



# QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

FOURTEENTH EDITION [QUARTER 3 2024]

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

## MORE ABOUT SARDS

A condition causing rapid and irreversible blindness in dogs, typically affecting middle-aged canines. The condition involves the rapid degeneration of retinal photoreceptor cells, though its exact cause is unknown. Diagnosis is confirmed through clinical signs and electroretinography, which shows non-functioning photoreceptors. There is no effective treatment, and management focuses on helping the dog adapt to blindness.



## EASTER: SEEKING FOSTERER

**Easter, a pack leader with a sweet, relaxed nature, recently faced a rapid change in his sight and is now blind. MercyLight continues to push for therapies and seeks a kind-hearted fosterer to help ease his adjustment.**

In April this year, volunteers noticed something amiss with Easter's vision. He was promptly put through a complete eye examination with an eye specialist for animals and was eventually diagnosed with Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration Syndrome (SARDS), a condition that causes rapid blindness due to changes within the retina. The cause of SARDS is unknown and was only diagnosed in canine ophthalmology in the last 20 years. There is no effective treatment for SARDS at this point.

However, we did not give up hope on Easter - exploring various options such as Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy to increase blood oxygen concentration. Sadly it did not work.

Easter's life changed within a very short period of time. He had to learn to navigate his daily life relying on his other senses to move about within and outside the shelter. We have made various adjustments to aid him in his daily life, including having him wear an anti-collision bumper halo to help him avoid obstacles during his multiple daily walks.

However, the shelter environment is not ideal for blind dogs as we may not be able to give him the full extent of attention he needs due to the sheer number of dogs in the shelter. A home would be an ideal environment for Easter to adjust to his sudden blindness. We are urgently looking for a long-term fosterer for him, if you have it in your heart. 🐾

Fosters provide homes for dogs in need, offering care and love to address medical issues. Fosters play a crucial role in reducing shelter overcrowding and giving dogs a better chance at a happy, healthy life.

>> Interested or know someone who may be suitable?  
Visit [mercylight.org.sg](http://mercylight.org.sg) to learn more about fostering.

## MEET THE ADOPTERS: BELLE

### WHILE UNDERGOING HOME RENOVATION, REGULAR VISITS AND INTERACTIONS ALLOWED BELLE TO CONNECT AND FIND A HOME WITH GARETTE AND LYNETTE

#### Why did you decide to adopt from a shelter and from MercyLight specifically?

We have always strongly believed in adopting. Even before we got our home, we regularly attended adoption drives to explore our options. We first encountered MercyLight at Pet Expo 2022 and have since followed them on Instagram and kept up with updates on their website. In 2023, we chanced upon Belle's profile on MercyLight's website. However, since we didn't have our place yet, we decided to wait. After a few months of contemplating, we finally reached out to MercyLight in December 2023 to arrange to meet Belle.

#### Can you run us through your decision making process when you decided to adopt Belle? What factors did you consider?

One of the main factors we considered was whether we could commit the time to welcome Belle to our family. Since Garette is self-employed, we felt that we had the flexibility to cope with Belle's needs. Aside from that, we evaluated our financial situation and family planning. As we were not intending to have a child any time soon, we concluded that we wouldn't be overwhelmed by the simultaneous responsibilities of caring for both Belle and a baby.

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

Our situation was a little different, as our home renovation was ongoing when we started the adoption progress. This gave us more time to interact with Belle before we started the home trial. The whole adoption process took place over 4 months. We visited Belle once a week for about 3 months before we started the 3-weeks home trial. During the visits, we would take Belle out on walks, bath her, and also take her on outings for her to explore. As first-time dog owners, we had a lot to learn, and Kelly's guidance in this process was extremely reassuring. During the home trial, even if it was late at night, she was readily available to clarify our doubts, for which we are very grateful. She also shared numerous tips and advice on handling Belle, making the process much smoother for us.

