

MARCH 2026

THE PAW[®]

MAGAZINE

Daisy- Rescued 2008

CAN A
RESCUE DOG
CHANGE A
LIFE?

www.WPP.dog

THE PAW[®] MAGAZINE

VOL. 4 ISSUE 3

MARCH 2026

WRITE TO: 12644 CHAPEL ROAD #193
CLIFTON VA 20124

PHONE: 703-503-9449

WOUNDED PAW PROJECT[®] EXISTS
TO END THE CYCLE OF ABUSE FOR
DOGS EVERYWHERE.

WE RESCUE, REHABILITATE, AND
ADVOCATE FOR THE VOICELESS—
AND WE FIGHT FOR SECOND
CHANCES WITH COURAGE,
COMPASSION,
AND UNWAVERING COMMITMENT.

WWW.WPP.DOG

INFO@WPP.DOG



PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY
WOUNDED PAW PROJECT[®]
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Table Of **Contents**

06

Rescue Dogs and Mental Health

14

National K9 Veterans Day

20

Building a Calm Home

26

Squeaky Toy Pawduct Review

A WORD FROM THE FOUNDER...

The cover of this month's issue poses a question many families quietly discover for themselves: Can a rescue dog change a life?

For me, the answer began with Daisy.

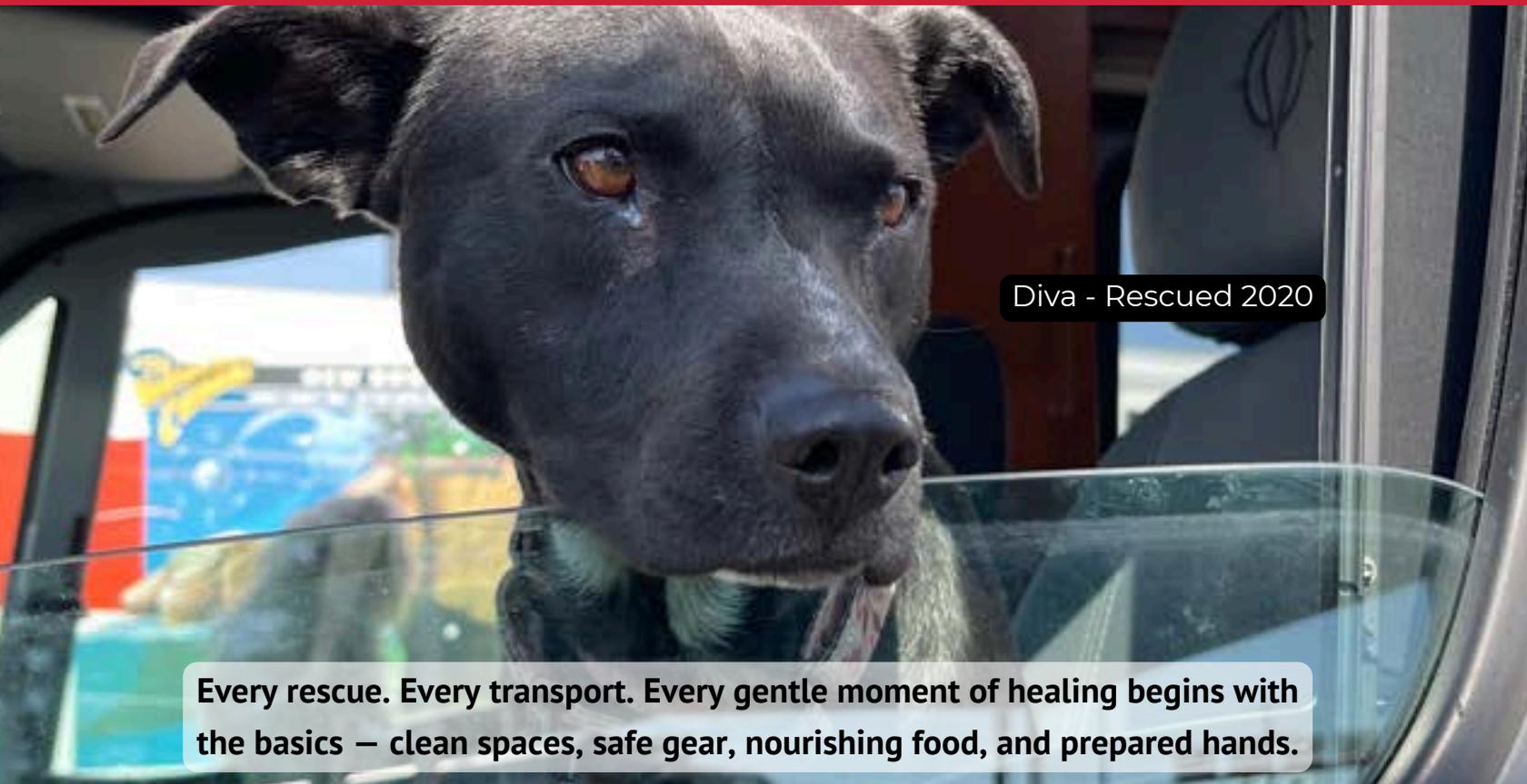
She entered our home to help my children navigate the uncertainty of military deployments. Years later, when I returned carrying injuries that extended far beyond what could be seen, her role shifted. She didn't arrive with specialized training or commands. What she offered was consistency. Presence. Expectation-free companionship during a season that felt anything but steady.

