



Vision Australia
Seeing Eye Dogs



Seeing Eye Dogs volunteer impact report

2020-2021





On the cover: Letisha Watson, identifies as an Indigenous woman and is proud to be working on the Reconciliation Action Plan working group. She is a dog lover, volunteer carer and also the client services development lead and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) contact for Seeing Eye Dogs. Pictured sitting with pup-in-training Kiki and senior puppy development trainer, Kim Rulach.



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Yellow Seeing Eye Dog
Drummer in harness



Message from the CEO

Welcome to the Vision Australia Seeing Eye Dogs annual volunteer impact report for the 2020-21 financial year.

Following on from last year, we are pleased to share with you that Seeing Eye Dogs has continued to adapt its operations in line with all government COVID-19 regulations. Our priority through this time has always been everyone's safety, staff, clients and our volunteer community.

With your help and support, as our committed volunteers, we can continue to train world-class Seeing Eye Dogs to be matched with our clients.

We commend your flexibility to adapt to the new hybrid way of interacting with the organisation. Our community of volunteers have seamlessly transitioned to virtual training, online peer to peer carer catch-ups and contact-less transfers.

In addition to the great work done by our volunteers, we also send a big thank you to our donors, corporate partners - Petbarn Foundation and Royal Canin, and ambassadors. Seeing Eye Dogs wouldn't be what it is today without your support.

We would like to thank each and every one of you for your dedication in helping people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose.

We look forward to our continued relationship with you.



Ron Hooton
CEO

CEO Ron Hooton, with Seeing Eye Dogs pup-in-training Amy.



Update on the Seeing Eye Dogs strategy

Following from last year's inaugural volunteer impact report, our vision continues to be to produce dogs of the highest quality and to be innovators in the services that we provide to our clients.

In February 2021, we started a working group to further develop the animal welfare strategy which supports our vision. This strategy ensures that each and every one of our dogs is cared for at the highest standard.

Continuing on from last year, our online and hybrid programs now play an important role in our everyday training and support for volunteers, staff and clients.

Undeterred by the challenges of COVID and resulting changes in our programs, client services continued to deliver on our purpose to match clients with Seeing Eye Dogs.

Despite international border closures, this opened up an opportunity for further collaboration between Canada's CNIB Guide Dogs and Seeing Eye Dogs. We take this opportunity to thank the carers who raised these special pups until it was time for them to travel home to Canada.

Back at Seeing Eye Dogs Kensington headquarters, we focused on improving the overall usability of the Leigh Garwood Mobility Training Centre:

- Air-conditioning and heating were installed to create a more comfortable space for our dogs, clients, volunteers and staff to train in.
- A new audio-visual system was also installed to facilitate online events.
- The traffic component of the training program was enhanced with the final addition of a working, reversing motor vehicle.



The safety and wellbeing of our volunteers, staff and dogs is paramount to our organisation. We wrapped our Seeing Eye Dogs vehicles to:

- Improve visibility on the roads.
- Have a better configuration for transporting dogs and equipment.
- Encourage more carers to raise pups by promoting the great work we do.

Everyone wants to know about puppies. In the year ahead, we have an exciting new program commencing in the puppy centre and will be introducing a group of puppy nanny volunteers. This role will involve volunteers working on socialisation with the pups as well as enrichment for the dams (mums).

