



Hearing Dogs
for Deaf People

Favour

Issue 68
AUTUMN
2023
£1.75 when sold

The magazine from Hearing Dogs for Deaf People

Soundwork

How we teach our dogs to
alert deaf people to sounds

A lasting legacy

Over half of all
hearing dogs
are funded
by gifts
in Wills



“Alfie is more than
my hearing dog...
he’s my soulmate”

With hearing dog Alfie,
Lisa no longer feels alone

PLUS

How you can change
a deaf person’s life
by sponsoring
a puppy

Book a Hearing Dogs speaker



1 in 5 adults in the UK have hearing loss

Are you, or anyone you know, a member of local community groups such as Rotary, WI, Inner Wheel or Probus? If so, we have fabulous speakers across the UK who could give a talk about Hearing Dogs and the many ways the Charity transforms deaf people's lives.



We'll tell you all about how Hearing Dogs for Deaf people can help

Learn how we train our amazing puppies to become life-changing hearing dogs

To request a speaker, simply fill in this form:
hearingdogs.org.uk/talk

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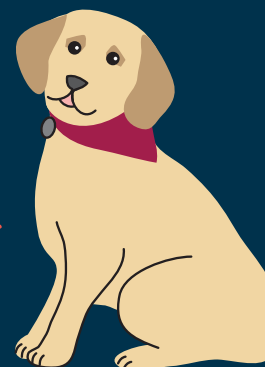
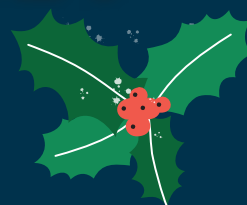
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hearingdogs.org.uk/christmasmarket

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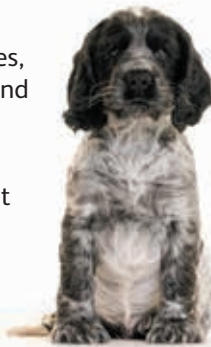
In this issue, you'll read stories of people whose lives have been completely transformed by their hearing dogs. People who felt lonely and anxious until their hearing dogs opened up their worlds, helped them reconnect with life, and helped them leave loneliness behind.

Our hearing dogs, and Hearing Link Services, make life so much easier for deaf people and people with hearing loss. This wouldn't be possible without your support.

As you read on, you'll see how your support makes such a difference to deaf people.

Thank you, and we hope you enjoy this issue.

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Favour

magazine is named after Hearing Dogs' very first dog, Favour.

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Royal Patron

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Registered charity in England
and Wales no. 293358 and
Scotland no. SC040486

Member of UK Council on
Deafness, Assistance Dogs (UK),
Assistance Dogs Europe and
Assistance Dogs International



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Cover photo by Paul Wilkinson

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Produced by: mjdesign, mjdesign.me.uk

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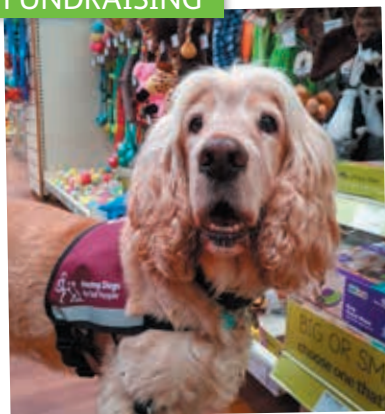
Updates from our latest appeals and news about our favourite dogs – we sniff out the stories that matter to you...



Pets at Home raises £650,000 for Hearing Dogs

Pets at Home kindly chose Hearing Dogs as the beneficiary of their Summer Fundraiser, for a second year

FUNDRAISING



Pets at Home has raised a whopping £650,000 for Hearing Dogs, having chosen the Charity as the beneficiary of their Summer Fundraiser for a second year running.

This brings the total raised by the national pet retailer for the Charity over the last two years to over £1 million.

All the money raised from the Summer Fundraiser 2023 will help to train hearing dog puppies that will go on to change deaf people's lives.

The Summer Fundraiser took place throughout July, with every area of the business getting involved – from all Pets at Home stores, Groom Rooms, and the Pets at Home Veterinary Group, to their distribution centres and offices – all raising funds to support the training of life-changing hearing dogs.

Steve Heyes, director of communications and fundraising for Hearing Dogs, said: "We are absolutely blown away that

£650,000 has been raised in this year's Summer Fundraiser! A huge thank you goes out to all Pets at Home colleagues and customers – you've all done something incredible and are directly helping change the lives of deaf people through our clever dogs.

"Our relationship with Pets at Home, a huge national retailer, not only helps to fund the training of our amazing hearing dog puppies, but it also provides us with an amazing opportunity to raise awareness of Hearing Dogs with a big, new audience, which is so valuable to the Charity.

"Pets at Home colleagues truly went above and beyond to raise money to help deaf people leave loneliness behind and reconnect with life. They fundraised in stores, sold handmade items, did cycling challenges, car washes, dress up days, and more. It was all brilliant and we were so impressed by how hard everyone worked to raise money and awareness for Hearing Dogs for Deaf People."

Many of Hearing Dogs' volunteers and staff played a significant role in the success of the Summer Fundraiser this year. They visited over 220 stores across the UK with dogs-in-training, shared stories and information with Pets at Home colleagues and customers about the Charity and what our clever dogs do, and they took the time to say thank you to colleagues in store for everything they were doing. This support was crucial, so on behalf of the Charity, a big, thank you to everyone who got involved.

The Summer Fundraiser saw the Pets at Home team wearing Hearing Dogs branded T-shirts in stores, selling Hearing Dogs merchandise and encouraging customers to make donations at the till – all to help change the lives of deaf people and people with hearing loss. If you visited a store during July and donated to the Summer Fundraiser, a huge thank you.



Hearing Dogs family welcomes new Chief Executive

A new chapter began for the Charity in July, as Tracy Griffin was welcomed as the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Hearing Dogs for Deaf People

LEADERSHIP

Tracy joined us from The Big Issue Foundation where she had been CEO for the last few years. Prior to this, she gained a wealth of experience working for several UK charities and held Trustee roles at Action for Children and now Jeans for Genes UK.

Just before she joined, we asked her to answer some questions about herself...

Can you tell us about your professional background? I chose a professional career in the charity sector, both in the UK and overseas, and feel very privileged to have worked in some fantastic organisations – Save the Children, NSPCC, Shelter, Scope and The Big Issue.

“I am thrilled to be joining you all and privileged to be able to lead Hearing Dogs for Deaf People into its new chapter.”

My passion has always been working towards inclusion of people who either do not have a voice, are marginalised, or otherwise feel excluded from their communities.

My work has involved repatriating child soldiers in Africa, supporting small-scale micro-businesses in India, to supporting abused or bullied young people, homeless individuals, and people excluded due to disability.

What areas of the Charity world have you been involved in before? I've been involved in all parts of an organisation,

having been director of fundraising, services, marketing and communications for many years. I've also been heavily involved with volunteers – both Save the Children and NSPCC are volunteer-led organisations. As director of community and corporate fundraising I worked alongside and was accountable for 1,500 volunteer fundraising groups in the UK and their representation on the Board.

I've been a charity trustee for many years and enjoy working with charity boards from both an executive and non-executive perspective.

What are you looking forward to most about joining the Hearing Dogs for Deaf People family? I'm looking forward to getting to know you all – people and dogs, and to making a difference. I recently joined a trustee and senior team awayday, and it's clear how much passion, expertise, excitement and opportunity there is for the future of the Charity.

Why is it so important that our Charity helps as many deaf people as we can? Feeling excluded from the world around you is a lonely place to be. It drains confidence and is the cause of many wellbeing and mental health issues. Connection and bond with an animal has a unique and powerful effect on how people view the world and participate in it. It can transform anyone's life, but especially people living with a variety of disabilities and wellbeing issues.



