

Support Dogs' charity magazine

# Aura

Spring / Summer 2021

Edition 38

**“I owe Support Dogs so much...my dogs have restored so much contentment to my life.”**

**Disability assistance client Sarah with Towcester.**

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**From rescue dog to hero hound - how we give unwanted dogs a second chance**

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**What qualities are needed to be a successful seizure alert dog?**

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**AUTISM STORIES** AUTISM ASSISTANCE PARTNERSHIPS LAWSON AND WILLOW AND THOMAS AND MARKY ON PAGES 4 AND 10.

**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

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MESSAGE FROM RITA...

# Reaching our potential

Support Dogs is working hard to overcome the terrible impact of the past year - on our clients whose physical and mental health have been affected, and on our waiting lists of families in desperate need of our support and whose progress through training has been impacted by lockdown. And on our income, which dropped by over 40 per cent after 12 months of limited events and fundraising activity.

We are all hoping that 2021 proves to be a year where we can focus on giving our vital support to those who need it most. The wonderful kindness of our supporters and volunteers over the past year who have enabled us to continue our work has been hugely appreciated.

Our charity exists to save and improve lives. This doesn't just mean the lives of individuals and families affected by autism, epilepsy or disability. It extends to the lives of the dogs we train to become life-saving dogs; an aspect of our work that we are extremely proud of.

One in four of the dogs we train join us from rescue centres or were unwanted pets, and we are proud of being "champions of the second chance," giving dogs who have had a more difficult start to their lives the chance to reach their potential. Over the past few months, we have been working to increase awareness of this aspect of our work. We are delighted to have had the support of the campaigner and vet Marc Abrahams and presenter Gail Porter in running an online seminar attended by more than 200 people to promote this work earlier this year.

The pandemic is leading to an increase in dogs ending up at rescue centres and so the need for this area of our work is greater than ever. Dogs from rescue centres can often have qualities that can help them to become great support dogs. For example, separation anxiety can lead them to wanting to build a very close bond with a client and this can be useful for our seizure alert programme.



Rita Howson, with trainee support dog Rodney

This year we welcome David Hobson as the new chair of the charity. David has been on our board for the past three years. His background is in the property and construction industry so will help us as we strive to find larger premises to significantly increase the number of dogs we train and families we help each year. We also welcome three new trustees from healthcare, marketing, and finance industries: Mark Holmshaw, Amanda Royston, and Maurice O'Brien.

I do hope you are inspired by some of the stories you read in this magazine. Please do get in touch if you think you could help our charity grow its resources and help more people.

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 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: David Hobson

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)

# Superdog Willow 'like winning the Lottery' for youngster Lawson

How autism assistance dog Willow makes the world less frightening place.

Hospital appointments were always a nightmare for Lawson Hall, an eight-year-old boy with severe autism, and his mum.

During his annual assessment with his paediatrician the youngster would never sit still, hiding under the chair and clambering around the room while mum Nina struggled to keep him under control.

Since the arrival of Willow, the beautiful yellow Labrador who became Lawson's Support Dogs' autism assistance dog last year, things have been very different.

*"Hospital appointments were always a struggle; a real nightmare, but with Willow by his side Lawson just sits there in his chair, counting out her kibble, and staying still," says Nina. "Lawson has never been so calm. The paediatrician was fascinated by Willow and took lots of notes. She was really impressed!"*

That one incident is just one example of the difference that Willow has made to the lives of Lawson, his mum and 12-year-old sister Matilda, who also has autism and learning difficulties.

Lawson's autism was apparent from a very young age and he was diagnosed after his two-year health check revealed that his speech and walking was delayed.

*"When he was diagnosed it was a complete shock, although we knew something was not right. At that time, I was a paediatric nurse, but had no real experience of autism," says Nina, now a GP practice nurse in Sutton Coldfield, near the family's home in Tamworth. "In a way it was a relief as it meant we could get some support for him."*

Lawson's autism was severe enough for him to attend a special school, and he still sees a speech therapist, as



although he is verbal, he chooses who he speaks to.

But getting him to school was a horror show. "If we drove and I parked in a different place he would have a meltdown; if we walked, he would run off and there have been times when I've fallen over trying to stop him running into the road as he has absolutely no road sense," she adds.

