

Guide Dogs National Centre

Welcome to the National Centre newsletter.

At the National Centre, we have had a busy start to 2024. We have accepted 16 new breeding mums and 4 new breeding dads in the first 2 months of this year.

In February 2024 we saw the arrival of 131 pups, and I would like to say a huge thank you to all our breeding dog volunteers and National Centre staff for their hard work & support and rearing these new life changers.

In team news, we have welcomed two staff members, Andrew and Erica, into the Breeding Dog Advisors team for 12 months. Meanwhile, two members of the team, Kim and Amy, have both been on maternity leave and both gave birth to baby boys in 2023.

In October 2023 we held our first breeding dog holder role information day, where people interested in the role could come along to learn more about what is involved. We were overwhelmed by the amount of people who attended on the day, and I am pleased to say after coming along lots of people decided to apply for the role - welcome to all our new joiners!

We will be holding another breeding dog holder information day at the National Centre on Sunday 17th March.

On 8th March 2024, Central News were filming pups at the National Centre with Breeding Dog Supervisor Tim to learn about the early stages that our pups go through when they are with our breeding dog holders in their homes.

Kelly Newton,
Operations Manager - Breeding Dogs

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Breeding dog statistics January-February 2024

- Pups born: 167
- Litters born: 23
- Puppies placed with puppy raisers: 269
- Current breeding dogs: 311 (76 dads, 235 mums)
- New breeding dogs accepted: 20
- Matings undertaken so far this year: 31
- Conception rate: 97%
- Average litter size: 7.3

Meet the dogs

Jimbo

Our latest new stud dog who has been accepted for breeding is Jimbo.

Whilst he may look like a Labrador at first glance, he is in fact part Labrador, part golden retriever!

We are hopeful that he going to play an important role in the diversity of Guide Dogs' golden retriever population.

Jimbo's puppy raisers, **Andrea and Barry**, live locally to the National Centre and have decided to become breeding dog holders and keep him on with them at home.



Staff spotlight

Meet Lucy Richardson, Breeding Dog Wellbeing Technician



Meet Lucy, who has a very important job at Guide Dogs.

Lucy helps take care of our guide dog mums and their newborn puppies - our guide dogs of the future. Most of our puppies are born in volunteers' homes but sometimes our guide dog mums will give birth at our National Centre in Leamington.

Lucy is on hand to support our guide dog mums and puppies during their first days and weeks, giving them the very best start in life.

You can find out more about Lucy and her job in our 'Spotlight' series, available now on [YouTube](#).

Puppy raising

Welcome to Midlands and East puppy raising

By Anna Standing, CAS Operations Manager

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 Jenny Mee has given an overview of stopping behaviours with some ideas as to how to work through it.



Jenny says: You all work so hard on getting your pups walking nicely on lead, but as with all training, you may sometimes come across the odd bump in the road! One of the most common (and frustrating) issues you may face is stopping on walks. It can creep up on you, or come from nowhere, but all of a sudden your pup has planted their feet and refused to move - often in the worst possible place!

Without the right intervention, stopping can quickly develop into a persistently reoccurring behaviour. It can also prevent puppies from entering training, and delay their development as a future Guide Dog. As a Puppy Raiser it can be one of the most frustrating behaviours to deal with, and any puppy could develop this pattern of behaviour. So what can we do about it?

First we need to work out why pup is stopping. Sometimes (especially in young pups) they are simply a little distracted or overwhelmed and just need some time to take in their surroundings. It could also be related to a desire to either go to a certain place (e.g. free run area) or avoid something (anxiety in a new or busy place perhaps). It could even be a sign of 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 take in their surroundings and then (hopefully!) focus back on you. Avoid reaching for your food pouch or pocket as smart pups can soon learn it's a good trick to get a snack! Instead give them time and try calmly changing directions or encouraging them forwards. Once they are moving freely again they can be rewarded with praise and food, but make sure you wait at least five seconds once they are moving.

Like most things, prevention is usually the best cure - take the time to note where you are if and when it does happen, and think about what the cause might be. Observing your pup's body language can be helpful at this point too. If you know the cause or trigger you are halfway there to either avoiding it or helping distract your pup through it next time.

Finally, remember it's just a bump in the road and support is on hand. Get in touch with your PDA so they can help you to figure out the best plan to prevent and/or overcome any stopping.

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

Fundraising in your community

Hi everyone, it's Florence Shore here, Regional Community Fundraising Manager for the Midlands region. We have had a busy start to 2024 with our groups out and about at over 50 collections so far and counting! We have also been connecting with corporates and organisations across the region, who have very kindly chosen to support us as their Charity of The Year or by naming a puppy. A huge thank you to everyone who has reached out and helped us start the year off with a bang!

