



Hearing Dogs  
for Deaf People

# Favour

Issue 69  
**SPRING**  
**2024**  
£1.75 when sold

The magazine from Hearing Dogs for Deaf People

## A partnership for a partnership

How former sponsor  
pup, Gwen, is supporting  
her deaf partners

## Pride-filled goodbyes

Our volunteers share  
how they manage  
when a pup graduates

## PLUS

Semi-finalist Tasha  
Stones talks about her  
'Bake Off' experience',  
her deafness and her  
baking inspirations

A man with glasses, wearing a blue quilted jacket and khaki trousers, sits on a wooden bench. A black dog sits on the ground next to him. The background shows a blue door and a wooden fence.

“Elroy gives me a reason  
to get up in the morning”

How Elroy has supported Deryck through his loss



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Hearing Dogs  
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Spring 2024



Paralympian Suz Hext talks about how “cool Kimmy” helps with her training

## Welcome!

Welcome to the spring 2024 issue of *Favour*. We're delighted to share some wonderful stories highlighting how your amazing support is transforming deaf people's lives.

You'll learn about hearing dogs like Buddy, who gave his deaf partner early warning of a potential fire (p5), and Kimmy, who is helping world champion para swimmer, Suz Hext, in her training for the Paris Paralympic trials (p12 and 13). You can also learn how we support our dedicated volunteers every step of the way in our article about Senior Puppy Trainer, Michelle (p10 and 11).

And finally, make sure to 'Paws for coffee' with *The Great British Bake Off* semi-finalist, Tasha Stones (p26 and 27).

We hope you enjoy the magazine and thank you so much for your continuing support. Together, we're changing lives.

**Favour**

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

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Hearing Dogs  
for Deaf People

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Cover photo by Paul Wilkinson

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**NEXT ISSUE**  
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Autumn 2024

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# Newshound

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



## From little acorns...



### COMMUNITY



Last October, Malcolm, a Hearing Dogs Volunteer Speaker, visited Crescent Primary School in Eastleigh to deliver a presentation and workshops about our highly skilled assistance dogs. This visit planted the seed from which something amazing has grown, as the children have now kindly chosen Hearing Dogs as their school's 2024 charity of the year.

Alongside volunteers Caroline and Ron, and ambassador dog, Gyn, Malcolm presented to nearly 600 pupils and 40 staff members. He also delivered fun workshops about the charity with each Year 5 class. The Hearing Dogs team clearly made a lasting impression, as the children then voted to present what they had learned to their

parents at the school's Coffee and Christmas Carol Concert. One parent, whose child lives with profound hearing loss, shared they've even now decided to apply for a companion dog from the charity.

The concert raised over £130 for Hearing Dogs which has been donated to sponsor Wish, a Labrador puppy-in-training. Following this, the primary school has more brilliant plans to keep fundraising, with a view to sponsoring another puppy. Two staff members are even getting sponsored to abseil down the Spinnaker Tower in May!

Natalie Preston, Deputy Headteacher at The Crescent Primary School, said, "The children absolutely loved Malcolm's presentation. Malcolm showed them some

British Sign Language to try with their peers and they really enjoyed meeting Gyn, a beautiful Cocker Spaniel. I am really pleased we have been able to sponsor the lovely Wish with fundraising from our carol service. We are really looking forward to hearing how she is getting along with her training.

"It was fantastic to learn how a puppy is trained. The children were particularly impressed to learn that hearing dogs are trained to tell their owners if the fire alarm sounds and they need to head to safety!"

Natalie continued, "Our families have really enjoyed chatting with Hearing Dogs at our community events, meeting more of the pups and partners and finding out how hearing dogs make such an invaluable difference to the lives of those with hearing loss."

If your school or community group would like to learn more about Hearing Dogs, we'd be delighted to give you a presentation or workshop! Please request one of our friendly and knowledgeable Volunteer Speakers at [hearingdogs.org.uk/support/enquire/request-speaker](https://hearingdogs.org.uk/support/enquire/request-speaker)



### LUCY AND WILBUR'S APPEAL RAISES £36,000 FOR HEARING DOGS

A huge thank you to everyone who donated to Lucy and Wilbur's 2023 Christmas appeal; you raised over £36,000! It costs approximately £40,000 to support a partnership throughout a hearing dog's lifetime, so your collective gifts will have incredible impact.

At Christmas time, Lucy explained to Hearing Dogs' supporters how deafness had been impacting her life. Before, she used to sleep as much as possible so that there were fewer waking hours in her day. Now her hearing dog, Wilbur, brings warmth to Lucy's life every day, supporting her to feel safe and connect with others.

Thanks to the kindness of people who donate to Hearing Dogs, amazing partnerships like Lucy and Wilbur's are made possible.





## PARTNERSHIP

## Big Friendly Gordon goes for gold!

**A**fter hearing dog Gordon was partnered with 12-year-old Elyana in 2022, he changed her life. Now, at three years old, he's a finalist in the Child's Champion category of the Kennel Club Hero Dog Award 2024!

The annual awards ceremony takes place at Crufts at the NEC Birmingham and celebrates "the unique relationship people have with their dogs, the important role man's best friend plays throughout their lives and the support they give us in the face of adversity."

Before Elyana was partnered with

Gordon (also known as 'the BFG – Big Friendly Gordon') she was living with intense anxiety. At her lowest points, this led to her tearing her hair out in clumps and vomiting. She also faced challenges around bullying and making friends whilst she was adapting to her cochlear implants. The arrival of Gordon transformed her life, her confidence, and her self-belief. Elyana's mum, Silvie, shared, "Their bond is so strong and her confidence has grown so much. When she is out and about with Gordon, she's like a different child."

The winner of the awards will be decided

through a public vote and announced at the Crufts main arena on 10 March 2024.\* The Kennel Club Charitable Trust also give generous donations to the winner and the runners-up to donate to their nominated canine charity. Gordon's achievement is not only a wonderful recognition of his impact on Elyana's life, but also a credit to his entire training team.

Good luck BFG, we're so proud!

*\*At the time you're reading this, the winners will have been announced! Visit our social media channels @HearingDogs to find out more.*

## To the rescue: hearing dog Buddy alerts to smoke alarm

**W**hen Adrian's hearing dog, Buddy, nudged him, he initially thought he wanted to go for a walk. But when Buddy dropped to the floor, Adrian realised he was alerting him to something much more serious.

This happened when Adrian was home alone with Buddy for the first time, not long after they were partnered. Without Buddy alerting him, Adrian wouldn't have known that the smoke alarm was going off.

"I didn't cotton on at first, but then he nudged me again. When I said 'What is it?' he lay down on the floor. That's the 'danger' signal and I then remembered I'd left my

porridge on the hob," recalled Adrian.

Hearing dogs mostly lead their deaf partners to the source of the sound they have heard. However, they are trained to drop to the floor instead when they hear danger signals, like smoke alarms or fire alarms, to avoid leading their partner into danger.

"I went downstairs and smoke was seeping under the kitchen door." Adrian continued, "when I opened the door, the kitchen was full of smoke. I switched off the hob and opened the windows."

"I was so proud of Buddy. I gave him a treat and lots of fuss and then took him out for a long walk."

## PARTNERSHIP



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We continue to be humbled by the incredible challenges our supporters take on for our charity. By running, walking, swimming, cycling, climbing and more, our amazing supporters transform deaf people's lives. Find out how you could too at [hearingdogs.org/events](https://hearingdogs.org/events)

## The two Petes reach the peak!

**F**riends Pete S, 51, who is a country and western singer and Pete J, 60, who is a line dance instructor, climbed Ben Nevis together, raising over £4,500. Pete S's god-daughter has an assistance dog and the pair have a close friend who volunteers with Hearing Dogs; this inspired them to conquer the immense climb.

