

Scotland and Northern Ireland region: puppy raising update October 2025

Hi All, Fiona Fraser here, and I am one of the Puppy Development Supervisors for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Puppy Development Supervisor's message

In October's puppy raising newsletter, we've shared a video on **'Preparation before social settling'**. Under this theme, the video focuses on different mental and physical exercises your puppy can undertake before learning to settle in different social settings/environments as well as looking at time of day and feeding considerations.

Social settling can be very daunting for puppy raisers especially when you're not used to taking your puppy into such varied social environments such as shopping centres, cafes and restaurants. You may have entered these environments with pet dogs previously, but they would be clearly marked as dog friendly establishments. Ensuring your puppy can settle in a wide variety of environments, including spaces not open to pet dogs, will give them the invaluable experience needed so guide dog owners can confidently go into all environments knowing their guide dog is able to settle calmly, thus giving them more mobility and choice.

One of my very first weeks at Guide Dogs, I remember shadowing a Guide Dog Trainer. I followed Lynsey and her trainee guide dog around Forfar, we went in and out of many shops and as she walked confidently, and I looked at the dog's body language wondering things like "what if she does a poo? Or goes to take something off the shelf?" I was very experienced with training pet dogs, but this was all new. I had no experience with working guide dogs who were in all these different environments. We stopped to have a coffee; Lynsey took off her dog's harness and the dog just laid down next to Lynsey's side. I continued to look around the café, people were glancing at the dog but quickly went back to their conversations. I was much more



aware than anyone in the café. Guide Dog Trainer, Lynsey, was oblivious to my internal anxiety and thoughts of “what if we get refused? What if the dog barks? Or goes to the toilet?”

When I am working with first time puppy raisers and fosterers, I often think back to that time, and of all the things that went through my head. I remember the nerves and excitement of taking dogs into these busy new environments. I don't take for granted that it feels so comfortable and relaxed for me now to go to all these places.

As Puppy Development Advisors and Supervisors, we know it can be daunting, and luckily the visit with Lynsey went smoothly and my first experience of taking a dog into social situation was a good one. We want to make sure that you are set up for success and we don't rush taking puppies into social situations. It's a lot easier to have our puppies settled at home on the lead at the kitchen table rather than asking the pup to settle for the first time in a busy café. We can recreate these scenarios to ensure we don't rush our puppies and take it one step at a time. Remember that great training tip “we always train *for* the environment not *in* the environment.” Knowing the different things we can do prior to the settle can really help.

Being prepared is key when it comes to settling, and knowing your own puppies' abilities will really help you make the right choices for when, where and how long to settle. Often at the end of a visit in town, we may have a break and have a coffee with you and your pup, this is a chance for you to relax. But your Puppy Development Advisor will also be looking to see how your pup is settling. We are assessing lots of things throughout this time; what your pup does, how long they can settle, if they need a settle aid etc, and of course helping you to manage and giving you feedback at the same time.

Our pups often learn to bark or whine while stopping in a cafe or a restaurant, usually because we interrupt them with touch or offering food or settle aids. A reason for doing this is it can feel embarrassing for us, and we don't want to disturb members of the public within the establishment. So ensuring we don't rush the initial settling stage, preparing them well and avoiding our pups learning to attention seek; we will have those lovely stops where you can take time with either your Puppy Development Advisor or

friends and family to stop in any environment sit down and your pup will know to relax with you. This is of course the end goal, and it takes time to get here, but it is a lovely part of puppy raising and having your dog with you, so you can go into varied environments and prepare them for a varied life that they will have with their guide dog owner.

Speaking of varied environments, look at all the wonderful places Puppy Development Advisors and puppy raisers have been since the last newsletter!

Edinburgh Zoo: Puppy Development Advisor visits with pups and helping to add more pathways for assistance dog users



You may have seen in a previous update that our Puppy Development Advisors, Lynsey Anderson Fell and Jade Steven, have been partnering with Edinburgh Zoo to take some of their puppy raisers and pups - who are at an appropriate stage on training - for walks around the zoo. Not only do they go and see very different animals but as the topic of this newsletter suggest they also take time to stop and settle with their pups on benches and in the zoo's café, so we get a chance to see lots of behaviours in an environment that is very novel.

We were approached in September by the zoo to extend the path that the assistance dogs take, and to help add more enclosures for dog access. This would aid guide dog owners by ensuring they had a wider variety of areas they could access with their guide dog, while ensuring the welfare of the zoo animals

before any new routes were added. Lynsey provided a stuffy black Labrador so the keepers could start to use this before the pups visit.

We are starting a few test walks with some puppies to ensure both guide dog puppies and the zoo animals are comfortable. We were very lucky to do a bit of a smell exchange where we got some fabric which had been in with the giraffes. It was interesting to see the puppies' reactions to these new smells. They were a little underwhelmed when they gave one sniff and walked away! But for their visits this is a great start before they go and see the giraffes and hopefully the smell will not be off putting for our puppies when they see them in real life. However, seeing the giraffes' long legs and necks might be another story.

*Please note the visits to Edinburgh Zoo must be arranged through your Puppy Development Advisor and we do these only with staff accompanying puppy raisers and pups. It is not an option to take your puppy without a Puppy Development Advisor present.

We were floored By the Floors Castle STV news piece

We do lots of media and you guys work so hard promoting us at every opportunity. With one days' notice Puppy Development Advisor, Gillian Salmon, had to prepare a recruitment filming session at her planned Floors Castle puppy trip event! The media piece turned out amazing. We have had great feedback.

