

Newsletter

June 2014



The Quarterly Newsletter of Australian Support Dogs, Inc. (ASDOG)

MEET IVY: A SMALL PUPPY ON A BIG JOURNEY!

Ivy has embarked on a two-year training program that will see her graduate into the very responsible and rewarding role of an assistance dog for a person with a physical disability.

In this mid year newsletter update we explore what that two-year program entails and how Ivy will be prepared to truly enhance the independence of her future recipient.



2014: After receiving a tick of approval for sound health and temperament, Ivy recently joined second-time ASDOG puppy raiser Andrea, an experienced volunteer with extra space in her heart and home.

'Ivy has settled in very well. She is a confident, clever little puppy who is also beautifully calm and gentle. Ivy is an absolute delight!' Andrea.

In May, at 4 months of age, Ivy had some routine veterinary procedures: she was spayed, vaccinated and screened for degenerative joint disease. She recovered quickly and is back in the throes of experiencing a happy positive upbringing with lots of play and social opportunities.



Assistance dogs learn over 50 obedience and task cues and Ivy is already practising *sit*, *stay*, *watch*, *come*, *mat* and *toilet* on cue.

To further reinforce these skills, Ivy is participating in an 8-week basic obedience course, and she is showing great potential!

Ivy enjoys interacting with her ASDOG puppy counterparts at monthly classes and public outings, and proudly shows the Training Coordinator her fabulous progress each time.

To exceed the required 120 hours of public access work, Ivy will continue to be exposed to a variety of people, places and things. So far she has taken it all in her stride: visits to shopping centres and cafes, on- and off-leash exercise, rides in buses and vehicles, and meeting people of all ages.

2015: With over 25 cues in her repertoire and an infectious enthusiasm to learn many more, Ivy will transition to the dedicated care of an advanced skills trainer. Her training sessions and skills will escalate as she learns how to truly enrich the life of her future partner.

Public access work will continue so Ivy is familiar and calm in a range of environments including all modes of public transport, big events, recreational venues, businesses and services.

A recipient matching process will commence mid-way through Ivy's advanced skills training program. Lifestyles, interests and personalities of assistance dog applicants will be considered to ensure Ivy becomes part of a well-suited, happy and successful team.

Ivy's recipient may have a spinal cord injury, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, spina bifida or similar condition. Imagine not being able to pick something up that you drop, take your jacket off if you get hot or remove your card and money from an ATM. Ivy will easily do all this for her recipient... and much more!

2016: Ready with an accomplished array of skills, cute little Ivy will have blossomed into the impressive and motivated assistance dog her recipient will adore. After graduating from the team-training program with full public access accreditation, their bond will develop like no other, and they will embark on a 10-year extraordinarily helpful and loving partnership.



ADVANCED SKILLS TRAINING

At about 12 months of age our dogs transition from Puppy Raising to Advanced Skills Training, a formal one year course comprising intensive obedience, skilled tasks and public access training.

Assistance dogs in training, Jenna and Freya (below, with trainers Gayl and Michelle), are part way through their advanced training course. They are enjoying approximately one hour of daily formal tuition, plus on-leash walking, off-leash exercise, as well as ongoing visits to a range of public and private venues.

What 'cues' are the dogs taught?

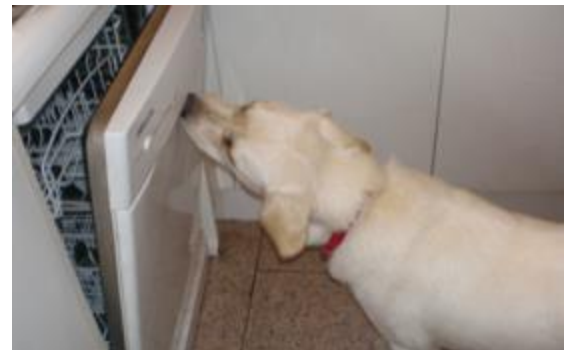
The dogs are taught both visual and verbal cues, including the examples below:

- Basic behaviours: *leave it, watch, nose.*
- Stability: *sit, drop, stay.*
- Movement and positioning: *right side, behind, front, under, mat.*
- General management and care: *wait, jump, toilet.*
- Complex tasks: *push, pull, fetch, bench, put, take, lift, shut, telephone.*

How do the complex tasks meet recipients' needs?

Assistance dogs in training are taught a core set of skills. During the recipient matching process, any additional skills identified by the trainer and/or recipient are added to the dog's training program. Recipients' needs fall into 3 broad categories:

1. A recipient may rely on an assistance dog to do tasks that are physically impossible to achieve e.g. picking up something from the floor or low drawer, taking a jumper or socks off, lifting and closing the dishwasher door.
2. An assistance dog may do some tasks with more ease, speed or accuracy than the recipient e.g. opening and closing the front door, taking clothing out of a washing machine, retrieving grocery items from shelves, taking a card from the ATM.
3. Having the assistance dog do the task may be more convenient e.g. the dog turns a light on or opens the blinds, while the recipient continues working. The recipient and assistance dog may even share tasks at times e.g. retrieving items from the various levels of a clothes airer.



IN THE NEWS

Service dog success rates

Of the thousands of dogs enlisted by guide and assistance dog organisations each year, over half fail to graduate successfully as working dogs. Health, behaviour and temperament problems account for most of these failures.

The Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine is currently conducting a number of projects that explore the developmental and genetic causes of behavioural and temperament problems in these dogs.

Does ASDOG conduct screening for health, behaviour and temperament?