Pete S shared his incredible experience: "I've done four marathons but this was a different sort of pain. On balance, I prefer running marathons! The ascent took four hours and the last quarter was relentless – -3 degrees and rainy. One minute we could see clearly, then clouds would come down and we couldn't see two feet ahead of us.

"To reach the summit's emergency shelter for a rest, we had to climb a slippery 20 foot stone wall, which was

pretty deadly! Knowing we'd be making a difference to the deaf community motivated us to keep going though.

"Someone challenged me to line dance 'Pot of Gold' at the summit for an actual pot of gold, so I did. They donated £110 in £1 coins! The three hours coming down were harder than going up as we had to

really concentrate.

"The highlight was sharing the experience and incredible views with one of my best friends. The first thing we did when we got to the bottom was have a beer!"

Cheers to that Pete and Pete – we hope you've since had a well-deserved rest!



**C**ongratulations to Caroline who, last October, completed almost 100km over two days in the Sahara, raising over £2,200 for Hearing Dogs. The original route was the length of two marathons (around 84 kilometres). Alongside 15 others, Caroline chose to add the extra 15km, finishing in a fantastic 10th place out of 90 participants!

Caroline, 54, is profoundly deaf and has been partnered with two hearing dogs in her life: first Lizzie and then Sable. After having

cochlear implants fitted six years ago, Caroline felt she no longer needed a hearing dog and took on this epic trek to help others.

"My cochlear implants made a massive difference. I feel other people have far bigger challenges than me. I benefited from Hearing Dogs, so now it's my turn to fundraise," shared Caroline. "I feel I can only ask people to part with their hard-earned cash when I'm doing something that is genuinely going to be quite tough!"

As if the mammoth trek wasn't enough,

the desert had plenty to throw at Caroline. She explained, "The temperature was between 30-40 degrees each day. You picture rolling sand dunes, but it mostly looks more like the surface of the moon. The rocky floor was covered in huge thorns. On the sand it felt like I was taking two steps forward, one step back! The stars of the show were my desert gaiters that were sewn onto my shoes to prevent sand and debris getting in."

Despite slippery sand and fierce thorns, Caroline was able to take in the Sahara's natural beauty. She shared with us the highlight of her trip: "Just after we set off, we came across a herd of around 50 camels. They were bathed in that lovely 'early morning glow'. That was a really magical moment."

Caroline said, "I'm so grateful to everyone who contributed to my fundraising. I have first-hand knowledge of the difference these amazing dogs make. If the money we've raised together can help change the life of another person with hearing loss, it will be very worthwhile."

Thank you so much Caroline!



## Meet Caroline, the Saharan superstar!



## CELEBRITY

## Bake Off star, Tasha, sees a slice of life at Hearing Dogs

In December, we were delighted to welcome *The Great British Bake Off* 2023 semi-finalist, Tasha Stones, to our southern training centre.

The 27-year-old was the show's first deaf contestant and stole viewers' hearts alongside her British Sign Language interpreter, Daryl. Tasha wowed the judges with her imaginative bakes, winning the much-revered 'Star Baker' for her Japanese Katsu & Matcha Illusion Biscuits and Medusa Plaited Centrepiece loaf.

Speaking about *Bake Off*, Tasha told us, "It was honestly the best summer of my life. Alison, Noel, Paul and Prue, and the rest of the crew, were all just so lovely, and the support from everyone else in the tent just blew me away."

Tasha has applied for her own hearing dog and during her visit to The Grange, she saw our life-changing hearing dogs



in action. Tasha met puppies-in-training, Ashton and Victor, and was treated to a sound-alert demonstration by hearing dog, Turner. "The soundwork is mind-blowing! The dogs are just so clever and they seem to enjoy their work so much," said Tasha.

"I've only had a glimpse of the Charity's work, but it's clear how much goes into training and matching the dogs with the

right partner. I'm blown away by it!"

Since her visit, Tasha has been kindly fundraising for Hearing Dogs. You can donate to her JustGiving page at [justgiving.com/page/tasha-stones-hearing-dogs](https://www.justgiving.com/page/tasha-stones-hearing-dogs)

➡ Turn to Paws for coffee on pages 26 and 27 to read our full interview with Tasha.

## A new career: hearing dog Inca models for life drawing workshop

Throughout January and February, hearing dog Inca's career took an unexpected, creative turn when he became a model for a life drawing workshop in Thirsk, North Yorkshire. At four sessions run by Rural Arts, a charity offering creative opportunities, 12 budding artists enjoyed studying and drawing Inca, a gold Cocker Spaniel who has lived with his deaf partner, Martin, since 2019.

Traditionally, in life drawing sessions, the model holds poses for a long period of time. Whilst he did master the skill of 'Wait' during his hearing dog training, luckily for Inca, he didn't have to sit still throughout each three-hour session! Instead, his wagging tail and natural Spaniel-ness added new artistic dimensions. Tutor and textile artist

at Rural Arts, Jo Lawson, explained, "Unlike with people who can hold a pose, with Inca it's more about drawing movement."

Another feature of traditional life drawing is using a naked human model as the subject. Rural Arts' senior creative producer, Julian Hartley, explained that this can sometimes feel intimidating for new artists. As a result, the prospect of drawing a canine subject instead attracted many first-time students to the sessions. Julian said, "Having a lovely, friendly dog like Inca takes some of that fear factor away and means the artists can relax and enjoy learning new skills."

Inca was paid the same fee as Rural Arts' human life models and his earnings were kindly donated to Hearing Dogs! Before the

## PARTNERSHIP



sessions, Martin shared, "We were delighted to be asked to come along... Being deaf can mean not getting to meet people very easily. Inca has opened up the world for me, and I hope the artists will get great pleasure out of drawing him."

Well done Inca; you're truly an artistic ins-paw-ration!

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# Forging a new life after loss: Deryck and Elroy's story

When ex-navy veteran, Deryck, lost his wife during the pandemic, he was plunged into a very dark and lonely place. The day before what would have been their 46th wedding anniversary, he met his hearing dog, Elroy. Now, Deryck's best friend is always there for him

**M**y hearing loss is caused by otosclerosis. I've had several operations but now, if I don't have my hearing aids in, I can't hear anything at all.

In 1968, I joined HMS Raleigh near Plymouth and spent seven years in the Royal Navy. I was a Radar Plotter and I'm sure this contributed to my hearing loss. I wore a headset for hours and was often near firing guns.

**"I worried so much about oversleeping that I hardly slept at all."**

After the navy, I became a long-distance lorry driver. The shipments were worth thousands, and if you arrived late, they sometimes wouldn't let you in. I slept with four alarm clocks in my cab to be sure of waking up after making stops. But I worried so much about oversleeping that I hardly slept at all.

Eventually, I was signed off due to stress. My wife, Sandra, also had a series of strokes and an aneurysm.

**"I was racked with guilt afterwards that she might've cried out to me that evening and I hadn't heard her."**



I stopped working, we sold our house and bought a motorhome, and I basically became her carer. Sandra then became poorly with pain in her lower abdomen. One day in 2020, I took her to hospital and I was shocked when they said they thought she had cancer.

Later that same day, she went to lie down and after I had taken her a drink, I dozed off in the chair. When I returned to the bedroom, only six hours after leaving the hospital, she'd passed away. I was racked with guilt afterwards that she might've cried out to me that evening and I hadn't heard her.

I was extremely upset when I called the emergency services that night – it really brought home to me what being deaf meant. They asked me a lot of questions I couldn't hear. My struggles continued because my wife's funeral had to be arranged by phone due to the COVID lockdown.