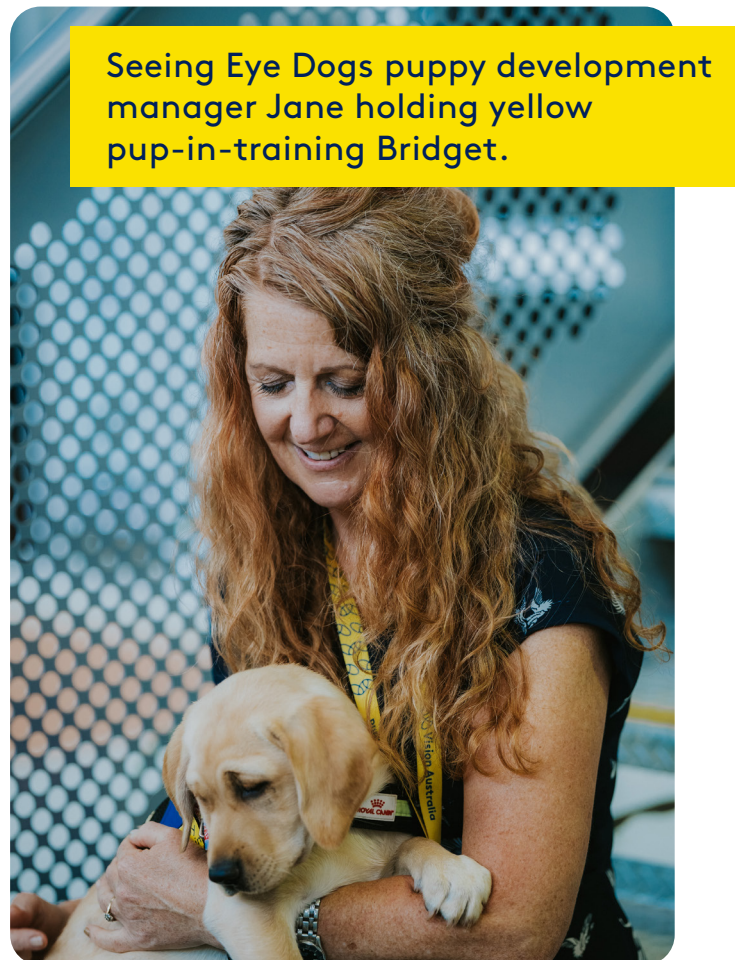
After a year of planning, Seeing Eye Dogs are excited to announce the implementation of a new volunteer management system. This will:

- Improve the experience for new and existing volunteers.
- Streamline the volunteer application process.
- Assist you in maintaining your volunteer compliance more efficiently.

With an expansion of our client service delivery, we continue to match even more people with our dogs than ever. With volunteers like you, our combined commitment to raise future Seeing Eye Dogs is possible.

We look forward to another successful year.

Jane Bradley
Puppy development manager
Seeing Eye Dogs



Contributions in 2020-2021

-  **700** volunteers supported our community.
-  **50** Zoom sessions attended by volunteers.
-  **More than half** of our puppy carers volunteered again - a Seeing Eye Dogs record.
-  **420 members and 30,000 comments** in our Facebook carers group.
-  **15** new dogs joined our world-class breeding colony.
-  **220** puppies have lived with our loving carers.

Did you know?

Next financial year we project an unprecedented 2.5 million volunteer hours at Seeing Eye Dogs. This is a 300% increase.



Did you know?

An incredible 41 clients were partnered with Seeing Eye Dogs!

Colleen, client, sitting on a step looking into the eyes of Seeing Eye Dog Xian and giving her a pat.



Client services

During the past year, we have partnered 41 clients with Seeing Eye Dogs which was a milestone achievement as we continue to grow. This has resulted in wait times for applicants falling considerably, a fantastic result all around. The team have really shown their dedication to make this happen.

Along with the rest of Australia, our staff had all sorts of extra challenges as a result of COVID restrictions. The solution was to deliver more hybrid home-based programs as an alternative to on-site at the Kensington facility. This has provided clients with more choice as to how they would like to train.

In order to keep matching more clients with Seeing Eye Dogs, our team also had to grow, and this year, the instructor team expanded significantly.

To ensure we would have a strong skill base, a traineeship program was developed in 2019. After three and a half years of training and hands-on work, three new instructors graduated.

Since then, five new trainee instructors have commenced their traineeships, demonstrating our commitment to continue to grow and match more clients with Seeing Eye Dogs.

"My best guess is there's probably around 60 dog guide mobility instructors in the country. What I know is that with people such as Jenny, Carly and Emma joining our organisation, Seeing Eye Dogs is in really great hands for the future."

**Paul Adrian,
Training manager**

Cassie, client, with her Seeing Eye Dog Neesha.