This issue explores how rescued dogs support mental health through structure, movement, touch, and responsibility. The science now explains what many of us have experienced firsthand — dogs can help regulate stress, restore routine, and reconnect us to purpose.

On March 26th, Wounded Paw Project® marks ten years. The mission was born from lived experience, not theory. Daisy showed us what steady care can do. We've been building on that lesson ever since.

With gratitude and determination,
Ernesto P. Hernandez III
Founder of Wounded Paw Project®





Diva - Rescued 2020

Every rescue. Every transport. Every gentle moment of healing begins with the basics – clean spaces, safe gear, nourishing food, and prepared hands.

When you donate tangible supplies to Wounded Paw Project®, you're doing more than giving items. You're freeing critical funds for medical care, emergency response, and rehabilitation – where they're needed most.

Supplies That Fuel the Mission

For Pawville Farms®:

- Dog-safe cleaning supplies
- Chicken feed & bedding
- Gardening tools (hand tools, gloves, durable hoses)
- Storage bins & weatherproof totes

For WPP Rescues & Transport:

- Collars, slip leads & harnesses
- Crates & transport carriers
- Blankets and towels
- First aid supplies (vet wraps, gauze, saline)
- Gas gift cards for transport volunteers

Giving is simple – and every item makes an immediate impact.

Email us at donations@woundedpawproject.org and tell us what you'd like to donate, and we'll guide you through next steps.

SHE WAS THERE BEFORE THE WAR CAME HOME

*How Daisy Helped Spark the Healing Behind
Wounded Paw Project® — and What Rescued Dogs
Teach Us About Mental Health*

Long before the Purple Heart. Long before the prescriptions. Long before the pain followed him home. There was Daisy.

Daisy, a pit bull/labrador shelter rescue, was adopted to help Ernesto P Hernandez III's children cope with his military deployments. Like many military families, goodbyes were part of life. Daisy became stability for the kids — something warm and constant in uncertainty.

She was meant to comfort them. No one knew she would one day help comfort him.



Daisy - Rescued 2008

When Ernesto returned home from Iraq with injuries that earned him a Purple Heart, the visible wounds were only part of the story. Chronic pain became daily reality. Invisible injuries — the kind that alter sleep, mood, and nervous system regulation — quietly reshaped life at home.

Doctors worked to treat the physical damage. Medications attempted to manage the pain. But trauma does not always respond neatly to prescriptions.

And somewhere in that difficult season, Daisy did something small — but powerful.

She connected first.

The First to Reach Him

Trauma can create distance. Even in loving homes. Even in strong families. There is often a quiet period of disconnection while the nervous system recalibrates — or struggles to.

Daisy noticed.

Rescue dogs are often highly attuned to emotional shifts. Having experienced instability themselves, many develop a sensitivity to tone, posture, and energy.

Daisy began staying closer. Sitting



longer. Resting her head against him without invitation.

She did not ask questions.
She did not require explanations.
She did not need him to be “better.”

She simply stayed.

And in that steady presence, something began to soften.

She wasn't a trained service dog. She wasn't performing tasks on command. But she was regulating the space around him in ways science now helps explain.

What Was Really Happening

Today, research gives language to what families like Ernesto's experienced intuitively.

Dogs reduce cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone.

Dogs increase oxytocin, which fosters bonding and trust.

Dogs lower heart rate and blood pressure.

Dogs create grounding through physical touch and proximity.

When someone lives in a heightened stress state — common after combat exposure — the nervous system remains on alert. Hypervigilance, irritability, withdrawal, and disrupted sleep often follow.

Daisy's presence became a daily intervention.

She required walks — which meant movement and sunlight.

She required feeding — which meant routine and structure.

She offered physical contact — which meant calming neurological input.

She anchored the present moment when the past felt loud.

Without clinical terminology, she was helping regulate a body and mind that had been living in survival mode.

Why Rescue Dogs Can Be Especially Transformative

Daisy's role as a rescue dog matters.

Rescued animals often understand uncertainty. They have navigated instability. Many develop heightened awareness of their environment and the emotional states of those around them.

This does not mean every rescue dog arrives healed. It means that when stability and safety are provided, many become deeply responsive companions.

Rescue dogs frequently:

- Mirror calm behavior
- Seek closeness during emotional distress
- Respond quickly to subtle shifts in tone or posture



Daisy - Rescued 2008

- Form strong attachment bonds once trust is established

For someone navigating invisible wounds, that responsiveness can feel profoundly stabilizing.