I went to a very dark place after losing Sandra. I realised how much I'd relied on her; she had been my hearing aids, relaying what people were saying and providing context. Suddenly, I was completely on my own, in the middle of a pandemic, unable to go out.

**"Elroy is always there. He's my best friend."**

Between Christmas and Easter in lockdown, I didn't see a single person. I began to wonder what the point was in going on.



I'll be honest, there were a few times where I thought about taking some tablets from the cupboard.


I remembered seeing someone in town with a hearing dog, so that July, I applied. On 23 August 2021, the day before what would have been my 46th wedding anniversary, Elroy arrived.

Elroy gives me a reason to get up in the morning. When I'm feeling down, he seems to know because he comes and sits with me. I still have days when I don't see or speak to anyone. But Elroy is always there. He's my best friend. Soon, I'm taking him to a reunion for the Royal Navy crew I sailed with.

**"I have a coffee and a Danish pastry and Elroy has a special doggy treat. He's in ecstasy!"**

The fact Elroy might one day save my life became evident soon after he arrived. I was frying a steak on the hob and Elroy kept nudging me and dropping to the ground. He was telling me the smoke alarm was going off, but I hadn't heard it at all.

We have our own routine. At bedtime, I hide treats round the house. I then say 'Go!' and he hunts all around the house for them! On Sundays, we visit a café on the front in Eastbourne. I have a coffee and a Danish pastry, and Elroy has a special doggy treat. He's in ecstasy! He also loves blackberries and will pick them off the bushes one at a time.

There are thousands of deaf people out there who are on their own. Deafness is an invisible disability, and Elroy reminds people that I'm deaf. Before, I hardly knew anyone in my neighbourhood. Now, everyone talks to me. They all love him and I couldn't be without him. 






## A HEARING DOG IS THERE FOR THEIR DEAF PARTNER, NO MATTER WHAT



By giving a gift of £15, you can help a hearing dog provide their incredible companionship to someone in need. Thank you.

### 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/deryck](https://hearingdogs.org.uk/deryck)

# From buses to bottles: the diverse life of a training instructor



**I** knew I wanted to work with assistance dogs ever since my first job after university, where my boss had one. It took me 10 years after making that decision to reach Hearing Dogs!

"The job of Puppy Training Instructor came up just before I finished my degree in Canine Behaviour and Training. When I got the job, I couldn't believe my luck.

"I'm now a Senior Puppy Training Instructor. I work with Volunteer Puppy Trainers, who take the puppies through their early training, and Volunteer Dog Trainers, who take them through their advanced training. I also run projects to support our volunteers.

"On a typical day, I could be running group training classes or one-to-one visits. Or I might be writing a tailored training plan, or preparing a dog to be placed with their

deaf partner. No two days are the same!

"When a puppy meets their new volunteer, we let them both settle in and bond gradually. We try not to overwhelm new volunteers and make sure they feel supported. There's a lot to learn but we take it step by step. We buddy up new and experienced volunteers, so they have peer support throughout the training process.

**"Our puppies are amazing and you learn so much from each one."**

"Every puppy is unique and you learn so much from each one. We hold training classes out and about to help them gain

confidence in real-world environments. This is important not only to make sure our dogs feel happy wherever they go, but also so that their future deaf partners have a calm, relaxed future dog by their side. It amazes me how many sights, smells and sounds a puppy can experience 'in the wild'.

"We may visit a quiet residential area, a busy shopping centre, or a café to practise 'settle' as a group. Our volunteers really get into the spirit. They even dress up in different outfits so the puppies are introduced to 'new people', be it a pretend lollipop lady or even a pretend vet. This is to mimic the different people the puppies will meet when living with their future deaf partner. These fun group sessions, where there are distractions we can control, are a great way to build up the puppies' skills and confidence. Everything's broken down into bite-sized chunks and is taken at each puppy's own pace.



Senior Puppy Training Instructor, Michelle, covers our south Manchester and Cheshire regions. Since 2015, she's supported many volunteers and pups through the Hearing Dogs reward-based training programme. It's a reward-based role too, as Michelle sees the puppies grow up to transform lives



"We also run introductory public transport sessions with our pups when they're around eight months old. In the area I cover, Stagecoach kindly loans us a bus for our pups to practise on. This allows the pups to take baby steps towards travelling on a real bus. We practise getting on and off and then add controlled distractions, such as ringing the bell. Doing these sessions as a group can help the less confident dogs get on the bus, having seen their confident friends do it first.

"As well as out-and-about sessions, I make home visits to support volunteers. These can include introducing sensory activities using home appliances, such as a vacuum cleaner, or building up a pup's confidence around being groomed.

"In training, it's important to think about things from a dog's point of view. If you have ever pushed your dog away for jumping up at you, you may have unknowingly given them exactly what they are looking for – attention!

"Working out how a dog might interpret our interactions helps us to guide them

and reward the right choices. This helps build the dog's relationship with us and their confidence, which in turn will motivate them to make a positive choice to alert their partner to sounds. Engaging in fun activities such as hunting games and agility strengthens this, which again will help the dogs in their final role with their deaf partner.

**"Hearing dogs get to be dogs all the time! To them, their 'job' is a fun game rather than a chore."**

"When a puppy is ready, I support the Volunteer Dog Trainers to begin teaching them to alert to sounds. We start by working on the 'nudge'. Initially, we

encourage the dog to nudge a sticky note. Then, we help them to increase the strength of that nudge by asking them to push over something light, such as a plastic bottle or a DVD case. Eventually, this will develop into the potentially life-saving skill of nudging to get their deaf partner's attention when they hear an important sound.

"We reward our dogs in their training depending on what each individual dog enjoys. That could be a treat, a toy or a big fuss. What's great about training hearing dogs is that our dogs get to be dogs all the time! To them, their 'job' is a fun game rather than a chore.

"In the world of dog training, there are various areas you can go into. When someone said they thought puppy training would suit me best, I think they were right! What I love about my job is I get to work with a wide range of incredible people (and puppies!). It's amazing when you've matched a hearing dog to their deaf partner and the volunteer feels really proud of the work they've put in. Seeing that journey is what I really enjoy." 🐾

# Poolside and beyond: cool Kimmy is always there

Suz Hext, a Paralympian, Para Swimming World Champion and Para Dressage Triple European Gold Medallist, was achieving amazing things in the athletic spotlight. But behind the scenes she was finding life tough due to her invisible disability – her deafness. Now, Suz's hearing dog and canine training companion, Kimmy, has turned this around







**“IF I’M HAVING A TOUGH DAY, SEEING HER HAPPY MAKES ME HAPPY.”**

overload, and listening fatigue is exhausting. Now I know Kimmy will keep me safe.

“Not long after I was partnered with Kimmy, there was a fire alarm test at the hotel in Manchester. Straight away, she nudged me and dropped to the floor to let me know. The next day, there was another test alarm as I was warming up next to the pool. She was on it straight away. That was two days in a row, bless her!

**“SHE’S THE COOLEST DOG IN THE WORLD!”**

“Kimmy creates awareness for other people about my deafness, and people are more understanding as a result. She’s a conversation starter, and because she’s so chilled about everything, she gives me confidence. She’s also made me more confident about letting my friends know how they can involve me more.

“If I’m having a tough day, seeing Kimmy happy makes me happy. When my nerve pain and spasms are bad, she comes and gently lies on me. She just knows.

“We’ve been to award dinners and weddings, and even went to the Sports Personality of the Year awards. She takes everything in her stride and loves our busy life together.

