



## London Community Team

Welcome to the London newsletter.



I'm Luke Hughes, Canine Assisted Services (CAS) Operations Manager here in London.

Tucked away on the second floor of an office not far from Euston station, we typically have between 20 and 25 guide dogs in training at any given time. They spend their Monday to Friday in one of our dog day boarding rooms, with outings into one of our dog training rooms and onto the streets of London. Their time is occupied by a mixture of learning indoor tasks and developing outdoor guiding skills in harness, and having some down time working through a frozen Kong or taking a well-earned nap. Their weekday evenings and weekends are spent with our amazing volunteer fosterers and tend to involve a heavy dose of more sleeping interspersed with some time for play, usually lots of off-lead exercise in one of London's many parks.

Every month we say goodbye to a handful of dogs that have been matched to our service users and are ready to move onto the final part of their journey to become qualified guide dogs with their new owners. And we welcome in a new batch from another wonderful group of volunteers, our puppy raisers, who have looked after the dogs since they were puppies and been getting them ready to start learning to become a fully-fledged guide dog.

But it's not all about dogs. There's also lots of people too. More on this next time.

We hope to tell you more of what goes on behind the scenes over the coming newsletters but for now we would like to introduce you to a few more of our current residents, both four legged and two!

Luke

CAS Operations Manager

# Dogs in training

## Mackie



First up we have Mackie!

Mackie is a black 15-month-old Labrador who has been in training with his Guide Dog Trainer Hayley for seven weeks. He has taken a bit of time to get used to his new London home and office and can be a little cautious at times, especially when it's dark. This has led to Mackie stopping on his way home with his **fosterer Pieran** on occasion, which is not uncommon with our dogs and can occur for several different reasons.

Hayley and Pieran are working together to manage and reduce Mackie's stopping behaviour. This shows the huge value of our volunteer fosterers and how important it is for them to keep us updated with any behavioural problems they observe and to implement the advice we give around how to manage them.

Pieran has found fostering to be a really rewarding experience and has loved watching Mackie learn new skills. When Mackie is in the office, he's very relaxed and enjoys nothing more than laying down watching the world go by.

## Olive



Our second dog in the spotlight is Olive, the most advanced of our three featured dogs, having been in training for 13 weeks. Golden Retriever Olive, who turns two in April, is with Guide Dog Trainer Kim and is the first dog to be **fostered by new volunteers, Matt and Ash**. They said: “Having Olive is an amazing experience for our first dog, we didn’t know what to expect but Olive is such a calm and gentle dog, and we feel like we can see changes every week with her training.”

Olive absolutely loves soft toys, her favourites being anything fluffy and squeaky. She also has a soft spot for shoes and socks whenever she can get hold of them which is a behaviour we would like to reduce so Olive may have to have even more fluffy toys to keep her busy! Olive has been a little sensitive to having the guiding harness and handle put on her but with lots of patience and food rewards from Kim she is much happier wearing her guide dog kit and should be ready to become a fully qualified guide dog in the summer.

## Tarka



Finally, we have our newbie, 17-month-old Golden Retriever Tarka! She has been in training here at the London Community Team for three weeks and is being shown the ropes by Guide Dog Mobility Specialist, Barry. He says she is settling in brilliantly although does love to let the office know when she's excited by letting off a bark or two, most commonly when Barry shows up to start some training with her. She is with first-time **fosterer, Victoria.**

One of Tarka's favourite hobbies is barking at other dogs while they are swimming, but she hasn't quite mustered up the courage to jump in herself.

# Staff spotlight

## Meet Nicola, Training and Behaviour Advisor



Nicola joined Guide Dogs nearly 20 years ago as a trainee Guide Dog Mobility Specialist and spent 15 years as a qualified Guide Dog Mobility Specialist training dogs and coaching service users before moving into her current role.

Her day-to-day is spent supporting our trainees and qualified staff in learning new dog training techniques, supporting the development of training plans for adapting dog behaviour and providing regional and national training sessions to a range of staff.

Nicola found her way into Guide Dogs while looking for a career change and had always been interested in our dogs ever since first seeing them on Blue Peter as a child. Guide dogs continued to be a theme in her life whilst living in Leamington Spa during her time studying at Warwick University, as she would see dogs from the Leamington training school all over the town.

Her favourite parts of the job are supporting our staff to learn new skills and problem solving alongside them to resolve behavioural issues. Although her current role doesn't lead her to interact as often with volunteers, she's always very happy to have a catch up with some familiar faces as they come and go, some of whom have been fostering for almost as long as Nicola has been in the team!

In her spare time Nicola enjoys open water swimming and spending time tending to the plants and flowers in her garden.

