

# Puppy Times



## Hello all

**This is an exciting time for Guide Dogs and for Puppy Walking, which is reflected in this edition of Puppy Times. With the launch of the new strategy there is a real sense of focus, looking at what we have achieved and what we plan to achieve in future years.**

What we have achieved in the past would not have been possible – and certainly our future plans won't be – without the support of many thousands of dedicated volunteers. This has been recognised by the formation of a Volunteering Department to improve the way in which we recruit, support, train and communicate with all our volunteers. We will be working closely with Jo Sullivan, our new head of Volunteering, and her team to further improve all these areas within Puppy Walking.

**We have ambitious plans to expand the core guide dog service, gradually increasing the numbers of partnerships we train, and widening our client base.**

We are already working on making the service more accessible to people from minority ethnic groups, young people and people with additional disabilities. We are also working to ensure that all who could potentially benefit are aware of the service.

Increasing the numbers of partnerships trained begins with increases in the breeding and puppy walking programmes in order to supply more and, if possible, better quality dogs for training. I say 'if possible' because we are already world leaders in breeding, puppy walking and the care and welfare of our dogs. Even though this is the case we need to breed and puppy walk approximately three dogs for every two successful qualifications.

Doing more and doing it better is a noble aim, driven by the knowledge of the real difference our dogs make to the lives of blind or partially-sighted people. They break down barriers, provide companionship, and, crucially, enable them to get around on their own. The ability to get around is vital in order to live a full life.

Finally apologies that this edition has been slightly delayed and you will now be reading it in the New Year. I hope you find this edition of Puppy Times interesting and informative. If you have any comments or suggestions, please let me know.

Thank you for all your support and hard work.

**David Hurst**  
*National Puppy Walking Manager*





## News

### ***Guide Dogs key messages and secondary facts***

We launched a pocket-sized key messages booklet earlier in the year, which is full of key facts and information about Guide Dogs. To compliment this, we have recently put together some more detailed secondary facts about the charity and our work.

These messages and facts are for staff and volunteers to use when speaking to members of the public, existing and potential supporters, the media, and businesses and other organisations, to ensure that everything we say and print is consistent across Guide Dogs.

The messages and facts will be updated annually and are available to download from the volunteer extranet, or by emailing [publications@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:publications@guidedogs.org.uk)

### ***Date for your diary***

The Guide Dogs Experience will be held on Saturday 10 July in 2010, at the Kennel Club building in Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire. Once again we hope for sunny weather, lots of visitors to learn about our work and the chance to showcase what we do.

### ***Virtual Gifts***

We have recently launched a new way for you to buy unusual presents for loved ones online with our fabulous guide dog-e-gifts website. You can visit [www.guidedogs-e-gifts.org.uk](http://www.guidedogs-e-gifts.org.uk) and pick from a range of virtual gifts to suit every budget.

£6 buys a dog bowl, £15 gets two puppy jackets, £137 buys everything a guide dog puppy needs to start at training school, and £20 buys some all important poo bags! When you buy a virtual gift your recipient will receive a lovely Guide Dogs card, containing a photo description of the gift that you have bought them.

### ***Guide dog owner survey***

Earlier in the year, Guide Dogs asked guide dog owners about their satisfaction with the charity's service. We are very pleased that a high level of satisfaction was expressed. 90% of respondents said that Guide Dogs have met or exceeded their expectations and 96% that their guide dogs meet their mobility needs.

The Operations department will now look at the results and identify any areas where we could further meet the needs of clients and improve the quality of services delivered.

## Get together for Guide Dogs

**We have recently launched a new fundraising initiative inviting people to organise a get-together with family, friends, work colleagues or the local community to raise money for Guide Dogs.**



Get together for Guide Dogs is a simple concept that can cover barbecues, coffee mornings, salsa evenings, whist drives or even beach parties – all that's needed is an idea, some time and some friends.

To make it easy, there's even a Get together for Guide Dogs fundraising pack, complete with invitations, posters and fundraising tips.

**To get yours, just call 0870 600 2323 or register online at [www.guidedogs.org.uk/gettogether](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/gettogether)**

**When puppywalker Susan Nuttall hosted an afternoon tea for the members of her church, she set herself the ambitious fundraising target of £400.**

Having hired the church hall free of charge, she roped in couple of friends, and homemade sandwiches and a range of delicious cakes ensured that all 80 people who were invited came along to support the event.

