

# NBC NEWSHOUND



In support of



**A newsletter for volunteers supporting  
the National Breeding Centre**



## **In this Fifteenth Edition:**

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# Welcome to the fifteenth edition of NBC Newshound

Hi Everyone

**Welcome to issue 15 of Newshound. In this issue we are celebrating the German Shepherd! It's safe to say many of us have a soft spot for them! Currently 2.7% of working guide dogs are German Shepherd and 4.2% are German Shepherd crosses. There are currently 26 pure German Shepherds on the breeding programme comprising 17 brood bitches and 9 stud dogs.**

Inside you will meet our handsome cover star stud dog London and two of his beautiful offspring, stud dog Gene and brood bitch Luna. Many thanks to holders Richard, Vicki and Sarah who kindly visited the NBC for their interviews.

The puppies in the gallery this time are from BB Neesha and SD Brody, and a couple of happy hours were spent trying to catch their cheeky personalities on camera!

For those of you who love Labradors, we also meet brood bitch holder Phillippa and puppy walker Melvin who describe how their friendship has been forged through brood bitch

Vickie and her puppies. We also meet the NBC's young volunteer of the year for 2019, Maddie, who tells us all about her film making skills and why she thinks other young people should volunteer.



Many of the stud dog holders and brood bitch holders in this issue are members of their local fundraising groups and we really hope that they will inspire those of you who are thinking about joining such a group to do so. Please contact Felicity Stratton, Liz Gilbert or Miles Northwood at Guide Dogs if you would like to find out more. **Many thanks also to Nicola for her help with this issue.**

We very much hope you enjoy the magazine. Please, please get in touch with your own stories or news so we can feature them in future issues. **Our email address is [NBCNewshoundfeedback@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:NBCNewshoundfeedback@guidedogs.org.uk).**

My best wishes to you all,  
**Caroline**  
**Editor Newshound**

# Hello everyone,

**As I write, there are real concerns re the spread of Coronavirus, so I hope that, with Spring approaching and holiday and travel plans for the Summer perhaps already arranged, you all stay safe and healthy, including your lovely dogs!**

Looking back over 2019, we placed 1073 pups into puppy walking, a little below our plan as we reduced breeding towards the end of the year to assist the flow of dogs through the system to better match resources available. Our conception rate remained very high at 95% for the year and our average litter size rose to 8.1 for the year, a credit to everyone involved.

We have successfully hosted several major donor events and Patron Days at the NBC - we are incredibly grateful to the generosity of those attending who continue to support our Breeding operations and the NBC. During Guide Dog Appeal month in October, the NBC staff put on several events, including cream teas with a view and a music night. Combined, we made almost £3,000 – a fantastic team effort in addition to the day jobs! Thanks to everyone that contributed. I am pleased to say that the fourth edition of our newsletter “Breed all About It” has just gone to press and is there to further inform, educate and entertain staff and volunteers alike regarding the breeding programme and its functions.

We continue to collaborate with our partner international Guide Dog schools, including those in the Netherlands, Belgium, Japan and South Africa to name but a few. More recently, work with two different Canadian schools has resulted in

imminent supply of two new stud dogs for our programme, one Labrador and one Standard Poodle. We really do believe that international collaboration and mutually beneficial exchanges are the most successful way of introducing new bloodlines into our programme and to ensure genetic diversity is maintained.

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**I'm excited to say that we have just advertised for a new role - Head of Canine Genetics. We recognise and appreciate the value science makes to the world and indeed the contribution it makes to our own breeding programme. As such, over recent years we have continued to avail ourselves of ever increasing numbers of genetic tests that have become available for several hereditary health conditions and we have developed the use of Estimated Breeding Values for health, which use population genetics to estimate the 'value' of dogs in terms of their likelihood to produce certain diseases. We are soon to embark on an ambitious 'Genomics' project where we will look to DNA sample many of our stock, have the DNA sequenced and the data stored. We can then look to see if we can establish relationships and links between certain DNA sequence patterns and hereditary health diseases, or indeed temperamental traits in future. A new Head of Canine Genetics will be just the person to advance this work, keep our breeding programme the best it can be and help to protect, preserve and enhance the health and temperamental qualities of the wonderful dogs we produce.**

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Matthew with pet dog Gavin



We have some exciting events and ventures upcoming at the NBC, including some TV filming and hosting of the People awards later this year. We are also making plans to have a local 'celebratory' day in the Summer (more details to follow as planning develops) as well as joining in with national plans to celebrate our 90th Anniversary in 2021, probably with a combined regional event, again more

details to follow in due course.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Newshound and stories of our wonderful volunteers. Thank you one and all for the invaluable work you do in support of our breeding operations and the NBC. Without you, it wouldn't be possible to deliver the life changing services we do to blind and partially sighted people in need.