Do you have any family dogs or pets? Can you tell us a bit more about them?

I've never been without a dog, having grown up with dogs, and for many years fostered and owned dogs. I currently have a young, water-loving chocolate and white Sprocker, Flynn, and a 16-year-old black and white cat, Ruby, who wonders what I was thinking in introducing Flynn to the family!

What do you do in your spare time?

I met my partner Tim while at university and we have three sons. We spend a lot of time together – travelling, walking, eating, drinking – and we all love the theatre. In escaping from the boys' love of anything to do with a ball, I swim, windsurf and head for a spa with my friends.

What message would you like to share with our supporters, volunteers and staff? I am thrilled to be joining you all and privileged to be able to lead Hearing Dogs for Deaf People into its new chapter, building on all that has gone before, and in partnership with you all.

A special thank you to everyone who supports the Charity or volunteers in whatever capacity, without whom charities like Hearing Dogs would be unable to deliver the work that they do.

STAY IN TOUCH: ✕ twitter.com/hearingdogs f facebook.com/hearingdogs ▶ hearingdogs.org.uk

Dr Bruce Fogle MBE retires as a Hearing Dogs trustee

Co-founder of our charity, Dr Bruce Fogle MBE, has retired as a trustee after more than 40 years of changing deaf people's lives

Dr Bruce Fogle MBE, co-founder of Hearing Dogs, has retired as a trustee for the Charity and has been named as a vice president.

Bruce has a long history with the Charity. He co-founded it back in 1982 with Lady (Beatrice) Wright, was elected vice chairman in 1986, and has been actively involved since then.

As a dog lover, and a practising vet with decades of clinical experience, Bruce has always known how strong the bond is between people and dogs. He also saw first-hand the incredible difference dogs can make to people's lives. It was this insight which led him and Lady (Beatrice) Wright to launch Hearing Dogs for the Deaf, as it was then known, as a three-year pilot scheme, at the Crufts dog show in 1982. He has been an integral part of the Charity since then, as we have grown to train more life-changing hearing dogs and help more deaf people.

Bruce says: "I am tremendously proud of all that Hearing Dogs for Deaf People has done in the past 41 years to change the lives of deaf people and people

with hearing loss.

"When Babs and I co-founded the Charity, we knew the potential of dogs being trained to alert deaf people to important and life-saving sounds, and the difference this could make to deaf people's lives, but we could not have imagined just how many people the Charity would go on to help.

"We have gone from training a small number of hearing dogs four decades ago, to now training and matching around 200 dogs each year and helping thousands of other people with hearing loss through our personalised Hearing Link Services, such as our helpdesk and support groups.

"It is our wonderful family of over 3,000 kind volunteers and our professional and dedicated staff that has enabled the Charity to go from strength to strength. As I retire as a trustee, Hearing Dogs is in very good hands to continue its mission of seeing a day when no deaf person feels alone."



Christina O'Donovan-Rossa, chairman of Hearing Dogs, says: "It has been a joy to work alongside Bruce, both as a trustee and now chair. His endless enthusiasm, boundless energy, good humour and wise counsel will be sorely missed. He is the repository of wonderful stories about the Charity, which ensures we remain steadfastly focused on our key purpose."

From everyone at Hearing Dogs, we thank Bruce for changing the lives of deaf people for over 40 years. To mark Bruce's retirement and to commemorate the many wonderful things he has done to help deaf people and people with hearing loss, a tree has been planted at our southern training centre, The Grange, which we are sure volunteers and staff will enjoy for many years to come.



DID YOU KNOW?

- In 2004, Bruce received an MBE for services to deaf people.
- Bruce is the world's best-selling practising vet and his books have been published in over 35 languages.
- This year, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons awarded Bruce the Queen's Medal, their highest honour.
- For his services to pets, pet owners and vets, the British Small Animal Veterinary Association awarded Bruce Honorary Life Membership.

Exciting news about Ruby

You might've read in previous issues of *Favour* about hearing dog puppy Ruby, who was named to celebrate our 40th anniversary. You may even have donated to her appeal, in which case – a huge thank you!

We're delighted to share the exciting news that Ruby has now been chosen to become a hearing dog mum! This means that when the time is right, she'll raise the next generation of hearing dog pups.

As a hearing dog mum, Ruby will continue living with Dawn, who, with the

support of puppy midwife Emma, will look after her newborn puppies until they are ready to go to their new homes. This will include monitoring both Ruby and the pups' health and making sure the pups get a great start in life.

Dawn says: "I'm over the moon that Ruby has been chosen as a hearing dog mum, not only because I'm super proud of her, but also because it means she will stay with me indefinitely! I am so very grateful that Hearing Dogs has given me the opportunity to continue sharing her journey.

"We're still continuing with her training, although as she won't go to a deaf partner, she won't need to be trained to alert people to sounds. Most recently, I've been getting her used to public transport. She liked the train, but wasn't at all impressed with the bus. She didn't make a fuss, but I could tell she was glad to get off.

"We continue to enjoy time on the Essex coast where she loves running around on the sandy beaches at low tide, chasing her ball and jumping over the groyne. We've



also even been on a few boat trips, which she really enjoyed.

"As a hearing dog mum, Ruby will be able to pass on all her best traits to her puppies – her calm, loving temperament; her intelligence, patience and understanding; and her utterly joyful character – so that, over time, many more people will benefit from her little Rubettes. What a fabulous legacy for the Charity's 40th anniversary pup!" **A huge thank you once again to anyone who donated to Ruby's appeal.**



King's Birthday Honours List recognition for Ian

We are proud to say that one of our hearing dog partners, who has hearing dog Buddy, has been recognised with a British Empire Medal in His Majesty the King's very first Birthday Honours List for his work as a volunteer car service driver for the Welsh Ambulance Service.

Ian, who is 53 and lives in Pontypool, volunteers two days a week to take patients to their hospital appointments, including for dialysis, oncology and outpatient treatments.

Ian, who is severely deaf, is usually accompanied to the appointments by his hearing dog, cocker spaniel, Buddy.

Ian said he couldn't believe it when the letter landed on his doormat, and actually thought he was in trouble when he saw 'On His Majesty's Service' on the envelope.

"I was shaking like a leaf and it gave me goose bumps to read – I still have goose bumps talking about it now", he said. "Poor old Buddy was wondering where his tea was because I just kept re-reading the letter.

"The fact that it's the King's first Birthday Honours List makes me especially proud, and I'm really looking forward to being presented with the medal."

Ian, who has been deaf since birth, was partnered with Buddy in 2014. "Having



Buddy, and Shaun, my hearing dog before him, makes my deafness more visible to other people. They have also allowed me to lead a more independent life.

"Buddy's been coming with me since I started volunteering for the Welsh Ambulance Service just over three years ago. Everyone loves him and he's good as gold, just occasionally popping up his head from the back of the car to say hello."

NOTHING COULD EASE LISA'S ANXIETY, EXCEPT ALFIE



Lisa went from feeling anxious and isolated, to living the full life she deserves thanks to hearing dog Alfie

Lisa is a confident, happy, independent person. But she didn't always feel like this. After losing her hearing as an adult, she struggled to cope. Her anxiety became overwhelming as she felt increasingly isolated by her hearing loss.

Lisa explains, "I lost my hearing over the course of about three months. Someone very close to me had passed away and when my daughters were reading the eulogy at the funeral, I realised I couldn't hear what they were saying. It all just happened so quickly.

"At first it was a moderate to severe hearing loss in one ear, but within a month I was completely deaf. It was terrifying.

"I had lots of tests done but no one knew why it had happened. I used to work in a nightclub and loved music, so the doctors said it could be that. I also fell down the



Alfie loves alerting Lisa to sounds she may have missed

stairs a few years ago, so maybe it was that. No one knows.

