend fellow BDH Irene. She saw how well she was getting on with Annie and learned that she needed to find a new home. Patchy's family had moved out of the area so were unable to meet the requirements for being an hour's travel from the National Centre. After a few nail biting weeks, Patchy was placed with Lesley and it is hoped that there will possibly be puppies this coming Christmas, as Patchy is due to be mated in October.

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Lesley had no previous whelping experience before Guide Dogs. She says, "Looking after the puppies is a new opportunity that I'd always wanted to do and I'm still learning. I can't fault the support that Guide Dogs provides. There are videos, an induction day, paperwork and you are given scenarios that might happen and of course 24-hour availability by phone. Fortunately I'm not squeamish at all and although there's a bit of anxiety to begin with, once a whelping begins, the adrenaline rush kicks in." Her advice to would be Breeding Dog Holders is to be prepared in advance and don't try to live as you would normally, be adaptable. She says, "you need to work around the puppies when they arrive and give your home over to them for the duration, so don't try to keep an immaculate house. It's only a short time and although there's a lot of feeding and cleaning to do, it isn't constantly hard work. There are some wonderful times just playing and cuddling the puppies."

Lesley is particularly interested in encouraging other local people to have breeding dog mums. She says, "I really recommend it to anyone who is interested. However, you do need to inform yourself of the realities before committing. So if you aren't sure or you think you have an idealized version of what might be required, then try to visit someone who knows about the process." Lesley has hosted several would be Breeding Dog Holders in the past, introducing them to the puppies and explaining exactly what is involved. She described the practicalities such as feeding and worming for example. These visits have resulted in people deciding to become holders for Guide Dogs on occasion. She enjoys mentoring those who are new to Guide Dogs too, and says, "I'm very happy for people to come and see what it's all about. I would also welcome any members of staff who might not normally get to see puppies in the nest to visit too."

GDM Annie



GDM Patchy



The Brilliant Mums!

Volunteer holder Glynis takes care of GDM Cookie, who gave birth to single puppy Abi this Summer. Here Glynis shares their story so far.

Glynis first became involved with Guide Dogs in 2017. Her children had always wanted a dog and one day, her youngest came to her with a leaflet that had come through the door from Guide Dogs asking for guide dog mum holders. Neither Glynis nor her husband had ever had pets before, and felt that this would be an ideal way to introduce a dog into the family home, given the support and training that comes along with it.

Their first dog was BDM Bailey. Glynis says “it felt strange having a dog follow you around the house when we had never had that experience before, but it was a lovely feeling and we soon felt we couldn’t be without one.” Bailey was withdrawn from the breeding programme and eventually went to live with Glynis’s daughter full time. Next to arrive was Jacky, a BDM who was heavily pregnant and needing to be rehomed due to unforeseen circumstances. Glynis delivered Jacky’s first litter with the help of Su Price (BDA), who had been on her way to work when Jackie’s waters broke. All eight puppies were safely born over a three hour period.

Jacky’s second litter, also born at home, contained nine puppies, one of which was Cookie. The litter were identified as potential breeding stock as they were pure Labrador. The family puppy raised Cookie up to the twelve week mark, after which she went to be puppy raised in Scotland where Glynis was able to visit her. Two of the litter were accepted to be breeding stock - Cookie and Chelsea -

and as Glynis had already bonded so well with Cookie, she chose to take her on alongside Jacky. She says, “Cookie is so cuddly and affectionate and her sister Chelsea is just the same.”

Cookie has now had three litters to date. Two litters contained nine puppies each and then unusually, her most recent litter with GDD Zorba, contained just one puppy, Abi. Glynis says “this birth was a little different as the contractions were much slower with just one puppy. However, Cookie wasn’t too large as such a close eye had been kept on her throughout, and feeding had been carefully monitored. Cookie went on to foster six other puppies from BDM Belinda who was unwell and being taken good care of by the National Centre.”

Cookie proved to be an excellent foster mum. Glynis says, “Su visited with a colleague bringing the six foster pups indoors. She asked that we take Cookie outside for a play initially while they were settled in with Abi. Abi was encouraged to urinate on a paper towel and the scent was then wiped onto the new puppies. Cookie was brought in on a lead at first but she immediately took to the new pups as if to say, oh there you are at last! There were three black and three yellow puppies with the supervisors saying it was the easiest fostering they had ever done. Cookie cleaned and fed the new puppies immediately and seemed so pleased to have them.”