# Puppy raising

## Welcome to South East 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 easy! Below, **Puppy Development Supervisor, Sophie Boorman**, has given 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 giving you every desperate bribery either ignorance or 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 as a regular occurrence 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 a pup for stopping, and fatigue 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 food or moving your hands towards where you carry this. Calmly changing directions, waiting your dog out and making distraction noises are 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 Puppy Development Advisor if your puppy is regularly stopping on walks so they can help put the best plan in place to help you 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

Thank you!



A massive and heartfelt thank you to everyone across London who helped us with our fundraising last year. We are happy to let you know that in 2023 we raised enough across the capital to support 40,583 days of a working guide dog partnership - fantastic! Overall, our income was 33% up on last year, with schools, Name A Puppy, collection boxes and third-party fundraising all doing particularly well. We are very pleased and very grateful. Thank you, we couldn't do it without your support.

## New year, new partnerships



Volunteers have been busy running Meet and Greets in London offices. These are great fun and are enjoyed by companies and our volunteers. It's a lovely way to be an ambassador for our charity and educate others about the services we provide. In February of this year, we started two new relationships this way, with Equifax and Vialto. If you know of any companies or groups that would like a similar visit, please contact Community Fundraising Relationship Manager, Gurdev Bal at [gurdev.bal@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:gurdev.bal@guidedogs.org.uk).

## Station success



Our station collections are going from strength to strength. Our latest at London Bridge on Thursday 29 February raised a staggering £1,900.66. Many thanks to all involved. If you would like to join a group of happy volunteers, please contact Community Fundraising Relationship Manager, Gurdev Bal at [gurdev.bal@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:gurdev.bal@guidedogs.org.uk).

## Named puppy visit



Puppy Development Advisor, Steph Ranson and puppy raiser, Keith, visited Itochu in London with named puppy Sora. This is the second puppy named by this company. Sora means Sky in Japanese and their first puppy was named Mirai which means future. Itochu are now fundraising to name their third puppy, aiming to raise a further £10,000 for Guide Dogs - we look forward to learning the next name.

If you know of an individual or organisation who would be interested in naming one of our guide dog puppies, please contact Community Fundraising Relationship Manager, Gurdev Bal at [gurdev.bal@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:gurdev.bal@guidedogs.org.uk).



## Make every cuppa count



During April and May, we're organising several events inviting our service users, volunteers, and other supporters to come and share a cuppa with their local community group. It's a great chance to meet other people locally who enjoy supporting Guide Dogs.

Our events are being held at Wesley's Methodist Church Cafe in New Malden on Saturday 13 April, the George IV Pub on Chiswick High Road on Saturday 20 April, and at our London Office on Wednesday 1 May. Please do come along!

Further details will be in your invitation which should arrive in your inbox from Friday 22 March with a reminder on Friday 12 April.

Alternatively, why not plan to organise your own Make Every Cuppa Count fundraiser, or ask your friends, neighbours, colleagues, or club members to do the same?

Download our new resources including our new jam jar labels from the [Volunteer Information Point](#) and ask supporters who are not Guide Dogs volunteers to sign up at [guidedogs.org.uk/cuppa](https://guidedogs.org.uk/cuppa) for their free fundraising pack.

Want more details now or closer to the event? Please contact Community Fundraising Relationship Manager, Gurdev Bal at [gurdev.bal@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:gurdev.bal@guidedogs.org.uk).

# Paws on the Wharf art trail unleashed in London!



We are delighted to be bringing Paws on the Wharf, our free and accessible guide dog sculpture trail to Canary Wharf this spring (25 March - 17 May). As our London volunteers, we very much hope you'll get the chance to sniff out the trail and join in the fun, bringing your friends, family or colleagues along.

## Can you lend us a paw?

We'd also love your help to spread the word and encourage people to come and support our trail. Make sure you follow our trail Instagram account [@pawsonthewharf\\_guidedogs](#) and visit our [website](#) for information and details of the special events we're hosting.

We hope to see you there!

# #SightLossStories

## Taylor's story



Taylor was two years old before she was diagnosed with her eyesight condition, a rods and cones dystrophy called Leber congenital amaurosis, which meant that she was missing 90% of the rods and cones in her eyes.

“I always describe it as having a team of workers and only having ten as opposed to 100. So that kind of means that certain messages get through and certain messages don't like my depth perception. That's why I have a cane or a dog, because I can't tell how deep steps are or how far away things are, so everything looks completely 2D, everything's totally flat.”

With her diagnosis, doctors predicted she wouldn't be able to go to mainstream school, or many other things that other children could do, as she only had 10% of her vision. But Taylor defied everyone's expectations, and went to a mainstream school, college, and university where she pursued her passion for music and singing. She even formed a band, Pixie and the Gypsies, and released an original album entitled 'Honey Trap' in 2018, topping the UK iTunes jazz charts.

