

Support Dogs' charity magazine

# AURA

Spring/Summer 2020

Edition 36



**“We’re in awe of what Support Dogs do. Chess gives Molly confidence and pride. She is independent, and can do things for herself.”**

AURA FEATURE STORY ON PAGE 10-11

Photo courtesy of A Dog's Life

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The joys of being a puppy socialiser  
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Amazing adventures of autism dog Stanley  
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**supportdogs**

For Autism. For Epilepsy. For Disability





# Could you volunteer with Support Dogs?

## Volunteering with our trainee dogs and puppies

We are looking for volunteers living within an hour of our centre in Sheffield to help us with our trainee dogs and puppies. Roles include:

- Puppy socialisers looking after a pup full time from your home for their first 14 months.
- Bed and Breakfast foster carers providing a loving home in evenings and at weekends for a trainee support dog.
- Doggy drivers helping transport our dogs to and from our training centre.
- Adult dog socialisers providing full time care from home for an older dog before their training begins.

Find out more at [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk) or phone 0114 261 7800



## Do you know a dog who needs rehoming?



**1 in 4 of the dogs we train join us from rescue centres or as rehomed dogs. Our charity is looking for dogs with potential to become life changing support dogs. If you have a dog aged between 10 months & 3 years you are looking to rehome please call 0114 261 7800 or visit [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)**

Once you have finished enjoying this magazine please put it somewhere where others can read and learn about the work of our charity



MESSAGE FROM RITA...

## Stronger together

The last few months have brought unique challenges to all our lives. Our charity has been operating for almost 30 years and we of course have never had to carry out our life-saving work in an environment as difficult as this.

However, as we get used to terms like self-isolation and social distancing, for many of our clients this is not a particularly new experience, as they struggle with the effects of living with epilepsy, autism and disabilities or medical conditions such as MS, cerebral palsy and spinal cord injury.

Research tells us that three million people with disabilities rarely leave their homes, lead isolated lives and are chronically lonely. On a typical day, one in eight disabled people have less than 30 minutes interaction with other people.

For those children with autism we help, the world can be a lonely and threatening place. Many of those we support have sensory difficulties - which means they struggle with noise and crowds, have severe anxiety.

Fortunately, because of their wonderful support dogs, our clients have a tailor-made link to the outside world. Our amazing dogs are there to give them and their families the support and confidence they need to leave the house, build friendships and have a safe, active engaging life. They are there to keep them well and give them the vital care they need at times of ill health.

Despite the current challenges, we are dedicated to ensuring more and more people benefit from our life changing services. We have continued to maintain our services in any way we can through the coronavirus pandemic, but as a small charity this is only possible thanks to the wonderful help of our dedicated volunteers and supporters.



Rita is pictured with two of our new pups

We rely 100% on voluntary donations and fundraising is very difficult at the moment. From those who have continued to dedicate their time to foster and care for our dogs in training and of our newest pups, to those who continue to donate and raise vital funds for us at this worrying time, we are deeply grateful. I do hope you are inspired by some of the stories you read in our magazine and please do get in touch if you think you could help our charity to grow its resources and help more people.

*Rita Howson*

Rita Howson  
Chief executive

## About Support Dogs

It's Support Dogs' passion and commitment to ensure that people affected by autism, epilepsy and physical disability can enjoy a greater level of independence. We aim to do this by providing, training and supporting registered assistance dogs.

We provide:

**Autism assistance dogs** for children aged three to ten years with autism. The dogs are trained to provide safety for the child and reduce stress in social environments.

**Seizure alert dogs** for people with epilepsy. The dogs are trained to provide a hundred per cent reliable, 10-55 minute warning prior to the onset of an epileptic seizure, which enables them to get to a place of their choosing and take control of the situation.

In some instances it has been reported that seizure alert dogs have also been shown to reduce seizure frequency.

**Disability assistance dogs** for people with physical disabilities. The client's own pet dog is trained to perform tasks which are specifically tailored to their individual needs; examples of these tasks include:

- Opening and closing doors
- Raising the alarm
- Fetching the post
- Loading and unloading the washing machine
- Assisting with dressing and undressing

Support Dogs is a registered charity and does not charge for its services. However we rely entirely on voluntary donations and receive no government funding.

Chief Executive: Rita Howson

Chair: Barry Brackner

Honorary President: Angela Rippon CBE

Patrons: The Earl & Countess of Scarborough  
Elaine Paige OBE

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To sponsor a dog today call Support Dogs on

**0114 261 7800**

to donate visit

[www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)



# “Since Stanley came into lives we have had a completely different child”

Natalie Warburton, mother and full-time carer of Jenson, a young boy with severe autism, explains the difference their autism assistance dog Stanley has made to her son's life.

“Before Stanley came into our lives we lived a very isolated life.

Jenson was a very anxious angry and frustrated little boy. He was diagnosed with autism when he was three years old in January 2014.

He was non-verbal for the most part, only able to say a couple of words. He really didn't like leaving the house even if the destination was somewhere he would enjoy. He would have meltdowns before we could even get past our front gate. On the few rare occasions we would make it out further, Jenson would become erratic with anxiety and run off as fast as he could especially near roads. We would try to take Jenson to visit relatives but it would result in either turning back around or only staying for five minutes.

Jenson was also terrified to sleep in his own bedroom after having his first nightmare. He would scream every night. His paediatrician tried to help with medication but Jenson was still too scared to go to bed in his room.

I researched autism assistance dogs online and that's when I came across Support Dogs. I read about some of the clients' stories and the impact it had had on their lives and made an application for Jenson.

Since Stanley has come into our lives we have had a completely different child. We started slowly by introducing Stanley sleeping on the bottom of Jenson's bed. The very first night Jenson went to sleep calmly and slept right through until morning. After a few days Jenson began spontaneously saying “woof” at bedtime to signal wanting Stanley to join him. Stanley stays on his bed until Jenson is asleep and then we bring him back down to have a play with us then he re-joins Jenson when we go to bed.

