

Assistance Dogs

Caring



Companions



Assistance Dogs UK

A voluntary coalition of assistance dog organisations

**Assistance Dogs UK
is a voluntary collation of assistance
dog organisations that have been accredited
by one of the international standards bodies
in assistance dog training and welfare.**

**ADUK is on a mission to elevate public awareness
and educate service providers about highly trained
assistance dogs and the essential rights of the
disabled people who rely on them.**

**We bring together member organisations to pool
their knowledge and expertise, generating a wealth
of information and guidance. Through these
collaborative efforts, ADUK members and candidates
create best practices, developing their skills and
expertise collectively.**

**Together, we champion the transformative impact
of highly trained assistance dogs, celebrating
the remarkable work of our members and the
lives they touch.**



Autism Dogs Charity



**Our Assistance Dogs
help to make transformative changes
to our beneficiaries' lives, including
increasing independence, reducing the frequency
and severity of meltdowns, increasing participation
in daily activities, promoting a healthier lifestyle,
enabling access to public places, improving sleep
patterns, and so much more!**

**Through a unique approach to providing human
support - running alongside the dog training - we are
unlike other organisations, providing the family with
the tools to assist both the handler and the dog.
Our qualifications and approach to the programme
enable us to deliver the programme responsibility,
with the organisation being acknowledged for
dealing with some of the most complex and
challenging cases successfully.**

**Run by autistic people for autistic people, Autism
Dogs Charity is the most qualified programme
of its type. We are the only organisation of our
type to be awarded the Autism Advanced
Accreditation Specialist Award from
the National Autistic Society.**



Max's story - written by his Mum Emma

Life before Harry the Assistance Dog

At 18 months Max was struck by a rare illness.

Unable to keep food and water down, we watched our baby deteriorate rapidly and his life was in the balance. By a miracle he pulled through but immediately we noticed a change, he had rapidly regressed by months and the Max we knew was no more. Now unable to verbalise, walk, and with no eye contact, our son disappeared into himself. Judged too young to label with ASD, he was given a standard developmental delay diagnosis and we had no idea of the long road we had ahead of us.

Max thrived in his own way, he loved nursery and his key people but he really struggled with loud sounds, overload, crowds and social situations.

It was an emotional, horrible, stressful and soul destroying 9 years until Max's Autism diagnosis became official.

But now what? The diagnosis was only a name. The resources were too limited, the individual understanding so constricted that we were still dealing with violent meltdowns, night terrors, refusals to leave the house, constant screaming and violent stimming. Every day was a terrible battle - What would happen today? Who will take the hits? What can we do to make this less traumatic for Max and for our other children?

We felt broken. The lack of sleep and the feeling of letting everyone down overwhelmed us, and we realised that the diagnosis didn't bring any miracles or the answers we needed. We tried everything we could. Parent advice classes, groups with other ASD parents, OT, physio, therapy and outside support from the National Autistic Society - where I started to read about autism assistance dogs.

We researched the help available and found that many charities will only offer assistance to children up to age 7, but luckily, we were guided by ADUK to Autism Dogs Charity. They are the only charity that is a member of ADUK and ADI that is also accredited by the National Autistic Society.





Max's story - written by his Mum Emma

Life with Harry the Assistance Dog

Harry has been with us now for just over 2 years and has completely changed Max's world. Harry helps Max get out and about; he is not only an amazing support, but also Max's safe place. Knowing Harry is with him gives Max confidence to go out, but also enables him to stay longer at places where before we would either not go, be faced with meltdowns, or have to leave early.

Having Harry in our lives has meant we have been able to go on holiday!

We can also attend appointments at the hospital, GP, and dentist. On days when Max struggles with school, Harry has been amazing in walking him into school and doing Deep Pressure Therapy (DPT) when required. This enables Max to take part in education, where previously we have lost days of learning. We are already planning his post-secondary education where we hope Harry will attend the next setting with Max each day.

At home Max's meltdowns have massively reduced. Over the 2 years, Harry has obviously honed into Max's needs due to his training, but also Max has learnt what he needs from Harry and how best he helps him. Max lays down for DPT, cuddles and gains comfort from Harry to regulate himself. Harry has not only changed Max's world, but he has changed us as a family. We have much less stress and worry, and we have learnt so much from the Autism Dogs Charity team and the other families that they put us in touch with.

Having an autistic child can feel so overwhelming and sometimes lonely, it's wonderful to have a band of people who understand.

We've said from the start that we found a home with the Autism Dogs Charity, but really, we found a village: an amazing set of staff and other families that offer 24/7 support and kindness! Being on this journey is the best thing we ever did both for Max and the rest of the family.







Canine Partners is a registered charity that transforms the lives of adults aged 18 and over with physical disabilities by partnering them with assistance dogs.

Our amazing dogs bring a greater independence and quality of life to their partners, offering security, companionship, and practical help with everyday household tasks.

These life-changing dogs also provide psychological and social benefits including increased independence, confidence, social interaction and self-esteem. We rely on donations and legacies to fund the creation of our life-transforming partnerships.

Canine partners are carefully matched to the applicants' needs and lifestyle, no matter how challenging. They are trained to help with everyday tasks such as opening and closing doors, unloading the washing machine, picking up dropped items, pressing buttons and switches and fetching help in an emergency. They can even help people to get undressed and remove a card from an ATM!



Wren and Darcy



Since I was a child,
I've struggled with health problems.
Then in 2012, I had a bout of glandular fever.
Following on from that I was diagnosed with
Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and later on Postural Tachycardia
Syndrome and Ehlers Danlos Syndrome. During that time,
my mobility, fatigue levels and pain levels got worse.

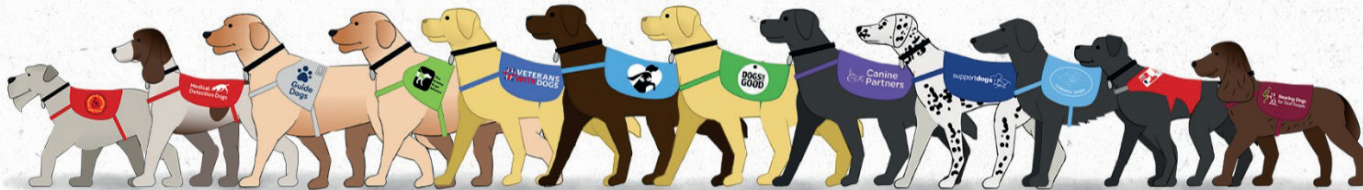
I was unable to live anything like the life I had envisaged. My joints dislocate regularly, I have to wear braces, splints and supports, and be very careful about how I move. I often have to use a wheelchair or on better days I use my crutch. If I over-exert myself, stand up too quickly or if I'm upright for too long, I either pass out or I get very dizzy and very unwell. My fatigue and pain levels are very high so I'm dealing with exhaustion daily.

I need help doing the physical things that are part of daily living, such as folding laundry and putting it away because there's so much standing up, bending over, and moving which can cause issues. When I was at my lowest, I couldn't do anything – I couldn't cook for myself, I needed assistance showering and I rarely left the house. It was incredibly isolating, and my world shrunk to the size of my flat. Everything was dictated by whether I was well enough to do XYZ, and the answer was usually no.

My mental health was at the worst point it had ever been. Depressed and lonely, it was very anxiety-inducing to think that if something happened to me, I'd be by myself and there would be nothing I could do. It was one of the loneliest periods in my life and it was a struggle at times to see how I could continue living like that. I was single at the time, and I thought no one is going to want this.