“‘Thank you’ doesn’t sum up how grateful I am. I thought any hearing dog would be amazing, but I could never have dreamt of the partnership I have with Kimmy. She’s the coolest dog in the world! Completely life-changing.” 🐾



**12** years ago, Suz’s life changed forever. When she was 23, the promising equestrian rider had a horse rear up and land on top of her. The accident left her paralysed from the waist down. Inspired by watching the 2012 Paralympics in hospital, Suz got back in the saddle and back to competing.

After winning three European Championship gold medals, Suz switched her focus to para swimming, having used it as part of her riding physio and fitness. She competed in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics, and she won gold and silver medals in the 2023 Para Swimming World Championships.

“I’ve had hearing loss since I was born and for a long time managed quite well with hearing aids,” shared Suz. In 2020, it took a massive dive. By the end of the year I had almost no hearing.

“I felt extremely vulnerable and isolated. I worried about missing the smoke alarm and I didn’t sleep very well. I had a vibrating alarm clock pad, but I worried about it sliding out from under my pillow and making me miss training.”

Suz had to pull out of both the 2020 Paralympics after the first two races and the 2022 World Championships because she developed sepsis following an ear infection. “After that my surgeon agreed for me to have bilateral cochlear implants and bilateral blind sac closures, meaning both my ear canals have been closed to avoid infections.

“Before, I don’t know if I was more exhausted from lip-reading during training

or from the physical training itself. Now, my coach has a microphone linked to my implants and I can hear him talking as I’m swimming along. That’s been an absolute game-changer. I feel incredibly lucky and hugely grateful.

“Although I wouldn’t change my cochlear implants for the world, it’s not like ‘normal’ hearing; you still struggle with listening and understanding people.

“A lot of people see my physical disability, but they don’t see my deafness. My speech is quite good, so if I have my hair down covering my cochlear implants, people don’t always realise.

“Even with friends, if I ask someone to repeat themselves more than once, they say ‘Don’t worry, it doesn’t matter.’ That hurts big time. I’m a pretty strong person, but I can come away from an evening feeling pretty low.

“Applying for a hearing dog was a massive step because it was me admitting I needed help, but the sense of relief was enormous. When Kimmy arrived in March 2023, she was a bundle of energy, wagging her tail so hard her bum wiggled!

“Her trainer said it might take time for her to react to my alarm clock, but straight after our first training session with my alarm, this great furry lump launched herself at me as soon as it went off! I know I can rely on Kimmy to wake me up. I’m currently training for the Paris Paralympics and I’m no longer checking the time during the night. That’s one of the biggest things for me, that anxiety has gone.

“Kimmy is a huge hit, particularly at the Bath University Sports Training Village. I love telling people about her. Everyone is always blown away by what she can do.

“Kimmy’s always got half an eye on me. If she falls asleep poolside, when she wakes up you can see her checking I’m still there in the lane beside her.

“Before, I didn’t like taking my implants off in the changing room after swimming in case a fire alarm went off. I now have the confidence to take the hearing breaks I need as sometimes it feels like sensory

**“A LOT OF PEOPLE SEE MY PHYSICAL DISABILITY, BUT THEY DON’T SEE MY DEAFNESS.”**

# Gryffin sees everything as an adventure



Nine years ago, Ann experienced a coma triggered by an autoimmune response to a virus. When she regained consciousness, she was profoundly deaf

**F**or Ann, coming to terms with her deafness took time and during that time her third son tragically died. Then, hearing dog Gryffin arrived and his zest for life gave Ann new hope for a life with hearing loss.

"My first memories after waking up from the coma were of seeing people's lips move, but hearing nothing," explains Ann. "It was a frightening time for me and my family.

"In addition to my hearing loss, I have hyperacusis, which means sounds quickly become painful. Because hearing aids work by amplifying sound, they are not helpful for me. I rely on lip-reading and auto-captions. For work, I use speech-to-text reporters who

type verbatim what people say. Without them, work would not be possible.

"Adapting to living with hearing loss wasn't easy. Going out in a group isn't possible anymore as I can only follow conversations on a one-to-one basis, and even then, only if I can lip-read the person speaking to me.

"I have always been passionate about music and ballet. I have learnt to accept that I will never hear a new piece of music for the rest of my life and instead focus on other activities I enjoy, especially going out with Gryffin.

"Most of all, I missed my daily phone calls with my mum in Lancashire, but we found other ways to keep in touch with regular

visits to each other's homes, until she died.

"Communicating with friends and family, I use texts and emails, but it is not as spontaneous as picking up the phone and having a chat. My judicial colleagues are very accommodating and always make sure I have the adjustments in place that I need; Gryffin is always very popular at training sessions.

"Three years after I lost my hearing, my third son Marcus died in a car accident. Trying to deal with the police, the undertaker and coroner while not being able to hear what they were saying made an already difficult situation almost impossible. It was a very sad time for my family and I.

"I applied for a hearing dog towards the end of 2015. My family encouraged me to apply as although I had adjusted to living with hearing loss, they were very concerned that I couldn't hear sounds at home and out of the house. They thought having the safety and security of a hearing dog could help me, especially when travelling on my own.

"Since Gryffin has joined the family, he has helped me in so many ways. He alerts me to sounds; for instance, wherever I am at home he's insistent that I respond to the doorbell. He helps me to feel more comfortable explaining about my hearing difficulties to other people. His presence reminds people that my hearing loss is



Photos by Paul Wilkinson





going on planes, visiting 10 Downing Street and Gryffin being blessed at St Paul's Cathedral; the latter two were arranged by my son Oliver.

"Gryffin enjoys football matches with my eldest son Max. He loves waking up my youngest son Magnus by jumping onto his bed. Gryffin also enjoyed lots of attention at Magnus' graduation ceremony. Gryffin loves trips to the beach in Lancashire, where I grew up, and visits to the Lake District for long walks.

"Gryffin is very patient when I am working, sitting calmly next to me. However, he is happiest when we are out and about enjoying our life together or when he is helping me. Everywhere we go, people comment on Gryffin's friendly and sociable personality. He thrives on social interaction and is always a willing and enthusiastic participant.

"We have given talks to several local charities about Hearing Dogs for Deaf People and managing hearing loss. Last year, we raised nearly £4000 walking in memory of Marcus. This year, Gryffin and I raised more funds in memory of Marcus by completing the Hearing Dogs walk across Morecambe Bay.

"Everything about Gryffin is special. He brings so much happiness and pleasure to everyone he meets with his unlimited energy, loving, friendly ways and zest for life. I am very grateful to his trainer and volunteers for helping him to learn the skills he now uses to support me.

"The bond Gryffin and I have is truly special. I look at him and know Marcus and my mum would have loved him too. I cannot imagine life without Gryffin!" 🐾

significant and helps them understand my difficulties with verbal communication.

"Gryffin is a very positive but undemanding communication partner. I chat away to him throughout the day and he happily wags his tail in response. Taking Gryffin for a walk gives me a break from concentrating on lip-reading or reading speech-to-text – both are tiring and require concentration. It also helps if I am struggling with tinnitus or hyperacusis.

"Gryffin has an incredible zest for life. He sees everything as an adventure, and this filters through to my family and I. He takes everything in his stride and thrives on new experiences. These have included





**Do you remember adorable Gwen who featured in issue 60 of *Favour*?** This sponsor pup is now all grown up and supporting deaf couple, Jason and Yvonne. Learn about her amazing skills and how you can sponsor a puppy today.



# Sponsor pup Gwen is a “superhero”

Jason and Yvonne were used to navigating a silent world. But when they couldn't hear an essential medical device alarm, they realised they needed more support





**J**ason and Yvonne met at school when they were 14. “We got married in 1995 and have two boys, both hearing, who have now left home,” shared Yvonne. Jason’s deafness is hereditary, whereas Yvonne is deaf as she was exposed to rubella in the womb. “Being deaf is hard work, from waking up to going to bed. You just have to make the best of it.”