Jenson's sociability has dramatically improved to an unrecognisable level. He enjoys going for long walks with Stanley

and will take the lead so he can walk him himself. Stanley has taught Jenson to wait at a road kerbside, Stanley stops and Jenson naturally stops with him and only begins to walk again once Stanley does. Previously we could never make it past the entrance of our local Tesco. Now, with Stanley, Jenson not only manages his emotions and anxiety but he also helps to put items in the trolley and takes great pride at the end when we reach the till.

too much for him to cope with. We started to attend parties taking Stanley with us and slowly Jenson's confidence has grown. He will now go into the play centre with the other children and when he feels anxious he comes back to the table where Stanley is and sits with him.

Jenson has always had attachment issues and when it comes to me at home he would never leave my side, if I went to the bathroom I had to let him come with me or he would cry and be upset. If I left the room he would scream and work himself into a meltdown even if it was only in the next room.

Since having Stanley, Jenson has become much more independent.

He no longer becomes anxious or agitated and is quite content to continue his activity whilst Stanley is there. His spoken language has improved so much! He has learnt all of Stanley's commands “settle,” “up, up,” “stay,” “wait,” etc, and he really enjoys being able to talk to Stanley. I think that because talking to Stanley is limited language he finds him easier to talk and bond with rather than adults and other children as they are more complex.

Jenson will seek Stanley out if he is upset or anxious and will self-choose to go and sit or lay next to Stanley for comfort.

Stanley has truly become Jenson's best friend and in doing so has not only given us our lives back but given Jenson the confidence and security to explore and challenge all aspects of the life he was missing out on. And for that we will be forever thankful.”

For more information about Support Dogs' autism programme go to: [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)

Me, my husband, our elder son Christian, who's 14, and Jenson are also now able to visit relatives more frequently and for longer periods of time. Jenson will sit down next to Stanley calmly and engages more with his family members.

Jenson goes to a special school, which he's attended for the past two years. He was previously in a mainstream school; however they couldn't meet Jenson's care needs.

Jenson doesn't really have any friends, and birthday parties have always been



## The adventures of JENSON & HIS AMAZING AUTISM ASSISTANCE DOG STANLEY

Stanley brings Jenson freedom, confidence and adventure





# YOU can be amazing in 2020

Help us **change the lives** of those with autism, epilepsy and disability by taking part in these brilliant challenges. We are on hand to help you plan your event and support you to take it online. Get in touch with us on [fundraising@supportdogs.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@supportdogs.org.uk) or 0114 2617800.

## Virtual fundraising

We have put together some virtual fundraising ideas so that you can continue to **support our work from your own home**. Take part as a team of friends or colleagues or on your own. However you take part, you will be supporting us at a time when we need you more than ever before.



### Mission Impawsable

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is a 375 minute gaming challenge to raise money for Support Dogs, representing one minute for each family that asks for our help every month. Take on Mission Impawsable as a team, flying solo, stream your gaming on Twitch, or use it as a way to get your friends together online. **Visit our website for more details.**

### Virtual quiz

A great excuse to see your friends (virtually!) and do something fun to raise funds. **Contact us for our Clever Paws quiz questions to get you started.**



### Virtual dog show

Enter your four-legged pal into our online fun dog show with weekly categories and prizes. We're looking forward to seeing your entries! **Enter on our website.**

### Virtual challenge

Don't let cancelled races stop you taking part in a challenge. Set yourself a goal; be this steps, star jumps, skips or football keep ups and **ask people to sponsor you.**

**For more ideas for fundraising at home please visit our website or contact us.**

**Support Dogs** relies 100 per cent on voluntary donations. We are privileged to have some amazing supporters who give up their time, skills and energy to raise funds to enable our charity to continue with our work. We wish we could list everyone, but there is sadly just not enough room. But here is just a flavour of some of the ways some very kind people have helped.

The team at **Tierneys Solicitors** who raised a fantastic **£84.40** on a dress-down day.

**Charlotte Weightman** who knitted and sold teddy bear clothes to raise **£32**.

The wonderful **£400** given in memory of **Shelia Linney**.

Everyone from **St Luke's Church in Chelmsford** who donated **£284.60** from a recent collection.

The team from **Atherton Godfrey** who chose us as their charity of the year, and raised a brilliant **£1,958.63**.

**Mark, Ruth, Annabelle, Bruno and William** who asked for donations to Support Dogs instead Christmas presents, raising **£90**.

The members of the **Rotary Club of Rotherham** who donated a fantastic **£500**.

Members of **Sheffield Hallam Trampoline Club** who not only donating lots of Christmas treats to our dogs but also raised a whopping **£527.07** from one event!



Olga and Miele were wonderful ambassador dogs for our charity over the past decade. Along with older sister Fudge and owner Simon Anderson they raised over **£50,000** during this time. Both Olga and Miele have sadly passed away recently, but their legacy will live on.

**Bidborough CE Primary School** who have chosen us as their charity for the year and have raised a fantastic **£250.87** so far.

Everyone at **Shevington High School** who continue to raise funds for us, raising an additional **£120** at their Christmas fayre.

**Gaynor Turner and family and friends** who have raised over **£1,500** in memory of **Mitchell James Turner** from a clayshoot and fundraising night in a local pub.

Members of the **The Priory of the Poor Knights of Christ** who donated **£899.85**.

**Kayleigh Smithson and friends** who braved the sea on Christmas day raising a brilliant **£75!**

The **radiology department at Manchester Royal Infirmary** who donated **£100**.

The fantastic team **Holt Doctors** who raised **£1,030** from a Christmas quiz and advent calendar. Dog-in-training Derek even featured in their Christmas cards!

**London office of international law firm King and Spalding** who raised a fantastic **£2,600** on a fundraising walk around Regents Park.

