

## Trainer's Reports on Assistance-Dog-in-Training, Sara

*Our fantastic new Trainer, Pauline Dickerson, has been working with Sara since April 2009, and she is progressing very well indeed, as the following reports show.*

**May:** Sara's training has reached a point where she has acquired basic knowledge of the majority of the tasks and concepts needed for support dog work. However, further development of these skills, in terms of generalisation, level of difficulty, consistency and reliability, is required for her to work effectively as a support dog. With this in mind the focus of training is now on working to expand the criteria of distance, duration, diversity and distraction.

Sara's enthusiasm for her work has presented a further challenge, in that she has developed a tendency to anticipate what she might be asked to do and act without waiting for clear instructions. This is being managed in two ways; firstly by having her respond to the 'stop' cue, focus on the handler and await further instructions, and secondly by ensuring there are sufficiently long pauses between instructions/tasks, in which Sara is rewarded for inaction and focus on the handler.

**June:** This month I have continued working with Sara to develop learned skills and some previously noted issues requiring attention have been suitably resolved. Other issues needing attention have become apparent. Sara is now more focused and waiting for clear

instructions before carrying out a task. She is now retrieving plastic objects without chewing them, including successfully retrieving a bowl containing food and placing it on the bench. Sara is still very distracted by other animals in the environment, so pet shops present a reasonable challenge at present.



As part of the public access training, I have taken Sara on three short train trips, all of which went extremely well. Sara now seems more relaxed in public places and is less attentive to her surroundings while out. I have started working Sara off-lead at the local sports oval. She is very keen to retrieve a thrown ball and very quick to respond to cues, even with distractions in the environment.

**July:** Task training within the home environment has progressed well and Sara has mastered a large portion of the required behaviours. Over the last month a lot of work has been focused on adapting behaviours to working with a wheelchair bound person, with great success. The emphasis of training is now on public access and performance of tasks outside the home. Sara is adapting well to this phase of her training, although she is still showing mild signs of stress on occasion. Sara is now successfully managing to enter pet-shops, providing there is not too much animal activity. Playing and/or barking puppies remain a challenge.

**August:** Training continues to focus on public access and issues that require modification. Sara's task training is basically complete and training in this area is now geared toward maintenance. The increased intensity with public access visits has yielded good results in that Sara seems more relaxed and focused.



We are still working on a couple of aspects of Sara's behaviour: barking at unfamiliar visitors to the house and reacting to worrying environmental stimuli and people.

**September:** Sara's growing maturity is having notable influence on her task work both in public and at home, with improvement in accuracy and consistency. Sara is now able to participate in classes at the Hornsby Dog Training Club, and is working well in close proximity to other dogs. At the oval she is attentive and co-operative off-leash, following within 10 meters of my person and responding promptly to cues. Her infatuation with retrieving a thrown ball adds to her enthusiasm and attentiveness. Now that the task training and public access training are well progressed there is the opportunity to concentrate on identifying and addressing any smaller issues, in particular any environmental stimuli that Sara may find distracting. With more concentrated attention on my part in anticipating situations in which Sara may give a bark, I have managed to avoid this behaviour more than 98% of the time, and have established a fairly consistent and reliable response of spontaneously focusing on the handler in response to these stimuli.

Sara is a superb dog to both train and have as a companion. When she does eventually leave our home, she will be seriously missed by the entire family. However, I know that she will be a wonderful companion and super assistance dog for whom ever is lucky enough to receive her.

*Pauline Dickerson*



# Newsletter

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## From the Management Committee

Much has happened since our last newsletter. Our Trainer, Pauline Dickerson, has made great headway with Sara, as you will see from reading her Training Reports.

We have a new puppy, Barnaby, who was a huge hit with the crowds attending Warringah Dogs' Big Day Out at the end of August. We had a stall at the Frenchs Forest event and enjoyed the day – as you will see from Barnaby's take on it. Sheree and Jade and Alan and Rayner were on hand to provide him with some advice during the day. Barnaby is being raised by Ann Barnacoat and is doing very well indeed. We will have more about him in the next newsletter.

We also attended the Pittwater Dogs Day Out in September – though the weather wasn't so kind and we had to tie everything down to prevent it blowing away!

On Sunday 29th November we will be at the Ku-Ring-Gai Dog Day at St Ives Showground. If you're in the area, please come and say hello.

We hope you will enjoy our feature story by Assistance Dog Jade – she is a wonderful assistance dog, and she and Sheree make a fantastic team. Finally, we will be bringing you an update on Jedda in the next newsletter – and some more pictures of Barnaby, of course!

Thank you again for your support.



## Thank You...

We have received assistance and donations from the following people and organisations. Thank you all for your generosity.