I've needed the support of either carers or a personal assistant since 2015, which was incredibly difficult to accept initially. This was supposed to be when the world would be my oyster and I would go and be young, do exciting things and live an exciting life. That's when I came across Canine Partners.

When I first met Darcey, I thought she was gorgeous and adorable. My disability and my ill health had taken centre stage – people were asking **"What's wrong with you?" "What do you have?"**. It's a natural human curiosity, but it effectively made me feel like that was all people saw. As soon as I started going out with Darcey, the first thing people asked me about was her, which I could talk about all day.



Wren and Darcy

I still have a life and the potential to do more things. I started having to go outside every day because I had a dog to walk and while that was difficult at first, it has meant that I've re-entered the world in a way that I haven't been able to. It's difficult to explain how massive that is if it hasn't happened to you. The help that Darcey gives me in the little day-to-day tasks enables me more energy to be part of the world again.

I still have a Personal Assistant who comes a couple of times a day and helps with things that Darcey can't. She helps me do the dishes and fold up laundry, which might be tricky for a dog to do without opposable thumbs!

Since having Darcey, I have reclaimed some of my pre-illness bravery. It's very hard not to be careful when you know that everything you do can make you very unwell. I had written myself off. I felt like I would be stuck in one place, unable to do much of anything and just existing rather than living. I resigned myself to that future, but Darcey was the stone in the road that changed the course of the wheel.

I'm currently planning to retrain as an art therapist. I want to be able to have a positive impact on the world, and that wouldn't have been even within my wildest imagination. Without Canine Partners and Darcey, my life would be in exactly the same place— nothing would have changed.

I think I'd have been stagnating in a very small life and be in a very unhappy place.

The most significant benefit of having Darcey is the emotional support she provides. Although that isn't her primary duty, it has been one of the most significant improvements in my life since I was paired with her. Thanks to her, I've been able to do things I thought were off the cards for me. I'm getting married next October and Darcey will be the ring bearer — she came on our first date.

Darcey introduced structure back into my life and that has meant that I am able to build again. She's given me back a lot of confidence and with that, I've regained my independence. I no longer feel like I rely solely on the people around me — I can be my own person again and Darcey is a massive part of that.





Dog A.I.D.

Dog A.I.D. is a national charity that changes lives by enabling physically Disabled people across the U.K. to train their own pet dog to become an accredited Assistance Dog. Dog A.I.D. works in partnership with a network of dedicated and experienced volunteer dog trainers who coach the charity's clients to train their dog using reward-based, positive techniques.

A Dog A.I.D. trained Assistance Dog has an incredible impact on the life of its owner by supporting them to carry out day-to-day tasks such as helping them to dress, retrieving items, emptying the washing machine and bringing items from shelves whilst out shopping. Outcomes for people who have an Assistance Dog include:

- 🐾 **increased independence**
- 🐾 **increased self-confidence**
- 🐾 **improved mental wellbeing**
- 🐾 **reduction in social isolation**
- 🐾 **reduced reliance on family members and/or carers**
- 🐾 **increased opportunities, with many of our clients being able to return to work or education, supported by their qualified Assistance Dog**



Ben and Phoebe



Phoebe, a fox-red Labrador, came to my family to be our pet dog in 2018 when she was 12 weeks old. Her family had to relocate due to work and couldn't take pets to their new accommodation. She had already had three homes by the time she came to us but once I met Phoebe, we instantly had a bond, and she took her rightful place on my lap.



Within about a year of having Phoebe, we started noticing that she started on her own trying to help me in day-to-day life. We found this amazing and naturally were quite curious on if we could train her even more but, we were nervous as me and Phoebe already had a strong bond, and we didn't want to send her off to be trained. After a number of days researching online, we came across Dog A.I.D. and were instantly interested, reaching out to them due to the fact that the charity trains dogs alongside their owners.

We started Assistance Dog training officially once Phoebe was 2. However, we were working alongside Sarah (our volunteer trainer) on generic dog training from when she was around 18 months old. The Assistance Dog training for Phoebe ran through 2020 and 2021. Spending the year training her predominantly online during COVID-19 was definitely a challenge... especially with my mum trying to point the camera in the right direction to show tasks to our trainer. Phoebe completed her Assistance Dog training in July 2021.

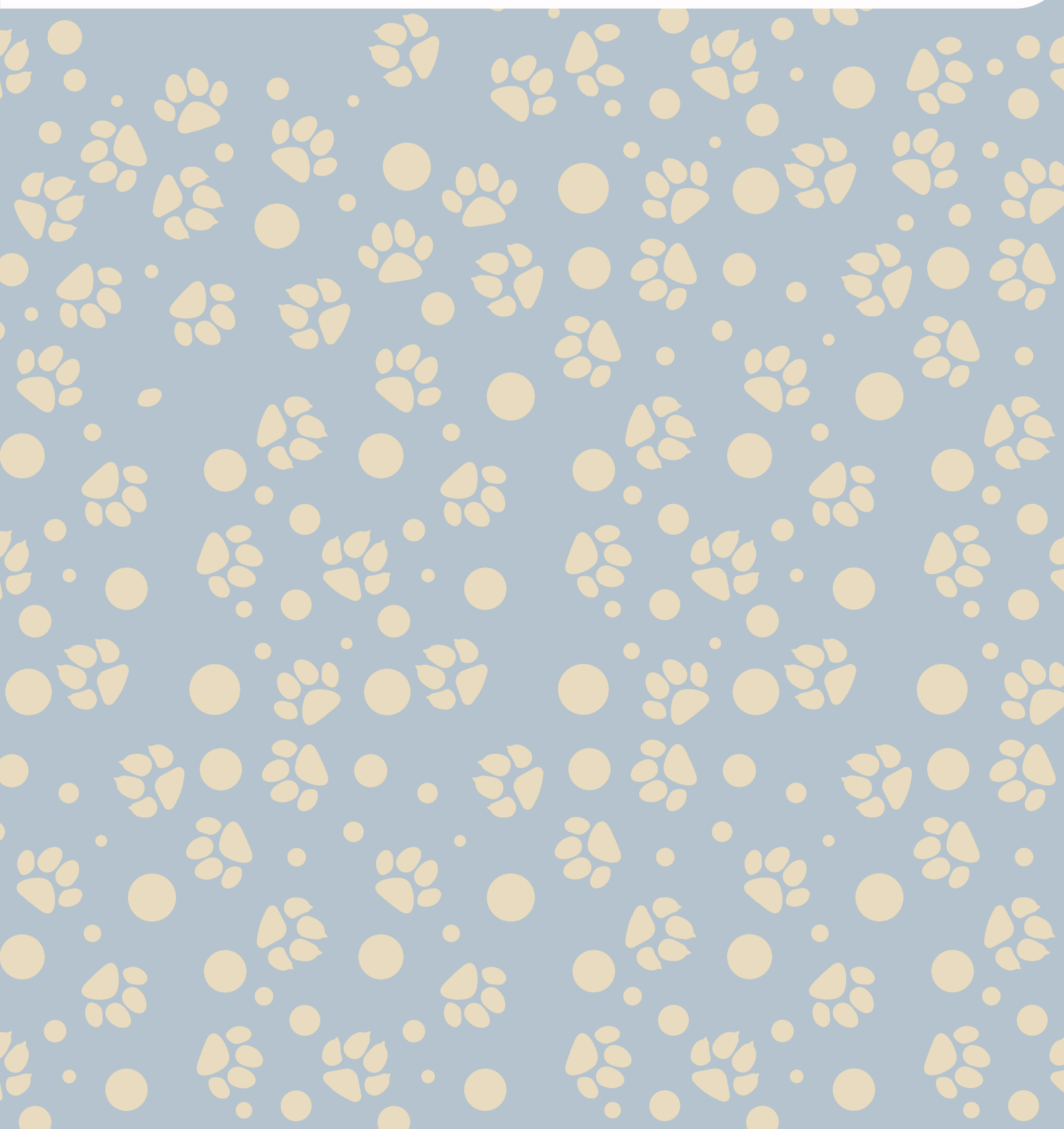
Phoebe helps with taking my clothes off and bringing me new clothes every morning. She can open cupboard doors in the kitchen and bring me the post whenever it is delivered. She comes out with me wherever I go out and about and, in the supermarket, will help put items into shopping bags (even if it's her own treats) and will hand over items like a wallet to people on the till if I can't reach. Training Phoebe to go round shops came quite late in the game in terms of her training due to us isolating for most of the whole of 2020. We thought this would be a challenge, but she's adapted a lot quicker than we thought.

