



*Saving just one dog won't change the world...
but, surely, the world will change for that one dog...*

To Comfort Your Dog or Not to Comfort Your Dog, That... Should Not Actually Be a Question!

"People who coddle their dogs are only making things worse by reinforcing their fear and anxiety!"

Does that sound familiar?

Maybe you've heard something similar at the dog park or read it in the comments section of a social media post. The idea that you will "reinforce your dog's fear" if you comfort them when they are upset, distressed, or afraid is commonplace, but it is actually a harmful myth and one I find particularly irksome. Let's explore why...

What Is Reinforcement?

To begin, let's get our terms straight. The word "reinforcement" can be used in all kinds of different ways in different contexts, but in training we're typically referring to a very specific psychological phenomenon: Reinforcement describes the increase in a behaviour due to the past consequences of that behaviour.

Notice the focus on *behaviour*? This is an essential distinction. The focus on *observable behaviour* is fundamental to the meaning of reinforcement in dog training. Fear is an emotion, not a behaviour. Statements like "you are

reinforcing your dog's fear, anxiety," etc. are based on a misunderstanding of what reinforcement is.

Seems simple and straightforward enough, right? So why do we so often see this argument repeated? In part, at least, I think it is that the common rebuttal, "you can't reinforce an emotion," doesn't feel very satisfying or convincing. We can, after all, do things that make emotions happen, right!? Absolutely we can!

I believe that this is where a lot of the confusion lies.

Build Confidence for Now – and Later

Before we dive in too deep, I want to be clear that, in my view, it is essential to support our dogs when they are feeling distressed. Being your dog's safe haven when they need security is foundational to your relationship. Showing your dog that you've got their back whenever they might need it gives them confidence to explore.

Perhaps the most important reason to be there for your dog, even when they look for support in minimally challenging situations, is to practice what to do when

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APRIL 2022

THE OFFICIAL SPEAKING OF DOGS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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About Speaking of Dogs

Speaking of Dogs is a Toronto-based organization that launched in 2001 and is dedicated to educating and enlightening people about dogs through seminars, workshop forums, outreach and rescue. Our goal is to end cruelty, abandonment, mistreatment and homelessness of man's best friend.

Speaking of Dogs Rescue is the operating name of Speaking of Dogs Rescue Program, a Canada Revenue Agency-registered charity based in Ontario.

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Newsletters

If you no longer want to receive our newsletter, email newsletter@speakingofdogs.com, with "unsubscribe" written in the subject line.

Dogs Looking for Homes

A friend in need is a friend indeed

Without a doubt, a dog is a real friend. Our dogs come in all shapes and sizes, but they have one thing in common—they all need loving forever homes. Open your heart and your home to a rescue dog. You'll be glad you did. For complete information about the adoption process, please visit www.speakingofdogs.com/adoption-process. For more information on each dog, simply click on their name.

Chinny

YORKSHIRE TERRIER MIX
SMALL, ADULT, FEMALE

FEATURED DOG:

Chinny is a 4-year-old spayed female Yorkshire Terrier mix who is about 18 pounds.

In the house, Chinny is well behaved, perfect in her housetraining, and not destructive. When guests come over, she initially barks, but as long as she is allowed time and space, she approaches when she's ready and then settles quickly. Once settled, she takes treats and sniffs each newcomer with acceptance.

With her foster mom, Chinny is affectionate, funny, and playful. This little lady is whip-smart and a loving companion. After a good walk, she's quite happy to chill in her favourite chair by the window.

We suspect, however, that Chinny was not socialized with other dogs or strangers appropriately or in a positive way, as she was highly reactive to both when she first came into our care.

Her foster mom initially observed her aggressively lunging and barking at people and dogs whom she encountered on walks. Over the past couple of months in foster care – with support, patience, and proper counterconditioning – Chinny has slowly begun to relax and



gain the coping skills she needs to be in a growing circle of people with dogs on her daily walks.

Chinny is treat-motivated, which helps with the behaviour modification and desensitization training we are applying. The theory is that instead of associating people and dogs with scary threats, she begins to associate the people and dogs with more positive happenings – like treats!

