

South West Regional Centre

Welcome to the Bristol newsletter.



I'm Evita, Canine Assisted Services (CAS) Operations Manager here in Bristol.

We currently have 15 dogs in training and will be welcoming three more from the Southampton team very soon, as well as five new pups in the coming months. The next few weeks will be busy, as we have three dogs on class and will

be matching another eight, ready to start the next phase of their journey with their new guide dog owners.

To help with the matching process for our longest waiters , we will be running a 'Staying Ready to Train' day later this month. These are training days where we invite our longest waiting clients to spend the day at our training centre, meeting the team, doing walks with different dogs, and generally getting them ready for when they get the phone call to say we may have found them a match! For Guide Dog Mobility Specialists, it's an invaluable way to get to know the person and their needs before they undergo the matching process. From our last three Staying Ready to Train days, we have successfully made 1-2 matches each time.

Another event we are planning in the background is a volunteer 'coffee evening' for our fosterers and dog wellbeing volunteers to get to know one another, meet staff and to see what the dogs get up to at 'school'. Details will be shared in due course.

Thanks,

Evita
CAS Operations Manager

Newsletter highlights March 2024, Issue 2

Dogs in training	2
Staff spotlight	4
Puppy raising	5
Community fundraising	6
#SightLossStories	7
Volunteering	8
Media round-up	9

Dogs in training

Oreo

Oreo, a one year and 11-month-old black Labrador, came into training just before Christmas and is now halfway through her training to become a guide dog. Oreo started coming into the office during the day for training, but it soon became clear that she didn't enjoy being in the office. She now stays at home fulltime and is collected each day for training from her fosterer, **Pamela**. This is a much better way of working for Oreo and has helped her training to progress quicker.

Oreo is progressing well and is currently working on obstacle avoidance and learning new routes. Pamela and I are also working on helping Oreo to settle in different environments like cafes, and restaurants. This can be quite tricky for Oreo as she is keen to keep going but settling is an important part of being a guide dog. To encourage Oreo's settling, we take a blanket with us to different venues for her to settle on, starting with short periods of time, gradually building the duration up.



Bryony

Bryony is a one-year and nine-month-old German shepherd x golden retriever who is making great progress with her training. She is an outgoing character; eager to work and play!

Bryony has shown some stopping behaviours when out on harness walks with her trainer, Emily. This is usually when they are walking away from the 'interesting' part of a route. Emily has been working on Bryony's stopping by gradually adding in longer residential sections before and after the 'interesting' areas. Emily is aiming to keep the routes as realistic as possible, as Bryony quickly works out when Emily adds an additional loop for training practice! If Bryony stops, Emily uses her voice to get her going again and gives her lots of praise and toy play at the next objective. **Fosterers, Tasmin and Fred**, have also played a huge part in teaching Bryony not to stop by following Emily's advice outside of training hours.



Dogs in training

Finch

Finch is a male golden retriever aged 20 months. He moved to Bristol in October 2023 to start his official training to become a guide dog.

It was quite a culture shock to start with having a change of home and finding himself in this strange environment. His fosterer, **Samantha**, helped him to quickly settle in and took him for lots of off-lead exercise (free runs).

Finch was introduced to the harness and some of the easier guiding tasks by guide dog trainer, **Giuliana Monaco**, and has recently moved to Guide Dog Mobility Specialist, **Keita Sigston**, to cover the more advanced aspects of training.

In the early days, Finch struggled with the feel of the harness but then we swapped his standard harness for a softer sheepskin lined harness which made a huge difference. Finch is a very laid back and likes nothing more than a chin rub.



Staff spotlight

Meet Sam Jarvis, Vision Rehabilitation Specialist

Hi, I'm Sam Jarvis, a Vision Rehabilitation Specialist (VRS.) I have been working in the sight loss sector for over 23 years. I worked with a charity in London for 20 of those years gaining experience within the voluntary sector. During that time, I spent several years as a volunteer coordinator before training to become a VRS.

I moved from London to Gloucester in 2020. Moving to the countryside has always been a plan in my life. I love being outdoors, long walks with my dog, and growing my own vegetables is a dream come true.

I joined Guide Dogs (Bristol region) in December 2021. I have thoroughly enjoyed the job and becoming part of such a great team. I cover the South West area, which means my days can vary from being in a meeting in Bristol one day, then at the sea front in Weston-super-Mare the next. I might be working with a service user teaching long cane skills, orientation, and mobility or independent living skills, such as making a hot drink safely or accessing apps on their mobile phone.

I have had the pleasure of meeting some of our volunteers during joint training sessions arranged by Guide Dogs. Also, on occasion I have had a brief chat with some volunteers that do a great job out and about collecting at various places. I have assisted some My Sighted Guide volunteers with advice when a service user sometimes has a change in their circumstances, maybe further sight loss, or life changes. Our service users have always given such great feedback with regards to the volunteers.

Sam J



Puppy raising

Welcome to South West and Wales puppy raising

Puppy raising is the starting point for all future partnerships and our volunteers are out there doing amazing things every day to make that happen. But it isn't always easy! Below, **Puppy Development Supervisor, Sophie Boorman** gives an overview of stopping behaviours with some ideas as to how to work through it.

“So, you're out for a walk, all is going well until the moment you've been dreading - your puppy stops. Legs locked, feet firmly planted and ignoring you or giving dubious looks. Now you're trapped in this moment of cajoling, frustration and embarrassment, perhaps helplessness, as your puppy refuses to budge. Sound familiar? Well, if it happens on your walks, your puppy is performing what we call 'stopping', and for a guide dog owner those feelings are tenfold and can lead to a partnership dissolving entirely.

