

GDNC NEWSHOUND

In support of
 Guide
Dogs

A newsletter for volunteers supporting
the Guide Dogs National Centre



In this Twenty first Edition:

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Gaby, Mandy & GDD Baxter

Welcome to the twenty first edition of GDNC Newshound

Hi Everyone

Welcome to issue 21 of the National Centre's Newshound magazine for volunteers and staff.

There's an eclectic mix of items this time for you to enjoy! You can read all about gorgeous Guide Dog Dad Baxter who is our cover star. His holder Gaby and her mum, Guide Dog Trainer Mandy, tell us just how special he is to them. We also meet the wonderful Poodle GDD Gershwin and his holder Lucy and see how he has transformed her life. You can see some of Gershwin's first litter of puppies in the gallery. Holder Elaine takes care of beautiful GD Mum Shiva who has come all the way from France. Here she shares their journey together.

Also in this issue we meet some of the volunteer Centre Puppy Socialisers and learn just how special and life enhancing this role is to them. There's nothing quite like puppy cuddles on a Monday morning!

I would also like to thank the various past and present members of staff who have helped with this issue. Matthew Bottomley marks his retirement by taking us back in time with his happiest Guide Dogs memories. I personally would like to thank Matthew for all of the support and encouragement he has kindly

shown to me and the development of Newshound. It has been very much appreciated.

Events Team Leaders Mark Richards and Marianne Griffiths give us an informative guide into all things Demo Team based while Becky Hunt gives an update on the Puppy Cognition project. Please also give a warm welcome to our lovely new Volunteering Co-ordinator, Verity, who will be writing the volunteering updates for the magazine from now on.

Finally a big thank you to both Dr Helen Vaterlaws Whiteside and Eleanor Stephens for helping me with this issue.

I'm planning on having Newshound out for around Christmas time, so if there are any dog, volunteer or staff stories you would like to see featured, please contact me at caroline.habberley@guidedogs.org.uk.

Wishing all Newshound readers a happy and healthy Summer time.

Best wishes, Caroline
Newshound editor. 2023



Hello everyone,

As you'll be aware, since the last edition of Newshound, our Heading of Breeding Operations, Matthew Bottomley, has left Guide Dogs. Matthew was a highly valued member of staff for over 34 years, and, under his leadership, our breeding programme moved from our first Breeding Centre at Tollgate House to our state-of-the-art National Centre. In that time, our breeding programme has produced over 20,000 puppies, who have gone on to change the lives of so many people with sight loss.

Since Matthew's departure, we've expanded our breeding activities by introducing two teams. Our Breeding Operations Team, which is being temporarily managed by Breeding Dog Health and Wellbeing Operations Manager Janine Dixon, whilst we recruit a permanent Head of Breeding Operations, supports our breeding volunteers, as well as our pups and breeding dogs onsite at our National Centre. Our Breeding Programme Team, managed by Head of Breeding Programme, Tom Lewis (previously Head of Canine Genetics) supports building and managing our breeding colony and helping ensure we are using best practice in breeding to be as ethical, efficient, and effective as possible. For both teams, the wellbeing of our dogs and puppies remains a top priority.

Our New National Centre Vet Team have now joined us and our Vet Centres at both our National Centre and our Reading Hub are up and running. Our Breeding Dog Advisors are also running a Dog Club at our National Centre, which is proving to be a lot of fun for both our dogs and our people. A huge thank-you to everyone who has helped us shape and evolve the club moving forward. Staff from our Breeding and Science Teams also

represented Guide Dogs at the International Guide Dog Federation Conference in Canada in April, continuing to build on the relationships we have with other guide dog schools from across the world. On a similar theme, we've hosted visitors from guide dog schools in America, Sweden, Finland and Japan, sharing knowledge for the benefit of guide dogs everywhere.

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We've had lots of opportunities to showcase our work at the National Centre in the media since the last edition of Newshound. At the end of last year, we were visited by BBC journalist Sean Dilley. The subsequent coverage on the BBC has helped us to recruit more volunteers to support the running of our dog services. We also featured on The One Show towards the end of May, which has also helped to drive interest in our volunteering roles. At the start of June, we hosted our National Centre volunteer awards. This was an opportunity to thank our volunteers and all the volunteering roles supporting the breeding programme were represented, with nominations and winners in all categories. Congratulations to all the winners, including Media Champion volunteer Caroline, our Newshound Editor, who won the 'Optimistic' category.

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As always, a big thank you to all our staff and volunteers who support our National Centre and we hope you have a great summer and enjoy this latest edition of Newshound.

Best wishes,
Dr Helen Whiteside
Assistant Director: Breeding, Puppy Raising and Science

An Illustrious Career

Matthew Bottomley recently retired from Guide Dogs after 34 years dedicated service. Here he shares some of his favourite memories.

Matthew with pet dog Gavin



Matthew's journey with Guide Dogs began when his mum spotted an advert for a 'Kennel Maid' in their local newspaper, The Worcester Sauce. She had realised that he was unhappy in his role as a Bank Clerk and urged him to apply as it sounded ideal. Matthew had always loved dogs, having several pet Labradors and enjoyed working with people directly so felt the role would incorporate all the things he liked as well as being very worthwhile.

