

## **Scotland and Northern Ireland region: puppy raising update December 2025**

Hi All, Fiona Fraser here, and I am the Puppy Development Supervisor for the Scotland and Northern Ireland region.

### **Puppy Development Supervisor's message**

Getting a new puppy is an exciting time. But getting a guide dog pup is extra special - family and friends have often been involved in the application process and countdown to the pups' arrival. Everyone is hyped for puppy delivery day. Your little bundle arrives and "boom!!!" Your life as you know it is turned upside down. Then "bing bong" the doorbell goes, it's a family member, they come in and bypass you right to your pup, you smile as you watch them play and interact.

Next day "bing bong" the neighbour has popped over to return the hedge trimmer and before you know it, they are crouched down in the hall with baby pup tugging at their coat sleeves. Later that day, your daughter comes home from school and shortly after "bing bong" her friends, three excited girls start squealing as pup bounds down the hall to play and tumble with them. The next day "bing bong" your sister pops by with puppy toys and says she doesn't mind as your pup pulls at her cardigan.

Next day "bing bong" it's a delivery driver - you scoop your pup up and she makes a huge fuss over your pup who tries to mouth and bite her hands, but she says it's fine as she has dogs. The next day "bing bong" your pup springs from his bed and charges to the front door spinning and jumping pushing forward as you try to hold tiny collars and open the door. "Calm down you say" it's the boiler engineer, he loves dogs, and you spend two minutes chatting about his pups when he was a boy, all the time your pup is fussing and mouthing him.

Let's fast forward six short months, it's after school and "bing bong", your daughter answers the door, and your pup runs excitedly towards her and

launches with the same enthusiasm as he did as a baby. But instead of delighted squeals there's crying and shouting. You intervene and remove your pup. You have some upset school friends that have been jumped on.

Your pup is confused. What has happened with the "bing bong" people who came to see him? Why are they not excited anymore? The "bing bong" had always meant people were there to see him. They loved his jumping and mouthing; they loved his happy and excitable jumps.

This scenario may seem far-fetched but in some form most pups do make these associations. Early associations are some of the strongest. It's not that our pups can't say hello to visitors. It's advisable they don't greet them at the front door, and they don't make the association that when someone comes in, it's to see them. The doorbell or "bing bong" should not be a trigger for excitement and over the top greetings. Take your time with visitors, prime them for what you want them to do before they come over and if you don't have a chance to do that then please keep your pup away from the door while you settle your visitor. And then pup can come through.

Training your visitors can be the hardest part of teaching social greetings. But dealing with family and friends and being an advocate for your pup is a huge part of the puppy raising role. Please do speak with your Puppy Development Advisor if you need help managing these situations.

## **Our timescales for issuing pup photos**

The lovely Operation Support team would like to clarify the timescales for when your pups' photographs will be issued. These have an up to 12 weeks turnaround from qualification or withdrawal. The team have been receiving a lot of calls about photos that are well within the 12 weeks' timescale. Please note photos are ordered in batches so sometimes you will receive them within a few weeks and sometimes closer to the end of the 12 weeks' timescale. For more information on timescales, please visit Kallidus and read 'Puppy Raising - Essential Information'.

## What's been happening across Scotland and Northern Ireland

As always, I could go on all day with all the fab things that's been happening, you are all so fantastic at keeping puppy training and Guide Dogs in the spotlight. Below are just a few to highlight for you.

### Scottish Parliament visit

Puppy Development Advisor, David Smith and his puppy raisers had a wonderful puppy trip to the Scottish Parliament. We want to thank all the volunteers who supported this visit. Below are photos and a statement from David Smith about the event.



“Our group of 11 guide dog puppies, one guide dog and guide dog owner and 24 volunteers and staff enjoyed a memorable visit to the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday 12 November, following a kind invitation from MSP David Torrance of the SNP.

“The aim of the day was to meet MSPs from across Scotland and share the vital work carried out by Guide Dogs. The pups impressed everyone they met and were brilliant ambassadors throughout. During our time in the Garden Room, we also had the privilege of meeting Ian Hamilton, BBC correspondent and respected documentarist. His own guide dog had retired only the day before, making the encounter with our young recruits particularly moving and hopeful for him. His warmth and encouragement meant a great deal to the team and volunteers.