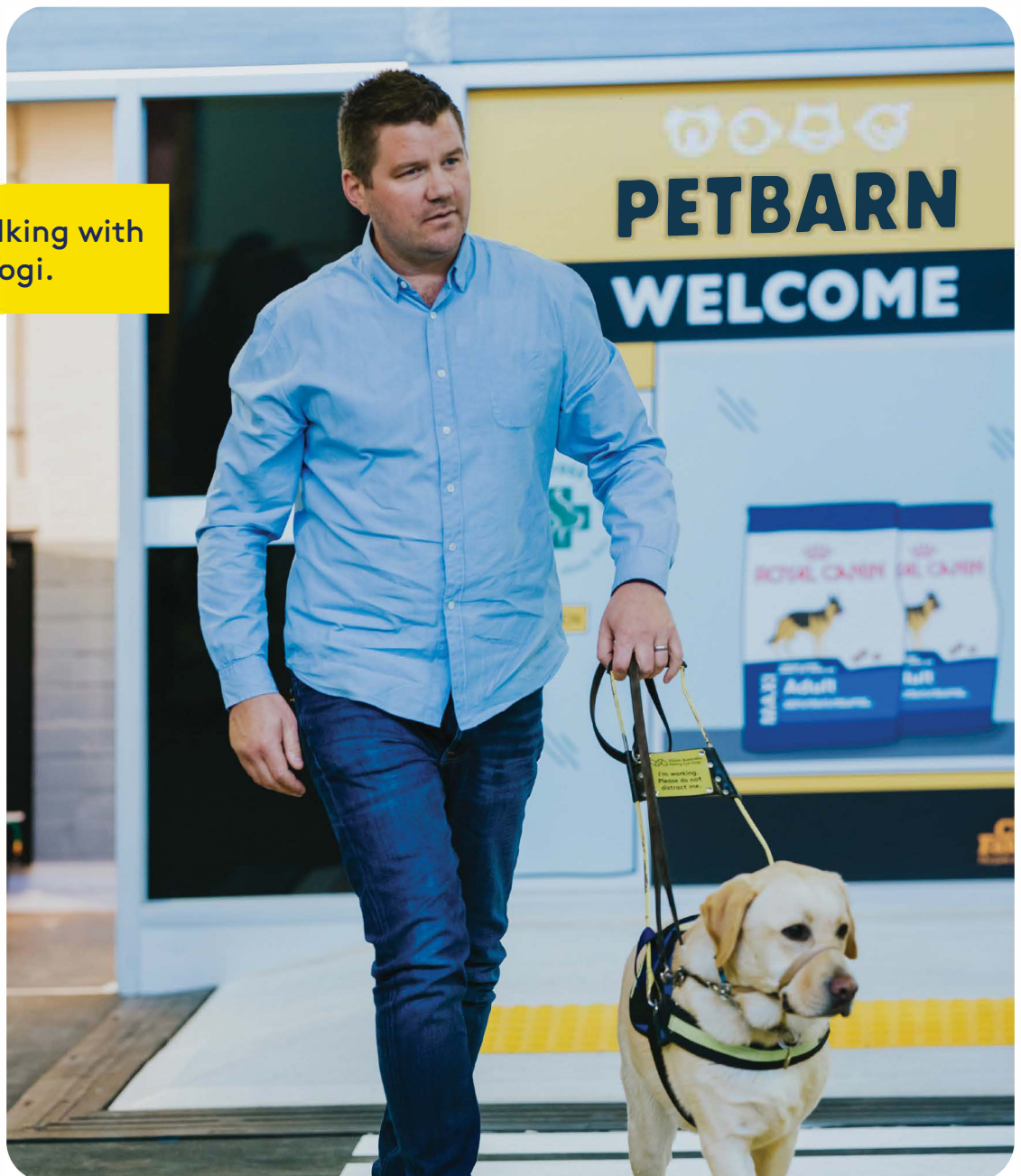
Following client feedback, we expanded our range of services. In the financial year we delivered:

- Four free webinars: in-depth sessions on the experiences of those with a Seeing Eye Dog or thinking about getting a dog guide and how it can be a positive life changing experience.
- 70 masterclasses: small group sessions designed to promote discussion and learning which is relevant to being a dog guide handler.
- A monthly newsletter: with regular updates about what's happening at Seeing Eye Dogs, and within the blind and low vision community.

