



Scotland and Northern Ireland region: puppy raising update April 2025

Hi all, Fiona Fraser here, and I am the Puppy Development Supervisor for the Scotland and Northern Ireland region.

Puppy Development Supervisor's message

When we speak to first-time puppy raisers, we tell them “this is a rewarding but challenging volunteering role”, but until that puppy arrives the enormity of the role is rarely understood. Those first early weeks are spent training to gain some ‘consistency and routine’ by learning your puppy’s signals: likes, dislikes, and timings.

When we have all this figured out (usually on very little sleep) that routine can start paying off as we know your guide dog puppy likes to “busy busy” 30 minutes after breakfast and needs a toilet break in the middle of a play session. You also know the level of vocal rewards, what physical touch your puppy likes, and you can use their kibble to build consistency with spending outside.

Inside the home, you’re developing self-control and calmness in many ways, as you’ll have a tiny whirlwind to manage. These calm self-controlled sessions will be very short: building value in your pups’ cage and bed; introducing a mat or blanket; after the lead and collar are introduced you can begin walking around the house with a lead, settling in areas to mimic a stop while on a walk, but all this would be short, 10 seconds to two minutes to begin with.

When we develop an understanding of a behaviour early on at home, it’s much easier to generalise and transfer those skills to unfamiliar environments. I love the phrase “**train for the environment and not in the environment.**” Remember, you’re building a strong behaviour foundation before they step out of the house for walks.

As a guide dog these skills which are learnt from lots of varied environments will mean the guide dog owner will have their whole world open up. They will know they can “toilet” their dog at home before they work or ask at a

suitable place when out, and they can relax with a settled dog with friends for coffee and dinner or in an important business meeting.

Your hard work in developing consistency and routine, and attention on all those early steps training you pup in your dressing gown to toilet on cue and sitting in your pretend cafe in your back garden with table and chairs means someone with sight loss can live a full life.

How developing a routine benefits your pup and your volunteering

You all do such an amazing job, fitting a pup into your life can be a challenge. I recently went out with a Puppy Development Advisor (PDA) to see a newly placed pup; she was 10 weeks old and things were a little hectic.

The first-time puppy raiser was tired as their pup was up in the night and the toilet training just wasn't "clicking" coupled with the fact their two primary age children had become the pup's favourite toys. The "great idea to puppy raise" was not as rosy as it once seemed.

The PDA identified the puppy raisers overwhelm, she identified the worst points of undesirable behaviour as the kids' breakfast time before school, kids coming in from school and the 6:45pm zoomies/play time in the evening. The PDA built a training plan around the flash points and added in stair gates and gave both puppy raisers roles at the flash points. She rotated the pup's toys and introduced enrichment for some parts of their meals. She demonstrated the mat training and showed how to build value in the crate while the puppy raisers were present in the room.

I revisited a week later, and it was like walking into a different family, everyone looked more rested, the dialogue had turned from what the pup was doing wrong to what they had achieved and the whole family were excited to show just how bright their puppy was. Although the behaviours had not totally extinguished, their PDA went through the plan again and the whole family were more positive. Just by knowing the routine and putting in

management steps the family were able to have space to train what they wanted and were starting to build natural settling and self-control around busy family times. They were able to anticipate zoomies and ensure the children understood what to do around the pup. It really does take everyone in a household to be consistent and know the routine, and we thank everyone who helped us get to the end goal. It's not easy, especially in those early days.

Do remember you are not alone; your PDA is there to help you. They will not mind a call to discuss building routines. They want to know if things are not progressing. Don't wait for a next booked visit, pick up the phone instead. We can give hints and tips. We have experience of looking after hundreds of pups and puppy raisers, including their families: so, we can provide a plethora of advice, and know-how in tweaking existing training plans to suit you and your puppy's needs.

Remember one size does not always fit all. What you did with your pet or even your last three guide dog pups may not be what you need to do with your current pup.

Our PDAs will focus on settles around food prep at classes and on early visits with younger pups. We would love videos of how you get on with developing a natural settle around food preparation or busy mealtimes. Please share these videos with your PDAs.

Thank you for spreading the word about puppy raising

A huge shout out to all our volunteers and staff who have been working so very hard to keep puppy raising at the front of people's minds. So many of you have been giving interviews for newspapers, on TV and multiple radio stations. Please look at the wonderful photos of Honey Bunch meeting rescue turtle April at the sea life centre in Loch Lomond (pictures below). We were very lucky to have this filmed and shown on STV news and many other media outlets.



Guide dog puppy Raymond in Northern Ireland was on his best behaviour when he met King Charles and Queen Camilla. Meanwhile, PDA David Smith took his pups to Edinburgh to visit the Scottish Parliament. These are just a few of the events our pups have attended, not only to support their training but to promote Guide Dogs. We would encourage you to spread the word about puppy raising and if you have any local bulletin boards in your community, please ask your PDA for posters, if you would like to put these up. Also, if you meet anyone who is interested in puppy raising, why not ask them if they would like to come to puppy class? We have had a few successes with 'bring a friend'. Thanks so much to all who have supported us and continue to help puppy raising grow in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Lorna and I would like to thank all our puppy raisers and fosterers for your support. Thank you for everything you do, we both look forward to seeing you all soon as we accompany our PDAs on their visits.

Fiona and Lorna

Fiona Fraser

Puppy Development Supervisor - Scotland and Northern Ireland

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