Lawson is a big animal lover so when Nina found out about Support Dogs from an internet search in 2017, she applied to the autism assistance dog programme.

Her son was introduced to several potential match dogs, but it wasn't until Willow came to his house, started following him around and followed him up the stairs that senior Support Dogs' instructor Tracey Moore declared: 'That's a match!'

Lawson and Willow had clicked, and first Nina and Willow and then Lawson and Willow successfully passed their training, graduating last year.

Now Willow walks to school with Lawson without any problems or meltdowns, easing the stress on his mum.

*"Once we got Willow we straightaway noticed what a complete difference she made," says Nina. "If Lawson walks fast, she will keep pace with him. She goes into school with him, and he doesn't cry or hang back anymore; now*





Lawson with his much-loved autism assistance dog Willow

*he's the first one in the cloakroom. He says goodbye to her, and that's that."*

As well as keeping Lawson safe, Willow has a hugely calming influence on the youngster. She is there when he throws himself to the floor and lies down beside him to calm him down. Adds Nina: *"She just seems to know when he is not right and is there to help him. When they are out and about, he leans into her for reassurance, and she leans back into him - it's quite sweet."*

Although Willow is officially Lawson's assistance dog, he is also the family pet. Matilda will curl up with him in his dog basket for comfort when she is stressed, and when the children have gone to bed it's Nina's turn for a canine cuddle on the sofa. "Willow's a big help to all of us," she says.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, inevitably things were not easy for Lawson, stuck in the house, living with a strange new routine, and he stopped eating and lost weight. But since it eased life is getting easier again, and Nina says that without Willow life would have been so much worse.

Despite being a hard-working professional pooch, Willow has her daft dog moments too. Take her jacket off and she's a normal, fun-loving, ball-chasing crazy dog.

But primarily she's a life-transforming autism assistance dog, making the world a less frightening place for a young boy who needs a best friend. *"Nothing's perfect and Lawson's still got autism,"* says Nina.

**"Getting Willow was like winning the Lottery. She is amazing; she is golden! She makes a massive difference to me, my daughter, and of course Lawson. When he has Willow by his side, he can cope with being in the outside world."**

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

# YOU can be amazing in 2021

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**.

## EVENTS COMING UP

For more fundraising ideas and events visit [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)

### Monsal Dale Bridge Abseil 22nd May 2021

#### Peak District, Derbyshire

Abseil from an old railway bridge into a river gorge in the Derbyshire Peak District. Our first live fundraiser of 2021!



### Virtual London Marathon 3rd October 2021

#### Anywhere!

You have 24 hours to complete the distance, running or walking, with as many rest stops as you like, all from your home!

### Santa in the City 2nd December 2021

#### London

A 5km fun run in the City of London. All entrants get a Santa suit - including a hat and beard!



### Peak District Challenge 3rd - 4th July 2021

#### Bakewell, Derbyshire

A brand new event with 100km, 50km and 25km options, starting in scenic Bakewell and taking in the glorious White and Dark Peak.

### Great North Run 12th September 2021

#### South Shields

Join us on the famous 13.1 mile run from Newcastle's city centre to the coast in South Shields.

### Santa Paws Walk 5th December 2021

#### Sheffield

Join us with your four-legged friends for a muddy walk in the park.

## OTHER WAYS TO FUNDRAISE



Did you know? You **Donate used postage stamps** and we'll recycle and sell them to collectors. You can send to us free of charge, just phone 0114 261 7800 or visit [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk) stamps.



Did you know you can use **Use Amazon Smile** or Give as you Live when online shopping and they will donate to us on your behalf every time you can make a purchase.



Did you know? You can **sell your CDs, books, DVDs and games to Ziffit** and donate the proceeds to Support Dogs. Just download the Ziffit app on your phone and nominate Support Dogs as your charity.



# A BIG THANK YOU

## to all you fantastic fundraisers

We feel so privileged that so many people have continued to choose to fundraise for us and think of inventive ways to raise funds in these challenging times. There are so many more people we wish to thank but sadly there just isn't enough room.

