

Scotland and Northern Ireland: puppy raising update June 2025

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

Puppy Development Supervisor message

In this month's puppy raising newsletter, you will have seen the video on 'positional cues'. One of the first things you teach when your pup arrives is often the positions sit and down using a verbal cue (cue is the name for the behaviour). It is easy forget to ensure we "proof" these behaviours and make sure our pups can do them in varied environments with a single cue. We want to make sure we remember we are working towards consistent good straight left position and prompt responses. A young puppy will need lots of support and we work up to the good straight positions and prompt response. Its very easy to overlook this when we are covering big things like, shops, trains/transport and social greetings. As show in the video working at home on straight positions and prompt responses to cues can be a big help when out and about. "Train *for* the environment not always *in* the environment."

Case study: Sally, Dave and puppy Eva (names have been changed)

I remember taking a puppy class once and Sally was there with her husband Dave and 8-month-old pup Eva. I had all my puppy raisers stood up at once and they were doing sits and downs, and some lead work in a group. Sally was doing well with Eva, and Eva was doing all the positions on cue. I asked all the handlers with a partner if they could swap and perform the same behaviours. This time Eva was with Dave and was very slow to respond to sit and down, and at times just stood looking blankly at Dave. Sally began to "nicely" coach Dave stating his tone was wrong, then his timing was wrong etc. I asked Sally to come up again and do the behaviours, Eva did them all first time with no hesitation and kept a good left-hand side position. Sally smiled confidently at Dave, "See it's Dave, she can do it for me". I asked

Sally to do the cues again, only this time to put her hands in her pockets and give the same cues, Eva hesitated and came in front of Sally, Sally moved her back left and gave the cue again and Eva just stood and did not “sit”.

So why had this happened? Why had Eva suddenly lost the ability do simple behaviours she had known for months. The reason was that Sally had been doing a small hand raise with her left hand, it would raise up just a few inches for sit and lower a few inches for down. So, Eva had learned the physical cue over the verbal cue, but Sally had assumed she had taught the verbal cue and was unaware she was doing small hand movements.

Our pups first language is body language so they can pick up even an eyebrow raise. We tested this by Dave using the same hand positions that Sally had used and Eva did everything first time. This was a super valuable lesson for everyone at puppy class. We all took so much from seeing the subtle “unintentional cue” and it only took one week to get Sally fully onto vocal cues. This is why when your Puppy Development Advisor comes out, they may pick up on small things that you have no idea you’re doing. It’s a similar situation when your puppy returns from being temporarily fostered and you receive reports that your pup wouldn’t follow cues; couldn’t sit or didn’t know down and appeared to ignore the handler. You might say, “well he never does that with me?” Your pup can behave differently with someone else because they are not doing the small body language additions you give your pup. We should always be looking for possible unintentional cues that we might be signalling when supporting our pups.

At puppy class your Puppy Development Advisor may swap dogs if appropriate or they may ask you to give cues while not looking at your pup, for example, with your hands behind your back, while wearing sunglasses or having your back to your puppy all to see if there are any unintentional positional cues creeping in!

Team focus

Puppy Development Advisor David MacKay has been with Guide Dogs for over 30 years, first as a Guide Dog Trainer at Leamington Spa and then as a Puppy Development Advisor up in Scotland. He has supported puppy raisers in many areas during his time as a Puppy Development Advisor. Supporting and working alongside volunteers is part of the job David enjoys most. David's scheme is Aberdeen and Angus supports puppy raisers from Dyce down the East Coast to Carnoustie.

Puppy Development Advisor Joan Van-Eijk is our Puppy Development Advisor who supports our puppy raisers in Perthshire, down through Kinross to Dunfermline. Before becoming a Puppy Development Advisor Joan worked on the Puppy Raising for Excellent Partnerships (PREP) project, which helped Guide Dogs to develop a standardised and consistent approach to puppy raising.