"Listening and learning from our clients is vital in developing our services."

**Letisha Watson,
Client services
development lead
and carer**

Mitch, client, walking with Seeing Eye Dog Yogi.



Breeding and puppy centre

The 2020-2021 financial year saw 220 pups born on-site at Kensington to start their journey to become Seeing Eye Dogs. Our dedicated puppy centre staff supported these pups from breeding to birth across 31 litters, whilst 12 Seeing Eye Dogs pups undertook adventures to support clients around Australia and the world.

Seeing Eye Dogs were also fortunate enough to receive a number of pups bred by other organisations that will add diversity and strength to the Seeing Eye Dogs colony.

Furthering our international partnerships, Seeing Eye Dogs is supporting CNIB in Canada with two of our pups joining their program.

We are start up members of the Oceanic Breeding Co-operative and we value our collaboration with other dog guide and assistance organisations.

This means some Seeing Eye Dogs born pups are joining a nationwide breeding colony with the aim of providing consistently higher quality working dogs to clients.

The expertise of the Seeing Eye Dogs puppy attendants and advances in the breeding program has meant that we experienced the highest proportion of natural births on record.

Yellow pups having fun in the Seeing Eye Dogs puppy centre.



Kennels

The kennels team has also been kept busy. Staffing was maintained throughout each of the COVID lockdowns to uphold our high standards of care for dogs on-site. Looking after the basic needs, healthcare and providing meaningful enrichment to dogs continued to be the kennels' team focus.

During lockdown restrictions, we missed our kennels volunteer support. However, the team were able to deliver innovative solutions to combat the restrictions such as contactless drop offs and pickups of dogs for boarding to protect volunteers and staff.

Other initiatives adopted through the year included:

- Working with other departments to provide the best care for each dog based on their individual needs.
- Trialling and assessing different options to help settle incoming groups of dogs, minimising disruptions to others.
- The adoptions team continuing to assess and find suitable homes for released dogs adhering to COVID safe practice.



A Seeing Eye Dog enjoying the free run with kennel attendant Josh Radford.



Carer program

We are lucky to have such a close-knit community of dedicated volunteer carers from puppy to breeder, foster and training dog carers.

The carer program continues to be very popular with record numbers of applications being received in the financial year.

With continued program improvements and professional development opportunities, the amazing skills and expertise of our carers continues to grow.

Without these dedicated volunteers, we wouldn't be able to continue to match people who are blind or have low vision with Seeing Eye Dogs.

Following on from last year and with your support, we continue to innovate and deliver online and hybrid programs in an everchanging COVID landscape. This included the development of a hybrid format for the 16-week walk and talks, the 10-month assessments and breeder walks.

We also used the last year to create exclusive online carer resources including a new carer manual and breeder carer information packs. All puppy information packs were moved online to support our efforts to be sustainable and reduce costs.



Seeing Eye Dogs breeding dog Keisha and pup-in-training Frieda.



Carer program - highlights



The puppy carer program expanded into a new region, North Brisbane.



The vet passport was re-designed to a more user-friendly format including easy access QR codes.



COVID Q&A sessions were implemented to inform carers about changing government regulations and Seeing Eye Dogs handling practices.



Carers were supported through lockdown with the 'Quarantraining' video series.



The in for training (IFT) scheduled date forecasting was introduced, providing carers with an estimated date the pup is due to commence training. A photo project also supports this initiative.

Puppy development trainers Abi Howes, Jack Lord and Paige Coleman, training Seeing Eye Dogs pups.



Volunteering

Annual volunteer thank you event

On Thursday May 27, 2021 to coincide with National Volunteer Week, Seeing Eye Dogs held our annual volunteer thank you event.

The event celebrated the huge contribution of more than 700 active volunteers.

Tracey Smith was awarded her 20-year volunteer pin, Seeing Eye Dogs senior puppy development trainer and volunteer Kim Rulach reached her 15-year milestone and four new volunteers joined the 10-year Seeing Eye Dogs Walk of Fame: Phil Taylor, Vanessa Godfrey, Julie Scott and Steve Tocci.

Another 42 volunteers reached their five-year milestone, while 67 reached three years and a tremendous 188 volunteers have been with the organisation for one year.

