

Erin News

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Welcome to the 12th edition of Erin News- find out what has been going on behind the scenes as we head towards homing our 500th hound.

Sighthounds say: stop, look and listen

Jem (formerly Domino) was rescued at the age of 5 months. He was a pathetic scrap suffering from rickets due to malnutrition and had to spend several months in rehabilitation. Luckily his legs straightened out and in May 2016, having been adopted by Jackie, a lovely lady from the Wirral, he took his first steps to becoming a therapy dog when he spent an hour being fussed and stroked as he checked out the Therapy Dogs Nationwide (TDN) stall at a local dog show. Nobody could believe how recently he had been rescued and he certainly lived up to his name. Jackie observed him in lots of different situations and he appeared to have all the right attributes to train as a TDN dog (excluding his penchant for sneaking in windfall apples and crunching them up on her bed!). In September, Jem qualified as a therapy dog. Over to Jackie to tell us more:

"Can your dog read?" "No, he can't. That's why he'd love you to read to him." That was the beginning of Jem's first session as a therapy dog in a local primary school. Looking at him, settled at a child's feet and wearing his new high visibility jacket, it was hard to believe this was the bewildered eight month old stray which I had adopted from the wonderful Erin Hounds just a few months before. When I realised that

Tizzy, my elderly lurcher, really needed to retire from visiting schools, hospitals and care homes, it was time to find a young successor. It had to be a lurcher. The very qualities which draw us to sight hounds make them wonderful therapy dogs. They are calm, patient, quiet, quick to learn and eager to please. They love to lean affectionately against new friends and have the advantage of being big enough to stroke easily when visiting wheelchair users. I knew my next dog had to be a lurcher but when I first met Jem, I didn't realise how lucky I was that my new dog was going to be this particular lurcher. Because Jem was so young, I knew I had several months to train him before he could be assessed as a therapy dog. All the dog therapy charities have a minimum age requirement so that they can be confident that the dog won't be too scatty or unpredictable. They also insist that the dog and owner have been together for six months. This, again, is to ensure that volunteers know their animals really well and that the bond between dog and owner is strong enough for obedience and trust in an emergency. Jem (he was called Domino when with Erin Hounds but I thought that it would sound as if I was demanding a pizza if I shouted



Jem listens

his name in the park) knew almost nothing when he arrived with me. Houses were a mystery, traffic was terrifying and the lead was an exciting chewy toy. He started puppy classes after a couple of weeks focussing at first on the sorts of thing you would teach any young dog and gradually introducing him to the elements of the therapy dog test. The things required of a therapy dog are simple. They are not the specialist assistance dogs who need years of training to help with the needs of their owners. Therapy dogs go out into the community to improve the lives of people having a tough time. Dogs may visit schools, care homes, hospitals or prisons so need to be tested to ensure that they will cope with the situation. They have to walk calmly on a loose lead, cope with being touched, remain patient if their owner has a conversation, meet new people without getting over-excited and not panic about sudden

loud noises. Additionally, dog owners have to provide a couple of references and, if planning to work with children or vulnerable adults, it is sensible to apply for a DBS (previously CRB) check. Jem and I took our test on a wet, miserable morning in September. We passed (quite a surprise as, like most sight hounds, Jem isn't keen on being out in bad weather and was making his opinions known) and Jem was ready to put on the yellow jacket and start to work in schools helping children and teenagers who are struggling with reading. The idea of reading to a dog may seem barking mad at first but it's amazing to see how much the children progress as they gain in confidence and enjoy books. Because the dog can't read, it isn't going to criticise

or interrupt so there is no need to feel anxious or embarrassed. Jem can't help so children gradually start to listen to themselves, correct their mistakes and get themselves out of difficulties. I sit where I can't see the book, offer all the help that's requested but almost never intervene. After all, it is the dog who is being read to: I'm just there to hold the lead and end the session with praise and an assurance that Jem enjoyed the book. There is time for a chat, a stroke and a dog treat. Working with a therapy dog is so worthwhile for me. I am fortunate to have time to give a couple of afternoons to doing one of the most important things in the world: helping children become confident, competent readers. In a strange way, I think

it is also very fulfilling for Jem. He certainly enjoys visiting his friends in school but there is something subtly different about his behaviour when he's got his uniform on that suggests he understands that he is doing something important. As you are reading this, you probably have a hound which has the potential to become a great therapy dog. If you can spare even an hour a week, you could make so much difference to people's lives. The therapy dog charities have many requests for visits which just can't be fulfilled because there aren't enough volunteers. Please consider it. Jem and I are registered with: Therapy Dogs Nationwide, enquiries@therapydogsnationwide.org.uk."