Glynis has no regrets about becoming a guide dog mum holder and says of the experience “whelping can be hard work but it is very rewarding and I would recommend it. It can be daunting at times and I was very glad that Su was there for my first litter as it was nice to have the

back up. I was on my own for the second litter which arrived in middle of the night. On this occasion some were arriving feet first which I wasn't expecting, so I rang the helpline and was reassured that this was nothing to worry about. I was lucky enough to watch a neighbour's BDM whelp before I had my first experience and this was really useful in terms of knowing what to expect. That is something I would urge other would be holders to do if possible."

Both Cookie and Jacky have been "brilliant mums" says Glynis, with Jacky sometimes getting in with Cookie's puppies, meaning the family had to keep an eye on her. Sadly Jacky died at a relatively young age which has been heartbreaking for the family but she has left a legacy of qualified guide dogs and buddy dogs.

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Glynis says, "single pup Abi is going to be a right character and is very like her mum. When Abi started teething, Cookie would go and fetch a toy for her to bite on if she saw her mouthing us!" Glynis has some puppy raising friends who live close by, who really wanted one of Cookie's pups to raise and this has indeed happened meaning that Cookie and Abi will be seeing each other quite regularly. Glynis says, "this has worked out fabulously!"

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GDM Cookie with Abi Pup



Being a Breeding Dog Holder is Glynis's main volunteering role, but she also occasionally takes on looking after puppies who might need a little extra care. "I live quite close to the National Centre and sometimes I have puppies come and stay for a short while, which Cookie absolutely loves." She says "the best thing about volunteering is having Cookie at home and having puppies to look after is such a privilege. Plus we get to find out what they go on to do. Guide Dogs recently sent me a breakdown of where the pups had gone and there were photos of them in harness which is so rewarding."

She says, "if you are thinking of becoming a holder, go in with an open mind and get lots of information beforehand. If you can, meet other holders first and get an idea of what whelping might look like in your individual home. It's good to try and visualize your own personal set up in advance. Also be prepared for a lot of visitors! You will put your heart and soul into it, learn to work around it and have lots of fun!"

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Glynis concludes, "I love what I do so much and I love that the dogs go on to help blind and partially sighted people. It is such a great community to be a part of and I've met so many lovely people. The bonus is that having dogs also gets us to go out for a walk together. The kids always say that they have left home and been replaced by dogs!"

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Meet the Ambassadors!

Amongst us are many very special dogs doing an amazing job. They are our Ambassador Dogs representing Guide Dogs on tours, at events and displays and in the public domain. Here we meet just a few to find out just how vital they are.

Yoda



Rachel and Ambassador Dog Yoda

Rachel has worked for Guide Dogs for 34 years in many different roles. She is currently a member of the Visitor Reception team and takes care of Ambassador Dog Yoda. She says, “I love part of being a good welcome to staff, volunteers and visitors at the National Centre, helping people to feel at ease immediately as they come through the door.”

Rachel sadly lost her last dog very suddenly and after waiting several months, tentatively asked Janine if there were any dogs that needed rehoming. Eleven-week-old Yoda, who had some health issues, was initially going to come and stay with Rachel for a few weeks, but

it was love at first sight and he became a permanent fixture. She says, “Yoda is very old for his years and very special. He is great with other dogs as he is such a steady influence on them. Occasionally he has been used alongside some of the training dogs to help them with dog distraction. He very much likes to do his own thing, in his own way. He’s very steady. At 9pm every evening he gets up, goes outside to spend and then gives us a particular stare. This is his sign for us to have a cuddle with him. He likes to snuggle up to his broccoli shaped stuffed toy at the same time. He’s had his toy since he was tiny and I had to get two so I could keep them washed and clean.” Yoda arrived just before lockdown and Rachel says, “it really helped to get out and about with him. I felt very privileged to have him around at that time.”

Yoda has completed his Ambassador training but doesn’t wear the jacket as he has some body sensitivity. He also doesn’t like getting his feet muddy or wet and Rachel describes him as a “Teflon dog” as nothing sticks to him. She stresses the importance of reading your dog properly and says, “we’ve noticed that Yoda gets very excited and enthusiastic in the mornings, but prefers to settle down and chill out in the afternoons. This means that he is very good at meeting and greeting National Centre tour guests at the beginning of the tour and being a friendly first introduction to our dogs, but not so keen on accompanying the tour as it goes around the building. We factor this into his daily routine. As he isn’t a high drive dog, we make sure he has his down time and he lies in his bed when he needs his space.”