Living with an invisible disability means people aren’t always considerate towards the couple’s needs. Jason explained, “I’ve found people can be quite dismissive. They assume you’re stupid if you don’t hear them.” Yvonne said, “I’ve found it harder as I’ve got older, how people are with me. Sometimes I just don’t go out because it’s too tiring, and I can start feeling isolated from the world outside.”

For Jason, there are also other barriers to him leaving the house. He’s been on the waiting list for a kidney transplant for seven years and needs dialysis three times a week. Although Jason later began receiving dialysis in hospital, not being able to hear the alarm of his at-home dialysis machine was what prompted the couple to to apply for a hearing dog. Yvonne recalled one night at a hotel, when she woke up to someone standing at the bottom of their bed: “I screamed the place down. The man, who worked for the hotel, was very apologetic but said there had been a noise complaint from the person next door. It was Jason’s dialysis machine alarm. I hadn’t heard it and Jason slept through the whole thing.”

On this frightening evening, little did Jason and Yvonne know that a clever puppy, who would change their lives, would be going through her hearing dog training: training being paid for by kind people who sponsored her through donations. After passing her assistance dog assessments, Cocker Spaniel and bundle-of-cuddles,

Gwen, moved home with the happy couple in January 2022. “She’s completed our family,” said Jason.

Gwen’s impressive sound-alert skills mean Jason won’t miss a life-saving telephone call. Jason explained, “I’m due for a kidney transplant, and I must know when the phone is ringing. I used to miss calls, but now Gwen loves telling me the phone is ringing. She could literally save my life. I’m also feeling fitter because of the daily walks, which will be important for my upcoming operation and recovery.” Gwen also supports Yvonne with sounds, like the alarm clock, meaning she’s no longer late for her work at the local hospital. Although she’s not trained to, Gwen even alerted Yvonne when Jason had fainted and broken his nose in another room, leading her to where he had fallen.

But heroic Gwen isn’t just alerting her deaf partners to sounds. Yvonne shared, “She’s a godsend! Her hearing dog jacket reminds people that we’re deaf and they’re much more considerate as a result. I’m also more confident going out on my own.”

Gwen’s naturally sweet and loving character has also stolen their hearts. Yvonne shared, “We’re more relaxed; she’s just made us happier in general. We’ll put a film on, but we don’t really watch it because we’re playing with Gwen, cuddling her, or watching her antics.” Jason added, “She is very affectionate and loves evening cuddles.”

Gwen has enjoyed many adventures since living with her deaf partners. Yvonne recalled, “Gwen is a well-travelled dog and she’s stayed at numerous hotels in Devon and Cornwall. A highlight was when we visited the Carbis Bay Hotel in Cornwall and she was allowed in the spa! She was very disappointed not to get a robe and slippers though. She’s also been to Lord’s Cricket Ground and loved it. She’s not fazed at all and takes it all in her stride.”



Gwen was a sponsor puppy and over 200 people kindly sponsored her to become the wonderful hearing dog she is today. From resembling a sweet hot cross bun as a young pup to learning life-saving soundwork, sponsors proudly saw every stage of Gwen’s incredible training (and her antics with her favourite toy, ‘Pandy’!)

The generosity of the Charity’s many puppy sponsors means that clever hearing dogs can transform deaf people’s lives. This is a generosity for which Yvonne and Jason are very grateful: “Thank you [to Gwen’s sponsors] for helping Gwen to become a hearing dog – she’s an absolute wee gem. 🐾

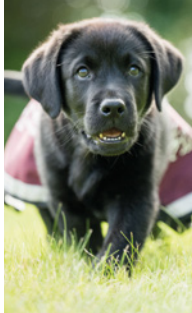
## ➔ Find out more

**To sponsor an adorable hearing dog puppy through their life-changing training journey, visit [hearingdogs.org.uk/sponsor](https://hearingdogs.org.uk/sponsor)**

Henry



Alfie



Amber



## SPONSOR A PUPPY TODAY

You can follow the journey of one of our adorable pups who will one day help a deaf person to stop feeling isolated from the world outside – just like Gwen.




From just £5 a month you could sponsor happy Henry, mischievous Alfie or adorable Amber.

When you sponsor a puppy, you’ll receive a fabulous welcome pack and regular updates on their progress including cute photos plus access to the online Puppy Pen.

[hearingdogs.org.uk/sponsor](https://hearingdogs.org.uk/sponsor)

# Fundraising partners

## WAYS TO HELP

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

Our corporate partners give incredible support that changes deaf people's lives. We'd like to thank all the organisations who support Hearing Dogs and make such a difference to deaf adults and children across the UK



## PAVERS FOUNDATION

A huge thank you goes out to Pavers and the Pavers Foundation for kindly allowing our puppies-in-training into their stores. This will help our pups develop their social and behavioural skills in public spaces, introducing them to new surroundings and helping to grow their confidence. Thank you also for helping us to raise awareness of our work. You're amazing!

## ELITE HOTELS





We were delighted to be chosen as Elite Hotels' charity of the year for 2023 and 2024! Elite Hotels are a luxury hotel group based in East Sussex. As well as choosing Hearing Dogs as their charity of the year, the hotel group generously featured Hearing Dogs in their bi-annual magazine last October. The article educated their readers about our services and how they're supporting us through Elite Hotels' charitable foundation! We're so excited to continue working with everyone at Elite Hotels and thank them so much for their invaluable support.



## AVIVA

Corporate organisations often ask us how they can support Hearing Dogs, and every company has different ways they'd like to get involved. One popular way is by sponsoring a hearing dog puppy! Kirsten, one of our deaf partners, is an employee at Aviva and is partnered with beautiful hearing dog, Pickle. Her team have seen first-hand just how life-changing Pickle has been for Kirsten. As a result, Kirsten's team generously decided to sponsor two of our gorgeous puppies, who will go on to change their future deaf partners' lives. Thank you so much to Aviva for choosing to support Hearing Dogs.

## THANK YOU ALSO TO...

 Mars Petcare  Pulse Cashflow  Barrett & Coe   
WTW  Downing LLP  Hidden Hearing

Do you work for an organisation that would like to support Hearing Dogs?

Please get in touch by emailing

[corporatesupport@hearingdogs.org.uk](mailto:corporatesupport@hearingdogs.org.uk)



After the success of our two-year partnership, we are delighted that Pets at Home are continuing their support of the charity by contributing towards training for our wonderful dogs on their journey to becoming a deaf person's life-changing companion. Thank you so much to all at Pets at Home and the Pets at Home Foundation for helping us to change more deaf people's lives. Your support truly means so much!



We would like to thank Specsavers for again choosing to support the Great British Dog walk in 2024! We are so grateful for their continued support of this amazing event. To find out more about the walks this year, visit [hearingdogs.org.uk/greatbritishdogwalk](https://hearingdogs.org.uk/greatbritishdogwalk)



# It's not too late to join one of our Great British Dog Walks

Join friends, family and fellow dog lovers for a special sponsored walk that raises funds to change lives. With longer and shorter routes available at each beautiful location across the UK, it's fun for all ages and abilities.

We can't wait to see you there, with or without a canine friend! Find a weekend walk near you at [hearingdogs.org.uk/gbdw](https://hearingdogs.org.uk/gbdw)



## JOIN THIS YEAR'S PAWS APPEAL AND MAKE IT THE BIGGEST AND BEST YET!

This September, you can transform the lives of deaf adults and children by joining a fun bucket collection in your local area.

