



# QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

NINTH EDITION [APRIL 2023]

## WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE

### ADOPTION STORIES

DIEGO..... 3-4

KARA..... 6

### RESCUES

YUKI..... 1-2

KODA..... 5

### & MORE!

FRESH FACES..... 7

**Our mission is to improve the quality of lives of stray dogs through rescue, rehabilitation and re-homing them; to increase public awareness and acceptance of stray dogs as companion animals and that they deserved to be treated with compassion and kindness.**



## AMAZING GRACE: YUKI'S STORY & CHANCE AT LIFE

### AN UNIDENTIFIED INJURY PROVED TO BE A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

Like many strays, Yuki's story is a story experienced by hundreds of strays in the far reaches of Singapore. Strays (both cats and dogs) find ways to survive and live in harmony, often in less populated industrial areas. For unfamiliar eyes, these animals may be labeled as "pests" leading to the hiring of private pest control companies to remove the animals. In a process called "surrendering" the captured strays are handed over to the Animal & Veterinary Service (AVS) where they are examined, checked for visible injuries and diseases, sterilisation tattoos (on the inside of their ear) and scanned for a microchip.

Surrendered strays are compiled onto a list that is periodically shared with Animal Welfare Groups (AWGs) to redeem should they have the capacity to do so. The list states that the dogs' options are to be "rehomed, relocated and as a last resort, euthanasia."

Yuki's assessment file showed a serial number (she did not yet have a name), notes on her visible injuries ("digital paw pad of right hindlimb peeling off") and her behaviour ("fearful at admission, no aggression displayed"). Attached to her file was a photo of a fawn-coloured dog facing the wall, curled in a corner, tail wrapped protectively around her leg. Yuki, like many other strays when first brought indoors, appeared scared.

One day after redeeming Yuki from AVS, shelter volunteers noticed Yuki limping on her right hind leg. Yuki was quickly sent to the hospital for an assessment.

X-rays revealed a shocking break of her right femur, estimated to have been broken 6-8 weeks earlier.

To correct the broken and misaligned leg, a specialist needed to be consulted. Yuki underwent the procedure with no amputation, and is now recovering in the shelter. The vets working on Yuki remarked that despite her condition, she was sweet, calm and resilient. Yuki may need to undergo physical rehabilitation, and it may take up to four months for Yuki to regain her leg function.

## YUKI'S STORY

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Although Yuki's journey ahead is long and requires many resources (surgery, medicine and post-operation follow-up hovers around \$10,000), it is worth it to see her comfortable and smiling at the shelter with a bright future ahead.

Had the broken leg been identified when Yuki was surrendered and examined she might not have not qualified for rehabilitation or relocation. With no last resort or support, Yuki may have been euthanised. Yuki's resilience and calmness despite a severely broken leg was the saving grace that brought her into the care of MercyLight.

It is challenging enough for an able-bodied dog to adapt and survive on the streets, let alone a dog like Yuki with existing disabilities. We are rooting for her swift recovery, and look forward to seeing her run and live without the pain and struggles of a broken leg. 🐾

## POST-SURGERY

Yuki is now able to stand. With time and care she may be able to walk.

For many strays their scars are reminders of their survival, resilience and hope and better days ahead.



**TOP: First x-rays of Yuki's leg | BOTTOM: X-ray after surgery**

Although rescuers and animal welfare programs give hope for many strays, it is important to be mindful of a stray's innate nature and history in order to understand them.

Strays' survival is dependent on timidity, caution and flight responses. If strays become too friendly, they can be mislabeled as pests, nuisances or threats.

Years of negative encounters with humans accumulate and can cause survival reactions (often labeled as "aggression").

Examples of events that erode a stray's trust in humans include:

- Abandonment - tenderness and then absence
- Hit-and-runs and associating cars with humans
- Loud noises and unfamiliar smells around humans
- Trapping, chaining, forceful or rough handling by humans
- Being stuck in a drain/fence while hearing humans
- Capture and forceful separation from pack/mother/puppies
- Relocation by humans
- Sterilisation - waking up drugged in an unfamiliar environment such as a surgery. Although hugely important, this early memory is often a stray's first encounter with humans and it can haunt them

Regaining a stray's trust in humans is a huge endeavour and achievement. Behind each stray are many angels who helped - the feeder, the compassionate stranger, the search party, the rescuer, dozens of shelter volunteers, veterinarians, trainers and photographers. One of the most disappointing events for rescuers is to see a re-homed dog being returned as it also erodes trust. Adoption is a journey and it is for life. 🐾



## MEET THE ADOPTERS: DIEGO

### A STRONG BOND TOGETHER THROUGH OPENING THE HEART, MIND AND HOME

#### Why did you decide to adopt from a shelter?

I had the urge to get a second dog after having Sam for 7 years. However, I was worried that I could not commit fully - I'm a perfectionist and I didn't want to adopt another dog without being able to give my 100%.