"When I lost my hearing, I had just moved house. My daughters had left home, and I had downsized and was really excited about living on my own. But it was not the positive experience I had hoped for. Losing my hearing made everything difficult. I felt really lonely, and as though I was stuck in limbo – I couldn't communicate with hearing people or deaf people. I just felt stuck in the middle.



Lisa is very happy to go to her local supermarket now Alfie is with her

"It was scary and isolating, and I felt very vulnerable. It was all new to me, and I felt like anything could happen, like a fire. I couldn't sleep. It really wasn't good, and all made worse by how lonely and isolated I felt.

"People thought I was okay and was coping alright. I put on a front for the children and my mum and nan, as I didn't want them to think I wasn't coping. But I wasn't.

"Nine months after losing my hearing, I got a cochlear implant. It helped in some ways, but it was still not the same. I thought 'no-one's going to want me now – a middle-aged woman, and now I'm deaf'. It's incredibly lonely feeling like that.

"I already experienced anxiety, but losing my hearing made it so much worse. It got so bad that I really struggled being out in public. I once had a really bad panic attack in a supermarket. My legs turned to jelly and I crumbled to the floor. I was shaking and in a complete state. It was awful. My daughter had to come and get me to take me home.

"I ended up shutting myself away at home. Feeling lonely, scared, and unsafe. I was deeply unhappy. I felt useless, and as though I was good for nothing.

"LOSING MY HEARING MADE EVERYTHING DIFFICULT. I FELT REALLY LONELY"



"ALFIE IS MY SOULMATE. WITH HIM I DON'T FEEL LONELY ANYMORE."

"I knew I had to do something to stay in the world. So I applied for a hearing dog.

"Hearing Dogs for Deaf People chose Alfie for me. When he came to live with me, he just completely turned everything around.

"He's not just my ears; he's so much more. He has a knack for cheering me up. He's great company. He's affectionate, loyal, friendly, funny. He's the most amazing dog in the world as far as I'm concerned.

"We have such a strong bond. I often say Alfie is my soulmate. With him I don't feel alone anymore.

"I feel safe with him in the house, knowing he will alert me if the smoke alarms went off. He gives me so much confidence. I get out and about because of him. I went from being so anxious and not leaving the house, to going out every day. I am now happy going to supermarkets with him by my side, I don't feel scared or anxious. It's like a totally different life.

"When we go out, he wears his burgundy Hearing Dogs jacket, so people know he's my assistance dog and they'll come over and say hello. I feel more connected to the world around me with him there. I still get anxiety sometimes, but it's nowhere near as bad as

it was before I had Alfie. All the therapies I tried – cognitive behavioural therapy, other therapies, medication – nothing worked. But Alfie did. That's why he's my soulmate." 🐾

PLEASE DONATE



Your support has helped to transform Lisa's life.

Please give a gift today so that another clever hearing dog can be partnered with a deaf person like Lisa.

How to donate

🐾 If this magazine has been mailed to you, please use the donation form enclosed

🐾 Write a cheque to Hearing Dogs for Deaf People and post to: **Freepost RSGX-LSRG-UCGH, Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, The Grange, Wycombe Road, Saunderton, Princes Risborough, HP27 9NS**

🐾 Donate online at hearingdogs.org.uk/lisa



Teaching our dogs to alert deaf people to sounds

A key part of training life-changing hearing dogs is teaching them how to hear a sound and alert a deaf person to it. Here, we look at how this is done...

A hearing dog's unique ability to hear a sound and then alert a deaf person to it is what sets our highly-skilled dogs apart. It's their 'unique selling point', and one that involves lots of dedication, time and most importantly, fun, to achieve.

We teach all our dogs a core range of sounds, such as the smoke alarm, doorbell, portable oven timer, and alarm clock. We then work with individual dogs to teach them bespoke sounds, based on whatever lifestyle or needs their future deaf partners might have. For example, the sound of a baby's cry for deaf parents, carbon monoxide alarms, video calls, text message alerts, and many more.



Mene, Amy's hearing dog, alerting her to her baby's cry

We often get asked exactly how a dog alerts a deaf person to a sound. It goes like this: the dog hears a sound they have been trained to recognise. They run over to their deaf partner and give them an insistent

nudge on the leg with their nose. The person holds their hands out in a 'What is it?' gesture and, if they use speech, would say the words 'What is it?'. The dog then leads them to the source of the sound.

An exception to this sequence is when the sound is a 'danger sound', such as the smoke alarm, carbon monoxide alarm, or intruder alarm, as we would not want a dog to lead a person toward potential danger. For danger sounds, when a dog is asked 'What is it?', they will drop down to the floor, signalling to the deaf person that such a sound has gone off, giving them the chance to get to safety.

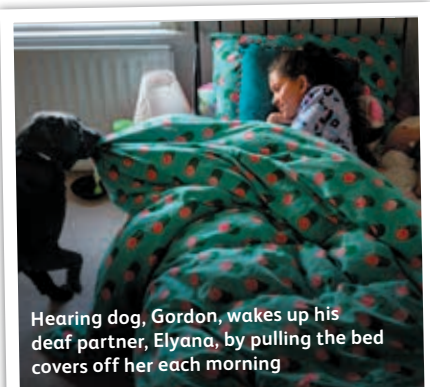


Bella alerts volunteer trainer, Fiona, to the smoke alarm

The perfect way to wake up

The final sound alert sequence is when a hearing dog wakes up a deaf person in the morning. For this alert, when the dog hears the alarm clock they would spring into action – either jumping onto the bed and laying across the person's chest to wake them up, or they would grip the corner of the duvet with their mouth and pull it off the sleeping person to wake them. Being woken up by a happy, affectionate dog eager to spend the day together is certainly something that our deaf partners speak very positively about!

Seeing these sound alerts in person is impressive, and knowing how valuable they are to deaf people makes them even more so. Not only do they enable someone to feel safe and protected, they allow them to go about their daily life free from many of the obstacles they may have experienced before.



Hearing dog, Gordon, wakes up his deaf partner, Elyana, by pulling the bed covers off her each morning



The training process

Teaching our dogs to alert deaf people to sounds involves encouraging them to learn a certain type of behaviour, with lots of treats along the way. Katie Grundy, a hearing dog trainer, explains: “To teach our dogs to alert a deaf person to sounds, first we teach them something called ‘targeting’, which is to touch something with their nose.

“We sometimes do it with our hand to start with, so we’d just hold out our hand and if the pup comes over to sniff the hand, we reward them for approaching it and ‘targeting’ it. This then becomes a behaviour the puppy enjoys – they see the hand, or other target, come and touch it with their nose and they get a treat for it.

Hearing dogs trainer, Jess, teaching Charlie to target her leg when there is a sound

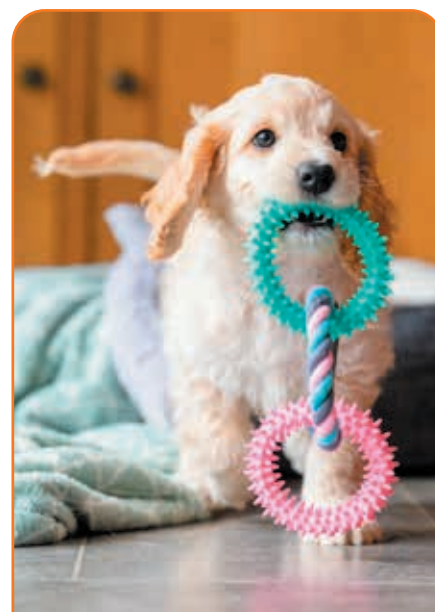


“The purpose of this is that the dogs learn to target something with their nose, which is then turned into an alert behaviour when we incorporate different sounds. This behaviour, along with the fact they get lots of treats and rewards for doing a good job, means they develop the confidence to nudge a person with their nose whenever they hear certain sounds.