Chinny has shown marked progress, quickly accepting the company of new little dog companions on walks and sharing sniffs and smells along the way. She now mostly passes strangers on the street without notice, while for others she needs a small reminder of “no barking” and a treat when she complies.



While Chinny has improved and progressed, her adopter will need to continue to be dedicated and patient with her training. Training on walks will be a way of life for Chinny! For these reasons, she is not a good match for a first-time dog owner. Chinny also needs a home without children under 12 and without cats.

To learn more about desensitization and counterconditioning, you can refer to this article from [VCA Animal Hospitals](#). We also recommend the [CARE for Reactive Dogs website](#).

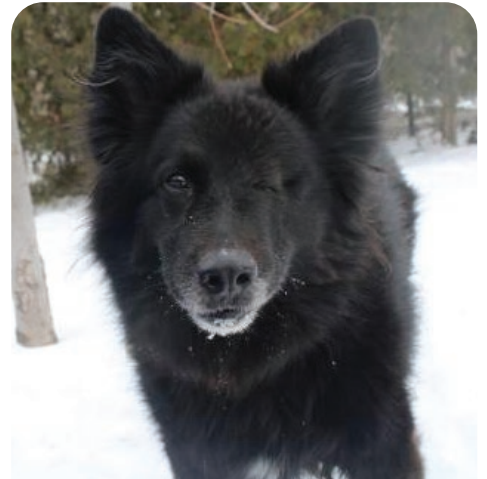
Chinny is a work in progress, but she's also a priceless work of art! Could you give this beautiful little girl the patient, dedicated, understanding forever she home needs?



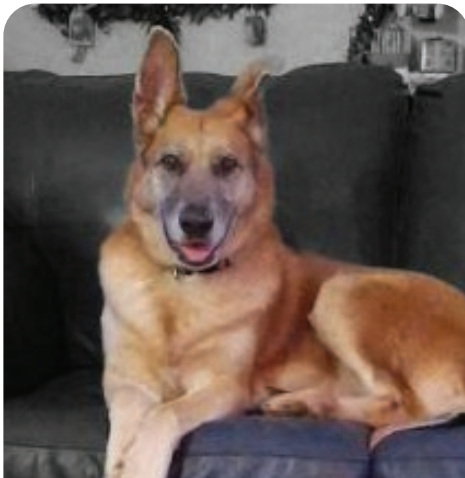
Veeru
INDIAN PARIAH DOG
MEDIUM, YOUNG, MALE



Ben Beagle
BEAGLE
MEDIUM, ADULT, MALE



Harley
COLLIE / SHEPHERD MIX
MEDIUM, ADULT, MALE



Kyra
BELGIAN/ SHEPHERD MIX
LARGE, ADULT, FEMALE



Tia
PODONGO / BEAGLE MIX
MEDIUM, YOUNG, FEMALE



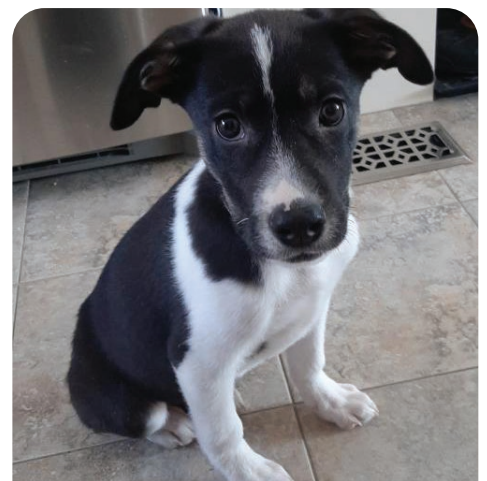
Violet
RETRIEVER / TERRIER MIX
SMALL, YOUNG, FEMALE