I cannot actually put in full words the change that having Phoebe as my Assistance Dog has made to my life. Having a dog who goes out anywhere with me and pick things up that I always end up dropping means that I can actually now more than ever be part of society in a way I couldn't before.

It's also been helping me socially as everyone who I meet now always wants to say 'hello' and ask about the cute dog by my side.

However, above all the help Phoebe gives me a regular basis, what this training has given me a bond I haven't experienced with a pet before and due to our connection, it's safe to say me and Phoebe are true friends for life.







LIFE CHANGING DEVOTION

We all know the difference dogs can make to our lives, but for the people they support our dogs can actually make life possible. We make life changing differences for people with disabilities through the power of expertly trained dogs.

Our charity brings trained dogs and people together to help them overcome specific challenges, in order to enrich and improve the lives of both. Our assistance dogs support adults and children with a range of disabilities and also children with autism.

Our community dogs and their specialist handlers help people to improve their independence, wellbeing and skills. Our Family Dog team gives advice and support to help families with an autistic child to get the most out of their relationship with their pet dog.

Our Vision is to create "A world in which everyone and every community is able to benefit from the help of a trained dog."



Emma, Albie and Dougie

Having Dougie makes me feel like I've won the lottery. No human can give us what he gives us. He gives us life, opportunities, joy, laughter... I'm so proud to have him in our family.

Emma's son, Albie is an energetic, engaging, chatty boy, who is constantly commentating on life. However, his autism can make a lot of things extremely challenging for him. "He's unaware of his surroundings and is easily distracted, so prior to getting Dougie, going out safely was impossible," says Emma. "Generally, it felt like the world wasn't ready for Albie. Even popping out to the corner shop was a military operation. Simple things were overwhelming and utterly exhausting."

Dougie is a very special black Labrador who has been trained by Dogs for Good as an Autism Assistance Dog. His careful training and matching to just the right family, means that he can help Albie in a variety of ways, both practically and emotionally. According to Emma, just by his very 'Dougieness', he has broken down the day-to-day barriers that made accessing life so difficult. Home is Albie's safe space and given the choice, he'd rather not go out at all. He has difficulty with transitions such as putting his shoes on, leaving the house and going to school. "Transferring the focus onto Dougie means that Albie's thought process is redirected," explains Emma. "Dougie will get Albie's shoes for him, then we'll put on Dougie's jacket and lead and the thing we're going to do is totally reframed because of Dougie's presence. Dougie being with us means that Albie's attention is focussed entirely on his best friend. That brings safety and a level of calm that I never thought possible and we go out and do so much more." So much so that

Albie now has a wish list of things he's said he'd like to do with Dougie.

"It covers everything from treasure hunting on the beach, forest adventures and food at the pub, apparently!" laughs Emma.

"All are things we'd never have been able to successfully achieve before Dougie.

"Albie is keen to confirm this, too. "The best thing about Dougie is we go on adventures together - they are great!" he says.





Emma, Albie and Dougie

Dougie's presence provides a social talking point which in turn, brings positive visibility "Just like anyone else, Albie doesn't like being stared at. But the way he reacts to life and situations sometimes draws a lot of eyes upon us. Dougie being with us makes it clear that we need a little bit of extra kindness, not judgement. And it's astonishing. People don't always know how to talk about autism, but they know how to talk about dogs and I'm more than happy to fill in the knowledge gaps!" Emma says that Albie connects with Dougie in a way he can't with humans and Dougie delivers a level of emotional support that is, in her own words, magical.

**"Dougie helps me when I am sad," says Albie.
"He keeps me safe, and I keep him safe - we look after each other!"**

Emma says that Dougie knows when Albie needs him and importantly, he also knows when to give Albie space. "He's intuitive and consistent, and sometimes, for Albie, only Dougie will do," she says. "He's able to rid Albie of any sadness so much quicker than I can. He remedies things in a way that doesn't ask anything of Albie really. He'll gently nudge Albie and then give him a few licks, which in turn makes Albie giggle and the sadness melts away. It's so simple and it changes everything." He's here for Albie but he works his magic on us all."

**The final words are from Albie
who sums everything
up beautifully...**

**"Dougie is my family,
I love him!"**







Guide Dogs

Guide Dogs has been at the side of people with sight loss for more than 90 years. It all began in 1931 when two pioneering women trained four German Shepherds to support veterans blinded in WWI. We are now the world's largest breeder and trainer of working dogs. Our highly trained dogs give their owners freedom and independence in their daily life, supporting them to get out and about with confidence, whether that's to work, school or the shops.

Thanks to our dedicated staff, volunteers and supporters, we have partnered over 36,000 people with a guide dog and transformed the lives of thousands more through our other services.

Guide Dogs is here to support people with sight loss live the life they choose. To find out more, visit www.guidedogs.org.uk



Scott and Milo

Growing up on a farm, Scott always knew he wanted to be a farmer. But when he lost his sight, his life changed dramatically. Worried how he would continue to look after his two young daughters, the family reached out to Guide Dogs. Now paired with guide dog Milo, Scott has the confidence to pursue new studies, a new career and is now on the way to representing his country in Judo at the highest level of the sport. It's not the life he dreamed of, it's one he could never have possibly imagined!

"Life changers isn't just a quote – it's so true. Milo has saved my life in more ways than one. From my bad mental health, to physically saving my life whilst out walking on the streets. My whole family have seen a change in me since Milo came along."

Scott started losing his sight a few years ago, experiencing a slow deterioration as a complication from diabetes. But in 2019 whilst working as a dairy farmer his sight suddenly went cloudy.

Scott was diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy. He struggled to adjust to life with sight loss. He felt he'd lost his independence, and unable to work or be as hands on with his children, his purpose too. From once being active and always outdoors, he spent more time inside the house.

"I remember quite early on my wife went out and left the TV on for me as background noise. It was on a timer and at some point, it went off. And I just sat on the sofa in the kitchen for hours in silence too scared to move. I didn't feel safe."

But things began to change when the family reached out to Guide Dogs. Scott loves animals, so applying for a guide dog felt like the perfect thing to help him build confidence and independence. In 2020 he was matched with golden retriever Milo.

"When I am walking with Milo it's like a weight has been lifted."

"I put all my trust in Milo because he is only focused on one thing, keeping me safe."





Scott and Milo

And Milo's impact has reached beyond just guiding. Scott's wife Amanda says:

"Life throws you a curve ball sometimes.