There is something uniquely powerful about healing happening in both directions.

In caring for Daisy, Ernesto wasn't just receiving support. He

was providing it. Responsibility became purpose. Purpose became momentum.

And healing began.

What This Means for Mental Health

Daisy's story is deeply personal. But the lessons extend far beyond one household.

Rescued dogs can support mental health in ways that are both emotional and physiological.

Here's how:

Routine Rebuilds Stability

Mental health challenges often disrupt daily structure. Dogs require consistency. That consistency restores rhythm.

Touch Calms the Nervous System

Ten minutes of petting a dog can measurably lower stress markers. Regular contact reinforces regulation.

Responsibility Reduces Rumination

Depression and anxiety often thrive in isolation and overthinking. Caring for a dog shifts attention outward.

Movement Supports Mood

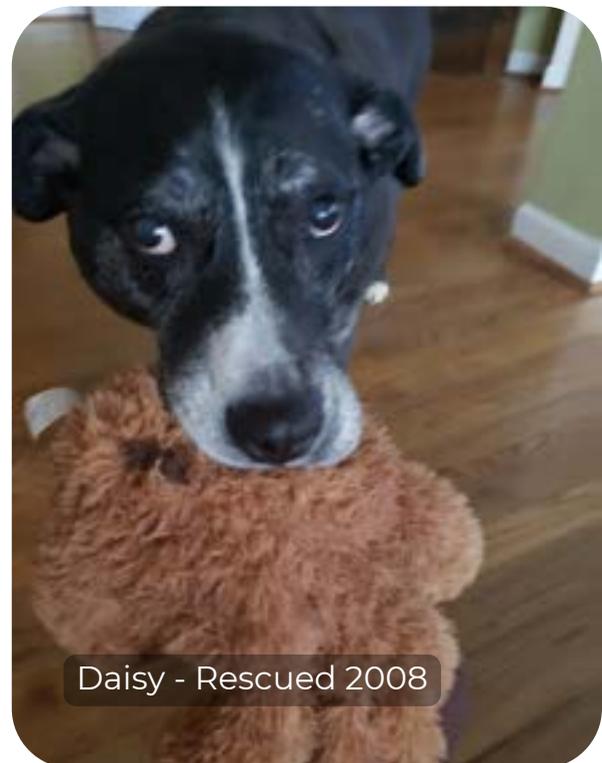
Daily walks increase endorphins and improve sleep quality. Physical activity is one of the most evidence-

supported tools for emotional resilience.

Rescue Creates Meaning

Adopting a shelter dog introduces purpose. Offering safety to an animal who once lacked it reinforces self-efficacy — the belief that you are capable of making a difference.

It is important to say clearly: dogs are not replacements for therapy, medication, or professional support. But they can be powerful complements to both.



Daisy - Rescued 2008

From One Connection to a Mission

In 2016, what began as a personal journey became something larger. Ernesto and Daisy formally founded Wounded Paw Project® to give other shelter dogs a second tail in life®.

The organization was not born from strategy alone.

It was born from experience.

Daisy had been adopted to help children through deployment. Years later, she became the first to reach the very person who once left to serve.

Her impact was not dramatic or theatrical. It was steady. Quiet. Consistent.

And that consistency sparked a broader realization:



Daisy - Rescued 2008

If one rescued dog could help reconnect a wounded veteran to his own life, how many others might do the same for someone else?

Ten Years Later

Ten years after its founding, Wounded Paw Project® stands as a reflection of Daisy's original gift: connection.

She did not erase pain.
She did not eliminate trauma.
She sparked healing.

