



Run the Ring 7

Dogs for

I have felt like a

loves her job and feels like she belongs at the charity.

KNOW I wouldn't be here still without him.

herself were common questions that other autistic adults were having.

A word from our CEO The last 12 months have seen a period of growth and exciting new opportunities for us here at Dogs for Autism. Following a move to a 'temporary' office last

summer, we were offered the lease on a large building on the same site at the Lavender Fields farm near Alton, which has become our new Training Centre. Following the centralisation of our training programme last year, this now gives us all the resources we need to build and strengthen our provision. As I type, a group of volunteers is swarming all over the new centre in hi-vis jackets and hard hats, giving of their time and expertise to transform the space

into one fit-for-purpose for the work we do. To say that we are both excited and grateful in equal measure is an understatement. Our next newsletter will give the whole story behind the 'In The Dog House' refurbishment project - and it is awesome. Watch this space.....

I was poignantly reminded recently of the reason we do what we do, and I had a chance to reflect upon the way a dog and team can develop over years together to finely hone a partnership. We are a young charity, and naturally most of our current partnerships are in their early years together, but for my son Marcus and his assistance dog Daisy that teamwork has matured over four years, and now Daisy's role is not only elemental to Marcus's life, but to mine also; she just gets better and better at what she does. A stay in hospital is hard for anybody, but if you can't communicate effectively and

struggle to manage your anxiety it is even more challenging. Marcus is needle phobic so Daisy helped him accept his canular bandage by wearing a bandage herself, which is lovely, effective and unbearably cute - but the real power of her presence in that hospital room was her ability to let me know very clearly if Marcus's emotional state was heading towards a meltdown. I can't list every benefit of that here - there isn't space! But when she did finally alert I was able to make sure changes happened rapidly to help him manage the situation he was in,

and the staff at the hospital were amazing. Suddenly everything happened very quickly indeed... Upon reflection, Marcus didn't go on to have a meltdown. This is new, and Daisy's intervention gave us time to get both of them into a safe place for it to

extraordinary. His meltdowns used to be inevitable once they were on the way and happen with as little 'fallout' as possible. Daisy has become so good at her job that for the first time at the age of 16 we can help Marcus manage his emotions early enough to avoid one altogether. I never thought that would be possible, but it renews my drive for the work we are doing in our charity - not only is it lifechanging but it is ground breaking! Our next job is to secure the funding to properly research and develop our programme to teach all dogs to do this as part of the offer we can make to autistic people and their families. Once we have done this work we can then share it with other organisations to help an exponential number of families in the future! If you

know anyone who might be interested in helping us to fund this work we would love to hear from you! **Funding Highlights**



Spotlight... **Autism Awareness Month**

by Lola Bellarosa-Homer All my life

As Autism Liaison Co-Ordinator for Dogs for Autism, Lola Bellarosa-Homer is often the first point of contact for the families the charity helps. She has always really enjoyed her role, but her recent autism diagnosis has meant she really understands why she absolutely

After her son, who is now 17 years old, was diagnosed with autism and cognitive learning disabilities, Lola set about investing time into learning about autism and how best she could support her son and help him navigate the world. For as long as she could remember she had felt like she hadn't fitted in, and experienced huge anxiety and depression that led her to self-harm, from being a teenager until she met her husband. While there wasn't a lightbulb moment, she realised that a lot of the questions she asked about

"Getting the formal diagnosis meant everything, for the first time in my life I felt like I belonged", Lola explains.

and be whoever you authentically want to be; make no excuses for who you are.

thoughts as I want to be able to help others who are either struggling with their diagnosis or feel as lost as I did prior to my diagnosis". Lola and her husband have helped DfA celebrate Autism Awareness this April with a series of short films for our autistic partners. Now that Autism Awareness Month has come to an end, Lola wants to share with us her thoughts on the cathartic film making process in a second interview. We asked her:

What was it you wanted to tell the world in your interview? I wanted to tell fellow autistic partner to be proud of who you are

What have you gained from the whole experience? I want our supporters to see the courage to embrace their diagnosis, to

What does it mean to you to have Michael's support? Michael is my lifeline to the world. Without him, I don't think, in fact, I

What would you say are the positive outcomes from your diagnosis or telling your story for us? My positive outcomes have been my confidence has grown and my mental health has improved. I now know myself better and I am proud of who I am and my struggles. It certainly is not an easy journey, and it takes a lot of time to get your head round things, you almost

start advocating for themselves and to set boundaries in order to put their own wellbeing as a priority.

