

Imperfectly Perfect Pets



Natural Therapies Transform Lives

by Sandra Murphy

Pets, like humans, can face physical and mental challenges. Today's fresh approaches help pets replace disabilities with abilities and lead fuller, happier lives.

Physical Adaptations

Zach, a rescued cat, welcomes foster pets to Paw Prints in the Sand Animal Rescue, in Newport Beach, California, teaching kittens cleanliness, and good manners to dogs. "We can't imagine life without him," says Monica Sederholm, co-founder of the organization. A congenital condition causing irregular bone growth in his shoulder blades, fused bones and a missing kneecap hasn't stopped him. Muscle pain keeps him from retracting his claws, but daily massages help him relax.

Although Zach remains mobile, walking

is difficult or sometimes impossible when an animal is missing a limb or paralyzed. Designed for specific disabilities and fitted for size, a wheelchair cart provides freedom most cats and dogs embrace. Rescue volunteers and adoptive parents must keep clutter off the floors, supervise and remove the cart to allow for comfortable naps.

Gwen Cooper, author of *Homer's Odyssey: A Fearless Feline Tale, or How I Learned about Love and Life with a Blind Wonder Cat* and the *Curl Up with a Cat Tale* series, adopted Homer, a blind kitten

from Miami. "Never having sight, he wasn't afraid to take risks," she explains. "He climbed, explored and played with our other cats." When a move to Manhattan, New York, presented a scary prospect for Cooper, Homer inspired her, saying, "Homer didn't let fear of the unknown trip him up. He taught me the relationships you're sure you don't want can be the most meaningful."

"Dottie CrazyPants, a rescued Harlequin Great Dane with severe skin and ear infections and a dysfunctional immune system, had no quality of life until I tried holistic treatments," says Lara Katz, executive director of the North Carolina Therapeutic Riding Center, in Mebane. Dottie didn't gain weight, even though she ate a lot and drank gallons of water a day, resulting in indoor accidents. "A raw food diet resolved many health and housebreaking issues."

Discontinuing regular medications left Dottie miserable and nearly unable to walk. "A massage therapist said her energy centers were blocked," Katz says. "After an energy medicine treatment, Dottie slept through the night for the first time in months. Her paws looked better short term."

A combination of holistic treatments including cold laser and red-light therapy, Chinese herbs, an anti-yeast protocol and probiotics works best. Katz also uses only eco-friendly cleaning and laundry products.

"Certified through the Alliance of Therapy Dogs, Dottie's visits take a bit of management because of the types of cleaning

products used in nursing homes. It's worth it. She's completely changed my lifestyle regarding how many toxins we're exposed to daily."

Emotional Relief

Tracy Krulik, a certified canine separation anxiety trainer in northern Virginia and the Washington, D.C. area, is a graduate of Jean Donaldson's Academy for Dog Trainers. "Using videoconferencing, I can watch my client's dogs at home, see when panic starts and create daily training plans to keep them safely calm."

Feldenkrais practitioner and author of *Grow Young with Your Dog: Learn How You and Your Canine Companion Can Feel Better at Any Age!* Mary Debono, of Encinitas, California, sees a variety of pets. "I invited an Arabian named Easy to be the demo horse during a class I taught," she recalls. "Sore all over, he couldn't lift his feet high enough to step over a pole lying on the ground." Easy showed dramatic improvement through Feldenkrais, which focuses on improved function, rebooting the body by interrupting the cycle of pain and tension, so that the patient realizes change is possible.

Debono also treated a rabbit that didn't like to be touched. "I used the eraser end of a pencil through an opening in his crate. Non-habitual touch gets the attention of the nervous system; areas of tension are sore, so gentle lifts provide relief." Without pain, movement is easier and behavior improves.

Lesson Learned

Sandy Johnson, former actress and author of *The Pet Healer Project* and *Miracle Dogs: Adventures on Wheels*, in Los Angeles, was in recovery from Stage 4 kidney cancer when she adopted Charley, a Brussels Griffon. "Her singlemindedness taught me my greatest lesson about the body's ability to heal," she says.

Animals show less concern about

blindness, a bum knee or even the need for a wheelchair than humans do. People that live with special needs animals are quick to say the benefits far outweigh the cost. When we're open to the possibilities, such pets offer lessons in living life to the fullest.

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Inspired Services and Stories

Educational Resources

- Video of Feldenkrais practitioner Mary Debono working with a cattle dog at DebonoMoves.com
- Help for rescuing blind, deaf and wheelchair dogs and cats at PetsWithDisabilities.org
- Equipment for special needs pets at HandicappedPets.com
- Answers to questions about animal wheelchairs, from a no-kill-shelter advocacy group courtesy of BestFriends.org

Special Pet Journeys

- Beaux Tox, a Labrador with a smooshed face, loves his transformed life, Tinyurl.com/LabradorsNewLife
- Starfish, the dog, learned to walk and run after a rough start, Tinyurl.com/NewlyMobilePooch
- Pumpkin, a dwarf mini-pony, not only walked, but ran after receiving custom braces, InspireMore.com/dwarf-pony