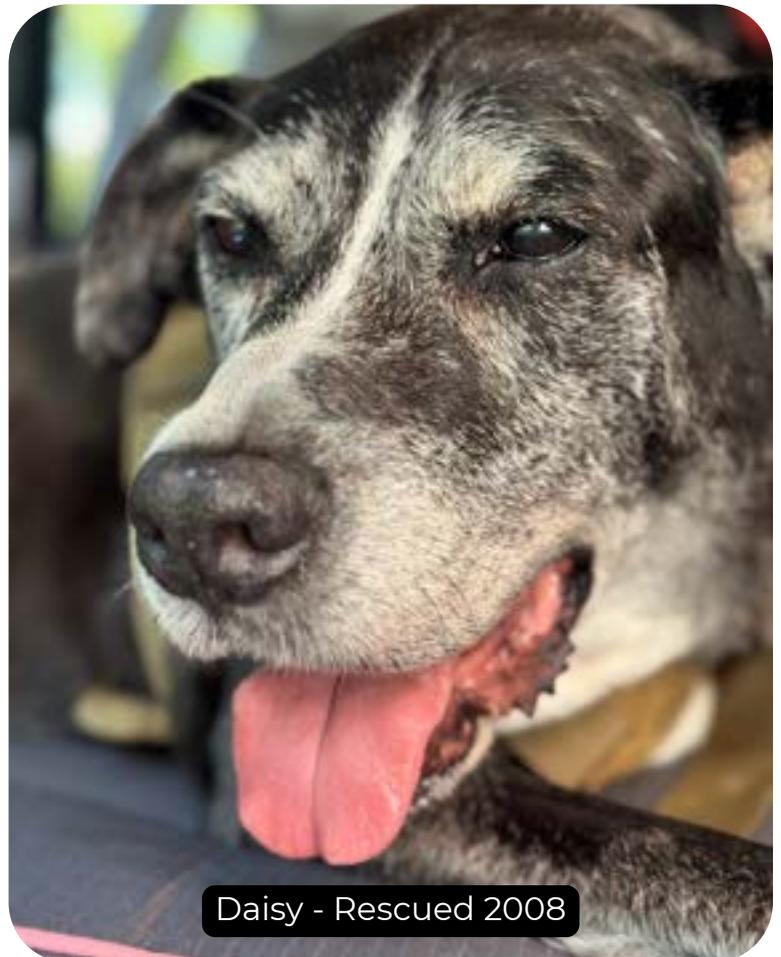
She proved that presence matters. That routine matters. That attachment matters.

And she demonstrated something many families now understand firsthand — rescued dogs do not just need homes.

Sometimes, they help rebuild them.

For readers navigating stress, transition, loss, or emotional strain, Daisy's story offers a simple but profound reminder:

Healing is relational. And sometimes, the first step forward is already waiting at your feet.



National K9 Veterans Day

Service Doesn't End When the Uniform Comes Off

They did not volunteer.

They were trained, assigned, and relied upon.

On **March 13—National K9 Veterans Day**, we honor military and working dogs whose lives were shaped by discipline, danger, and loyalty. These dogs protected lives, supported missions, and stood between harm and the people they served.

Service leaves a mark.

Working K9s operate in high-stress environments where precision is expected and hesitation carries consequences. Some injuries are visible—worn joints, scars, exhaustion earned over years of duty. Others are quieter: heightened vigilance, difficulty transitioning out of structure, stress that lingers after the work ends.

When the job is over, responsibility remains.

At Wounded Paw Project®, we believe honoring service means caring for what comes next. It is responsibility in action.

On this day, we recognize K9 veterans not with ceremony alone, but with commitment—because loyalty does not expire when the uniform comes off.

NATIONAL K9 VETERANS DAY

• MARCH 13 •



They served without choice.

They protected without hesitation.

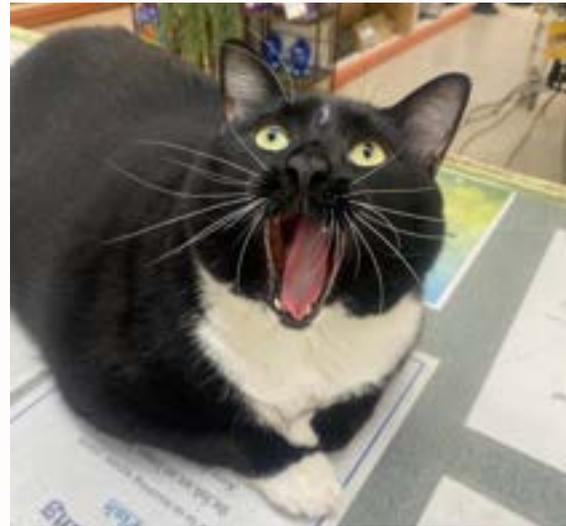
They gave everything without recognition.

Military and working dogs are veterans.

Their service does not end when the uniform comes off.

At Wounded Paw Project® we honor K9 veterans.





MEET BLUEZ!

LOCAL LOVE: PET OF THE MONTH

At Wounded Paw Project®, the work may focus on dogs, but the heart behind it belongs to every animal who brings people together.



CUZ KOOL KATZ
WANNA HELP
SAVE DOGZ TOO





Bluez - Rescued 2020

Bluez is a big, bold tuxedo cat with a habit of showing up exactly where he's needed—and a story that proves that sometimes, the coolest cats are part of the mission too.