“A special highlight of the day was celebrating the outstanding dedication of puppy raiser Diane Hanking. Diane received her well-deserved Long Service Award for 25 years of volunteer service for puppy raising. This recognition was presented to her by MSP David Torrance, marking a proud and heartfelt moment for everyone present.

“Parliament kindly provided a lovely lunch, giving the group time to speak with MSPs in a relaxed setting and highlight the impact our volunteers and dogs have on people who are blind or partially sighted. The event was extremely well received and created many positive conversations.

“The day also offered a wide range of real-world experiences for the pups including car, train and tram travel along with navigating busy public spaces and the bustling streets of Edinburgh as the city prepares for Christmas. They handled these challenges brilliantly and settled beautifully throughout, demonstrating great potential for their future role. It was a long but rewarding day and a wonderful opportunity to showcase the dedication of our volunteers and the promise within each young dog.”

## **Silverburn cinema training**

Puppy Development Advisor, Erin McArthur, has been progressing training at the cinema with a small group of pups; it's so fun to have these different locations to practice in and we're grateful to Cineworld in Silverburn for this opportunity. If you know a local venue that would welcome a group training session, please do let your Puppy Development Advisor know. Not too many pictures as it was lights down for the training within the IMAX. Pictured is

the lovely Tracy and guide dog puppy George who went into training just days after this visit. Good luck, George!



## Northern Ireland

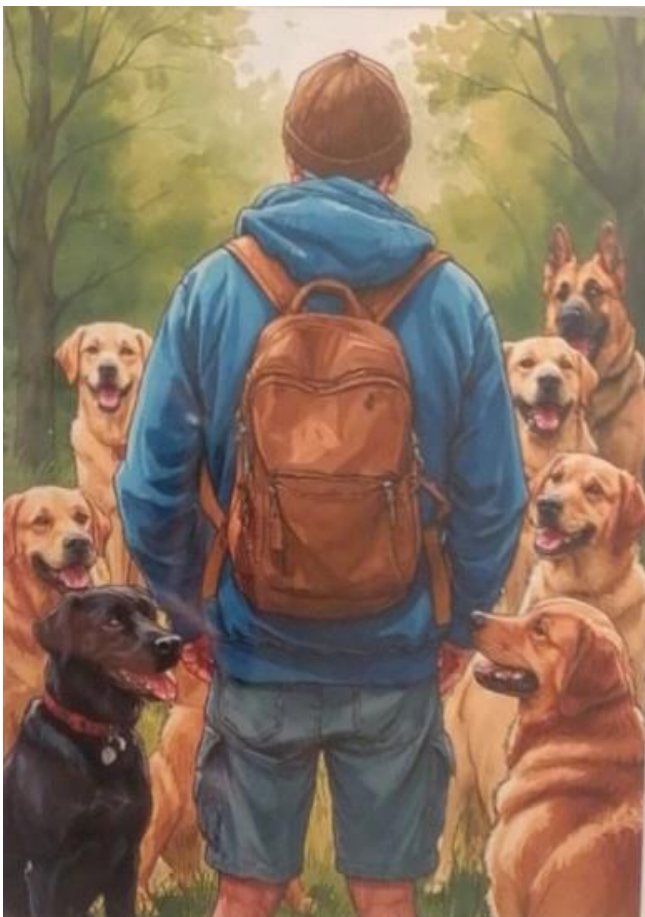
It's been a busy few months with Guide Dogs Northern Ireland (NI) running all their 40 years celebration events - thanks so much for all who attended, I think you will all agree they have been a huge success. If you would like to

see many more highlights, please head over to the [Guide Dogs NI Facebook page](#) where you can find celebratory posts.

## **Trips out**

Puppy Development Advisor, Emma Chicken, took a group of puppy raisers to the Ulster rural museum where everyone had a wonderful time. There was so many varied areas to work the pups. She looks forward to doing more of these visits in the New Year.

## **Crossing the water: Alan and Margaret**



Puppy raisers, Alan and Margaret, move from Northern Ireland to Scotland, but we are lucky they still wish to remain as volunteers for us! We know all our puppy raisers, fundraisers and staff will miss them both a lot.