His initial interview was done by Nicole the then Kennel Manager who serendipitously went on to be his wife. He says that at the time he was described as "scruffy and unfashionable" but fortunately got the job. Matthew lived in at Tollgate House and was the only male member of staff. He says, "I spent a lovely year learning about guide dog dads and mums and their puppies and it proved to be a brilliant foundation for my future work. It was very different then however and some jobs were not so pleasant. We

had to chop up sheep heads for example and dogs were fed on tripe as part of their diet. The puppies were fed excess Ambrosia rice pudding and sometimes I had it for my breakfast too!"

Nicole encouraged Matthew towards an Apprenticeship and he attended a three-day assessment in Middlesborough. He says, 'we were assessed individually and on how we handled and related to dogs. We had to choose a dog from a kennel of eight. I was lucky enough to go first and had spotted one I thought would be of good temperament. We had our dogs with us over the next few days and I found mine very easy to look after. In my final interview the panel told me they were impressed as I had picked out the most suitable dog. I went on to do my three year Apprenticeship at Leamington Training School and qualified as a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor."

He continues, "I loved every minute of my training - the location, environment and the people and I learned lots. I had to create fifteen successful partnerships to qualify and I still have my certificate and statuette on display. I think my most proud moments have been the training and matching of guide dogs and their owners and seeing the bonds created as a result. It has been a real privilege."

Matthew went on to cover several roles including District Team Manager and Quality Assurance Manager. He helped to set up the Telford office alongside Dave Stanton. He was approached by Professor Gary England and Simon Blythe to select new breeding stock in 2002 and joined the National Breeding Centre. Matthew's most recent role was that of Head of Breeding Operations.

He has travelled everywhere in the UK selecting the best dogs and feels that his skills as a Mobility Instructor gave him a head start. “I understand what blind and partially sighted people need from their dog and this has helped me to choose the right dogs and puppies.”



Matthew feels that he has learned an awful lot and is still learning from colleagues both at home and internationally. He says, “I’ve learned about confirmation and the movement of dogs and all about hereditary health issues. My training knowledge has helped with temperament and behaviour and I have learned a lot of technical knowledge. I’ve learned from my mistakes and I try to always be improving. One of my achievements was to bring in estimated breeding values which are effectively a prediction of genetic merit for all our dogs. They help us identify the best dogs as future breeders and pick the best possible pairings when deciding matings. This will carry on and develop further into the future.”



In 2014 Matthew became an assessor, which gives him the opportunity to assess other schools in the International Guide Dog Federation. He works to ensure that they reach the minimum standards to belong to the group, which includes looking at welfare and training methods. He has visited many conferences around the world including those in Japan and Australia. He also sits on a committee which awards a special scholarship and funding to innovative individual project work. The award is in memory of Derek Freeman and Matthew says this is “a real honour and a wonderful legacy.”

Matthew felt particularly proud when Guide Dogs hosted their own Breeding Conference at Ashorne. Everyone really enjoyed it as Hannah Fellows and the

team put on an excellent event. The centre also hosted a memorable Master Chef event and Matthew spent a year with Blue Peter at one point. He has entertained royalty hosting both Princess Alexandra and Sophie, Duchess of Edinburgh.

Back at home, Guide Dogs have also had an impact. Nicole bought home Delsie a guide dog mum for a couple of nights and she ended up staying permanently. She had two litters of two puppies each. She had caesarian sections for both and the staff joked “she was too posh to push.” Matthew enjoys the whelping process and whelped lots of guide dog mums when he worked at Tollgate. He jokes, “My first whelping went very well. I had a bed in the room so I could stay with the mum. When it was all over the other staff bought me a cigar to celebrate as a proud ‘Father’!”

The family have always had much loved dogs right up until relatively recently with pet dog Gavin (a Grand Bassett Griffon Vendeen) who has sadly now passed away. Matthew hopes to have another dog in the future. He says, “My favourite guide dogs are those that I have trained. There was Guinness a Golden Retriever who was born to be a guide dog as he was so wonderful. I had Taggart, a black Labrador, who helped his owner overcome their fear of dogs and became fully integrated into their community. Then a real favourite was a little yellow Labrador Topsy who I just loved. They all get inside my heart and I have had a bond with all of them as they are all so special.”

Matthew says “We all contribute to Guide Dogs with a passion to make a difference and we make an amazing contribution to people’s lives. I have loved the people, the staff, volunteers and service users, and it has been a privilege to work with such fabulous dogs too. It is a wonderful feeling.”



A Christmas Miracle

It was a unique Christmas Day 2022 for volunteer holder Maureen from Redditch, who instead of having Christmas lunch with her family spent the day supporting guide dog Mum Kim who gave birth to seven puppies.

Kim & Christmas day pups



GDM Kim was due to give birth on 28th December but surprised everyone when her pups made an unexpected early arrival.

Kelly Newton, Operations Manager, said at the time, “it is very rare for a litter of guide dog puppies to be born on Christmas Day, so a special thank you to Maureen and her family for changing their celebrations so they could support GDM Kim and her litter.”