Raising money in buckets placed on the tables, Susan was astonished at the end of the day when the notes were stacked and the coins were counted. Not only had she smashed her target, she'd almost doubled it – and a re-count confirmed the total of £750!

*"The afternoon was lovely," she said. "It was a real community get-together that people are still talking about."*



## Extranet update

**The volunteers' extranet is growing fast, following the successful completion of its six-month pilot phase at the end of June.**

The extranet – a website accessible only by authorised users – has already been viewed more than 10,000 times, averaging almost 100 visits a day in June alone!

Its 1,500+ registered users have submitted more than 500 forum posts, uploaded over 200 photos, and added dozens of volunteer news items, making it a real, nationwide, online community.

An increasingly popular feature is the Dog Blog, which tells the story of every guide dog, from puppyhood onwards. Users can start a new blog for their puppy, or if one has already been started, they can add to it, uploading news, anecdotes, progress reports and pictures.

And because each dog's blog can be updated as it progresses, one day it may be possible to see updates about yours even after it has left your care. Which means you may never again have to wonder how your little pup is doing out in the big world!



### How to use the extranet

Contributing to your dog's story is easy! Just visit [www.guidedogsvolunteers.org.uk](http://www.guidedogsvolunteers.org.uk) and type in the following details when you log in for the first time:

Email: [volextranetuser@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:volextranetuser@guidedogs.org.uk)

Password: labrador

Once you have logged in for the first time, you will be asked to register and change to a new, individual email and password. If you have already registered and have forgotten your password, just get a reminder from the link below the log-in boxes.

# Profile

## Jo Sullivan, Head of Volunteering

**It's been said many times before – but it bears repeating – that Guide Dogs is entirely dependent on the goodwill and hard work of its volunteers. The organisation could not help thousands of blind and partially sighted people without the dedication of its 10,000 puppywalkers, fundraisers, stud and brood bitch holders, boarders and drivers.**

These vital volunteers deserve every kind of support available so following the volunteer review project, the Volunteering Department has been strengthened. Leading this is Jo Sullivan, Guide Dogs new Head of Volunteering.

A few months in to the role, Jo is delighted with what she's seen so far. *"I worked for Mencap for 13 years, so it was a big step to move to Guide Dogs. I have been made to feel so welcome that I now feel absolutely part of the team. Everyone's so friendly; I have no regrets."*

Jo will be joined in the Volunteering Department by five managers, a senior administrator, eight regional coordinators and four national volunteer office staff. Since volunteers are scattered right across the country, Jo will be based at her home in Gloucestershire, but will travel almost daily to visit colleagues – paid and unpaid – wherever they may be.

Jo says her first job is to make people aware of the Volunteering Department *"so that there's no confusion about what we do. We will be like a human resources department for volunteers, so we'll support the recruitment, induction, training and development of volunteers, as well as handling any complaints or grievances."*



More specifically, Jo and her colleagues will be working towards several operational goals. For example, she explains, *"we want to expand and diversify our volunteer base to include more young people, people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and people with disabilities – to better reflect the communities our clients come from. We also need to support and train people to manage volunteers; it's not the same as managing paid staff – it requires a different skill set."*

Given the sheer numbers of volunteers involved, achieving just one of these aims will be no mean feat.

One thing that helps is the commitment of the volunteers; *"for many, it's a 24-hour job,"* she says.

***"Our volunteer's dedication is second to none. We need to value, support and develop our volunteers and give them the recognition and rewards they deserve. We should be shouting about how fantastic they are!"***

*"Hopefully, by being at the leading edge of how volunteers are treated, we'll become the organisation of choice for people who want to donate their time and energy to a very good cause."*



# Area Consultation Groups Update

## ***South and East***

Following a routine review of the South and East Puppy Walkers Voice group, a new committee has been formed. Our grateful thanks go to the outgoing members whose momentum we aim to maintain. We hope that every area in the South and East will have a representative on the group; they will be the contact point and voice any issues from puppy walkers in their area.

### **The group is currently looking at:**

- Engaging with first-time puppy walkers to help them understand what's involved before their first pup arrives;
- Establishing more Meet and Greet opportunities to socialise and exchange ideas;
- Supporting the concept of puppy walker mentoring.