Support Dogs' volunteer coordinator **Sarah Cooper** who raised a stupendous **£1,760** by doing something new every day for a full year!

Everyone who generously donated in memory of our long-time supporter Chris Watts.

**Freemasons from the Province of East Kent** who donated a generous **£1,250** to support our working partnerships in Kent.

**Everyone and their dogs** who put their best paws forward in our first ever virtual Santa Paws walk raising over **£1,000!**

**Linda Tuffield** who sent e-cards to friends and family at Christmas and sent us the **£81.60** she saved on postage.

**Pound Hill Junior School** raised a fantastic **£288** from their Christmas Jumper Day.

**Ottilia Fleming** who has raised over **£400** making and selling special loom band bracelets to friends and family.

**Brooke Ward** who has raised a brilliant **£282** by walking 31 miles throughout March.

**Elizabeth Atkins** who donated old coins and stamps to us raising **£1,000**.

**Wych-Malbank Rotary** who sold beautiful handmade gifts to raise a wonderful **£800**.

**Alice Moseley** who very kindly chose to donate **£10** to us following her friend making her dog cupcakes for her birthday.

**Marek Janos and Ed Sanders** who both took on an epic challenge of running four miles every four hours for 48 hours raising a fantastic **£918**.

**Everyone at Berkshire Hash House Harriers** who donated **£127.50** following a training run.

The **members of Beauvale Community Association** who collected a fantastic **£98.68**.

**Oliver Jacques** who cycled 100 miles over two weeks as part of his cubs' personal challenge badge raising a magnificent **£225**.

**1st Cottam Scout Group** who raised superb **£180** through a sponsored silence.



Youngster Oliver Jacques after his cubs' cycling challenge



Brooke Ward who walked 31 miles for our charity in March

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

## Could your company name a support dog puppy?



Tracey Marsden and Sophie Thomas from CMS with Locky

Support Dogs offer a number of unique ways for businesses to support our charity and to be engaged in our life saving working. One of the most popular is of course is naming a puppy. Examples of businesses who have done this include Canon with their pup Candhu, PWC with Kevin, Accenture with Buddy and most recently, lockdown has provided the perfect name for a puppy being sponsored by the law firm CMS - Locky the Labrador.

CMS is looking to raise £20,000 over two years to help pay for Locky's training with a large number of fundraising events planned. CMS Partner and head of the firm's Northern offices Charity Committee, Tracey Marsden, said: "We will be following the development of Locky over the next few years and look forward to celebrating his graduation as a fully trained Support Dog". Support Dogs' corporate partnerships manager Chris Daykin said: "Like many charities, lockdown has been tough and had a serious impact on our income and ability to fundraise. If your organisation is interested in supporting us and naming and following a puppy's journey please get in touch."



# Labradoodle Towcester – helping Sarah to pick up the pieces

Twenty-five years after a devastating riding accident that left her paralysed, Sarah is thriving – thanks to her two life-changing support dogs.



Sarah Henson with her disability assistance dog Towcester

Sarah Henson was 47 when her world was turned upside down.

The busy, active mother of three was thrown from a horse and paralysed from the chest down. After being taken to hospital by air ambulance, Sarah underwent several operations to insert metal rods into her spine to support the broken vertebrae.

After five months in hospital Sarah came home determined not to feel sorry for herself, but she found her physical restrictions frustrating. The smallest of tasks took twice as long, and she was constantly dropping things just out of reach, unable to pick them up.

Eventual salvation came in the shape of a young Hungarian Vizsla puppy called

China, initially a pet, but later trained by Support Dogs as her disability assistance dog. China transformed Sarah's life – as well as picking up items Sarah dropped, she also fetched remote controls and telephones, was trained to use a special rope system to lift Sarah's legs on her bed and pull her into a sitting position in the mornings, to fetch help when she fell out of her chair,

China was also a much-loved companion, giving Sarah much-needed confidence, and when she died at the age of nine Sarah was heartbroken.