#### How has Belle been settling into your family? Have you noticed any changes?

When Belle first arrived at our home, it was a brand new environment for her and she took



**'HOME': A beaming Belle with Garette and Lynette**

quite some time to adapt. For example, during the initial period, she would shiver whenever we took the lift. Over time, as she grew more comfortable, we noticed that she became less anxious and was more willing to explore the neighbourhood. We are heartened to see that she eventually overcame her fears and eased into the new environment. We also observed an improvement in her appetite, and she became more food-motivated. Recently, she even started to play with the toys that we bought for her, something that she didn't know how to do before. With each passing day, we can see her making more and more progress.

#### How has adopting Belle changed your daily lives?

Belle's presence has brought a lot of joy and laughter to our family. We're often amused by her cute antics and quirkiness. Since Garette had the flexibility to plan his own work schedule, he would plan his schedule around Belle's needs to make sure that she was well taken care of. While there have been some changes to our lifestyle, such as frequenting dog-friendly cafes instead, these changes have been positive and it is truly a rewarding experience to see how well Belle has integrated into our family.

#### Do you have any advice for others who are considering adoption?

**Any other tips you would like to share?** If you have seriously considered the multiple factors and feel that your family is ready to welcome a dog, please consider adoption. The entire process is extremely fulfilling and the joy of adopting is no less than purchasing a dog. One advice we have to potential adopters is to love them without spoiling them. Be firm with them but not to be too harsh whenever they misbehave. They need time to learn and it is important to be patient with them in order for them to adjust and thrive in their new home. 🐾

# NEW RESCUE: PARDON

## RESCUED FROM AN UNFAIR AND UNNECESSARY END TO LIFE

Like many familiar faces at Mercylight, Pardon Blessing was redeemed from NParks, after he was trapped and caught by NParks. The first time he was trapped and sterilised by a contractor and then released in a new environment under NPark’s Trap-Neuter-Rehome/Release-Manage (TNRM) programme. He may have been traumatised from this encounter, which coloured his subsequent reaction and behaviour towards humans.

After he was sterilised and released, he made home in areas with high human traffic. Complaints came in from the public and so he was caught again but by NParks as they needed to respond to public concern.

This time around, he was showing signs of frustration from being confined, barking and lunging at humans, likely due to trauma from his bad first encounter. Because of his behavior, NParks deemed him unsuitable for release and scheduled him for euthanasia. At this point, Mercylight intervened and took him in. We aptly named him Pardon, as he was spared from death row.

We suspect that Pardon’s case is one of abandonment, as he arrived at the shelter already knowing basic tricks like "sit" and "paw." Additionally, the stray feeders we contacted noticed him as a new, young, friendly adult dog in an area with already established packs of strays, which supports our theory that he was abandoned.

Pardon is currently undergoing the rehabilitation process, as we try to help him regain his trust in people. He has assimilated well with the pack, and is slowly opening up to people and volunteers.

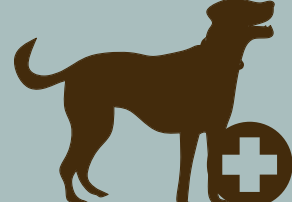
Rehabilitation can be a long and arduous process, but is one that is extremely rewarding. We hope that everyone will be able to give Pardon a chance, and understand that his behaviour comes from a place of fear and trauma. 🐾



## TNRM and living in harmony with strays

The TNRM program, implemented by the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVS) and supported by Animal Welfare Groups (AWGs), aims to address these challenges through a science-based and humane approach. Dogs like Pardon can fall short of this system when they exhibit **undesirable behaviour** most notably “loitering near humans” which leads to re-trapping and observations. The dog is often **stressed** and **confused** since it is displaced from familiar environments without understanding the reason.

Abandonment leaves animals confused, unsure of what they did wrong. Understandable stress-based reactions can emerge.



After release, Pardon was found in a high traffic area and captured a 2nd time. NParks interpreted Pardon’s behavior as unsuitable for rehabilitation and he was scheduled for euthanasia.



### Humanely Trap:

Collaborative efforts are made to trap free-roaming dogs for sterilisation, which helps control the population of stray animals.

### Neuter & Vaccinate:

Veterinarians perform sterilisation procedures to prevent further reproduction and reduce the number of free-roaming dogs.