Outside of writing music and doing gigs, Taylor is also a vocal coach, focusing on jazz and musical theatre. It was this work that eventually spurred her on to reach out to Guide Dogs.

“I was in a situation where I was being offered work, but I didn't feel safe with my cane in the dark. In the daytime, I have some vision to help me, but I kept saying to my mum that I was almost turning down work because I was nervous in the dark. I don't want to get a really good opportunity like a West End show and panic about getting there and back.

“My mum suggested I apply for a guide dog, and I didn't know if I'd be allowed or not because I have some vision.

“I applied in September 2019, and everything moved along really quickly, I did the cane assessment in February 2020. They booked my final assessment to see if I would be eligible for the last week of March.”

Unfortunately, COVID-19 had different plans, and the assessment was cancelled due to the first lockdown. It was quite a wait until Taylor was able to resume her application.

“I didn’t actually have that [guide dog] assessment until June 2021, but then the pause during COVID meant that I would be waiting longer. Just before I went on holiday last June, I got a call from Barry (a Guide Dog Mobility Specialist based in London) asking me to come in before I left for some routine stuff and to meet him.

“He completely downplayed it and when I got in, he admitted he fed me a bit of a lie, and they had a dog for me. We did a matching walk, and it went really well, then when I came back from holiday she came round to stay for a night. The sensation already with her was just mental and how fast because I’m quite a pacey walker, so we were partially matched on that.”

In June 2023, Taylor was finally paired with Golden Retriever Labrador cross Jilly, a newly qualified guide dog that was ready to start her journey, too.

“After almost two years on the guide dog waiting list, I can honestly say it was 100% worth it! When I went on my matching walk with the beautiful Jilly, I felt my world change. I walked faster, stood taller and couldn’t stop smiling at her. Since then, through training, we’ve gone from strength to strength as we navigate as one. In just a couple of weeks together she’s allowed me to do things that I would never have felt comfortable or confident doing with a cane. Our partnership fills me with such hope and excitement because we are already a dream team.”

# Volunteering

## Local Volunteer Awards: start nominating now

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

But you don't have to wait for the nomination window to open - 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](#).

## Our 'Big Help Out' event in London

The 'Big Help Out' was launched last year with the objective of raising awareness of volunteering throughout the UK and providing opportunities for people to experience volunteering and make a difference in their communities.

The London team will be promoting our volunteering opportunities at Paddington Central Business Park, alongside Regent's Canal in the heart of Paddington. Come and meet some of our dogs, service users and fellow volunteers on **Tuesday 4 June, 12-2pm**. Bring a friend too!

For more information about any of the above please email our London Volunteering Coordinator, Desi Nathanielsz at [desiree.nathanielsz@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:desiree.nathanielsz@guidedogs.org.uk).

## Event volunteers needed



### London Landmarks and London Marathon

Join our cheer squad and be a part of the action at London Landmarks Half Marathon on Sunday 7 April and London Marathon on Sunday 21 April.

You'll play a vital role in keeping spirits high and our runners motivated all the way to the finish line. Dog ears, noses and t-shirts are provided. Whether you can join the fun for a full day or just a few hours, we're happy to have you with us.

### The Guide Dogs Run

On Saturday 29 June, The Guide Dogs Run is coming to Hylands Park, Essex, but we can't do it without you! We'd love you to join us by signing up to one of our volunteer roles on the day. Roles on the day are varied, so if you fancy a full day or just a few hours, please do come along.

For more information or to sign up to either event, please email [eventvolunteers@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:eventvolunteers@guidedogs.org.uk).

Please note that all volunteer roles are eligible to claim reasonable travel expenses for attending these events.

## Media round-up

### London team gets a special visit from Deputy Mayor for Transport



Our Policy, Public Affairs and Campaigns team received a very special visit at our London office from London's Deputy Mayor for Transport, Seb Dance. With an estimated 217,00 people living with sight loss in London, this was a great opportunity to showcase our services, as well as the changes we need to see to make our streets and transport accessible.

Seb and his team took a quick tour of the office before sitting down for a demonstration from Laura Mullen (Guide Dog Mobility Specialist), Nicola Muckle (Training and Behaviour Advisor) and shining star training dog Rory.

Afterwards, he had a chance to speak to one of our service users, Paul Clayton, about his experience. Greg Szarzynski and Neil McBride, from our Vision Rehabilitation Specialist team, as well as Sharon Pearlgood from our Habilitation team, were on hand to talk about the services that allow us to help people live the life they choose. They were able to share their experiences of working with service users around London, as well as passing on some of the difficulties people face every day while getting around.

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.