“When our dogs are alerting deaf people to sounds they just think they’re playing”

“Even though our dogs are changing deaf people’s lives, and even saving lives when they alert to sounds like the smoke alarm, to them it’s just a game. We make the training really fun for the dogs and reward them with treats, a fuss, or their favourite toy – whatever they respond to best. So when they’re living with their deaf partner and alerting them to sounds, they just think they’re playing, and don’t realise the hugely positive impact they are having on someone.”

To find out more about how we train our clever pups, visit hearingdogs.org.uk/training



We rely on our amazing volunteer puppy trainers to train the next generation of life-changing hearing dogs. If you or someone you know might be interested in helping to train a cute pup to make life easier for a deaf person, visit hearingdogs.org.uk/volunteer

Elvis helps Chloe to feel safe



“Hearing dogs help people come out of the isolation of deafness – and that’s massive.”

Chloe, 28, was born with bilateral profound deafness. She had hearing aids until the age of 18, when she had a cochlear implant fitted. She is the only person in her family who is deaf, and doctors still don’t know the cause. She now lives in Twickenham with her husband and her hearing dog Elvis, who helps her on a daily basis.

Self-conscious

“I was lucky when I was little. My family were fantastic and learned British Sign Language straight away, so communicating with them was very easy. When I went to primary school though, I became very self-conscious about my deafness. I asked my parents not to sign when we were around school friends, and I always wore my hair down to hide my hearing aids.

“I went to a mainstream primary school with a deaf unit, but teachers felt I was more advanced than the other deaf students, so they put me into a hearing classroom with a sign language interpreter.

“I found this quite difficult. I was the only deaf child in a class of 30 hearing children and it meant I had to sit at the front all the time. I couldn’t sit next to my friends.

“School is usually a child’s first experience of independence, but having an interpreter with me all day meant I didn’t have the same freedom as other children to make friends etc. Wherever I went, my interpreter went with me.”

to take the train again for some time afterwards.”

The idea of applying for a hearing dog grew over time for Chloe.

“During the pandemic I started using the Borrow my Doggy app and realised

can take it off and I know I’m safe.

“When my husband’s working away, I let Elvis sleep on the bed next to me. Just knowing he’s there, and will let me know if anything happens, is very reassuring.

“I’ve also been able to go shopping for the first time in ages. Before I had Elvis I used to shop online because I found it hard to approach people for help. I didn’t feel comfortable going into changing rooms because I was worried someone might walk in on me, or that a fire alarm might go off and everyone would leave the building without me knowing.”

Ever since Chloe came out of the cloakroom at work to find her colleagues evacuating the building because the fire alarm had gone off, the thought of not hearing a fire alarm is her biggest fear.

“Now I have Elvis, I’m so much more relaxed, because he will let me know. It’s his favourite sound to alert me to as well!”

Elvis has also given Chloe the confidence to speak to people when she’s out walking and when she goes to church on Sunday.

“Church can be quite a noisy environment with everyone chatting and music in the background, and before I had Elvis I wouldn’t engage with anyone. Now I’ll turn up and talk to people and get involved in things. Everyone loves him at church – he’s a bit of a celebrity!”



“With Elvis, I feel completely safe”

Overcoming barriers

Chloe’s secondary education at the Mary Hare School for the Deaf in Newbury was a much more positive experience.

“I realised for the first time that I wasn’t the only person who was deaf and that it was okay to be deaf. I felt much more secure in myself – I loved being there. I’m still in touch with all my friends from school – we talk every day – and some of them were my bridesmaids.”

Chloe studied psychology at university, before joining the NHS. She works full-time as a Data and Insight Lead in London and, twice a week, takes the train and then the tube to work.

“I’m comfortable with the train as long as nothing goes wrong. Because people can’t see your deafness, they just assume you can hear them, and I’ve had several experiences on the tube where someone has barged past and glared at me because I haven’t heard them asking me to move.

Upsetting

“One day I was on a packed train platform at rush hour and, all of a sudden, I could see people screaming and pushing. It turned out that someone had fallen onto the track, and they were running around trying to get help, but I didn’t know what was going on. I found the whole experience very upsetting and didn’t want

how much I loved getting out and about and walking dogs. I also found it was a great way to connect with other people.

“Another factor in my decision was seeing the way people reacted to a blind colleague with a guide dog. People responded to him very positively – making sure they had his attention before speaking to him, and taking the time to include him in meetings – and I think this was because the assistance dog was a visual reminder that he was blind.”

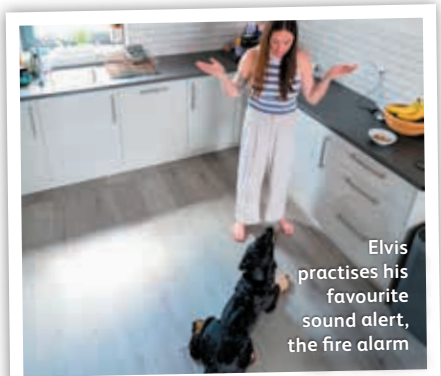
Chloe’s mind was made up when a friend who had been matched with a hearing dog started posting videos on social media showing how their dog was helping them.

Life with Elvis

Never having owned a dog before, Chloe found the first couple of weeks with Elvis quite a steep learning curve, but eight months later, she says she can’t imagine life without him.

“We’ve just come back from holiday and I really missed him – it felt as though I’d lost a limb!

“At home with Elvis, I feel completely safe. Before I had him, when I was home alone, I would take my cochlear implant off because it freaked me out hearing sounds and not being able to identify them. Now I



Elvis practises his favourite sound alert, the fire alarm

“I would never start conversations with strangers before, but now I’ll say hello to everyone. I recently started talking to a lady in our local park and found out that she was deaf too. It turned out she only lives down the road from me. If I hadn’t had Elvis, I would never have met her.

“He’s the perfect dog for me and I’m so grateful because I know a lot of people worked very hard in getting him to be the dog that he is now. He’s my best friend!” 🐾

➔ More real-life stories

To read more inspiring stories about the differences our dogs make to the lives of deaf people, visit our website hearingdogs.org.uk/stories



“TILDA ASKS SO LITTLE AND GIVES SO MUCH.”



After losing her pet dog and being diagnosed with cancer, things were incredibly difficult for Margaret. Then Tilda, a companion dog trained by Hearing Dogs, came along to help...

“I began losing my hearing in my late fifties and got my first hearing aids in my sixties. I have moderate hearing loss, so can hear most things if I’m wearing my hearing aids, but without them and without my speaker phone, I struggle to hear. I find it particularly difficult to hear when I’m in a crowd of people talking, as even with my hearing aids, I seem to pick up the wrong sounds.”

Heartbreak

Margaret has grown up with dogs all her life, but she lost her pet dog Daisy in a tragic accident in 2021.

"I thought I'd never get over the heartbreak of losing her and, as the months passed, the pain of not having a dog around, got worse. I knew I wouldn't be able to cope with a puppy though and having previously rescued other dogs, I was aware they could sometimes not be easy."

Soon afterwards Margaret began chemotherapy treatment for her cancer. It took its toll on her and, coupled with the accident, and the trauma and grief of losing her dog Daisy, she suffered significant depression.



Emotional support

"Ironically, it was the vet who had helped me with Daisy who suggested that I apply to Hearing Dogs. I'd heard of the Charity, but I thought you had to be profoundly deaf to be eligible. I hadn't realised they also trained companion dogs, which provide companionship and emotional support to people with any level of hearing loss."

"From the moment I applied, Hearing Dogs was wonderful. They stuck by me all through my down time. I was living with my daughter at the time as I wasn't well enough to be alone. When I returned home last year, they got in touch to ask if I would still be interested in a companion dog."

Overjoyed

In October 2022, the Charity matched Margaret with Tilda, a chocolate brown miniature poodle.