### **You really do make a difference!**

I must now go for a jog, having agreed (probably foolishly!) to enter the Great North Run in September in aid of Guide Dogs – wish me luck!

Thanks again and best wishes

**Matthew**

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## **Our Young Volunteer of the Year 2019**

**Volunteer Maddie won the NBC's award for young volunteer of the year in 2019 for her fabulous Mother's Day video featuring a brood bitch holder's experiences. Here she tells us about her passion for Guide Dogs.**

Maddie approached the NBC just over a year ago having just graduated from University. She says "I was working in the tv industry on a freelance basis and had some spare time on my hands. I'm not very good at sitting at home doing nothing and my Dad who works at Land Rover suggested Guide Dogs as a solution. I emailed John Garrett and originally was prepared to take on anything that was needed, but John had an idea which particularly utilized my

film skills, so it fitted the bill perfectly!"

Maddie had several meetings with John, eventually coming up with the idea to make a short film for Mother's Day featuring information about brood bitch holding. This could then be used across the NBC's social media platforms to promote volunteering in this area.

Maddie welcomed the challenge and found that she learned many new skills to add to her cv as a result. "I am trained as a camera assistant and currently work for an outside broadcaster. This means I take equipment to locations for filming events. These can be sporting, light entertainment or news based.

I am tech specific in that I maintain, fix, rig and operate the camera equipment and guarantee it for clients. So making my own video was very different in that it required me to be creative and work on my editing and story telling skills."

Maddie's brief was to create a film to raise awareness for the volunteers who look after brood bitches. It was a brand new area of learning for Maddie. She wanted to showcase what the role involves, why it is so great and encourage people to have a go and find out more information. She visited a family who had a pregnant brood bitch and talked to them about their experiences and reasons for volunteering in this role. Maddie says "the hardest thing about film making is making someone feel comfortable in front of the camera who isn't used to it. I thought this through and sent them a list of questions I would be asking in advance and then got feedback to see the areas they wanted to talk about. From there I was able to shape the questions I asked on camera and a storyline. I basically told the story from the family's perspective plus I got to spend time with the brood bitch and the puppies and I enjoyed it very much!"

During the video the family demonstrate how much they love the role of brood bitch holding, and it also includes film of their supervisor Szymon in action weighing puppies and so on.

Maddie is particularly passionate about getting other young people to try volunteering. "If young people tried volunteering they would see how rewarding it is. As a young person I feel that we have lots of things that fill our time that aren't necessarily productive and also we are



Volunteer, Maddie

encouraged at school just to focus on our career prospects. For me volunteering has built my confidence. I know now that I can approach a new client and work with them confidently and that comes from practising through volunteering. You could come for just an hour a week for example. It makes you more than two dimensional and can show you are enthusiastic about things on your cv."

**Maddie feels that she has learned a lot from her experience including new technical skills where she has improved her editing and reached out to business contacts for help. She has also learned an enormous amount about the charity itself which she can now share with others.**

## Maddie's message



**Her message to those thinking about taking the plunge and volunteering is:**

the best thing about volunteering for me is the access you get. I stepped forward and said I'd like to volunteer and John said yes, you can do this. He's very good at spotting what people are passionate about. If I hadn't stepped forward I wouldn't have had the privilege of visiting the family in their home or meeting the dog and puppies. There are so many opportunities that you can mould to suit you. So if you put yourself out there you will get the enjoyable experiences other people won't get and improve your skills too. It's a win win situation.



## London's Calling

**French born stud dog London has sired 59 puppies so far and is father to stud dog Gene and brood bitch Luna. Stud dog holder Richard is now semi retired having worked as a Police Officer for thirty years. He spends his time doing part time decorating jobs and volunteering for Guide Dogs. Richard's wife and daughter also volunteer.**

Richard's friend, also a Police Officer, who had a stud dog, first told him about breed stock holding and he got to hear about the scheme through him. Richard has had German Shepherds throughout his life and fell in love with them at an early age when his friend's mum had one. Richard and his family applied for a stud dog and originally took care of a handsome German Shepherd called Aden. Aden had one litter but was retired early due to some medical conditions, sadly passing away aged 9. Aden really enjoyed accompanying Richard out and about on collections as a retired dog. Richard says "we came to fundraising quite late

on, but the times Aden came out with us he loved doing it. Having him with us on those occasions made it really worthwhile and enjoyable."