Every member of **Sheffield University Boxing Club** who skipped a huge 104 miles to raise funds for our work.

If you are inspired to help our charity email [fundraising@supportdogs.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@supportdogs.org.uk)

A BIG THANK YOU to all you fantastic fundraisers



Holt Doctors

## Great North Run Sunday 13 September 2020



Have you ever wanted to run the iconic Great North Run or want to set yourself the challenge of completing the 13.1 mile course? We have places available in this world-famous race. We ask our runners to raise a minimum of £325 with a £25 registration fee (only payable when we offer the place). We will be with you every step to the finish line with help and advice, a Support Dogs' running vest and unrivalled cheering on the day!

## Ride London 100 Sunday 16 August 2020



One hundred traffic-free miles through central London and the Surrey Hills this epic event is not to be missed! Following in the tyre tracks of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic cyclists, taking on the famous Box Hill, you will finish on the Mall in central London. We ask for a minimum fundraising target of £500.



JOIN OUR CHARITY MUCKY PUPS WALK

## Mucky Pups Walk Sheffield Sunday 1st November 2020

Our fantastic annual muddy fundraising walk. Choice of 8km or 3km (fully accessible) routes for dog walkers and non-dog walkers alike, with stop off points for cake!

Entry costs £10 adults, £5 children, £5 for dogs with family and team entries also available. Includes a **t-shirt and medal for every finisher** and even a puppy cheerleaders.

To sign up or how to set up a Mucky pup walk in your area visit [www.supportdogs.org.uk/muckypupswalk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk/muckypupswalk)





# Life-changing Labradoodle Cleo brings out the best in Natalie

Thanks to her beloved support dog, Natalie Hibberd is fulfilling her potential as a writer.

A young woman with cerebral palsy has overcome years of severe anxiety and depression to complete her first novel at the age of 21.

Natalie Hibberd credits this huge turnaround to her disability assistance dog Cleo, a Labradoodle trained by Support Dogs

*"Cleo is the light of my life, my best friend and my most treasured possession; she keeps me safe and I'm no longer afraid to leave the house,"* says Natalie. *"She opens doors for me – figuratively and metaphorically!"*

When Natalie first met Cleo she was at a very low ebb. Aged 18, she had just left college after taking her A levels, and was ill, anxious, depressed and lonely – and unable to write.

Natalie was born with cerebral palsy which affected her lower limbs and meant she could not walk unaided. She also had trouble with her motor skills such as hand-writing, and suffered from pain in her legs and hips.

As well as the physical side of her condition, she also had to cope with the

emotional side of being disabled. *"I got picked on a lot when I was at primary school by teachers as well as other children,"* she says. *"They would talk over my head and ask if I could speak."*

Secondary school was easier as although she went to a mainstream school it had a specialist physio unit and disabled children were not treated differently to able-bodied.

But when she went to college that changed, and she went downhill drastically. *"Disabled students were not encouraged to mix with able-bodied students. It messed with my confidence and my mental health deteriorated."*

While her twin sister went off to university, Natalie stayed at home. She says of that bleak time three years ago: *"I could fill a bingo card with everything that was wrong with me."*

Salvation came in the form of a bonny black Labradoodle. Cleo was sourced from the Doodle Trust, a rescue centre for poodle crosses.

*"I'd always loved dogs; I'd always been passionate about them, and I'd begged*



*and pleaded for one since the age of three,"* says Natalie. *"My mum, who is my main carer, decided that now was the right time to get me a dog – a pet dog at that stage."*

Natalie was introduced to a two-year-old Labradoodle. *"She was absolutely gorgeous, and I felt at once that she was the dog for me. I've never been so excited about anything in my life!"*

Natalie and Cleo bonded well, but Natalie had always had the idea in the back of her mind that Cleo could make an excellent support dog as she was already showing the aptitude.

Natalie and Cleo celebrating after graduating as a disability assistance partnership

She applied successfully to Support Dogs' for Cleo to be trained as her disability support dog, and the pair qualified as a partnership in August last year.

*"The training was very hard work, but then the way I live everything is hard work, and this was for something that I really wanted,"* she says. *"I was extremely nervous because I didn't want to let Cleo down because by this point she was my best friend."*

*"It was hard when Cleo had to go away to the centre for a month to train and be assessed, and because I hadn't had her as a puppy I wasn't sure how she'd react. But it staggered me the way the trainers and instructors trained her so thoroughly, and were also so kind to her."*

Cleo's favourite task is picking up items that Natalie has dropped. She says: *"It doesn't sound much but when you spend your life in a wheelchair you have to spend 10-15 minutes groping around trying to pick things up off the floor."*

*"She also helps me put on and take off my coat, socks and shoes, presses*

*buttons for me, and opens doors using a pom pom. And she stays with me at night in case I get into trouble. I've fallen a couple of times and she's off like a rocket to fetch help."*

Natalie started drafting her novel, a teen thriller called 'Inside Out', published late last year, when she was just 12 years old. It's about a society that has been divided into factions – Insiders and Outsiders – the haves and the have nots – and the rule is that they cannot mix.

Natalie is now writing what she called a 'pemoir', a pet memoir about her and Cleo's heart-warming story. She hopes to raise money in aid of Support Dogs from its publication.

When the duo go out and about, Cleo is always the centre of attention, and Natalie is happy to have attention deflected away from her to her dog. *"People now stare at her rather than me, and ask about her, not me. Going anywhere always takes a while as we get stopped so often but I love that as talking about Cleo is my favourite thing!"*

For Natalie, the emotional side of her connection with Cleo is as important as the practical side of having a support dog.

*"When you have spent your whole life assessing the safety of your situation and whether certain people are a threat, now when we go out I know that if someone tried to accost me she wouldn't stand for it, and would be there to protect me,"* she adds.

As for Support Dogs, Natalie is almost as enthusiastic about the charity as she is about her beloved Cleo.

