

ANNUAL REPORT
of the
Belgian Sheepdog Rescue Trust

May 2008

BSDRT Volunteer Network

Volunteers are the backbone of every nonprofit organization, and BSDRT has the very best! Since a nationwide network was developed in November 2007 it has swelled to 133 members. Members sign up for very specific tasks in clearly defined locations across the US, which allows us to immediately respond to reports of suspected BSDs in shelters as well as to owners desiring to surrender their dogs. The process of accepting purebred Belgian Sheepdogs into the rescue/adoption program has smoothed tremendously and their fate is no longer routinely left to whichever shelters house them. The credit for this improvement belongs to the members of this fantastic Volunteer Network.

We also have the volunteer services of two veterinarians, as well as two trainers who specialize in evaluating and re-training dogs with behaviors that fall short of aggression but are nevertheless disruptive and delay adoption. In addition, three behaviorists help us assist adopters with answers to their training questions via conference calls when their new companion arrives to join the family.

A new, private website is available for volunteers to meet each other, review and discuss cases, report dogs, and access documents needed to complete their tasks.

Before I move on to the next topic I want to acknowledge the following individuals for their various roles in making a difference in dogs' lives by identifying, transporting, fostering, conducting home checks, and following up with shelters in recent rescue cases. Not everyone is a regular volunteer but we're equally grateful for his or her participation. Please join me in thanking: Melinda Andric, Renee Artmyshyn, Jen Basile, Gretchen Brown, Patty Carlson, Barb Clauson, Debby Courtier, Vicki Daughtery, Mary Joy Davis, Beverly Enold, Lisa Epperson, Kat Farres, Jo Granmahun, Jill Griffin, Margaret Grinols, Ellen Haro, Laura Hilton, Marsha Hines-Wahrburg, Audrey Hsia, Lesley Hunter, Amy Johnston, Judy Johnstone, Elaine Jordan, Vicki Kelley, Sandy King, Beth Kingdon, Cindy Kretzmeier, Cathie Lang, Alissa Levine, Val Lussier, Teri Meredyth, Jill Miller, Maurrie Mills, Carol Morris, Barbara O'Gara, Melissa Poage, Moshe Reshef, Patty Rickard, Barbara Roy, Sandy Shaw, Sandy Stealey, Anthea Thacker, Rita Thatcher, Kim Tomes, Audrey Tucker, Nancy Vida, Deb Vidaver-Cohen, Elaine Williams, Sherri Wilmoth; adoption application processors Megan Lloyd-Thompson and Kim Wilson; and those who do the dirty work – Regional Coordinators Dave Vesely, Terri Ann Votava, Sonja Ostrom, Sue Spinhirne, Cheryl Robotka and Anita Meeks.

Incoming reports of suspected BSD

Most reports of suspected BSDs in need come from volunteers and other Belgian Sheepdog owners, with occasional emails or phone calls from shelter personnel who believe they may have a BSD in their facility. The sources are, in order of frequency, PetFinder's, BSDRescue.com, Belg-L, various puppy sales websites, and self-reports (of surrenders).

I've received more than 3,000 emails regarding 294 dogs; we promptly ID and evaluate each report. Of that total, 38 are BSDs. Twelve were accepted by BSDRT; three more will be

accepted when paperwork is completed in the coming weeks. Of the remaining 23, five had extended histories of biting or other aggressiveness so aren't appropriate for our adoption program. Four were privately adopted; breeders re-homed two; one owner-surrender was retracted; and 4 shelters adopted dogs in their custody following BSDRT's review of their applicants and conducting home checks. Two BSDs are in long-term foster, and five remain in shelters or sanctuaries that prefer to find adopters themselves.

Dogs in the BSDRT program

There are currently six dogs listed on the website as available for adoption. One of those is now with its new family and the listing is ready to be removed. Two are in the contracting stage of adoption, and one is going to be adopted by her foster family when she is spayed later this month.

Four dogs are in foster homes with our volunteers' families, and two dogs requiring additional evaluation and training for problem behaviors (jumping, anxiety, growling) are placed with experienced trainers.

Adoption

We presently have 62 adoption applications from all areas of the country. Most applicants currently have, or previously had, other Belgian Sheepdogs. Two applications were rejected because families wanted outdoor-only dogs, and two were rejected because they don't have a fence, don't intend to install one, and don't leash dogs when they're outside.

Other actions

Volunteers are involved in several projects in addition to active rescue cases. We have an article in development wherein breeders and long-time BSD owners describe what they look for when ID'ing a Belgian Sheepdog. This will be a great resource for those volunteers interested in learning more about ID'ing possible BSDs in shelter environments.

Another group is identifying breeders' websites, other Belgian Shepherd-related Internet sites, and general pet-related websites in order to provide them with BSDRT's new URL so their rescue information is updated. Other volunteers are "seeding" the Internet with keywords to ensure that Rescue's URL shows up in all search engines.

We are also gathering material for a fact sheet to provide to adoption applicants the same day they submit their applications. This will give them information about what to expect with the breed, herding characteristics, personality types, exercise requirements and other pertinent facts we'd like them to review before an interviewer contacts them.

Sponsors will soon be sought from within the pet industry so that we can provide a basket of goodies to assist foster families and get adopters off to a good start with their new pets. Basic items requested include grooming supplies, dog food vouchers, and dog toys.