Maureen has been a volunteer breeding dog holder for three years and this was the second litter of puppies born to GDM Kim.

Maureen said: “We were delighted it was Christmas Day when the puppies were born - it seemed apt, Kim giving birth to little Christmas miracles that will change people’s lives.”

“It was early afternoon when Kim went into labour and all the puppies were born by early evening. She had seven healthy black Labrador pups, four boys and three girls. My daughter’s partner cooked us Christmas dinner and they delivered it in the evening, so they got to meet the pups too! It is an indescribable experience having litters of guide dog puppies born in your home, which we feel honoured to be able to have.”

Guide Dogs are in urgent need for volunteers in the Redditch and surrounding areas. If you think you can provide a loving and permanent home to a guide dog mum, please contact Volunteering Coordinator Verity O’Donnell, via volunteermidlands@guidedogs.org.uk or call 0800 781 1444.



Christmas day pup



A Puppy New Year!

Guide dog mum Sylvia gave birth to Guide Dogs' first litter of the year. The eight Labrador puppies, five boys and three girls, were born on 5 January in Leamington Spa. It was Sylvia's first litter and the puppies weighed around 400 grams each.

Volunteer Breeding Stock Holder Gillian and her family first became involved with Guide Dogs in 2005 when Gillian's three children were desperate to have a pet dog. She says "living in Warwick at the time, we were very aware of Guide Dogs' work as we frequently saw dogs in training in the area.

A friend told me about the Breeding Dog Holder volunteering scheme and, as dog novices, we thought it would be a lovely

way to support the charity, as well as introduce a new family member into the fold. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to play a role to support those with sight loss so desperate for an assistance dog."

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Su Price, Breeding Dog Advisor says, "Sylvia is the perfect mum and took to her new litter beautifully. Hopefully her lovely calm and caring temperament will be passed on to these puppies and one day they will be the perfect guide dogs and companions for people with sight loss all around the UK."

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GDM Sylvia's pups



GDM Sylvia and pups



It Had to be Gershwin

Guide Dog Dad Poodle Gershwin, who is four, recently sired his first litter for Guide Dogs. His holder Lucy shares his story here.

Volunteer holder Lucy has always had dogs in her life. Beloved family dogs have included Border Collies, German Shepherds and Labradors. Her link with Guide Dogs came about through her mum's volunteering as a breed stockholder. She looked after a guide dog mum who produced four litters and Lucy helped out extensively with these. Lucy had always wanted to work with animals and got to know the Guide Dogs family because of her mum's longstanding connection. She subsequently volunteered as a puppy socialiser for two years as well as helping out in kennels. This led to her working in kennels for several years as a member of staff. She even did her University dissertation about the puppies in whelping block.

It was during her time in kennels that Lucy spotted Gershwin who was 18 months old at the time. Lockdown was about to begin and Gershwin needed somewhere to board as he had just arrived from Canada. Lucy describes seeing him as "love at first sight" so she called Debbie Stanley (Breeding Dog Advisor) and offered to board him temporarily. Lucy says "Gershwin didn't do so well in kennels so it worked out fabulously. We had a very strong bond after four weeks and he turned out to be a massive character. We couldn't let him go so he has stayed with us permanently. He was the one most positive thing about Covid times for us. He was an excuse for us to get out of the house so we didn't feel so trapped and has been great company. We needed each other."



GDD Gershwin



Lucy now works from home and Gershwin is always by her side. She says of him "he's very good looking but I know I'm biased! He's got this little moustache and a fluffy head. He's got a big tail and some tassels so he is a little Poodlish in terms of his grooming. I taught myself how to groom him and he is very patient when I do it." Lucy's mum now has a withdrawn dog that was a daughter of their original brood, as well as a toy poodle. Lucy says, "the family dogs love Gershwin and he loves them and is very playful. It's hilarious when Gershwin stands next to the toy poodle as she is five kilos and he is 30 kilos!"



Lucy describes Gershwin as “different to other dogs, in that he is very unique. I’ve never met another dog like him. Sometimes he seems to have some human characteristics in that he can look very thoughtful and he is clever. We often go tracking where we follow a man made trail through the woods. He has a good nose and this is great stimulation for him. We go together and follow routes and find articles using scent. It’s so good for his brain and his tail is wagging all of the time. Gershwin also likes coming on his holidays with us. We go hiking in the Lake District and Wales, which he loves. He has lots of stamina and enjoys going up and down the mountains.”

Gershwin has sired one litter so far with guide dog mum Annie. He won’t have a lot of matings as only so many Labradoodles are produced each year, so he might have one more mating this year.

Lucy is very encouraging of anyone wanting to be the holder of a guide dog dad. She says, “they are more low maintenance than having a guide dog mum. However they can be strong and big due to their hormones, so they need a lot of exercise, training and enrichment. Gershwin goes into the National Centre every six months plus any matings he might have. He has regular fertility tests, a prostate scan, an eye test and so on. The centre are very accommodating should you need to go on holiday. They

also give prior notice of a chosen guide dog mum’s season should the potential dad be needed to come in so you can plan ahead.”

