

## **North East region: puppy raising update August 2025**

Hi All, Janet Champion here, and I am the Puppy Raising Operations Manager for the North East region.

### **Puppy Raising Operations Manager's message**

You will have seen in the puppy raising newsletter that there is a video on how to negotiate doorways with your puppy in a safe and calm manner. The video demonstrates various techniques that can be used to support safe and calm passage through different types of doorways.

It also shows how to prevent some common issues from developing such as lunging or rushing through doorways. Some of the reasons for this behaviour could be your puppy's desire to investigate what is on the other side of the door or they want to get through as quickly as possible because, perhaps at some point, they experienced something which has made them worry when passing through an open doorway; perhaps the gap didn't feel wide enough for them or a door started to close before they were fully through.

It's also common to see, when hinges are on the left-hand side that handlers reach across the dog even with bags etc hanging over their arms to hold the door open. When this happens, a dog is only given a narrow gap and may feel that their head will be hit by hanging objects. In this situation, it's far more likely a dog will either back off and refuse to pass through the door or will rush to get to the other side.

It's also worth thinking about the scenario when you don't know what is on the other side of a door as this is what our guide dog owners experience every day: perhaps a distraction such as another dog, a cat or even a child in a pushchair with a sausage roll, or something more hazardous in a busier area such as an obstacle or moving object. By negotiating doors calmly and consistently there is much more chance of managing the unexpected events which may occur.

## **Guide dog puppy, Merlin relearning door manners**

While it's great to introduce patience from an early age, it's never too late to start consistently introducing door manners. I remember how a simple change brought about a huge change in the behaviour of adolescent male Labrador called Merlin.

Merlin's behaviour had become more challenging for his puppy raiser as his hormones kicked in. She had stopped enjoying taking him out and about so contacted her Puppy Development Advisor for help. As soon as she clipped the lead on to leave the house, the Puppy Development Advisor noticed that he wasn't being polite when negotiating the exterior doors of the home, so, instead of going out for the walk they had planned, they did a focused session on door manners at the front door.

Merlin loved this session and focused well on the task in hand and the subsequent rewards he received for making progress. The Puppy Development Advisor booked in a follow up visit for a week's time and was amazed at the difference in Merlin's behaviour when going out of the house.

At Merlin's next puppy class, the Puppy Development Advisor allocated extra time to work with him before class to bring those same techniques into a new environment. By introducing patience at an exciting time, the puppy raiser was able to adapt the techniques whenever she felt Merlin was starting to become over excited, to give him chance to calm down and take everything in, and just as importantly to give his puppy raiser a breather too.

## **Team update**

### **Helen Barley moves to Guide Line**

I would like to take this opportunity to let you all know that Helen Barley is moving on from her role as Puppy Development Advisor for the West Yorkshire scheme. We are delighted to let you know that she is staying within Guide Dogs and will be moving across to the Guide Line team so many of you may come across her when you call. Helen joined Guide Dogs in 2019



to train as a Puppy Development Advisor. At the time, she had to quickly negotiate the changes brought on by the pandemic, including lockdowns. Helen has run schemes in both South and West Yorkshire so many of you may have come across her during her time with the puppy raising team. Helen moves into her new role at the beginning of September, and I would like to say a big thank you to her for all she has done for puppy raising in the North East during her time with us. Good Luck Helen in your new role!

## **Interim support for puppy raisers in West Yorkshire**

While we look at the region as a whole and decide what our recruitment will look like, puppy raisers in West Yorkshire will be directly supported by Puppy Development Advisor, Gillian Salmon, and Puppy Development Supervisor, Fiona Fraser (from the Scotland team). There will also be additional support available from colleagues from other regions until the recruitment process is complete.

We will be contacting puppy raisers directly affected by these changes in the very near future to explain what this support will look like and how in-person visits will continue as normal.

## **Tell us your ideas for puppy raising**

There is an awful lot going on in the background to continually try and improve the support we give our puppy raisers and there will be some new ideas rolling out in the next few months. We're always open to hearing your ideas too (perhaps a virtual coffee morning or a Q&A session with a particular staff member or department), so please don't hesitate to contact me directly at [Janet.Champion@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:Janet.Champion@guidedogs.org.uk).

We have had a busy summer in the North East so I want to say a huge thank you to all our puppy raising volunteers as well as staff. We can't raise and train guide dogs without you and it's really amazing everything you do to support our dogs' journeys. It's a fast-paced department and the commitment from everyone involved is what keeps everything going.



Thank you for all you are doing and look forward to seeing you all soon,

Janet

**Janet Champion**

**Puppy Raising Operations Manager - North East**

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