Last year, our Paws Appeal raised over £23,500! By joining the 2024 appeal, you'll be one of hundreds of kind volunteers donating a couple of hours of time to support deaf people.

The Paws Appeal takes place at supermarkets, garden centres, sports venues and more across the UK. In 2023, Erin, with hearing dog Otis, hosted our collection at Morrisons supermarket in Blackpool.

Erin said, "Before Otis, I was unable to leave the house due to anxieties and low self-confidence. Now, I go out and about

independently, all thanks to Otis and the amazing support from Hearing Dogs!

"I really enjoyed hosting the Paws Appeal at my local supermarket. Members of the public kindly stopped and were keen to know more, and I was able to share the incredible difference Otis has made to my life."

Volunteers held 91 brilliant collections last year, and we'd like to hold even more in 2024. When you join, you'll be fully supported by the Hearing Dogs team and you're welcome to come along with a friend. Wearing furry dog ears is optional!

To get involved, please visit [hearingdogs.org.uk/PawsAppeal](https://hearingdogs.org.uk/PawsAppeal) or email [fundraising@hearingdogs.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@hearingdogs.org.uk). Thank you so much!

## COULD YOU BECOME A VOLUNTEER SPEAKER?

Our super Volunteer Speakers fly the Hearing Dogs flag, delivering presentations to local schools, businesses and community groups. On a schedule that suits them, they raise vital awareness of the impacts of hearing loss and how our clever canines transform lives.

Volunteer Speaker, Phil, shared his experience: "The audiences are so enthusiastic. I find it so rewarding to think I might've given someone the tools to get help with their hearing loss."

To find out more or sign up, please call us on **01844 348129** or email [volunteer@hearingdogs.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@hearingdogs.org.uk)



## Calling all cake lovers!

Host a Paws for Cake picnic or party with friends, family and colleagues this summer, and raise funds to train life-changing hearing dogs.

By whipping up some brilliant bakes to share at your Paws for Cake event, you'll change the lives of deaf adults and children. Whether you're a seasoned baker or you're new to the kitchen, every slice sold will help deaf people leave loneliness behind.

Sign up at [hearingdogs.org.uk/cake](https://hearingdogs.org.uk/cake)



North Kent College students including Amelia and her hearing dog Scamp raised almost £200



Lucy, with hearing dog Wilbur, Paws(ed) for Cake with 'the West Mercia Police Road Safety Team, raising over £170

# Goodbyes that are filled with pride



Caring for a hearing dog puppy-in-training is a wonderful experience, but one that inevitably ends with goodbye. Our Volunteer Puppy Trainers find ways through this process, knowing their gifts of time and dedication will transform lives once their puppy moves on

**A**ny dog lover will tell you about the unmistakable bond that exists between dogs and humans. The loyalty and trust humans earn from dogs can grow into heartfelt friendships. Unfortunately, this does mean saying goodbye to a dog really can be tough. By far, this is the most common reason that people hesitate to sign up as a Volunteer Puppy Trainer. However, for the volunteers who look after our canine trainees, the joy far outweighs the sadness.

Volunteer Puppy Trainers are assigned a hearing dog puppy to look after in their own home for over a year at a time. This is generally until a puppy is ready to begin their advanced soundwork training. Supported by an experienced Dog Trainer, volunteers care for the puppy, carry out obedience training (for example, 'Sit', 'Wait', 'Down') and attend regular training classes. They also support pups to grow their confidence by introducing them to new environments. Volunteer, Linda, shared, "You help shape the way they see the world, which means they learn that something unusual is fun or interesting, rather than scary, and it's lovely to see that happen."

It's always a moment of immense pride when puppies pass their training milestones, called 'Puppy Star Awards'. Volunteer Puppy Trainer, Liz, found this helped when saying goodbye to puppy Arthur: "We felt really proud of what we'd achieved. What got me through was thinking about how excited the deaf partner who was going to get him would be feeling. It's what Arthur was born to do."

Handing a puppy over is undeniably an emotional experience. However, many volunteers feel it is easier than going through the bereavement of a pet. "It's never easy, but it's still easier than losing a dog after many, many years," shared volunteer, Ali. "We plan it so we say goodbye to one puppy, then pick another one up very shortly afterwards."

Other volunteers take a break in between puppies instead. This offers them a moment to reset before welcoming a new pup-in-training. They may plan a trip away to give themselves time to reflect on the experience. At home, some volunteers display photographs of each puppy they have supported to honour their time together; we've seen this described as a 'Wall of Fame' or a 'Gallery of Graduates'!

**"SAYING GOODBYE IS ALWAYS TOUGH, BUT OF COURSE THIS LEADS TO A NEW 'HELLO' AND ANOTHER CANINE LODGER TO STEAL OUR HEARTS."**

**"WHEN THEIR NEW PARTNER KEEPS IN TOUCH, YOU CAN SEE THE INCREDIBLE DIFFERENCE THAT DOG IS MAKING TO THEIR LIFE."**







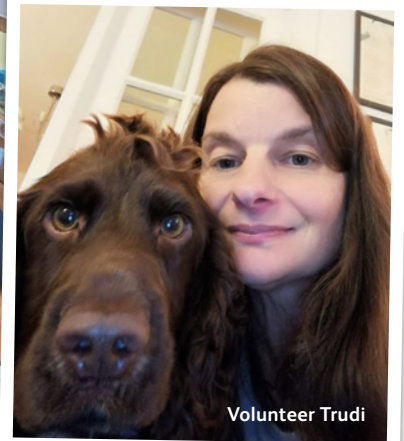
David and Jilly with Fizz



Volunteer Liz



Volunteer Janice



Volunteer Trudi

The role's flexibility means volunteers experience the joys of building a relationship with a young dog, without the lifetime commitment. Looking after different breeds and personalities, and learning new skills as a result, can be great fun. However, above all else, knowing their dedication to a puppy will change someone's life is the biggest motivator. Even when a volunteer has fallen in love with a puppy, understanding this helps when they move on. Volunteer, Janice, who looked after hearing dog Elvis, said: "I've now met a couple of people who have been partnered with hearing dogs and, for me, it's put the sadness of having to hand Elvis back completely into perspective."

Volunteer Puppy Trainer, Karen, said, "The feeling when I heard Jessie had gone to her deaf partner was amazing... I thought I would burst with pride. I also find reading partnership stories helps to get things in perspective and enables me to do it all over again!" Once qualified, hearing dog puppies transform lives. They alert deaf people to life-saving and important sounds and provide invaluable emotional comfort and support.

After being matched with their hearing dog, deaf partners can choose to keep volunteers in the loop by contributing to an online 'Scrapbook'. This digital album shares photos and tales from their life with their hearing dog. Volunteers find this a valuable way to stay connected and feel part of a hearing dog's new life. Volunteer, Trudi, shared, "When their new partner keeps in touch, you can see the incredible difference that dog is making to their life."

When the time comes for goodbye, each volunteer has the full support of the Hearing Dogs family. This includes their assigned Dog Trainer, our Volunteering Team and fellow volunteers via in-person

## "THEIR LOVE AND DEDICATION MEANS THE WORLD TO DEAF ADULTS AND CHILDREN."

events and social media groups. Volunteer, Phil, shared his goodbye experience: "Greta, a gorgeous poodle, has enriched our lives and is now off to start her working life. Saying goodbye is always tough, but of course this leads to a new 'Hello' and another canine lodger to steal our hearts." Volunteers can say goodbye in a way that feels right for them. That could be having a final walk and cuddle at one of our training centres, or having the puppy collected from their home by a friendly face.

Head of Volunteering, Victoria Leedham, said, "We can't thank our Volunteer Puppy Trainers enough for the safe and loving home environments and training they provide. Their support is essential to each puppy's development into a well-rounded hearing dog."