Puppy raiser, Steve, made me have a lump in my throat when he talked so beautifully about preparing for Hannah to leave, and Nicola spoke so so well about the realities of puppy raising. Gillian came across great and portrayed a great message. Everyone was so natural, and the group shots and training of all the pups and puppy raisers were brilliant and filming in the castle and the bird room looked stunning. Everyone who attended the session should be so proud of themselves and their pups! Below are a couple of pictures: one of our pups and their puppy raisers outside the castle, and a close-up of Hannah settling inside the castle.



One man, many hats - thank you, Jim Grundison

Jim has worn many hats with his time as a volunteer at Guide Dogs: puppy raiser, fosterer, fundraiser, and driver. He has an additional hat/role that not many other volunteers will have done; Jim is a very skilled collection box restorer. Jim hasn't restored one or two collection boxes; he has beautifully restored an amazing 200 life-size collection boxes for Guide Dogs! Jim doesn't just paint these boxes; he will restore them if they've got bits missing. He has repaired things like broken-off ears, holes in the side etc. Its a real skill and the attention to detail is amazing.

Jim drives all over Scotland to pick up damaged collection boxes and happily returns them in their news sparkling condition ready to collect money again. I am sure when you see a box in your local shop you will think of Jim and all the work that goes on behind the scenes. Thank you Jim for all you do its very much appreciated.



We have collection boxes in need of homes, so if you think you know of somewhere a box could be placed, please do mention it to your Puppy Development Advisor who will pass on the details to the relevant fundraising group in your area.

Forfar training school's 60th birthday bash



Wow what a day we had celebrating 60 years of Guide Dogs in Forfar. Thank you to all the puppy raisers who came along and supported the event. It was great that our CEO, Andrew Lennox, came along - and after the pipe band marched in and opened the event - he addressed staff, volunteers and visitors. He took lots of time to talk with visitors and I saw him chatting with lots of puppy raisers too.

We had two Puppy raising demonstrations - both demonstrations were fantastic. Lorna Barclay and Jude Taylor planned and rehearsed them and showed pups of different ages and stages, we talked through these with demonstrations of baby pups in home, from vet handling, to a makeshift bus journey set ups, café set up and the brave puppy raises who did dog greetings and off lead recall in this very very busy environment. All puppy raisers and pups were amazing, not a paw out of place.

Huge thank you goes to: Suzie and Elain Grant, Chief and Neil Cameron, Alun and Anne Peak, Sandie and Lisa Strang, Anya, Shan and Linda Connor, Ida and Brenda Lackie, Odell and Pauline and Jim Carnie, Sultan and Danny Rooney, Atlas and Carol Danskin, Carter and Carol Wood, Karen and Cara Hockley.

We had a couple of kennels available for the demo dogs to rest, below you can see just a few of our Puppy Development Advisors also taking a rest: David, Jude, Tara and Erin. All the Puppy Development Advisors and myself and Lorna want to say a huge thank you to all involved in the demos and those of you who came to watch us.



We are sorry we are lacking in puppy demonstration photos as we were too busy enjoying the action - instead, please see some archived photographs of Guide Dogs in Forfar and some on the day!



If you were there for the second demonstration you would have heard a special shout out to our puppy raising volunteers Sam and Dorothy Fleming who took time out from their 50th wedding anniversary celebrations in

Peebles to come and see us and support the event. Showing just how dedicated our volunteers are, we hope you both had a wonderful day!



Gemma Finlay, Forfar Dog Supply Manager, shared the below message after the event, and I am sure there is more to add to that total. I think you will agree a fantastic total from a fantastic day.

“Thanks to everyone’s hard work and enthusiasm, we raised an astonishing **£10,899.38** — a truly impressive result that reflects the hard work, energy, and teamwork that went into the event (the cost of the event was £1,500, which takes us to a total income of **£9,399.38**)!”

From one celebration to the next! Northern Ireland is celebrating 40 years of Guide Dogs

Please keep a close eye on our social media for events, and if you’re in Northern Ireland and not on social media, do ask your Puppy Development Advisor, Emma Chicken, for 40th anniversary news/updates.

Taking the dog out for a run took on a whole new meaning when Guide Dogs Penny Puppy mascot went for a run with Steven



Steven Mitchell from Northern Ireland is a great support for his Mum and Dad with all the pups they have raised. He isn’t just helping raise pups but now money too. His support extended to a phenomenal fundraising challenge recently where he ran a 50km cul-de-sac ultra marathon, running 556 laps in an incredible 5 hours and 20 minutes.

Check out these great photos of Steven and his friends, guide dog mascot Penny Puppy, and of course his family guide dog puppy, Raymond, all supporting him. Steven raised an amazing £3,151 - a whopping 630% over his initial target!



It's cold in Scotland but colder in the Arctic and Antarctic for these puppy raisers

Puppy raisers, Margaret and Dave Burk, complete their second ice cold polar plunge for Guide Dogs. They have raised more than £700 by jumping twice, once in the Antarctic and once in the Arctic Sea! I love the below photos as it looks like Dave is walking on water as Margaret plunges in.





We know our puppy raising volunteers have been up to so much more than we can show in one update. Don't be shy, if there is something you would like spotlighted, please mention it to your Puppy Development Advisor.

We are continuing to recruit more puppy raisers, so please do keep spreading the word as we know "word of mouth" is our biggest form of recruitment success.

As always, we thank you for your support and all the hard work and dedication you put into raising or fostering our pups, including any other roles.

Fiona Fraser

Puppy Raising Development Supervisor - Scotland and Northern Ireland

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