



Newcastle Community Team

Welcome to the Newcastle newsletter.



Hello, I'm Jane Louth, Canine Assisted Services (CAS) Operations Manager for the North East.

We have had a brilliant start to 2024. At the beginning of the year, we focused on managing the intake of new dogs as they left their puppy raisers and began early training. We also qualified the first partnership of 2024 on 2nd January so that was a great start to the year!

I'm now working with colleagues in the puppy department and our region's Dog Flow Manager to create 'dog profiles' to help identify potential guide dog owner matches sooner. With more dogs coming to us here at Newcastle at a later stage of their training over the next couple of months, we have plans well underway for the year ahead; we have 30 training dogs currently at various stages of training and four are in training with their new guide dog owners - a busy year ahead!

Another exciting development is the recruitment of three Academy Guide Dog Mobility Specialists (AGDMS), which means we can plan for more training dogs over the coming years. We also have a new Dog Wellbeing Technician (DWT), Amy Richards. The site now has additional Dog Wellbeing Technical staff, with five dog care rooms that means we can utilise the full site and support the training dogs and team.

I've had the pleasure of recently meeting one of our guide dog owners who has been waiting for her sixth guide dog. We took three dogs to try out with her to find a suitable match. She told me about the freedom and joy of walking with a dog again rather than on a family member or friend's arm, or with her cane. It was really inspiring to hear her continued hope and positivity and I was thrilled to speak with her last week when a suitable match had been agreed! The partnership is now in class together and doing well.

The best part of my role is seeing the dogs arrive into training, their journey with the trainers to matching with a client, and then celebrating the creation of a new partnership; the dedication and skill that goes into this by all the staff and volunteers involved in supporting the dogs and clients is amazing.

Thank you for all you do to help us create these life-changing partnerships.

Dogs in training

Top of the class



We have a group of dogs nearing the end of their training, and next week we will start the process for matching them with potential guide dog owners which is always an exciting time!

Duke (top left) and Jimmy (top centre) have been on their best behaviour after being put to the test on their recall in an open environment with an impromptu meet up with pet dog Jax.

Ike (top right), Carter, Carol and Milton have also met the grade for the next stage and very soon all will be in partnership preparation training with their trainers Clare, Shelly and Kelly.

Meet the new recruits



From left: Baker, Robert, and Mowzer with trainer Gail.

In Newcastle we have some new recruits who are just a few weeks into their training with trainers. Here's Guide Dog Mobility Specialist (GDMS) Gail Glover with her newbies - we wish them the best of luck in their training!

Staff spotlight

Meet Kelle, Community Development Officer



Hello! I'm Kelle, Community Development Officer for the North East.

I've worked for Guide Dogs nearly two years now and thoroughly enjoying my role! I've been lucky enough to deliver Community Sighted Guide Training in some fantastic, varied settings and for organisations who have really embraced the learning, such as The Deep Hull, Flamingo Land, Durham Cathedral, Northern Stage Theatre, Metro Centre and NUFC just to mention a few!

My previous roles within the charity sector, over the last 20 years, have included working with young people, family mentor, managing volunteer services and trustee for a mental health charity for seven years.

I'm a mum to three grown up boys, who all tower over me now! In my free time I'm an avid podcast and audio book listener. I enjoy getting out and about walking regularly, theatre trips and socialising with friends and family.

I recently delivered some training at South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust and we received some lovely feedback about how the staff there feel more empowered to support people with sight loss:

"This has made me a lot more aware of how to help people with sight loss in the workplace.

"Very informative session, covered more than I expected and the practical gave me a great insight."

Puppy raising

Puppy raising in the North East

Over the past couple of years, puppy raising in the North East has grown considerably. We now have 201 puppies being raised by volunteers and supported by eight Puppy Development Advisors and two Puppy Development Supervisors. Our eight local schemes cover the whole of Yorkshire and stretch up the North East to our furthest north scheme which is based around Berwick on Tweed and the Scottish Borders.

Dogs stopping on walks

Stopping to look around and take in all the sights and sounds of the environment around them is a really important part of development for a younger puppy. It will help them feel confident out and about in the big wide world if they are calmly allowed the time to absorb information close to their handler before carrying on with their walk.

However, if that behaviour continues due to other reasons, it can present a problem for the puppy's future as a potential guide dog. When a guide dog stops whilst working it should be to let their guide dog owner know that there is some sort of hazard ahead, such as a gap too narrow to proceed, an obstacle blocking the path, or a kerb edge. Stopping at other times can be confusing and disorientating and prevent the partnership getting to their destination. It could also be very dangerous if the stopping occurs, for example, in the middle of the road.