The family spent a few months without a dog at home and then the opportunity to have London arose. Richard says "we love having a dog around as we are very doggie people and without Aden there was a big space in the house. We didn't rush to replace him and thought very carefully about having another one, making sure it would still fit in with our family life. We were actually happy to have any breed, but Debbie asked us as she knows we are essentially German Shepherd people. It was definitely love at first sight but personality wise it took us a bit of time to get to know each other. He has a totally different personality to Aden."

Richard is London's second holder and has had him since March last year.

He says “he has settled in very well and we have got a real attachment. He is very loving and close.” Richard says of stud dog holding “you have essentially got a free pet for whom you have the responsibility of its welfare. For example if you go on holiday you can board your dog at the NBC which is a great financial saving. You have to adhere to strict rules but it’s very much worthwhile for what you get back personally in terms of having a lovely dog. We can also give back to Guide Dogs through him as he can pay his way by going out and meeting people to raise awareness. He absolutely loves doing that. I would definitely say that stud dog holding is easier than brood bitch holding though, that takes a lot of commitment.”

As well as stud dog holding, Richard also spends a lot of time campaigning for Guide Dogs, particularly around the area of access. This role utilizes the many and varied skills he had as a Police Officer. Guide Dogs sends him leaflets and stickers regarding the obligation for restaurants, cafes etc. to allow access to assistance dogs and he visits local shopping areas to explain to shop owners the legal requirements.



“ Richard says there are many benefits from volunteering. “There is a feel good factor. My wife and I are both from the public service sector and you get into a particular mindset of wanting to help other people, a continuation of our work ethic if you like. We have met lots of good people and have a great new friendship circle separate to our work friends. It is great for post retirement and London is a local superstar!” He adds “I would urge anyone to do it, even if it’s only an hour every so often. You don’t need to have a dog to fundraise. You could help chaperone a guide dog owner and be involved with a dog that way. You need to look at how your life balance works, whether you have any spare capacity and whether it suits your lifestyle. It’s great for young people to do too.”

Richard has recently become a member of his local Northampton fundraising group along with his daughter. He is on the group committee and has taken over running the Facebook page. He says “it is a group of like minded people and there are lots of roles to do.” He would like to see more promotion of the local groups to encourage people to join and help to fundraise.

Richard concludes, “the week before last, I got changed into my Guide Dogs polo shirt and tried to leave the house. London leaned against the front door trying to shepherd me. I realised that he had spotted my outfit and assumed that he was automatically coming along too. He loves it so much, he doesn’t like being left behind!”

# Gentleman Gene

**Volunteer Vicki and her family hold a two year old German Shepherd stud dog who, because of his beautiful nature, is known as Gentleman Gene. Gene is also one of stud dog London's offspring by brood bitch Bernie.**

Volunteer Vicki has grown up around dogs having had experience with German Shepherds, Collies, Spaniels and a Great Dane. Having a dog to complete her young family became a priority. She says "we really wanted a dog as a family and we were undecided about how to go about getting one. We didn't want a puppy and although we had experience of rescue dogs we were a little bit cautious about what to do. We began talking to a person in the park with a gorgeous German Shepherd who pointed us towards the scheme at Guide Dogs. We hadn't known about it before then."

Vicki duly made an enquiry and attended an induction day. Her original intention was to have a brood bitch but after researching what was needed and meeting a holder, she decided that this would be too much to take on with two children. Debbie Stanley (Stud Dog Supervisor) suggested having a stud dog and this made perfect sense. Vicki's mum has always supported Guide Dogs and so the charity is "close to our hearts."

Vicki's husband really wanted a German Shepherd but the couple were told not to necessarily expect one as they were not generally placed with young families. They were happy to take any dog that Debbie felt would be suitable for them and the older children met a couple of dogs just to see how they would get on with different breeds.



Vicki and her family with SD Gene

Debbie phoned after six months and said "if you were ever going to have a German Shepherd, then this is the one!" Gene is very different in that he has a very calm temperament, he doesn't have a strong chase instinct and he is not vocal. It also so happened that his Puppy Walker in Scotland had children and as a consequence he is very used to being around them, and is calm and gentle. Vicki says "he thinks the children are his siblings!" She adds "it was love at first sight, we absolutely adore him!"

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Vicki says "the best thing about being a volunteer for us is the opportunity to have an amazing dog delivered to us. He is fully trained, has beautiful behaviour, no burden on us financially and he is helping to create guide dog puppies for the future. He fitted straight into our family and is phenomenal, it is such a privilege."