We would like to say a special thank you to our Paw Pals committee members for running such amazing events, providing support and supplies for the puppy packs.

In addition, we would also like to thank our social media moderators for keeping the carers Facebook community thriving.

Did you know?

50% of Vision Australia Seeing Eye Dogs staff also volunteer at Seeing Eye Dogs as full-time puppy, foster, training dog and breeding dog carers?



L-R: Pre-COVID event with Rebecca Holder, Sue Banks, Brit McCarthy, Harriet Moffat, Di Yates, Belinda Trembath and Ashley Mooney with two Seeing Eye Dogs lying in front of them.



Volunteer roles

At Seeing Eye Dogs we have many volunteer roles with ages ranging from eight to 89 years old including:

- Puppy, breeder, foster and training dog carers
- Social media moderators
- Peer-to-peer facilitators and phone callers
- Administration volunteers
- Driving volunteers
- Kennels, puppy centre, and new puppy nanny volunteers
- Letterbox drop volunteers
- Seeing Eye Dogs representatives
- Vet support volunteers
- Instructor assistants
- Sewing volunteers
- Maintenance volunteers

Carer Liv Butcher sitting with Seeing Eye Dogs pups-in-training Union (yellow), Jethro (black) and hugging Tino (black) under her left arm.



Walk of fame members

In 2018 we launched the Seeing Eye Dogs walk of fame, to recognise and celebrate the contribution of volunteers who have been involved with Seeing Eye Dogs for 10 plus years.

Below is a list of our valued volunteers who have dedicated their time and love to Seeing Eye Dogs.

- Karen Anderson
- Anita Bottomley
- Di Combe
- Jeni Conquest
- Joan Duncan
- Vanessa Godfrey
- Kate Harry
- Susan Rafferty
- Esther Revens
- Linda Richardson
- Kim Rulach
- Julie Scott
- Tracy Smith
- Phil Taylor
- Steve Tocci
- Michael Vitale

Carer and walk of fame member Michael Vitale with Seeing Eye Dogs pup-in-training.



Volunteer testimonial

How volunteering helped Daniel secure employment

Seeing Eye Dogs volunteer Daniel believes that the combination of the Vision Australia employment services program, and his time volunteering, helped him find current employment in the credit assessment department at ANZ.

As part of the program, Daniel was encouraged to apply for an administration volunteer role with Seeing Eye Dogs which he continues to do today. In his role, he helps process puppy caring applications and has learned lots of new skills.



"Staff have been very warm, friendly and patient while I learnt my volunteer role. The dogs in training under desks, boxes of Nutella bars and good coffee also made Seeing Eye Dogs such a great volunteering environment!"

I strongly believe in the good work they do and enjoy being a part of it!"

Seeing Eye Dogs administration volunteer Daniel Sassoon.



Client testimonial

After a 25-year career transcribing books and other printed material into braille for people who are blind or have low vision, Haddon's Cheryl is enjoying retirement alongside Sherry, her Seeing Eye Dog.

Cheryl, 75, has been blind since she was seven years old as a result of an accident in her childhood. Sherry is Cheryl's sixth Seeing Eye Dog, after she was matched with her first dog at age 17.

After the two were matched in mid June, they've quickly become a tight-knit pair.

"Having a Seeing Eye Dog gives me a sense of freedom, I don't have to rely on anyone else. Sherry gives me my independence back and means I can do things myself," Cheryl said.

"Life with Sherry is a bit different to life with my other Seeing Eye Dogs. I used to travel two hours to and from Melbourne for work each day and now I don't have to do that, life's a bit more varied.

"Sherry's had to get used to doing a lot of different things and be able to do them well. She comes with me to Probus Club meetings, my book clubs and my walking group. She really gets me out and about and out talking to people."

Sherry not only helps Cheryl participate in the activities she enjoys; their partnership also impacts how other people treat Cheryl.

"When you're out with a Seeing Eye Dog, people seem to look upon you as an individual a bit more.

"If I'm out with my husband but without Sherry I find people will try to communicate with him rather than me. When you've got a Seeing Eye Dog with you, people seem to realise you're still your own person."