Willow
YORKSHIRE TERRIER
SMALL, ADULT, FEMALE



Pippa
POODLE / ST BERNARD MIX
LARGE, ADULT, FEMALE



Gus
LABRADOR / HOUND MIX
MEDIUM / BABY / MALE

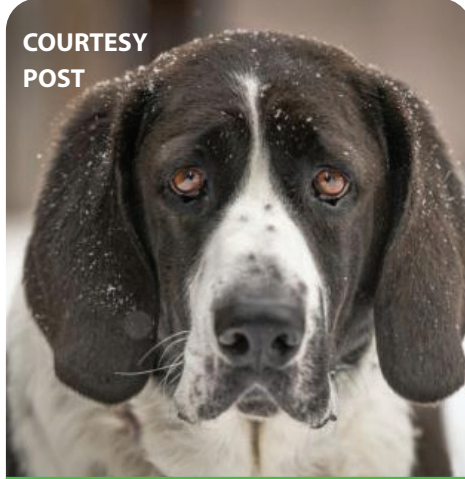
COURTESY
POST



Tufi

LABRADOR RETRIEVER MIX
LARGE, YOUNG, MALE

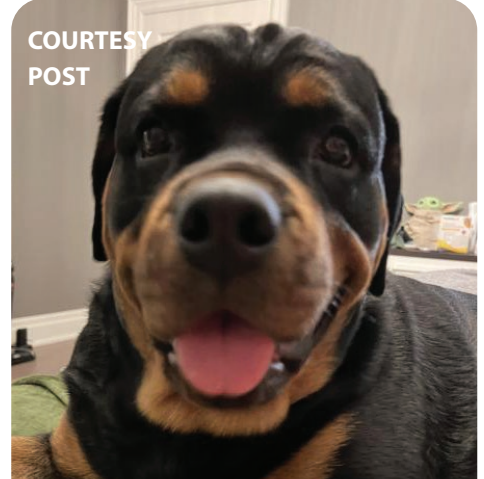
COURTESY
POST



Chelsea

POINTER / HOUND MIX
LARGE, ADULT, FEMALE

COURTESY
POST



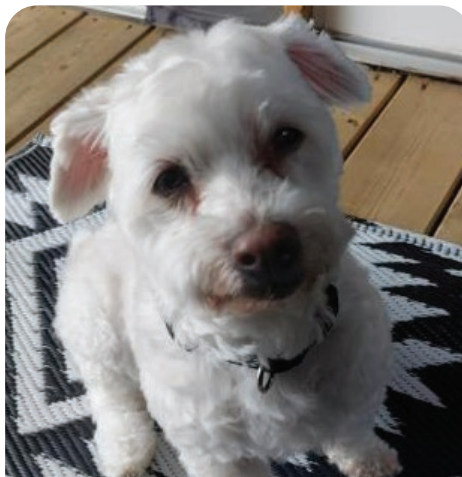
Ralphy

ROTTWEILER
LARGE, YOUNG, FEMALE



Chuck

CHIHUAHUA / PAPILLON MIX
SMALL, ADULT, MALE



Maxou

MALTESE / POODLE MIX
SMALL, SENIOR, MALE

RECALL

Click the link for details
on this month's recalls:

- [All foods produced by Bravo Packing of Carney's Point, NJ \(which has no association to Bravo Pet Foods of Manchester, CT\)](#)

HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY EASTER AND PASSOVER!

You may be planning to have a larger group for Easter or Passover than you've had for your last few holidays and special events, but please don't forget about pet safety!

Chocolate and sugar-free candies sweetened with xylitol are toxic to dogs and cats, and fatty foods like roasts and ham can give them an upset tummy or even pancreatitis, which can quickly become a medical emergency.

Easter egg hunts and lily decor can also be hazardous to your pet's health, and a large group of dinner guests can be stressful after two years of relative quiet.

For tips to keep your pets in good health and good spirits during the long weekend, check out this article from the [American Kennel Club](#).

We wish all our volunteers, supporters, adopters, and readers – and their dogs – a happy Easter and happy Passover!

Ask the Trainer

[*Continued from page 1...*](#)

things really are scary! A spooked dog doesn't reason well, but a long history of finding you for comfort, relief, and security will increase the chances of your dog running straight to you when the unexpected happens.