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Vicki has put Gene through his paces by passing both bronze and silver awards easily. She hopes to take the gold when the timing is right. Although she doesn't have time to volunteer regularly in other areas, she does take Gene to open day events to talk to people about the work of Guide Dogs. Although some people are a little wary of him because he is so big, most people love him and want to know all about him. She also encouraged her neighbor Sheila, a huge fan of dog care charities, to apply to be a volunteer puppy socialiser. She duly got the role and was able to help socialize some of Gene's puppies as a result.

Gene has sired one litter of puppies so far having been mated with German Shepherd Avie. She gave birth last July and the litter contained six girls and three boys. Although the family did not get to meet the puppies in person when they were born, they do have access to a special Facebook page which is keeping them up to date with photos and information from all of the puppy walkers. Gene's puppy walker has also been puppy walking Jace, one of Gene's daughters until she goes into training.



Vicki says ...

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Vicki says her son Ben who is just six months old has starting interacting with Gene. **“If Gene has enough he just gets up and walks away. He is so protective but in a very gentle way. He likes to lie next to the cot and the pushchair.”**

Vicki's older children Joseph (aged 8) and Annabelle (aged 6) both adore Gene and spend lots of time with him. Annabelle says “ he doesn't chase cats and he always lets us play with him.” Joseph says “he's fluffy, he's kind and very friendly with Ben the baby, he is a big doofuss!”

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# Lady Luna

**Brood bitch holder Sarah takes care of BB Luna who is a Sponsor a Puppy for Sainsburys. Luna will have her first litter in 2020 and is a daughter of stud dog London.**

Sarah's story with Guide Dogs began 32 years ago when she lived in a vicarage with her husband, a priest and young family. She says "we had a lovely garden, a happy family life and I thought puppy walking would fit in beautifully. I had also taught a girl who was blind at a primary school and became aware of many of the issues around sight loss." Sarah and her family puppy walked three puppies back to back, all yellow Labradors but all with very different personalities. She remembers one puppy diving through the cat flap and taking the whole thing with him around his middle as he'd grown so much! She says "the puppies came to church, out shopping and on

the school run with me and they all went on to be wonderful Guide Dogs finding their forever owners."

She says of puppy walking "you are essentially fostering a dog for Guide Dogs and doing your part towards the dog's eventual aim. You have to be proactive and you do need to plan ahead to ensure the puppies learn things at the right time. It is a fabulous thing to do with children. Although it is hard to part with them after a year, there is a great pleasure in seeing them matched and guiding and knowing you played a really important part in that. The children were very proud of "their" puppies. They still talk about them."

Many years later and after an extensive period away, Sarah and her husband returned to the Midlands and after speaking to a friend who knew about the breeding programme, decided to apply for a brood bitch. Very shortly afterwards they were given Luna a beautiful German Shepherd to take care of.



Sarah and BB Luna

“We have recently moved house and have a large paddock area, a kitchen with plenty of room for the whelping box and, just like the puppies in the past, Luna comes with us to church and out and about. She was a little aloof at first but we did a lot of intensive work with her and we gained her trust and after a couple of weeks it was clear that we belonged together. We have a little black and tan terrier called Maisie so the dogs are referred to as Little and Large, but Maisie is definitely the boss!”



Luna is due to come into season in April 2020 and Sarah hopes very much that puppies will arrive soon after. Sarah has previous experience of whelping too. She says, “many years ago I took in a stray dog who had puppies – not quite as carefully planned as Guide Dogs - and this dog always got on really well with the puppies being puppy walked and mothered them.”

Having Luna has proved to be an absolute joy to Sarah and her family. Her children are grown with children of their own. Sarah’s grand daughter Mia has a disability and she says “Luna has been a total bonus to Mia. Mia adores her, as do my other grandchildren and Luna is so gentle with them. My grandson also plans to help with the puppies and really understands what guide dogs do. My husband takes her on long walks.” Luna spends time at the nursing home where Sarah’s father lives and is popular there. She also goes to the primary school with Sarah to pick up the grandchildren.

Luna’s puppy walker Martin sang in the church choir and as soon as she was able, she attended church with him too. Martin shared that a member of the choir had been poorly and Luna instinctively went up to her whilst still a six month old puppy and sat with her of her own accord. Sarah says “these dogs are sensitive and kind with their heightened senses. Luna is always happiest shepherding us to make sure we in turn are happy.”

Sarah has just joined the local fundraising group for Daventry and has enjoyed attending the meetings and taking part in the fundraising events.

Last summer she held a special guide dogs garden party, hosting around 90 people, to help raise money for the charity. There is another brood bitch



holder locally who has offered to help Sarah with anything when Luna has puppies and there are also other breed stockholders and guide dog owners locally.