...as well as education, training, dog welfare and social events.

If you would like to help in any of these areas, please contact us on **020 8506 5455**.

**Richard Huggins,**  
**Puppy Walking Manager, South and East**

## ***Wales and West***

The group met recently at Fromebridge Mill to discuss a variety of issues and topics which affect puppy walking. We have welcomed some new members to the group and met Ed Stevens, the new Regional Volunteer Manager. Ed gave the group an update on the Volunteer Review project and explained how the new Volunteer department would be set up and the benefits to all volunteers. The Volunteering Department will in future be represented on the group which I am sure will be a great addition to the many diverse topics we deliberate over.

**Terry Smith,**  
**Puppy Walking Manager, Wales and West**

## ***North***

Following my call for a new secretary in the last update, I'm very pleased that the role will be jointly filled by Raymond and Susan Coxon, puppy walkers from the Nottingham area.

Two group members, Jennifer Barber and Mandy Anderson, recently organised an information day for puppy walkers from West Yorkshire and the Pennines. Speakers included Peter Darby, Brood Stock Supervisor at Tollgate, a GDMI and a re-homing officer. We're now looking to replicate the day in other areas of the North.

**Sue Richardson,**  
**Puppy Walking Manager, North of England**

## ***Scotland***

The Scottish group has recently discussed the possibility of a Scottish section of the extranet, the use of balance leads in training and the selection of specifically Scottish names for pups walked in Scotland.

Other items on the agenda have highlighted some important facts that puppy walkers should know, such as:

- Guide Dogs runs its own CRB checks on official speakers; it does not accept checks carried out by other organisations
- Proctor and Gamble, who produce Eukanuba, do not conduct invasive experiments on animals
- Puppies should never be taken onto moving walkways (also known as travelators) at airports

**Alison Sinclair,**  
**Puppy Walking Manager, Scotland and Northern Ireland**

# Guide Dogs strategy 2010 – 2020; the mobility journey

**Guide Dogs has come a long way since the charity was founded in 1934. It continues to deliver the guide dog service and other mobility services, as well as breaking down barriers – both physical and legal – to enable blind and partially sighted people to around on their own.**

This remains at the heart of Guide Dogs' new 2010 – 2020 strategy. The strategy is based on a person's mobility journey, from the moment they are diagnosed with sight-loss to the time when they regain the confidence to get around on their own.

This "mobility journey" has been informed by what blind and partially-sighted people themselves have told us about their lives. Each of them has experienced the journey differently, but most have been through several distinct stages, and the strategy for 2010 to 2020 sets out how Guide Dogs will support people at each of them.

## Stage 1 – diagnosis

Shock, depression, anxiety – you need support to understand your eye condition and the changes it brings. For people at this stage of the journey, Guide Dogs will:

- Fund research into eye conditions
- Work to understand the emotional impact of sight-loss
- Share our findings with other organisations

## Stage 2 – getting through the depression

Talking through your feelings with someone who can help you get your confidence back. Guide Dogs will:

- Provide a new counselling and support service
- Support children diagnosed with sight-loss
- Support the families and carers of people with sight-loss



## Stage 3 – wanting to get out and about

Feeling more confident and thinking about how you want to get around. Guide Dogs will:

- Help people plan how to get around
- Help people use any remaining vision



## Stage 4 – finding the right services

Finding a service to help you learn the right skills.

Guide Dogs will:

- Deliver more guide dog partnerships
- Encourage research into new technology to help people get around
- Introduce a “sighted guiding” service

## The outcome – getting around with confidence

Completing your personal mobility journey – you’re mobile again, but Guide Dogs will still:

- Campaign to put an end to dangerous street designs
- Fight discrimination against visually-impaired people
- Continue campaigning for accessible travel information

It’s an ambitious strategy, and incorporates several elements that are new to the organisation.

It also represents the most comprehensive and logical approach yet to Guide Dogs’ number one priority: the independence and mobility of its clients.

It is hoped that, by working with partner organisations – and, of course, with the help of its volunteers – Guide Dogs will be able to build on its strengths and ease the journey for thousands more people over the next ten years.