Puppy Development Advisor, Emma Chicken, has created a wonderful image (pictured) - signed by puppy raisers - which encapsulates Alan perfectly, surrounded by dogs who adore him, including all the guide dog breeds he's had over the years and wearing his trademark shorts!

## A girl's best friend



They say diamonds are a girl's best friend, but they are nothing without Zeb by your side!

Congratulations to our puppy raisers, Kathryn and Ross, who you might have seen their heartwarming story on Guide Dogs NI Facebook socials. Our pups are so important, and this story shows how much they are part of the small day-to-day things and the big life events too! So, for those who didn't catch it on Facebook, here's what was posted:

"A massive congratulations to Puppy Raiser Kathryn and her new fiancé Ross, on their engagement last weekend! 💍"

"Kathryn said: "We were out for our regular Sunday afternoon walk with Zeb, and we decided to go to Mount Stewart. We were walking around the lake and sat at a bench with Zeb on the ground beside us.

"Zeb obviously had to play a part in the proposal. I realised after it was probably a reason why Ross proposed when he did. He knew I wanted Zeb to be part of it, and obviously, Zeb's going to be going off to training in the next few months. Zeb is a part of the family, so he had to be there." 🐾"

## Winter Weight Watchers

Ouch I know, who wants to be counting calories at Christmas? But for our pups it's more important than ever.

We have noticed a rise in some of the body condition scores (BCS) of some of our older pups recently. As we break into winter weather, we might not

be off-lead exercising (free running) as much. And when our dogs are neutered, we need to reduce their feeds. Please speak with your Puppy Development Advisor for advice as it can be hard to spot yourself when their weight creeps on. If your worried at all about your pup's weight, try keeping a detailed diary of everything your pup eats and their exercise. This can help tailor a plan to support your pup to have a good BCS.

When we highlight your pup for entering training, we need you to ensure their weight remains stable. Please don't feed your pup extra treats, chews etc. We know this can be tempting prior to intake but that can cause one to three kilogramme weight gain in a short time. Unfortunately, if your pup rapidly gains weight before intake we can't progress them to training if their BCS increases from their accepted BCS: a healthy score of five.

## Thank you

Here are some lovely pics of some of our pups in festive scenes. We would love you to send your Puppy Development Advisors any festive pictures you have - please remember leads must be always held when in a public access area. Puppy Development Advisor, Tara Green, with guide dog puppy Nicole surrounded by Christmas trees in a shopping mall (pictured below) and guide dog puppy Geeta admiring herself in the decorations (pictured on the next page)!





We hope everyone has a lot of fun over this winter break equally we understand the winter holiday period isn't always an easy time for everyone. We would like all our volunteers to reflect on what a wonderful job they have done in 2025 and how valued you are and to know by volunteering you have helped change lives!

## Winter “paws” with my guide dog puppy

Outside, the streets are bustling,  
people rushing by busy with their lives.  
I sit and watch the mayhem,  
all the things around me feel awry.

Then you come and rest your head,  
so gently on my knee.  
I smile and think how far we've come,  
how long our journey's been.



Let's stop time just for a moment  
in this winter festive glow,  
and look at all we've done together  
and all we still don't know.

Last winter, toilet training,  
bus trips, shops, and more—  
emergency stops to find a place for “busy busy” out of the store.

I see the tiny teeth marks now,  
you left when you were small.  
It's hard to think you were that pup—  
you're now steady, wise, and tall.

I waited for this season:  
the calm, the peace, the trust.  
And now the time has quickly come  
to shape you for your task.

Today I'll stop the festive rush,  
let all the noise drift by.  
We'll walk through Christmas crowds together, just you and I.

We've had our ups and downs in 2025, and in 2026, my friend,  
you'll go on to change some lives—  
a different path from mine, but our story's not the end.

Thank you, my faithful guide dog pup,  
for all you give each day,  
for helping me live mindfully  
in your quiet, loving way.

Everyone at Guide Dog Scotland and Northern Ireland wishes everyone a  
peaceful Christmas and New Year when it comes. Thank you all for your  
support and hard work this year and we look forward to a wonderful 2026  
working together.



Thank you for all you are doing and look forward to seeing you all soon,

Fiona Fraser

**Puppy Development Supervisor - Scotland and Northern Ireland**

**Document ends.**