He arrived at Burke Nursery & Garden Centre (Burke, VA) in 2020, tucked quietly into a hay bale

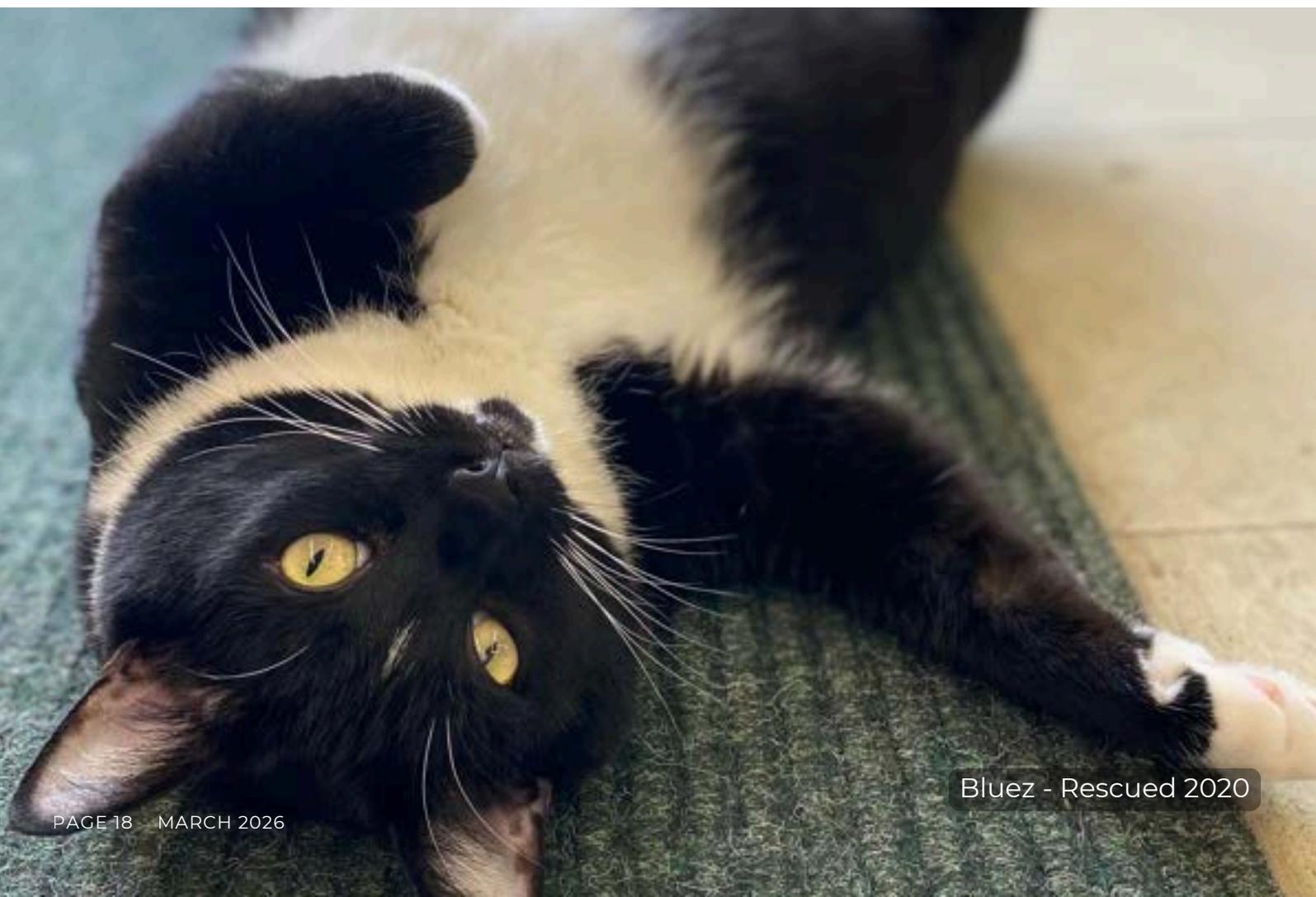
shipment, and quickly made it clear he had found his place. What began as an unexpected arrival turned into a permanent role as the nursery's unofficial greeter, supervisor, and resident lap inspector.

Bluez spends his days following customers through the store,

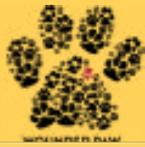
keeping a watchful eye on plant selections, and climbing into laps like it's always been part of the plan.

For many regulars, a visit to Burke Nursery isn't complete without a moment with Bluez —whether it's a quick hello or an unplanned cuddle.

Bluez reminds us that community shows up in many forms—and that sometimes, a cool cat helps carry the mission forward simply by bringing people together.



Bluez - Rescued 2020



From Landfill to Loved: Luna & Diva's Story

Learn how your home loan can help save a dog's life.

HELP SAVE A LIFE



Luna and Diva were discovered in a landfill, barely alive — traumatized, clinging to each other, after watching their siblings crushed by heavy machinery.



Wounded Paw Project® pulled them from the wreckage and rushed them into emergency care. Today, Diva and Luna are thriving with warm beds, full bowls, and humans who treasure them.

You can help dogs like Diva and Luna when you get your mortgage through Capital Bank Home Loans, a local bank committed to helping animals and veterans alike.

For every loan closed, **Capital Bank will donate \$1,000 to Wounded Paw Project¹** to help rehabilitate and rehome dogs in need.

GET STARTED TODAY



How to Build a Calm Home for a Rescued Dog

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO HELPING YOUR NEW DOG FEEL SAFE, SETTLED, AND UNDERSTOOD

Bringing a rescued dog into your home is an act of love—but for the dog, it can also be overwhelming. New smells. New sounds. New people. Even the kindest home can feel like too much, too fast.

