

Scotland & Northern Ireland region: puppy raising update March 2025

Hi all, Vanessa Scott and Janet Champion here, and we are the Puppy Raising Operations Managers for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Puppy Raising Operations Manager message

Spring is in the air! As the days get lighter and warmer it's the perfect time to get outside and enjoy the fresh spring air with your pups. The change in seasons brings new opportunities for training and socialisation, as well as more chances for your puppy to explore the world around them. In this month's newsletter we are focusing on foundation behaviours such as positional cues and manners - the foundation for all puppy raising training.

Foundation behaviours

Foundation behaviours may seem like a smaller aspect of the puppy training pathway, but it provides opportunities for quick, achievable, fun and interactive training sessions to be established with your puppy, that lay the foundations for further training and behaviours. Foundation behaviours can be started almost right away when a puppy is placed with a puppy raiser. They can be tailored, in both duration and difficulty, to the puppy's individual learning needs, and progressed at a pace that suits both puppy and volunteer.

There is no limit to how difficult you make it, which can be very beneficial at the later pathways of the puppy raising journey, when the puppy is ready to intake into training. Can the puppy be told to "sit", "stand" and "down" for 30 seconds? Amazing! If yes, we can then see if they can do a minute. Can they remain in a position, whilst their handler moves away two metres? Brilliant! Can they then do it when the handler moves three metres away etc? This can provide an excellent session when the weather outside may be too hazardous to walk in, but the pup still needs mental enrichment.

The fast paced, quickly progressed and highly reinforced sessions then help create an even stronger bond with the puppy's handler, as well as setting

the foundations for behaviour that can be taken outside the house and into the wider world.

Recently, we had a puppy that struggled with self-control in social situations. This particularly manifested in being very distracted by people/dogs and rubbish, and the pup would lunge towards these. The handler struggled to get the puppies attention in these situations, due to the level of distraction.

By going back to basics and building up their foundation behaviours in the house, such as sit/down/stand and door manners, it helped the puppy's resilience and self-control, which could then be built up to help its self-control in busier and more demanding environments. It also helped build an understanding of when the puppy was being compliant, and they were rewarded heavily and positively, which then helped the pup know how to behave around more difficult distractions on the lead.

If we see the training and behaviours we expect of our puppies as building blocks, foundation behaviours act a solid and secure foundation for the rest to be built upon.

Puppy Development Advisor updates

David Smith



“Hi, I am David Smith, and I have been working within the puppy raising department in its changing name and job title changes for nearly 18 years. I currently cover the South Fife and Stirlingshire area covering, by no means exhaustively Glenrothes, Kirkcaldy, Falkirk, Grangemouth and Stirling.

“I’m so fortunate to work with such wonderful animals every day. My job as a Puppy Development Advisor (PDA) allows me to

combine my love for dogs and working with likeminded volunteers in a meaningful purpose, knowing I’m part of a bigger team working together,

making a real difference in the lives of others. While I believe the role of a PDA is incredibly rewarding, it often goes unappreciated in what really is involved. The crucial foundations much like building foundations, our work is essential, though frequently unseen, with our efforts often hidden beneath the surface.

“But what I think I like best about my job, is witnessing the transformation of puppies, from boisterous eight-week-old bundles of energy to confident adolescents ready to take on the life-changing role when they leave us as potential future life-changing guide dogs.”

Erin McArthur



“Hi, I’m Erin McArthur, I am a PDA in the Glasgow and South Lanark area. I have been with Guide Dogs for five years now having previously trained exotic animals such as sealions, penguins, dolphins and parrots, and of course dogs!

“I have just returned to my role after a year off on maternity leave. It’s fabulous to be back with old and new puppy raisers and all new dogs on scheme. I must give a massive thank you to them all for their hard work whilst I was off, and they have been covered by other PDAs. It has been a delight to hear how their last dogs got on, even the ones who didn’t make it into the guide dog training programme but are now living their best lives as much-loved pets.

“Having a baby has given me even more respect for what all our wonderful puppy raisers go through and deal with on a daily basis, the toileting, the teething, the biting and even the sleepless nights. Being a mum is amazing and challenging, Harris (pictured) is such a little character already. I don’t know where the last year has gone and don’t worry, he is absolutely daft about animals already! He’s met several guide



dog puppies and is mesmerised by them and giggles away when they play with their toys, fingers crossed he'll be an animal trainer in the future!

"I am so looking forward to 2025 and the new puppies and challenges and adventures that this year is going to bring and so happy to be back at work and get back to supporting our fabulous puppy raisers train the next generation of life-changers."

Dates for the diary

Puppy Development Advisor, Tara Green, will be offering a **'bring a friend' along to puppy class on Thursday 6 March** at the Milngavie Guide Hall. Tara will email the details to her scheme.

Puppy Development Advisor, Jade Steven, will also be putting forward a **'bring a friend' along to puppy class on Thursday 13 March**, 11:00am-12:00pm, at Cramond Kirk, Cramond Glebe Rd, Cramond, Edinburgh EH4 6NS. Jade will email the details to her scheme.

Puppy Development Advisor, Lynsey Anderson-Fell, carried out some fosterer training this month and explored the importance of why we teach certain behaviours with our pups, as well as inviting a guide dog owner to share their story. The **'powerful why session'** was a great success! Lynsey has received some positive feedback from those who attended saying they really enjoyed it and learned some new techniques.

The next **'powerful why session'** will be for puppy raisers, this will take place at her class on **Thursday 6 March**, at the Jack Kane centre.

That all for this month's edition.

Thanks again for everything that you continue to do for Guide Dogs, and in particular puppy raising, it's very much appreciated.

If you have any ideas or suggestions for the up and coming newsletters please drop us an email at Vanessal.scott@guidedogs.org.uk or Janet.Champion@guidedogs.org.uk.



Kind regards

Vanessa and Janet

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Puppy Raising Operations Managers - Scotland & Northern Ireland

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