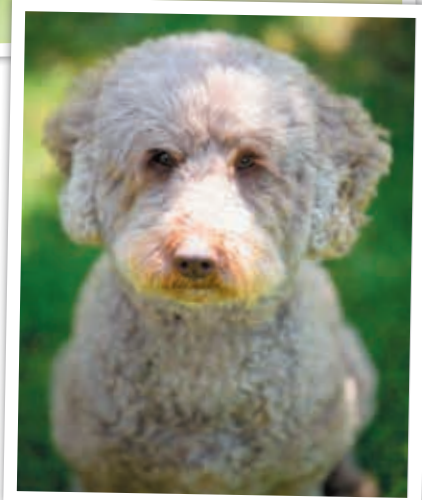
"I was overjoyed when I had the email to say that the Charity had found a dog they

thought would be a good match for me. I couldn't quite believe it!

"The first day I met Tilda it almost felt as though I'd known her for ages. I adored her right from the word go, but for the first couple of weeks she was almost like a robot dog in the sense that she didn't put a foot wrong. Gradually, though, her character showed through."

"I remember soon after I got her, we were out walking, and she saw some birds in a field. She chased after them, but then kept on running. I couldn't understand it at first, but then realised she'd seen a muntjac deer. I needn't have worried though, I whistled for her and within a few moments she came back, eyes gleaming and looking very pleased with herself, only to repeat it a few minutes later with a pheasant!"

"That was the last time she left my side. Her recall is remarkable, which means that wherever we are, provided it is safe to do so, I can let her off lead without any anxiety."



Constant companion

"I live in an annex off the side of the house where my son lives with his family, and Tilda is my constant companion. In the evenings, she can usually be found curled up next to me on the sofa, and at night she's with me in my bedroom."

"I'm still having immunotherapy for my lymphoma, which leaves me very tired and achy, and if I didn't have Tilda, I know I wouldn't make the effort to go out. We've made so many friends together, and I feel more inclined to go out to places because of her."

"Tilda is a wonderful companion. I can't tell you the difference she has made to my life. She is a tribute to everyone who has invested their precious time in her and I don't want to think even for one moment what life would be like without her." 🐾



🐾 Are you a dog lover with mild or moderate hearing loss? If you are, a companion dog might be right for you.

Visit hearingdogs.org.uk/companion to find out more about these dogs.

Winnie makes my life so much easier

Ralph used to struggle with people's lack of awareness of his 'hidden disability'. Now, former sponsor pup Winnie is changing that...

“We're not entirely sure why I'm deaf,” says Ralph. “My family think I have been deaf since birth and it was discovered when I was around two years old. Since then I have worn hearing aids.

“Everyone was supportive, and I adapted well to home and school life. However, when I left home to move to London, I noticed I would miss really important sounds, such as the doorbell or, even more importantly, the fire alarm. This was especially worrying when I was alone in my flat.

“I also struggled with alarm clocks. They just didn't wake me up. As I work in the City, I have lots of meetings, and I needed to be absolutely confident I could not just be there on time, but also be able to use public transport to get there in the first place.

“Then, during meetings, while they generally went well, there were occasions where people didn't know about my deafness, and assumed I was ignoring them.

“I also found socialising difficult. I have to make sure that people are facing me when talking to me. Once people are aware, they are usually very considerate, but it's getting that awareness across in the first place that I've needed help with.”

These combined issues made Ralph realise that, to make his way in the world, he would need support. So, along came Winnie!

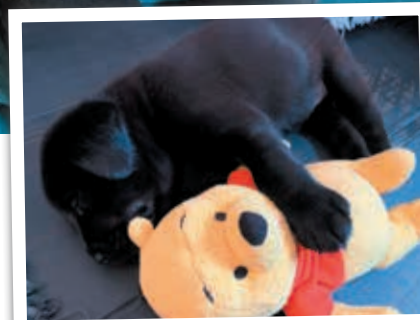
Winnie was a Hearing Dogs sponsor puppy, meaning that kind people sponsored her training journey, from 8-week-old puppy to a highly skilled



hearing dog who could alert people to sounds and offer lots of love, companionship, and emotional support.

Ralph smiles: “Things have been much easier since having Winnie. She has been really helpful in raising awareness, because of her burgundy Hearing Dogs coat. This means that people are more likely to take my hearing loss into consideration.

“This makes work meetings much easier. She also lets me know when the weekly fire alarm goes off, which is very reassuring. I'm happy to say, she comes with me to




work on the District Line! She's very popular with all the commuters.

“She's also made a huge difference to my home life. She's excellent at waking me up on time, and I can now hear all the important doorbells for the deliveries of dog treats and toys!

“Winnie is so attentive. I feel safe with her. She's also funny: she's always keen to get up to mischief on our walks. She wanders off, then comes right back when called, proud to show me what she has discovered.”

“If I were to sum her up it would be: full of love.”

The huge difference Winnie has made to Ralph's life has only been possible thanks to the kind people who decided to sponsor her training. From Ralph, Winnie, and Hearing Dogs, thank you! 

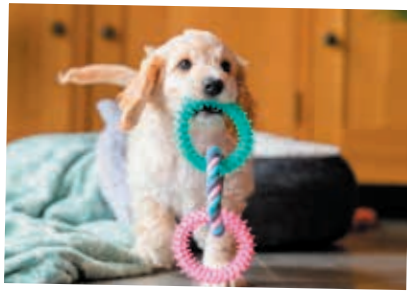


Meet the next generation of sponsor pups

If you sponsor a hearing dog puppy from £5 a month, you will receive a fantastic welcome pack, regular updates on their training, and you'll change a deaf person's life

Cockapoo Summer is a whirlwind of joy and laughter

Summer is a little bundle of energy, bound to steal your heart because wherever she is, joy and happiness follow. She loves exploring the garden, getting really wet from the sprinkler and dashing around. What else does she get up to outdoors? Her volunteer puppy trainer, Claire, says: "I recently planted a set of wildlife and bee-loving plants. When I came back to water them, Summer had dug them all out!" A typical Cockapoo, Summer's a friendly pup that gets along with everyone she meets – dog or human. Will Summer's sociable nature turn her into the neighbourhood's favourite dog? What else will she discover in her garden adventures? And which deaf person will Summer's funny and happy nature make her the ultimate mood booster for? Sponsor Summer today and find out!



Cocker spaniel Ralph is a clever boy with a cheeky streak

Ralph is an adorable Cocker Spaniel with a big heart and a tail with a mind of its own. His volunteer puppy trainer, Samantha, says: "He might look sad with his soulful eyes, but his tail tells a different story. We could power the house off it!" It gets cuter. Not only has he made friends with Samantha's cats, but he also likes to snooze in their beds – good thing they're close pals! Ralph's always up for a game of fetch and once tried to run with a frisbee in his mouth. He soon discovered it was far too big and tripped up. Whoops – what a funny boy! Will Ralph conquer the art of running with a frisbee? Will he ever sleep in his own bed? Sponsor Ralph today and find out!



Visit hearingdogs.org.uk/sponsor, our puppies change every few months.

PUPPY SPONSORSHIP IS A GREAT GIFT

From just £5 a month you could sponsor Summer or Ralph for yourself or as a unique, thoughtful gift for someone special. You'll receive a fabulous welcome pack and regular updates on their progress, plus more photos and stories about their life at home in our exclusive puppy pen. Just visit hearingdogs.org.uk/sponsor

Four engaging updates

Six online puppy pen episodes

Certificate, postcards and window sticker




Exclusive soft toy, pen and notepad

Framed picture (while stocks last!)



Fundraising partners

WAYS TO HELP

-  make us your charity of the year
-  name one of our puppies
-  payroll giving

We wouldn't be able to continue our important work without the help of all the organisations we have worked with over the years. Thank you for your amazing support; from regular donations, Charity of the Year partnerships and naming one of our adorable puppies

DOWNING LLP

We were absolutely delighted to have been chosen as one of three charities that Downing LLP (a responsible investment manager in London) has decided to support. The staff at Downing LLP will be getting involved in lots of fundraising and volunteering opportunities with Hearing Dogs for Deaf People.