She continues, “it’s a great way to have a dog because of all the excellent support you have. You meet lots of people out and about and I’ve never been more popular! Hopefully Gershwin will have a long and successful future providing puppies to help blind and partially sighted people down the years.”

GDD Gershwin



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Since Newshound’s interview with Lucy, GDD Gershwin sired another litter of nine puppies with GDM Mary a black Labrador. You can see some of Gershwin’s first litter in the puppy gallery on the last page of Newshound.

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A French Connection

Volunteer Elaine holds retired guide dog mum Marina and has recently taken on potential guide dog mum Shiva who has arrived from Guide Dogs in France (CESECAH). Shiva's mum is French and her dad is Dutch and she is an example of our international collaboration with other Guide Dog organisations. Here Elaine shares her story.

GDM Shiva



Elaine has volunteered for Guide Dogs for about eight years. She has always had dogs in her life and found the charity following a recommendation from a fellow teacher. Elaine's last pet dog had sadly passed away and she was thinking of

retiring and volunteering as a holder seemed a logical next step. She originally had a Golden Retriever called Faith who was withdrawn from the breeding programme for health reasons and went on to be a qualified guide dog. Next came black Labrador cross Marina who has had three litters of puppies. All of her litters have been healthy and numbered ten, eight and nine respectively. There were plans for Marina to have her fourth and final litter, but Covid intervened and she was therefore spayed and adopted by the family as a pet.

Shiva's story starts at the end of September 2022, just after lockdown had finished. Elaine had just completed some major building work on her home and as part of accepting a new dog into her life, she had to create an enclosed part to her garden as it was next to a river. Elaine's first meeting with Shiva was when she was delivered to her new home. Elaine says "I remember that Shiva was very anxious at first as she had been to stay at a lot of places and with different people in a short period of time. She didn't know she was staying permanently with me, but gradually within a couple of weeks she became very relaxed. Now she is completely happy and knows her routine."

Elaine wondered if Shiva would understand English commands but discovered that she would listen and respond to both English and French words. She found out that her previous holders were bilingual. They sent a lovely letter to Elaine detailing her life in France. Shiva had lived with a Labrador called Rosebud who had had puppies of her own, had use of a large garden, had lots of freedom and lived with several children. They mentioned that she loved to run, liked

playing hide and seek, welcomed everyone with a wagging tail and had a favourite tree to rest under.

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Elaine is hoping that Shiva will be mated in late April when she is due to come into season and is very excited that there will potentially be puppies in her home once more. She has had to learn whelping from scratch as a volunteer holder. She says, “I grew up on a farm and am used to handling animals and have seen lots of different births so I’m not squeamish. I always wanted to work in a vets when I was younger and I find the whole thing so interesting. It feels like a big responsibility as the dogs are so valuable but I really enjoy helping with the birth, cleaning the puppies and weighing them. My husband likes to help at the births too and he is very calm. We make a good team!”

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Shiva herself has lost no time in fitting right in with Elaine’s family. It is a busy household and Shiva is never on her own. As well as Marina for a companion, there is also puppy George who belongs to Elaine’s daughter. He was neutered before Shiva arrived. Elaine says, “She loves the puppy so much and entertains him by racing around the kitchen with him in the mornings. The pup provokes her to do this and they so enjoy it and I think it shows she will be a great mum. She is very gentle and affectionate with both George and Marina and she loves to cuddle them. She also almost demands attention particularly if I am with one of the other dogs as she likes to push her nose in between us. She’s very much a diva and I find it funny. She looks very elegant but actually is the opposite as she always manages to find mud and frequently needs hosing down after a free run. She likes to lie on her back, very relaxed with a silly expression on face and she flops

down on the floor with no elegance at all. She has really helped to moderate Marina’s waking up time too which is now later and at a much more civilized time I’m glad to say!”

Elaine has helped in other volunteering roles during her time at Guide Dogs including working on the Pupdate information leaflets and being a member of a fundraising group. However she has decided to concentrate on being a guide dog mum holder as this is the thing she enjoys the most. She would very much like to become someone that other volunteers can turn to as a sort of mentor either in person or by phone, offering advice and reassurance, particularly if they are new to holding.

Elaine would definitely recommend having a guide dog mum to others. She has told lots of people about it. She says “Volunteering makes you aware of people’s issues and all that they have to deal with and that strikes home. In seeing it for real I can see what a difference it makes. It is such a worthwhile and lovely thing to do and I can’t really see a downside.”



GDM Marina & GDM Shiva



A Living Legend

Potential Guide Dog Dad Baxter (as seen on this issue's cover) has found the perfect home with his holder volunteer Gaby. Guide Dogs runs in the family as Gaby's mum is trainer Mandy who previously held Guide Dog Dad Zip. Baxter is Zip's son. Here they share why that link is so very special to them.

Volunteer Gaby has always had dogs in her life mainly because her Mum Mandy is a guide dog trainer at Leamington Training School. She says, "Mum always used to bring dogs home and see how they behaved around us as children. As I got older I volunteered in kennels as part of my Duke of Edinburgh Award and then worked there as a late runner after hours up until nine years ago."