*"It was absolutely ghastly, and I felt as if my right hand had been cut off,"* says Sarah. *"It wasn't just the inconvenience of not having someone to help me in so many ways but not having a companion*

*to face the world with – it sounds silly, but one can feel quite isolated and freakish in a wheelchair but having a dog to talk to as you go round is such a stress reliever."*

*"Support Dogs did their absolute best to match a trained dog for me, but my son could see how distraught I was and a week after China died, he gave me a surprise new puppy, a little black Labradoodle called Towcester. As she grew it turned out she was suitable to be trained as an assistance dog,"* says Sarah, now 72.

*"She had always been naturally well-behaved. Support Dogs worked hard with her and now she's pretty rock solid; I have every confidence in her."*



Despite being so close to China Sarah didn't find it hard to bond with Towcester. *"I felt very lucky to have another dog, although no-one will ever take China's place. But I love dogs and for some reason Towcester decided I was her human. The first time we met when she was 11 weeks old, she just came and sat by my wheelchair and has never really left."*

Towcester now provides much of the practical help that her predecessor did, and the pair qualified last year as an assistance dog partnership earlier this year.

*"I am always dropping things in odd places and she is amazing at understanding which of many things is the actual thing I want and quickly picks it up for me,"* adds Sarah. *"China being a bit of a prima donna could never pick up secateurs etc for me and although Towcester is much smaller she doesn't hesitate and is straight in there. She always picks up her metal feed bowl after her meals and trots off with it to the washing up sink. She is very proud of my car keys and I have to watch that she doesn't pick them up without being asked and as soon as she can, rush around the garden triumphantly parading with them. She soon brings them back though. She barks on*

*command to alert people if I need help. And when I fell out of my wheelchair, she got me my telephone that had fallen clear and I was able to phone for help."*

Sarah has been impressed by Support Dogs' training team. "Having spent all my life with dogs and horses and seriously training horses for most of that time it has been great to take an increased interest in training dogs instead and if I'd had more energy, I would have loved to have done more of it.

*"So, it was wonderful to be taught by Support Dogs - people say to me 'ah, aren't the dogs brilliant'. Yes, indeed the dogs are brilliant but it's only because of the Support Dogs' trainers. They are honestly the brilliant ones!"*

Sarah and her husband live on the edge of farmland in rural Lincolnshire, and Sarah, in her Trumper trike, exercises Towcester along farm lanes.

As well as the practical help that Towcester provides, she is also a loyal and much-loved companion, always ready to help when needed.

Sarah says: *"It's lovely to have a jolly little mate who's always up for a game and a joke. And she's good company and always happy - a gift".*

**"Support Dogs have been a breath of fresh air and I was lucky to be taken under their wing - the period when I was between/without a dog I was absolutely miserable and just wanted to stay moping at home. I owe them so much, and these two dogs have restored so much contentment to my life."**



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

# YOUNGSTER THOMAS IS THRIVING THANKS TO HIS FOUR-LEGGED BEST FRIEND

**With Marky by his side, helping him to face the world, Thomas feels safe and secure.**

For many youngsters with autism who struggle to make human connections, their autism assistance dog very quickly becomes their new Best Friend.

That happened to eight-year-old Thomas Fletcher and his assistance dog Marky. But it wasn't until Thomas's mother Kim was chatting to another mum at the school gates that she fully realised the transformation that his four-legged friend has made to her son.

*"The other morning a mum who has seen Thomas before and after Marky came up to me and said she couldn't believe how much Thomas has changed - and how Marky had changed his life," says Kim.*

*"This is from someone who doesn't know us very well, yet she had noticed the change too. And it's true; Marky has completely changed Thomas's life. He is that friend he needed who is always there for him."*

Thomas who lives with mum Kim, dad Paul and younger brother William in Sheffield, was diagnosed with autism at the age of three.

Thomas finds engaging with other people incredibly difficult. He has no sense of danger and without Marky by his side would run into the road. He has regular meltdowns when he throws himself to the floor, is unable to move, and becomes physically violent, screaming and throwing punches. The school run was running a gauntlet for his parents. On the rare occasion when they could get him out of the house, Thomas would go in his buggy or his wheelchair often with a blanket over himself and his head.

Academically Thomas is incredibly bright. He taught himself to read and can do maths beyond his years. He attends a mainstream school (with one-to-one support) but his ability to make connections and socialise is non-existent and his behaviour is challenging.