ASDOG progresses only those dogs with sound temperament, behaviour and health through its programs. Puppies are screened for overall health and temperament prior to purchase and, at 16 weeks, have x-rays to detect any evidence of degenerative joint disease.

Additionally, puppy raisers and advanced skills trainers follow comprehensive training regimes, submit monthly reports to the Training Coordinator, and attend monthly assessment classes to monitor each dog's progress. Stringent benchmarks ensure that problems are identified early and management techniques implemented. Unfortunately, despite early and committed intervention, not all dogs are suited to the environments and routines of assistance dog work.

What is ASDOG's success rate?

ASDOG is pleased to report that approximately 2/3 of all dogs brought into its programs have successfully graduated as accredited assistance dogs. Though its success rate is higher than the average, ASDOG is keenly following this research and will implement recommended strategies from the results.

More information on the research can be found at www.research.vet.upenn.edu.

Chelsea's career change update

With their sights set on future roles as assistance dogs, puppy siblings Chelsea and Charlie joined their respective puppy-raisers at the end of 2011. Whilst Charlie sailed through his puppy-raising program with Jacqui and her family, Chelsea, unfortunately, was diagnosed with profound hearing loss.

With bittersweet irony, Charlie's puppy raising family became Chelsea's adopted family! 18 months has passed since the changeover and now Jacqui shares her experiences with adopted pet, Chelsea...

Chelsea is deaf (except for noises like metal scraping on metal - which sends her into a barking frenzy), and as a result, has a calm, subdued personality. Though she is clever it takes her longer to learn, but she gets there in the end. With a dog like Chelsea you learn to communicate with hand signals and facial expressions. It does take a bit of getting used to! We have developed our own language and signals and she understand us. I talk to her even though she can't hear me but I'm sure she can read my facial expressions.

I used to worry a lot about her getting out and running off. I don't worry so much anymore as I know she wouldn't go far. I do worry about her on the road, as she wouldn't hear traffic. She loves to sit at the front window and watch the world go by. It also gives her a clue as to when someone is coming. And yes, she barks at strangers like a regular dog! If she sees either my husband or I drive down the drive she runs to the door to greet us.

Chelsea likes to fetch, run around our backyard and swim at the beach. She loves soft toys and is quite messy... she never puts anything away and our home is always scattered with her toys!

Chelsea is a wonderful family pet and adopting her has turned out to be one of the best decisions we ever made. I was worried how she would adapt to us and we to her, especially after puppy raising Charlie and loving him so much. Chelsea is easy and, most importantly, my kids adore her. They help feed, walk, collect poop, brush and check her for ticks. We can't imagine life without her now. The funny thing is now I wonder why it took us so long to get a dog!



PLEASE COME AND SEE US!

- **Warringah Dogs Big Day Out**
Sunday, 24th August, 10.30am
Frenchs Forest Showground
Blackbutts Road, Frenchs Forest
- **Willoughby Spring Festival Street Fair**
Saturday, 6th September
Chatswood CBD



A HEARTFELT THANKS TO OUR 2013 ~ 2014 SUPPORTERS

As the financial year draws to a close the ASDOG Management Committee would like to express our sincere thanks to our valued members, volunteers, donors and supporters for enabling us to continue the rewarding work of enhancing the lives of people with physical disabilities. ASDOG proudly continues to operate the affairs of the Association exclusively with volunteer personnel, and utilises public donations in the following ways:



Purchase of Labrador Retriever puppies:

Puppy Heidi, top right, arrived with an abundance of enthusiasm in January!

Veterinary procedures including vaccinations, desexing and hip screening:

Puppy Jenna, centre right, breezed through her procedures with great results.

Formal training fees for dogs in the Advanced Skills Training program:

Trainee assistance dog Freya, top left, continues to make great gains in her advanced training course.

Health and equipment needs including bedding and grooming items, dog jackets, leads, flea and tick treatment:

A complete starter pack was purchased for new recipient Daniel and Assistance Dog Charlie during team training.

Formal training fees for new teams in the Recipient Training program:

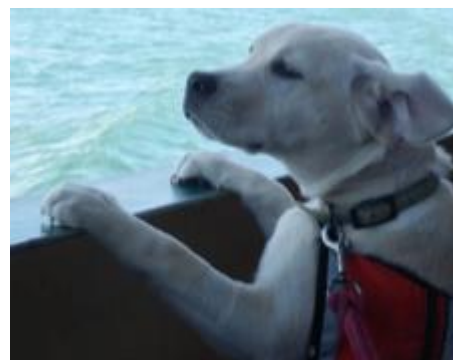
We congratulate David and Assistance dog Ebony, left, recent graduates of the team-training course.

Annual training, health and welfare assessments for graduate teams:

Allan and Assistance Dog Rayner, right, passed their 7th annual Partnership Evaluation and Public Access test with ease.

Ancillary costs required by law:

ASDOG maintains current insurance policies for volunteers, dog training contractors, the Association and the public.




NEW FACILITY DOG INITIATIVE

ASDOG is pleased to announce that it is in the process of researching and considering the training and placement of its first Facility Dog.

Working with professional staff members, facility dogs are incorporated into the daily routines and care of their clients, patients or students. The dogs participate in the same two-year assistance dog-training program, so, in addition to providing therapeutic benefit, a range of clients at a facility are able to utilise the dog's skills.

Facility Dogs live with a handler and go with them to their workplace every day. They may be involved in assisting clients in their day-to-day independence, participate with them in therapy sessions and attend their community and recreational activities. When not 'on duty' facility dogs enjoy work-free evenings and weekends at home with their handler. Team training is conducted with the primary handler and on-site training sessions are provided for staff members who may play an active role in the facility dog's working routines.

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