*"There are not enough good words or strong words to say about what I think about Support Dogs,"* she says. *"I think it's remarkable what they do. They are extraordinary, and wonderful. They are my second favourite subject of conversation!"*

Find out more about Support Dogs' disability assistance programme at [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)



# CHESS – MAKING ALL THE RIGHT MOVES FOR YOUNG MOLLY

Molly, who has cerebral palsy, has formed an instant bond with her new disability assistance dog Chess.

Twelve-year-old Molly Birch is a happy child with the widest smile, on the cusp of adolescence.

But Molly also has cerebral palsy, which affects her balance, reduces her concentration, and makes it difficult for her to walk far without help, and gives her no grip and only sporadic use of her left hand. She started talking late, and although she is now making great progress at mainstream school, she still tires very easily. Life has been not been easy for the sunny-natured young girl.

But Molly now has a very special friend to help her navigate her way to adulthood- her very own disability assistance dog Chess, provided and trained by Support Dogs. Labrador Chess has become a cherished four-legged companion and even more importantly, given her the independence she needs as a young teenager.

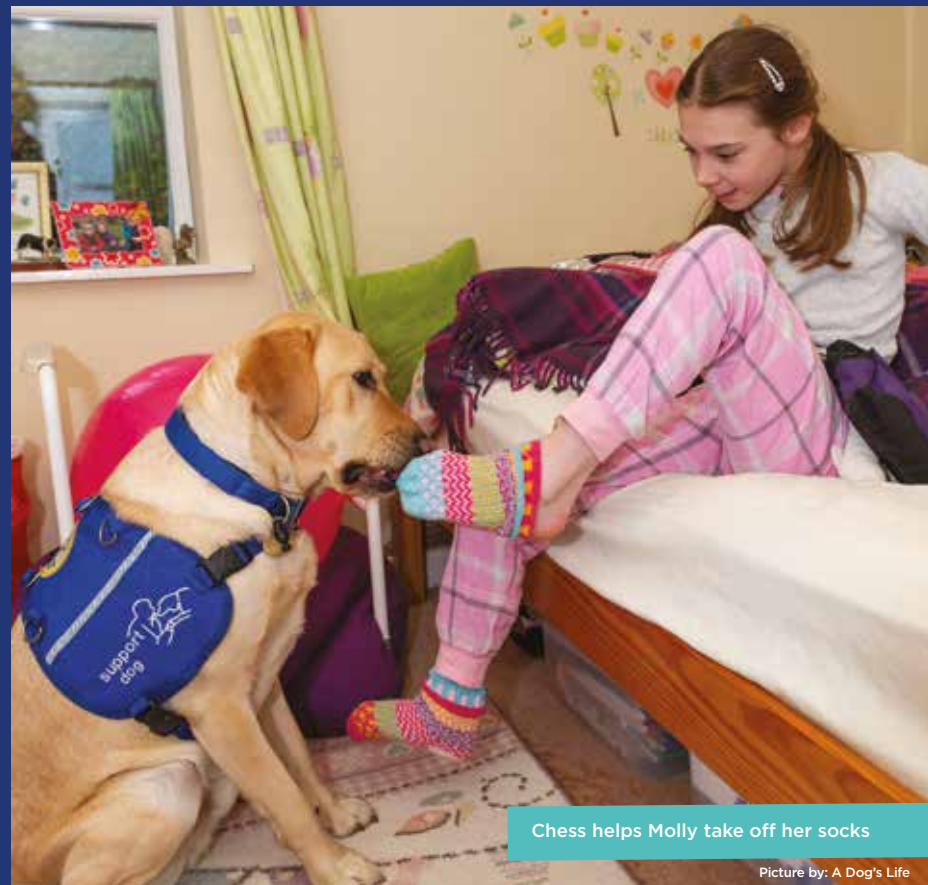
Her devoted parents, Emma and Kevin, were determined to do everything they could to give their daughter the best possible life, with the support of the child development team at their local hospital.

*“When Molly was born it was touch and go, and a very worrying time,”* says Emma, pictured right with Molly and Chess. *“We didn’t know what the future would hold for us as a family.”*

*“As a toddler she used to get around by rolling when she wanted to move – rolling around the house like a rolling pin! And when she went to reception she couldn’t talk – just make noises. But she’s grown and developed. By all standards she has defied everyone.”*

Molly has always had a special connection to dogs. Her first ‘word’ was forming the letter A, for Arthur - the name of one of the family’s gundogs.

*“That was the first time we thought about involving a dog in her life,”* says Emma. *“She always gravitated towards dogs; she*



Chess helps Molly take off her socks

Picture by: A Dog's Life

*finds them very comforting. Arthur would sit by her chair when she was asleep, and she loved touching him. We lost him last year. Molly has a picture of him in her bedroom and she has never missed a night of saying goodnight to Arthur.”*

The Birches, who live on a farm in North Yorkshire, first heard about the charity several years ago when they found that Support Dogs were running a first pilot child disability assistance partnership in Bristol. They asked to be considered should a second opportunity arise.

When the time came for Molly and Chess to be matched, when Molly was 10, they bonded straight away. Says Emma: *“You have an expectation, but what happened with Molly and Chess surpassed my expectation. At their first meeting in the park, she ran across the grass and he went with her. It was like they had known each other all their lives. And he so quickly tapped into her needs. Having had dogs,*



*I knew it takes time to build a bond, but this was instant.”*

The pair graduated as a child disability assistance partnership in February this year. Chess shadows Molly around the house, providing practical assistance, from helping her get dressed and undressed, picking up



Molly and Chess - the best of friends

Picture by: A Dog's Life

dropped pens and pencils, fetching shoes and splints, opening and closing doors, and going for help if she needs it.

Just as importantly, Chess aids Molly with her balance. He has a handle on his harness which she uses when they go out, helping her to negotiate kerbs and busy environments, reducing the need for her wheelchair.

