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A new pair of eyes at long last for Stephen



Bonding: Stephen and his new guide dog Xena get to know each other out and about in Michigan and back at the accommodation arranged by the Leader Dogs charity

By Lynn Winton

A year has gone by since we wrote about N2 resident Stephen Steppens and his long wait for a new guide dog. Stephen, blind since birth, is well known amongst Fortis Green locals, often spotted during his frequent visits to his gym or on the way to St James's Church, Muswell Hill, which he attends regularly.

An adventurous traveller, used to going much further afield, he was frustrated to find his daily outings beyond the local area reduced without a guide dog to give him the confidence to explore the country. It was a year since his black labrador Owen had been retired and Stephen was back on the waiting list at Guide Dogs UK.

Another year passed but we are delighted to report that, finally, Stephen has a wonderful, newly-trained guide dog called Xena, all the way from Michigan in the US, thanks to a groundbreaking arrangement between Guide Dogs UK and an American charity called Leader Dogs.

Stephen's story

"After waiting over two years for a guide dog, I received information about this partnership. Four people on the waiting list would be selected as four dogs were being trained. I wasn't even that daunted about travelling to Michigan. I was so desperate I'd have gone anywhere."

"Things moved quickly, I successfully applied for a place. I had to send videos to demonstrate I was out and about. It's very important that the guide dogs are given to active people otherwise they wouldn't make use of their valuable training."

"As always, Natalie Blanks, manager of The Muswell Hill Club, helped me with my passport, visa and all the

forms. Then it was all systems go. I flew to Michigan with the three other successful applicants, accompanied by two case workers from Guide Dogs UK. We stayed for three weeks in specially adapted accommodation at Leader Dogs.

"Xena was the perfect dog for me. We bonded immediately. The three weeks training together was very intense. Then we flew home together, with her curled up like a doughnut on the seat next to me."

"I'm continuing the training five times a week from home. We're just about to embark on our first supervised tube journey together. Soon we'll be fully qualified and the world is once again full of possibilities."

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Time rolls by for the Monday Club

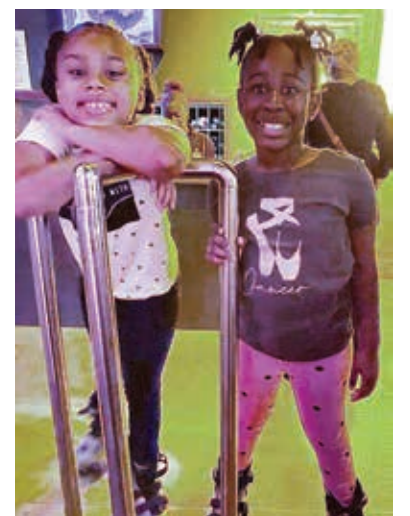
By Diana Cormack

East Finchley's youth club The Monday Club has celebrated its 17th birthday. It was launched on 31 October 2005, which founder Maureen Clemetson recalls was a foggy night. She and her assistant Maureen Antoinette doubted whether many teenagers would make it to the High Road Methodist Church hall for the first meeting (Halloween was not such a huge event then).

Gradually teenagers began to appear as the evening wore on, forming what Maureen calls her 'first generation' of youth club members, mostly from the Grange Estate and Strawberry Vale. With her passion for providing something for young people to do locally, she is now on her 'third generation' of youngsters with meetings currently held at the Tarling Road community hub.

Seventeen years on, past

and present club members from each generation, some of whom are parents of present day members, celebrated together. They joined in the fun at a family skate session at Roller Nation, Tottenham. Maureen was delighted at the turn out and commented that the first generation loved it just as much as the younger ones. The youth club welcomes any parents who want to participate in their trips and celebrations



Anniversary: Monday Club youngsters enjoy the party



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