### Rehome/Release:

AWGs work tirelessly to find homes for the sterilised animals. Those that cannot be rehomed are released into suitable locations where they can live out their lives naturally.

### Manage:

AVS and AWGs actively monitor the situation on the ground, encouraging public participation in reporting incidents and issues related to free-roaming dogs.



**Encourage responsible pet ownership** - adopt, don't shop and commit to "adoption for life." Spay and neuter all pets. Abandonment is extremely stressful for animals. The rehabilitation process can be long and require massive amounts of time, effort and resources by rescuers who are often the only ones who provide hope for abandoned animals.



**Live in harmony** - Take time to learn the journey of strays, read about animal body language to minimise disturbing and stress-induced reactions. We can live in harmony.



**Understand the work of stray feeders** - these selfless individuals feed rain or shine and experienced feeders seek areas away from human activity.

## MEET THE ADOPTERS: CHOSEN

### A BEAUTIFUL BEGINNING AND STORY OF HOW CHOSEN WAS “CHOSEN”

In the heart of Singapore, Elsa, a compassionate daughter and the main breadwinner for her family, embarked on a remarkable journey of love and commitment by adopting Chosen, one of MercyLight's senior dogs. Living with her parents and elder sister, Elsa has always been a dog lover, deeply touched by the plight of abandoned animals. Her story with Chosen is one of perseverance, dedication, and the undeniable bond between a human and her furry companion.

#### Can you introduce yourself and tell us about your family?

My name is Elsa. I live with my parents and my elder sister. I have two other siblings who have since moved out.

#### How did you decide to adopt a dog, and what motivated you to choose an older dog like Chosen?

I love dogs. I am one of those who couldn't watch movies where the dog dies. About one to two years ago, I was doing research on which shelter to donate to. During this search, I stumbled upon MercyLight's website and came across Chosen's profile. Chosen had been adopted as a puppy but was returned and had since spent nine long years in the shelter. I was moved by Chosen's story and knew immediately I had to adopt her. After reading an article in the Straits Times about dogs who spend their lives waiting to be adopted, I felt an urgent need to give Chosen a forever home.

Initially, my application was rejected because I already had a dachshund named Luppy. Sadly, our beloved Luppy passed away in October last year. In February this year, while clearing my inbox, I found the rejected application by chance and took it as a sign to try again. I resubmitted my application, and thus began the home trial process for Chosen. I visited MercyLight to meet Chosen and get to know her. This led to three home trials: a three-day trial, followed by a week-long trial, and finally a three-week trial.

#### How did your family situation and your father's health issues affect your decision to adopt Chosen?

My decision to adopt Chosen was deeply influenced by my family situation. During Chosen's home trial, a family member, who already had health issues, experienced a severe decline in his condition. Our family had to manage additional responsibilities, including hospital visits and medical expenses. Despite these challenges, I remained committed to adopting Chosen. I discussed my situation with Kelly from MercyLight to see if the shelter could provide some support so I could continue the adoption while still managing my family's predicament. Kelly agreed, ensuring that I could care for both my family and Chosen.

Managing the care for both family and Chosen has been challenging, but my mother, an experienced dog caregiver, has been a great support. Kelly from MercyLight has also been a reliable support, even



**Elsa and Chosen outside their home. Chosen's age and story affected her adoption prospects but Elsa and her family were committed to making it work.**

volunteering to care for Chosen during a work trip I had to Shanghai.

#### What were some of the initial challenges you faced with Chosen's adoption, and how has Chosen integrated into your family, especially with elderly parents?

During the home trials, Chosen was initially nervous and stayed on her bed, deeming it her safe space. Understanding dog behavior, I knew this was normal and patiently helped Chosen adjust. By the third home trial, Chosen was more comfortable and began to explore her new home. It was an incredibly heartwarming moment seeing her step out of the bed and start sniffing around the house. Seeing Chosen increasingly feel safe and secure in her new home reinforced my decision to adopt her. Over time, Chosen has grown more confident and comfortable, becoming a beloved member of the family. Always up for a treat, Chosen has brought lots of joy and new stories to the family, such as the time she knocked off and ate a sea cucumber that was being dried in the house. This incident endeared Chosen even more to our family.