Adds Emma: *“My favourite thing is watching them go up steps – something Molly used to find very hard. He watches her and matches her pace. She needs patience and he is a very calm dog. It takes time for her to do things and he waits. He just cares for her.”*

*“It touches me to see Molly able to do things independently without an adult helping her. She doesn’t have to walk around holding an adult’s hand now she’s entering her teenage years. And he’s*

*given her a huge boost in confidence so that she feels safe.”*

When Molly goes to bed Chess has down time and sleeps at the bottom of Emma’s bed. Molly and Chess have their own settee in her bedroom, where they snuggle up together.

Molly says of Chess: *“He is kind, loyal, and has a soft coat. We are so lucky to have him. He’s my friend and I’m very proud of him.”*

Molly is now settled in mainstream school, where teachers and fellow pupils are helping her to progress, and with one-to-one support and a special curriculum she is achieving well.

The future for the young girl who loves animals, horse-riding, swimming, and most of all her assistance dog, Chess, looks bright.

Adds mum Emma: *“We’re in awe of what Support Dogs do. We’ve been so lucky with Chess and his personality and nature. Chess gives Molly confidence and pride. She counts for something. She doesn’t have to rely on people, she is independent, and she can do things for herself. She stands taller when she walks with Chess.”*

Chief executive of Support Dogs, Rita Howson says: *“We’re so pleased to be able to make this difference to Molly and her family. This is the second time we have run a pilot project like this, matching a disability assistance dog to a child.*

*“While our priority is to continue to focus on training and provide assistance dogs to meet the incredible demand of the three main programmes, we will review the success of this pilot and the viability of repeating it at some point in the future.”*



# PUPPY LOVE

What makes someone give up their time, energy – and a nice clean house – to bring up a support dog puppy? Helen Frith and Laura Smyth lift the lid on the joys and frustrations of being a puppy socialiser for Support Dogs - and the perils of leaving your socks on the floor.



Helen with puppy Lawson

For the past year Helen Frith and Laura Smyth have willingly given up most of their spare time to giving two Support Dogs' puppies, fox-red Labrador Lawson and black Labrador/Retriever cross Ginny, the very best start in life.

When they are 15 months old, the pups will bid farewell to their devoted carers and start their journey to becoming fully-trained, professional service dogs, transforming the lives of people with epilepsy, autism and epilepsy.

But at the moment they're still, well puppies. Messy, cheeky, sometimes destructive but always lovable puppies. So why do it? Especially when just as they start to become well-behaved young dogs, they move on.

Both Helen and Laura had similar

reasons for becoming puppy socialisers. They had both recently lost their own pet dogs, and while they didn't feel ready for the commitment of another pet, they missed having canine company in the house.

*"I couldn't bear a house without a dog," says Helen. "My husband was due to take retirement in about a year's time, and after that we had plans to do things, so being a puppy socialiser for that time fitted in perfectly. I'd get a dog for a year and I'd also be helping someone else to have a trained assistance dog in the longer term - everything just clicked."*

*"We got Lawson when he was three months old. I thought he was gorgeous and it was so lovely to have a dog in the house again."*

Laura's own circumstances were also ideal for her to become a puppy socialiser. *"I'd been a stay-at-home mum for a few years and my little girl Erin was just starting nursery, so life was opening up a bit, and I was itching to do something," she says. "I found out about Support Dogs and came along to an information day, and that was that. We have a great time with Ginny and she has become part of the family."*

*While both women absolutely adore their canine charges they admit it can be hard work. "It's harder than I thought at first, especially with me having a toddler to look after as well," says Laura. "We'd never had a puppy before and the first weeks were very tough - puppies can be so demanding and destructive. Socks are her thing, and we've lost so many..."*

Helen's experience has been similar. *"It's a bit like having a toddler. You can never sit down, and you have to have eyes in the back of your head," she says. "He's always got something in his mouth!"*

But for both Helen and Laura, who both live in Sheffield, it soon got better and the upsides vastly outweigh the downsides. *"I just love having Lawson in the house," says Helen. "He has such a lovely personality and is great company to have around."*

*"I also really enjoy meeting the other puppy socialisers - I have made some lovely friends and we go for walks together, which has been an added, unexpected bonus."*

Adds Laura: *"I really enjoy the training side of things, and the social side of being a puppy socialiser. You can feel a bit isolated at times. And it's nice to share the ups and downs with the others. It's different to having a pet dog - you feel more responsible."*

All Support Dogs' puppy socialisers attend six weeks of weekly classes with their pups, then monthly workshops to learn basic obedience, and by the end of their tenure the pups should be at a level of well-trained pet.

# "FROM DAY ONE I NEVER THOUGHT OF LAWSON AS MY DOG, HE IS ON LOAN"

Which brings us to the potentially difficult topic of having to say goodbye to the puppies after 12 months of bonding, love and cuddles. But both women are absolutely clear on the subject - it will be painful but worth it.

*"From day one I never thought of Lawson as my dog," says Helen. "He is on loan. It's like my children - I wouldn't expect them to stay at home when they grow up. He will have had a fantastic childhood, and then he will go off and work for a living. That's been my philosophy from the start."*

Laura concurs. *"Whenever you welcome an animal into your life, you know that at some point you will have to face the pain of saying goodbye. The difference is, with puppy socialising, you know when that day will be from the start. We accept that that's how it is and just concentrate on enjoying every day that we get to spend with her. I know that Ginny will never forget us, but I also know she will move on quickly and love being with her permanent family just as much."*

*"We had a few negative comments from family and friends when we got Ginny along the lines of 'how could you take the puppy away from Erin?"*

*But it's been brilliant. We've had loads of conversations with her about disabilities and about the fact that someone is going to need Ginny, and that's more important than us loving her and wanting her; we are doing this for someone else."*