A calm home doesn't mean a silent one. It means **predictable, patient, and safe**. It means allowing your dog

to settle before being asked to perform, obey, or impress.

At Wounded Paw Project®, we've seen it again and again: healing begins when safety comes first.

This guide walks you through how to build a calm, supportive environment that allows rescued dogs to regulate their nervous systems, build trust, and truly arrive.

Step 1: Start With One Safe Space

Before your dog explores your entire home, give them one quiet place they can claim as their own.

This space should require nothing from them—no interaction, no expectations.



Luna - Rescued 2020

Include:

- A crate (door open), pen, or quiet corner
- Soft bedding that stays in place
- Fresh water nearby
- Distance from doors, televisions, and heavy foot traffic

Step 2: Anchor the Day With Routine

Dogs who have experienced instability learn to stay alert. Routine tells them they don't have to.

Establish consistent:

- Feeding times
- Potty breaks
- Walk schedules
- Morning and evening rhythms

Step 3: Lower the Sensory Load

Many rescued dogs are sensitive to noise and movement. A busy home



Roxie - Rescued 2024



Diva - Rescued 2020

can keep their nervous system stuck in “high alert.”

Start by:

- Keeping TVs and music low
- Avoiding sudden shouting or loud laughter
- Using white noise or soft background music
- Closing windows during peak street noise

Step 4: Let the Dog Control Connection

Affection should always be an invitation—not an expectation.

Instead of reaching toward your dog:

- Sit nearby and allow them to approach
- Turn your body sideways
- Let sniffing come first
- Respect retreat every time

Step 5: Communicate Calmly

Dogs read tone, posture, and movement far more than words.

Practice:

- Soft, steady voices
- Slow, deliberate movements
- Gentle praise without constant chatter

Step 6: Protect Them From Too Much, Too Soon

Early overwhelm can undo progress.

In the first weeks:

- Limit visitors
- Avoid busy outings
- Introduce new people one at a time
- Advocate for your dog's space

Step 7: Learn the Language of Stress

Stress isn't always loud. Watch for:

- Excessive yawning
- Lip licking
- Turning away
- Freezing or pacing
- Avoiding eye contact

A calm home isn't built in a day. It's created through patience, consistency, and respect for where a dog is—not where we want them to be. When safety comes first, trust follows. And with trust, healing begins.