You can read more about the strategy in Guide Dogs’ new booklet, “A vision of the future: Guide Dogs’ strategy 2010 – 2020” which is available to download on the Volunteer Extranet, or from [www.guidedogs.org.uk/aboutus/strategy-2010-2020/](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/aboutus/strategy-2010-2020/)



# Profile

## Sandra Croker, puppy walker

**Most puppy walkers volunteer as they wish to use their spare time and love of dogs to help make a positive difference to others' lives. But some, like Sandra Croker of Birmingham, have more personal reasons for volunteering their time and energy. Three of Sandra's four grown-up children are registered blind – and her daughter is a guide dog owner.**

Sons Michael and Adam and daughter Claire all have the rare hereditary condition Laurence-Moon syndrome, a feature of which is retinitis pigmentosa. Claire has been a guide dog owner for twelve years and it was seeing what a difference her first dog, Taffy, made to her life that inspired mum Sandra to become a puppy walker.

***“Taffy made a huge difference to Claire,” explains Sandra. “She could get out more, and could go out after dark. She relied on him a lot and he was really good for her. Just seeing the way Claire worked with Taffy and Taffy worked with Claire, showed me how valuable the relationship they developed was. Somebody had helped Claire by becoming a puppy walker, so I wanted to help someone else in the same way.”***

The Crokers' home is a busy place. Michael, Adam and Claire all live with Sandra and their dad, also called Michael, who own a residential home for the elderly. Taffy, who is now retired, also lives with them, as does Claire's new dog, Wallis. Completing the picture are Maple (a former guide dog pup adopted following pre-training withdrawal) and Sandra's latest pup, Spice.



Yet the competing demands of family life don't detract one bit from Spice's training. Sandra takes her young charge out for a walk every day, helping her get used to everything from public transport to pigeons.

She says: *“The most rewarding aspect is knowing that, if your pup qualifies, it will become someone's eyes. I know very well just how important that is.”*

She does have some advice, though, for anyone thinking of taking up puppy walking. “You've got to be able to give that pup all the love and attention you can. You'll need a lot of patience – and a sense of humour. If Spice sees your socks lying around, she'll have them!”

Having walked ten puppies in as many years, Sandra has had her share of the ups and downs pups can bring – “It's always hard to give them up, but it's well worth it”. But she has no intention of making her life any less hectic just yet.

*“I'll carry on as long as I'm allowed,” she insists. “I'm going to have to give Spice up soon – she's twelve months old – so I'm already looking forward to my next pup. I just hope I don't have to wait too long!”*



# Health Matters

**A look at some of the health issues that can affect your pup – and how to avoid them. In this edition, we focus on obesity.**

Health issues, shorter life spans, higher vet and feeding bills – the growing problem of obesity amongst the UK's dogs is a major problem. Guide Dogs is addressing this issue before it has a serious impact on our own dogs.

Obesity is a 'man-made' disease. As a nation of animal lovers, all too often we're tempted to give pets and working dogs little treats. Puppies eyes, in particular, are frequently bigger than their stomachs.

**But, the good news is that canine obesity can be prevented, and every puppy walker can play a big part in keeping their pup at a healthy weight.**

Guide Dogs has recently set up a project to look at this issue, and project manager David Grice explains: "This is more than a diet-control issue; it's a cultural one affecting every puppy walker plus staff and guide dog owners. The project's scope spans the whole of a dog's life – from before it's born (with control of the brood bitch's weight), right through to retirement and beyond.

*"As with humans, the problem of obesity often starts early in life, constant management of feeding and exercise remains essential to health as a dog's routines and age results in lifestyle changes. This is why puppy walkers have such an important role to play in the success of this project."*

*"We'll be working closely with puppy walkers, guide dog owners, boarders and other volunteers, ensuring that dogs have an acceptable diet and exercise regime. Each dog will be carefully monitored and if there are any signs of unwanted weight gain, we'll address the issues quickly."*

***"We want to ensure that Guide Dogs leads the way in reducing the risk of canine obesity."***

**The aims of the project will be achieved by:**

- Providing an improved education platform for puppy walkers, guide dog owners and staff regarding dog condition, weight and obesity
- Changing the perceptions and opinions of puppy walkers, guide dog owners, staff and other volunteers regarding dog weight, moving to a zero tolerance culture towards unnecessary canine weight gain
- Ensuring weight-management processes are consistent and carried out thoroughly by all people responsible for guide dog stock.