While Sherry has an important job in helping Cheryl navigate her way in the community, she's also a loved companion like any other dog.

"She's a very cuddly dog. I love the fact that when you're sitting down she'll come around and lie across your feet.

"If people come to visit, the first thing she does is go and get her toy llama and parade it about for everyone to see."



Cheryl, client, with Seeing Eye Dog Sherry walking together.



Meet the Seeing Eye Dogs team

Monette Manalili, administration support officer

In April 2021, Monette celebrated four years working at Vision Australia. She knows that working for Seeing Eye Dogs was meant for her. Such a dedicated worker she's been known to mistakenly turn up to work on a public holiday!

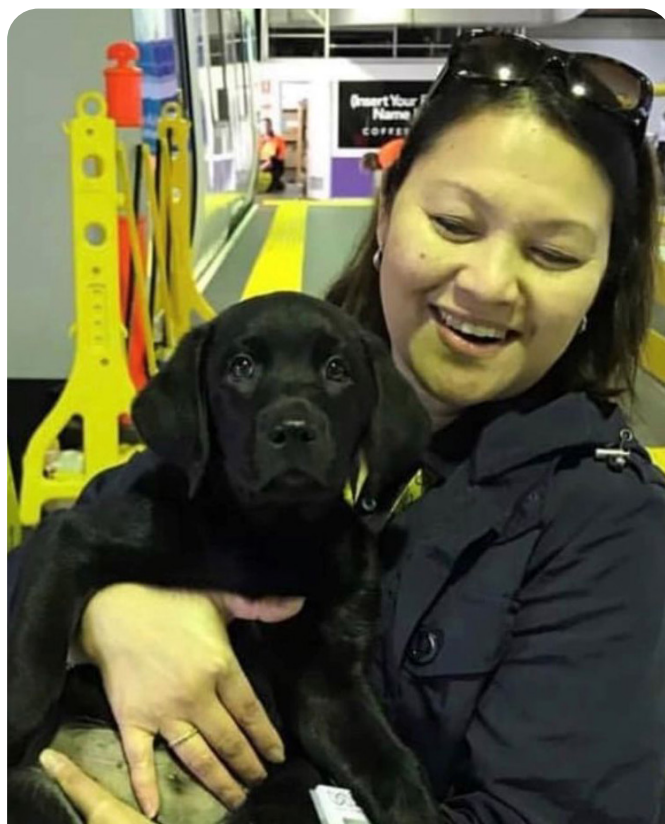
"Every day, I come to this happy place, bringing with me a deep sense of purpose of what my role can contribute to others - giving independence to people who are blind and have low vision; it really is priceless!"

As an administration support officer, Monette assesses all carer applications. As part of her role, she knows it can be a happy but sad time giving a puppy back when it's time for training. She encourages carers to remember the bigger picture and the amazing role they

are playing for people who are blind or have low vision.

Outside of work, Monette loves sharing food and wine with good company. Her favourite movie is The Little Prince, quoting, "it is only with the heart that one can see rightly: what is essential is invisible to the eye."

A reunion with her family back in Manila is what Monette is most looking forward to as travel restrictions ease. Hopefully it won't be too long Monette!



Administration support officer Monette holding a black Seeing Eye Dogs pup-in-training.



