

5 October 2009

Puppy walkers visit Scottish Parliament

Five young guide dog puppies and their puppy walkers enjoyed an educational trip around the Scottish Parliament on Tuesday, September 29.

The group, from the South Fife branch of Guide Dogs, were shown around the building by Jim Tolson, MSP for Dunfermline West.

Puppy walkers are volunteers responsible for the full time care and education of the guide dog pups from six weeks until approximately 12 to 14 months of age, when they are returned to the charity to begin specialised guide dog training.

Annette Bastianelli, of the South Fife branch, said: "We are always looking for new and challenging experiences to give the guide dog puppies as wide an education as possible in these early stages of training.

"A visit to the Scottish Parliament building was an ideal opportunity to further their schooling. Jim Tolson made us all feel most welcome and conducted a very enjoyable and interesting tour.

Jim said: "I regularly take local groups around the Scottish Parliament building and was delighted to be asked by puppy walkers at South Fife branch of Guide Dogs who, of course, wanted to bring their guide dog puppies along.

"I was very impressed by the excellent behaviour of the dogs – posing for a group photograph at the bottom of the main stairs leading from the Garden Lobby to the debating chamber!"

If anyone would like more information or is interested in becoming a puppy walker or in another volunteering role for Guide Dogs, please visit www.guidedogs.org.uk or call 0845 371 7771.

ENDS.

Notes to editor:

- Guide Dogs wants a society in which blind and partially-sighted people enjoy the same freedom of movement as everyone else.
- Guide dogs are not the only service we provide. We also supply other mobility services such as white cane training, we campaign to break down barriers preventing blind and partially-sighted getting about on the own and we fund ophthalmic research.
- The guide dog service receives no government or social services funding – it is supported entirely by the generosity of the public.
- Guide Dogs is currently appealing for puppy walker volunteers across Scotland, specifically in: Dundee, Carnoustie, Forfar(Angus) , Montrose, Arbroath, Inverness, Nairn, Forres, Elgin, Aberdeen, Stonehaven, Bridge of Don, Inveruie, Dyce, Banff/Macduff, Fraserburgh, Peterhead, St Andrews and East Neuk, Perth and surrounding area;(Glenfarg, Bridge of Earn, Abernethy, Newburgh, Methven,) Kinross, Milnathort, Aberfeldy and surrounding area, Blairgowrie Kelty, Stirling, Bannockburn, St Ninians, Tillicoultry, Menstrie, Alva, Blairlogie, Glasgow, Milton of Campsie, East Lothian, Midlothian and Scottish Borders, Dumfries, Ayr, Irvine, Troon, Ardrossan, Kilmarnock, Newton Mearns, Clarkston, East Kilbride, Hamilton, Motherwell, Wishaw and Lanark.

About Puppy Walking:

The puppies spend much of their first year of life living with the puppy walker volunteers in their home; they will teach them basic obedience and get them used to a home environment, noise and the bustle of towns.

They prepare the pup for their working life ahead which includes taking them on public transport including, trains and buses.

Guide Dogs supplies basic equipment and covers all veterinary and feeding expenses.

Puppy walkers need to have access to a car, be home for most of the day, and free to take their puppy into many varied environments – sometimes busy and difficult.

Their yard or garden will also need to be securely fenced.

For media enquiries please contact: Lorna Catling in the Guide Dogs' Public Relations team on (0118) 983 0114 or email Lorna.Catling@guidedogs.org.uk.