Stopping can prevent puppies from entering the next stage on time and delay their training as our technical teams work to resolve the issue. Any puppy could develop this pattern of behaviour; some common reasons are distraction, desire to go to a certain place, anxiety, inadvertently rewarding pup for stopping or discomfort.

Now, what to do about it? In the moment be patient, wait alongside your puppy in walking position and give them time to acknowledge you. Avoid using any food or moving your hands towards where you carry food.

Calmly changing directions, waiting your dog out and making distraction noises are all tactics you can try to encourage your puppy to move. With stopping, prevention is usually the best cure - take the time to note where you are, your pup's body language, what you usually do and what is going on around you that might be influencing your puppy. Noting when your pup may stop, what encourages this, and distracting them through it can work wonders to eliminate the behaviour if they do practice it.

Please contact your PDA if your puppy begins stopping on walks so they can work with you to make a plan for your puppy to help overcome stopping and go on to succeed.”



In case you missed it: watch the recording of our recent 'Royal Canin diet for guide dog puppies' webinar, which is now available [on-demand](#).

Community fundraising

Owls naming pups!

'The Owls' from Pill are a group of all male singers, garbed in Dickensian costume of top hats, fancy weskits and flowing cloaks. They carol their way through action packed performances in Bristol and North Somerset raising money for charity. For over 40 years, they have been supporting Guide Dogs, raising thousands of pounds, starting with raising enough money to completely fund their first guide dog 'Perr' after Henry Perrett in 1979 (pictured right). The Owls will continue to support Guide Dogs in the years to come and plan to name future pups as part of their current fundraising.



Make Every Cuppa Count

Every year around National Tea Day, Guide Dogs host a campaign to encourage supporters to hold a tea party or coffee morning. This year, we have renamed the campaign, and you can now 'Make Every Cuppa Count' on Friday 19 April by carrying out an event that suits you! Small or large, at home, work or school - every penny you raise will go towards helping us provide life-changing services. Some of our local fundraising groups will be hosting events across the area and we'll be sending out invites in the coming weeks. Please go along and support them if you can. Alternatively, you could host your own event by registering for a fundraising pack at the Make Every Cuppa Count from our [d](#).



#SightLossStories

Meet Kim, Habilitation Specialist



Meet Kim, who has her dream job as a Habilitation Specialist.

Kim teaches children and young people with a vision impairment a wide range of different skills so they can grow their independence. She says no two days are the same and she adapts her lessons so they are fun and engaging for children at different ages and stages.

She says her role is the most rewarding of her whole career.

To find out more about the impact that Kim has on the lives of children living with sight loss, please watch our [YouTube video](#).

Volunteering

Your local volunteering update

Local Volunteer Awards: start nominating now

This year, the Local Volunteer Awards are going to be held in early September instead of June. Watch this space for further news! The Awards are our way of recognising and thanking volunteers for their outstanding contribution.

Staff, service users and fellow volunteers can nominate a volunteer for a Pat on the Back at any time of the year and these nominations are automatically entered into consideration for a Volunteer Award. Nominated volunteers will receive a special Pat on the Back pin badge and a 'thank you' letter with your nomination message and endorsed by our Head of Volunteering.

So don't wait! Thank a volunteer today via the [Pat on the Back volunteer nomination form](#).

Introducing Helena

Welcome to our new Volunteering Coordinator, Helena Brodie.

Helena will be focusing on recruiting additional volunteers within puppy raising and community fundraising, and organising events such as volunteer socials and our upcoming Volunteer Awards in September.

Whether you're new to Guide Dogs or an experienced volunteer, Helena is here to support you through any stage of your volunteering journey.

To contact Helena please email helena.brodie@guidedogs.org.uk



Update on volunteer recruitment in the South West

You may have read about our extra promotion of the volunteer training dog fosterer volunteer role in the last edition. The banner at Clifton Down Shopping Centre and advert in the Pigeon led to lots of applications over the winter and our colleagues are working hard to ensure they're each processed quickly. Thank you so much to those of you who have applied, and we will be in touch once we have a suitable dog to match you with. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please email OVOSouthWestWales@guidedogs.org.uk.

Over the coming months, we are focusing on recruiting puppy raising and community fundraising volunteers across Bristol, Bath, South Gloucestershire and Somerset. With Helena now onboard, we're getting stuck into planning lots of events including the [Big Help Out](#), which is taking place in June. For more information on any of these roles, please reach out to Helena.

A huge thank you for everything you do for Guide Dogs. We would not be able to provide our life-changing services to those living with sight loss, without our 16,000 volunteers across the UK.

Media round-up

Guide Dogs in the news

Fundraiser and guide dog owner Dan Roberts was interviewed on BBC Radio Bristol in February to talk about his fantastic success of raising over £20,000 for Guide Dogs since 2019. A musician, Dan has named 8 puppies and chooses the names from submissions by the audience at his live shows. Dan's story was also featured in the [Weston Mercury](#).



Back in January the [Somerset County Gazette](#) celebrated more fundraising success from our Taunton fundraising group who raised another £13,000 enabling them to fund a working guide dog. These funds came from the incredibly popular Christmas pop up shop the group held last year, which in total raised £19,608. Amazing!

What did you think of our newsletter?
[Tell us](#). Your feedback will let us know if we're on the right track or if we need to improve. Thank you.