I read about Diego's story on Dogs Singapore and felt very strongly for him. I reached out to Mercylight to enquire about potentially adopting him but was rejected initially as I was going to be the sole caregiver for him. At that point, I had already bought Diego a collar and was ready to welcome him home. Kelly then decided to give me a chance with Diego!

#### Tell us about your decision to adopt Diego?

I had to do a lot of thinking about how to integrate the dog into the family, especially with an existing dog at home. During his initial transition period, I canceled my Christmas holiday plans and took 2 weeks off work so I could stay at home full time to look after him and bond with him.

I feel that timing the initial transition and focusing 100% during that period was really important for us to build trust and strengthen our connection. I also spoke extensively with Kelly and my dog trainers to get their advice on the process of bringing Diego home for good.

#### What was the adoption process like for you?

My son Luke and I went to shelter for about 6 visits, and during those visits we also took him out in our car for walks and to the nearby parks. We also brought Diego to meet our dog Sam and brought him back to my place for a couple of hours to see how he settled at home.

Soon, we had half day trials together. We would pick Diego up in the morning and return him to the shelter in the evening, followed by longer weekend stays. These visits were important for us to find out new things about Diego, as well as brainstorm ways to make him more comfortable in our home.

During our first weekend home stay, Diego actually ran out of the gate after returning from a walk as the gate was not closed fully. We chased him around the neighbourhood for 45 minutes before finally catching up to him. Luckily, he was wearing an airtag and Kelly was able to help us trace his live location. This incident highlighted to me the importance of reviewing our home's safety protocols in order to prevent this from happening again.



**Prisca's dedication was unwavering, she cancelled her holiday plans to ensure Diego's first few weeks at his new home were comfortable**

**Diego owner: Prisca (along with Sam)  
Adopted: December 2022**

#### How has Diego settled in and changed your daily lives?

It's been a few months since his adoption, and we have observed that he is definitely more comfortable now. He used to hate car rides as he got motion sickness - however, he slowly got used to it after we brought him out to further destinations such as Botanic Gardens, Jurong Lake and even to Sengkang to assist with the search for Kudo. Nowadays he is even comfortable enough to sit and lie down in the car.

Over time Diego has also built up a lot of stamina. My current dog Sam is very athletic and full of energy, and he loves to explore the bushes and chase squirrels. Diego on the other hand used to walk very slowly and would only stick to walking on the concrete pavement. Lately, we've observed that he's also open to exploring and sniffing the bushes and trees on his walks, just like Sam. He can also go for runs or longer walks with us now.

Thankfully, Sam is not a jealous dog and he's happy to have a new pal at home. They're still figuring out how to play with each other and share their toys, but it's obvious that Sam respects Diego a lot.

" ...we can't suddenly expect him to understand humans or get used to living in a home with humans. It isn't up to him to fit in with us, but up to us to constantly compromise at his level. "

# MEET THE ADOPTERS: DIEGO

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

**Do you have any advice for others who are considering adoption? Any other tips you would like to share?**

I've come to realize that when adopting a stray dog, especially one who has spent time living in the wild, we can't suddenly expect him to understand humans or get used to living in a home with humans. It isn't up to him to fit in with us, but up to us to constantly compromise at his level. Also, not everything is going to be smooth sailing and perfect at the beginning - sometimes, overcoming difficult challenges together can strengthen the bond between dog and owner. For example, one time we had to walk to a vet appointment nearby while it was raining and Diego absolutely hates the rain. We struggled and took a long time to get him there after a lot of consoling and cajoling - I feel like this difficult experience really cemented our bond.



**Diego's fellow canine family member Sam has encouraged him to settle in. Diego has become more comfortable with car rides and longer walks. According to Prisca, it "obvious that Sam respects Diego a lot."**

I would also advise families who are adopting/have adopted a dog to think a lot about safety protocols, such as how to prevent them from accidentally running out of the house or car. We work with 2 dog trainers who help to train not just our dogs, but also us as handlers too. I interviewed and selected these trainers based on the dog's characters and needs. Together, we work out detailed steps and plans to ensure car safety and other safety protocols.