Jack Lord, puppy development trainer intern

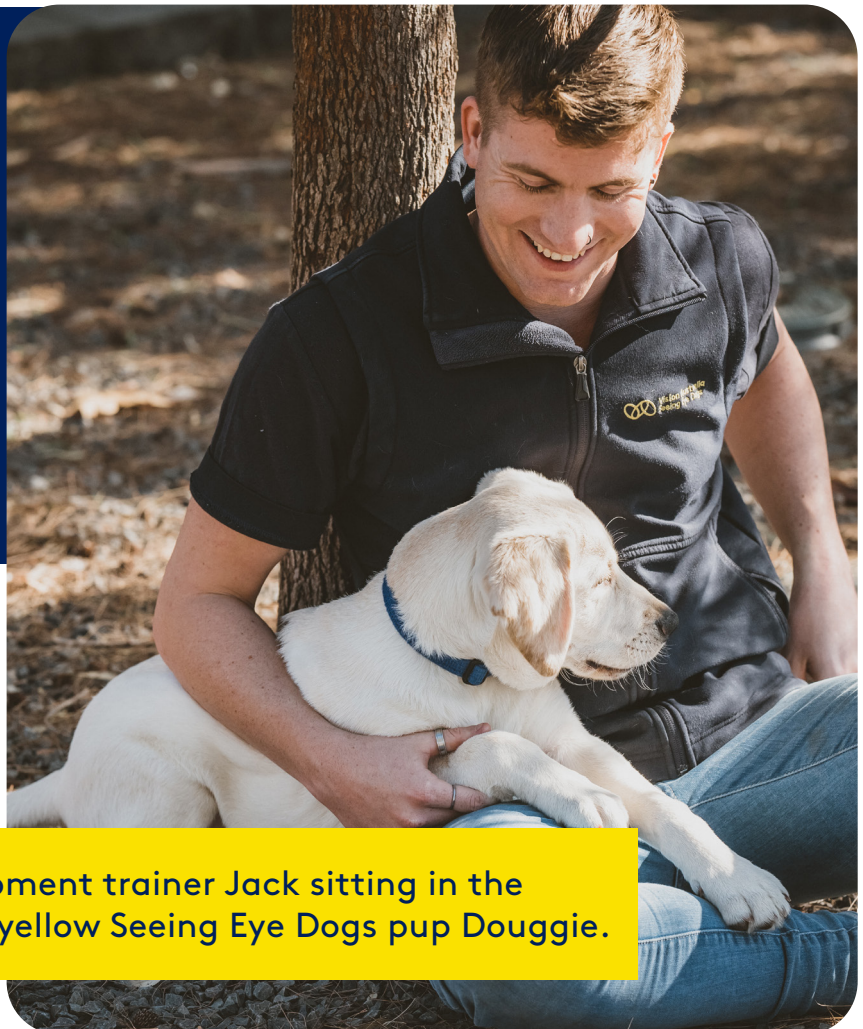
Jack has worked with Seeing Eye Dogs for five years. Currently he is working in the puppy development team as an intern though he worked most of his career in kennels and the puppy centre.

Jack's favourite food is anything Japanese and his favourite movie(s) is the entire Harry Potter collection! (He confesses to being a closet nerd).

As restrictions ease, and life is normal again, Jack is looking forward to being on the first flight back to the U.K. to see his extended family and friends.

Jack has a pet dog named Nemo, a retired Seeing Eye Dog. "Not to sound biased or anything but, he's the best dog in the entire world", says Jack.

"The best aspect of my current role is training our amazing carers in puppy caring. I love setting people up for success and seeing them develop their confidence and skills."



Puppy development trainer Jack sitting in the garden with a yellow Seeing Eye Dogs pup Duggie.



Claire Crewe, puppy development trainer

Claire has been working at Seeing Eye Dogs for eight years where she has worked across different teams, first in the instructor team and now as a puppy development trainer.

Her favourite part of the job is not only seeing the dogs grow and their skills improve but also seeing the development of skills and understanding of dog behaviour and training in the carers.

When asked about how COVID has changed the way she's had to work at Seeing Eye Dogs, Claire said, "I think we have done an amazing job as an organisation, and as a community of staff and carers, to adapt to this strange and challenging new world."

"I know I have learnt new skills on how to keep carers and dogs engaged and training safely."

Puppy development trainer Claire hugging yellow Seeing Eye Dogs pup Jewel.

Like many of the staff at Seeing Eye Dogs, Claire loves animals and has three pet dogs and a cockatiel.

"My dogs regularly make appearances on Zoom training sessions and will generally help me with demonstrations. I call them my back-up dancers, but really they are the stars of the show!

"The cockatiel is the newest addition and goes by many names including, Birdy McBirdface, Tweets McGee, Birdzilla and Tweetasaurus Rex, her actual name is Cyd."

And just in case you thought you knew everything about Claire, we recently found out she has a degree in fashion design. "I guess you could say, I am pretty handy with the sewing machine!"





**Thank you
for changing lives**

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