Yoda is also very good with children due to his innate calmness, as he “doesn’t overwhelm them.” Rachel has had a few magic moments with Yoda in recent times. She says, “we often go walking in some woods close by and recently met a gentleman in a wheelchair with his carer. He really wanted to talk to Yoda. Yoda went up and gently put his head on the gentleman’s lap which really made his day and showed me the power of how dogs can change someone’s day so profoundly.” She says, “I also had a Centre tour visitor very excitedly come up to me to show me some photos he had taken of Yoda on the visit - it felt like Yoda was a celebrity!”

She says, “My favourite thing about Yoda is his quirky personality. He is so funny and individual. He is not a demonstrative dog on the face of it, but he is always by my side and likes to be with me when I am working on reception.”

Claire and Ambassador Dog Robin

Robin is a two-year-old golden retriever, who qualified as an Ambassador dog in July 2023.

Robin regularly greets the National Centre tours with enthusiasm, a big Goldie smile, and a very waggy tail. Robin is always pleased to meet people and dogs and has found his true vocation.

In his spare time Robin enjoys napping, swimming and long beach walks.

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She says of Guide Dogs, “there are not many workplaces where you feel like it is a family and everyone is for the same cause. We are very lucky as not everyone gets to have that in their working lives. I like people to feel welcomed, heard and valued and I love meeting all of the different types of people who come through the door. Every day is different. Then there is the power of our dogs too and how they help people on many levels as well as guiding them. I love how Yoda’s presence can have such an impact on someone’s day and how people absolutely love our dogs at Guide Dogs and relish the opportunity of meeting them face to face.”

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Robin

Margaret and Ambassador Dog Vita

Margaret, Vita's holder says,

Eva & Vita



Golden Retriever Vita is not just a Golden Retriever, she is an Ambassador Golden Retriever bred by Guide Dogs. Vita was originally Guide Dog breeding stock - one of the 'top dogs' - but due to an eye problem, Vita will not be used for Guide Dog working roles. Instead, she is working to promote Guide Dogs as an Ambassador. Vita is just four years old and her breeding line is Iris and Clover, Bart and Truman. She was puppy raised through Covid by Kate and Eva in Hertford. Vita is a smiley, clever girl with a love of people, bred to understand human emotions and to provide comfort and empathy.

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What does the work 'Ambassador' mean? It's "an official envoy, a diplomatic agent of the highest rank, a mediator, a patriot, a communicator, a marketer, an expert." I believe that Vita has all of these qualities. She has the charisma and determination to woo anybody to talk to her and ask about the Guide Dog organisation.

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Vita's main Ambassador role is at the National Centre, tour guiding visitors around the location. Her second role is out and about at events and recently some hospital work.

Whilst I was visiting my sister in a Fife Rehabilitation hospital, Vita with her Ambassador jacket was invited onto the ward to meet patients, doctors, nurses and visitors. Comments included "where can I get a dog like Vita?" and "Tell me more about the Guide Dogs charity." Doctors commented that this was one of the best therapies for patients, many of whom had sight loss.

Earlier this year, my sister, who has partial sight and a disability, received an invitation to attend an afternoon tea at a prestigious five star hotel in St. Andrews. During the booking process, the hotel staff showed no hesitation in accommodating Vita, who was wearing her Ambassador coat. Upon arrival, my sister and Vita were provided with disabled access, a specially reserved parking space, and a personal meet and greet service from the concierge, who swiftly escorted them to the lounge on the eighth floor. A china bowl filled with water was promptly provided for Vita, while my sister was served her tea shortly afterwards. Vita was invited to participate in photos on the balcony with American tourists. These photos capturing the special moment were circulated globally promoting Guide Dogs UK.

Linda and Ambassador Dogs Sophie, Connie & Nadia

Linda, their holder says,



BDMs Sophie, Connie, Nadia

I have three dogs - Nadia (Flat Coat Retriever), Connie (yellow Labrador) and Sophie (black Labrador). Nadia and Connie will be 12 years old later this year and are retired guide dog mums. Sophie is Connie's daughter and has just had her third litter of puppies. All three have accompanied me on tours of the National Centre - Nadia and Connie since they came to me in 2012 and Sophie since she was five months old as I was her puppy raiser.

Since the introduction of Ambassador Dog status both Connie and Sophie have been successfully assessed. Nadia is showing her age and now stays at home on tour days. Connie had four litters, but Nadia had just one as it was decided to stop using Flat Coated Retrievers as Guide Dogs - but she did then become a PAT dog and visited schools for children with special needs and care homes. She particularly liked these visits, as the residents were always keen to share their biscuits with her - and sometimes a breakfast sausage.