- John and Yvonne Almgren •Aussie Travel Cover
- Belrose Bowling Club •Shirley Bellamy
- Gary and Judi Blackler •Barbara Chappell
- Robin Nicholls •N.G. Somerville •Lola M. Stow
- Mrs Hendra Tatham

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PO Box 2077, Hornsby Westfield NSW 1635 Enquiries: Phone 1300 788 721

Email: [information@asdog.org.au](mailto:information@asdog.org.au) Website: [www.asdog.org.au](http://www.asdog.org.au)

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## Barnaby's Big Day Out...

... at the Warringah Dogs' Big Day Out at Frenchs Forest dog oval at the end of August, where ASDOG had a stall.

Barnaby is very cute, pint-sized and cuddly. He is a beautiful yellow Labrador puppy who is on a mission to become an Assistance Dog! He is the very latest recruit for Asdog, and in his first week with his puppy-raiser, Ann Barnacoat, demonstrated that he is a very happy and confident puppy.

So far Ann is very pleased with his progress. In his first week, he settled in beautifully. Indeed, he simply walked in on his first day as though he actually owned the place! Barnaby just loves to pick things up and carry them around – an excellent attribute for an Asdog puppy!

ASDOG recently had a busy fundraising day at the Warringah Dogs' Big Day Out. At the time, Barnaby was about 10 weeks old, but there was no doubt he was our star personality! He even took 4th place in the Cutest Puppy competition – but it didn't go to his head! As with everything else he has experienced thus far, he simply took it all in his stride.

Barnaby was petted and admired by all – big or small, four legs or two – and he took it all in his stride. He slept through a lot of the show, as puppies tend to do, but even asleep he was still the star. As for his future... well, we have high hopes for him.

Joan Minns

Our latest recruit to the Asdog Management Committee



## Jade's Story

**Sheree and ASDOG Jade have enjoyed an endearing and successful three-year partnership. Here Jade candidly reveals the truth about the life of fame she was born into!**

*Editor: Jade, you must be a great help for Sheree. What sorts of things do you do for her?*

**Jade:** I do heaps; I'm very clever you know! I open and shut the doors, drawers and the fridge, I put things away and retrieve things, I take Mum's jackets and shoes off, pick things up that she drops, put the toilet seat up and down, open and close the blinds, turn lights and the water fountain on and off, take the phone to Mum...

*Editor: Wow! You are clever. What about house work, do you help with that?*

**Jade:** Oh yes, I forgot that. I take the washing off the airer, put Mum's things away where she tells me, tidy my toys up, pick up my old bones in the backyard, put things in the bin, take my dinner bowl to the sink...

*Editor: And when you go out?*

**Jade:** Yep, I'm helpful everywhere. I help with doors, I take the queue

ticket out of the machine at the bank, I pass Mum things from shop shelves and pass Mum's credit card from the counter back to her...

*Editor: Which job do you think is the most important to Sheree?*

**Jade:** Mum says that when I pick things up that she drops like the door key or mobile phone it makes her feel safe.

*Editor: That's fantastic. You must get a bit tired of working sometimes though.*

**Jade:** Are you kidding? I'm given a treat every time I help out. I could work all day; in fact if you have a dog biscuit I could help you now. Would you like your jacket taken off? No, what about your shoes? Perhaps you'd like me to put your mobile phone on the table...?

*Editor: Ah... I'm okay for now. Did you have to learn anything new after you moved in with Sheree?*

**Jade:** Yes, funny you should ask that,



I thought I had passed graduation! Mum needed a few things that weren't on the curriculum yet. It wasn't a problem for a special dog like me, though. I quickly learned and passed the blinds, toilet seat and ticket machine tests.

*Editor: How do you know when Sheree needs your help?*

**Jade:** She either tells me with a known command, points to something like a drawer handle or positions herself in a familiar spot like next to the fridge door.

*Editor: Can you tell me about where you and Sheree go in an average week?*

**Jade:** Well, we go to work five days a week to the office and two hospitals. On the weekends we have lunch with Mum's friends and go to the lake, the beach and different parks. The lake is my favourite place; I loooove swimming. We also go shopping every week or so. Mum lets me pick a new toy sometimes. I only buy the ones that squeak, they're the most fun!

*Editor: What a busy week. What happens on a typical workday?*

**Jade:** After breakfast we have a run and a sniff in the park. I don't have my jacket on then so I get to play with my friends. I like Baxter, Lilly and Monty the best because they're big like me. I get dressed in my jacket and we catch a taxi to work. I sleep on my bed next to Mum's desk or go out to the lawn if I need a break and then we go for a run at lunchtime. Another taxi takes us to the hospital sometimes so Mum can see some clients or attend a meeting and we go home at about 5 p.m. Our friend Paul drives the taxi home and he plays with me after I get changed out of my jacket.