Lastly, do not be too proud to ask for help! Kelly is full of experience and she can offer a lot of valuable information if you just ask her. 🐾


## A STRAY'S LIFE

Life on the streets presents many challenges for the strays. However, many of these dogs show powerful resilience against all odds. Some of the challenges faced by strays include:

 The elements (sun, heat, rain)

 Dangerous terrain, roads, fences

 Ingestion of dangerous foods, splintering bones, poisons, plastic

 Vehicles, heavy machinery

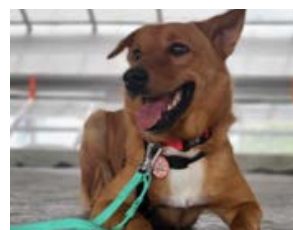
 Electricity

 Floods

 Other dog packs, wild animals

 Disease (such as heart worm)

## KEEP UP WITH THOSE IN THIS NEWSLETTER AND RECENTLY ADOPTED



@kara.thedoggo



@diego\_and\_sam



@luna\_and\_tama\_love\_chester



@harvest.blessing



## RESCUE: A SWIFT LIFE-SAVING INTERVENTION FOR KODA WHEN A WOUND TURNED LIFE-THREATENING, QUICK ACTION GAVE KODA A CHANCE

Koda belonged to a pack with some familiar faces at MercyLight (Kangaroo, Diego, Amigo). A few months ago, Koda went missing. When we found him in March 2023, he was badly injured with a gaping and raw wound across his back. With such a large, infected wound, Koda would not have survived. Koda was unlikely to be trapped successfully by conventional means, and due to the severity of his wound, we made the decision to dart him as a last resort.

Darting a dog is a complex rescue technique which can only be done by licensed professionals with a vet present at the scene. The rescue cost about \$800. Koda was successfully darted and rescued, but the vet was unable to operate immediately due to the acute infection of the wound. It took a few days for the vets to clean his 15cm x 10cm wound, allow the skin to contract and ensure that there was enough tissue to stitch together.

Koda was hospitalised for the next 4 days but it wasn't a pleasant experience for him. Koda did not eat for days and was reactive to vets and nurses. He had to be sedated to be examined. After the surgery, he was discharged to recuperate in the shelter where he ate well, was more positive in his response and allowed the volunteers to clean him. Fourteen days later, his stitches were removed.

Koda came from a pack of 5 dogs. To date, we have successfully rescued 4 of them and we hope that we can get the last one (nicknamed Brownie) soon as he is all alone out there trying to survive on his own.

Although Koda's stitches have been removed, there is still a long way to go before he can be put up for adoption. He is babesia and heart worm positive, common infections in newly rescued dogs that could take up to 5 months to treat. These treatments require carefully timed and administered medicine as well as monitoring.

Despite the pain he must have been feeling, he has been nothing but a gentle and sweet boy at the shelter. We are confident that Koda will let his personality shine through as he recovers and undergoes rehabilitation. 🐾



**Koda recovering in the shelter. Despite being in excruciating pain and sensitive about having his wound cleaned daily, Koda began to show trust when his regular feeder visited him in the hospital. He has since showed very trusting behaviour and his chill personality has emerged.**



**A feeder noticed a dollar-size horizontal gash on Koda's back. The next day the gash increased to a worrying and painful size. MercyLight stepped in to call a professional trapper for a swift capture and surgery.**



Behind each stray are unknowns. For a dog like Koda it is unclear how his gash happened. Experienced feeders and rescuers note that the wound does not look like a dog bite. Possibilities includes road accident, wild boar attack, intentional harm by humans or the original small gash got torn further when it was stuck to something else.

Although it is nice to tell the happy stories, the difficulties of rescue are stories that should be shared too. MercyLight commits shelter, rehabilitation and re-homing efforts to each blessing it helps. Rebuilding a stray's trust in humans is a huge endeavour. Adoption is a beautiful life-commitment. For each dog adopted, another dog can be rescued and call the shelter home.

## MEET THE ADOPTERS: KARA

### ON HOW KARA'S NEW FAMILY HELPED HER BECOME COMFORTABLE IN THE CITY

Kara's story begins with the rescue of her mother, Malia in November 2021. Malia was rescued through the combined efforts of a MercyLight volunteer and adopter. The pair was moved to rescue Malia as she appeared to always be alone and loitered around an HDB. Malia was friendly as likely she was often fed by HDB residents. To our surprise, Malia was pregnant and gave birth to 6 puppies a few weeks later in the shelter (Miyoo, Aki, Kara, Hikari, Lael, Kaishin).

For Jun and Ellyn, adoption was important to them. As first time dog-owners they knew that adding a new family member would be a journey. "The process may be a little slow but it is not discouraging. We would say it was much needed," said Ellyn.

