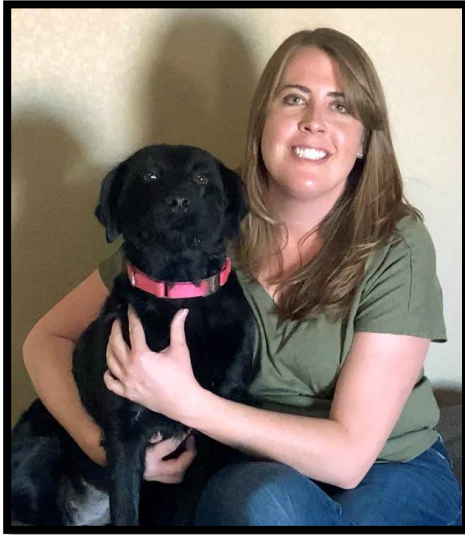


Sarah Lone and Layla



At the start of the Pandemic, I found myself alone without pets, after losing my senior dogs in the year leading up to and including January 2020. Being unable to continue my volunteer shifts at the local animal rescue, and missing my furry companionship, I looked into fostering. Animals have always been a big part of my life. I also have a senior horse who while good company is not the indoor companion a dog is, so I started fostering for a local rescue with the hopes of adopting a dog that would be a good fit for AAI therapy work. As someone in the medical field I knew of therapy animals and the work they do, and had seen them

at local hospitals, as well as heard stories of their impact on others. So, in a time of isolation and seeing the impact as a medical coder in the mental health arena decline, I felt called to pursue volunteer work where I could be a positive influence for others with something meaningful and comforting to me as well!

I began my foster adventure knowing it would take time, and with an open mind and just a few set criteria; I wanted a medium-sized dog, not short-haired, around 1-4 yrs old, good with people and other dogs. I fostered a good variety with 2 Blondes All Breed Rescue. Then in August of 2021, right around the time I was getting ready for a family camping trip, I saw a medium-sized scruffy terrier mix that was about 2 yrs old was being transported to the rescue from Texas and in need of a foster home. I wasn't sure if the timing would work but thinking this could be the one, I offered to foster and only had about 5 days to decide if I would adopt her or she would be posted to the website for adoption. So, in a leap of faith, I decided to keep her. She had been spayed the day I got her, and on meds and adapting to a whole new state and environment, so it would take time to see her personality and if she'd take to becoming a therapy dog. However, her loving



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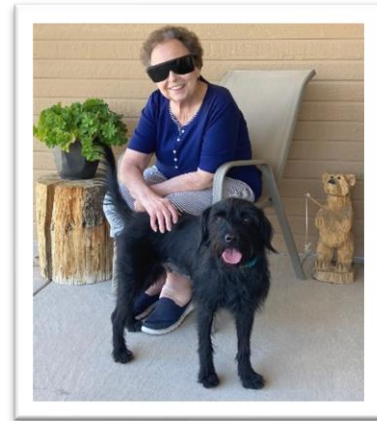


nature and desire to please was apparent right away. Finally, after introducing her to my family and seeing her take calmly to my Grandma (who was in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's) I knew this sweet girl would be a good fit for the job.



As with anything new, there was a transition period for both Layla and myself as we began our partnership. I was lucky to have had a lot of good tips from the rescue's trainers and from my experience with the previous 7 dogs fostered. We attended one leash training class after adoption with the rescue trainer who was awesome in giving me tips to move in a direction we needed. We spent countless hours visiting local home improvement and ranch supply stores, as well as farmers markets to practice everything that would be needed to pass an evaluation and have good doggie manners. Then in March of 2022 (just 7

months after adoption), we attended evaluations (me nervously) and yet Layla did great, receiving a predictable score and becoming an official therapy team with DPP. Since it was right as the pandemic was ending and things were just reopening, we started volunteering at RVU medical campus and started discussions and tours to get involved with visits at an Assisted Living Center. This was something I had in mind from the beginning because of my Grandma's battle with Alzheimer's. Luckily, she wasn't in a memory care unit, but knowing the struggles of the disease and not knowing if she ever would need that level of care, it felt like it would be a good fit for us.



Sadly a few months into our therapy work with DPP, Layla had to undergo a major surgery. I had noticed some intermittent limping shortly after adopting her, and after 3 vet opinions, we found out she had a condition known as luxating patella. At the time she was around 2.5 yrs old and being a very active dog who loves chasing the ball, we decided that the surgery would be the best option for longevity. So, in June of 2022 and with lots of support from family and friends, Layla had bilateral knee

surgery. With that came 10 weeks of leash restriction and being carried up and down the stairs. It was a difficult time for us both. Just like with people not being able to work, I could tell it was tough on Layla, so after we hit 6 weeks of leash restriction, we went back to RVU (knowing they have elevators) and she was able to visit with staff and students which lifted her spirits too! After ongoing rehab and care, I'm happy to report that Layla has recovered and is able to enjoy her favorite activities, which include chasing the ball, car rides, and climbing into people's laps for hugs and attention.

Layla and I routinely visit Peakview Assisted Living, both the senior living and memory care, on Wednesday afternoons.

Layla eagerly says hello and gets her treat from the front desk before starting her rounds in the community areas. One thing that I noticed early on in our visits with memory care, is that even when people struggle with memory, one thing that most can always talk about is pets. On one special occasion at senior living, we were called up to a tenant's room because she couldn't make it to the common area. She was so happy and grateful, showing us pictures of her dogs and telling us we were the highlight of her day! Sadly, in December 2023 we



lost my grandmother to her battle with Alzheimer's. I was able to visit her at home when she transitioned to comfort care and, of course, Layla accompanied me. Layla has always been so intuitive and was able to comfort not only my grandma in her last days, but all of the family as well.



Layla and I now attend CU Dental School occasionally along with RVU medical campus. We enjoy adding in a variety of people, ages, and settings to our routine senior visits at Peakview. We have also attended a handful of special events over the years from DU Destress to JADPRO, which was a great opportunity to discuss and demonstrate the impact that therapy animals have in the medical field in a conference setting directed to medical professionals. Volunteering with DPP has been a blessing to us as much as it has to those we visit, and we look forward to continuing to work with, and meet lots of new people with plenty of smiles and tail wags.

DPP Team of the Month (April 2024)