Behaviour and Biology

As a dog trainer who specialises in behaviour modification and works with clients every day, it's been my experience that a lot of people find that being their dog's safe haven makes sense, both intellectually and intuitively. But some aren't so sure. So let's dive in a little deeper to understand why comforting a distressed dog is very unlikely to result in any sort of behavioural fallout.

As mentioned previously, we know that reinforcement isn't the right word to use if we're talking about emotional responses, like fear. Rather than reinforcement, let's use a better word: elicit. We can definitely elicit emotional responses! This is a very important distinction.

Reinforcement is about strengthening behaviours. It involves increasing the likelihood of a behaviour happening in the future or encouraging it to happen more often. Emotions are involuntary responses; we don't choose when or where to have them, but they are very much related to the behaviours that follow. Some would say that emotion *drives* behaviour and that through experience we opt for the behaviours that best served us, that is, the behaviours that were reinforced.

I've spent a good bit of time thinking about ways to communicate these concepts, and not long ago I came across a great metaphor: Think of your brain

as a computer that tells your body how to act by quickly processing information gathered from the world through sensors (your eyes, ears, etc). The brain sends signals to the body to act based on, in part, options that have been hard-wired into our species over millennia of survival.

While these options are passed on through DNA, there is an additional player: an individual's learned experiences. The process goes something like this: What worked last time? How did the individual behave to get something desirable? How did the individual behave to get away from something they didn't like?

Take, for example, a curious child who hears a buzz and reaches toward a bee only to get stung. That sting will elicit pain, and then adrenaline, cortisol, and other chemicals will instantaneously flood through the body. As those biological functions happen, the child will feel fear and distress, and then he will exhibit specific behaviours, such as grasping his hands, crying, running away from the bee, and running to a loved one for comfort. If the child is comforted, his distress will be reduced, and this relief will reinforce the behaviour (i.e., running to a loved one). The next time that child hears a buzzing bee, the sound will elicit fear, and the child will likely run to a loved one because that's what worked the last time.

Comfort Isn't a Luxury, It's a Necessity

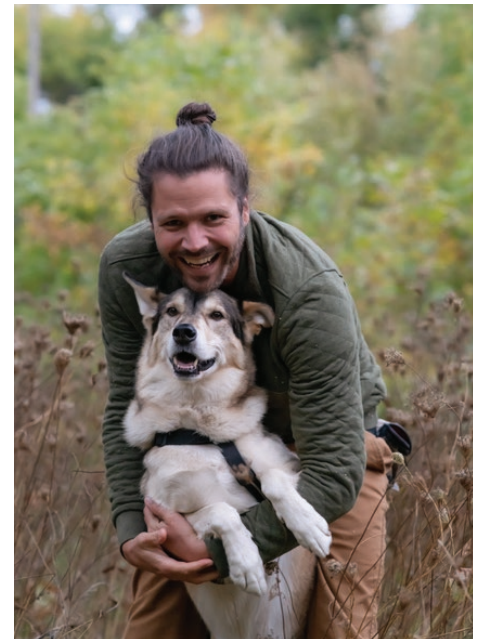
So what does this have to do with comforting your dogs? For a start, their brains function more or less the same ways as ours – and every other animal. If something makes a dog feel fearful or anxious, they are going to behave in a way that will help them find relief and feel safe. The behaviours that led to

that relief will be reinforced, but not the emotions that came first.

The only way to increase or intensify those fear-based emotions would be to add more things that your dog is afraid of or perhaps by withholding relief and allowing those fears to escalate into panic.

Like us, dogs are social animals who are raised by mothers and caregivers. From our earliest days, both people and dogs benefit from the security provided to us by those who are raising us, and as young ones we look to those caregivers when we feel unsafe or insecure. This is fundamental to the success of our respective species and to the healthy development of each and every individual dog and human out there.

So for dog's sake, be there for your pup and provide that relief, that safe haven, when they need it. Don't listen to anyone who tells you otherwise!



Don Hutton is a certified dog trainer, providing dog behaviour consultations and ethical training solutions through Running Dogs – Training & Behaviour (www.runningdogs.ca).

Step Up for the Pups This Spring!