The family had several pet dogs who were all German Shepherds. Archie a withdrawn training dog and Jade a rescue dog. Over the years Mandy and her family took care of many dogs but wanted to have a more permanent resident at home for the family. Zip the German Shepherd guide dog dad came into their lives at this point and provided many years of happiness for the family, as well as siring eight litters of puppies. Zip was twelve when he passed away leaving a huge guide dog legacy, being known unofficially as a "legend."

During his lifetime two of Zip's female puppies had gone on to be guide dog mums themselves, but never one of his sons. Mandy and Gaby were so excited and emotional when they learned that Zip's frozen semen was going to be used posthumously to produce more puppies from his line six years after his passing. Using artificial insemination, guide dog mum River became pregnant and gave



Gaby with GDD Baxter

birth to three puppies. One puppy sadly died but Baxter and his sister thrived and Mandy was able to visit them in the nest. She remembers that Baxter was "very vocal and loud."

At first Mandy wanted Baxter herself either as a guide dog dad or as a training dog, particularly because he was Zip's son. However, her husband rescued a Belgian Malinois and it soon became apparent that the new dog wouldn't be able to live with another dog in the house due to its reactive nature. She was very upset but after Baxter was chosen to be potential breeding stock, Gaby mentioned that she would like to apply to hold him instead. After Baxter's rigorous health and temperament checks, it was agreed

Gaby would be his new holder. Mandy says “I cried when I saw him again as he had been a little puppy when I had last seen him. He reminded me so much of Zip with his big head and curly tail, so I was very emotional.” Gaby says, “it was love at first sight but I did think he was huge! I soon found out he had a lovely nature and that he loves to give cuddles.”

Baxter is going to be two in June and hopefully he will have his first mating soon. Mandy’s dream is that if he produces any suitable male puppies for breeding, that her son will apply for one so that they can create a family dynasty. Baxter has fitted into family life very well. He keeps Gaby fit out on long walks and sits with her when she is working from home. She says, “He is very good company and often features in my work meetings on zoom. I’ve found that he is very good around babies and children despite being a bit clumsy, but he’s not keen on cats. He loves to play fetch and use interactive toys. He’s a bit fussy with his food, but he does love treats and enjoys using a snuffle mat or a stuffed kong. He does have the best life!” He lives alongside a tiny Pomeranian called Nika who belongs to Gaby’s partner Stuart. Gaby says, “he looks really big next to her and it is a really hilarious combination on a walk, but he gets on with her really well.”

Gaby has felt very confident in having a guide dog dad. She says “Growing up I have developed a lot of useful handling and kennel skills. I also use Mum’s experience and she has helped a lot with some of Baxter’s separation anxiety. Gaby also has a lot of support from Debbie Stanley (Breeding Dog Advisor) and Felicity Rusk (BDA).

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Gaby says she would definitely recommend having a guide dog dad to anyone thinking about doing so. Of German Shepherds she says, “sometimes it is a bit more difficult to find holders because of people’s perceptions of them. However they are very sensitive and make a lovely family dog.” It would be true to say that both Mandy and Gaby feel they have been given a miraculous chance to carry on guide dog dad Zip’s wonderful legacy through Baxter.

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GDD Zip



On Our Best Behaviour

Mari & India



Did you know that Guide Dogs has its very own Demonstration Team? Dedicated Trainers Mark Richards and Mari Griffiths and their dogs Laine and India, plus a team of enthusiastic volunteers and their dogs represent the ‘Face of Guide Dogs’ in the public arena.

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Mark and Mari are both longstanding expert Dog Trainers. Mark has been with Guide Dogs for 26 years both as a Senior Trainer and memorably in more recent years, solely demonstrating guide dog’s behaviours to the public with his trusty companion Upton at events around the UK. Mari started with Guide Dogs in 2014 after volunteering on tours, working on reception, as a dog boarder and as a driver. She went on to be a Guide Dogs Trainer and worked for five and a half years at Midlands Regional Centre in Leamington, before a foot injury stopped her doing this role.

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The Events Team as it stands now was created during Covid. Both Mark and Mari started new roles as Events Demonstration Team Leaders with a task to recruit and train a bespoke group of volunteers to showcase guide dog training methods and behaviours at public and corporate events. Mark’s work with Upton previously included displays such as blindfold walks with members of the public. Going forward it was decided that the focus of the demo would change with volunteers demonstrating some of the positive reinforcement techniques used to train the dogs alongside the professional Trainers.

The team currently comprises Mark, Mari and their respective current dogs Laine (Labrador cross Golden Retriever) and India (Golden Retriever) plus nine volunteers and six dogs. Mark says “this is a huge ask for volunteers (known as Events Demonstration Assistants or EDAs) both in terms of building a knowledge base and travelling long distances. Each partnership takes a lot of hours of training and support in order to demonstrate adequately the behaviours a guide dog will require once qualified.” Mari continues, “we are looking for people who are able to hold their own in front of a group of people, who are confident with a microphone, who can engage with an audience and who, of course, are confident in handling their dog.”