Says Kim: *"Before we got Marky, Thomas was very unhappy and frustrated, and really emotionally fragile. He had high levels of anxiety and was starting to bang his head on hard surfaces, cutting his head open, and refusing to come home from school."*

Paul and Kim first realised the impact a dog could have on Thomas when they visited a family member with a dog and found that Thomas was instantly calmer in his presence.

They did some internet research and found Support Dogs' autism assistance programme. When Support Dogs found the right match for Thomas, he met Marky and there was an immediate and obvious bond.



Thomas out and about with Marky and dad Paul

## AURA FEATURE CHILD AUTISM



Thomas with best friend Marky

*“As soon as Marky came into the room you could see the change in Thomas – it was amazing,” says Kim. “William was in the room too, but Marky instantly knew it was Thomas who needed help.”*

Adds Paul, who as Marky’s handler spent a long period working with Support Dogs’ instructors and trainers: *“I didn’t believe that we could get a dog to be Thomas’s best friend. I now realise where all that training goes and where the money goes – you can’t compare a home-trained dog with Marky.”*

One of Marky’s most important role is keeping Thomas safe. When they go out Thomas is attached to Marky’s harness to prevent him panicking and running off. Now leaving the house is now so much easier and simpler for the Fletcher family, and even Meadowhall shopping centre, formerly Thomas’s nemesis with its crowds, bright lights and busy shops, is no longer out of bounds. With Marky by his side, helping him to face the world, Thomas feels safe and secure.

*“Thomas would never do anything we asked, but he would do anything for Marky,” says Kim. “If we said ‘go and put your shoes on’ he wouldn’t, but if you say ‘Marky is ready to go to school’ he’ll come straight away. Marky has us wrapped round his paw!”*

Paul adds: *“At eight years old, Thomas doesn’t want to hold our hand all the time, and now he doesn’t have to. In many ways he uses Marky as a comfort blanket. If he has a meltdown, he is trained to lie on Thomas to calm him down, and within ten minutes he is back to his usual self. Before Marky, meltdowns could last all day.”*

Over the past few months, things that would have been unthinkable for the Fletcher now seem more normal. Thomas loves high performance cars and was able to spend all day at Birmingham NEC for an auto show last year. The family was even able to take a caravan holiday on the isle of Wight for the first time.

There have been setbacks. Lockdown inevitably caused all kinds of problems for Support Dogs’ clients, particularly autism clients, with the change in routine and constraints to normal life. Fortunately, because Kim works for the NHS as a GP Thomas was able to go back to school at Easter last year, minimising the disruption to some extent.

Then Paul then seriously injured his hand in an accident and could no longer be Marky’s main handler until his hand fully healed. Happily, Marky adapted seamlessly to working with

Kim as his handler. And because of lockdown restrictions Thomas and Marky couldn’t qualify as a partnership in May 2019, as scheduled, but finally made it in October.

The whole Fletcher family obviously love Marky to bits, and Thomas and Marky are now inseparable. Marky does ‘lap rests’ with Thomas – resting his head of his knee so Thomas can stroke his head, giving him comfort and reassurance. Although Marky is not allowed to sleep with Thomas, he lies next to him when he is reading before he falls asleep, Marky checks on Thomas again before his bedtime and in the morning comes and finds his best friend.

**“Marky came to stay in October 2019, and he is the best thing we have ever done for Thomas,” says Paul. “I don’t know what we’d do without him.”**

To find out more about our autism assistance programme go to [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)

# From rescue dogs to hero hounds

Marc the Vet and Gail Porter add their support to giving unwanted pooches a chance to become life savers.



Marc the Vet

*from rescue centres or unwanted pets and turning them into vital, life changing assistance dogs - is absolutely brilliant, both for the dogs and for the people whose lives they transform,"* says Marc.

Danielle Kennedy, who coordinates recruitment of rescue dogs at Support Dogs explains: *"We're struggling to meet the huge and growing demand for our services, and urgently looking to build new partnerships with organisations and individuals that can help us with dog supply."*

Danielle is liaising with established rescue charities such as Dogs Trust and Blue Cross, council dog wardens and specialist dog detection services to find more canines that can be trained up to work as professional service dogs.