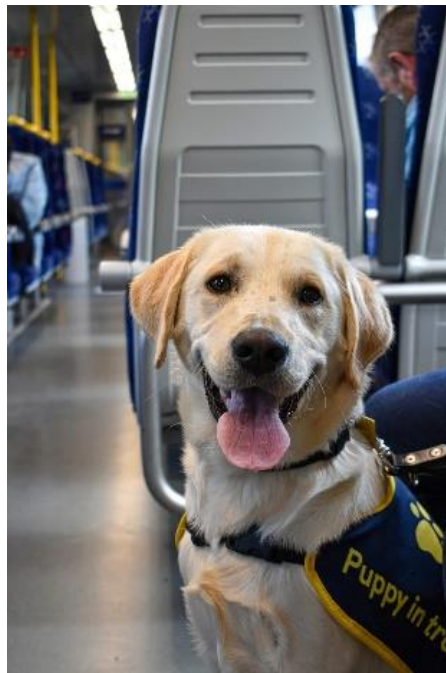


We want to give a huge shout out to **Puppy Development Advisor Erin McArthur** (pictured left) who received her five years' service award. Congratulations Erin!

What's been happening

- We have been running very successful recruitment events across our region and online with your virtual events. Thank you to all who have signposted people to these events. We have received great feedback that word of mouth from puppy raisers has been a great way in recruiting new volunteers. Please do **bring a friend** to puppy class or ask them to apply online should you know anyone who might be interested.
- Huge thank you to all our volunteers. And a well done to all volunteers who were nominated for a local volunteer award for your puppy raising roles and any additional roles you do to support Guide Dogs.
- Lots of puppy raisers do more than one role and we have lots of opportunities that may well fit in around your puppy raising or fostering journey, from class helper, mentor, fundraiser, speaker, puppy drivers and many more. Please ask your Puppy Development Advisor for more information.
- Puppy Development Advisors Erin and Tara have their trip with older Glasgow pups to the Scottish parliament booked. This will give them a good chance to see them on longer train journeys and in varied busy city environments as well as see how they get on in a multi-dog outing.
- As you might have seen on Facebook we have been visiting Edinburgh Zoo. More pups will be visiting the Zoo on organised visits with their Puppy Development Advisors. This means puppy raisers can only take their pups to the zoo if the visit has been organised by a Puppy Development Advisor. These trips give your pups good opportunities to train along side some very novel distractions and some very interesting smells! If you would like to visit, please contact your Puppy Development Advisor and they will advise on how to book a date with Puppy Development Advisors, Lynsey and Jade in Edinburgh.

- Puppy Development Advisor Gillian is also in talks with the Game of Thrones team in Belfast for a studio tour...who knows in our next update, we could have pups pictured with dragons!
- We were delighted with the awesome coverage with Scotrail in Glasgow, for the “dogs day out” with puppy raisers Alison, Ewan and Craig and their very well behaved pups, Enoch (pictured below, under puppy raiser Alison’s legs on the train), George (pictured below, standing next to Craig’s legs at their destination) and Barley (pictured below, sitting on train next to puppy raiser Ewan who is out of shot).



Virtual and in-person inputs

These online inputs have proved very popular over the last two years. We have regular group virtual pre-placement support available and recall health

and safety inputs prior to off-lead exercise (free running). Your Puppy Development Advisor will invite new and experienced puppy raisers to join when they receive their new puppy. Your Puppy Development Advisor will book your space and inform you of the details.

Joan runs transitional visits to Forfar for some older dogs to visit before they move to training school. Your Puppy Development Advisor will advise you of available dates and times when appropriate for your pup to visit before training.

We also have induction days in Forfar. These induction days are great way to find out about all thing's puppy raising (without your pup). Please ask your Puppy Development Advisor for more information.

Balmoral Show a huge success



Puppy raisers across the Belfast scheme worked hard to support the Balmoral Show both with and without their pups. It was a truly amazing four days which saw us raise the profile of Guide Dogs to a new level with over 120,000 people attending the show. We connected with lots of people (and possibly a few new potential volunteers), schools, corporates and many politicians and other people who wanted to learn more about our work in Northern Ireland. We raised a massive **£7,135.00** which of course will double to **£14,270.00** thanks to the amazing Halifax match giving!

To all our volunteers who play a vital role at Guide Dogs, thanks again for your continued support and enthusiasm!



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.