Sophie is usually the chosen one for tours and thoroughly enjoys the attention of visitors - spending a lot of time on her back as willing visitors give her tummy tickles. The dogs love children (plenty of training with my six grandchildren) and on several occasions nervous children on tours have overcome their fear of dogs, after being accompanied on the tour by Sophie or Connie. Connie has a habit of yawning and grunting loudly whilst I am talking to visitors as though to say - this really is boring and I've heard it all before!

Connie and Sophie enjoy taking part on the tours as much as I do - meeting a wide diversity of interesting and interested people. We are very happy to promote Guide Dogs as best we can.

Dog Club for Breeding Mums and Dads

Excitingly, 2023 has seen the first roll out of our new look DOG CLUB for our breeding Mums and Dads. It's been lots of behind the scenes work in progress for many months, but in conjunction with the support of our Training and Behaviour colleagues, we're now very much underway!

Breeding Dog Advisors Vicky and Su have completed the most recent course - consisting of eight weekly sessions, and have been thrilled with the progress that everyone has made and the lovely feedback we have received.



The training sessions focus on positive reinforcement training (PRT) and environmental enrichment (EE). Session one invites our breeding dog holders to the centre without their dog to start with; this provides the opportunity to cover some theory based elements and discussion regarding our dogs' learning and communications.



Breeding dog holders and their dogs then work in small training pods - all set up for maximum success with a variety of fun-filled activities to keep our dogs calm and contented throughout their training (such as their dog bed from home, snuffle/licky mats and stuffed kongs and toys).

Our Breeding Dog Advisors teach and develop behaviours which can be used to help our dogs within their breeding career. For example, a 'chin rest' can be demonstrated by our dogs when they are having a physical examination, with the dog actively offering this behaviour and



Yvonne and Dottie

enabling choice - the dog and handler are better able to communicate together. Other examples of behaviours that are taught and developed in Dog Club are 'Hand Target', 'Drop' and 'Place'.

Classes are small, with a maximum of seven dogs at any one time, which allows for our dogs and handlers to progress at their own rate during the session. On completion of all of the dog club sessions and the presentation of a certificate, we provide a plan to further develop the training at home in conjunction with your own Breeding Dog Advisor.

Your Breeding Dog Advisor will happily have a chat to you in more detail, so hopefully, we will see you with your breeding Mums and Dads at one of the classes soon.

Vicky and Su

Breeding Dog Advisors -
Dog Club, Summer 2023



Reliable Recalls

Dog Recall



Mark Doggett, Training and Behaviour Advisor, helps us work on successfully recalling our dogs.

One of the most important behaviours we want from our dogs is a reliable recall. If we were to describe the perfect recall behaviour it should be like this - handler gives the recall cue (whistle, visual hand to touch, or verbal call), and the dog would turn towards the handler and come all the way to them.

Below are my top tips for maintaining that recall:

- Even when your dog has a good recall, reward recalls with something your dog loves - food, play, interaction with you.
- Before the dog is let off lead to go free, reward a simple sit or eye-contact so the dog is aware rewards are available from you.
- Make sure to practise recall at various times throughout your walk, so that recalling them doesn't always mean the end of free time. Pick some easy times to recall them when they are not distracted by something else.
- Use the 'freedom to roam' to reward the recall - when the dog comes back to you, you can then let them carry on their off-lead time as an alternative reward to food or toys.
- Reward your dog for voluntary check-ins. When your dog is off-lead, and chooses to come back to you without you recalling, give some praise and reward with something your dog likes.

A Wonderful Surprise!

Dedicated volunteer Keith has his extensive volunteering time matched by his employer Microsoft, as well as a portion of any fundraising he is involved with. It's all tracked through the Name a Puppy scheme, which means that recently he has been able to choose the names of a couple of puppies.



Stella and Malcolm

This year he has chosen to name one in memory of his Dad, Jim. The puppy Jimbo was born on December 12th 2022 to GD mum Dottie and GD Dad Coffee. He is a gorgeous Golden Retriever.

Keith then decided that it would be a good idea to name the other puppy on behalf of the volunteer Tour Guides who hosted tours at the Midlands Regional Centre before Covid struck. The group got together and felt that it would be a lovely gesture to name a puppy on behalf of Stella and Malcolm who have been Guide Dogs volunteers since the 1980s and have

puppy raised 26 puppies in their time, most of which have gone on to be qualified guide dogs. They were stalwarts of the tour guide team and have continued to keep in touch with the group since retiring.

