

Speaking of Dogs Rescue January 2026 *Newsletter*

Year in review



It's annual update time again! It seems the older we get, the more quickly time passes — and this past year, there was so much to do, so many dogs to advocate for and so many inquiries to reply to that the days just ran out of time.

We're still dealing with human challenges which become dog challenges. The ongoing rising cost of living and unaffordable vet care still top the list of reasons people can't keep their dogs. Job loss, housing, no time, moving and behaviour issues are also listed regularly on our intake forms. Despite the increasing demand for re-homing, we were successful in placing over 120 dogs in new homes this past year.

Big thanks to our intake coordinator Leanne T. who spends countless hours on the phone getting as much information on the dogs as possible. The more we know about the dogs, the more successful matches we can make. Unfortunately, owners are not always transparent about their dog's behaviour or medical status.

We continue to be a part of a puppy mill coalition that was started some years ago. The millers' greed and complete lack of care for the dogs is exhausting. Hopefully, and sooner than later, the Ontario government will tighten up the PUPS Act and give it more teeth (pun intended). If you'd like to help, you can contact your local MPP and remind them that puppy millers are still operating, still neglectful and still lining their pockets off the backs of innocent dogs.

Our partnerships with Ontario and Quebec shelters continue as they have for the last two decades. We feel the same frustrations as shelter staff. An endless stream of unwanted dogs and staff spending long days and sleepless nights trying to find space for just one more dog is both emotionally and physically draining.

Our Forever in Foster (FIF) program served a record number of dogs last year as we sadly discovered various dogs we had taken in had untreated conditions that had progressed beyond treatment. Creating a palliative care program and sustaining it for 20 years has been quite the journey. Forever in Foster parenting is not for everyone and can be extremely emotional. We are grateful every day for our palliative care givers and our FIF captain Cheryl P. who is a registered vet tech. Cheryl has done an incredible job overseeing the program for over a decade. We embraced 32 palliative dogs last year and currently have 18 dogs in the program. All costs are covered by the rescue, while FIF foster parents concentrate on the TLC.

Our pilot project "The Leg Up Program" financially assisted five registered charity dog rescues last year. That program helped 10 dogs. The board is in discussion to determine its next stages. Blackie's Fund stepped in 19 times in 2025 and provided medical and behavioural support, spay/neuter surgeries and short-term boarding. This program has been operational since 2017 and has helped hundreds of dogs. A big thank you to all our Blackie's Fund match donors. [Read more about Blackie's Fund](#) .

We continue to partner with K9 Advocacy Manitoba when we can and follow their incredible crusade on social media and through Flights for Hope where we often sponsor flights.

Our donor support has helped sustain us through this busy year and for that we are sincerely grateful. As many of you know, we often take in the medical dogs who are overlooked due to cost. We have you to thank for making this possible. Last year, we helped 4 parvo puppies, took in 30 puppy mill dogs (who all required spay/neuter and dental surgeries), were able to approve two cystotomies, numerous mass removals, cover neurology, orthopedic and behavioural consults, an abdominal obstruction, several cases of Lyme's disease, a cancer patient as well as providing routine veterinary care to each dog. Routine vet care includes: exam, core vaccines, 4DX, CBC blood work, a fecal, flea and tick prevention and a microchip.

As a volunteer-run charity, we are blessed to have the most remarkable team of people working together on behalf of the welfare of dogs. We are profoundly thankful for their support, expertise, tireless efforts and time. Next year will be our 25th anniversary and we have some big plans and ideas but can't let the dog out of the bag just yet. Be sure to read our newsletter and follow us on FB to see what's in store for 2026!

Lorraine Houston and the Speaking of Dogs team



A few of our 2025 adoptees

Ask the trainer

Roo's story: learning what a rescue dog really needs

During COVID, when everyone was adding puppies and rescue dogs to their families, Jenny and her husband Mark decided it was finally their moment. They grew up with dogs, but Roo would be their first dog as adults. Her rescue videos from Mexico sold them: a scruffy, light-brown, 40-pound Mexi-mutt bouncing around the shelter yard, hopping like a kangaroo, full of humour and energy. They could already hear themselves calling, "Roo!" They imagined cottage trips, lazy summer picnics, long park walks. They bought all the essentials, then eagerly awaited her arrival.