At the start of their journey, Jun and Ellyn knew they preferred a medium to large dog that could be HDB-approved. They connected with MercyLight at an Adoption Drive at Bukit Timah Saddle Club where they met a dog called Nino. Our impression of the dogs at MercyLight was that they were all well-mannered," said Ellyn. After meetings at MercyLight, Kara was suggested as she was similar to the shortlisted dogs by Jun and Ellyn and she was quick to bond with them.

In a group Kara was friendly and easy-going, however, on her own she was uncertain. Jun and Ellyn were patient upon realizing that Kara was encountering new environments and things. Items like televisions, mirrors or scooters in the neighbourhood were all unknown for Kara.

"The time between home visits was much needed, it helped us all. Jun and I had time to prepare the house for Kara and ease her into



**Jun, Kara and Ellyn on an evening out in the city**

new things," said Ellyn. With each visit Kara's trust in Jun and Ellyn grew along with their bond. Soon Kara's visits became longer and her adoption was finalised.

Moving from the Animal Lodge to a busier urban area was a transition. Support from the MercyLight community helped Jun and Ellyn understand small ways to help Kara normalise the unfamiliar. Small, thoughtful actions like parking a bicycle and trolley carts inside the house with treats helped Kara normalise unfamiliar things in a safe environment. All the small efforts worked to help Kara transition and she received high marks in her training class with Pawsitive Furkids.

Enrolling in a course is a requirement for adopters of Project A.D.O.R.E. dogs. "We found the training classes more of a training class for us humans," said Jun, "Like the MercyLight dogs we first met, Kara is quite obedient and if something isn't working we ask ourselves if there is something we [humans] need to change." 🐾



**Malia (Kara's mum) and Kaishin (Kara's sibling) are available for adoption**



Project A.D.O.R.E is program that allows medium to large dogs from Animal Welfare Groups to be adopted into families staying in HDBs.

Pawsitive Furkids helped Kara's family better understand Kara so that she could transition into her new home, neighbourhood and urban environment. Pawsitive Furkids has been a long-supporter of MercyLight. Several dogs for adoption have completed full courses with volunteers already!



## FRESH FACES AT THE SHELTER

### SOME ARRIVALS WITH NEW CHAPTERS AHEAD AT MERCYLIGHT



#### MACY AND MERLIN

Macy and Merlin are accidental rescues that joined our family on 9 Jan 2023. In the search for Mercy, volunteers encountered two stray dogs who seemed to have no feeder. They were very hungry and lapped up all the food they were offered with wagging tails. It was a moment that certainly touched the hearts of the volunteers present. Subsequently, they were taken in and given names that began with the letter 'M', in honour of Mercy.



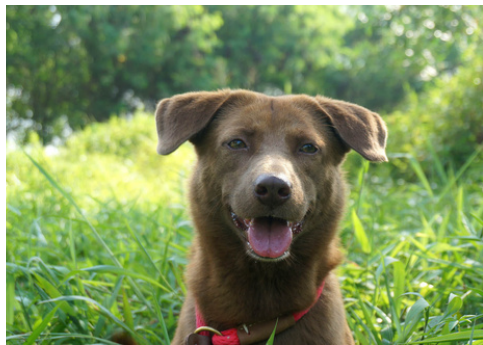
Enthusiastic and human-friendly, Macy and Merlin are finding their place amongst the dogs in the shelter, and can now have all the food (and treats!) that they desire.

We hope that we can help both Macy and Merlin find their forever homes, so that they can begin a new chapter in their lives. 🐾



#### ALPHA AND CHOCO

Alpha and Choco were adopted in 2019 but were unfortunately returned back to the shelter in December 2022. Their owners were no longer able to provide them with sufficient care and attention due to changing family commitments. Although it is difficult, we believe that once a MercyLight Blessing, always a MercyLight Blessing.



Alpha and Choco were hence welcomed back to shelter life with open arms. With the aid of caring volunteers (some who were already familiar with them from their time in the shelter before their adoption), Alpha and Choco are adjusting well to the change, finding both solace in old friends, and excitement in meeting fresh faces. Both Alpha and Choco remain outgoing with people as well as dogs, and often linger by the tables as meals are being prepared, in hopes of securing a few more treats! 🐾

MercyLight is dedicated to rescuing, rehabilitating and rehoming stray dogs, so that they may get a second chance in life. Rescue efforts require a great amount of time, effort and manpower, but we believe that every single dog rescued makes it worthwhile.



Catch the next issue in June 2023!

