

WAG WELCOMES DOG WHISPERER

Bark Busters changing lives, reducing stress

By Alison Taylor / Pique Newsmagazine

When Harry and Potter came to Whistler Animals Galore this summer there was nothing magical about their lives.

It was obvious that Harry, a five-year-old border collie, had been fending for himself for a long time. His buddy Potter, a black lab cross pup with an infected puncture on his muzzle, couldn't stand to be without him.

They had been surviving on their own for so long that when Harry and Potter were put in separate kennels at WAG they dug deep in the ground to crawl under the fence, cutting their faces and getting stuck in the process.

They seemed like hopeless causes — with no social skills, high stress levels and lots of loud barking.

And then Sandy Yates from Bark Busters came along and changed their lives forever in a few short weeks.

Bark Busters has a unique way of training problem dogs and while Yates generally works with private clients, she offers her services free of charge to help the animals at WAG.

"The nice thing about working with WAG is that it really gets back to the roots of how Bark Busters started," said Yates.

The company, like Yates herself, hails from Australia where its founder, Sylvia Wilson, started obedience training dogs in the animal shelter where she worked.

"She was the dog whisperer of Wollongong," laughed Yates.

Soon, however, Wilson's whispers paid off into several franchises, which now stretch around the world.

Yates brought the Bark Busters franchise to the Sea to Sky corridor and the Sunshine Coast a few months ago.

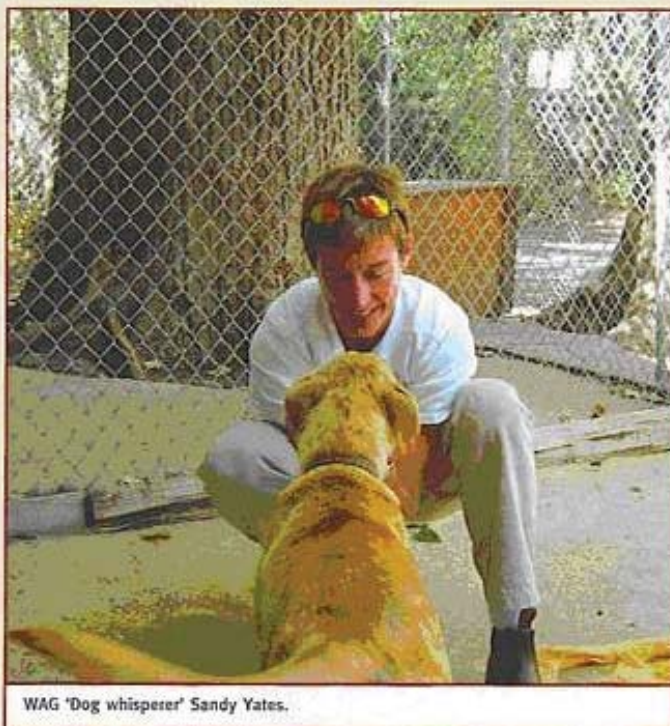
She now counts the once hopeless cases of Harry and Potter among her success stories.

But more importantly, her work has had a huge impact on overall life at the small animal shelter.

"It's been amazing," said Joanne Russell, WAG's shelter manager.

"I've seen such quick results."

Yates's training has set rules and boundaries in the shelter. She makes it clear that the humans are the leaders of the pack, a basic premise behind



WAG 'Dog whisperer' Sandy Yates.

the Bark Buster's philosophy.

"In the dog world there has to be a leader," explained Yates.

Problem dogs or disobedient dogs are the result of those dogs believing they are higher up in the pecking order than humans.

There are various techniques for humans to assert their role as leader in the house. Most important said Yates is to be aware of your body language and your tone of voice.

Yates demonstrates her technique with one of the shelter's four playful shepherd pups.

The pups were born in June in Mount Currie, picked up on the side of the road and brought to WAG.

It wasn't clear if it was Odie, Chili, Bitsy or Comet chewing on the side

of the wall, but Yates was able to make the pup stop with a rough staccato growl sound that come out as "BAH!"

When the pup stopped momentarily, Yates lavished praise.

But soon the pup was gnawing on the side of the wall again.

Another rough "BAH!" was followed up with a spritz of water from a spray bottle. Again she lavished praise and that was enough to deter the pup from its path.

But dominance and misbehaviour is sometimes not as obvious as chewing on the wall.

For example, if a dog comes up to you and nudges your hand for a pat or rolls over on his/her back for a tummy rub, that's a way of dominating their owners.

"As soon as we do that (pat them or rub their bellies), they say 'gotcha!'" said Yates.

The best thing to do she said is simply ignore the request. Let the dog give up and walk away and then call him/her back for a pat.

The same is true for dogs that walk ahead of their owners or run out of the door before their owners.

The leader must always lead, explained Yates.

Ultimately the Bark Busters training has lowered the stress levels for dogs at the shelter and made it a happier place for all the dogs to live.

Yates has also worked with WAG's long-term volunteers, and set up training for the staff and volunteers.

Russell explained that shelter life is not ideal for the dogs. Not all dogs are vaccinated when they come in, many need time to heal from their surgery and because they live in such close proximity, the dogs pick up on each other's stresses.

And a highly stressed dog is not an adoptable dog she added.

WAG needed a system like Bark Busters that would provide quick results.

"It was what we needed here because we don't have the manpower to do a long term program," said Russell.

The Bark Busters training is now an integral part of life at WAG.

And as for Harry and Potter?

Within weeks of coming to the shelter and working closely with Yates and the shelter volunteers, Harry and Potter learned to be apart.

They are now happily adopted in separate homes.

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