But the dog that stepped out of the transport vehicle in a gas station parking lot was not the Roo from the videos. She trembled violently, trying to slip out of her harness. Her eyes were wide and terrified. The volunteer had to scoop her up and place her in their car because she tried to flee. Roo shook the whole way home, then darted under the kitchen table and refused to come out. She wouldn't eat. She wouldn't drink. She wouldn't look at them.

Panicked, they called the rescue who suggested they hand-feed her to build trust and to leash her and escort her outside even if she resisted. That only made things worse. The handfeeding forced Roo to approach hands when she wasn't comfortable, but hungry. The leash caused panic. By day four, she was growling whenever the leash came out.

Stressed out because she wasn't getting exercise, and in the hopes of snapping her out of her state, they took her to a dog park. Perhaps seeing other dogs would spark the joy they saw in the videos. And for a moment, it did. Roo came alive playing with other dogs. But when it was time to go, she ran for 40 minutes around the park to avoid being leashed until a stranger managed to grab her.

That was when Jenny and Mark realized they needed help and called me. When I arrived, Roo peered at me from under the table, shaking and silent. It was clear she didn't trust people because her entire world had been flipped so suddenly by humans. One day she was running freely with familiar dogs; the next, she was spayed, shipped to another country and sent to live with strangers during the most emotionally intense stage of canine adolescence.

Training wasn't the answer. Safety was.

We removed all pressure — no more handfeeding, no more forced outings and no more approaching her with a leash. Instead, we created an environment where Roo could make choices and explore when she felt brave enough. Little piles of yummy food and snuffle mats were placed close to the back door to enjoy when she wanted. Soft "Hi Roo" warnings before walking past while tossing her a treat helped to build predictability and safety. They stopped trying to coax her out and instead allowed her to simply watch and adjust.



Slowly, Roo began to leave her safe space. On day three, she ventured into the living room for a brief sniff around and on day four, she approached the doorway, but the threshold made her a little nervous. By day five, she tentatively stepped into the yard on her own.

Since this was taking quite a while, we discussed various ideas to help move ahead. And that's when we realized the key was hidden in her shelter videos all along. In the videos from Mexico, Roo was happiest when she was with other dogs. Dogs were her safe place, her familiar language and social anchor. Humans were frightening, unpredictable, unknown. Perhaps not always, but definitely due to the transition to Canada.

So, we brought in Broodie, a calm, trustworthy “failed” service dog whose natural confidence and quiet friendliness make her a perfect helper dog. We let Broodie into the backyard first, then opened the door so Roo could see her. Roo trotted straight into the yard and tried to play with Broodie. Broodie gave her a couple of play bows and a quick chase but then was focused on learning about this new place — exactly what we wanted her to show Roo. Over the next few sessions, we brought in a couple of other helper dogs and together with Broodie, they demonstrated stability, clarity and emotional safety. Roo watched them closely: how they approached people, how they explored the yard, how they walked on leash without fear.

Once Roo felt safe in the presence of her dog “translators,” real trust with Jenny and Mark began to grow. Only then did training make sense — recall, hand targeting, simple cues — but it all came after safety and trust had been rebuilt and after watching her doggie friends do so without any fear.



After a month, Roo got a dog walker and Jenny and Mark were also walking her themselves without another dog. They discovered she loved treasure hunting in the backyard and the flirt pole was a huge hit. It was so nice to see Roo interact with her humans without needing a dog to be there. They briefly considered adopting a second dog as Roo's permanent companion but ultimately didn't need to. The helper dogs were a bridge — temporary guides who helped Roo understand that people could be safe, too.

The moral of Roo's story

Training didn't change Roo. Safety, choice and connection did. For dogs like Roo, trust doesn't grow from forcing them to face their fears. It grows from offering them what they know, what they understand and what makes them feel safe so they can finally open their hearts to everything that comes next.