But what name would be best? After all naming a puppy is a very important thing to do. Firstly Guide Dogs accepts both male and female names and also gender neutral ones too. The names need to be ideally two syllables and shouldn't rhyme with any of the training commands. The group thought very carefully and then decided that they knew exactly what to call the puppy. Stella has a very particular and affectionate nickname for Malcolm. She has always called him Birdie, and the tour guides agreed this name would be perfect for the puppy.

Birdie was born on 23rd February 2023 to GD Mum Della and GD Dad Harris. She is a beautiful black Labrador cross Golden Retriever.

Volunteer tour guides from the Leamington team visited Stella and Malcolm at home to surprise them with the good news. It would be true to say that they were absolutely thrilled with their puppy and will follow its progress very keenly.

To date Keith has raised around £30,000 and still has another three puppies to name in the future.

All information about Name a Puppy including the four stages of support - Name, Raise, Train and Transform can be found at www.guidedogs.org.uk.



Volunteering Update

From Left to Right -Irene with Bella, Lesley, Margaret with Tessie, Elaine and Philippa with Tina.



It's been a very busy few months in volunteering since the last edition of Newshound came out.

Our recruitment priority for the National Centre continues to be for Brood volunteers and with that in mind, we held a Guide Dog Mum Volunteer Taster Day at the beginning of October. This was a really well attended event with approximately 70 - 80 visitors coming along to find out more about the Brood Dog holder role, meet and chat with staff and ask detailed questions about what's involved. We were lucky enough to be supported by several experienced Brood holder volunteers and their lovely Guide Dog mums and would like to say "thank

you" to them and all the members of staff who were also there for taking the time to come along and support on the day.

Thank you too to all those who have been flying the flag to promote the Brood holder role and as ever, if you know of a local venue / business or community organisation / publication where there might be an opportunity to spread the word further, I'd love to hear from you and explore how to make the most of any opportunities. Please do get in touch!



November saw Guide Dogs annual People Awards ceremony which celebrates our incredible volunteers, service users and staff, shining a light on their huge contribution and outstanding achievements. This year's ceremony took place at Guide Dogs North West Regional Centre in Atherton, Manchester and was hosted by BBC Breakfast presenter Jon Kay.

There were many worthy nominations and winners including our own Breeding Dog Advisor team, in the Expert category, as well as Janine Dixon, Head of Breeding Operations at the National Centre in the Optimistic category.

The Princess Alexandra Award for Lifetime Achievement went to Brood and Stud Dog Fosterers, Janet and Clive and details of their nomination are below. Many, many congratulations to all those who were nominated!

“

“Janet and Clive have been volunteering for Guide Dogs since 1981, giving a loving home to more than 100 of our dogs. Their unwavering dedication and passion for Guide Dogs’ work is an inspiration to volunteers and staff, and they completely represent Guide Dogs’ values and behaviours. They will take on any dog, no matter the issue, and help work through any challenges the dog may present. They don’t ever give up on a dog where others likely would.”

”

They recently took a dog who couldn’t be left alone for a minute and helped him become a dog who can be left settled for over an hour. The couple’s positive outlook on working with Guide Dogs staff and not giving up is inspiring.”

The regular puppy trips have been operating as usual from the National Centre, wonderfully organised and coordinated by Volunteer Driving Coordinators John Herman and Ian Scott and supported by our fantastic drivers. With new puppy schemes recently opening up in Suffolk and Norfolk, additional puppy trips are now taking place on a Thursday to Peterborough/Wisbech, on selected weeks, when pups are allocated to these schemes.

A particular shout out needs to go to volunteer drivers Ken W and Melvin C whose van unfortunately broke down on the home stretch of one of their recent puppy trips. Both Ken and Melvin were kind enough to stay with the vehicle until it was recovered and finally made it back to the National Centre at about 7pm. A very long day and their time and commitment is very much appreciated.



l to r Jon Kay (BBC), Clive, Janet, Andrew Lennox CEO

In other news, the Midlands & East Regional Team volunteering team in June this year, the Team welcomed Charlotte Hawthorne as the Volunteering Coordinator for Birmingham. The Team is now fully staffed and busy planning for the year ahead. Additionally, a revised copy of the Volunteer Handbook was issued recently issued. The Volunteer Handbook provides all volunteers with key and ‘need to know first’ information about their volunteering journey with Guide Dogs. The document can be accessed directly on the Volunteer Information Point (VIP) - www.guidedogs.org.uk/vip.