In turn the dogs “need to be able to happily show their full potential when there might be considerable noise, crowds and other dog distractions.” Mark and Mari are keen to stress that the volunteering role isn’t just about learning the dog training methods. Mari says “we also teach the skills of knowing the

audience whether this is a small shopping mall experience or a large public event such as Crufts.” Mark says, “we teach technical skills but also guide volunteers in how to be genuine, have passion for the organisation and in learning the facts necessary so that they can answer questions as they arise. EDAs need to be comfortable in their own skin and spot

Mark and Laine



situations and control them confidently.” The main aim of the demonstrations is to educate and entertain the public and to highlight Guide Dog’s ethos in caring for our dogs’ health and welfare as well as showcasing the use of positive reinforcement techniques used by staff and volunteers during their training and day-to-day care. We also encourage the audience to imagine having sight loss themselves and then understanding how the dog’s skills can help with this.

Mark and Mari’s own dogs Laine and India, regularly exhibit their skills at locations the length and breadth of the UK. Mark says, “I currently have two dogs living with me at home. My brilliant ex demo dog Upton who still thinks he can come

out with me even though he is retired and a beautiful little yellow Labrador Hero, who despite having a serious medical condition is now nine. They both absolutely love each other. As a result, Laine actually lives with a colleague called Kate fifteen minutes away so I pick her up when I need her for events. She has such a zest for life and is fabulous at home.” Mari says, “India lives at home with me and my family and is excellently behaved. She is very gentle and very easy and we love her.”

The Demonstration Team will be actively recruiting more volunteers in the future. For now however, Mark and Mari are busy training their EDAs and their dogs in the Midlands area and are at full capacity. They will be looking further afield in the Bristol and Atherton areas shortly, to expand the team to cover wider areas. Due to the extensive training and specialized requirements of both the EDAs and dogs, this is a slow but meticulous process.

Mark says of his role “I really enjoy the events, working with my dog and meeting new people. I also particularly love seeing parts of the country I wouldn’t otherwise visit. I feel very privileged to do this work.” Mari says, “I really enjoy having a successful day when everything goes to plan and working with my lovely reliable dog.” Both Mark and Mari enjoy seeing the volunteering team out doing their demonstrations and being proud of their achievements. Mark says, “it’s a fabulous way for volunteers to expand their repertoire and ability for themselves and their dogs and a wonderful way for all of us to give back to Guide Dogs and help enforce our core messages to the public about people who are blind and partially sighted.”

Any further enquiries, please contact eventsdemoteam@guidedogs.org.uk

Puppy Cognition

I am a Canine Science Associate in the Science team based at the National Centre. I work on all the dog behaviour projects within the team and over the past year have run the puppy cognition project. Our first puppies are now approaching a year of age, and those that are selected as Potential Breeding Dogs (PBD) will have the assessments re-run when they come to the National Centre.

Why are we undertaking Puppy Cognition?

We want to collect a large range of behaviour information on our puppies which can feed into the Born to Guide project and support our breeding programme. Guide Dogs currently collects a wider range of behaviour information from staff and volunteers caring for our puppies. However, collecting data through standardised practical assessments adds another perspective of data for us to look at.

What does Puppy Cognition involve?

We undertake a series of six tasks with the puppies, which are essentially fun little games that we play to help us understand the puppies personalities and support them as best we can on their journey to be future life-changers. The tasks all look at something slightly different including problem solving, odour discrimination and human contact. **The puppies will experience new items, such as an upturned umbrella, a reflective metal sheet and an interactive cat toy. The tasks also look at their response to a person talking and see if they can problem-solve little challenges.**

Do the puppies have a favourite task?

One of the tasks that the puppies particularly like is called 'Odour' - we use two tubes, one has pieces of kibble in and the other is left empty. The tubes are presented to the puppy and they then choose one to go to - plus always get the treat at the end! **There is no "pass" or "fail" in any of the tasks for the puppy. Instead the team are interested in understanding how puppies respond, and how they engage in tasks.**

What are the next steps?

We will complete the puppy data around Spring and begin PBD assessments just after that. We will then follow these puppies through their guide dog journey and look to correlate the tasks data to other behaviour information we collect. Ultimately, we aim to also look at correlations to genetic information as part of the Born to Guide project, but this will be a few years away yet as we are still collecting swabs from puppies.

Where can I find out more information?

You can read more about the Puppy Cognition Project, including the link to a You Tube video which demonstrates all of the tasks, by heading to the Guide Dogs website. You will also find lots of information about the Born to Guide Project here too. . www.guidedogs.org.uk



Image of one of the problem-solving tasks called cylinder task



Image of odour

Many thanks to Becky Hunt - Breeding Dog Data Manager.



Meet the Puppy Socialisers!

One of the most envied volunteering roles at Guide Dogs is that of Puppy Socialiser. Here we meet some of the volunteers, who share a few hours a week with our potential guide dogs.

Gill

I started puppy socialising at the national centre about two years ago, when the Covid restrictions were eased. This coincided with my third guide dog mum being retired, but by volunteering to become a puppy socialiser at the centre it meant I could still be involved with young puppies, which really suited me.

It's lovely to see the puppies enjoying themselves, playing inside and out with the numerous toys and equipment available and as socialisers we are contributing to these skills and their ability to relax around people they haven't met before.