She adds: *"When I look at the Support Dogs' videos on YouTube and how the dogs are helping people, how could we possibly keep her? Also, going to the charity's doggy graduation ceremony was great. It reminds you why you are doing it. It was a real boost."*

Both feel very proud of their respective pups, and their future careers as professional service dogs. *"I would be disappointed if Lawson didn't make it as a support dog," says Helen. "I've put so much effort in. Being a puppy socialiser is such a fabulous thing to do. I'm already extremely proud of him."*

Adds Laura:

**"I would definitely encourage other people to become puppy socialisers. And don't dismiss it because you think it will be hard. It's so rewarding."**



Laura's daughter Erin playing with Ginny



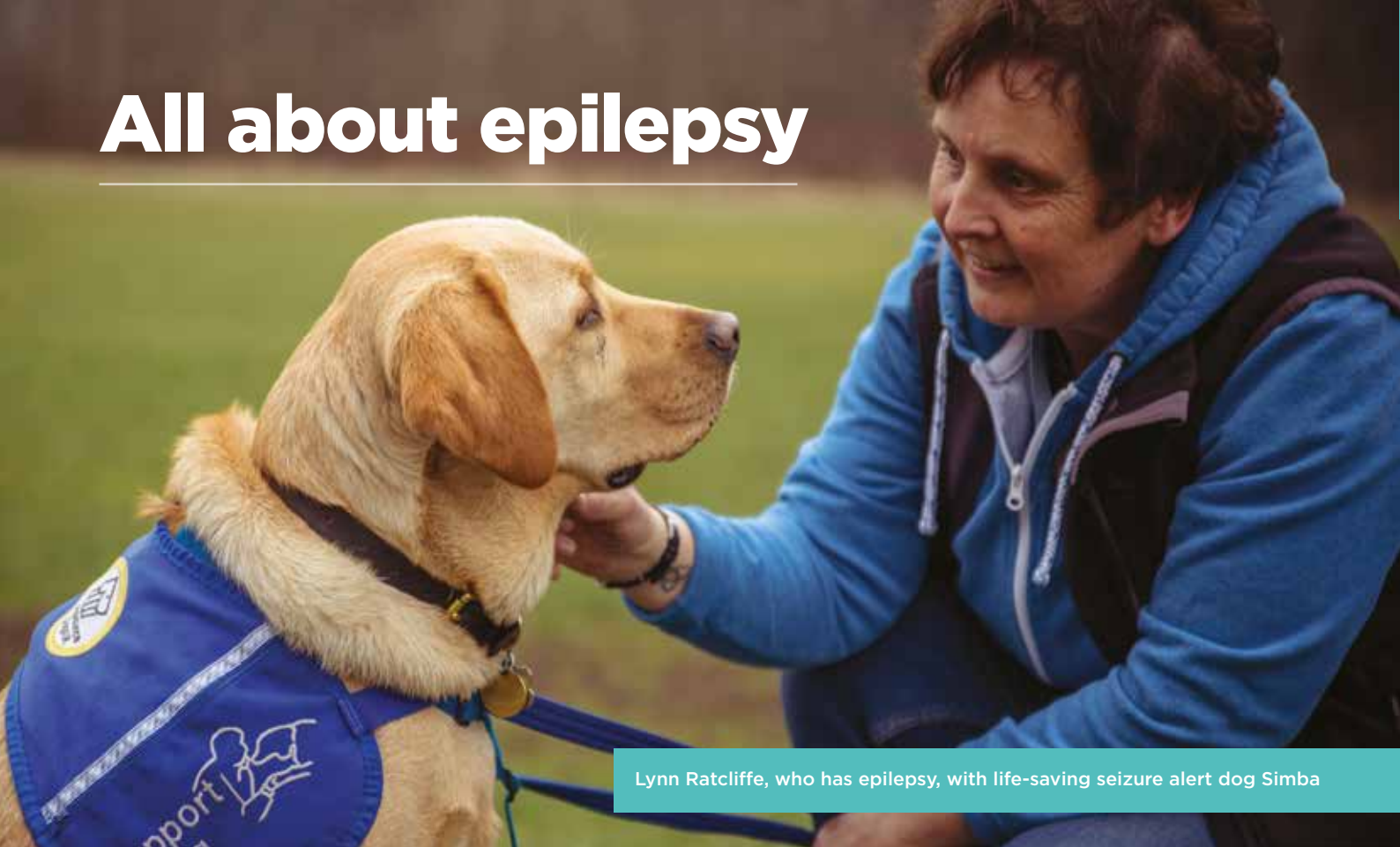
## Do you have what it takes to become a puppy socialiser?

Could you play a vital role for our charity by volunteering to be a puppy socialiser and provide full time care for it from your home for the first 14 months of its life? If you live within an hour of our centre in Sheffield we would love to hear from you. Please visit:

[www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)



# All about epilepsy



Lynn Ratcliffe, who has epilepsy, with life-saving seizure alert dog Simba

**For the past 20 years Support Dogs has been training seizure alert dogs for people with epilepsy, enabling them to lead safer, more independent lives.**

All our seizure alert dogs provide a 100 per cent guaranteed alert between 10 and 55 minutes in advance of a seizure so that their owner can get to a safe place to have their seizure.

These dogs provide a life-changing service. Day-to-day tasks, including going to the shops, cooking, ironing and having a bath, which would previously have been hazardous, are now manageable for our clients to be their own and in safety.

Our seizure alert programme is unique in the UK and we are extremely proud of what our dogs and their owners, such as Lynne and Simba and Angie and Ushka, pictured, can achieve together.



Ushka and Angie - a great seizure alert partnership

## What is epilepsy?

It's one of the most common serious neurological conditions, affecting 1 in 100 people in the UK, meaning 600,000 have epilepsy in the country, but it is an invisible disability and still much misunderstood.