**She says “I am very enthusiastic about Luna and I think volunteering is such a creative thing to do. Very often people see you have a special dog and want to talk about her. I am able to describe how she fits into our life and how it is a lovely way to have a dog. Sometimes people are wary of German Shepherds but I am able to show she belongs to Guide Dogs and that she has a loving and gentle nature. I am impressed with how organized Guide Dogs is and also with their attention to detail. We have great support from our supervisor Su Price. I feel that I have a special connection with every guide dog that I see out working because of the sense of camaraderie and family Guide Dogs provides.”**



# Helping with Whelping

**Brood bitch holder Phillippa and puppy walkers Melvin and Kay are great friends. Melvin has helped Phillippa to deliver all of BB Vickie's puppies!**



Phillippa, Melvin and BB Vickie

Phillippa originally had a much loved pet Lurcher who died in 1998. As her two daughters became older, they longed for a dog but the family couldn't agree on a suitable breed. Phillippa happened to see a Guide Dogs bulletin for puppy walkers and thought this would be a great way to introduce a dog in to the home. Seven years ago she applied and Wendy a Labrador came to stay. The whole family became very attached and it was difficult to say goodbye after a year, but then Bianca, Misty and adopted dog Alex followed. Finally Phillippa puppy walked black Labrador Vickie who became a brood bitch. Phillippa says "it was very exciting, she settled in quickly and became part of the family. The only change we have had to make is to move the dining room for each litter

and she has had three litters so far all during the summer months. That has been great as it has meant they could spend a little time outside and we have lots of visitors coming to see them!"

Vickie has tended to have large litters so far producing 32 puppies in total. All of her puppies are black except for one yellow one in each of the first two litters and two yellows in the third. The stud dogs used have been Disney, Marcel and Benji (two yellow Labradors and a Golden Retriever).

Phillippa has no previous whelping experience and has undergone the extensive training by guide dogs for brood bitch holders. She has known Melvin and his wife Kay for five years having met through Guide Dogs and Melvin acts as Phillippa's helper when Vickie gives birth. Melvin says "it was a chance remark really to Phillippa. I really wanted to see puppies being born and she invited me along. I say I am her "birthing partner" which makes people laugh. I unofficially help her, so Phillippa does all of the technical parts for which you need training and I help to weigh the puppies, complete the records and clean up."

Both Phillippa and Melvin love the wonder of birth. Melvin says "it is such a relief when each puppy takes its first breath on its own. The wonder of it is that they are born, cleaned up and within a minute they are already feeding on their mum, nature is amazing."

Phillippa adds “during Vickie's last whelping, we thought she had finished producing puppies and went through all of the checks to make sure. In the early hours my daughter who was on night watch woke me to say more puppies were on the way. Vickie produced three more and the last one was the heaviest!”

Sometimes the pair have had to deal with the occasional emergency. One puppy had to be rushed to the vets late at night for treatment and fortunately she was saved. Vickie has proved to be a wonderfully attentive mum to her puppies and recovers very quickly, regaining her full condition.



BB Vicki and SD Benji

Phillippa has great praise for her supervisor Tim Bloomfield. “We learn a great deal from his visits. Last time we already knew that puppies can't see or hear when they are born, but Tim showed us the signs to look out for that show when they are developing. It's a real education.” She also does something very special for the puppies when they leave to start life in their new homes. “I sent the last litter of puppies away with an embroidered bag, a toy and a letter plus a four leafed clover from my garden.” If a

puppy's new holder contacts Phillippa, she loves to send them a towel with their name embroidered on it as well as offering the same to the puppies in her local puppy training class.

“Phillippa is persevering with keeping in touch with as many of her puppies' puppy walkers and guide dog owners as she can and uses a combination of texts, WhatsApp, email and Facebook for this.

“**Phillippa says the best thing about volunteering at Guide Dogs is the “feeling of family.” She says “I have made so many connections and have a large network of people which means I can get the support I need and can ask for anything or get help if needed. For example, if we accidentally run out of food, I can ring Guide Dogs and it will be with me straight away.”**”

Phillippa, Melvin and Kay are all members of the Solihull fundraising branch. Melvin and Kay are the coordinators of this group as well as being tour guides at Leamington Training School. They are always looking for new members for the fundraising group, particularly stud dog holders and brood bitch holders like Phillippa. They organize the street collections, attendance at events, quiz nights and talks. Phillippa says “ Vickie often attends fundraising events. It's really good to take her as she can help me tell the Guide Dogs story. Many people aren't aware you can look after breed stock and she has such a lovely nature, she is a great ambassador. She loves people and is known in our family as “licky Vickie!”

