



Claire Roberts with pup Feby and husband Philip holding their Italian Greyhound, Maddie

PET RESCUE



Liz Kennedy with husband Gareth Arthur, son Ben, daughter Caitlin and their dogs – from back left – Toppa, Bella, Misha and Gemma

August 31 is International Dog Day. To mark this, *Katie Scott* speaks to some DB families who have recently welcomed pets into their home, and celebrates the local heroes who save abandoned animals across Hong Kong

On any given day in Discovery Bay, whether in rain, shine, squalls or a sweat-fest, you can see the furriest of the community's residents having a walk. Our enclave is possibly one of the most animal-friendly places in Hong Kong, as the number of pets and most notably the number of rescue animals pays testament.

Claire Roberts, of Doctors Beck & Stone (The Ark Veterinary Hospital) in DB North Plaza, adopted her one-year-old mongrel puppy, Feby, from Hong Kong PAWS Foundation

(PAWS). She and her husband fostered for a week before adopting and then took the same approach when adopting Maddie, a seven-year-old Italian Greyhound.

"We have always had a four-legged family member, so it seemed right to meet with PAWS to discuss options, especially as we know there are so many animals out there looking for that 'forever home,'" Claire says. The Roberts also foster kittens and are currently looking after one with a neurological disease, which affects its mobility.

Fellow DB resident Liz Kennedy also has a houseful of animals, with three adult dogs – Bella, a Golden Retriever, and Gemma and Misha, both *Tong Gaus* (local street dogs) – and three cats – Tawny, Freddie and Gracie. Liz adopted her pets from Protection of Animals Lantau South (PALS), having first fostered three of them. She is also currently fostering another Tong Gau, eight-month-old Toppa.

Liz considers DB "a fantastic place for dogs as there are plenty of open spaces and trails to exercise and socialise them". She extols the joys of dog owning

TALKING POINTS

but warns any potential adopter to go into it with realistic expectations and a great deal of thought about the present and future.

“Ask yourself whether you have the time, finances and ability to make a commitment,” Liz says. “It breaks my heart that animals are abandoned when people leave Hong Kong. If you’re not completely sure you are going to be able to take your dogs or cats (or any other animal) with you, then maybe consider fostering.”

Are you qualified?

Incredibly, dogs commonly get abandoned not just if a family relocates but if they grow too big, become too active, or simply because their adopted family tires of them. Locally, both PALS and PAWS are working to stop these ‘returns’ from happening by ensuring families are prepared before they take on a pet.

PALS founder Jacqui Green, a 27-year Mui Wo resident, currently has 13 dogs in her care, three adult cats, four older kittens and one four-week-old kitten. Jacqui has had decades of experience homing dogs and now gives potential adopters a honed survey to gauge their ability to be “good parents”. She explains: “I will sometimes turn people down and this is usually related to the amount of time they want to leave their pets alone. If you are working, you have to have a helper or a dog walker who knows what they are doing.”

If you get the green light, the next thing to think about is what kind of dog you want. PAWS volunteer, DB resident Kate Halstead says: “My best advice, if you are thinking of adopting a dog, is to forget about ‘looks’ and really think about your lifestyle. Are you active? Will the dog come hiking or running with you, or do you prefer to go for light strolls to DB Plaza and around Siena Park? If you hate hiking or exercising then a dog like a young Husky would be wrong for you; a



slightly older, smaller breed of dog would be much more suitable.”

The age factor is significant in more ways than one. Puppies and kittens can be a lot of work, whereas older animals, though still playful, are already toilet trained. Jacqui adds that potential adopters should also consider the age of their children. “If you have one child and then you get a puppy, then you have two children,” she says.

The wider issue

At any one time there can be 30 dogs in PAWS’ care, many of whom are street dogs who have been found wandering around the city, construction sites or villages, such as those in the New Territories, Lamma or Peng Chau. Jacqui says that there was a time when some villagers used to literally throw litters of puppies away. Nowadays, dogs and cats left by construction workers, when they have finished on a site, are the main concern.

PALS is working with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

(SPCA) to de-sex and microchip abandoned dogs, but both Jacqui and Kate point out that pet owners also have a part to play. “If everyone either spayed or neutered their pet, this would help control unnecessary pregnancies and the dog populations in Hong Kong,” Kate says. “It is just as important for male dogs to be de-sexed as it is females. As well as helping rescues like PAWS, it also has health benefits for our furry friends as it considerably reduces the risk of a number of cancers in dogs as well.”

Both PAWS and PALS take in a large number of ex-breeding dogs, which is why there are so many pedigree dogs at their regular fostering and adoption days in DB Plaza. Kate explains: “These dogs normally come to us at around three to six years of age, and they are normally pedigrees, such as Poodles, Pomeranians and Labradors, that were kept in cages at puppy-mill breeders. Once dogs are of no use to the breeders they will get rid of them, so we take them in and home them.”

Jacqui is currently lobbying LegCo to better police the breeders. “There will always be breeding, but there should be stringent rules,” she says. “It’s an immoral and unethical trade at the moment, whereby animals are treated like money. Life should not be bought in the shops.”

The need is great despite the Herculean efforts of local animal activists, like Jacqui and Kate. If you could provide a home for a pet, whether permanent or temporary, the benefits for your family could be huge. Why not take August 31 to think about it? **B**

Find it

- Hong Kong PAWS Foundation, www.hkpaws.org
- Protection of Animals Lantau South, www.pals.org.hk
- Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, www.sPCA.org.hk

Find more topical local information  @ www.arounddb.com