Therefore, an important part of puppy raising is detecting why a puppy is stopping; their behaviour and body language before stopping may give lots of clues. Do they need the toilet? Are they distracted? Are they worried about something up ahead? A specific smell or sound? Or would they just prefer to go a different way or to a favourite location such as the pet shop or field?

What the handler does in these occasions can affect whether the behaviour gets worse or better. Try encouraging the puppy on with a fun and interesting voice or silly noises or their favourite toy. We discourage using tension through the lead to "restart" the walk, and the use of food rewards must be carefully managed so as not to reward and therefore inadvertently increase the stopping behaviour. Sometimes just varying the route or changing sides of the road can help but the best thing to do is to contact your Puppy Development Advisor who can arrange to meet you. Together, you can understand why your puppy is stopping and they will provide specific advice for you and your puppy.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about puppies stopping and thank you for all your dedication to raising well-rounded puppies!

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

Boxing Day dip with a difference



A huge thank you to Sunderland and South Shields Group Fundraiser Steve Walsh, who braved the North Sea on Boxing Day to raise money for Guide Dogs.

Dressed in a sea-appropriate dog costume, he raised over £890 and many a smile in the process.

Thank you, Steve, we hope you've thawed out!

Introducing Make Every Cuppa Count



Small or large, at home, work or school, we are asking supporters to host a tea party, coffee morning or bake sale to raise life-changing funds for Guide Dogs. The official day to Make Every Cuppa Count is on **Friday 19 April** but as always, people can host their fundraiser anytime they like. You are all very welcome to join us for a cuppa and slice of cake at the following Make Every Cuppa Count events hosted by our local volunteer groups:

17th April 10am - 12pm at The County Hotel Hexham NE46 1PS

19th April 10am - 12pm at Berwick Community Trust - William Elder Building TD15 1JT

20th April 10am - 1pm at Holy Trinity Church Hall NE37 1NR

20th April 11am - 3pm at Hilton Village Hall TS15 9LB

20th April 1pm - 3pm at Roker Methodist Church Hall SR6 9PF

22nd April 10.30am - 12pm at St Cuthberts Church Centre DL1 5QG

#SightLossStories

Meet Margot, one of Guide Dogs' youngest service users



At one year old, Margot is one of the youngest children supported by Guide Dogs. She was born with a rare condition called Bilateral Anophthalmia, meaning her eyes and optic nerves never developed. Worried about her future, her parents reached out to Guide Dogs for help when Margot was just nine weeks old. Now with the support of habilitation specialists and weekly sessions, she has blown all the family's expectations out of the water.

"Her first birthday in October was lovely," Margot's mum Laura recalls. "It was just a celebration of her and how much she's achieved. For Margot to be able to feel something, grab it and bring it to her mouth was amazing, as we were told at one point that she would have to be fed for many years. Now her favourite thing to do is eat! And she's learnt so many other things besides."

Margot's incurable condition affects just one in 100,000 babies and means that she lives her life in constant darkness. Margot has an operation every three months to clean her eye sockets, insert a prosthetic and then stitch her eyelids shut. She wears glasses to protect her from rubbing her stitches while they're healing. Laura says the support of Guide Dogs has been crucial to helping Margot develop, as well as supporting the family in coming to terms with what it meant for their daughter's life and their own.

“Before Margot was born, I thought that Guide Dogs was simply about the dogs,” says Laura. “I never realised how much more they do. Their involvement felt like a huge heavy burden had been lifted off our shoulders. It felt like a light at the end of what was, at that point, a fairly dark tunnel ... Knowing what we know now, I wish I could say to myself back then, ‘Don’t worry, everything will be okay’.”

Margot and her family are supported by Kate Reed, a Senior Habilitation Specialist. Her role involves nurturing Margot through her early years, helping her become independent by teaching her essential tasks such as learning to stand up, moving about, and developing her core strength. Kate teaches Margot to assess her environment and what’s around her, helping her learn how to reach for things and explore various textures. Kate also works closely with family members and nursery staff, creating a strong support team to build Margot’s independence.

Despite initial fears and uncertainties, John (Margot’s dad) and Laura are adamant Margot can achieve anything she sets her mind to. John says: “I have lots of hopes and dreams for Margot and none of them have changed, to be honest. When we first found out about her diagnosis we thought ‘Margot would never be able to do this or that’. Then working with Guide Dogs, you come to realise that she will be able to do anything.”

To hear more about Margot, you can watch [this heartwarming video](#).

Volunteering

Hello, I'm Shannon Butler and I am the Volunteering Coordinator in Newcastle. My role includes thinking of new, creative ways to attract volunteers, engaging with the public and our current volunteers and attending/planning events such as our volunteer socials.

