The winter issue is here, another Christmas just around the corner and the year is coming to a close, how time flies! I hope by now you have all managed to find the new office, we are now down the Radiotherapy corridor opposite LA1 waiting room.

I hope you enjoy this issue which includes the lovely article from Sandra, one of our meet and greet volunteers (currently taking a few months away due to family commitments) and an update on “Transforming Cancer Services”

Our volunteer numbers have increased again, it is wonderful there are so many lovely people wanting to join us and give their time so freely. We have started a new service for the patients, we now have Maria on board who is offering her hairdressing skills. Maria is proving to be very much in demand and is helping to make patients stay just that little bit more comfortable.

Sadly we are also saying a fond farewell to Jessie Gibbon who has been with us for nearly 18 years, latterly volunteering in Phlebotomy. Jessie has been a valued member of our volunteering team and she will be greatly missed. Our thanks and best wishes go to Jessie for a happy healthy retirement.

May I take this opportunity also, on behalf of myself and Velindre, to thank you all for the generous donation of your time and efforts during 2015 and for your ongoing support. We never could have asked for more dedicated volunteers and your generosity with your time has helped countless others and your support is never forgotten. Thank you.

If any of you have anything you can share with us we would love to hear from you! Please contact Carole Jacobi, Volunteer Co-ordinator. Carole.jacobi@wales.nhs.uk

New Volunteer’s!
Welcome Aboard

I am sure you would all like to join me in giving a very warm welcome to our latest new volunteer recruits Rachel Walker – Cancer Services Admin & Fundraising, Maria Phillips – Volunteer hairdresser, Bernice Veillard – Outpatients meet and greet, Joan Bardos – Outpatients meet and greet, Jean Hopkins – Chemotherapy Day Unit and Jane Ashman – Outpatients meet and greet. If you see these new recruits around please give them a warm welcome!
A Year in the Life of a Volunteer Puppy Walker for Guide Dogs – Sandra Corben Meet & Greet Volunteer

When I was widowed two years’ ago, I decided to apply to Guide Dogs to become one of their volunteer puppy walkers. The term “puppy walker” does not truly reflect the actual role, the title makes it sound as if you just walk puppies for Guide Dogs. In fact, these beautiful little creatures come to live with you for anywhere between 12-14 months before going off to Guide Dogs for their intense training. It is more of a fostering role. A recent documentary on ITV referred to us as “puppy parents”!

My role as a puppy walker is to teach the puppy basic obedience and, very importantly, introduce them to as many sights and sounds as possible. Obviously, I also have to toilet train the puppy and, eventually, get them to go to toilet on command preferably, at home. Obviously, as the puppy gets older and you are out for the day on training trips you would have to find somewhere suitable for them to “spend” on command. Being a Guide Dog puppy in training means that I can take the puppy practically everywhere with me. I have had a few looks of surprise when I have emerged from a cubicle in a public toilet followed by a dog! I have to say it is a bit of a tight squeeze for the two of us! Where possible I try to use a disabled toilet when out on a training session. Things like this are such an important part of their socialisation. We all know how loud electric hand dryers can be and a puppy has to be use to all of these sights and sounds before they leave us to go on for intense training.

I also have to take the puppies on public transport such as buses and trains. I have to say, the first time I caught a bus I needed training myself! Being a car driver, I’m not sure which decade I last used the public bus service. Being new to buses, I soon found out that the timetables only seemed to refer to main stops along the way. In reality, there were lots of other minor stops in between. Even in my local town I found it strange not knowing when these stops were coming up. On one occasion, I pressed the STOP button thinking my little village was the next stop en route. However, there was one stop before it which I hadn't realised. Nobody else was getting off at this destination and, to try and disguise my mistake I got off a stop early and walked the rest of the way. This error that I made started me thinking that, if I could make this mistake as a sighted person what must it be like for someone with a visual disability. Guide Dogs are campaigning for buses in the future, to have audio announcements regarding scheduled stops. I believe that some parts of London may have this service already. It would be such a useful tool to someone who is visually impaired.