Two years ago, we created Step Up for the Pups when all of our regular events were cancelled due to the pandemic. Even though most COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, we've decided to hold this successful event again, to raise funds for the medical care of the dogs in our foster programs!

Step Up for the Pups will take place on Sunday May 29th. You can participate by walking on the day by yourself or with others, with or without dogs, or pledge your support for one of our participants.

Sponsoring participants through our [Canada Helps page](#) is easy, and the site will immediately issue a tax receipt. Sharing is simple, too!

Want to really Step Up for the Pups? It's easy to set up a fundraising page on the [Canada Helps site](#) by clicking on "Create a Fundraiser" and following the instructions. Then it's simply a matter of sharing far and wide to help raise funds between now and May 29th!

For more information about Step Up for the Pups and how you can help, please visit the [Speaking of Dogs website](#), and don't miss the May newsletter!

MEET SOME OF THE PUPS!

We're hoping as many people as possible will take part in this walk and help us help as many dogs as possible!

By participating you'll be helping dogs like Baker and Sally, who came to us heartworm positive, and Chico, a little terrier mix who had an untreated eye infection that resulted in an eye enucleation.

You'll also be stepping up for Jojo, a German Shepherd dog who came to us unspayed and only days later needed to be rushed to the emergency clinic because she suffered a life-threatening condition called Pyometra, which is an infection of the uterus.

And we can't forget Rocky, a lovely Bernese Mountain dog mix who came to us with a bad ear infection. Despite many vet visits, they could not resolve the infection, and he required an ear ablation, which is a surgery that removes the entire ear canal.

We've also taken many dogs from puppy mills, including Snowbelle, Joanne, Sophie, Ariel, Julie, and Dazzy, who all needed spaying and extensive dental surgeries.

Lainey, a lovely collie retriever from northern Manitoba, needed a mass removed, and Milo, also from northern Manitoba, came to us with a fractured pelvis.

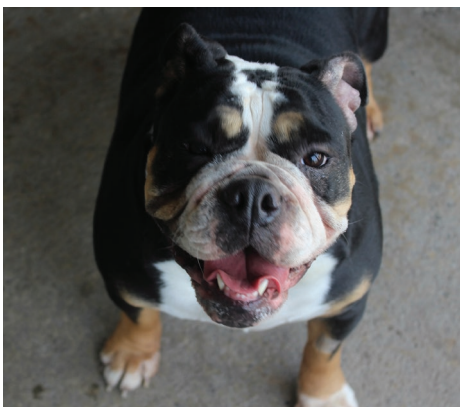
Last month we took four dogs from a breeder closure – Lucy, Lana, Nora, and Pippa – who all needed spays and dental surgeries.

Nova, a young English Bulldog, came to us with serious skin allergies that needed months of treatment, shampoos, lotions, special food, and vet visits.

And last but not least, over the last six months we've approved over 20 dental surgeries for our senior friends, who all too often come to us with rotting and abscessed teeth.

So far this year, we've also seen more owner surrenders than ever before, and shelter requests are coming to us almost daily.

With your help, our volunteers and veterinary partners were able to step up for these dear dogs. Please step up for them too. Please visit our [Canada Helps page](#) and Step Up for the Pups!



