



North East: puppy raising update December 2024

As we come towards the end of 2024 and we move into the festive season, it's a great opportunity to look back on the past year and celebrate the achievements of our amazing volunteers, in whatever capacity you support the puppy raising team.

We want to welcome all our new puppy raisers and fosterers who have joined in 2024 and thank our existing volunteers for making them so welcome. It's not easy and with your first guide dog puppy, we know it can feel overwhelming at times - often puppy raisers say they feel much more relaxed with their second and subsequent puppies, and we have many puppy raisers that are well into double figures. We are truly grateful for all the time and effort you give. Without all of you, we would not be able to provide life-changers. So, when people ask you "what did you achieve in 2024?", know you can all say you made a real difference to someone's life.

During 2024, here in the North East we have placed 153 pups with their puppy raisers; 113 pups have progressed into training on the guide dog pathway; 11 pups have moved into the breeding programme to become amazing guide dog mums and dads, and we currently have 188 pups at some point on the puppy raising journey in the region.

We also mustn't forget the 34 pups who have taken a different path whilst on their puppy raising journey - being a guide dog is not right for every puppy whether that is due to health reasons, or their temperament is better suited for something else. So even if a puppy's journey takes them down a different path, you will have played a huge part in their formative months and setting them up for a future where they can thrive and flourish.

I can't thank you all enough for the incredible work you do to support our puppies. Keep a look out over the next year for some new events we will be rolling out in the region which will help us all remember why we keep on doing this, especially through those tougher periods!

Setting up a new scheme

Puppy Development Advisor (PDA), Gillian Salmon joined us in 2023 and has had the task of setting up a new scheme, here are some words from her:

“Starting anything new has its challenges and starting a new puppy raising scheme in the Scottish Borders and North Northumberland is no exception. The area is largely rural, with lots of smaller towns and villages creating unique challenges for advertising and recruiting volunteers. However, we have had a great response from members of the public and businesses within the region who have been more than happy to spread the word. Over the last 12 months the scheme has slowly began to grow and develop. We are now recognised in the area and have a real presence; some pups have even become local celebrities with a full village behind them wanting them to succeed.

“Another challenge of having a new scheme is that no one has done it before, so everyone is learning for the first time. We don’t have that network of support in place from experienced puppy raisers who can mentor and support the new volunteers on their journey. However, what we do have is a very supportive and passionate group of volunteers who work hard to learn the foundations of the training programme and practice regularly to help them and their pups be successful. I have also been very lucky to have people who volunteered many years ago come back on board to support the scheme in the fosterer/boarding role, your knowledge and expertise has been invaluable.

“Being new to the area myself I have relied on the volunteer’s local knowledge of the best parks for off-led exercise (free running), where the shopping centres are to help me select the best places to train. You have also helped me secure venues for puppy classes and events. Without this local knowledge and support it would have been much more difficult to find suitable locations, so thank you.

“As one year draws to an end and another year is about to begin, I reflect on the amazing people I have met on this journey. I am in awe of the volunteers and the amazing job they do. You are all fantastic ambassadors for Guide Dogs and have been fundamental in the

scheme's growth over the last 12 months. You have all made my job extremely enjoyable and I feel very privileged to work with you all. We have shared many laughs and some tears along the way and my hope for 2025 is that you all will continue with me on this amazing journey, and we continue to grow and develop the area into a well-established scheme."

Continual improvement and learning

Hi, I am Rebecca, and I cover the Northumbria Scheme as well as running a regular regional Zoom sessions for puppy raisers and fosterers.

We've had a really busy year, welcoming new puppies onto the scheme and saying a proud farewell to our dogs entering training. Classes are growing across the area, and we've continued to introduce our pups to the Newcastle training school in preparation for big school.

The weekly regional Zooms are being well attended and I've so enjoyed the discussions between volunteers. I am ever in awe of the wealth of experience amongst our puppy raisers and fosterers. I am also so proud of the way they support one another giving ideas and encouragement to new volunteers. It's not always easy raising a puppy or fostering one. It takes a village at times, and everyone should be so proud of themselves. As the year winds down to a close it is lovely to reflect on all the fun, (muddy paw prints) and achievements we've had in 2024. Already excited to see what 2025 holds!

Working with our mentors

Hi, my name is Helen Barley and I am the PDA for the West Yorkshire scheme.

Having puppy raising mentors has been invaluable for the whole of the West Yorkshire scheme. Puppy raisers have someone they are able to contact for support and help from someone who has 'lived' experience as a puppy raiser for Guide Dogs. I have had support from them to help with immediate issues in the area, such as emergency boarding or equipment needing replacing, which I wouldn't necessarily be able to sort at such short notice due to the distance the scheme covers.

West Yorkshire has seen some staff changes and absences over the last few years and by having the mentors they have continuously supported puppy raisers on the scheme. They run group meet ups and have a WhatsApp group which new puppy raisers have found great support in, and they have done an amazing job at keeping this going.

Thank you to both my West Yorkshire mentors, Dinah and Elizabeth. You continue to be a huge support to me and the puppy raisers in the area, being a vital point of contact and I know that my volunteers are in capable hands, should a problem occur, especially if I am on leave.

Dates for your diary

Off-lead sessions at Oakwell Country Park

The Tuesday, mentor led, sessions at Oakwell continue to be suspended due to some veterinary health concerns in the area. We are taking this opportunity to review the current structure and will be in touch directly with those involved with these sessions early in the new year.

Transition into training webinars

These information sessions will continue on a quarterly basis for the time being for puppy raisers with pups who are 10 months and older. The next one will be held **Monday 3 March** at 10am and the link will be sent to you individually nearer the time by your PDA, if your pup is at the correct age at that time.

All that is left for me to say is I hope you all have a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year!

Janet Champion

Puppy Raising Operations Manager - North East

Document ends.