# Interview transcript 4- 10.7.23

Speaker 1

OK. So just to confirm that I'm recording it, do you consent to this?

Speaker 2

Absolutely yes.

Speaker 1

OK. Well, I might start with my first question, if that's OK, …... So, can you tell me about how you first became involved in the animal therapy space?

Speaker 2

Ahh, I was interested in the idea of it because of taking my old Beagle to visit my grandmother when she was in an aged care facility. And that was just very informal. And she wasn't, to be honest. She wasn't a great therapy dog. She just knew my grandmother. And then I ended up with another dog. And bumped into somebody who suggested pet therapy, and they all suggested a different organisation that I looked into and decided that their rules were a bit. Strict. not so much. Strict, but they were. What they needed from the dog wasn't what?My dog had. So I kind of kept my. Antenna aware I guess someone I read an interview in the Sydney Morning Herald. Yeah, and it was about Paws pet therapy. And it was, and it just everything in that. I think it must have been an interview. With Sharon and everything. About it. Sorry, my cat and dog are fighting.

Speaker 1

Ohh no, I love animals. It's fine.

Speaker 2

They've run away now. So yeah, I read this interview and it was really interesting and it kind of really spoke to what I was looking for. About doing community sort of engagement. Community service. Yeah, and it was quite funny. I was sitting at the opera bar at the front of the Sydney Opera House reading this article thinking this is amazing.

Speaker 1

Living the dream.

Speaker 2

And there was a contact number at the end of the article or a contact name, and I googled it and rang and spoke to somebody in the Paws office. And I think I'd signed up by. Within an hour, yeah. It was just it just fitted everything that I. Was looking for. So pet therapy was on my radar. From having. Done. Casual visits to a family member. Yeah. Then I didn't like the more formal. The original group that I looked into. I didn't like that. And then when I heard about Paws pet. Therapy. That's when I got involved.

Speaker 1

That's. That's actually really. Cool. And how long ago was that?

Speaker 2

And I did my training with Paws. In 2018, and it would have taken. So I probably first started to look. Probably as early as 2015, my. Grandmother would have. In fact, she passed away in 2015, so it would have been on my radar from about 2013 onwards and it just took me a couple of. Years before I found. The right one, yeah. And and the right dog as well. So the Beagle that I'd originally done this, which wouldn't have been OK for it.

Speaker 1

And could you tell me about the dog that? You were doing it with?

Speaker 2

Her name was Pepper. She was a rescue dog from. Queensland somewhere we think she was like a failed. Worked dog pigging dog. She the reason that we loved her for the work so much was that she no amount of energy that we could Bestow upon her or attention that we could give her was sufficient, so she just she just we, you know, we'd take her out and we'd we'd talk to her when. She just wanted to. Talk to everybody. She just loved people.

Speaker 1

What? What type of dog was she again?

Speaker 2

Mixed breed. She had Great Dane. She had Scottish. Deer hound. Literally, she had about 8 different. She was about 30 kilos. So yeah. So she was officially a big dog 30.

Speaker 1

I think I have seen a photo of her.

Speaker 2

Yeah, she'd be up on the website, yeah. And she just it was kind of. Way of it was already something that I knew. I wanted to do because obviously I love dogs. And it just was the perfect thing for her to attend to that side of her as well, that she just loved people and there was nothing that we could do at home that was satisfying, quite satisfying enough for her.

Speaker 1

I think I need to do it with. My dogs too. Because they're the same.

Speaker 2

Yeah. And it's like, I've also had dogs like the Beagle and I had a Great Dane. He was, he liked people, but he was anxious. And so he just wasn't appropriate for it and we could see that there was. Something about pepper that. Was different to the Great Dane. His name was Ferris Bueller. He just didn't. The Dane just couldn't. Do it. She was, we used to describe her as being bomb proof. Not because you could do terrible things, but she just. She could just bounce back from anything if there was just nothing that bothered. Her. She's such a relaxed.