In March 2014 my first Guide Dog puppy arrived. A beautiful Golden Retriever named Berry. She was just 8 weeks old when she arrived in my care and our adventures together began. Berry was a very confident puppy from day one. She took everything in her stride, it was almost as if she had done it all before! Fortunately, I was not a first time dog owner having had our own Retrievers for 30 years. When my Puppy Walking Supervisor from
Guide Dogs informed me that typical Golden Retriever traits are that they can be stubborn on occasions and attention seekers I have to say, that I did not believe her! Having had three of our own I thought I knew all about the breed! Well, Berry had every trait that Guide Dogs mentioned to me. They are adorable looking dogs and have such wonderful temperaments. They pick up on the fact that people love the sight of them and they try to use this to their advantage if they think they can get away with it! My little Berry was a princess but, with a diva side to her! My Mother-in-Law said she was a little B but, she didn't mean Berry!

At just 9 weeks old Berry made her debut shopping trip to B & Q. She was fascinated by the automatic doors. She just wanted to sit and watch them open and close, open and close! Eventually, I had to encourage her away from them. Of course, at this stage, they are not house-trained. I always carry around a “kit” with me comprising of kitchen paper, disinfectant, wipes, bags and hand gel. I am pleased to say that I never had to use this emergency kit when out and about in stores, etc with Berry! From my own personal experience, all shops, restaurants, pubs, etc were very welcoming and understanding. Everyone is always so interested in the Guide Dog puppies and I end up engaging in some lengthy conversations with total strangers. One of the questions I get asked the most is “how can you give them up”? When you have your initial interview with Guide Dogs that is one of the first things that you are asked. I went into it knowing that, hopefully I was going to help to change someone’s life for the better. Also, it is a positive goodbye which is totally different to having to say farewell the other way. I also try to think of it as a job. Having said all of that, obviously, there were tears when I had to say goodbye. More about that later! It is such a rewarding and enjoyable thing to do. I can only imagine the difference a Guide Dog must make to someone’s life. Berry really became a little companion to myself and, if I was seen out locally without her, I would get asked “where’s your little attachment”!

At 16 weeks old, Berry went into her first restaurant and slept the whole time under the table whilst we were eating. I have to admit, as it was the first time, I did wear her out beforehand! Trips to supermarkets followed, I became quite adept at managing a puppy, groceries in basket, handbag, etc. However, when it came to packing and paying for my purchases at the till, I sometimes felt that I could do with my own personal puppy walker assistant!

The hardest thing about being out with a Guide Dog puppy is that everyone wants to say hello to them. As she got older and, was able to wear her little blue “puppy in training” coat it made life a little easier. As she looked so gorgeous (and she knew it!) and was an attention seeker, I sometimes had to be firm and ask people to ignore her! When she was just a few months old, if she decided she didn’t want to walk any more she would just lie down. I would then have to coax her into getting up and continuing to walk on. This was not an easy task in full public view walking along the promenade at the height of Summer! However, you could see people smiling at my predicament accompanied by the usual oohs and ahs! Berry lapped the attention up and it made her even more determined to stay put! As she got older the stubbornness subsided and she never let me down in public. It was only at home that the stubbornness use to creep in. I use to say that she had a little switch which alternated between Guide Dog Puppy mode and just plain old puppy mode for use at home.
At 17 weeks old, Berry was able to have her first run off the lead. My supervisor came and we did the initial free run together. The first time I did it by myself it was a little bit nerve racking. It is bad enough letting your own dog off lead for the first time but, I felt a huge responsibility knowing that she was not mine and very conscious of the fact that she was a Guide Dog puppy. I needn't have worried as my hard work on recall training at home paid off. We train our puppies to come back to us on hearing the whistle. We start this almost as soon as we have them by using the whistle at mealtimes. Therefore, whistle means food! Sounds easy but, a perfect recall involves the puppy not only coming back to it's handler at a controlled speed but also making contact by touching my hand and then sitting in front of you to wait for a reward and having the lead reattached. By touching the handler’s hand on return a visually impaired person would know that their dog had returned to them. So, we introduce the “touch” command very early on. Berry loved her runs on the sand dunes and the beach. It was lovely to see her running and playing with other dogs when she was off lead.