And this was ours. But this wonderful dog [Milo] has made Scott happy again and taken our lives in a different direction. I don't have to worry anymore because I know Scott is happy, and the girls are happy. Happiness is what Milo has brought to us."

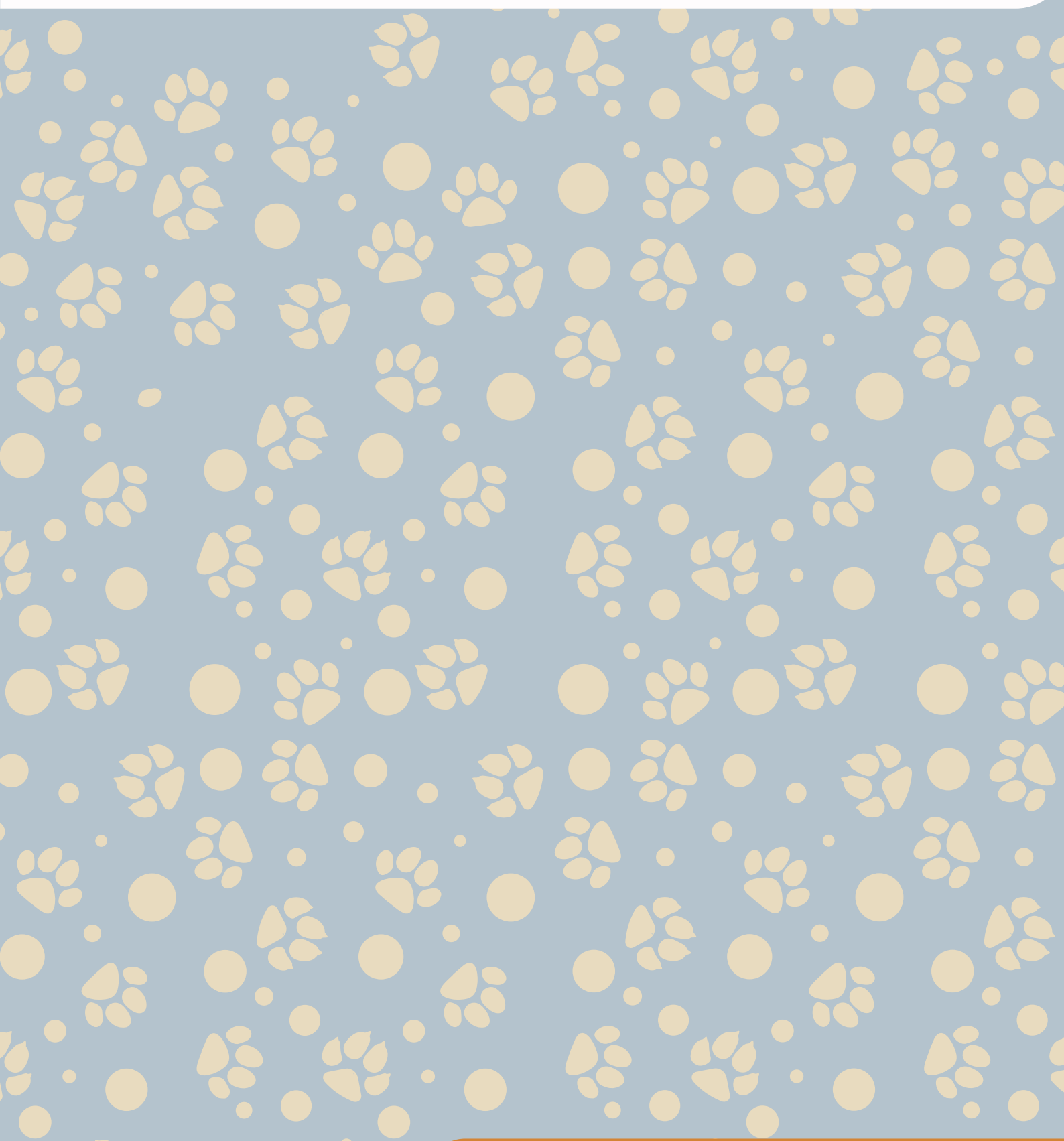
As Scott and Milo's partnership developed, with renewed confidence Scott decided to return to college. He has since completed a university degree and is about to start a Masters training as a counsellor to help others going through sight loss. "The thought of somebody being left, not knowing where to turn or who to speak to makes me feel really sad. I want to be that person who can help them and give them someone to speak to and through."

With the renewed confidence of having Milo by his side, Scott looked for a new hobby and began Judo training. In two short years of competing, he has been selected to join the Paralympics Potential Squad for 2028. "When I step onto the mat, the disability just disappears. It's the only sport where world class players train together – sighted or non-sighted." Scott is now hoping to represent Paralympics GB in Los Angeles games in 2028, with Milo by his side working hard at the gym and training most days to make that dream a reality.

"I'm proud. I'm proud from where I was to where I've come to know."

"It's like every day with Milo is an adventure. It's always different. I think I'm a stronger person. I think I'm a more approachable person as well. And I think I'm a better person since I've lost my sight to be completely honest. I really do."







Hearing Dogs for Deaf People

Hearing Dogs for Deaf People is a national charity that trains dogs that help deaf people leave loneliness behind and reconnect with life. The dogs do this through constant companionship and emotional support, giving deaf people the confidence to reconnect with their family, friends and community around them.

Just as importantly, they help by alerting deaf people to important and life-saving sounds like the smoke alarm, alarm clock, oven timers and even baby monitors. Their burgundy coats also signal to the public that their partner is deaf. This combination of practical assistance and lifelong friendship can be completely life changing.

Since our humble beginnings in 1982, we have partnered thousands of our clever dogs with deaf people. At the moment, we have over 1,100 working hearing dog partnerships across the UK.

We are also helping thousands more people through our other personalised services, such as our Helpdesk and support groups.



Alexis and Rudy

A partnership filled with love and laughter

Before Rudy came into Alexis's life, she struggled to talk to people, especially about her deafness

Alexis's hearing loss is caused by something called microtia. Microtia is a condition that children are born with where the ear is underdeveloped. Alexis was fitted with Bone Anchored Hearing Aids (BAHAs) at the age of five. Whilst they helped, Alexis still found some things challenging, particularly school.

Early struggles

"Alexis's early school life was a real challenge for her" Alexis's mum, Sam, tells us. "She really struggled with her confidence, despite having additional support from a Teacher of the Deaf and a Speech and Language Therapist since nursery. She was shy and struggled to talk about her hearing loss. She also found school difficult due to the large class sizes and so much background noise." School was made even harder for Alexis because of her lack of sleep. Alexis takes her BAHAs off before going to bed. At nighttime, her world is completely silent, and this scared Alexis.

Now, she sleeps soundly at night with hearing dog Rudy by her side.

School now

A confident and happy Alexis tells us: "Before, I couldn't really sleep. I had the light on always and that made me really tired, so I found it hard to concentrate at school. I don't need the light on anymore because Rudy sleeps close to me in my room and makes me feel safe. When I take my hearing aids off, I know that he's listening. I don't worry because I know Rudy will wake me up if there's any danger."

After a good night's sleep, thanks to Rudy, Alexis gets ready for the school day with Rudy's help again.

Sam says: "Alexis loves mornings now because Rudy wakes her up for school with big kisses and morning cuddles when her alarm clock goes off. She looks forward to school now!" Indeed, since Rudy was partnered with Alexis in August 2021, she has been excelling at school.