Written by
Andrea Dinan,
CPDT-KA, FFCT, KAD, LFDM-T
Award-Winning Certified Dog Trainer



Note from Speaking of Dogs: When looking to adopt a dog, we encourage everyone to do their research and due diligence. Not all rescues are equal. Is the group you're working with transparent about the dog's medical state and behaviour? Is the dog in a local foster home? Can you meet the dog prior to signing an adoption agreement? Is their priority a best possible match? If you search online for what makes a dog rescue ethical, you'll find a comprehensive list of practices that should be adhered to. The story of Roo reminds us that what you see is not always what you get. It is without doubt, a cautionary tale.

Fundraiser: Retro dance pawty



Who doesn't like a good old-fashioned disco party?

Join us on February 7 in Collingwood for a high-energy night of disco, dancing and prizes.

We can't wait to see your best retro looks!

All proceeds go to the dogs, of course.

[Get your tickets today](#)

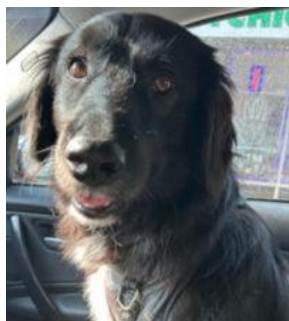
Dogs looking for homes

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 home to a rescue dog. You'll be glad you did.

[Learn more about our adoption process](#)

Meet January's featured dog – Karti



The cuddly goofball

Karti is a good-hearted, energetic, rough-and-tumble fellow with a huge appetite for life. He's two-and-a-half years old, neutered and weighs roughly 50 pounds. He looks very much like a flat-coated retriever; however, he came to us from the streets of Georgia (the European one) without any known backstory.

What we do know is that Karti suffered a serious injury to his left hind foot at some point, before being rescued by a kind-hearted Canadian on assignment. After surgery to remove two toes, Karti is bouncing back like

the champ he is. Despite his former life, this handsome retriever-type boy is house-trained and can be left alone without incident.

Karti is extremely affectionate and loves to cuddle — his favourite pastime is snuggling on the couch with his foster family. He's generally good with both people and dogs, especially when introduced off-leash in a safe, secured area. He can, however, be suspicious of men carrying large objects or wearing hats or hoodies, and while on-leash he can sometimes become reactive with other dogs.

Like many young dogs with big hearts and even bigger energy, Karti sometimes gets a little too excited. A certified positive reinforcement trainer can help get his "simmer down" or "off" button reliably working for him in a few sessions.



Karti's ideal home would be in a house with a fenced-in area and a family with some rescue dog experience and lots of love to share. Karti has been in Canada for nearly a year now and is being fostered in midtown Toronto. Both his physical and emotional transformations have been remarkable.

If you're looking for a loyal, cuddly boy to shower with affection, Karti is the dog for you!

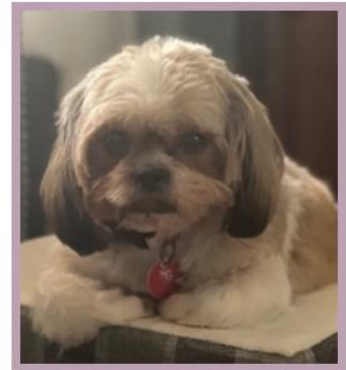
[Complete our adoption application](#)



Laika
German Shepherd mix
Large, Baby, Female



Kia
Labrador Retriever/English Pointer
mix
Large, Senior, Female



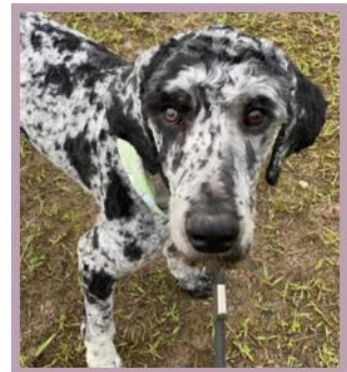
Olive
Shih Tzu
Small, Adult, Female



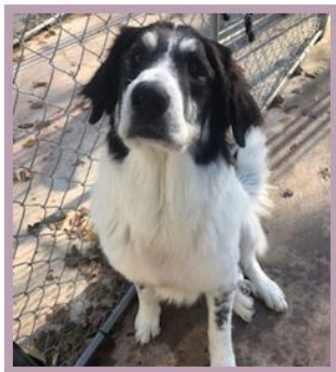
Nini
Yorkshire Terrier (Yorkie)
Small, Senior, Female