Every other week we attend puppy training classes along with other puppy walkers. These are great fun. When all the puppies get together, they all suffer from the same complaint - hearing loss! Everything you have practised at home goes out of the window as they are all distracted by one another. Of course, that is all part and parcel of the training. When you first become a puppy walker, you are issued with a list of commands that Guide Dogs use for their puppies. Also, you are given a manual and several DVDs to go with it. Three days after Berry arriving, I remember, during a phone call with my supervisor, telling her that there was no mention in the manual of where to find the OFF switch on the puppy. Berry was always a very, high energy puppy, full of fun and mischievous but, as time went on so well behaved when she had to be. You will see from the photographs, that she looked like a very proud dog and lots of people have said that she had a most regal look to her. She loved to pose for photographs.

I belong to a Tenovus choir and Berry came along to some rehearsals and to a couple of gigs. Thankfully, she never joined in with the singing. She was a regular at the eye department at the Princess of Wales Hospital when we went for appointments with my Mother-in-Law. She has also been to the Neath and Port Talbot Hospital, University Hospital of Wales and, of course, she was at the Velindre Spring Fayre.

On a few occasions we went shopping in Cardiff having travelled there by train. I must say, I was very proud when passing the windows of the large department stores. I could see our reflections in the windows and we did look good working together side by side. She strutted her stuff around John Lewis and was a girl that loved to
Actually, it was embarrassing that, when walking down any High Street she automatically thought we were going into the stores. Also, I couldn’t get past a particular coffee shop in my local town without her stopping and trying to take me in there! She would give all my secrets away given the chance. Good job I did not frequent pubs too often and have never been into a betting shop!

Originally, Berry was earmarked as potential breeding stock as opposed to going on for Guide Dog training. However, when it came time to assess her, she passed the eyesight test but, when her hips were scanned they were not perfect enough for breeding but fine as a working dog. After that decision was made, she was spayed and would go forward for training. Her Dad is a very handsome chap and has gone on to produce some very successful Guide Dogs. As you will see from the photograph she looks very much like him and, he too, has that very regal look about him.

After Berry had recovered from being spayed, I was informed by my supervisor that the dreaded day to say goodbye was just four weeks away. Berry was due to leave me on Thursday, 21st May 2015. All of a sudden, I felt sick and could not imagine life without my little Berry. Originally, I was going to have a few weeks gap before getting the next puppy. During this time, I was going to have the dining room redecorated. Berry had made a start on it by doing a bit of wallpaper stripping. However, I heard that there was a little boy Golden Retriever coming from the National Breeding Centre in Leamington Spa and looking for a home in Wales. He was going to arrive in the area on the same day that Berry was going off to BIG School. Well, you may have guessed, having a soft spot for Golden Retrievers, in particular, I was tempted and he was allocated to come to me. After all, the decorating of the dining room could wait another year. Who knows, perhaps the next puppy would enjoy a bit of wallpaper stripping too!

The last week that Berry was with me, our diary was full of farewell parties! Family and friends came to say their goodbyes to her, we met up for lots of cappuccinos and, of course, cake (humans only!) with other puppy walkers. Puppies going off for training are allowed to take a few things with them. The day before Berry left, I felt like a Mum labelling her children’s belongings ready for them going off to school which, I suppose was what was happening with Berry. I put her name on her little pink blanket, bedtime teddy bear, monkey and another toy which she loved to play fetch with. I made a slideshow of my favourite photos of her, together with captions and music and copied it onto a CD. I thought this would be a nice gesture so that wherever she goes in the future her new owner’s family would be able to see her as a little puppy. Even though the supervisor keeps records of each puppy, we are asked to supply some information about their personality. After all, we have lived with them 24/7 for the last 12-14 months.