Speaker 1

This is the great dane?

Speaker 2

Dog no, the the mixed breed pepper, yeah.

Speaker 2

The great the Great Dane he needed therapy and pepper the mixed breed was able to do the therapy.

Speaker 1

Provided therapy. So I know you're now working for Paws as an employee. So when did you make the change and why?

Speaker 2

It was because Pepper got sick and we had an event in the park that resulted in a fairly nasty scuffle between her and another dog, and that was unusual. So we kind of, yeah, we looked into it and we decided at that point to retire her from visits in case she she started to just. Show changes in her brain behaviour and the way she was trying to eat, she suddenly tried to eat cats on the street kind of thing and attack other dogs, and that was not who she was. And so we think in the end that she, she had a form. Of dementia. She's quite old. Like she was older than we thought. Yeah. So it's sort of behaviour since she was on medication and. Nothing helped and. She was just anxious and it progressed quite rapidly. Once, once we started to notice a change, so we retired, her and I told the Paws team that she was retired and then we made the really tough decision to euthanize because she was getting to the point where we weren't sure. If she was going to get confused and trying to. Attack a child. Or it was just getting it was getting, she was attacking her. Her kennel mate, so she was attacking the. Great dane which? They were best mates, they were really bonded pair. And we just, yeah, it was really hard. So we decided to make that decision so that that accident couldn't happen. That was a. Really. Really. And it was when I was on the phone to Sharon and we were having a good cry together on the phone when I rang to let her know. And she just happened to mention that that the other office person was on personal leave and that she was looking for somebody to fill that space and then we came to an arrangement where I would start doing a bit of part-time casual work and have stayed. So that was about a year ago.

Speaker 1

OK. Well, I'm sorry to bring up Pepper and if you don't want to talk about that anymore you don’t have to.

Speaker 2

Oh, that's no, no. It's it's. I've had time to it. Yeah. It's the passage of time and life. And it's not easy, but it is what it is

Speaker 1

Well, thank you for for telling me that, but it's a very interesting story about how you've gotten to where you are.

Speaker 2

I know it look, Sharon and I often joke that I just invited myself into the job, I'm sure. It isn't quite that. It's we. We did talk about it and we met about it, and yeah, it's just I knew the organisation and without a dog to do the volunteering, I just didn't want to. Not be part of the organisation. So. So yeah, I was sort of thinking in my head when I spoke to her. I wonder if there are ways that I could volunteer anyway, and then it turned out there was a paid position available. So that was kind of nice. To yeah. And the the paid position still leads to some volunteering work as well. So I get to satisfy both sides really.

Speaker 1

That's perfect. Well, my next question was to tell me about your role at paws pet therapy.

Speaker 2

Yeah, so I'm admin support I think. Is the official. Role. What I tend to do is I'm I will help new volunteers as they come on board. So if they. Inquire with us. I'll have a chat with them and I'll screen sort of a little. Bit of information about them and their dogs. Make sure that the dog is. Sounds appropriate, and that the the volunteer knows what we do. So that's quite a lengthy. That's kind of a lengthy phone. Initial phone call can take anywhere between. A really quick one would be 20 minutes, but I often take about 30 to 45 minutes for that. Just so that. Both parties know what the other parties doing and the. Interests. And then from that, then if they join up, I provide them with all the paperwork to do the course and then I organise the training days. And then we come together as a group of however many to have the the dogs and the handlers assessed, but along the way there's, you know, there's communication with the the volunteers as well. If they need any help with the course or any information so. That's primarily my role and then settings. That's the onboarding. I guess is what it's called.

Speaker 1

Yeah. OK.

Speaker 2

Yeah. And then I sort of set them up and then I do provide ongoing support. But usually once they've signed up and once they start doing the visits that goes more over to Sharon's role.

Speaker 1

OK. Yeah, that's good. Thank you for explaining that to me.