A Calm Home Checklist



A quiet safe space



Consistent routine



Low noise level



Choice-based affection



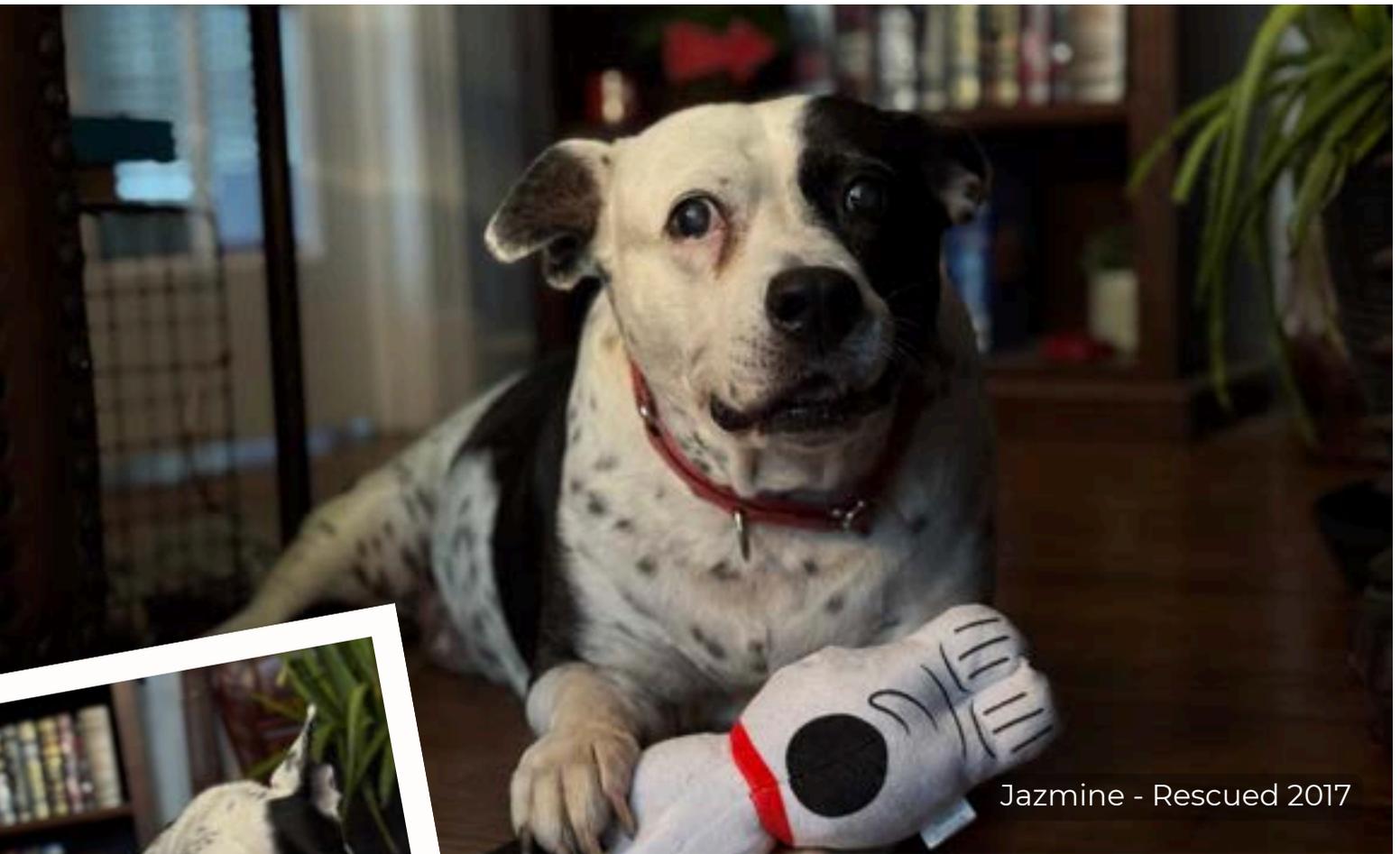
Slow introductions



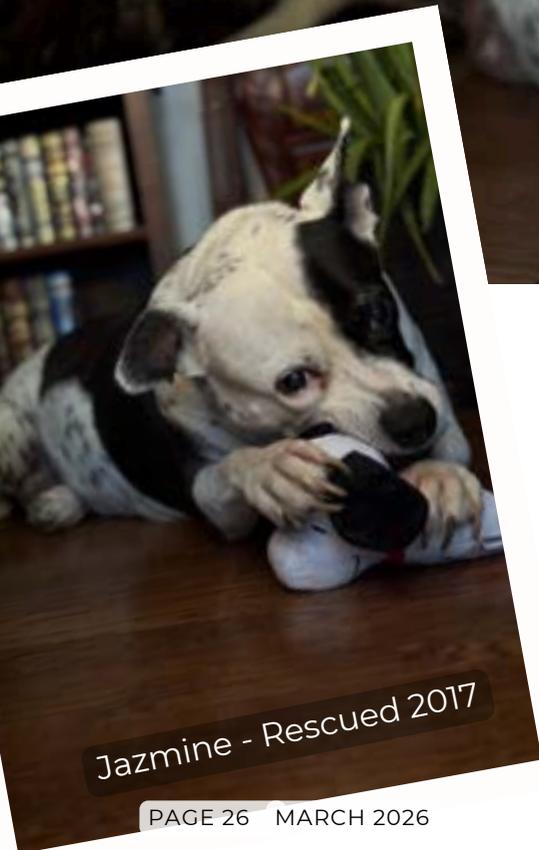
Watch for stress signals

JAZMINE'S PAWDUCT REVIEW: THE PLUSH TOY THAT MET ITS MATCH

BITE FORCE® DURABLE PLUSH



Jazmine - Rescued 2017



Jazmine - Rescued 2017

Hi. I'm Jazmine.

I've been around long enough to know a thing or two about toys.

Most plush toys arrive full of promise and

leave... quickly. Some don't survive the first squeak. Some give up their stuffing like it was never meant to stay inside. So when this **Bite Force® Durable Plush** showed up, I did what any responsible dog would do—I tested it thoroughly.

First, I claimed it. That part is important.

I picked it up, carried it around the house, and made sure everyone knew it was mine. The texture passed immediately—soft enough to hold close, but not flimsy. Then came the real work: chewing, tugging, repositioning it

just right between my paws. The seams didn't flinch. The squeaker stayed strong. Respect.

What surprised me most is that it didn't rush me. Some toys are too exciting. Some are too boring. This one lets me play hard and settle in when I'm ready. I can gnaw quietly, rest my chin on it, or just hold it while I think about things. That matters.

It's still here. No loose threads. No dramatic failure. Just a toy that understands commitment.

I don't give five paws easily. But this one earned them.



Jazmine - Rescued 2017



Jazmine - Rescued 2017

Final verdict:



*Durable. Dependable.
Worth guarding with
my life.*

— Jazmine

Our mission is stronger because of partners like you. Together, we are creating safer futures for animals in need.