After a lot of research and thought, she decided she wanted to know whether she too was autistic, and after seven months of consultation she was given her formal diagnosis. Describing how it feels to know she is autistic, Lola said "I finally see the world in colour. It's like someone put a key into a lock and opened something that had been shut away for 30 years. I wanted to share my



Khan to the Team. Many of you will recognise Dr Amir from his many TV appearances, and he is well-known for his short videos on social media educating us about different health conditions. Dr Amir announced his support for the charity on World Autism Awareness Day, with the help of trainee assistance dog, Piper.

Dr Amir Khan

We are always very grateful for the support of our Dogs for Autism Ambassadors, and we are delighted to welcome Dr Amir

When not in front of the camera, Piper loved playing in Dr Amir's garden – but was rather keen on the hedgehog food and had an unplanned swim in his fishpond! Luckily there was a towel to

Megan is a 2-year-old Cavapoo who lives with her partner Thomas and other family pets including dogs, cats, and horses!

Favourite Food: OSCAR's Universal with Chicken & Rice

Favourite Activity: Staying on her noodle mat and not moving

Latest Achievement: Accompanied Thomas to Crufts at the

NEC which before Megan would've been impossible.

Thomas takes Megan to school regularly to help him during his school day, and the family and school have been amazed at how much Megan's support has improved Thomas' school life.

We know that Dr Amir will be a strong addition to the Dogs for Autism team and are very grateful for his support.

A new Partnership...

On Oscar... Oscar and OSCAR!

Dogs for Autism are very proud of our partnership with Oscar Pet Foods.

and dedication OSCAR Pet Foods has afforded our charity.

read more about him follow us on Facebook!

On Corporate Partnerships

veterinarians who are available 24/7.

VidiVet

VidiVet supports our partners and their dogs

with free online video vet support from trusted

Megan fun facts: Age: 2 years 5 months

Sibling: Coco

Breed: Cavapoo - black & white

Favourite Walk: to Thomas' school!

Graduated: March 2023

until instructed to do so!

Thomas and Megan

As a thank you for their generosity and loyalty, Dogs for Autism have decided to dedicate a new autism assistance dog and name him after the OSCAR's brand. This Spring we have named one of our new miniature Labradoodle pups Oscar, in honour of the hard work Oscar is a golden labradoodle pup who has just been placed with his puppy parents as he begins his first weeks of training. At 12 weeks old he has just ventured out into the big wide world and is learning some of the basic skills that will stay with him as he goes on to complete his training. Training an autism assistance dog can take approximately 2 years, so Oscar will have more than enough time to enjoy his OSCAR Pet Food, both with his puppy parents and as he transitions to living with his autistic partner.

Put a Spring in your step with trundl's new app

NOT JUST

VidiVet is like having a vet in your home; you ask the guestion • For you. A new incentive to improve personal health. and one of their vets sends you an instant reply via the VidiVet For charity. An everyday way to support important UK app. The consultation videos are available so you can revisit their response for added reassurance. For everyone. A trackable way to cut your CO₂ Our partners have found this convenient when traditional vets' emissions. practises may be closed for the evening or during Bank Holidays. Having 24/7 support for our autistic partners and their To date trundl and brand partners have donated more than families gives them peace of mind. £7,000 to its mobility and outdoor related charity partners. including over £1,500 to Dogs for Autism. VidiVet is available via a subscription service which is less than the cost of one traditional vet visit. For more information visit: The next Dogs for Autism trundls will run from 9th-18thMay, with https://vidivet.com/ a big Oscar Petfoods and trundl initiative planned for 28thJune to 10thJuly (more on this to come)... I have used the Vidivet service several times since becoming a puppy carer for Dogs for Autism. The access to quick, personal, Download the app to view your impact here qualified advice is fantastic. They dealt confidently with my concerns about my puppy's tummy and eye issues - once recommending I contact my regular vet and twice reassuring me that the issues were fine to just monitor at home. I feel more relaxed knowing they are just a video call away night and day! **Toni - Puppy Parent** TRAVEL JAMES AND NATASHA NJT - Not Just Travel with James and Natasha NJT and Dogs for Autism have teamed up to offer you a tailored holiday booking service, specifically aimed at taking the hassle out of your travel. NJT are experts in arranging family-friendly holidays that cater for autistic families and their assistance dogs. When you book a holiday through our website, you also help our charity.

They understand people with autism need time, patience and support when booking a holiday.

They offer a 24 hour a day contact service via WhatsApp or a local number (no call centre phone calls)

to discover a perfect holiday just for you and your fam

• They can arrange airport assistance and assistance in resort if required.

They look after you and your requirements at every step of the way.

Petplan°

CHARITABLE

They can advise on the right holiday for your individual needs.

They do the hard work, so you don't have to!

They offer a personal service at no extra cost.