The adoption process, although rigorous, was essential for me. I had read about the adoption procedures in Singapore and appreciated the thorough vetting process by MercyLight. I did not feel burdened by the steps required, such as home visits and shelter visits, as I believed they ensured responsible pet ownership and were needed as much by my family too, to confirm we are a fit for Chosen and vice versa.

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## MEET THE ADOPTERS: CHOSEN

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I could tell each dog was very loved by Mercylight and there was great care to find a fitting home for them. As a fellow dog lover, I empathized with this.

#### **How has adopting Chosen impacted your life, particularly as the main breadwinner and caregiver for your family?**

Adopting Chosen has profoundly impacted my life. As the main breadwinner and caregiver, I found joy in giving an elderly dog a loving home. I wanted Chosen to experience the comfort of a home in her twilight years. I firmly believe that adopting an elderly dog is a rewarding experience, as they are often calmer and more affectionate. Chosen is the best work companion when I work from home, laying down at my feet and offering the best snuggles between meetings for some dog therapy! One would think I was giving her the ultimate: a home, but in fact, she gave my family and me just as much love and joy. We trade Chosen stories every day and bond over them.

#### **What advice would you give to others considering adopting a senior dog?**

Elderly dogs are very calm and more relaxed. If you are at a stage in your life where you don't have the time to train a puppy or handle that much energy, then an elderly dog would be very suitable for your household. Chosen, for example, is calm and mellow, allowing her to fit with my elderly parents and hectic work schedule very well.

Some could be concerned about vet bills when it comes to senior dog adoption. While there's some truth in this, realistically, regardless of a young or senior dog, a care support system and financial commitment towards medical expenses are prerequisites of pet ownership. There are also puppies who run into medical problems at a young age, and certain breeds are just inclined towards certain diseases; so in the end, any dog owner has to be ready for vet costs, it's really just part and parcel of caring for a dog. Hence, do consider your situation and have an open discussion with the shelter on the dog's health condition first. Elderly pets are as affectionate and endearing as young dogs. I would really recommend considering giving them a home as well.

**“Adopting a senior dog is akin to giving them a chance at a happy life. The immense joy of giving and having their love in return is beyond words. You'll have to try it for yourself!”**

#### **What message would you like to share with others about adopting older dogs or dealing with unexpected challenges during the adoption process?**

With respect to unexpected challenges, in my experience, I took stock of the situation and assessed the additional support needed to continue with adoption. Then I discussed openly with both Mercylight and my family to address these needs. I would advise open communication and options assessment first.

There are certain misconceptions towards senior dog adoption. For example, 'a senior dog is already broken in; I can't train them anymore', or that 'senior dogs won't bond with new owners'. Chosen certainly debunked these myths, she is obedient, no further training required.

She's also super affectionate and attached to my hip. While my experience remains mine, eventually, I believe it's about finding the right dog for us, not the right age.

Adopting a senior dog is akin to giving them a chance at a happy life. The immense joy of giving and having their love in return is beyond words. You'll have to try it for yourself! 🐾

## SPOTLIGHT ON: KUHL BEAR

Kuhl Bear, affectionately known as KB, is a senior dog who's young at heart! He runs and rolls around with the energy of a pup. KB is a sweet, mellow dog who loves his independence but is also a big fan of affection. He greets everyone with an adorable tummy roll when he's excited. KB absolutely loves car rides, outings, hanging out with his friends and going for walks. Plus, he's a huge foodie! He gets along fabulously with other dogs and kids.

Despite KB's amazing personality, he has been in the shelter for the past nine years. He isn't HDB-approved, but we're hopeful that someone special will give him the chance to live his golden years in a forever loving home.