SADIE

SAYS

YOUR DOG NEEDS TRAINING

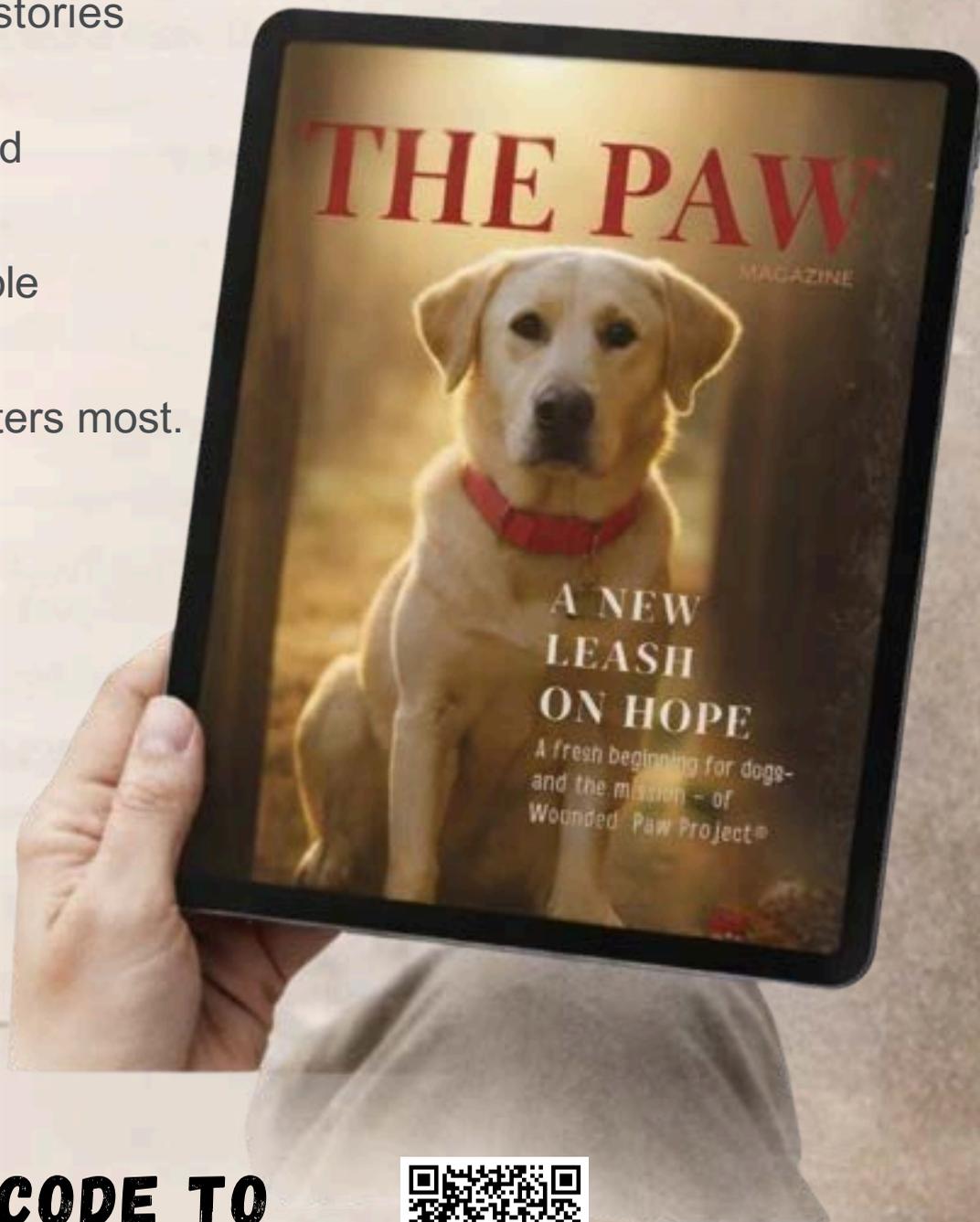
Because walks alone don't fix anxiety, fear, or bad habits. Dogs don't magically "turn out fine." Training builds trust, socialization prevents fear-based reactions, and advocacy (speaking up for your dog's limits) keeps everyone safe. Do it on repeat and you're not just raising a good dog—you're preventing trauma before it starts. That's healing in motion, every single day.

FREE. DIGITAL. DELIVERED.

The PAW® Magazine - Straight to Your Inbox

Every issue of **The PAW® Magazine** tells the stories that matter most—rescued dogs, second chances, healing in motion, and the people who stand up for animals when it matters most.

Now you can receive every digital issue for free, delivered directly to your inbox.



**SCAN QR CODE TO
JOIN OUR MAILING LIST**



This is what a second chance looks like.

The ride that changes everything.



Kane didn't always know what freedom felt like. He came to Wounded Paw Project from Washington, D.C., having survived a life no dog should know. Today, what you see in the mirror isn't his past-it's his future. Vehicle donations help make journeys like this possible. They support rescue, rehabilitation, and the road forward for dogs like Kane-and the people who walk beside them. Turn your vehicle into a second chance.
woundedpawproject.org/vehicle-donations



From shelter to riding shotgun.