As spring begins to...well...spring, so does our first campaign of the year - Make Every Cuppa Count. You may know this event as 'Tea Party', but this year, you can #MakeEveryCuppaCount when you host a tea party, coffee morning or bake sale on the 19th April. Small or large, at home, work or school - every penny you raise will go towards helping us provide life-changing services. If there's a better excuse to get together over a cuppa and cake, we haven't heard it! To find out more, please head to our campaigns page at guidedogs.org.uk/tea-party where you can order your fundraising pack today.

If you'd like to find out more about the wonderful world of fundraising, please do reach out to us at MidlandsGroups@guidedogs.org.uk and we would love to tell you about our amazing opportunities to get involved! If you need more inspiration, read on for some of the latest success stories and dates for your diaries.

It's a real Crumb-dinger!



Paul and his staff at Banks Opticians in Acocks Green were inspired by puppy Crumble on our Christmas Sponsor A Puppy campaign and raised an incredible £1,440!

Morna and a very grateful guide dog, Harrison, from the Redditch and Bromsgrove group went in to receive the cheque as well as lots of fuss from the staff!

Community fundraising

Solihull are going (Birmingham) International!

The Solihull group have been busy collecting at local supermarkets as well as spreading the word to holiday-goers and commuters at Birmingham International Station recently.

Please do follow their Facebook page (by searching solihullguidedogs) for more information and where to find them in the coming weeks - they would love for you to come and join them!

Another milestone for our Rugby Group

A huge congratulations to our Rugby Fundraising Group who have managed to raise another £13,000! This is the average amount of money it takes to support a working guide dog from qualification through to retirement and as a result of reaching this milestone, the group has been able to support a working partnership between a guide dog and a person with sight loss.

Make Every Cuppa Count

Come and join our local groups making every cuppa count over the coming month. There will be a mixture of puppy raisers, breeding dog holders, guide dog owners (and many dogs of course!) at the various events across the area. We would love to have a chat over a brew or two! Please do check your emails for an invite if there is a Make Every Cuppa Count event in your local area, or follow your local fundraising group on Facebook to see where you can catch them.



Volunteering

Your local volunteering update

Hello from Christian and Verity! We're here to deliver your volunteering update. Verity is the Volunteering Coordinator for the National Centre and Christian is the Regional Volunteering Partner for the Midlands and East.

Pat on the Back and Local Volunteer Awards

Did you know that there's a new way to nominate staff and volunteers for a Pat on the Back? This is a great way to recognise somebody's hard work and support of the charity. Any volunteer can nominate somebody for a Pat on the Back and the recipient will receive a letter and pin badge. This in turn also means that the nominee will be included in this year's Local Volunteer Awards nominations. To find out how to nominate somebody, you can visit the Saying Thank You section of the [Volunteer Information Point](#).

Speaking of the Local Volunteer Awards, our celebrations will be taking place in September this year. And at the end of Volunteers' Week (3-9 June) we will also be taking part in The Big Help Out which started last year as part of the King's Coronation celebrations.

Volunteer recruitment

If you have any ideas on how we can recruit more volunteers or can help us spread the word with posters and leaflets, please get in touch with us: VolunteerMidlands@guidedogs.org.uk.

You might know of a local community noticeboard, a regional magazine, a work intranet / e-newsletter, gym or sports club... If so, do get in touch and we can send you some promotional material.

Welcome to our new recruits!

In 2023, we recruited 125 breeding dog volunteers and had another 85 volunteers completing interviews and training on their journey to joining us in the role. We also recruited 42 new stud dog holders to look after our guide dog dads. Every volunteer has been vital to ensure we can support the Breeding Team and we will continue to recruit more volunteers in 2024.

Looking ahead

Looking ahead, we are planning to hold a number of social events for volunteers to get together to meet each other and Guide Dogs staff, as well as recruitment and awareness events around the region. The aim is to recruit more volunteers as well as get to know our existing volunteers even better. We'll keep you up to date about future events that you may be able to attend.

If you have any questions about volunteering or need to talk to us about anything else, please reach out.

Finally, from both of us, a massive "Thank you" to all volunteers for all your hard work and support. We couldn't do what we do without you.

Until next time, best wishes,
Christian and Verity

Media round-up

Did you know we had a litter of guide dog puppies born at the National Centre on Christmas Day? This story was covered by [The Leamington Observer](#).

Guide dog mum Hali gave birth to our first litter of 2024 in Evesham. Read the full story in the [Evesham Journal](#).

Finally, [Coventry Live](#) featured one of our breeding dog volunteers, Ruth, who's had nearly 90 guide dog puppies born in her home, and our appeal for more breeding dog volunteers.



Out now: Newshound

The 22nd edition of Newshound, our National Centre magazine, is out now!

Featuring volunteer stories from around the centre, some very special ambassador dogs, top tips for dog recall, and much much more, this is not to be missed. Look out for a copy around the National Centre!

A big thank you to volunteer Media Champion Caroline for all her hard work in putting together this latest edition.



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.