Pat on the Back

At Guide Dogs, we have our '[Pat on the Back](#)' scheme, which is designed to recognise outstanding achievements of individuals who volunteer or work for Guide Dogs. Anyone can nominate a volunteer for a Pat on the Back. Whether you are a staff member, a fellow volunteer, one of our service users, or a member of the public who has been touched by the efforts of one of our volunteers, why not take 10 minutes to nominate them? Nominated volunteers will receive a special Pat on the Back pin badge and a 'thank you' letter with your nomination message. They will also automatically be entered into consideration for our annual Local Volunteer Awards, which will be held in September.

Volunteers' Week and the Big Help Out

Guide Dogs are taking part in the Big Help Out again this year, an initiative set up to raise awareness of volunteering throughout the UK and provide opportunities for people to experience volunteering and make a difference in their communities.

This year, Volunteers' Week is Monday 3 June - Sunday 9 June, with the Big Help Out running across the weekend, Friday 7 June - Sunday 9 June. Throughout Volunteers' Week, we will be holding several Volunteer Celebration Events around the region to thank our wonderful volunteers for all their hard work. Invitations and more information will be sent out to volunteers closer to the time.

On Saturday 8 June, we will be in Eldon Square's Community Quarter looking to attract new volunteers. It would be great to have volunteers to help out on the day so again, we will send out more information and how to sign up closer to the event.

Volunteer recruitment

One of our current volunteer recruitment priorities for Newcastle is to **expand our puppy raising scheme in North Northumberland and the Scottish borders**. Puppy raisers provide our puppies with the vital foundation for their future role as a guide dog. Being a puppy raiser would involve providing one of our puppies a loving home for 12-16 months, where you will guide our puppies through training, socialisation, and the introduction to new environments and experiences. This is a fantastic role, which is both rewarding and vital to our charity! We have been advertising across the region for this role but are specifically in need of Puppy Raisers across North Northumberland.

We are also currently **looking to recruit training dog fosterers** in the Teesside area, including Guisborough, Redcar, Acklam, Ingleby Barwick and Stokesley. As a training dog fosterer in this area, you would be giving a dog in training a loving home for around eight

weeks, whilst they embark on their journey to become a life changer for Guide Dogs. Our Guide Dog Mobility Specialists (GDMS) work remotely in the Teesside area (rather than office based), so this role would involve one of our GDMS collecting and dropping off your training dog at your home each day. This role would be ideal for anyone who works from home or is retired. You'll get to see the progress your furry companion is making in their training and be a vital part of their journey, without the commitment of looking after a dog full time.

Finally, we have been dedicating lots of our time to **onboard new fundraisers and fundraising group coordinators** in specific areas, including Morpeth and Wansbeck and Hexham. We are putting a lot of effort in behind the scenes to think of new and imaginative ways to fill these roles, if you have any ideas, please let us know, in the meantime watch this space!

Volunteer events

This month, I have attended events at Newcastle University and Killingworth Shopping Centre alongside our fundraisers to talk to the public about getting involved with Guide Dogs and raising awareness for our charity. I have also spent some time in Berwick and surrounding villages with the aim of recruiting new puppy raisers in the area.

On the 9 March we held our first volunteer social of the year. We welcomed lots of our wonderful volunteers into our Newcastle office to enjoy cake, coffee and a chat!

A big thank you to everyone who attended, including our amazing puppies, ambassador dogs and working guide dogs, and Sheryl for bringing along her Guide Dogs merchandise.

Dates for your diary

In April, we will be holding an Open Evening at the office for volunteers, service users, local businesses and potential volunteers to attend.

Date: Tuesday 16 April

Time: 4pm-8pm

Address: Guide Dogs Newcastle Community Team, Northumberland House, Gosforth Park Ave, Newcastle upon Tyne NE12 8EG

On the day, you will be able to find out more about the services Guide Dog provides and volunteer roles available in your area. Please feel free to bring along any family or friends who are interested.

The Great North Run: event volunteers needed



Join our very own cheer bus and be a part of the action at the iconic Great North Run on Sunday 8 September. 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 commit to the full day or just a few hours it's great to have you join us. Simply contact eventvolunteers@guidedogs.org.uk to sign up.

All volunteer roles are eligible to claim reasonable travel expenses for the event.

Media round-up



Have you seen us in the news lately? From supporting our volunteer recruitment to celebrating our amazing fundraisers, you may have seen coverage of Guide Dogs in the local press. Some recent highlights include:

- The Newcastle Chronicle featured our [recruitment drive](#) for more trainees as part of the Guide Dogs Academy
- The [Northumberland Gazette](#) covered our need for more puppy raiser volunteers
- The Chronicle also covered our [celebration event](#) with Dave Thomas who has raised an incredible £100k for Guide Dogs.

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.