Speaker 2

Ohh and then I oh sorry I should say. That then that when. We do the training days, all of the paws, people who are there on the training days, that's for us. That's a volunteering role, so we do that on a Saturday. There's about six of those a year and for us that's where we do our volunteering. So we. We aren't paid for that, if that makes sense. So that was really interesting to me because without a dog. And I wanted to be involved in pet therapy. It's yeah. So I've got a dog now, but he's not old enough yet. So yeah.

Speaker 1

Oh, right. What have you? What's your dog now?

Speaker 2

He's 10 months old, so he can't be assessed for another another ten months, probably 8-ten months. So he is Dave. His name is Dave Growl and he is an old English Sheepdog Cross Poodle AKA sheepadoodle

Speaker 1

Ohh wow, he's beautiful. I did meet him. He's gorgeous. Hello, darling.

Speaker 2

Nickname rat Bagus rat bagus. He's trying to eat the cat. Who's sitting on my lap at the moment, it's. A bit much So yeah, that's how. I got involved with paws was through with. That's what my. Role is to do the onboarding and a little bit of volunteering as well.

Speaker 1

And I'm sure you can hear my dogs. Running up the stairs did. You buy your new dog to become a therapy dog?

Speaker 2

Yeah. So that's the intention and you can't force that like the dogs have to have the right temperament. But you can choose a dog, hopefully that you think might be heading in that direction. So I had spoken to somebody who had a his official, a sheepadoodle, if you're into the oodle names. So I chatted to somebody actually. I'd heard about the sheepadoodles vaguely and had commented. Gee, they're cute. And then spoke to somebody who inquired about volunteering with us. And so she recommended this particular woman who was breeding them. And so this particular woman that we got him from was trying to breed dogs that would have the right temperament for therapy and assistance for them. Yeah. So I think she said she's had quite a few dogs go. They don't go through the guide dogging, but a lot. Of assistance, work and companion work.

Speaker 1

Oh, that’ll be really, interesting to see how he goes.

Speaker 2

Well, the signs are good, but yeah, you just you you can't guarantee anything. But it's. Yeah. When we picked him from his litter, the lady knew that we wanted to do therapy work. So she gave us a priority with the dog that we were assigned to that we got the dog that was most likely from that litter to be. Sort of calm and. Therapy and he's showing. A lot of. Good signs.

Speaker 1

Well, good luck to him.

Speaker 2

He doesn't know what he's in for.

Speaker 1

Ohh, I'm sure he'll enjoy it.

Speaker 2

I think he will, yeah.

Speaker 1

OK. Well, my next question, we've already kind of answered. So the next one I think will be interesting to hear from you because you are within this space more than some of the others. So culture can be defined as the beliefs, values and social behaviours of a of a group of people. So I want to learn more about the culture of paws pet therapy. And about how the animals fit into this.

Speaker 2

OK, I love that cause I have a degree in anthropology as well, so that in cultural anthropology, so.

Speaker

That's great! can. You write my theses for me?

Speaker 2

Is that what you're looking? The culture?

Speaker 1

That's part of it.

Speaker 2

Wow!

Speaker 1

Yeah, I think. At the I'm looking at the experiences of the handlers and the. Dogs. So from the handlers perspective, and then obviously I'm doing the observations to try and see their behaviour. The dogs behaviours to get their perspective. So it's a multispecies ethnography-based research.

Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's that's why I'm so excited about it. It's so. So yeah, my first. Degree was in anthropology, so that's that really, that's.

Speaker 1

Well, you better answer this good. No, I’m kidding.

Speaker 2

Firstly, I would describe it as a grassroots organisation.

Speaker 1

Yeah. OK.

Speaker 2

I think that's where a lot. Of that's where it sort of comes from. It's about people wanting to work within their own community, volunteer within their own community. So I guess when you are wondering about the culture you're talking about, the people who volunteer or the actual structure of. The organisation itself.

Speaker 1

Everything, whatever you can tell me and how the animals fit into that as well.