Epilepsy can start at any age and there are many different types. Some types last for a limited time and the person eventually stops having seizures. But for many people, epilepsy is a life-long condition.

## What are epileptic seizures?

Electrical activity is happening in our brains all the time, as the cells send messages

back and forth to each other. An epileptic seizure occurs when the brain experiences a sudden burst of intense electrical activity. This temporarily disrupts the way the brain normally works, and the cells' messages become mixed up.

There are many different types of seizures. What happens to someone during a seizure depends on which part of their brain is affected, and how far the seizure spreads. In some seizures, the person might remain alert and aware of what's going on around them, and with other types they may lose awareness. They may also have unusual sensations, feelings or movements or they may go stiff, fall to the floor and jerk.

## How to apply for a seizure alert dog

There are a number of eligibility criteria you must fulfil before applying for a seizure alert

dog from Support Dog. For example, you must be over 16 and have at least 10 major seizures a month, and you cannot apply to have our own dog trained. Our charity will provide and match a trained dog for you. Please visit our website for details of the full criteria.

We run information days about our seizure alert programme at our national training centre in Sheffield. This is an opportunity for potential clients to learn more about our seizure alert dog programme prior to applying and, where possible, meet one of our existing clients. Our training staff are also on hand to answer any questions.

Sadly, due to our resources, places at this information day are very limited and we expect an extremely high demand. Places will be allocated on a first come first served basis.

## How to apply for an epilepsy seizure alert dog

If you have any questions please contact us by emailing [info@supportdogs.org.uk](mailto:info@supportdogs.org.uk) or phone **0114 261 7800**

or for more information about eligibility and how to apply go to our website [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)

**Thank you to Epilepsy Action for their support with this article. To find out more about Epilepsy Action and the services they provide visit [epilepsy.org.uk](http://epilepsy.org.uk)**

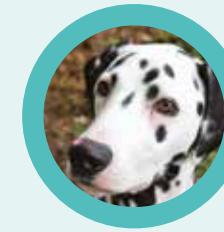
# HOW YOU CAN HELP

Support Dogs relies 100% on voluntary donations; we would love your support



## Charitable trusts and community organisations

Donations from trusts or community groups can be allocated to specific programmes of interest; for example, autism, epilepsy or disability, support our work in specific geographical locations, our work with rescue centres, or our work in general.



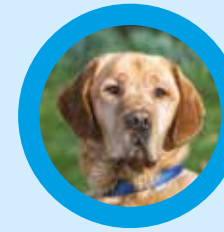
## Leave a gift in your will or in memory of a loved one

One in every three support dogs only exist because somebody left a donation to our charity in their will. These donations save lives will last far beyond the eight-year working life of a support dog.



## Corporate giving

We are a small charity, where your support will make a real difference in the lives of people in your community. Whether charity of the year, sponsorship for an area of our work, or fundraising for a charity that will engage staff and customers, Support Dogs has a number of innovative, fun and unique ways your company can get involved.



## Volunteers

Our volunteers are essential to us, providing foster care for our dogs and puppies prior to and during training, giving talks, helping with our admin, and running events and collections. Please help change lives by becoming a volunteer.



## Fundraising

From sponsor a support dog from £5 a month, putting on a doggy-themed fundraiser, taking part in one of our many sporty or adventure challenges or even just collecting stamps or having a collection tin in our aid - your support can make a difference.

## You can make a difference

Please contact us on **0114 261 7800**  
email [fundraising@supportdogs.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@supportdogs.org.uk)  
or visit [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)

# A moving ambition

**Support Dog's ambition to purchase a larger, purpose-built site is a step closer; thanks to a number of legacies that have been left to the charity in the wills of supporters.**

Rita Howson, chief executive explains: *"Our work is unique and provides vital care for those with challenging conditions including epilepsy, autism and MS. We need a site that we can develop to ensure we have a centre that give us the facilities to give the best support for them as they are trained and partnered with one of our amazing support dogs.*

*"The demand for our work is overwhelming. Almost 5,000 families contacted us last year in need of our services. Thanks to the kindness of some wonderful supporters we are now in the first stages of finding an appropriate site to purchase in the South Yorkshire area, where the charity has been based since it began almost 30 years ago. We are ideally looking for a semi-rural property with*

*enough space to allow our charity to grow and develop further in the years to come.*

Rita adds: *"We'd love to hear from anyone who might know of an appropriate property, or be interested in supporting us further, to enable us to embark on the next stage of our development to train more dogs and provide more life-transforming human/canine partnerships."*

Support Dogs relies entirely on voluntary donations and the support of volunteers is vital in all aspects of their work. 1 in 4 of the dogs the charity trains come to the charity are unwanted pets or come from rescue centres and are given a second chance to fulfil their potential as life-changing assistance dogs.





# Could you leave a legacy to Support Dogs?

A donation left in your will can make a lasting difference in so many ways



**INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM**

Left by:  
**Ann Richardson**  
15 August 2019

**SUPPORT FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY**

Left by:  
**G Longworth**  
9 March 2020

**TRAINED EPILEPSY SEIZURE ALERT DOG**

Left by:  
**Jean Kendal**  
January 2020

**A 100% RELIABLE ADVANCE WARNING BEFORE EVERY SEIZURE**

Left by:  
**Vincent Mckissock**  
30 March 2019

1 in every 3 support dogs only exists thanks to the wonderful kindness of donations left to our charity in Wills.

For 30 years our charity has been transforming the lives of children and adults affected by autism, epilepsy and disability. If the time is ever right for you to remember a charity in your Will please remember Support Dogs.

Did you know that even a **gift of 1%** in your Will can make a huge difference, so those closest to you **receive 99%**.

Do you know that **all you need** is to give to your Will writer is our registered charity number **1088281**?

## Make a will online for free with Support Dogs

Support Dogs have partnered with [MakeaWillOnline.co.uk](http://MakeaWillOnline.co.uk) to provide a free of charge will writing service to supporters.