"The strength of the bond between volunteers and our puppies-in-training is undeniable. I can't emphasise enough how much their input and dedication mean to the deaf adults and children who are eventually partnered with these puppies."

Despite its inevitable challenges, looking after a young hearing dog-in-training can be an incredibly rewarding experience. For anyone considering the role, volunteers Jilly and David have some wise words: "Feel proud of what you have achieved, rather than sad, when your dog moves on. The best way to get over it is to get another puppy and start all over again!"

To find out more about becoming a Volunteer Puppy Trainer, please visit [hearingdogs.org.uk/volunteer](https://hearingdogs.org.uk/volunteer) 🐾



Emily and her hearing dog Marcus (L) with Volunteers Jackie and Linda (R)

**"There are no words to thank the people who look after and train puppies before they become hearing dogs. They take these dogs into their home, they train them, feed them and give them a sense of routine. They do so much in their free time to help people like me – how do you find the words to thank someone for that?" – Emily, who is partnered with hearing dog Marcus**

# It matters: your guide on how best to communicate with deaf people

Simple tips that will make life easier for deaf people and people with hearing loss



Hi, I'm Lucy,

Right now, you are doing something amazing. The fact that you are reading this guide means you want to do something to make life easier for deaf people and people with hearing loss. People like me. Thank you!

Being deaf or having hearing loss can be an incredibly isolating experience.

It can be lonely. It can make you feel cut off from other people because of all the communication barriers you have to face on a daily basis. I know because I have been there.

Just by being aware of how best to communicate with deaf people or people with hearing loss, you can genuinely make life so much easier for them and make them feel included and connected.

By taking five minutes to read this guide, you could be the one who completely turns around another person's day.

Thank you again for reading this guide, and for making a difference.

Warm wishes,

Lucy (and hearing dog Wilbur)



**AROUND 1 IN 5 PEOPLE IN THE UK HAVE SOME LEVEL OF HEARING LOSS. AN ESTIMATED 1.2 MILLION PEOPLE ARE SEVERELY OR PROFOUNDLY DEAF.**

They could be your friend, family member, colleague, neighbour, or the person working at the local café.



## How best to communicate with deaf people or people with hearing loss

Here are some simple ways you can adapt the way you communicate to make life easier for someone who is deaf or has hearing loss.

### Find out how the person prefers to communicate

It is okay to ask someone what their preferred communication method is.



### Make sure you have their attention before talking

For example, a wave or light tap on the arm. It's far easier for someone to understand you if they know you are talking to them.

### Always face the person you're talking to

Make eye contact and try to avoid covering your mouth, chewing, or turning away, as many deaf people and people with hearing loss rely on lip-reading.

### Speak at normal volume

Speak normally – don't exaggerate, shout or speak much slower than you normally would, as this can distort the way your mouth moves and your facial

expressions, which makes it harder for people to lip-read.

### Don't say "It doesn't matter..."

If someone asks you to repeat yourself, either once or a number of times, don't give up and say, "Oh it doesn't matter". This can make someone feel that what they are saying doesn't matter, or that they don't matter.

It doesn't matter...

### Try rephrasing

If you say something, and someone doesn't understand, try rephrasing it, or finding another way to say the same thing.

### Stand somewhere with suitable lighting

Strong directional light, such as bright sunshine behind you, can make it difficult for others to see your face clearly which can hinder understanding.

### If possible, move to a quieter place with less background noise

Hearing when there is background noise can be particularly difficult for people with any level of hearing loss.

### Use non-verbal communication

Some deaf people use British Sign Language (BSL) or Sign Supported English (SSE), so learning the basics or becoming fluent could help.



### If someone struggles to lip-read what you are saying, try writing it down

This could be on paper or a phone screen, for example.

### Take turns to talk

If you are with more than one person, make sure only one person talks at a time.

**Lucy says:** "I sometimes have to ask people to repeat themselves. If they say 'It doesn't matter', I know they aren't being deliberately dismissive, but it always makes me feel like what I'm saying isn't important. If someone is patient and repeats themselves, or rephrases what they've said, it can make the world of difference."

Everyone has individual needs when it comes to communication. Not all tips in this guide will be appropriate for every person who is deaf or has hearing loss. But by being aware of the different ways that could aid communication, you could make someone's life much easier.

## How can I tell if someone is deaf or has hearing loss?

Deafness is an invisible disability and every deaf person or person with hearing loss is an individual. Some may be happy to tell you, and some may not. Sometimes people have hearing loss but haven't yet reached the point where they have sought help or been diagnosed.

However, there are some signs to look out for that could indicate someone has some level of hearing loss:

- 🐾 They may wear a visible hearing aid or have a cochlear implant.
- 🐾 They may have some kind of visual identifier with them, such as a hearing dog, or a badge stating that they have hearing loss or they lip-read.
- 🐾 They may ask you to repeat yourself when you say something, or ask 'Pardon?' or 'Sorry?' more than you might expect.
- 🐾 They don't respond when you say something to them.
- 🐾 They may misunderstand what you say or respond with something that doesn't seem to make sense, particularly when there is background noise.
- 🐾 They may say you are mumbling or talking quietly.
- 🐾 They may pay particular attention to your mouth and face when you are talking.
- 🐾 They may turn their head to the side slightly when you are talking to direct one of their ears towards you.
- 🐾 They may talk more loudly or quietly than expected.
- 🐾 They may not seem to follow conversation, particularly in a group setting or in environments where there is background noise such as pubs, restaurants, and shops.
- 🐾 They turn up the volume on the TV or when listening to music more loudly than is expected.
- 🐾 They may have difficulty hearing on the phone.

# Helping you to prepare



One of the most important relationships when managing hearing loss is with your audiologist. Our new webinar can help you plan for this appointment








**W**hen you first notice a change in your hearing, you might visit your GP and ask to be referred for a hearing test.

Maybe you'll visit a high street provider who offers a similar service. Whichever route you take for seeking help, it is common to feel apprehensive about how best to prepare for your appointment so you can achieve a positive outcome.

Our new service **Helpful Hours** has been created to equip you for situations like this. Designed by our Hearing Link Services team, these free workshops provide tips and advice on topics important to people with hearing loss. They are delivered in-person at community events – such as our Hearing Loss Community Days – and online as 60-minute webinars on Microsoft Teams.

The first session we've created, as part of the free Helpful Hours series, is 'How to get the most from your audiology appointment'. It offers techniques and tactics to help boost confidence for anyone attending an audiology appointment for the first time or for anyone planning a return visit.

The five topics covered in this session have been carefully researched using the lived experience of our Peer Support Volunteers, who are also presenting the webinar. They are:

-  Preparing for your appointment
-  Planning your appointment
-  What to expect
-  Choices to make
-  Post-appointment

To make the sessions accessible to everyone taking part, there is speech-to-text reporting (live captions) available via the Microsoft Teams app. After the workshop is finished, each participant is provided with information sheets summarising the topics discussed and offering additional information and links to further resources.

Nine workshops covering this topic have already taken place, and the response has been fantastic. They have been attended by people who have noticed a change in their hearing level, family members of those with hearing loss, and professionals in the healthcare and social sectors wishing to find out more about this topic.

One participant who took part was delighted with the support. They said: "It will help me to prepare the people I support in my job role. I would love to see more of these." Another added: "I thought it was a very helpful hour. It was presented well, and the use of personal experiences and examples was great."

Sylvia, a Hearing Link Services Peer Support Volunteer who helped design the first workshop, says: "Every person with hearing loss has experience of audiology appointments, but to get the best out of them requires an insight that many of us don't have. Helpful Hours addresses all aspects of an appointment and provides attendees with a valuable tool and the confidence to use it."

