

The Archer

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Our year looking after a guide dog puppy

David Tossell, of Bedford Road, N2, volunteered as a puppy walker with Guide Dogs UK. Here he describes how their four-pawed lodger changed daily life for him, his partner Helen and children Hannah and Marcus.

We received Fisher, a small seven-week-old Labrador puppy, and our task was to provide a temporary home and undertake basic training with the aim of initially preparing

him to become a guide dog for a none-sighted person.

Fisher was to stay with us for 12 to 14 months before moving on to stage two of his training with professional trainers. However, as he was considered to be potential breeding stock, there was a chance that he would be selected for breeding only and not become a guide dog.

Fisher gets socialised

The role of puppy walker is mainly to look after and socialise the dog. This involved some training based on positive reinforcement so Fisher received treats for successfully completing tasks. For instance, sitting, standing on all fours and lying down to command. As Labradors are devoted to food, constant rewards of kibble dog food were essential.

We also had to walk him regularly for exercise and to familiarise him with traffic, the noise of police cars and fire engines, other people and other dogs. Being a pup, he was interested in everybody and everything, including the baby fox we sometimes came across.

Fisher also became used to travelling by car and all forms of public transport. We experienced first-hand how inaccessible many tube stations are for disabled people with dogs.

Fisher becomes adventurous

As he grew, we needed to take more precautions. He could reach work surfaces so food had to be kept out of his reach, following the disappearance variously of bread, butter and



New arrival: Fisher as a pup

biscuits. He needed to be taken out more and for longer walks.

I often met with other puppy walkers and their dogs on Hampstead Heath where the pups could free run together.

There is a supportive network of puppy walkers with regular dates for coffee mornings and group training.

Fisher goes to pastures new

After successfully completing medical tests, Fisher was finally accepted to be a stud dog. He has been placed with another family in Leamington Spa near the guide dog centre.

Fisher was a responsibility and a commitment. There are reminders of his stay in the chewed furniture and the memory of ruined pairs of shoes. Our cats are more relaxed and must be glad he is no longer around. But we miss him.



Walkies: Fisher in the High Road with Marcus, Helen, Hannah and David.



Feet first: A meeting of the This Mum Runs group.


Running at the speed of chat

This Mum Runs is a network that provides free, social runs for mums in London, Bristol and Bath, with new runs coming in Cardiff and Brighton.

The Muswell Hill and East Finchley group is already well-established, running on Sunday mornings at 8am (meet at the Nature Hut by the cafe in Highgate Woods) and on Wednesday evenings at 7.30pm (meet at the junction of Creighton Avenue and Ringwood Avenue in the winter and in Cherry Tree Wood in the summer).





Runner Tricia Dixon says: "We start with a gentle warm up, which is crucial on these cold days, and then run together for 30 minutes. Pace is not important, we tend to run at the speed of chat."

The group welcomes all levels of running experience, placing the emphasis on running as a group and supporting each other. If you are a faster runner, you can still join in as the group uses looping to ensure that everyone stays together. To find out more, go to www.thismumruns.co.uk or follow @thismumruns_muswellhill on Instagram.


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