Although assistance dogs need to have different characteristics for each training programmes - autism, seizure alert and disability - they all need to be confident and adaptable, dog-friendly, people-orientated with no major fears or phobias. They should also be between the ages of 10 months and two years old.

Support Dogs is committed to high standards dog welfare, with trainee dogs never spending a night in kennels, but instead living with local foster carers. Potential support dogs typically spend a month working with the charity's training team for a thorough assessment, before a decision is made about their future.

Did you know that 1 in 4 of all our life-transforming support dogs were rescue animals or unwanted pets?

With good reason we describe ourselves as *'the charity that gives an unwanted dog a second chance.'*

Because of rising demand for our services, which we provide free of charge, we're actively seeking more dogs to train - dogs from rescue centres

or unwanted pets that have the potential to change someone's life.

Recently vet, broadcaster and animal welfare campaigner Marc Abraham presented a seminar with the TV presenter Gail Porter, aimed at increasing awareness and educating people involved in rehoming about this aspect of Support Dogs work. *"I think what Support Dogs does - taking animals*

# Real rescue stories

Tails of amazing dogs who came to us after a tough start

**Kevin** the ex-rescue centre dog has turned into life-changing canine hero after being given a second chance. The yellow Labrador arrived at Support Dogs from Dogs' Trust Loughborough, and is now transforming the life of owner Wendy Martin, as her valued disability assistance dog.

After his original owner was unable to care for him due to a change in their circumstances, Kevin was handed over to Dogs' Trust so that he could find a new permanent home. Staff at the rehoming centre recognised the pooch's promise and alerted Support Dogs.



Kevin



Wadsley

Fox-red Labrador **Wadsley** has transformed the life of Brogan Evans, a young woman with severe epilepsy, by giving her a 100 per cent 48-minute advance warning of an oncoming seizure, enabling her to lead a safer, more independent life.

Wadsley was originally a pet with a family who had to give him up at the age of two due to serious illness. Support Dogs responded to their advert on the Preloved website, and the family now follow their former pet's progress with love and pride.

**Fudge** is another rescue dog given a chance to be a hero hound. At the age of 14 months, the Border/Terrier Pug cross was handed to Blue Cross, who alerted Support Dogs. Fudge is now a disability assistance dog for Judith, a retired lecturer with a progressive neurological condition, giving her the motivation and confidence to live her life to the full.



Fudge

# Ex-rescue dog Bear gets a second chance



Bear and Danielle

Meet Bear - the unwanted pet with a great future as a life-changing assistance dog.

The beautiful fox-red Labrador has been given an opportunity to turn his life around - and that of his potential new owner.

Bear recently arrived at Support Dogs from Dogs Trust Manchester. Aged three, he is a little older than most future assistance dogs, but Support Dogs were keen to give him the opportunity to prove himself.

Bear came from a loving home, but because of a new baby his family were struggling to give him the life he deserved, and he was passed on to Dogs Trust. Rather than putting Bear up for re-homing, Dogs Trust contacted Support Dogs because they thought he had the qualities to make it as a professional assistance dog.

*"As soon as I saw him, I knew instantly that I'd be taking Bear back with me,"* said Danielle Kennedy, who works in dog recruitment and assessment at Support Dogs.

*"He came straight up to me and was really friendly, and from day one he wanted to be loved by everyone he meets! He's a good dog, very good with people and we'd love to have more like him."*

Dogs Trust are following his progress and are keeping an eye out for more potential support dogs to pass on.

Because of his age the Support Dogs' training team are keen to swiftly assign him to a training programme, with the possibility that he might be an excellent seizure alert dog - trained to detect and warn of oncoming epileptic seizures.

Whichever programme Bear is selected for, one thing is certain - he will play a major role in transforming the life of someone with autism, epilepsy or disability.