Phillippa has this advice for any potential volunteers. "It's fun at Guide Dogs, it's friendly and being a brood bitch holder isn't frightening. You might however end up doing more hours than you thought you would! It's so rewarding and perhaps more so being a brood bitch holder. The years come round so quickly between seasons. This summer is Vickie's last litter and we would love to have one back to puppy walk, with a secret wish that she will become a brood bitch too, and to carry on the line. We are definitely keeping our Vickie though."

Melvin says "we have done such a lot and have just wanted to give back. Recently my wife and I did an interview for the Solihull Observer featuring three of the puppies we had walked. Qualified guide dog Norma, Pickle who had almost finished puppy walking and Inver who had just started puppy walking. We expected it to be a small article but ended up on the front page which was amazing. I can honestly say volunteering is the best thing we've ever done, more rewarding than our careers, we love it!"

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## Did you know?

### All About Dog Care and Welfare

**Erica Cromack is a Dog Care Technician at the National Breeding Centre and has worked for Guide Dogs for 25 years. She has always wanted to work with animals and has a particular passion for brood bitches and their puppies having spent some time as a brood bitch supervisor too. Erica has her own dogs, retired brood bitches Dusty and Joanie, withdrawn guide dog in training Zaggy and springer spaniel Harry. Here Erica tells us all about dog care and welfare.**

There are two different shifts at the NBC, a daytime one starting at 7.30am and one later in the day incorporating an overnight stay. There are always staff on site to take care of the dogs and ensure their welfare. There are several blocks to look after, housing puppies, stud dogs, brood bitches, a whelping area and the hospital area. Both puppy block and

the adult blocks are very busy. The young puppies need feeding frequently, socialising, spending and their block is scrubbed down and fresh bedding put out each day. The adults are fed and let out to spend. Their block is scrubbed out and mopped taking care that dogs are put back in dry areas. The Welfare Technicians check the dogs and puppies for any health issues and have a responsibility each day to deal with anything that arises by phoning their supervisor or the vet and ensuring the dogs are well and happy.

The Kennel Technicians are designated a block for a year and then swap around. For example, a year looking after puppy block may be followed by a year in stud dog block.

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Erica says “we are hands on in looking after health and welfare, we spend time grooming the dogs which is really good for bonding with them whilst also checking them for any health issues and we also recognise the importance of environmental enrichment so the majority of dogs actively enjoy coming in to kennels.

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Obviously they are also happy to go home too. So we are not just looking at their physical health and welfare but their mental health too incorporating walks, sometimes very basic agility, giving them various toys such as kongs and stuffed bones and so on. The majority of dogs will have kennel companions unless they are being particularly dominant, at mating time for example, when they will have a kennel to themselves.”

In Whelping Block, staff try to create a more homely environment and make playtime important for the mums to be during their seven week stay. Erica says “whelping is my favourite thing and quite often it happens in the middle of the night. The sweetest moment is when the pups are bedded out and the mum is happy and everything has gone to plan, it's just the best feeling. I often find a toy that the mum has loved during her time here and send it home with her.”

The broods come into their block when they are in season which can be every six to eight months even when they aren't going to be mated. This is to protect their season and give peace of mind to their holders. They stay for around three weeks which is a long time for them to be away from home, but is a great opportunity for staff to bond with them and know them more. Holders can phone anytime but not visit. Stud dogs come



Erica and SD Taz

in for a much shorter time but again it is a great opportunity for staff members to know the dogs better.

Every week there is “Trip Day” in puppy block. This is the day the puppies go to their new puppy walkers, so the day before it is important for Welfare Technicians to go in and check that they are fit, healthy and happy and also to prepare all the things to make the day run smoothly. This includes ensuring the correct puppies go on the right trips and then welcoming in new litters from the brood bitch holders. These experiences are huge for the puppies so it is vital that staff take the utmost care of their needs. Puppies coming in are given their vaccination and a microchip.

There is a lot of volunteer help in all of the blocks too. Some volunteers exercise the adult dogs daily in the grass runs and the paddocks on site. They take a dog at a time for a one to one experience of outdoor fun and entertainment. There are also puppy socialiser volunteers who play with the puppies encouraging them to get used to people and a different environment.

Then there are the puppy drivers who take the puppies to their new puppy walkers and collect the litters to bring in. The centre is open all year round and volunteers come in at weekends too.