As a bonus for me and other "guide dog mum" holders, it's so reassuring to know that the puppies they've nurtured for six weeks, are continuing with their carefree happy lives during their stay at the centre.

Irene



My involvement with Guide Dogs started in 2017 when we became holders for Guide Dog Mum Nica. I then became a puppy socialiser in 2018 and I honestly can't think of a better way to start the week than going into the National Centre every Monday morning to play with the pups.

When the weather is fine we take them out to the grass runs where they can run around and get rid of their excess energy. We also use the outside rubber runs. If it's too cold to go outside, we use one of the indoor socialising rooms. The pups love to play with the toys and play equipment and it's great to watch them explore and gain confidence.

We know they are going on to do great things and it's so rewarding to be part of their journey.

Jenny



I started volunteering as a puppy socialiser in September 2017, and have been volunteering in this role for five and a half years on a Monday. I grew up surrounded by animals in my younger years with family dogs of a Jack Russell and Springer Spaniels. Having grown up loving animals, I pursued a career with them and locally qualified as a Veterinary Nurse. This later led to me teaching Animal Welfare as a FE lecturer at a local FE College for over 16 years.

In 2021 I trained and joined Puppy School (a UK network of puppy trainers) founded by Clinical Animal Behaviourist and Author Gwen Bailey. I currently run puppy classes in Southam and Northend. I also currently have my own two-year-old Labrador called Mabel.

I feel very lucky to have secured a volunteering position at Guide Dogs as a puppy socialiser. My favourite part obviously has to be engaging and interacting with the pups. Their happiness and inquisitiveness behaviour is joyful and after five years I still pinch myself that I get to help in this role. It is not always an easy role though, when trying to ensure all the pups in the litter get attention, puppy biting - their teeth are razor sharp! Not to mention the endless amounts of cleaning up. However I love seeing the pups curiosity in new experiences. Just this week we were overjoyed when a pup decided to explore a toy car and sit quite happily in the drivers seat!

Alongside the pups it is great getting to work as part of a volunteer team and developing friendships during our time spent socialising the pups. I volunteer alongside working and find it personally rewarding to know that I am playing a small but important role within Guide Dogs to aid the socialisation of future life changers in a critical time in their early development. I hope and plan to continue volunteering in this role for future years for as long as I am able to.

Sandra



My first experience of volunteering for Guide Dogs was in 2017 as a Tour Guide at the National Centre. I have a rescued Border Collie with anxiety issues, so I was unable to volunteer for a role involving having another dog at home. In 2018 I was thrilled when I had the opportunity to become a puppy socialiser. What could be better than going in every Monday morning to meet, play with and cuddle the pups? It is so lovely to see them exploring, running around and playing together especially “tug of war” with a knitted strip of ribbon.

I was also able to develop good friendships with my fellow puppy socialisers. Puppy socialising does however come with some challenges, particularly when they prefer your ankles to the toys, or the mop when you are clearing up, not to mention the logistical conundrum of how to split the litter!

It is also very rewarding to know that while we have fun and enjoy the experience, we are also part of a terrific team who help these puppies on their journey to be the next life changers.

Oh, and another thing, the toys the puppies play with have given me great ideas for gifts to buy for my younger grandchildren!

Caroline



I've been a volunteer for Guide Dogs for about ten years now - as a tour guide both at the National Centre and at the Midlands Regional Centre, and also as editor of Newshound magazine.

I started puppy socialising in August 2022 and so far I have absolutely loved every minute. Every litter is different - the puppies all have their own unique personalities and I never tire of their company whilst helping to enhance their stay at the centre. The few hours on a Monday morning fly by and already there are a few characters who have stolen my heart. We as volunteers spend a lot of time playing and cuddling as well as cleaning up and occasionally helping to feed the puppies. I've made some lovely friends and learned all about puppy health care and welfare.

I get to see first hand the dedicated care and affection all of the staff and volunteers give to the puppies - they have all the one to one attention they need whilst staying at the centre and are sent off to the next stage of their guide dog journey with lots of happy and positive experiences behind them. For me, they are an absolute joy to be around and I'm so grateful I am able to be a Puppy Socialiser for Guide Dogs.

Volunteering Update

NATIONAL CENTRE VOLUNTEERING UPDATE

Hello there,



Verity

My name's Verity and I have recently joined Guide Dogs as a Volunteering Coordinator, based at the National Centre. I started in post at the beginning of February and am part of the now growing Midlands & East Regional Team.

Following on from Christian's piece in the last edition of "Newshound", I'm pleased to report that as well as myself, there is another new member of the Team - Gail Pajak, who is the new Volunteering Coordinator at the Midlands Regional Centre.

Both of us have been made very welcome and I hope to meet more members of the National Centre Team over the coming weeks and months. I'd like to take the opportunity to particularly thank Melanie Brown and Christian for all their support and guidance easing us in as we learn the ropes!

There is lots going on in volunteering and at the National Centre our recruitment focus continues to be on our Breeding Dog Holder - Brood and Breeding Dog Fosterer roles. Thank you to all those who have been flying the flag to promote these roles and if you know of a local venue / business or community organisation / publication where there might be an opportunity to spread the word further, I'd love to hear from you and explore how to make the most of any opportunities. Please do get in touch!