Adoption Update

To: Speaking of Dogs Rescue

From: John and Atsuko

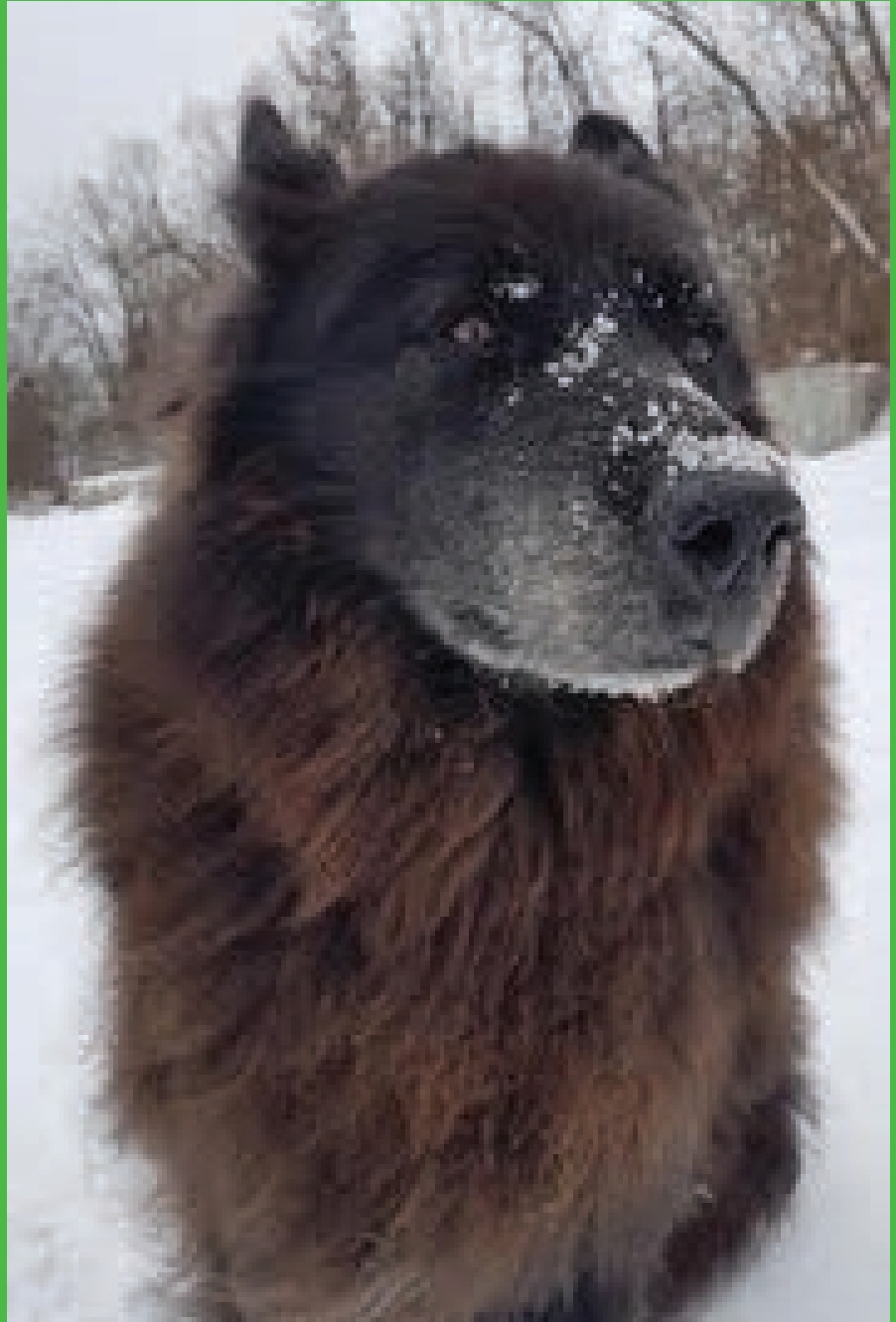
Subject: Moxie

Dear Speaking of Dogs Rescue,

Everything is great. Moxie is such a wonderful dog, and we are so happy to have her with us. She's the joy of our life. I think she is also enjoying life here; we are doing our best to make sure she does. Although she is an older dog, we have not experienced any health issues. We changed her diet to home-made food, and her energy level really seemed to perk up. She certainly has a distinct personality, but we have not experienced any behavioural issues. She is such an easy-going, friendly, and cooperative dog!

So many people are charmed by Moxie as they encounter her on our walks. The other day a young girl and her mother passed by, and the girl exclaimed "it's a bear!" Although her mother told her that Moxie is "a big dog" the girl insisted "No, it's a little bear!"

Moxie is the second amazing dog who came to us from Speaking of Dogs Rescue, and we are so lucky to have been able to spend time with them.