We are delighted to introduce you to Oscar, the most recent trainee autism assistance dog at Dogs for Autism. If you would like to

Since the charity's inception OSCAR Pet Foods have fed all our dogs whilst they are in training. Not only do they provide us with exceptional nutritionally balanced puppy and dog food, but they also offer a door-to-door delivery subscription service for their food, which means our partner and their families don't have to travel to purchase their dog food. Convenience and quality mean our

features!

partners and their dogs are thoroughly satisfied with the care OSCAR Pet Foods offer our charity.

Grants, Fundraising and Campaigns

Fundraising Partners

Grants

Booking your holiday with NJT means:

They do the research.

They have over 450 suppliers

No long queues to speak to them!

Your perfect holiday is just a click away... click here!



Dogs for Charity Partn

Fundraisers

HASKINS

for garden pleasure

some of our youngest pups, getting them accustomed to the sights, sounds and smells of a trip to a garden centre. For many of our partners, getting outdoors and enjoying their surroundings helps with their mental wellbeing, so being able to take your assistance dog to a garden centre or gift shop is vital.

meeting more local supporters.

Styles & Associates

Pets at Home

shoppers.

charity.

Petplan Charitable Trust

prevention for our trainee assistance dogs.

Haskins - Forest Lodge - Farnham

Haskins Garden Centres have a long history of charity

fundraising and we were so pleased to hear that our local branch near Farnham, Surrey had chosen us as their nominated local

Once a month the puppy training team will visit the store to train

Finally, we have to mention our very generous funding from the

As Alton's chosen charity for a second year running, we have been honoured to receive regular generous amounts from the Pets at Home Foundation via donations at the tills in the Alton branch. This Easter we spent some of the Bank Holiday weekend in store in Alton sharing information about the charity with the

We will be in store throughout the year and look forward to

We have been thrilled to learn that we have been chosen as the charity partner of Styles Associates in Alton this year. Earlier in the year the accounting firm asked their supporters who they should pick and ran a social media poll to decide the winner. Thanks to our wonderful local supporters our name came up

Pets at Home Foundation and Pets at Home in Alton.

We are very grateful to the Petplan Charitable Trust for their generous donation of £6000 to provide essential flea and worm

We take our welfare responsibilities seriously and this grant will fund flea and worm prevention for our trainee assistance dogs for

The Petplan Charitable Trust grants are made possible thanks to the Petplan UK customers who opt in to support the Trust's work.

a year, enabling our dogs to be happy and healthy on their journey towards changing lives for their future autistic partners.

Upcoming Events

Run the Ring 7

24th September 2023

Run the Ring is a cruise of all types of Volkswagens around the M25 to raise money and awareness for charities.

Read more

& 4TH JUNE 2023

Dogstival 2023

June 3 & 4 2023

"The coolest dog show in town!" Come and see us in the New Forest

Read more



We will help you with ideas, offer social media support, provide a fund-raising

Start your fundraiser now

pack including fliers, sponsorship forms and logos to use etc.

Just think - that 2023 medal could be yours...!

Agria Pet Insurance who organised a graduation party on their stand for the year's greatest graduates who have shown the most character/promise/have the brightest future ahead! It was a real celebration of their achievements and included having their caricatures drawn, framed and presented to them...Makka even had a bowl of "Pawsecco" and a slice of dog-friendly cake and we After four exhausting days, our first Crufts had been a great success and it was a real privilege to share the DfA story and see how the

Don't forget...

Give as you Live®

Give as you Live

with any challenges. Wanted 4 experience.." **Toni**

> You can help us everyday when you select us and use any of these household names Pets at Home VIP Lifeline **Enriching lives - Expanding horizons** Proudly sponsored by OSCAR Pet Foods:

Save the date! Walk a Golden Mile 2023 Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd July Sponsored by OSCAR... Powered by trundl **Event follow up**

Crufts improving their mental health and wellbeing.

...In spite of a snowy start on our journey to the NEC Birmingham for our first Crufts, the Dogs for Autism team all pulled together to make it a memorable and enriching experience! We were blown away by the amount of people who came up to our stand and shared their autism story with us, talking about themselves or their loved ones and telling us how their own dogs had been instrumental in In turn, DfA team members and volunteers were able to explain how the charity works and generate awareness on what a difference an assistance dog can make to the lives of autistic people, be it being present with them in a college lecture room or helping a family We were delighted that Grace, one of our partners, also joined us on our stand with her assistance dog, Makka...once a dog is



Weekly 1:1 training and puppy classes have given us lots of input and the opportunity to meet like-minded others, which has been an unexpected bonus. Meeting some of the people who have a matched fully-trained DFA

enjoy a day out all together. present, no-one wants to talk to any of us, but they always want to cuddle a dog! Grace and Makka also received an award from were all very proud to see the special bond Grace clearly has with her assistance dog. charity is going from strength to strength!

dog already has been inspiring and fascinating. I would highly recommend the

much more than pet food

©2023 Dogs for Autism