"Having Rudy gave Alexis so much confidence in herself and in her studies" Sam tells us. Alexis continues:

"I studied hard because Rudy was there to comfort me. Without him, I probably would have struggled."



Alexis and Rudy

Alexis started secondary school, a big step and one she faced with complete confidence – a far cry from the insecure person she once was.

“Having Rudy has transformed Alexis’ life at school, in social situations, in her willingness to take part and join in with other children” says Sam. “She is so much more confident communicating with people. She’s a different child. She has even joined after school clubs – something she didn’t have the confidence to do before. When we go to meet Alexis from school, Rudy knows exactly which door to wait at. They really are best friends.”

Sam says there’s no longer any sign of the severe anxiety that affected every aspect of Alexis’s life before Rudy: “This was always most severe when attending the many hospital appointments at Great Ormond Street Hospital. Rudy helps her feel safe and calm, so attending these appointments is no longer a challenge. We hadn’t realised quite how much of a difference Rudy made until the very hot weather prevented us from taking him with us to the hospital. Alexis had a very hard time being there without him.”

These changes in Alexis were almost instant. When Alexis first got Rudy, her parents heard a sound they’d never really heard before – laughter. “They bonded straight away. Alexis didn’t laugh before Rudy. When we first got Rudy, we could hear her in her bedroom giggling. Now she doesn’t stop laughing. It’s so lovely to hear.”

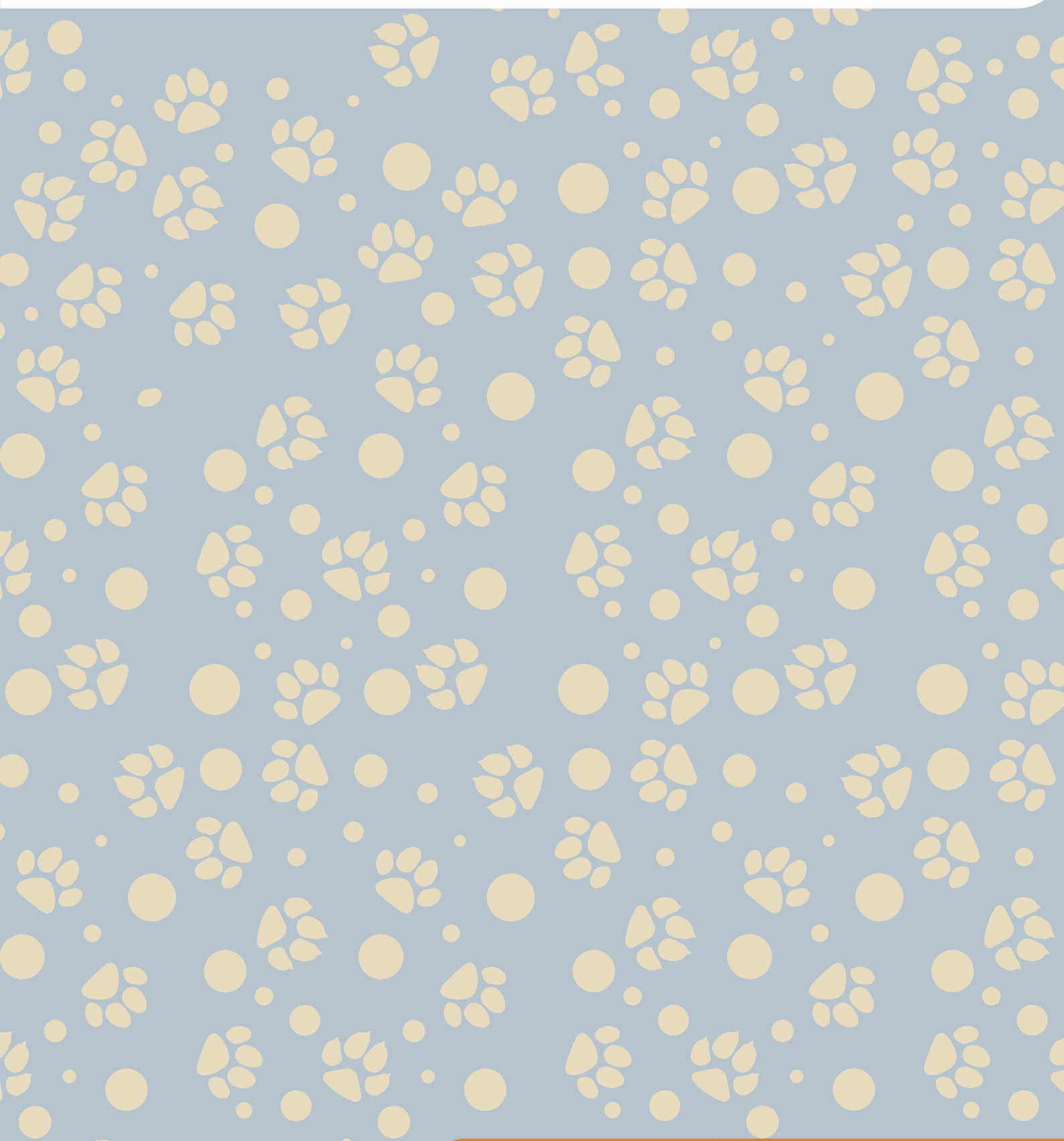
A bright future

Alexis’s parents used to worry what the future had in store for Alexis. They wondered if Alexis would ever find her confidence. Now, having seen the enormous difference Rudy has already made, these feelings of worry have disappeared.

Alexis has grown so much already. She’s joined clubs and made friends. She can talk to people about her hearing loss now and about how Rudy helps here. She’s even started taking her hearing aids off, she’s not so worried anymore.”

From what Alexis has achieved in such a short space of time, it’s clear her future looks bright. Her parents know Alexis is safe with Rudy by her side and that he’ll help her achieve anything she wants to accomplish.







Medical Detection Dogs

Patron: HM The Queen

Medical Detection Dogs trains dogs to save lives using their amazing sense of smell. It does this with Medical Alert Assistance Dogs and Bio Detection Dogs, both of which can be trained to detect even the tiniest trace of the smell caused by a medical condition.

Medical Alert Assistance Dogs support people with complex health conditions like Type 1 diabetes, PoTS (Postural tachycardia syndrome) and severe allergies by alerting them when they are in danger of having a potentially life-threatening medical event, so they can take the necessary action and prevent hospital admission.

Bio Detection Dogs are trained to detect diseases like cancers, Parkinson's, COVID-19 and bacterial infections on samples in the charity's training room with the ultimate aim of contributing to early diagnosis and saving lives.



Michelle & Spring

Michelle has a rare condition called Addison's disease, which means her body doesn't produce cortisol due to Adrenal gland failure. Michelle's body can't cope with any stressful event whether it be really happy or really sad – even watching something very emotional on TV can affect her blood pressure and blood sugar levels and leave her fatigued. Michelle is not aware when her cortisol levels drop, and this can lead to a life-threatening Addisonian crisis requiring urgent hospital admissions.

Spring is actually the second life-saving nose to help Michelle manage her condition and has taken over from her retired Medical Alert Assistance Dog, Clive. Successor dog, Spring, alerts Michelle when her levels are dropping, and she takes extra medication to counter this.

Before Clive or Spring, Michelle became progressively very poorly, stopped going out and spent a lot of time in hospital. She relied on constant adult supervision and lost her independence and confidence entirely.