Before I knew it, the dreaded day was here and, my Puppy Walking Supervisor from Guide Dogs would be coming to collect her. At this point, we refer to our supervisor as the “puppy snatcher”! She informed me that collection day is the only time that she doesn’t stay for coffee and would be in and out within 5 minutes. They do this knowing that any delays would make it harder for us puppy walkers. At 9.30am on the dot, she arrived, lead in hand. The puppies are used to seeing her during home visits, trips out together and in training class. Berry was so excited to see her. My Puppy Walking Supervisor asked me if I was ok and thanked me for the excellent job that I had done with Berry. I stayed on the doorstep and didn't accompany them to the car as I felt that was best for Berry. She
skipped happily up the drive and jumped into the car. All the time, I was willing her not to look back at me. I am pleased that she didn't. I waved them off, closed the front door, made a cup of tea and cried solidly for half an hour. I looked at the clock and thought I had better pull myself together and get cracking ready for my next little house guest who was arriving at 1.30pm the same day. During the next few hours, I felt like a chamber maid in a hotel making the bed up ready for the next guest. I took the labels off the new toys that I had purchased and made sure everything was in place for my new arrival. Before I knew it my supervisor was back, standing at my front door with a little golden ball of fluff. This time instead of calling her the puppy snatcher or wicked witch I referred to her as the white witch. I had mixed emotions that day, as on one hand, I had just lost my beautiful Berry and, on the other, here I was excited and welcoming this tiniest little creature aged just 7 weeks into my home. I opened my arms and cuddled the next precious little life changer.

Berry has now been at Guide Dogs training centre in Leamington Spa for 6 weeks. I have had two updates so far from her trainer. Apparently, she has bonded very well with her new handler and that makes me feel better too. She has accepted wearing the leather body harness well and the next stage is to see whether she will accept the handle part. Some dogs are withdrawn from the programme at this stage as they cannot take to wearing the harness. I will have another update on Berry in a few weeks’ time. If she makes it through the initial training which lasts approximately 3-4 months, I will be invited to Leamington Spa to follow her, at a distance, and watch her work with her trainer. After that, she will go on to advanced training and start working with the instructor who, will eventually, pair her up with her guided owner. Apparently, finding the correct partnership between guided owner and guide dog is a very important part of the process. I personally think, Berry will be suited to a younger person with a busy work and social life but, that will be left to the experts if she gets that far. If she does not make it as a guide dog, there are other avenues that may be considered, e.g. Dogs for the Disabled, Medical Detection Dogs, etc. Whatever happens, I am extremely proud of her and so glad that she has been part of my life. If all else fails, Berry will be offered back to her puppy walker for adoption – ME! I would love to adopt her if that should happen but, I hope she makes it, as it is her destiny to be a working dog and, she really does thrive on being busy. I find puppy walking to be a fun, challenging and very rewarding role. May my adventures with these little life changers continue for many years to come.

Sandra Corben
Why not use the Scout Post?

Scout Stamps are available from the volunteer’s office.

25p again this year – all to a good cause, a good service and so much cheaper than the Post Office. Last posting date Monday 7th December – so get organised!

Transforming Cancer Services in South East Wales

Imagine a world where fewer people get cancer, where cancer was diagnosed more rapidly, where we had a new, state of the art cancer centre, where we treated more patients closer home, and where all patients benefited from drugs and treatment researched and developed here in Wales.

Welcome to the world of the Transforming Cancer Services in South East Wales Programme.

It’s not always easy to imagine such a future when you’re dealing with the reality of present day life, is it? But we’re putting together a business case to show Welsh Government that cancer services for people living in this region could, and should be so much better.

How many times have you been called upon to direct someone – a patient, family member or other visitor – through the many corridors of Velindre Cancer Centre?

Volunteers, more than most people, probably know that the piecemeal way the hospital has grown over its 60 years has meant that we have far too many corridors!
It’s just one of the many reasons why we need a new Cancer Centre in Cardiff, and a change in the way services are provided throughout South East Wales, so that patients get help closer to home, if that’s what they want and need.

So what do you need to know about the proposals?

Well, we’ve produced a pocket sized leaflet for you to read, and to give to patients and families.