You can find more information about our work with rescue dogs on our website [www.supportdogs.org.uk/Pages/Category/our-dogs](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk/Pages/Category/our-dogs)

# Ruby's precious gift

Labrador Ruby is showing the qualities needed to be a seizure alert dog

For more information on our epilepsy seizure alert programme go to [www.supportdogs.org.uk](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk)



Chocolate Labrador Ruby with Jess

At first glance, the light-hearted BBC detective series *Death in Paradise* doesn't appear to have any connection to the deadly serious business of training seizure alert dogs for people with epilepsy.

In fact, it's proving to be an important indicator in assessing the suitability of trainee pup Ruby for a career as a life-changing seizure alert dog, able to offer a 100 per cent guaranteed advance warning of an oncoming seizure.

Chocolate Labrador Ruby - only 12 months old but already earmarked for the seizure alert programme - can be relied upon to settle herself down for the night when the theme tune to the programme starts up at the end of the show.

"We watch the programme as a family and she intuitively picks up when the theme tune comes up at the end of the programme that it indicates her bed time," explains Ruby's puppy socialiser Martin Dunn, who with wife Sue and daughter Jess has been looking after the bonny brown Labrador for the past ten months throughout lockdown.

Although she is still a puppy and yet to start her formal training to become a seizure alert dog, Ruby is also picking up other cues - for example she responds to the cooker beeping and the Dunn family laying the table for tea by going into her crate.

"This kind of intuitive behaviour; understanding routines and patterns of behaviour and making connections is really important in a future seizure alert dog," explains senior puppy coordinator Natalie Wroe.

**"It's like when you put your coat on the dog knows it's time for a walk because of the repetition of the action they make an association. Ruby is only a youngster, but she has picked this up early. She is very clever, highly intelligent dog."**

An ability to make those connections is just one of many qualities required of a successful seizure alert dog. Intuition is another. A seizure alert dog must have a natural instinct to be in tune with people and emotions, able to adapt their behaviour if their client is feeling down or unwell, and to offer comfort.

It goes without saying that they have to be people orientated. "Ideal seizure alert dogs should enjoy being with and having human companionship," adds Natalie, "For example, when you are pottering around the house, they follow you around, if you sit on a sofa they come and settle at your feet - they enjoy contact and being with people.

Fortunately, Ruby has many of these qualities, plus she is highly trainable, a quick learner, and always eager to learn new tasks and challenges.

So, what awaits Ruby, when she leaves the Duns and starts at the training centre Sheffield later this year? The pup will live with local foster carers and be able to relax and have fun at weekends and evenings. During the day she will be put through a



general training programme that all support dogs undergo.

Because she has been highlighted as showing good potential for the seizure alert programme, the training team will look to match her to a suitable client with epilepsy, and then train her towards that individual's lifestyle and needs.

Once matched, and when she has passed all her basic training, Ruby will spend two weeks with an instructor. This will be followed by the most intensive time of all - a three-week period of training with her new client and instructor at the centre, in which Ruby will be tailor-trained to detect the client's seizures.

This is when the final quality required of a seizure alert dog is required - to be motivated by food! This is important in all assistance dogs as Support Dogs' trainers use a reward-based system of training, but it is particularly vital in seizure alert dogs,

Explains Natalie: "We really want to make the seizure alert training really positive for them. It can be quite a daunting thing for the dog to experience if they have no understanding of what's happening to their human companion when they have a seizure. They have to see a seizure as a positive experience and be rewarded by high value food."

Happily, like most Labradors, being motivated by food is something that comes naturally to Ruby.

For the next six months and possibly longer, Ruby and her client will continue training at home, with lots of support from their instructor. By the end of that time Ruby will be expected to give a 100 per cent guaranteed warning of an oncoming epileptic seizure up to one hour in advance. Once that's established, she and her client will qualify as a seizure alert partnership.

And thanks to Ruby, her human will be able to enjoy a considerably more independent lifestyle and a vastly improved quality of life.

To find out about the application criteria and how to apply for the seizure alert programme go to our website [www.supportdogs.org.uk/epilepsy-seizure-alert](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk/epilepsy-seizure-alert)



## Monty Don digs in to help Support Dogs

Monty Don, the UK's leading gardening writer and broadcaster offered his support for our charity's unique life saving work after he learned how the pandemic had affected our fundraising.