Rescue concerns today and tomorrow

There are challenges on the horizon that we need to begin considering and discussing today if we're to be prepared to care for BSDs in need in the future. One such challenge is the aging population of our breed. Of three 14-year-olds, only one has been adopted. Re-homing

a growing number of elderly BSDs in the coming years may require unique incentives to adopters, or long-term supportive foster care by volunteers. What role is rescue expected to fill as these 12-16 year old dogs come to us with increasing frequency? What if breeders are unable to take them in themselves?

We lack a nationwide disaster preparedness plan and I think BSDRT is an appropriate agent for developing one, as we are most likely who will receive calls in an emergency. The Volunteer Network is a good starting point for a plan consistent with that of Homeland Security or State Emergency Readiness Coordinators. A plan of our own, or one including all Belgian varieties, is preferable to sending our dogs to holding centers operated by HSUS, which is what that organization and FEMA are calling for.

The increasing number of litters with unsupportive breeders that end up dumped in shelters or along roadsides have the potential to become a drain on BSDRT's finances. This could be a double-edged issue, as both puppies in need of medical care, and neglected adult dogs in need of training before they're adoptable, are reported. To date, dogs originating from these sources have been handled on a case-by-case basis but it would be helpful to consider policy that would address these unavoidable situations.

Another concern results from people who purchase BSDs but don't know what to do with them after some period of time. A high percentage of the dogs entering the rescue/adoption program lack basic obedience training and often have bad habits that require expert handling. There aren't many highly-skilled trainers who volunteer to re-train dogs that – while not classified as aggressive towards humans - have been allowed to be aggressive to other dogs, intimidate their owners and display extremely poor manners.

Evaluations indicate that dogs such as these can become adoptable but the level of care and re-training they need in the meanwhile is beyond what most foster families can provide. For example, a female, 5½, only recently entered the program although we've known about her since Oct 2007. She dislikes children, stares down strangers, and doesn't know basic obedience commands other than sit. She was initially trained with a heavy hand so is head-shy, shrinks from anyone approaching with a collar or leash, and urinates if spoken to in a loud voice. She has the capacity to become a fine pet and she's responding well to an expert trainer, but having several dogs under our care in this same condition at the same time can consume resources of time, money and housing at a fast pace. Between Feb and now, we've had as many as 3 dogs at one time requiring this increased level of care and rehabilitation.

I invite BSCA members to initiate or join discussions and help decide how Rescue can best meet our challenges and prepare for tomorrow. We should be aware that if we do what's right for the breed (as determined by the membership), hard choices will have to be made, and expenses will climb.

Regional reports

The following reports are submitted by Regional Coordinators. All dogs referred to are included in the numbers reported in the main body of this annual report and do not represent additional dogs unless otherwise noted. Reports by Great Lakes Regional Coordinator Cheryl Robotka and South Central Coordinator Anita Meeks were not available.

Terri Ann Votava, Southeast Regional Coordinator:

We have been asked to evaluate 11 dogs. Of those 11, one was a BSD but the owner is unwilling to cooperate in trying to place the dog in rescue. She has since declined to sign the dog over. Tadoo has gone to his forever home. We are in search of a foster home for Tasmine his sister who must be moved, and the other eight have been mixed breeds - three in Georgia and five in Florida.

Dave Vesely, Pacific Northwest Regional Coordinator:

Cajun and Angie are retired show dogs in Washington. Owner lost lease to the farm and had to downsize her pack; re-homed in ID and MN. Josie, a BSD in Oregon whose owner was terminally ill was adopted by Lynnette Bennett. Onyx (AKA Sophie), a BSD in Washington being offered on Craigs List. I contacted the owner and was able to arrange a foster placement with Lisa Lucas. Lisa entered Onyx into the FIDO program, a dog training/rehome program in a women's federal prison. Onyx was a star and is now in a permanent home. Eve, a retired show dog whose owner died. Her story is featured in the Rescue issue of the BSCA newsletter. Volunteers also helped place four BSD mixed breed dogs, including a mother and her litter.

(The PNW Regional report is for all of 2007, the dogs were not in the Rescue program.)

Susan Spinhirne, Heartland Regional Coordinator:

Since February I have been involved with seven dogs, five of which were evaluations of possible BSD in shelters and one was a rehome. The owner of the re-home did not want rescue involved and it was never determined if the dog was a purebred BSD. He had been adopted from a shelter by his current owner who placed ad on Petfinders to re-home him. The seventh was a transport. Only one dog was a purebred BSD and he was an owner turn in. The breeder is known, and was notified by rescue. She contacted the owner and has made arrangements to take possession of the dog. I am waiting to hear the outcome. I have worked on one rescue application for my area. That application was rejected because the applicant stated on the application and in a phone conversation that the dog was to be "strictly an outside dog." It was not going to be in the house at any time during the day or night.

Sonja Ostrom, Rocky Mountain Regional Coordinator:

We have had five dogs to be ID'd through the Rocky Mountain Region in the past year. None have been deemed to be Belgian Sheepdog. We have also assisted in submitting applications for rescue homes to three families and helped with the interview, and home calls for Belle who finally reached her permanent home with the Tad HARRISES in Wyoming.

Lynnette Bennett, Pacific Southwest: 90 dogs reported. 14 were BSDs; four were accepted into the program and two are pending acceptance. Two adoptions have taken place and one more is pending. One is in long-term foster care, three were taken into another rescue organization and privately adopted, and one remains in a shelter.

Lynnette Bennett, temporary Northeast Region: Of 79 reported dogs six are BSDs. One was privately re-homed, four were rejected for aggressiveness or biting, one was accepted into the program and has been adopted.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynnette Bennett