Erica also volunteers for Guide Dogs. "I love doing the puppy helper experiences and seeing people fall in love with the puppies. This is a once in a lifetime job. I like that the outcome is good and that the charity takes such good care of the health of each dog. I love that the dogs help to raise money. The puppy helper experience reinforces the charity as visitors are mesmerized by the whole story. I still

get excited if I see a Guide Dog out and about in town."

Erica's advice to those thinking of volunteering is "if you love dogs and people, you will thoroughly enjoy doing lots of different roles here, whether it is playing with the puppies or adult dogs, doing administration or driving, there is generally something to suit all tastes and it is a very worthwhile thing to do."

She adds **"Although it is tiring at times I feel privileged and blessed to have such a fantastic job doing lots of different things, caring for the dogs and having great friends."**

## Welcome to Dog Club

**Guide Dogs offers all breed stock holders the opportunity to gain the three Kennel Club Good Citizen Dog Scheme Awards of Gold, Silver and Bronze.**

Guide Dogs' dog club has been running for fourteen years. The group meets regularly but not in the Summer or Christmas holidays. There are usually twelve to a class and holders are generally but not always new to dog handling. An email is sent out when classes are coming up and spaces allocated on a first come first served basis.

The aim of each award is to assess the ability of the handler as well as the dog and although it is taken seriously, there is still a lot of fun!

Each award consists of ten exercises, working on more basic skills with the

bronze award and learning more complicated exercises through silver and gold. The awards incorporate all aspects of dog care welfare, road walking, recall, car journeys, lead walking and food control to name just some of the things covered. The dogs and handlers are all tested by an examiner to see if they have reached the standards necessary to pass and are then given their award certificate.

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Debbie Stanley SDS, says "we promote the scheme and would really encourage people to do it. It is a great way to meet new people and develop a deeper bond with your dog, while learning top quality dog handling skills. Quite often we have brand new dogs and we make the learning fun."

”

To date the number of dogs who have passed each award is –

<b>Bronze</b>	<b>339</b>
<b>Silver</b>	<b>271</b>
<b>Gold</b>	<b>112</b>

**Many thanks to Peter and Yolande, Sarah and Mini, Sandra and Sheena, Glynis and Jackie, Chris and Georgia, Sarah and Saffron and Jim with Trevor who let Newshound sit in on their dog training session and take photos.**



# Hello

Hi everyone, and welcome to our first NBC Newshound of the new year, one that is well underway by now. This year promises changes within the charity which you may have heard about. Whether you are aware of these changes or not, there will be more information shared with you in the coming weeks around our brand refresh, Stakeholder Events and potential changes to volunteer clothing.

These issues were discussed at our January Volunteer Voices meeting and information will be communicated to you as soon as it is available. Otherwise, this key communication initiative remains under review, the outcome of which will be shared with you towards the end of the year.

**Therefore, if you have any comments or feedback please contact:**

- Christina.sibbald@guidedogs.org.uk - **Brood Bitch Holder Rep.**
- Peter.meads@guidedogs.org.uk - **Stud Dog Holder Rep.**
- Sharon.broer@guidedogs.org.uk - **Stud Dog Holder Rep.**
- Yvonne.barnes@guidedogs.org.uk - **Admin & Reception Support Rep**
- Ann.cooper@guidedogs.org.uk - **Drivers Rep**
- Stephanie.hill@guidedogs.org.uk - **Tour Guides Rep**
- Angela.cutter@guidedogs.org.uk - **Puppy Socialiser & Dog Care Support Rep**
- Mark.pavey@guidedogs.org.uk - **Photographers/Photographers Asst. Rep**

If you have trouble contacting your reps using any of the above email addresses, we also have a VolunteerVoicesNBC@guidedogs.org.uk general email address you can use instead.

On a more positive note, the window for our local volunteer awards will open during the second week of March, so please be thinking of an individual, or group of volunteers you wish to nominate and I will send through the details as a reminder.

I also plan to revive our role-specific coffee mornings and volunteer information days, to improve communication and update you on work in Guide Dogs with which you may be unfamiliar. Therefore, please feel free to contact me with any suggestions and I will see what I can do.

Our volunteer welcome days are a good example of such an opportunity, as they can help you understand the bigger picture of our organizational structure, strategy, services and support. You can also learn about common eye conditions and how to guide a blind or visually impaired person.

Our welcome days were originally conceived as welcome events for volunteers and staff, but several long standing NBC volunteers have attended them and found them informative and useful opportunities to network with others in the Guide Dogs family. Therefore please contact me if you wish to know more (details at end of newsletter).

Finally we are still struggling to recruit brood bitch holders, however, we now have a project group working on different aspects of this challenge. Therefore, please contact me if you have the time and would like to get involved more proactively than just by sharing your story as and when the opportunity arises. Regards and thanks for all the support you give us, we could not help get blind and visually impaired people out and about without you!