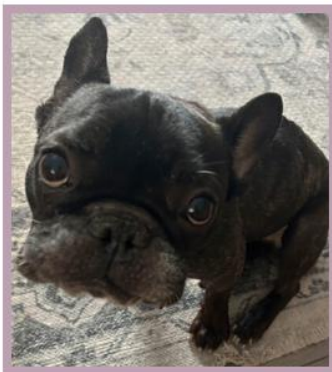
Dave aka Dolby
Corgi
Medium, Adult, Male



Willie
Standard Poodle mix
Large, Adult, Male



Sadie
Great Pyrenees Mix
X-Large, Adult, Female



Dorito
French Bulldog
Small, Adult, Male



Troy
Spaniel/Shih tzu mix
Small, Adult, Male



Piper
Labrador Retriever/Greyhound mix
Large, Adult, Female



Frosty
Bichon Frise mix
Small, Senior, Female

amazon wish lists

Want to help our dogs?

Consider making a donation from our Amazon wish list of priority dog supplies.

[Click here to view list](#)

Happy tails (recent adoptions)



Jessie and Junie



Heidi



Penny



Summer



Charlie



Marshall



Mia



Jack and Jill



Beth

Adoption update

Dear Speaking of Dogs Rescue,

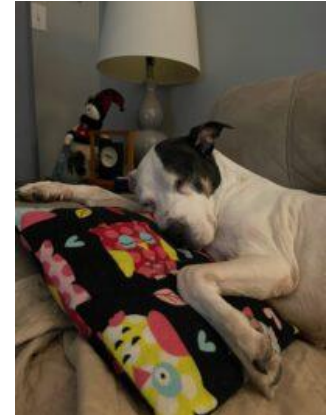


I just wanted to give you an update on Mollie. She's doing great! It's hard to believe it's been almost 1.5 years since this beautiful girl was given a second chance after Speaking of Dogs gave her life-saving surgery for cancer.

Mollie is beloved by everyone who meets her and will not hesitate to show all willing participants that being 55 pounds does not prevent a dog from reaching their full lapdog potential. Besides laying in laps, her favourite pastimes are lounging on the couch, walking around the neighbourhood, begging for food and visits with grandma. She gets along well

with the neighbourhood dogs and goes on regular walks with her BFF Hercules.

She loves her people and is quite the Velcro dog. We couldn't have asked for a more endearing, sweet, loving girl. She has enriched our lives in the way that only dogs can. Mollie is so loved and cherished by our family.



Sincerely,
Sherri Ann

Wiggles and wags

Leafs raffle

Thank you to our anonymous donor for the Leafs tickets and to everyone who supported the raffle. Special recognition to Gerry B. who co-ordinated ticket sales. The winning ticket was number 321.

Calendars

Kudos to Karen F. for creating our 2026 calendar and to Gabe T. for being our calendar captain. And a big shout out to Cedarbrae Vet Clinic, Collingwood Vet Services and Mountain Vista Vet Clinic for selling our calendars, in addition to being everyday heroes for the animals in their care. We have a few calendars left. If you'd like to purchase one, please email us.

Memorial fundraiser

Thank you to Muttz with Mannerz for the donations they collected during their fundraiser held in memory of Diane Purser.

Expert advice

We're so grateful to our dog trainers who write wonderfully informative articles for our monthly newsletters. Their efforts highlight current training techniques and ideology and help dog owners understand what dogs really need to thrive.

Holiday donations

Santa Paws sure didn't disappoint this year. The wonderful folks at The Printing House (TPH) 088 purchased over \$2500 worth of food, toys and treats for the dogs in our rescue. We're grateful for their kindness, generosity and caring. Just look at all these goodies for our foster dogs!



Appreciation is also due to the Bark Barn for putting a donation basket out for us during December.

In memoriam



Ruby Tuesday

Adopted February 2017

Loved by Breanna O'Toole and Family

About Speaking of Dogs

Speaking of Dogs Rescue Program is a Canadian registered charity established in the Greater Toronto area with foster homes across Ontario. Launched in 2001, we are a foster-based, all breed rescue with a focus on senior dogs. We are run solely by volunteers with a mission to help homeless dogs in need by providing shelter or sanctuary, necessary medical care, adoption and education.

Newsletter team

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