Monty kindly ran a Christmas auction of personally signed copies of his book 'My Garden World' to raise over £9,000 for Support Dogs.

Monty explained: "I have spent my entire life in the company of dogs and am endlessly fascinated by the depth and sensitivity of their interactions with humans through body language and, of course, through their power of scent. "I am very glad for this opportunity to raise some money to contribute to the

*superb work that is already being done by this fantastic charity, and to aid the ways that dogs can help detect, protect and aid so many kinds of illnesses and conditions."*

*"We're incredibly grateful to Monty for helping us raise money through the auction of his new book,"* says Support Dogs' chief executive Rita Howson.

*"We'd like to thank all our green-fingered supporters who dug deep into their pockets to help support our charity."*



Monty Don

# 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:  
**Audrey Roberts**  
June 2020

**SUPPORT FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY TO RETURN TO WORK**

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

**TRAINED DISABILITY ALERT DOG**

Left by:  
**Monica O'Meara**  
January 2020

**24/7 PERSONAL SUPPORT AND CARE**

Left by:  
**E Longney**  
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)





# Support Dogs' merchandise

## CUDDLY DOGS IN SUPPORT DOG JACKETS



**Yellow Labrador**  
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**Dalmatian**  
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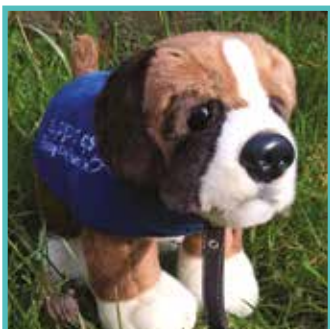


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## SUPPORT DOG PIN BADGES



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**Yellow Puppy Labrador**  
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**BEST SELLER**

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<b>Support dog pin badge</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Collie <input type="checkbox"/> Black Lab <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow Lab	£2.00		
<b>Postage</b>	<b>£2.99</b>	N/A	<b>£2.99</b>
<b>Total:</b>			

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



# Sponsor a support dog

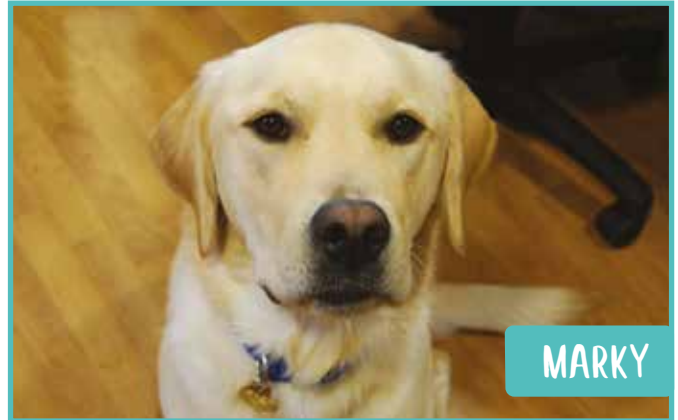
Our fantastic welcome pack and regular pup-cards make this the **perfect gift** or a treat. Now you can make it an extra lovely surprise with the pack delivered in a special gift box with a personal note from you inside.

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](http://www.supportdogs.org.uk) for other dogs you can sponsor.



RUBY

**Breed:** Labradoodle **Job:** Disability assistance  
**Home:** Lancashire **Birthday:** 14th August



MARKY

**Breed:** Labrador **Job:** Autism assistance  
**Home:** South Yorkshire **Birthday:** 26th March



FUDGE

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



WOLFY

**Breed:** Labrador **Job:** Seizure alert  
**Home:** Kent **Birthday:** 15th September



THOR

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



PUPPIES

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



## A wonderful gift!

When you decide to **sponsor a dog** you'll receive three updates a year and 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

RUBY  MARKY  FUDGE  WOLFY  THOR  PUPPIES

FOR MYSELF  AS A GIFT  Giftee Name and Address


Name

Address



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Email

Monthly Amount:

£5  £10  £15  Other

Bank Name & Address



Acc No.  Sort Code

Date

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

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Card No.

Card Holder Name

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

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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.

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**Thank you for your support. Make your donations worth more at no extra cost to you!**

*giftaid it*

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

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.

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