



**Yankee
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GOLDEN TIMES



In this issue

ASL: Not Just For Humans

Lori DiGisi tells the story of the unique partnership between YGRR and The Learning Center for the Deaf, where students gain hands-on experience while supporting the kennel and its daily operations. Through their work, and their use of American Sign Language, students form connections with dogs- including Marci, a deaf puppy whose confidence flourished.

Honzo's (Or Our) Adoption Story

Loving adopter, Hope, tells her account of adopting Honzo and her experience of opening her home to a dog with Hydrocephalus. Her unexpected connection with this little dog and how it helped her, and her family, heal from loss.

Playing With Your Dog - Part 2

Madyson Plante, Dog Education Specialist, discusses the perfect game and how play can be the key to helping your dog unlock a new level of joy and confidence.

ASL: Not Just For Humans

By Lori DiGisi

The YGRR kennel is a vibrant place where humans and dogs are constantly learning. There is a culture of inclusion and acceptance, understanding that dogs and humans come from a variety of backgrounds.

Everyone is focused on helping the dogs live in a clean, enriching environment filled with treats and love until their future adoption. Similarly, enriching students' environment is central to the mission of The Learning Center for the Deaf (TLC):

"to ensure that all deaf and hard of hearing children and adults thrive by having the knowledge, opportunity, and power to design the future of their choice."

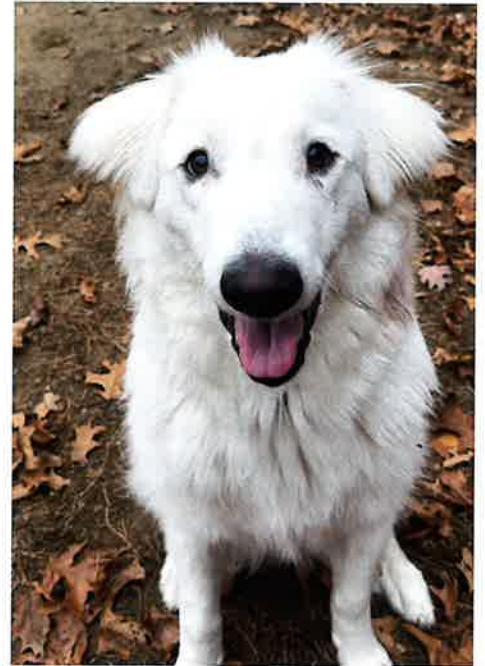
Therefore, when Joshua Vanik, a job coach at TLC, was asked by his supervisor to research opportunities for interns, Joshua met with Becca Toltz, the YGRR Kennel Manager, and found YGRR to be a place that would emphasize TLC students' strengths and abilities. Becca and Joshua developed an internship opportunity where TLC students helped with cleaning kennels, collecting and maintaining equipment, organizing supplies, and providing socialization for the dogs. The staff at YGRR were happy to demonstrate how different jobs needed to be performed, and the students quickly learned and showed pride in their work volunteering at the kennel.

One of the TLC seniors, Kevin Guman, signed up for the YGRR internship because he loves dogs and wanted to work with them. He signed, "I enjoy playing with dogs, and I like to make sure everything is clean and organized." Kevin cleaned kennels and helped to ensure all the equipment was organized for the staff. He was really excited to meet Marci, a deaf YGRR dog, and spent time playing with her. Marci's previous foster family had started teaching her ASL signs, and Kevin found that when he signed "sit," she would. Kevin was able to communicate with Marci, and she understood him. Joshua, who comes onsite with the students, also fell in love with Marci, spending an hour and

a half playing with her. If she nibbled on his hand, he would sign "no," and Marci understood.

Becca described seeing Joshua and the students interact with Marci: "I had taken them on a tour of the facility and gone over what their role would be in helping with the daily tasks at Yankee. We had just entered the training building for me to show them what needed to be done there, and for them to ask any questions they may have. When I finished going over everything and answering questions, I asked if they would like to meet a very special dog, Marci, the deaf Pyrenees mix puppy we had transferred from a rescue in TN. Within seconds of meeting Marci, both Joshua and his students were able to communicate to Marci how to run the entire agility course that was set up in the training building! More so, we had a see-saw at the time that all the dogs were terrified to go near. With Joshua and his students guiding her, Marci took on the challenge full of confidence you rarely see in a shelter dog! She did this several times, and with Joshua and the students' continued work, Marci went from a mouthy puppy to a well-rounded canine good citizen like I've never seen before! We often utilize hand cues as well as verbal cues when teaching dogs manners, but the use of ASL with a deaf puppy just goes to show the true bond and understanding that can be learned through sign language between dogs and humans."

Joshua continued to work with Marci on subsequent visits and shared his observations with the YGRR staff so that her adoptive family would be patient and ready for a successful adoption. Having completed his internship at YGRR, Kevin will graduate from TLC this year, and he plans to study technology in college next fall. When asked if he saw himself working with dogs in the future, Kevin signed, "I don't know if I would take a job with dogs in the future, but I could see myself working with a laptop in front of me and a dog by my side." Because ASL is such a visual language, and Kevin's expression was so clear, I understood his meaning even without an interpreter. This young man has a



Marci

bright future, and his love and care for dogs showed during his time at YGRR.

Joshua will continue to offer YGRR internships as part of TLC's strength-based approach to real-world internships. They are an integral part of helping students become prepared to leave the Deaf community of TLC. Jerome Dobson, the TLC Transition Coordinator, explained that TLC has 16 partnerships that help provide rich experiences in hearing environments where adults and peers recognize the positive contributions of TLC students. Fortunately, YGRR is one of these environments. Students benefit, and in the case of deaf dogs like Marci, YGRR benefits as well because ASL is not just for humans. Professional trainers utilize hand signals - a natural segue to ASL. But, as any trainer will tell you, communicating with confidence is the best way to help a dog understand. As Kevin and Joshua demonstrated with Marci, having someone who is experienced and confident in ASL benefits deaf dogs and the humans who care for them.