Earlier this year in May, Hearing Dogs staff and partnership Maxine and Walter visited Downing's offices to tell the staff a little more about our work, and about how their support will be helping more severely and profoundly deaf people. It was brilliant to see the engagement from all the staff, and Walter certainly enjoyed all the attention too!

Thank you to everyone at Downing LLP. We are so excited to be working with you.



MULBERRY

At Hearing Dogs, we're so very grateful to our long-standing supporters, who continue to enable us to train more life-changing hearing dogs. One of which is Mulberry, who recently donated a beautiful bag as a raffle prize for this year's big Feb fundraiser, The 28 Challenge. Gifts in kind can be as important as monetary donations – in this case, we were able to run a prize draw for the challengers who raised £28 or over. Lucky winner May is pictured with her Mulberry handbag and Siobhan Healy, Hearing Dogs Partnership Instructor for West Scotland!




NAME A PUPPY SCHEME

One of our most popular schemes for organisations, trusts, and individuals to get involved with is our 'Name a Puppy' scheme. For a donation of £10,000 you will have the opportunity to name one of our adorable pups and receive exclusive updates on their journey.

Ron is one of the hearing dogs named as part of the scheme, and he is out working for his deaf partner Mike now. Mike says:

"Ron has made a huge difference to my quality of life. Having him by my side gives me the confidence to be able to talk to people without worrying too much. I am happier to go to busy places whereas before I would have found an excuse not to go. And I have noticed that my fitness and mental health have greatly improved by long walks in the forest with Ron."



THANK YOU ALSO TO...  iLECSYS  Window Film Company  Lakeshore Leisure
 Pavers Foundation  Hidden Hearing  Hedsor House  Alerter Group

Do you know an organisation that wants to support Hearing Dogs?

Please get in touch by emailing corporatesupport@hearingdogs.org.uk

Challenge yourself

Can you take on a fundraising challenge this year?
There are lots to choose from!

Can you take on a fundraising challenge this year to change deaf people's lives?

Then how about taking on a challenge to raise vital funds for Hearing Dogs? We have put together a list of superb challenges, across the UK, to choose from. There is something for everyone – from walks to runs, swims to cycles and a few more unusual ones too!

Check out our list of events at hearingdogs.org.uk/events and if anything appeals to you, then simply get in touch by clicking on the “register my interest” button on the webpage. This list will be updated regularly, so if none of the current events are right for you, keep checking back for new challenges. Or, if you would like to take on a different challenge

for Hearing Dogs please email events@hearingdogs.org.uk

Each year thousands of pounds are raised towards training our amazing hearing dogs and providing our full range of personalised hearing support services.

So join Team Hearing Dogs for your next challenge and we'll support you every step of the way!



The Paws Appeal

The Paws Appeal was a great success thanks to the hundreds of volunteers who held buckets, chatted to supporters and took dogs along to venues throughout the country. We raised well over £23,000 and are already planning next year's appeal, which will take place in September 2024. It's never too early to get involved! Please email events@hearingdogs.org.uk for more information.



Ask for a speaker!

Do you know anyone who has links to a local community group such as Rotary, Inner Wheel or Probus?

If so, please let them know that we have fabulous speakers across the UK who could speak to their group about how deaf people's lives are changed through our amazing hearing dogs and hearing loss services, as well as fundraising for our wonderful charity.

To request a speaker, simply fill in this form: hearingdogs.org.uk/talk



“VOLUNTEERING HAS GIVEN US SO MANY FOND MEMORIES.”



Val and John are two of Hearing Dogs' longest serving volunteers; starting as volunteer puppy trainers an incredible 25 years ago. Now John has been partnered with a hearing dog himself, and uses his own experience to raise awareness of the difference our dedicated volunteer family make to people's lives...

Val and John first heard about Hearing Dogs when their local newspaper published an article about the launch of the Charity near where they live. Val explains: “As John already had some hearing loss by this stage, we read the article with interest. Later we visited the Charity's site and John made a donation to mark his 50th birthday.

“A short while afterwards, someone from the Charity gave a talk about Hearing Dogs at my local WI meeting. We've both always loved dogs, and as John was brought up with sheepdogs on a farm, training puppies seemed like a great way to help.”

“Our first dog was Shane, a medium-

sized puppy of mixed parentage, who had been donated along with his brother, Scout”, adds John. “He was a lovely little fellow, but unfortunately didn't make the grade as a hearing dog.”

Puppy love

Over the years, Val and John trained 25 hearing dog puppies and had another 85 through their doors, some for very short periods while waiting for another volunteer trainer to become available.

“We don't have favourite dogs; we've loved them all, but Val still talks about Flora, who was very affectionate and good at her training. The one that sticks in my mind is Spike, a springer/retriever cross. We



formed an instant bond; while we looked after him, he became my shadow. Spike loved balloons; often playing with one for two days without popping it. After finishing his training, he was partnered with a lady in Sunderland who, as it turned out, was a children's entertainer. Spike would've been in his element!"

When John's hearing deteriorated, and he was partnered with his own hearing dog Penny in 2016, the couple continued to support the Charity by fundraising and attending events to spread the word. One of the ways they did this was by running a soft toy tombola, as Val explains: "Our village has a charity shop which raises money for local causes and we're lucky that they donate their unwanted soft toys to us."

Dedication

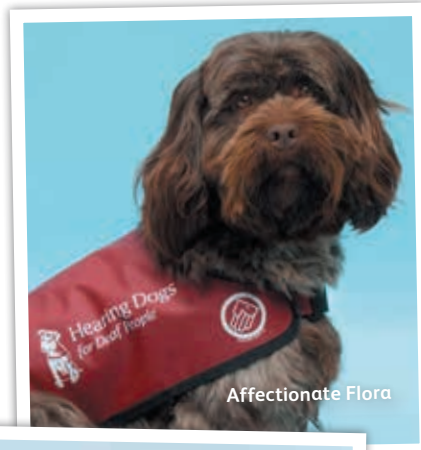
"I take the toys home every Thursday", she continued. "I wash them and make any repairs needed, and then we run soft toy tombolas at events. We also pass some of them on to the Milton Keynes volunteers and, between us, we've raised thousands of pounds from their sales."

When asked whether volunteering for Hearing Dogs is something Val and John would recommend, Val doesn't hesitate: "If you're thinking of volunteering, I'd say 'Go for it!' You get far more out of it than you put in."

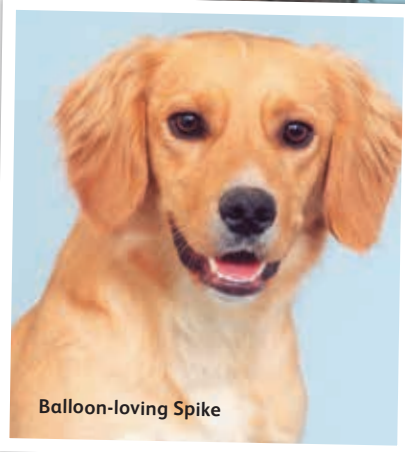
"Most precious of all though are the lasting friendships we've made..."

"Volunteering has given us so many fond memories, not least meeting Princess Anne twice when she visited Hearing Dogs' southern training centre, The Grange. Most precious of all though are the lasting friendships we've made – from fellow volunteers and staff at The Grange, to the many other people we've met along the way."

The Hearing Dogs 'bug' also extends to the couple's wider family, as Val explains: "Our grandchildren have grown up with the puppies. Our daughter used to bring two of our grandchildren to The Grange every Tuesday in the school holidays and they would play with the puppies to help socialise them. One of our grandchildren is now 25 and the other is 21, and they still help me run the Christmas Market stand!"