As always, a big, big thank you to all of our volunteers for all that you do for Guide Dogs. We simply couldn’t operate as a charity without your support, generosity, experience and good will.

With all best wishes for a fabulous festive season and 2024,

Verity

Volunteering Coordinator - Verity.O'Donnell@guidedogs.org.uk



Gallery



Vita



Annie and Patchy



Sophie and Connie



Robin

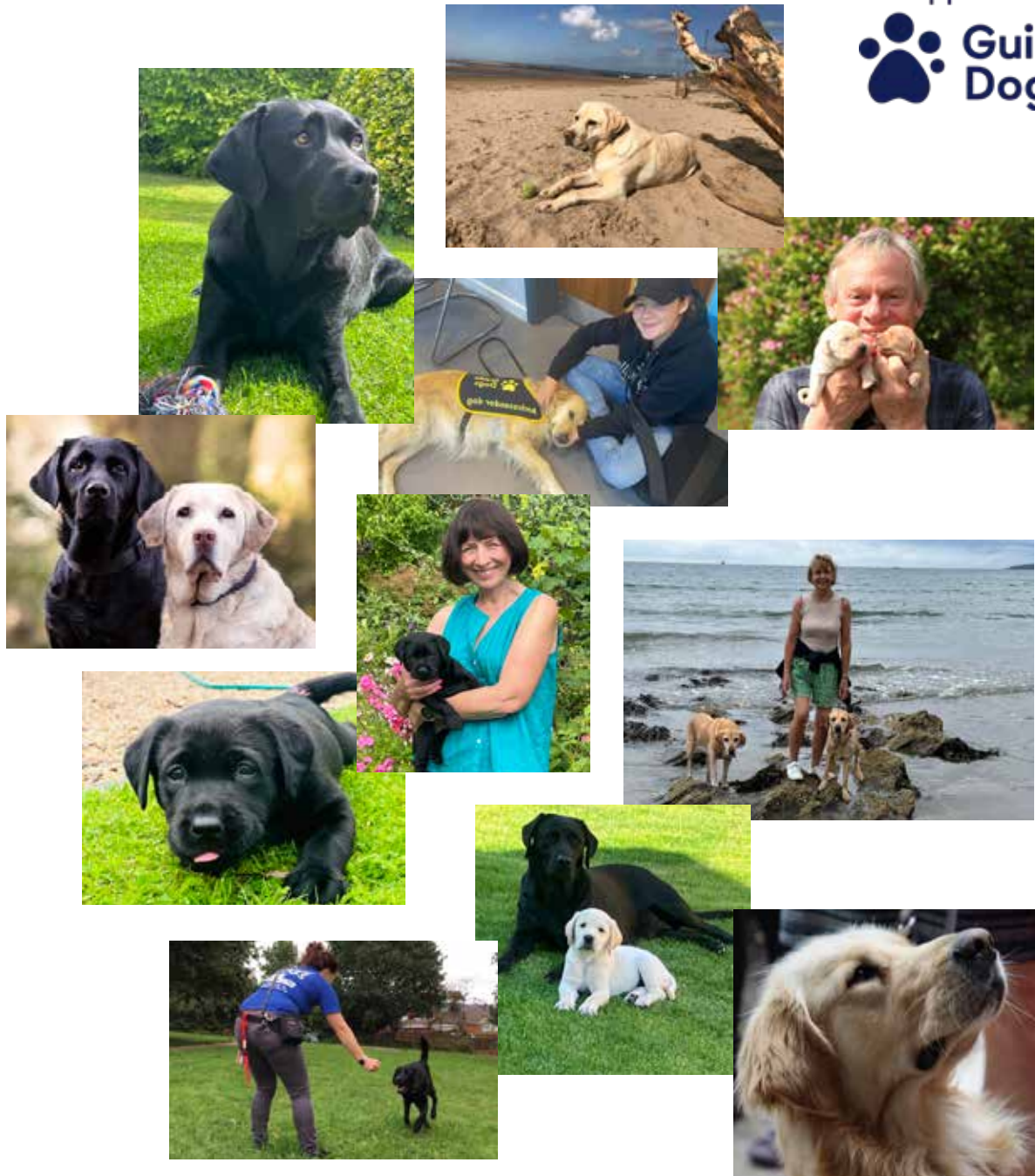


Abbey and pup



Abbey's pup

In support of
 **Guide
Dogs**



For more information about volunteering opportunities please contact:

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