



### Latest News

- Camelia Platt has conducted a 5-day training course for 125 Customer Care staff from Mega Image in disability awareness. This included trying on special glasses in order to experience walking with canes and guide dogs. "Why didn't we know about this before?" said one enthusiastic staff member.
- Alexander Puiu has joined the Light into Europe team on a two month student internship and is busy networking with other blind and disability associations in Romania.



- Digi Animal World interviewed Severian Pavel on Guide Dog training. The programme will be aired in Feb (see [www.digi-animal-world.tv/digi-animal-club](http://www.digi-animal-world.tv/digi-animal-club)).

## Alexandra Marin and Bonnie

by Ruth Rusby

Alexandra was born in Targoviste and moved to Bucharest when she was 15. She then attended the Regina Elisabeta High School for students with visual impairments. She suffers from a rare hereditary ophthalmic disease resulting in very restricted sight, prompting her parents to steer her towards special education.

"I met representatives from Light into Europe as part of my activities at the Special Secondary School for the Visually Impaired," says Alexandra, "where I work as a Special Education teacher."

Four years ago she was approached with the project "Guide Dogs for the Blind."

"The thought of having a canine helper made me very happy," says Alexandra, "I have always loved animals and particularly dogs.



In addition, I needed help with all my many and varied travels."

After going through the initial steps before training, Alexandra then had to wait a while until she got a guide dog, Bonnie.

"I had an emotional tie with Bonnie from the first moment," says Alexandra, "because I love animals, but to develop a real partnership took around five-to-six months. Bonnie and I have been together since May 2016 but now I feel that we have been together for life!"

(continued overleaf)



The advanced training with Bonnie took two-to-three weeks total dedication and included all aspects of physical and emotional development.

“For me, the most difficult things to learn were cumulative, like linking exact movements to various commands,” says Alexandra. “I was upset when things went wrong and worked hard to prevent relapse.”

Since Alexandra has had Bonnie, they go on the daily routes they learned during their training, as well as new ones.

“We have experienced Bucharest and Targoviste, as well as other new places,” says Alexandra. “The first day in any new place we explore gradually, of course. Bonnie is used to Bucharest, a big, crowded city, so does an excellent job in other locations.”

The main routes which Bonnie knows were already familiar to Alexandra, but now she can relax a bit as Bonnie pays attention to the road, people and especially any new obstacles they encounter.

“I have become more independent and active with her,” says Alexandra. “We go to the park or a certain enclosure almost every day.

Bonnie is very much admired there and as a result I have made new friends.”

I am very grateful to Mark Platt, he is another special friend for me, as he was the amazing puppy walker for Bonnie. I know that Mark and his family cherish Bonnie and while in their home, Bonnie’s training took place in many different places: local authorities offices, schools, shops. I think that was essential for Bonnie’s abilities.

“I would advise any blind person that they would become increasingly more independent with a guide dog,” says Alexandra. “If such a dog receives trust and affection she gives you back trust, affection and security.”

Alexandra believes there are many things the government can do for the blind with goodwill and commitment.

“The most important for me at the moment is to improve accessibility,” says Alexandra, “which is in fact legal in many institutions, such as hospitals, restaurants, shops etc. After this, accessibility to means of transport, audible signals for buses, trams etc., audible traffic lights, prevention of parking cars on the pavement, and so on.”



## GUIDE DOG AND PUPPY UPDATES



Clifford

- Misty’s puppies left their mum in December and have gone to new volunteer puppy walker homes! Misty’s “C” litter of puppies (Cora, Cleo, Clara, Caspar, Chester, Chilli, Clifford & Charlie), born 22nd Oct ‘16 have all been weaned and have now begun their initial training in new foster homes!
- New volunteers are still needed for hosting young puppies (Chilli & Charlie) as well as older dogs!
- Basil & Betty are being trained by Seve and Bobby, Bryony & Wesley are being trained by Anca.
- Bridie has become the first Buddy Dog for a young sight impaired man.



**Looking forward  
to a successful  
year of  
working together  
to train more  
Guide Dogs!**



## UPCOMING EVENTS

- ◆ **Curry Night, TBC,**  
March 2017
- ◆ **St. Patrick’s Day Parade**  
w/e 17<sup>th</sup> March 2017
- ◆ **St George’s Day, venue TBC,**  
22<sup>nd</sup> April 2017