Affectionate Flora



Balloon-loving Spike



Penny, John's hearing dog

🐾 Hearing Dogs trustee, Mike Coote, who has known Val and John for many years, sums up the enormous contribution they have made to the Charity. "Val and John are the epitome of selfless volunteers who want no credit and whose reward is in knowing they have increased awareness of the work and benefits of the Charity."

"Although I've known them for less than half the time they've been volunteering for Hearing Dogs, they've always been unfailingly enthusiastic, reliable and worthy ambassadors. They're always among the first to respond with offers of help and are always personable, positive and informative."

If you would like to find out more about volunteering, please visit hearingdogs.org.uk/volunteer

Now the couple has experienced first-hand the difference Penny makes to John's life, it has given their fundraising renewed impetus. "We always knew that by volunteering we were helping to change somebody's life, but now we have Penny, we know exactly how much", says John.

"Penny has made a great difference to my life. Deafness is an invisible disability and I used to avoid talking to people because I couldn't hear them. Now, when we're out walking and Penny is wearing her coat, people can see I have a hearing problem and take that into account when we talk. It's also very helpful when I go shopping – other shoppers and people at

the checkouts are very considerate.

"At home, Penny takes me to the telephone or the doorbell when they ring, and the cooker alarm if it goes off. If the smoke alarm goes, she lies down in front of me to indicate danger. If I'm in the garden and Val wants me all she has to say is 'Fetch John' to Penny and she will run out and get me."

"Probably the most important sound she can alert me to is when I go to bed. I always take my hearing aids out, which means I am completely deaf. Penny will jump on the bed to wake me up if the smoke alarm goes off, which gives me great peace of mind." 🐾

Four important things to know about leaving a gift in your Will

Choosing to leave a gift to charity in your Will is an incredibly personal decision, but it can be easier than you might think



1. Over half of all hearing dogs are funded by gifts in Wills

Highly trained hearing dogs alert their deaf partners to important and life-saving sounds, such as the smoke alarm, alarm clocks, carbon monoxide alarms and even a baby's cry. But they do so much more. Many deaf people feel lonely and isolated; cut off from the world around them. The many barriers they have to face in their daily lives can reduce confidence, independence, safety, and take a real toll on their mental and physical wellbeing. The love, support and companionship of a hearing dog can be transformative, allowing deaf people to lead the lives they deserve.

This was the insight that inspired Dr Bruce Fogle and Lady (Beatrice) Wright to found Hearing Dogs back in 1982.

Since then, we've trained over 3,000 hearing dogs and transformed the lives of deaf people across the UK.

Today, demand is great. Deafness is rising. Hearing Dogs relies on donations to continue training these amazing dogs, and over half our donations are from gifts in Wills through the kindness of people like you.

2. Leaving a gift can be easier than you might think

Leaving a gift in your Will to transform the lives of deaf people is an incredibly personal decision. But Wills can also be surprisingly quick and simple to organise.

First, you'll need to make a list of everything you own, including property and investments, and decide who to name as executors. These are the people who will make sure your wishes are carried out.

Then you'll decide who to include. Naturally many people will put their loved ones first, and then consider leaving a gift to charity. When considering leaving a gift to Hearing Dogs, some people choose to leave a percentage of their estate, for example.

You would then use a solicitor or trusted Will-writing service to write your Will so you can be sure everything is properly covered.

If you already have a Will, you can talk to your solicitor about updating it to leave a gift to charity if you would like to, or you can complete a codicil (which allows you to make amendments without having to completely re-write your Will) and store it with your Will.

There is lots of useful information and guidance on how to leave a gift in a Will on our website at hearingdogs.org.uk/legacies

3. You will transform deaf people's lives

As over half of all hearing dogs are funded by gifts in Wills, there are currently hundreds of deaf people across the UK whose lives have been completely transformed thanks to this kindest of gifts. People like Claire (pictured opposite).

Claire is partnered with hearing dog Ted. Claire says: "When I learned that my hearing dog had been funded by a gift in a Will I was completely stunned and very, very grateful. Ted helps the whole family feel safe – my husband who is also deaf and our son, Max.

"There's a special bond you have with a hearing dog. Ted's with me from the moment I wake up, making me aware of things around me. And while we're asleep, I have peace of mind that Ted will alert us to the fire alarm, or any other danger that may occur.

"I'm not the most confident person, but when you have a hidden disability like deafness, having a hearing dog like Ted gives you the confidence to go out, hold your head up high and be you. When people see Ted in his jacket they understand that I'm deaf without me having to explain; as long as he's there beside me, he acts as a reminder.

"It's wonderful really; that there are people who care so much that they've chosen to leave money to Hearing Dogs. Without gifts of this kind, it would be much more difficult to train dogs to



help people like me – and for that I am eternally grateful."

4. You can write or update your Will for free

Hearing Dogs works closely with Farewill – the UK's largest online Will-writing specialists and winners of the National Will Writing Firm of the Year 2019, 2020 and 2021 – to offer a free online and telephone Will-writing service.

With their expert help, you can quickly and securely write your Will in the comfort of your own home, then have it checked by a specialist to make sure all your wishes are clear – all for free. You will then need to print and sign it in front of two witnesses to make it legally binding.

We recognise that providing for your family, friends and loved ones will always come first. There is no obligation to leave a gift to Hearing Dogs if you use this service, but if you do choose to remember us, thank you. Your gift will help us towards our goal of a time where no deaf person feels alone.

If you would like more information on leaving a gift in your Will, please contact Zoe Cox on 01844 348130, email legacies@hearingdogs.org.uk, or visit hearingdogs.org.uk/legacies



"It was the realisation of how profoundly hearing dogs help deaf people, and my experience of hearing loss in my family, that led us to leave a gift in our Wills. I was astonished when I found out that over half of all hearing dogs are paid for by legacies. For us, it seemed a natural thing to do."

Sylvia and Alan

Could a Hearing Loss Community Day help you?



We hold events across the UK to help people with hearing loss better understand their hearing and find the right support for them

Experiencing a change in your hearing or having a friend or family member experiencing a change in theirs, can be worrisome. It can feel like completely unfamiliar territory, you will likely have lots of questions, and you may be unsure of what steps you should take or what help is available to make things easier.

One of the personalised services we provide to help people with hearing loss, of any level, and their loved ones, are our Hearing Loss Community Days.

What is a Hearing Loss Community Day?

Hearing Loss Community Days are designed to raise awareness of hearing loss and start conversations about any changes

you may have noticed in your hearing. They are free to attend, are open to the public, and are held in different locations around the UK, throughout the year.

They are useful for people with hearing loss, or anyone who may have a friend or family member who is experiencing changes to their hearing. They are also beneficial for anyone who simply wishes to know more about managing their hearing.



What happens at a Hearing Loss Community Day?

If you attend a Hearing Loss Community Day, you will meet our wonderful team of volunteers and staff who will introduce you to our charity and the full range of personalised services we offer to help anyone who has hearing loss. Whether you would benefit from peer support, a support group, or the daily love and assistance of a highly trained hearing dog, we will discuss your options with you and what other help is available.

You will be able to have conversations about hearing loss and how to manage your hearing, and you can chat to other people living with the same or similar challenges, including our partners and their hearing dogs.



“ I thoroughly enjoyed the Hearing Loss Community Day; we had professional advice from a range of experts, and just as useful was the opportunity to speak to other participants on many subjects. It was well worth attending and I’m looking forward to the next one! ”

Many of our Hearing Loss Community Days feature other interesting activities. These include talks on a range of topics, and demonstrations of the different types of technology that are available to help people with hearing loss.

We aim for these days to be informal but informative – allowing you to get relevant and personalised information and advice while giving you the opportunity to meet

others who may be in the same situation with their hearing, or who may have a loved one who is experiencing a change to their hearing.