The Fundraising Team held a Tea Party here at the end of April and it was lovely to meet those volunteers who were able to come along and join us for tea and cake. To mark the coronation of King Charles later this month, across the whole of Guide Dogs, we're delighted to be participating in The Big Help Out where thousands of organisations across the country are getting together to give people the chance to help out in their local communities.



Early June sees the annual National Volunteers Week in appreciation of all the amazing work that volunteers do and we will be marking the occasion through our own Local Volunteer Awards. The Local Volunteer Awards take place across all of Guide Dogs and Staff have been asked to nominate volunteers to receive one of 7 awards in recognition of all that they do.

More events are in the planning pipeline and I hope to be able to let you know more about these in due course. If you would like to be involved, please do let me know.

As always, a HUGE thank you to all of our volunteers for all that you do for Guide Dogs. We simply couldn't operate as a charity without your support, generosity, experience and good will.

With best wishes for a wonderful summer,

Verity O'Donnell

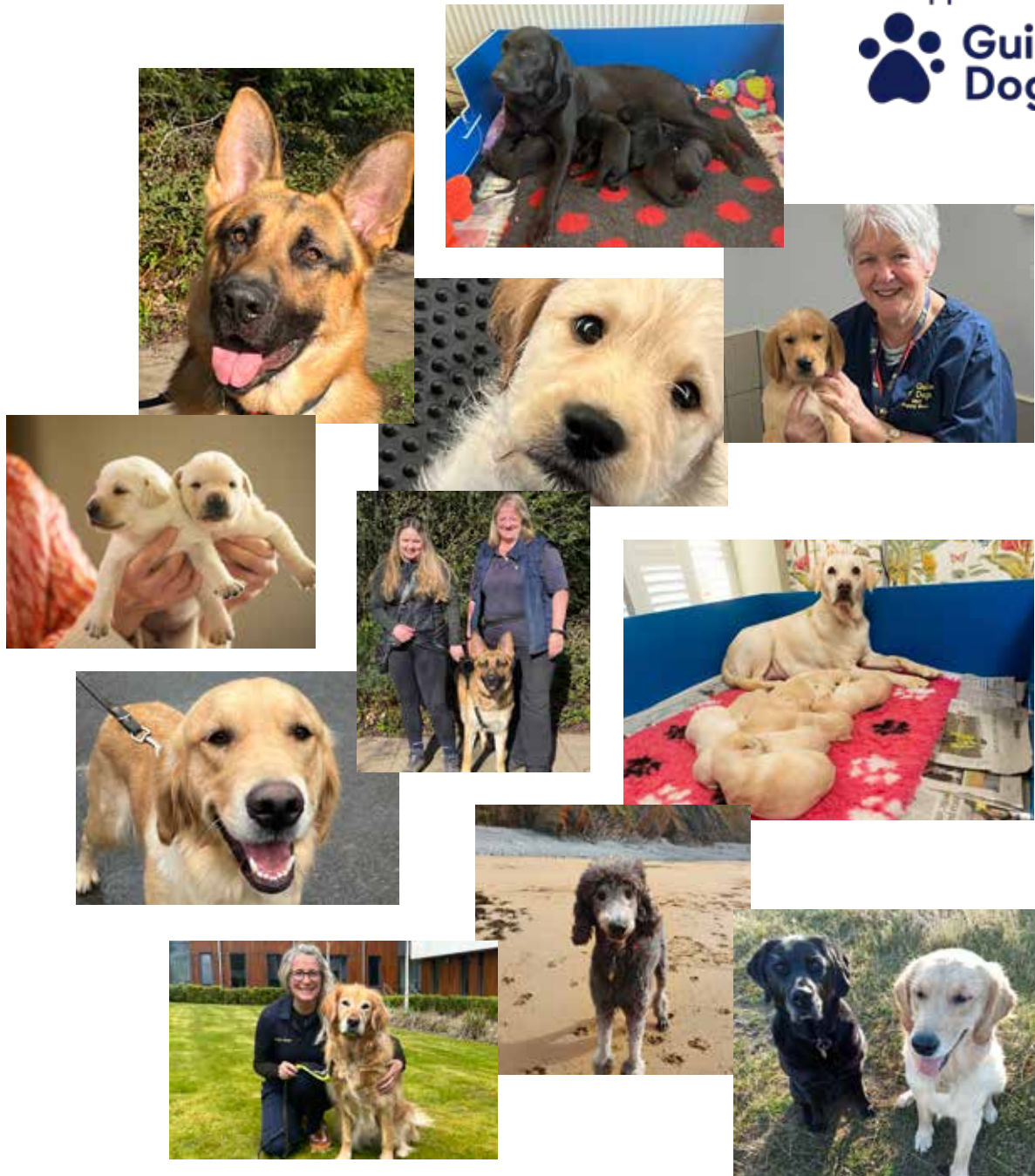
Verity O'Donnell
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Gallery



In support of
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For more information about volunteering opportunities please contact:

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