Getting a greyt education

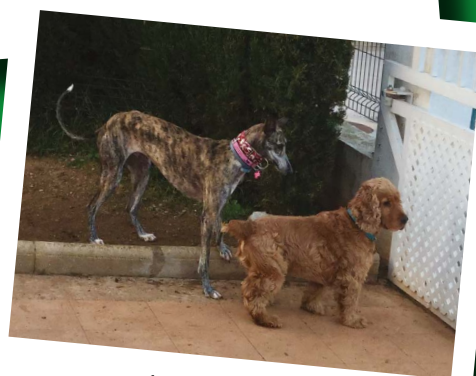
Pupils at a school in Macclesfield had been reading "Born to Run" by Michael Morpurgo and their teacher was disturbed to learn about the conditions greyhounds face, having met us before at one of our events at the local Treacle Market. She invited us along and so rescued greyhounds Jack, Georgia, Jussi and Beate went back to school with their owners. After a short presentation on greyhound welfare and rescue, the pupils took part in a quiz and a question and answer session. The children were surprised how calm and relaxed the dogs were and soon became best mates with the dogs who enjoyed plentiful cuddles and showing off their athleticism on the hockey pitch. Jane, the teacher and her classroom assistants thoroughly enjoyed our visit and have invited us back to speak to more pupils. Some of the children donated some of their pocket money to Erin Hounds which was very touching.

(A big thank you to our enthusiastic volunteers for taking annual leave from their own jobs especially to do this, Ed)



Knit one, save one (come hell or high water!)

In the 9th edition of Erin News, we told you about Jenny, an English lady living in Spain who, having been unable to source suitable wool in Spain with which to knit coats for Erin Hounds, sourced it from a wool shop in County Waterford, Ireland. As her needles clicked, she found herself falling for the sighthound breed, having learned about their plight through Erin Hounds. She contacted us to adopt an Erin Hound but with Irish greyhounds increasingly ending up in Spain and thousands of galgos (Spanish greyhounds) also suffering there, we suggested she contact our friends at Greyhounds in Need to adopt a dog already in Spain. Greyhounds in Need put her in touch with a Spanish rescue they support called 112 Carlota Galgos which homes hounds in Europe and America. There lay Dilly, a 2 year old galgo who had been found hungry and overheated in a Seville ghetto where children were stoning her. Now that she had been rehabilitated by Charlotte and Dioni, all she needed was a home. In December, Jenny and husband Allyn drove 500 miles to the rescue centre to meet Dilly, planning to spend 4 days getting to know her and vice versa before adoption. However, on day two, they were unable to visit because the heaviest rain in almost 30 years fell, causing major flooding and road closures. The following day, when the roads re-opened, they found themselves taking part in a search for a galgo who had escaped after one of the centre's 8ft boundary walls had collapsed due to the flooding. Luckily the galgo was recaptured safely. Like the Erin team, Charlotte works hard to assess each dog and home offer and Dilly turned out to be the perfect match for Jenny and Allyn. She is now gaining weight and enjoying home comforts including the sofa and walks with Jenny's mum's dog, Robbie. Jenny says "She was a bit excitable at first when meeting Robbie, barking and bouncing up and down on the spot. Everyone loves her and we have been amazed how she has taken to home life and are so pleased we finally have our own hound".



Dilly & Robbie

That's the way to do it

One of our star foster families has allowed me to share their comments about their new foster greyhound, made on the second day after collecting him from kennels:

"He is doing ok. A bit scared of everything so doing a bit of growling. Our dogs can tell it's not aggression so they are just ignoring him. He has not growled as much today as yesterday, in fact, I haven't heard him growl tonight at all. He is clean in the house, loves his crate and is fixated with the TV whether it is on or off as he is fascinated by his own reflection. All good for a green dog. He is great on his walks and I am looking forward to him learning to be a pet and joining in with more cuddles." (If you have the patience and commitment to help a hound adjust to life outside kennels and would like to foster, please contact us. Ed)

Looking for somewhere safe to let your dog run?

Check out www.dogwalkingfields.co.uk which lists private hire and public dog fields and some indoor enclosed areas (with owner's or council's permission) across the UK



Life before adoption: through the eyes of a greyhound

Knowing what the average greyhound has experienced, can give adopters insight into the adjustments hounds have to make on adoption. This understanding and seeing things through their eyes can help them make the transition more easily.

A greyhound has never been required to make any decisions for itself. It has been told what to do and when to do it with the only prohibition in a racing greyhound's life being getting into a fight, very much akin to the life of a prisoner.

From weaning until he starts his training at 12-18mths of age, the emphasis is on eating, growing and running around with his siblings. When he starts his training he is put alone in a pen in a large kennel block. Here, no one gets on his bed except him and no one is likely to touch him without plenty of warning.

Each morning, the loud-mouthed hounds in the block begin to bark or howl when human movement in the kennels starts so he is wide awake by the time a human opens his door to turn him out into his toileting pen. You now can see that a greyhound has never been touched while he is asleep.

He eats what is put in front of him when he is fed, and this is usually on an unvarying schedule and he is left undisturbed. He is never told not to eat any food within his reach and no one ever touches his bowl while he is eating.