We also welcome guest speakers to talk about local services and host specialised sessions on a particular hearing loss topic.

To find out more, and to register to attend an event, please visit hearinglink.org/hlcommunitydays 🐾

Events

FIND YOUR NEAREST HEARING LOSS COMMUNITY DAY

- 🐾 4 October – North London
- 🐾 18 October – Glasgow, Scotland
- 🐾 18 October – Highbridge, Somerset
- 🐾 22 October – Gateshead, Tyne and Wear
- 🐾 27 October – Chepstow, Wales
- 🐾 27 October – Staplehurst, Tonbridge
- 🐾 22 November – Belfast, Northern Ireland
- 🐾 1 December – Shrewsbury, Shropshire
- 🐾 6 December – Harpenden, Hertfordshire
- 🐾 15 December – Northampton, East Midlands

2024

- 🐾 16 January – Reading, Berkshire
- 🐾 14 February – Edinburgh, Scotland
- 🐾 23 February – Chelmsford, Essex
- 🐾 23 February – Chepstow, Wales
- 🐾 4 March – Harpenden, Hertfordshire
- 🐾 15 March – Bournemouth, Dorset

Please note: more dates will be added so keep an eye on our Hearing Link Services website.

🐾 DID YOU KNOW?

We also run special community days throughout the year specifically for our hearing dog partnerships. They are fun, informal days, offering support to our partnerships. They are also a great way to make friends and socialise!



Paws for coffee...



Author, actress and broadcaster **Samantha Baines** chats about dogs, how society can create challenges for people with hearing loss, and what she's learned from her own experiences of deafness

Tell us a bit more about your book, *'Living with Hearing Loss and Deafness: a guide to owning it and loving it'*. What is the main thing you want people to take away from it? I want deaf people and people with hearing loss to feel seen and hearing people to find out more about what life is like when you are deaf. It's the book I searched for when I was told I needed a hearing aid at age 29 and had no idea what to expect. There's practical advice, facts, interviews with audiologists and charities, and lots of people with different deaf experiences.

You say it takes courage to tell friends about hearing loss. How important do you think it is to speak to friends and family about it? It can feel daunting but having open conversations is so important. Your family and friends can't support you if they don't understand what you are going through and having support around you is really important. I mean they could also read my book which should help! Sharing your experiences is a great way to help you come to terms with things and you never know, it might help someone else recognise

Do you prefer tea or coffee? Earl Grey tea please with oat milk (I'm dairy intolerant).

What is your favourite thing about dogs? They love and accept all of you just as you are, and they are excellent cuddlers.

Would your dog, Custard, make a good hearing dog? She does not have the discipline and she's very sassy! She's a miniature wire-haired dachshund. She also tends to bark at the moon, birds and plastic bags, which I'd rather not be notified about on a daily basis! So I'm not sure how great a hearing dog she'd be!

the signs and get their hearing checked. One in five people in the UK have some form of hearing loss or deafness, so remember you are not alone.

You write that deafness can be challenging because society makes it a challenge, could you elaborate on this? I love being deaf and it's not a struggle to get by when I have the access I need. It's only hearing-focused environments that have no access provisions like subtitles/captions, BSL interpretation, visual cues as well as audible ones that make being deaf feel like a struggle. It was integral to my personal journey to recognise that it's society's barriers that cause challenges, not being deaf itself. I think this is such an important realisation because being deaf is a part of me and the idea that a part of me could be making my life difficult was detrimental to my mental health. When I'm at home with subtitles, with people who face me so I can lipread, with Custard who lets me know when someone is at the door, then life isn't a struggle, it's great.

Deafness and dating has its own chapter in your book, do you think this topic is often overlooked? Absolutely. Deaf people deserve love too and we get it! Due to a lack of deaf awareness some hearing people might feel nervous about dating a deaf person. In fact they've probably met a deaf person before without realising it. After all there are 12 million of us in the UK. Also, all deaf people are stunningly attractive and excellent humans... haha. Seriously though, dating can be a daunting space at the best of times so I thought it was important to explore this through a deaf lens too.

How important is it for hearing people to try to be inclusive and supportive of people with hearing loss? So important! I'd even remove the 'try to be' and just say be inclusive. If you don't know what being inclusive means then take a deaf awareness course, read up on it (may I suggest my book haha) and talk to deaf people.

Our 'peer support volunteers' use their lived experience of deafness to help others find solutions and ways of managing their hearing loss, which often helps them to view their own experiences in a positive light. How valuable do you think it is to speak to someone else who has similar experiences? Communication is so, so important. Initially I thought being deaf would hinder my communication skills but I'm learning BSL and I'm finding that I actually communicate in so many ways that don't just rely on hearing. Speaking to other deaf people with similar and different experiences was a real turning point for me. I'd felt so alone and 'other'

that meeting people who understood what I was going through was a huge support. I'm a member of deaf Facebook groups, I have a WhatsApp group of deaf friends and I campaign alongside other deaf people for RNID. If there is one thing I'd suggest you do, it's talk to other deaf people, it will change your life!

"I love being deaf now, my deaf friends, streaming music through my hearing aids, knowing why subtitles are useful for me, learning BSL, acknowledging my need to lipread: it's truly opened up my world."

You say you didn't immediately take measures to have your hearing checked, even when you knew there was an issue. How important is it to act quickly, in your view? Why do you think people tend to delay it for so long? Change is scary so we delay anything that might throw off our normal routine. I can't speak for anyone else but I wish I'd got my hearing aid sooner as it's had a hugely positive impact. I also wish I'd had my hearing checked sooner. I love being deaf now, my deaf friends, streaming music through my hearing aids, knowing why subtitles are useful for me, learning BSL, acknowledging my need to lipread: it's truly opened up my world. If I could have been in this happy place sooner, rather than struggling in silence, then I would have wanted that for myself, definitely.

What are your top three tips on managing hearing loss and deafness? I'd say it's not something to manage! It's part of you so embrace it. There's nothing wrong with you, you are not lesser in any way, you are just marvellous you. You may not be able to hear the doorbell but you can lipread your colleagues in the canteen and that's a win! Look for the positive, look for the gain not the loss. Speak to other deaf people online, at meet-ups or through charity work. Know

Close-up with...

→ SAMANTHA BAINES

Samantha Baines is a multi award-winning comedian, actress, broadcaster and best-selling author. As a hearing aid wearer herself, she is the author of critically acclaimed children's books with deaf main characters and the best-selling, non-fiction book *Living With Hearing Loss and Deafness*. Samantha has had acting roles in popular shows including *The Crown*, *Call the Midwife*, and *Silent Witness*.

your rights – employers are legally obligated to make 'reasonable adjustments' for deaf employees and there are government grants available for extra equipment that can help you flourish at work. Also, get a disabled person's railcard for a third off travel (you are eligible with any level of hearing loss).

You point out that while deafness isn't funny and can be isolating and confusing, having a sense of humour can get you through its challenges...how important is that? Deaf people are some of the funniest people I've met and I've worked with a lot of professional comedians. Humour gets us through challenges, change, anything that life throws at us. I have been in some very funny situations due to being deaf and I can laugh at them.

You've had lots of success in the entertainment industry so far. Is the industry a welcoming and supportive one? It's not always a welcoming one. For a long time I hid my deafness in the industry and would take out my hearing aid for auditions and just nod and hope for the best. I feel much more relaxed and able to do a good job now that I'm open about my communication needs and that also comes from feeling a pride in my deaf status. I've been lucky to have been welcomed into some excellent shows and environments but I'd be lying if I said it's all been smooth sailing. I now take the view that if people don't want to be inclusive, warm and welcoming then I'm better off out of there anyway. I'll create my own supportive environments because I do think people thrive when we are listened to and supported. 🐾

To find out more about Samantha, buy her books or listen to her podcast, visit samanthabaines.com



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