*Editor: What jobs are you required to do at work?*

**Jade:** I retrieve printed pages from the photocopier, fetch the air-conditioner remote from the wall bracket, put things in the bin, open and shut doors, pick up anything that Mum drops, take her jacket off



if she gets hot. Occasionally I have to demonstrate my skills for Mum's clients that have a spinal cord injury. They say I'm more intelligent than their children sometimes!

*Editor: You're so busy! Are you given plenty of play times?*

**Jade:** Play times are cool! I only wear my jacket when I'm in a public place where pet dogs wouldn't be allowed to go. Every day I get to run free in off leash areas and play, sniff, swim... it's a great life you know!

*Editor: It Certainly sounds like It! Who looks after your feeding, brushing and washing?*

**Jade:** Mum gets my food ready and I gently take the bowl off her lap. I get brushed by Mum with the special brush that she straps to her hand. And washing, aghhh... Mum's carer washes me in the shower. They think I run around excitedly after a shower because I feel fresh. What a myth; I'm just so ecstatic that the chore is finally over!

Well, er... I don't like to boast but I have frequent flyer points you know. I've been on planes to the Gold Coast, Brisbane, Bundaberg and even Adelaide twice. I get to ride in the plane with Mum; I sit on the floor next to her. Every couple of months Mum and I catch the train to the Blue Mountains and spend the weekend at Nanna and Grandad's place. That's the best fun. They live on a big bush property and I get to run and swim in the dams to my heart's delight!

*Editor: You are well travelled. Have you been everywhere with Sheree?*

**Jade:** No, I had to stay at home once when Mum and her niece went to the zoo. It's a designated quarantine area and no animals are allowed to go there, not even Guide Dogs and Assistance Dogs. It's okay though because I got to chew a huge bone at home.

*Editor: Where do you sleep at home?*

**Jade:** My white leather chaise is near Mum's bed. I sleep on my back with my head on my cushion and snuggle against my cosy purple blanket. Mum's friends laugh and they've all taken photos of me. I don't know why.

*Editor: Laugh? How odd! Have you ever been on holidays?*

**Jade:** That's when you don't come home at night time, right?

*Editor: It must be hard to do the right thing all the time. Have you ever done anything wrong?*

**Jade:** Ha ha ha... listen to this. I ate a whole sponge cake once... as quick as I could... at Nanna's house! Everybody laughed at how silly they were for putting it on the footstool and then racing out onto the back deck when something caught their attention. Phew!!

*Editor: What are your favourite things?*

**Jade:** Umm... breakfast, working for food, dinner, bones, swimming, my friends, rolling on my back, exploring, did I say food?, Nanna and Grandad, playing, taxi rides, carers, running and just going out anywhere. Oh did I say food, because I think that's my very favourite thing.



*Editor: I know how you feel! Finally, do you think Sheree realises just how special you are?*

**Jade:** Oh definitely, she tells me how beautiful and clever I am all the time.



### Christmas is coming! Time to visit the Self-Fundraising online shopping website and help ASDOG at the same time...

If you've bought something already, thank you - we are most grateful for your support. If you haven't yet tried it, why not give it a go now? At Self-Fundraising, you can shop online AND give financial support to ASDOG at the same time - and it costs you no extra! At Self-Fundraising, up to 10% of every purchase you make from their website goes to a worthy cause. Visit: [www.self-fundraising.com.au/cause/ASDOG](http://www.self-fundraising.com.au/cause/ASDOG) and see for yourself the wide range of products available through Self-Fundraising. Remember - your purchases are only connected to ASDOG if you purchase online by following this link... [www.self-fundraising.com.au/cause/ASDOG](http://www.self-fundraising.com.au/cause/ASDOG) Thank you, and happy shopping!

### Keeping an eye on our Dogs' weight...

There has been much discussion in the media lately regarding obesity in adults and children. What about our best friends? Our assistance dogs are required to stay within a healthy weight range. What about all the other dogs in the world?

We do need to keep an eye on our dogs' waistlines. Yes, they do have a waistline and we should be able to feel their ribs and backbone. When a dog turns while moving we should see a shimmer of ribs.

An overweight dog is at high risk of developing hip and elbow problems - exactly the same as us humans. This causes pain and encroaches on their daily routine.

So please ignore those pleading brown eyes and only give them measured dietary needs. Remember all treats used for training or rewards for good behaviour are to be included in the daily intake. Other treats and rewards not related to food may include: playing the dog's favourite game; giving the dog a massage; giving them a cuddle and/or giving verbal praise.

*Robyn Collieran and Ann Barnacoat*