**>>See more of KB's quirks on Instagram @thekuhlbear. To read more about him or fill out the adoption form, visit [Mercylight.org.sg](https://Mercylight.org.sg)**



## MEET THE ADOPTERS: WILLOW

### SETTLING INTO HER NEW HOME WITH A GROWING FAMILY

**Why did you decide to adopt from a shelter and from MercyLight specifically?**

*Kat:* Adoption had always been our only option. Growing up, my family took in many strays as pets, and it has shaped my strong belief that we should help dogs in shelters who are in need of a home, instead of shopping for pedigree dogs from breeders.

We first came across MercyLight via an Instagram post featuring Gia. When we were doing our first introductions with Gia at the shelter, we also met Willow (previously named Darlene), who was Gia's sister. During our trial walk at The Animal Lodge, Willow was calm and walked easily, unlike Gia, who was more energetic and repeatedly tugged on the leash. This made us reconsider which puppy we wanted to adopt, since we wanted to have a calmer dog who could bond well with our young daughters.

**Can you run us through your decision making process when you decided to adopt Willow? What factors did you consider?**

*Kat:* Adopting Willow was more of a practical choice than a romantic one. I wanted my daughters to have a pet as they grow up, just as I was surrounded by pets as I grew up. In my teenage years, I found that dogs provided an unconditional, loving presence, and are steadfast companions during turbulent times. Hence, I knew I had to provide my daughters with a similar opportunity to develop an emotional connection with an animal. Helping to raise a family pet would also teach the kids important values of accountability and empathy.

In view of that, we were looking for a dog that would be good with the kids, and gets well with the family. We wanted a dog that is not too large-sized, since we stay in a condominium apartment, and a female dog, which in my experience, is usually more calm. We also wanted a puppy that could grow up together with the kids. We conveyed all of these requirements to Kelly, who advised us accordingly.

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

*Kat:* It was my first time going through the proper adoption process with a shelter. While it was more dragged out than I expected, I understand the need for thoroughness, and admire how stoic Kelly is about her values.

*Bryant:* Since we stay in the east, it was a long drive for us to MercyLight for each meet-up, or to pick up Willow for each home trial, the first one being for a few days, then for a week, then finally for three weeks. Despite that, we persisted in the numerous, hour-long trips back and forth to the shelter. We were determined to adopt Willow.

During the first few staycations, Willow was quite reserved. Her playful puppy energy seemed to be slightly dampened by her hesitation with regards to the new surroundings. At first, she even barked at the mirror, startled to see her own reflection. Fortunately, Kelly had given us useful and practical advice on how Willow would behave in the first few days, so we were not taken by surprise. Over time, Willow adjusted to her new surroundings and her lovable puppy side started showing through.



**HAPPY AT HOME: Bryant, Katherine and their daughters, Paige (8) and Charlotte (6), settle into their new lives with the addition of a mild-mannered puppy companion, Willow.**

**How has Willow been settling into your family? Has adopting Willow changed your daily lives?**

*Byrant:* Originally, Willow was very scared of visitors, but has since become more confident. She now comes up to our guests and greets them with a curious sniff. Our family has also gotten more used to having her around. Willow has started to display more of her mischievous behaviour, chewing on toys and shredding toilet rolls. Willow also likes to lick things, and the kids love it.

*Kat:* Our daughters have indeed been involved in the integration process. Since Willow is a young puppy, we wanted to start her right, and engaged a dog trainer. Willow has come a long way, but still has much to learn. Paige, our eldest daughter, enthusiastically assists in Willow's training. The kids are a great help in feeding Willow and cleaning out Willow's pee pads.

We also discovered that Willow loves fruits, especially apples and pears. She would come and sit by my feet in the kitchen whenever I cut fruit for the girls. We now split our apples five ways instead of four.

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

*Kat:* In general, I would advise potential adopters to ask themselves why they want a pet in the first place, and if they can find it in themselves to adopt Singapore Special dogs. While they may not have the reputation to be the friendliest breeds, Singapore Specials are actually quite intelligent. As pet owners, we need to see each individual dog for what they are and what they can provide, instead of getting a dog solely for its acclaimed breed.

I also highly recommend families who want to take in puppies to consider training. It is essential to integrate the puppy into the home environment. Clear training and consistent interactions also yield greater instances of positive behaviours. 🐾

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 December 2024!