Michelle's journey with Medical Detection Dogs started when she and her husband took a trip to Crufts one year and discovered the Medical Detection Dogs stand. She spoke to Co-Founder and CEO, Claire Guest, about Clive's 'irritating' behaviour and Claire suggested that Clive, who was a pet dog, may actually have been trying to alert Michelle that she was about to become unwell. This turned out to be exactly what he was doing and after several years as a very successful assistance dog, keeping Michelle out of hospital and giving her the confidence to live her life again, he retired and assumed the role of very important pet.

At first Michelle didn't think she would need another Medical Alert Assistance Dog. She says, "I knew how amazing Clive was but after eight years, I'd forgotten what life was like before."

It soon became clear just how much Michelle needed another wet-nosed lifesaver as without the alerts she started to become seriously unwell again.





Michelle & Spring

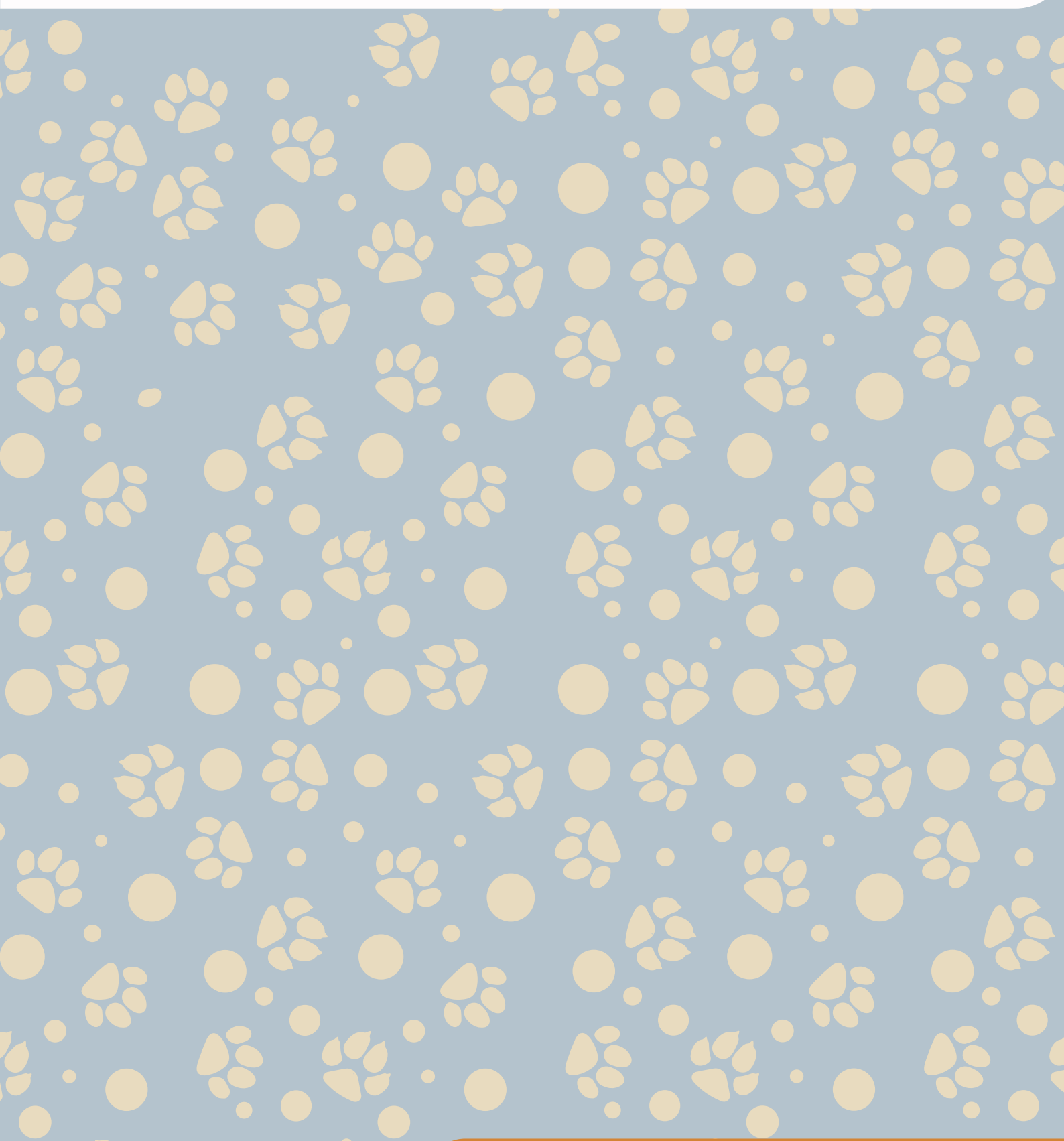
"I was spending lots of time in hospital, new conditions were developing, and I had a huge increase in steroids through my pump during that time."

Whilst it was evident that she needed to think about another assistance dog for her health it was a process that she found quite challenging to think about and Michelle says honestly, "I didn't think it could be done again." That all changed at a matching day at the Medical Detection Dogs training Centre when Michelle met Spring for the first time. Michelle says: "I fell in love with Spring at first sight and I feel sure it was the same for Spring as we couldn't be apart from each other - he just stayed with me, cuddled up with me and sat on my knee."

When Spring subsequently went to live with Michelle, he soon started alerting which was then backed up by Clive. Michelle says: "We all just started crying. Since then, it's been incredible, and we've not looked back. He paws me gently or delicately jumps up and will bark if he feels I'm not noticing quickly enough, and these alerts are unmistakable. He does it whether he's playing with other dogs, at the beach or even when I'm asleep. He's always watching out for me and I'm always watching out for him."

Having Spring has meant Michelle can start to get her Addison's under control again and get her life back on track. Spring goes everywhere with Michelle, and he's allowed Michelle to continue working full time, without needing someone always keeping an eye on her in her office. He has even been given an honorary member of staff badge by the Chief Constable of Humberside Police where she works!







**SERVICE
DOGS UK**

for those with PTSD
who have served

We provide Veterans from the Armed Forces and Emergency Services suffering with PTSD the benefit of specially trained assistance dogs, at NO COST to the Veteran. We are the only ADI accredited PTSD assistance dog charity in the UK to use rescue dogs. We are also members of Assistance Dogs UK so you can be confident that our standards are at the highest level. The dogs we use are carefully selected from rescue. Once a dog has been selected, a Veteran gets partnered with their dog and will be taught how to train their dogs, look after them, become a responsible guardian and much more - all under the guidance of professional dog trainers. It takes between 9-12 months of training for the Assistance Dog Partnership to graduate and achieve the required ADI accredited standards.



Lee and Rio

When I first met Rio, he was a cheeky, thieving and potentially stubborn dog.

However, he was clearly very intelligent and had a lot of love to give. Likewise, he responded well to love, care and understanding. Upon bringing him home, Rio transformed from a rebellious lunatic into a much calmer, loving, attentive dog that is keen to please, yet retains his cheeky and playful character.

We have bonded really well and are inseparable. This is also the case with my partner Claire and my two daughters of four and nine years old, with whom he has an amazing relationship. He is able to tailor his responses and levels of arousal according to the person he is interacting with and the environment he is in.

Rio is making a massive difference in my life. Rio has given me back some semblance of routine, a focus. SDUK, and the training programme, have given me a sense of purpose and boosted my confidence from a place of "I'm not good enough" or "I will never succeed at anything" to "I am more than enough" and "If I apply myself, I can do anything".

I hadn't really exercised properly for a long time. What was the point?

I was undesirable anyway, had nothing to work towards, would be ridiculed and besides that would involve going out into the big bad world. Safer to stay inside and self-medicate with alcohol, maybe watch some successful people on YouTube and convince myself I would be like them if only life would give me a chance.