He is not expected to indicate when he has to "go outside" but just gets turned out and it isn't long before he gets the idea of what he is supposed to do while he is out there. He may have access to the outside part of his pen and

will always endeavour to empty himself there rather than near his bowl or bed. No one comes into or goes out of his kennel without his knowledge. There are no surprises, day in and day out. Many greyhounds do not know their name because they are not addressed.

He is not asked or told to do anything as an individual but is always part of a group or pack. Even when being schooled or raced, someone else takes the lead and he is not alone. He will only travel between training and racing areas and will not see traffic, other dog breeds, children, chickens, bikes or cats. He will only be familiar with basic necessities like his bed and his bowl, not toys, balls or TV.

Ask yourself – living, as a commodity in rural Ireland, will my dog have experienced what is in front of him now? The answer will almost certainly be 'No' so cut him some slack while he learns and support him, bearing in mind that a steady, well-adjusted pet dog can be the best teacher of all for him.

Suddenly, he is expected to conduct himself appropriately without any preparation in a world which is not the one he knows, unless he is lucky enough to have been fostered before adoption. He is unrealistically expected to immediately be able to say when he needs to go outside, to come when he is called, not to get on the furniture nor eat food off counters and tables and walk well on the lead whatever unrecognisable things appear, which all adds to the pressure on him.

Almost everything he does is wrong. Suddenly he is a minority. Now he is just a pet expected to

be grateful for the change but is unemployed, in a place where people assume he knows the rules, even when there apparently aren't any. All the protective barriers of routine are gone and there is no warning before something happens. Also there is, more often than not, no reassuring presence of his own kind who have always been there as long as he can remember.

If you woke up with an unfamiliar human face two inches from yours, would you not protest in panic that this "someone" has crept up on you and may want to do you harm?

Left alone, for the first time in your life, in a deathly quiet, strange place, with no idea of what could happen or how long it could be before someone comes, would you not be anxious?

He is expected to immediately possess all the manners of at least a six-year old child but you would not leave a six-year old human alone to roam a home for hours at a time and not expect to find upset when you got back? Consider that if you did, you could be charged with neglect but people do this to greyhounds and then criticise or even return the dog, perceiving him to be at fault rather than as a lost soul in need of gentle guidance. If you are kind and support him as he blossoms into a pet, he will reward you with love which is another thing he has to discover within himself as he has never been shown any or had the opportunity to show any. Some adopters even level the charge of "non-affectionate" at him when he has so much love stored up but just has to learn what to do with it so please don't be blind to the needs of your sighthound as he settles in.

Laid back Lee

Lee is a perfect example of a greyhound who, given the time to adjust, has blossomed into the perfect pet and a great ambassador for greyhounds. When he first arrived he was like a bull in a china shop and now read what his mum, Caroline, tells us "Just wanted to let you know how proud I was of Lee today. We had an "away day" with work and were encouraged to bring our dogs to a "paint a pot" session. A French bulldog, a German Shepherd and a dachshund were also part of the group but Lee was by far the best behaved and adapted to the environment. He just lay on his blanket whilst the other dogs were up and down and wouldn't settle. With all that pottery and high energy little dogs around him, he just took it in his stride (or yawn should I say!). I believed in him and he was a little angel and even posed calmly for the mug shot." (The most telling phrase is "I believed in him" and we are so grateful to Caroline for that, Ed)



Lee

Home is where your hound is!

Having successfully travelled over the Irish sea, it seems that one of our hounds, Vanya (now Tanya) was not fazed by tackling the Atlantic ocean either! Having been homed in the UK, her new family had to relocate unexpectedly to Texas and so she packed her bags and with a little help from Pickford Pets arrived in the USA ready to explore. At no point did her family ever consider leaving her behind or giving her up and in fact, she has been extremely valuable in helping the children overcome their occasional bouts of homesickness.



Vanya (now Tanya)

Thank you

Heartfelt thanks go to all our donors, especially those who have set up regular payments. These allow us to keep rescuing, despite reductions in event-generated funding due to rain! Special thanks also go to:

- Sue for raising money for Erin Hounds by opening her beautiful garden
- Keith and Sue for holding car boot sales
- Sarah and Neil who asked their wedding guests to donate to Erin Hounds, in lieu of gifts
- Andy and Bob who helped us buy a new gazebo after ours fell victim to the windy weather
- £50 donation from Daisy's family, £100 donation from Adrian and further generous donations from Audrey and Val
- £200 donation from the Mackays in memory of one of our volunteers' dogs, Petra who was the mother of Skeeter, the greyhound they themselves adopted.

We have some new events this year so keep an eye on the website and Facebook page and come along to support us.

As ever, the hounds have the final say...

Even if you can't do much, it's no excuse to do nothing. The hope that you will help us is all we have to cling onto.



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