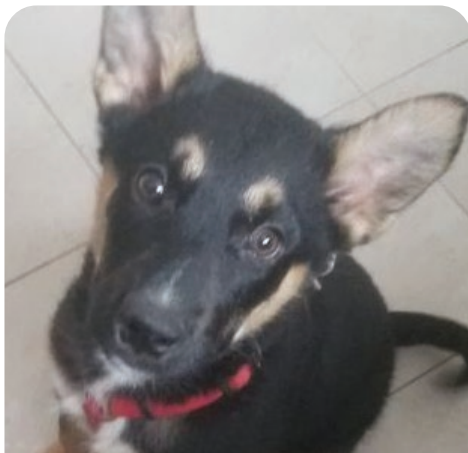
Happy Tails

RECENT ADOPTIONS:

A big thank you to our foster parents and our new adoptive guardians for helping give these loving dogs a second chance.



Teresa



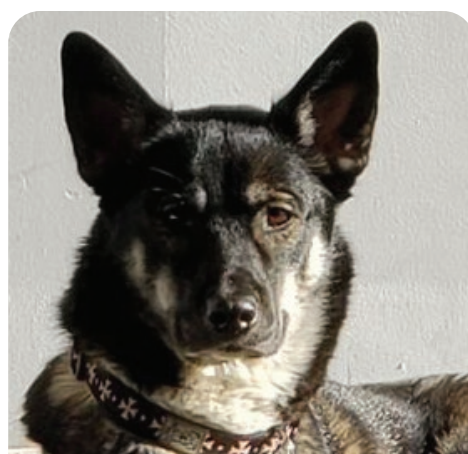
Stanley



Sophie



Snoop



Sadie



Rocky



Patrick



Nora



Pico

More Happy Tails



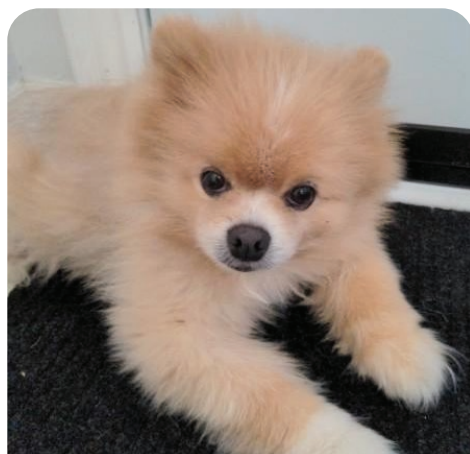
Dylan



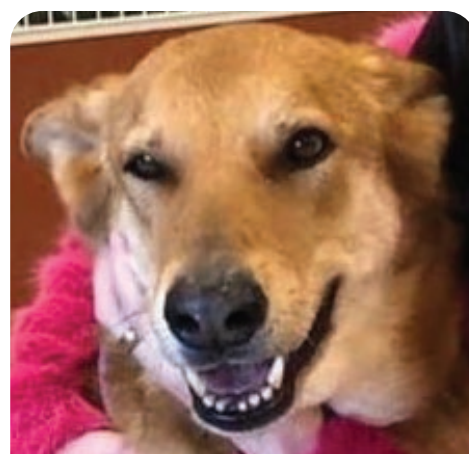
Rocco



Lucy Matilda



Fox



Ruby



Star

WE'RE OFFERING A BUFFET OF FUN AND FACTS ON FACEBOOK!



The Speaking of Dogs Facebook page is always serving up something interesting, whether it's updates about our dogs, amazing auctions, or fun jokes! We now have even more on offer: Treat Recipe Tuesdays! You'll find new recipes to tempt your best pal, and if you've got a favourite recipe you'd like to share, please text us or email info@speakingofdogs.com.

Check out our [Facebook page](#) every day to see what's cooking!

In Memoriam



Hulk
LOVED BY STEVE WYSE
ADOPTED JULY 2021



Pete the Peke
LOVED BY SUE AND EVERYONE
AT SPEAKING OF DOGS RESCUE
FOREVER IN FOSTER



Zelda
LOVED BY THE WALSH FAMILY
ADOPTED JULY 2019



Eddie
LOVED BY KAREN AND DIXIE
ADOPTED MARCH 2019

In Memoriam



Spyro
LOVED BY THE KOEHLER FAMILY
ADOPTED JUNE 2014