Well, now I have a reason to get up and go out. Me and my best mate, off on our adventures. It often seems like we've just been round the block whereas we've actually been out for hours, covering considerable distance over various terrain with Rio often darting off to scout ahead or run full tilt around me before hurtling back to check in.





Lee and Rio

"Rio is literally a lifesaver."

Rio has already saved my life in other ways. I was in one of my darkest and loneliest mental spaces for a long time recently. I didn't need to say anything to him, I didn't need to issue any commands or offer any treats. He sat in front of me, put his huge paw on my shoulder and licked my chin before settling down with his head on my thigh. It would be OK. I was neither a failure nor alone. And besides, I'd promised him I wouldn't let him down and that after his 8 previous homes between the ages of 4 months and 11 months when I first met him, I would take care of him forever. His big brown eyes and tilt of the eyebrows said that he would do the same for me.

One of my main reasons for applying to be on the programme was my difficulties in crowded places, shops, cafes etc. Just leaving the house and walking to the local shop had turned into a paranoid nightmare. Rio has been a huge help in this area, reassuring me and keeping me company. Life is so much better. Even just having his needs to focus on, needing to anticipate things that might be an issue for him distracts from the potential for the next person coming in the door being a knife wielding, suicide vest wearing terrorist and has made things like visiting cafes easier. We are finally making use of our National Trust membership!

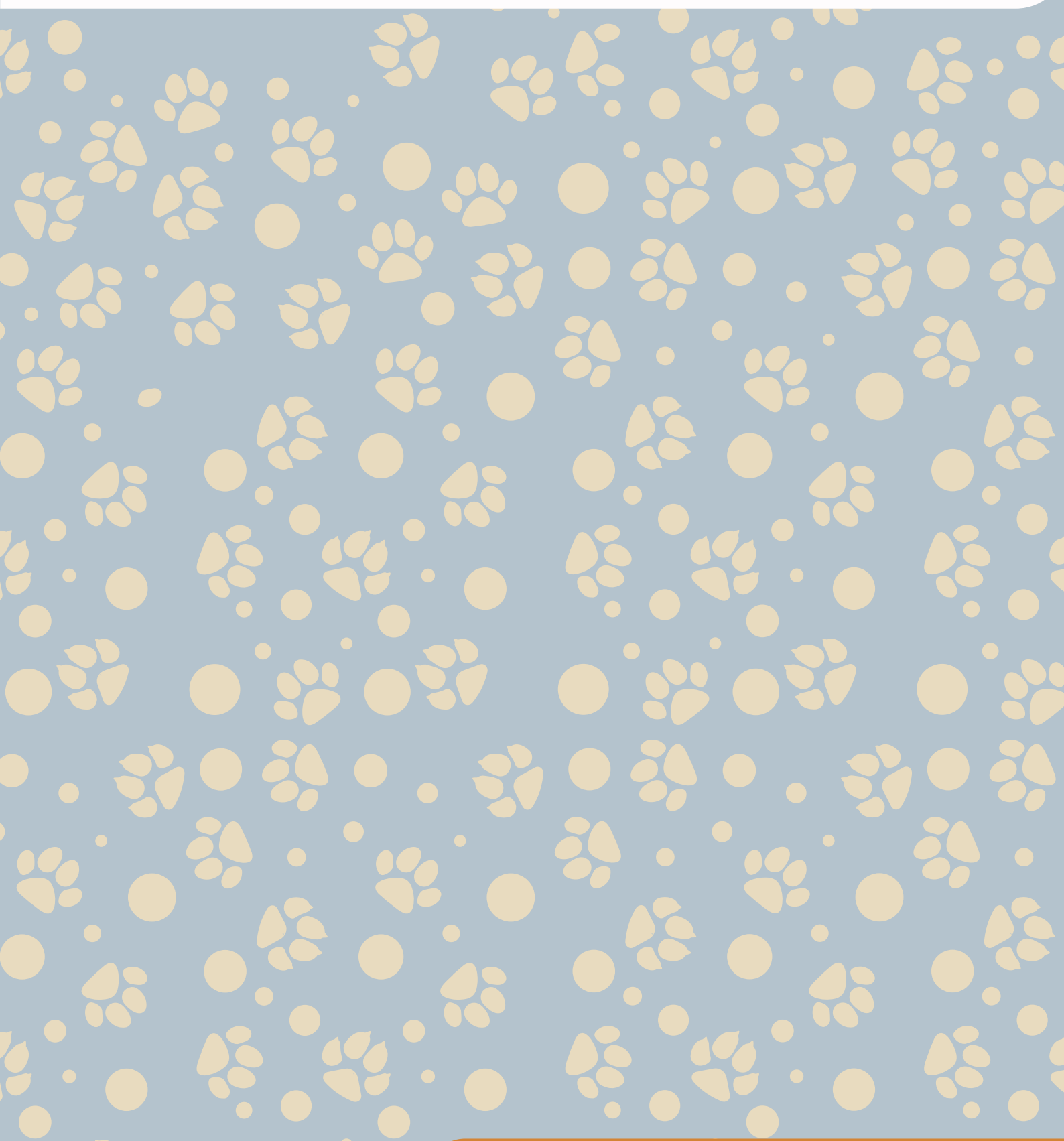
The people of SDUK are great too, of course! Professional, friendly, helpful, understanding and knowledgeable across every level. The trainers have found my sweet spot between bean bag 'workshops and tough 'Instructor' to really get the best out of me and therefore get the best out of Rio. I'm looking forward to our future together, being able to take him shopping with me and visiting all sorts of places together.

Rio and I have lots in common, and not just our personalities.

We both have a chequered past and both of us have a few issues. However, neither of us is going to give up on the other one.

**"He's got my back,
I've got his -
and SDUK have both
of ours."**







Support Dogs is a national assistance dog charity, established in 1992 and based in Sheffield. The charity began by training assistance dogs for people with a wide range of physical disabilities including conditions such as MS, Cerebral Palsy, spinal cord injury and Fibromyalgia.

In the mid 1990's Support Dogs became the first charity in the UK to train epilepsy seizure alert dogs. These provide a 100% reliable warning to exact minute before every seizure a client has, with a warning time of up to 1 hour in advance. This warning is lifesaving, enabling a client to move to somewhere safe and private to have their seizures.

In the mid 2000's the charity became one of the pioneers in the UK to train autism assistance dogs. They provide safety and support for children facilitating a inclusive and active life, reducing anxiety and supporting them in developing skills for independent living.

The charity has worked with a wide range of breeds including Dachshunds & Bichon Frisé to Dalmatians and of course Labradors.

1 in 4 of the dogs the charity has trained has joined from rescue centres or from someone needing to rehome their pet.



Nicola and Cobble

The Metropolitan police officer and formerly fit and active mum of two developed epilepsy out of the blue in 2015.

Life as she knew it stopped as she suffered several major seizures a week which led to numerous serious injuries.

"I'd been a Met police officer since 2002," recalls Nicola.

"Then one day I was off duty and fell and banged my head in the supermarket.