## **Help for puppywalkers**

Puppywalkers need to be particularly aware of how they can help prevent obesity and the problems it can cause. Two working groups are currently looking at a variety of "tools" which can be used to control and combat obesity. Those relating to puppies include:

- growth curve charts
- body condition scores
- feeding guides
- advice on the appropriate use and selection of treats and rewards, etc.

These have now been designed and are currently being assessed. Some, such as the growth curve charts, are being tested in a couple of areas to ensure their suitability for guide dog puppies (as opposed to, say, ordinary labradors). Following successful trials, it is hoped they will be launched and made available to puppywalkers nationally early in 2010.



# Canine Research

Guide Dogs is the world leader in its field and is constantly looking for opportunities to improve its work.

One way is to invest in canine research projects to improve our dogs' health and well-being and further develop the guide dog service.

To keep puppy walkers up to date with the latest and future research, below is a brief summary of some relevant developments in our canine research programme.

## **Recently completed research:**

### **Puppy testing**

To increase our knowledge about the qualification or withdrawal of a puppy due to its temperament, pups' confidence and responsiveness levels were tested using new and different stimuli.

The differences in the results between qualifying and withdrawn dogs were so small that the current test cannot accurately predict future success for six-week-old puppies.



### **Environmental enrichment (EE)**

Enriching the environment of dogs staying in kennels can improve their quality of life and positively affect their behaviour. Guide Dogs has already changed kennel design at our Atherton and Forfar Training Schools to promote mental and physical stimulation, relaxation and social interaction.

This study looked at levels of enrichment, staff perception of EE, and a dogs behaviour during grooming, feeding, exercising and in social situations. It found that while our schools provide a good range of EE activities, not all of our dogs receive them equally which we already working on to improve.

### **Kennel preferences**

Various kennel set-ups were tested to identify which ones dogs would prefer. These included: a deep bedding box, a covered area, and a kennel with rear screening.

Kennel environments with each of these set-ups, one with all three adaptations, and another with none of them, were trialled. The results suggested that adding deep bedding boxes or rear screening could be most beneficial for our dogs.

**Obesity survey** - for more information see **Health Matters, page 8**

## **Ongoing research:**

### **Inappropriate spending (including medical research)**

We have found that 7.7% of working guide dogs have spending problems. This may only affect be a small number of dogs but it can have a significant impact on a partnership.



In some cases these problems cannot be resolved - one dog in training was rejected in 2008 for inappropriate spending, and nine dogs were withdrawn after qualification. This is despite the time and effort that is put in at every stage of training aimed at establishing good spending routines.

Our research with clients and staff shows that expectations for spending routines vary and the definition of 'inappropriate spending' remains unclear. A group has been set-up to look at the effects of different spending surfaces and leash relief on a dogs spending routine. Further research on this is likely to follow.

### **Character assessment testing (CAT)**

The first results from the CAT course at Tollgate revealed that certain tests were predictive of a dog's future success as a guide dog. Further data is needed to complete the analysis so a CAT course has been set-up at Forfar and 80 dogs have been tested so far. Once we have completed the assessment of 100 dogs we will analyse all the data.

## **Future research:**

### **Travel sickness**

Dog Care and Welfare Advisors have asked for a review of travel sickness products that are currently available for dogs. We are looking at current research and available treatments for travel sickness in dogs and will report back on this in the future.

### **Effects of multiple handlers on guide dogs in training**

We are currently looking for previous research into the effect of multiple handlers on dogs and their learning.

We are also considering running a short survey with trainers, looking at their experience of handling dogs assigned to other trainers.

### **Downtime from learning**

We are investigating whether dogs need a period of rest to absorb knowledge and if so, for how long. For example after training, is resting overnight enough downtime for a dog? Do dogs require days off from learning?

### **Fireworks monitoring**

Operations staff have been asked to monitor the impact of firework noise on working dogs during 2009 and the New Year. Staff will be asked to complete feedback forms detailing the numbers of dogs affected, the impact on training or work and therapies provided.

**We hope you've enjoyed reading this edition of Puppy Times.**

**If you have any ideas for what you would like to see in future editions, please email [david.hurst@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:david.hurst@guidedogs.org.uk) or call 01926 651226.**

