

NEADS Graduate brings Service Dogs to South Africa

By Pamela S. Hogle

A pioneer in the therapy dog field in South Africa, Lesley de Klerk has owned and operated the Progressive Dog Training Centre for nearly 10 years, and is the founder of Paws for People, South Africa's first fully licensed and insured therapy dog organization. Never a person to stand still, however, Lesley is determined to bring service dogs to the countless South Africans who could benefit from a canine assistant.

Teams from Paws for People regularly visit numerous organizations and institutions in and around Johannesburg, focusing on abused and abandoned children, physically and mentally challenged people of all ages, and centers for the frail elderly. Seminars run by Lesley and her volunteer handlers have laid the groundwork for the establishment of other therapy dog units in other parts of South Africa. Uniquely in South Africa, Paws for People adheres to standards set by the U.S.-based Delta society and requires that potential therapy dog-handler teams pass the Canine Good Citizens test and that the dogs pass stringent aptitude and temperament tests.



Lesley and her dogs are leading the way in South Africa with therapy dogs and assistance dogs.



A Shiloh shepherd demonstrates the important service dog skill of maneuvering in a narrow environment.

For Lesley, education of South African children in proper treatment and care of pets was a natural extension of her therapy dog work. Paws for People teams visit primary schools and, with the active participation of the therapy dogs, instruct the children on responsible pet ownership as well as educating them about assistance dogs.

Their years of work with Paws for People have given Lesley and her all-volunteer team of dog handlers a wide range of exposure to and experience working with clients with various disabilities. The next logical step for Lesley was training service dogs. With more than 15 years of dog training experience using motivational methods, all she was missing was the knowledge to teach specialized service dog tasks.

In May 2005, Lesley, along with fellow dog trainer and handler Jennifer Williams, took a huge step toward turning the dream of a full-fledged service dog organization into reality: They attended a 6-week service dog training course at NEADS (National Education for Assistance Dogs Services), in Princeton, MA. This course filled in the gaps in their knowledge, equipping them to move Paws for People to a new level.

Education and outreach will remain important tasks as Lesley and Jenny begin to create awareness of what a service dog is and how a dog can help a person with disabilities. In South Africa, most working dogs are used for guarding or hunting, and awareness of the other ways in which dogs can provide services is low.

Lesley's three Shiloh Shepherds and Golden Retriever, along with Jenny's three Labrador Retrievers — all trained as therapy dogs — are busily expanding their professional skills to include service dog tasks so they can assist in the educational efforts. Since returning to South Africa, Lesley has taught her own dogs such service dog skills as a highly refined retrieve and turning on lights. These dogs now serve as demo dogs for her fledgling program. In addition, she has begun converting a house she owns into premises for the service dog school. With adaptations to make the house accessible, she will have training and kennel space as well as a place to work with her service dog clients, all on one convenient, comfortable site.

Paws for People is online at www.pawsforpeople.co.za and Lesley can be contacted by email at lesley.deklerk@pixie.co.za. 🐾

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Canine Behavioral Genetics Project

Searching for Dogs with Anxiety-Related Behavioral Problems

We dog owners live with our dogs... work with our dogs...and play with our dogs. Not only are we intimately familiar with the behavior of our dogs, we also, often, have detailed information about the lineage of our dogs – information that allows us to explore the heredity of both physical and behavioral traits. As a result, we have an invaluable opportunity to contribute to an understanding of the relationship between genes and behavior.

To take advantage of this opportunity, as well as the recent draft sequencing of the canine genome, Dr. Steven Hamilton of the University of California, San Francisco and Dr. Karen Overall of the University of Pennsylvania are collaborating on a project focusing on the genetics of behavioral problems in dogs.

The goals of this project are:

1. To assess the amount and nature of genetic diversity within a broad range of the total number of domestic dogs.
2. To explore the relationship between genes and behavior, both normal and abnormal, in domestic dogs.

DNA samples of pure bred dogs or mixed breed dogs (if parents are of known breed) are needed for this research. Participation is simple and involves taking cheek swabs, a short questionnaire, and copies of pedigrees (if available). *All data submitted are strictly confidential.* For more information on the project and behavioral genetics, please visit website: <http://psych.ucsf.edu/k9behavioralgenetics> 🐾

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