To find out more about this service, or to book a free place on a upcoming workshop, visit [hearinglink.org/helpfulehours](https://hearinglink.org/helpfulehours)







## Free support groups for hearing loss

Through our hearing support services, we offer people living with hearing loss several ways to access the support that's right for their individual journey.

From our Helpdesk, providing support and answers to hearing loss questions, to our online shop, offering awareness products and technology, there's a solution for everyone.

The flagship service offered by our Hearing Link Services team are free sessions called LinkUp support groups. These are a chance to spend a weekend exploring tactics with others experiencing the same difficulties as you. Working together with fellow participants and our Peer Support Volunteers, you'll share solutions and discuss technology and equipment that can make life easier.

In 2024, 10 LinkUp support groups will take place across the UK.

Michael, who attended one of our 2023 sessions, said: "Working through my hearing loss has been a difficult journey. I've experienced anger and frustration, embarrassment, discrimination and rejection, guilt, tolerance and support, as I'm sure many others have too. While I'm in a good place at the moment, I know there are

more peaks and troughs to come. I attended a session and I hoped that my wife and I could offer support and encouragement to others.

"Having a trusted friend – or wife in my case – is just as important as any piece of technology. My wife gives me confidence and helps me hear in many ways. By attending the support group with her, I wanted her to recognise that she also needs support and recognition for the role she plays in my life.

"With so many people struggling their way through hearing loss, these free support groups are fantastic for bringing folk together to share experiences of good and bad, to know that our experiences are often similar to others, and that getting through the darker times is possible."

You can register to attend a support group at [hearinglink.org/linkups](https://hearinglink.org/linkups)



### LINKUP SUPPORT GROUPS

2024

🐾 **May** – Fife, Scotland

🐾 **June** – The Grange, Saunderton, Buckinghamshire

🐾 **July** – Cardiff, Wales

🐾 **August** – The Beatrice Wright Centre, Bielby, Yorkshire

🐾 **September** – The Grange, Saunderton, Buckinghamshire

🐾 **October** – Fife, Scotland

🐾 **November** – Cookstown, Northern Ireland

2025

🐾 **February** – The Grange, Saunderton, Buckinghamshire

🐾 **March** – The Beatrice Wright Centre, Bielby, Yorkshire

# Paws for coffee...



We caught up with **Tasha Stones**, semi-finalist in last autumn's *The Great British Bake Off*, to learn about her 'Bake Off' experience, her deafness and the inspiration behind her baking



Tasha with Hearing Dogs puppy-in-training Ashton

**D**o you prefer tea or coffee? I'm definitely a coffee person. I start my day with a coffee – I need one to get myself going – but after a couple I limit myself to tea, otherwise I'd be bouncing off the walls.

**Do you have a dog yourself?** Sadly not. I've always loved animals, but we didn't have dogs growing up because our cats

wouldn't have liked it! When I was nine and living in Australia, I distributed leaflets to all my neighbours, offering to walk people's dogs. I walked a dog called Sandy every day we were there.

**Could you tell us a little about your hearing loss?** My family thinks I was born hearing, but by the time I was nine months old I was profoundly deaf. I have Waardenberg Syndrome, a genetic



Tasha with Hearing Dogs puppy-in-training Victor



@Love Productions 2023

condition that can cause hearing loss and changes in colouring (pigmentation) of the hair, skin and eyes.

As a toddler I was taught British Sign Language (BSL), but after I had my first cochlear implant when I was two, my parents were advised not to sign because it was thought back then that it could affect my ability to pick up speech. That really affected me socially. I struggled as a teenager not having sign language, and it wasn't until my late teens that I picked up signing again. Now I feel so much happier being able to consider myself part of both the deaf and hearing communities.

#### Where did your love of baking come from?

My love of baking came from my grandma. We made fairy cakes sprinkled with sugar, which my brother and I licked off once they were cooked! When I was 12 or 13, I started using baking as a way of expressing myself creatively, and it's just grown from there.

**When you're not baking, how do you like to spend your time?** I really love going to the theatre when there's a captioned or an interpreted performance on. I recently went to see *Operation Mincemeat*. How that story worked as a musical, I'll never know – it was totally nuts but brilliant! Unfortunately, only about two performances a year per show in the West End are captioned or interpreted, which can be frustrating.

I've also just started bouldering, but I have no upper-body strength, so I'm terrible at it. It's just nice to go with friends and try new things though – I'll try anything once!

#### Congratulations on reaching the semi-finals of *The Great British Bake Off*.

**What was the whole experience like?** It was a massive privilege to be the first deaf contestant on *Bake Off*. It was honestly the

best, and the most bonkers summer of my life, and it still feels completely surreal! I had quite a few 'pinch me' moments.

It didn't feel like a competition at all. The bonds you make with the other bakers just blew me away. We had a group chat, which is still going strong, and we'd ask each other for ideas to overcome problems with our bakes.

#### You were named Star Baker in biscuit week with your Japanese Matcha Illusion Showstopper. Where do you find the inspiration for your bakes?

I like to make things I know, and that my friends, family and I would enjoy eating. I also like to bring in flavours and ideas I've found on my travels. In my gap year, I went to Japan and then after I left uni, I travelled the Silk Road through Central Asia in a converted Soviet-era ambulance (it still had the light on top!).

I also like to inject some nostalgia into my bakes because I think that makes things taste better. I vividly remember these ginger caramel flapjacks from a local bakery when we were growing up. My mum gave my brother and me £5 on Saturday morning and we'd get a loaf of bread for the weekend and a treat for ourselves. My brother always got those flapjacks!

**How important do you think it is for the deaf community to be represented on national TV programmes like *The Great British Bake Off*?** It's incredibly important for deaf children and adults to see people like them in mainstream media.

I have a strong memory of watching *Dick and Dom in da Bungalow* when I was little and getting really excited when I saw they were wearing earpieces, because I thought they were hearing aids. I was so disappointed when my mum explained it was so that they could hear what the

producer was telling them.

The tide is changing a little, but there's still a long way to go.

**What sort of reaction have you had from the public since *Bake Off*?** There's been a huge amount of positivity, but also some negativity – people saying I fake my deafness and that I wasn't actually using my interpreter because I have cochlear implants and I don't "sound deaf"!

When I'm out and about, particularly if I have my hair down and people can't see my cochlear implants, they can get quite angry when I apologise for not hearing them and say "Sorry, I'm deaf", because they don't believe me! There's still a lot of education to be done.

#### What are your plans now *Bake Off* is finished?

There are some very exciting things coming up, including some TV work and food festivals around the country.

I know I want to continue raising awareness of the diversity within the deaf community. Not every deaf person is the same; we all have different communication methods and different backgrounds, and they're all valid.

**Do you know anyone who has a hearing dog?** I have a couple of friends and colleagues who have hearing dogs, and they are just brilliant. Seeing their partnerships is wonderful.

#### Having visited Hearing Dogs' southern training centre, what were your impressions of the work our dogs do?

It's mind-blowing! They're just so clever and they seem to enjoy their work so much. I've only had a glimpse of the Charity's work, but it's clear how much goes into training the dogs and matching them with the right partners. I'm blown away by it! 🐾





# Spring Into Action!



Ready for a new challenge? Walk, run, cycle, swim...  
or choose your own fundraising adventure.



Visit [hearingdogs.org.uk/events](https://hearingdogs.org.uk/events) today to join in,  
raise vital funds and change the lives of deaf people.

[hearingdogs.org.uk/events](https://hearingdogs.org.uk/events)



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**Hearing Dogs**  
for Deaf People

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