



## **South West and Wales region: puppy raising update December 2024**

Hi All, its Leah Rogers here, and I am the Puppy Raising Operations Manager for the South West and Wales.

Thank you to our puppy raisers in the region for another successful year in puppy raising.

This year we have placed 250 puppies on our schemes with puppy raisers existing and new. Plus:

- We have had 223 dogs progress into training.
- 20 entered the breeding programme.
- 88 puppies from our region qualified this year.

We are particularly proud that we now have a scheme in Cornwall; we are going as far as Redruth at present just to allow this to bed in and for the new Puppy Development Advisor (PDA), Jenny Hardy, to find her feet. May I welcome all our new Cornwall puppy raisers to Guide Dogs!

We are proud of our success this year, and this would not be possible if it wasn't for our puppy raisers who dedicate a lot of time and effort in preparing our puppies for the life as a guide dog.

We also must say a big "thank you" to your PDAs who provide ongoing support throughout the year to help you prepare your puppies for whichever path they take, whether that is as a guide dog, buddy dog, or pet.

Below, meet just some of our team who would like to say a few words:

### **PDA, Jenny Hardy**

Seven months into this new PDA role, I feel a lot has been achieved in this time. Firstly, welcome to the new puppy raisers which have recruited in the areas I cover (Plymouth and Cornwall), especially the ones in the Cornwall area which are building up numbers slowly on a new-ish scheme.

With the new puppy class in Cornwall that I've started, hopefully we can continue to build up a bit of a community for volunteers, which will enable them to support each other along the rollercoaster journey of being a puppy raiser.

Secondly, not forgetting the existing puppy raisers, whether they are on their second puppy or 22<sup>nd</sup> puppy, you have all been amazing. Without you, I couldn't do my job, but also Guide Dogs wouldn't have their life-changers of the future. You have made me feel welcome and I look forward to working with you in the years to come.

## **PDA, Lisa Gibson**

Our big focus this year has been distraction. Our dogs are of course bred and raised to be friendly and sociable, but this can make it really hard for them to behave neutrally around other dogs and other animals, people, children - the list goes on!

My brilliant puppy raisers and I have been working hard out and about, using distance to enable our pups to give us those neutral behaviours, and gradually decreasing the distance while still setting pups up to succeed. This can look like sitting on a bench in a park, walking parallel to another puppy raiser and their pup, even tagging along on school runs.

We sometimes have to get creative to set up those opportunities to practise! It takes time and effort, but the hard work does pay off - there's nothing like seeing those pups who have struggled with distraction then being able to work and focus on their handler where they couldn't before.

This has been a tricky year for lots of people and I have been blown away by how generous and supportive my volunteer puppy raisers and fosterers have been towards each other. They have worked extremely hard with their own pups and gone above and beyond to help each other out too, I could not be prouder of them all!

We have had so many brilliant success stories, big and small, on the scheme this year, but a special shout out has to go to Sonia Wyatt and her 13-month Labrador x Golden Retriever pup, Harold.

Harold had a tricky start in puppy raising, he had some medical issues as a young puppy meaning he underwent lots of vet interventions and was confined to crate rest during his critical early learning period. Through his time in puppy raising, he has struggled with his care, handling and with dog distraction, and as a very large boy (over 32kg) this isn't always easy to manage! His puppy raiser Sonia has worked incredibly hard to help him overcome these issues. She has put in the time every single day with patience and positivity to help him grow into the calm confident goofball he is today - well done Sonia!

### **PDA, Elli Cavazza**

I am incredibly lucky to have a group of volunteers supporting other puppy raisers, from mentors to puppy class helpers and boarding coordinators. Mentors have been an invaluable asset in assisting with visits, from helping me place a puppy on a day I had two coming into my area, to being able to do a first home visit whilst I had some time off.

The puppy raising mentors are particularly brilliant at helping people new to the role, lending a listening ear or visiting them when needing some encouragement. As part of this, they alternate in arranging coffee mornings for volunteers to get together, which really helps create community spirit and a sense of teamwork. I also have a mentor who enjoys teaching recall, and provides extra visits in between my appointments, particularly for dogs on a 'Supporting Dog To Plan'.

For both my classes I have puppy class helpers, who not only help with the logistics of setting up, but also support pups who might be struggling whilst I have my eye elsewhere. The way everyone works together has been fantastic for building up a new group, with people working to their strengths and puppy raisers (and the PDA!) feeling supported so we are all able to focus on what is best for our pups.

Finally, I would like to personally thank you all for your time and effort this year. Puppy raising is a 24/7 commitment and although it is challenging at times it is very rewarding too.

Therefore, thank you again and I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. I look forward to catching up with you all next year.

Leah Rogers,

Puppy Raising Operations Manager - South West and Wales

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