This simple to use online service is available at [www.makeawillonline.co.uk/supportdogs](http://www.makeawillonline.co.uk/supportdogs) and is a simple online form to work through. Make-a-Will Online work with hundreds of different charities across the UK and have been operating for over 10 years.

The solicitors from Make-a-Will Online check every will for your peace of mind.

When you make a will they tell us a gift exists. You can also choose to share your name so we can say "thank you".

Every gift, however large of small, makes a difference. Even just 1% of your will. There is further information about other will writing providers and also the information you need to give to your solicitor to leave a gift in your will at [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)

Every gift, however large of small, makes a difference. Even just 1% of your will. Please visit [www.supportdogs.org.uk/legacy](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk/legacy) to find out more about leaving a gift to support dogs in your will.



# Support Dogs' merchandise

### CUDDLY DOGS IN SUPPORT DOG JACKETS



Yellow Labrador  
£14.99



Cockerpoo  
£14.99 **BEST SELLER**



Collie  
£14.99

### SUPPORT DOG PIN BADGES



Collie  
£2.00



Black Labrador  
£2.00

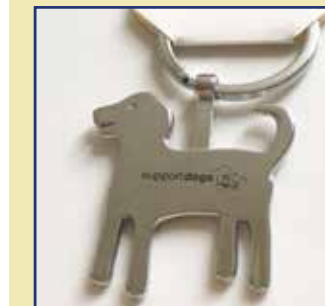


Yellow Puppy Labrador  
£2.00 **BEST SELLER**

### MAGNETS AND KEYRINGS



Support Dog Magnet  
£3.99



Support Dog Keyring  
£3.99

## Order Form

Item	Price	Qty	Total
Dog in support dog jacket <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow Labrador <input type="checkbox"/> Cockerpoo <input type="checkbox"/> Collie	£14.99		
Support dog pin badge <input type="checkbox"/> Collie <input type="checkbox"/> Black Lab <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow Lab	£2.00		
Support dog fridge magnet	£3.99		
Support dog keyring	£3.99		
Postage	£2.99	N/A	£2.99
<b>Total:</b>			

Or order online here:  
[supportdogs.org.uk/shop](http://supportdogs.org.uk/shop)

Name

Address

Postcode

Tel

Email

Payment method Cash  Cheque   
(Please tick)

Please complete the form and return with cash or a cheque payable to Support Dogs to:

**Support Dogs**  
21 Jessops Riverside, Brightside Lane  
Sheffield, S9 2RX



# Sponsor a support dog

From £5 a month or a one-off year payment, you can sponsor any of the dogs below or visit our website [www.supportdogs.org.uk/sponsor-a-dog](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk/sponsor-a-dog) for other dogs you can sponsor.

From Christmas to birthdays, sponsoring a support dog makes the **perfect gift** for someone special or a treat for yourself. You will not only bring a smile to their face but you are helping us to **transform the lives of adults and children with autism, epilepsy and disability.**



FUDGE

**Breed:** Pug Terrier cross  
**Job:** Disability assistance  
**Home:** Cambridgeshire  
**Birthday:** 29 December



IGGY

**Breed:** Labrador Retriever cross  
**Job:** Autism assistance  
**Home:** Yorkshire  
**Birthday:** 6 April



RUBY

**Breed:** Labradoodle  
**Job:** Disability assistance  
**Home:** Wigan  
**Birthday:** 14 August



SIMBA

**Breed:** Labrador  
**Job:** Epilepsy seizure alert  
**Home:** Cheshire  
**Birthday:** 5 August



THOR

**Breed:** Labrador Retriever cross  
**Job:** Autism assistance  
**Home:** Yorkshire  
**Birthday:** 1 April



PUPPIES

**Meet our heroes in training!** These amazing pups are currently in their first stage of training to become a support dog.



## SPONSORSHIP PACK

When you decide to **sponsor a dog** you'll receive three updates a year, a sponsorship pack including a special photo certificate of **your new pal.**

Plus to say a **massive thank you**, you'll receive a **free cuddly support dog toy!**

## I WOULD LIKE TO SPONSOR A SUPPORT DOG

FUDGE  IGGY  RUBY  SIMBA  THOR  PUPPIES

For Myself  As a Gift

Giftee Name and Address

Name

Address

Postcode  Tel

Email

Monthly Amount:  
 £5  £10  £15  Other

Bank Name & Address

Acc No.  Sort Code

Starting on

### Make a Difference with a One-Off Donation

£5  £10  £20  Other

I'd like to donate by:  Debit/Credit Card  Cheque (Payable to Support Dogs)

Card No.

Card Holder Name

Valid From  Exp. Date  CV2 No. (3 digits)

Payable to: Lloyds, 14 Church Street, Sheffield, S1 1HP.  
The account of Support Dogs Ltd A/c No. 03938225 Sort Code: 30-97-51 or please send a cheque payable to Support Dogs to the address below.

Signature:

*giftaid it*

## Make your donations worth more at no extra cost to you!

Simply fill out the declaration below and we can claim the tax back on your subscriptions and donations.

YES - Please claim Gift Aid on all donations I have made in the last four calendar years, and until further notice.

Signature

Date

To qualify for Gift Aid, what you pay in income tax or capital gains tax must at least equal the amount we will claim in the tax year (currently 25p for every £1 donated). Please notify Support Dogs if you wish to cancel this declaration.

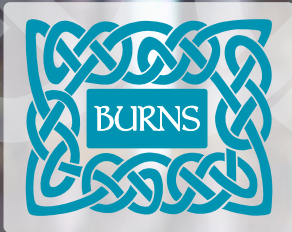
Please send completed forms to:

Support Dogs, 800 Brightside Ln, Sheffield, S9 2RX



Thank you for your support





Proud sponsors of Support Dogs



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1800 83 66 96 (ROI)



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