Two weeks later I went into the same supermarket with my mother-in-law and woke up on the floor with her standing over me in a state of panic. That was my first tonic-clonic seizure. "A paramedic who attended said it was probably a one off. I felt fine and drove back home. "A week later as I was getting changed at work I apparently collapsed again and had a second seizure. I was taken to Queens Hospital in Romford. I had an MRI scan, and they found bleeds on my brain from the fall. From then on, the seizures didn't stop and got progressively worse. "My life literally turned upside down

As well as the seizures, which left her weak and disorientated, Nicola also suffered serious injuries from falling during the seizures. She fell down the stairs on numerous occasions, broke her hand when she fell through the oven door, and had to have four skin grafts after falling on to a hot iron. She is oblivious of her surroundings for several minutes and can take up to an hour to recover.

Nicola was on anti-depressants and was wondering what the point of life was when her husband Mick saw a programme about Support Dogs on TV. Nicola was accepted on to the Support Dogs epilepsy seizure alert programme and qualified in late 2022. Cobble gives her a 37-minute advance warning of every oncoming seizure, enabling Nicola to sit on the sofa or lie on the bed.

Cobble often lies on the bed with her as she recovers.

Nicola had never had a dog before. "I'd been an OCD houseproud person, but I soon got used to hair everywhere," she says cheerfully. "Our partnership has really strengthened over the past year that we have been together.

He is so obedient – he used to be slightly distracted by my two boys but now he is definitely more focused

on me all the time.

And he keeps me company during my working day."





Nicola and Cobble

Happily, after an eight-month break Nicola was able to return to work as a policewoman, working remotely from home

"I live an hour and a half away from the nearest police station, so if Cobble were to alert me, I wouldn't be able to get somewhere safe, so I work via Zoom and teams," she explains. "Just having him there is so reassuring," she says. "I've not suffered any more serious injuries and now have an amazing alert time. It's not only reassured me and improved my confidence, but massively given our sons confidence that they can seek help from an adult if they feel worried at all. "They know I have got him and if I am home alone Cobble is there. That reduces stress – knowing when a seizure is going to happen is one of the biggest benefits of having a dog – it's definitely far better than waking up on the floor!"

"He has never missed a seizure, which is quite amazing"

Cobble alerts Nicola of an oncoming seizure by "following me like a piece of Sellotape! I can't move without tripping over him, almost strapped to my leg. That's my cue to check in with him and if I don't respond he gives me a head butt. He has never missed a seizure, which is quite amazing," she says.

Nicola's two sons, Oliver and Callum, both adore Cobble, who is now an important part of the family. And she makes sure he has plenty of down time on their walks which can take a while as so many people want to stop and chat about him when they see his Support Dogs jacket.

Nicola's confidence has grown so much since having Cobble that the family are thinking of planning a holiday abroad. "That I have the confidence to even contemplate that shows how far I've come," she says. The only thing that she can't do is drive – which used to be her passion – but Nicola says she is now much more accepting of life as it now is. "I'm in such a better place than before.

Looking back, I wonder how on earth did I cope mentally? I lost my driving licence, had so many injuries from falling when I had a seizure, but now I have got Cobble it makes so much difference," she says.

"Everything is so much brighter than before.

I can't thank Support Dogs enough for what Cobble has done for me. He has completely changed our lives."







**VETERANS
WITH DOGS**

Veterans With Dogs is an award-winning organisation training and providing assistance dogs for Veterans with complex mental health difficulties - including PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).

Our unique PALS (Partner Animals Life Skills) training programme develops unbreakable bonds between veterans and their dogs, offering 24/7 support, 365 days a year.

Our dogs do more than just assist; they save lives, offering companionship, love, and a newfound sense of freedom to their human partners.

Our Assistance dogs have a profound effect on the everyday lives of those coping with mental health challenges. Our dogs and veterans work together improving quality of life and working towards positive re-engagement within society.

Veterans With Dogs believe in the incredible power of the human-canine connection. Empowering our Veterans to regain a sense of worth and value.

**Together, we are transforming lives,
one wet nose at a time.**



Barney

"After being medically discharged from the armed forces over 20 years ago with several physical and mental health conditions I found life a real struggle for lots of different reasons.

Trying to be a good enough wife and mother for my family whilst suffering in secret with symptoms that were horrendous, not letting anyone see what was going on in my mind because I was too frightened and ashamed by the fact that no matter how hard I tried I did not get better.

I surrounded myself and family with big dogs, overzealous security regimes, over exercise, under eating, I had nightmares, many episodes of blackouts or loss of time, panic attacks the list goes on (my husband was still serving for 10 years so was often away in war zones or detachments) fear ruled my life, the overprotectiveness of my children was all consuming. I found out later that other parents at their school marvelled at my efficiency and the fact nothing fazed me. (funny really)

The symptoms got worse, I thought of suicide so many times, tried it a few times, failed a few times. The one solace I had was my dogs, but one by one I lost them, I became more reclusive, I stopped going out, always made excuses because I could not go to family occasions, my OCD caused many issues and arguments at home.

I was lost. I was invited to a military recovery centre for a few days and there I met a fellow veteran who told me all about Veterans with Dogs. I plucked up the courage to ring them and spoke to someone who gave me the information on how to apply.

After some time on their waiting list for a few different reasons, one being covid, I finally got the call. The Charities head of training with those magic words. WE HAVE A DOG FOR YOU. We travelled down to Exeter to meet him, and I was so nervous, my biggest fear was - what if he doesn't like me!

We spent those two days walking in the woods, playing and just getting to know each other.

Two weeks later the Veterans with Dogs team brought Barney to our home, they also invited my satellite trainer (who is amazing and such a lovely person) to meet Barney and me too.

Then that was it, he was mine.



Barney

The VWD team were at the end of the phone or email for help if needed, and I did call quite a lot in those first weeks. (Cheers guys for your patience).

I had an occupational therapist before and during those first few weeks with Barney and my husband or son would go for walks with us. Slowly I started walking Barney on my own, just round the block at first, but as our bond and my trust in him grew, so did our walks in both time and miles.

I was determined to give Barney the best quality life I could and that has meant pushing myself to get out. We can walk to our local park where he meets his doggy friends and I actually talk to people now, mostly about dogs but it is a conversation and has become a safe place for us.

Everybody loves Barney.

Residential stays with the team and other veterans during our training were amazing, seeing the dogs play and have fun was contagious, my fears that I would not be good enough for Barney were swept away as he was amazing at all his tasks.

He became so good at reading me and the slightest stress cues and began letting me know I needed a break from what was causing them. We passed our final assessment with flying colours, and he proudly wears his assistance dog vest.

He wakes me in the night when I am in the midst of nightmares. He makes me feel safer when I'm in the house alone. When I'm feeling dizzy during a panic attack he will lay on my legs and rest his chin on me. He is very insistent when 'he' decides I need his help - a big squashy wet nose stuck to my face until I tell him I'm ok.

A self-taught thing he did from quite early on was if I leave the house during a dissociative episode, once he realises, I am gone he will bark to let whoever is there know I'm missing. This enables my family to call for help earlier if needed.

A thing we did not expect was his impact on us all as a family, he is funny, cheeky, mischievous and gives his love to us all. I could go on for hours about what this amazing dog does for me, the list is endless.

He never judges me, he loves me unconditionally, he is helping me learn that I am not useless, worthless, a burden, or better off not here.

**I am just me and that is enough for him.
My guardian angel**





**The Florence Nightingale Museum
would like to thank all of the organisations
who have contributed to our exhibition on
“Caring Companions”.**

**There are a great many charities working in this area,
and we could not possibly feature them all. We hope, however, that
we have been able to show the many diverse ways in which these
amazing animals are able to contribute.**

**Due to space restrictions, we could only feature a few in our actual
museum exhibition space. Please do take the time to discover more
about what these dogs are capable of in this digital offering.**