Regards and thanks.

**John Garrett**  
Volunteering Consultant

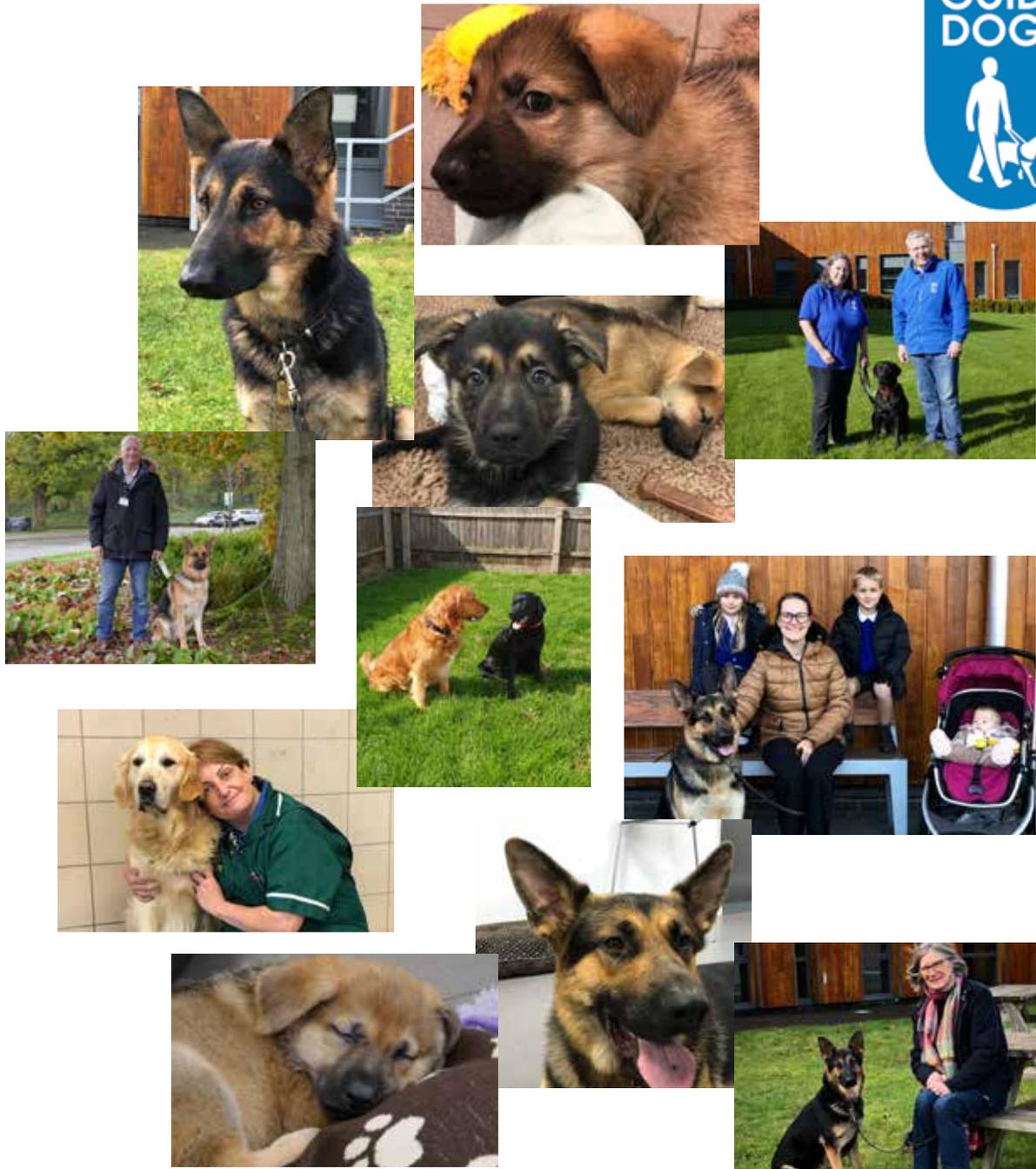
**T:** 0345 1430216  
**E:** john.garrett@guidedogs.org.uk



Puppy Gallery



In support of



**For more information about volunteering opportunities please contact:**

**[john.garrett@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:john.garrett@guidedogs.org.uk)**

**Guide Dogs National Breeding Centre**

Banbury Road, Bishop's Tachbrook, Warwickshire, CV33 9WF

**tel:** 0345 143 0216 • **web:** [www.guidedogs.org.uk](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk)

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