It sets out five basic facts about the plans, which are:

- There’s a new Programme underway to improve future cancer services and outcomes for patients in South East Wales
- It includes plans for a new Cancer Centre in Cardiff and the provision of more information, care and support closer to patients’ homes
- The programme will seek to identify ways in which we can improve detective rates, deliver better treatments and undertake excellent research and development
- That should result in even more people surviving cancer and having a better quality of life
- You can get a lot more information about the Transforming Cancer Services in South East Wales Programme on our website – just go to http://www.velindrecc.wales.nhs.uk/introduction

I hope you’ve already received some leaflets – if not, they are available from Carole Jacobi at Velindre. Please take as many as you need.

Tom Crosby, the clinical lead for the programme, and a Velindre consultant, said “I know how many people volunteers meet and help from my work at Velindre. We really want you to have as much knowledge as possible about the future plans, and to feel confident about acting as ambassadors for us when you’re out and about, either at the hospital or further afield.

For me, volunteers represent the ‘soul’ of Velindre. We know you will play a special role in the future of Velindre and cancer services throughout South East Wales. The Transforming Cancer Services programme is all about co-production. That means equalising the relationship between clinical staff, patients and the public. You are the epitome of that relationship, in that you step forward, take responsibility and give something back.”

We’ve been holding some drop in sessions at the Parkside Restaurant at Velindre. Volunteers Margaret Russell and Christine Curtis met up with five year old Toby Button, son of Mick Button, another Velindre consultant who’s also working on the Programme.

So, please, if you’d like more information about the plans, get in touch with Gail Foley, our communications and engagement manager. Gail.foley@wales.nhs.uk.

Gail will be attending our Christmas social so please come and chat to her.
November 22nd saw our annual Christmas Fayre held this year at the Earl Haig Club in Whitchurch. First of all a great big thank you to everyone who either donated items for us to sell, knitted for us, baked for us, gave their time to help on the day, helped in any other way or came to buy on the day. We couldn’t have done it without you! Again it was a huge success and we raised a massive £3,590.14

Barclays Bank have very kindly said they will funds match which will bring our total up to £5590.14. Just amazing! There is always a lot of hard work that goes into our fayres behind the scenes, but when we then achieve results like this it makes it all worthwhile. Thank you!

Volunteer Opportunities with the CHC Community Health Council

Are you interested in improving the health services of a nation? The CHC are looking for volunteers from all walks of life - to help us reflect the wants and the needs of the whole population of Wales in developing and improving the NHS locally and nationally. Community Health Council (CHC) members are local volunteers who act as the eyes and ears of patients and the public, listening to their concerns and working with the health service to improve the quality of patient care. Patient care is at the heart of the NHS, and the CHCs are THE independent voice of patients and the public in Wales. Members are asked to give the equivalent of three to five days a month and any ‘out of pocket’ expenses such as travel will be reimbursed. For further information, please contact the Board of CHCs on: 02920235558 or member.recruitment@waleschc.org.uk or visit the website http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/899/page/71611
Volunteer Training Opportunities

The new training schedule will be published at the end of the year and I will be contacting you all with details of the courses you are required to attend.

Alongside these there are many other courses that may be of interest to you that Velindre offer free to you as a volunteer. If anyone has a request or a particular area of interest please let me know and I will see if we offer anything to suit you.

Some Fun Stuff!

The wife was counting all the 5p’s and 10p’s out on the kitchen table when she suddenly got very angry and started shouting and crying for no reason. I thought to myself “She’s going through the change”

My neighbour knocked on my door at 2am this morning. Can you believe it, 2am! Luckily for him I was still up practising my bagpipes!

A Geordie told me he was really good at flirting, so I threw him in the swimming pool but he sank!

I just put my friend Richard on speed dial on the phone, it’s my get Rich quick scheme!

I’ve got a new job at a smoothie bar, I’m blending in well.

Despite my allergies, I impulsively bought a cat, turned out it was a rash decision.

I bought a suit made out of cactus, looked pretty sharp in it too.

Does it occur to anyone filling in their Curriculum Vitae that they know a little Latin?

Once again on behalf of myself and everyone at Velindre, our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you for your continued help and support.

May you all have the Christmas you wish for, and I wish you all a happy and healthy New Year!