Speaker 2

I think it's, I mean it's been the founder was somebody who just knew. From the background of being a registered nurse. Could see the the health benefits of and a dog lover. I think that's. Probably where it. Started it's very. It's sorry, the dog's nose, it's relevant. It's relevant that that Sharon is an RN or was an RN. And you know somebody who's really. Very much a. Dog lover so. She she could see how those two could fit. If that makes sense.

Speaker 1

Yeah. Yeah. No, I don't. That's why I'm doing it too. Yeah.

Speaker 2

And so I think that is. At the heart of the culture of. The whole organisation might just get my. Husband to put the dog. Somewhere else with his face.

Speaker 1

Fine. I don't care. This is casual. It's fine. I'm.

Speaker 2

Good. The poor cat is being harassed. Ohh.

Speaker 2

I don't know what's. Going on, he's awful because he's just been. For big plays, he been on holidays and. They miss you. He's just been for two hour walk . Well, so am I putting. It somewhere else, even if it's. Not for the interview. I think I need him to be elsewhere and I get a cup of tea. He's being a. An annoying teenager. Not right now. So that's it.

Speaker 1

That's okay, I’ve got one too. I've got a 1 1/2 or one and a bit. Year old kelpie. So she's.

Speaker 2

Oh, God. OK, so yes, you you know exactly what were going through

Speaker 1

There's a morning, crazy and afternoon crazies, so I know the feelings. It's fine.

Speaker 2

So if I didn't have the. Cat on my lap I. Wouldn't be so bothered, but it's. So the culture, let's see what else. It's yeah. So it's very grassroots. It is very much about. I mean it's a. Really good question.

Speaker 1

Take your time.

Speaker 2

The things that are important are that people get to work in their community. And understanding that animals. And humans can have a particular bond. Isn't and that is backed up by the science. Of the Physiology. So and I think that's where Sharon's background as an RN comes in. She really understands that it's not just about. Somebody comes and says hello with the dog and it feels good. We understand. That it. It feels good for physiological reasons as well, but it does lower the blood pressure. It does. Impact your heart rate and your respirate and pain perception and all of those things. So there is a there's an understanding from that perspective and then there's. Just the pure pleasure. Of what it's like to. Spend time with an animal. If you like animals. So it's that understanding that. It's not. Just pleasure, but it has physical, physical and therefore mental benefits as well. I think for the volunteers and certainly as from my perspective as a volunteer, it's about being able to work within my own community and be of service. Yeah, see. And I get to do that with my dog, who happens to be my best Mate and happens to have four legs, so and that's when I. So when I say to prospective volunteers, when they ask about it, that's how I would describe it. If you're interested in being of service to your community. You can do that with a whole lot of organisations. But if you want to spend. Your time with your dog. Who you. You know you love hanging out with. Win, win and then if your. Dog happens to be somebody who likes people. That's the sort of the triangle you've got. The handler who wants to do something, the dog who likes people and the handler brings that together to benefit somebody who. Might not have access to a dog in an. Environment that would be helpful, that's so I think that's where the dogs, it's always about. The well being. With the dogs. Everything that we train the volunteers to do and as a volunteer, you. Are always aware. Of the well being of your dog. So even I did. A visit recently to Macquarie Uni and I borrowed Sharni who is the dog from. One of the paws committee, so we. Work with she's. She's in the office, so she know we. Know each other well. I went as her handler, but the whole time. You're you're aware of how? How is Sharni doing? Is she OK? Does she need a break? Is she? Are we asking her to do something? That's OK. And if any sign. That she's not OK, then you sort of. Take her away. Yeah, you never you. You don't ever do a visit. That's not OK. With the dog. And then obviously you're also looking. At the the client. And whoever's interacting. Are they OK? Are they? Are they aware that they're safe? Do they feel? Safe. There's. So it's it's the. Constant triangle between the handler the dog and the the client.

Speaker 1

Oh wow, you answered that so beautifully. Thank.

Speaker 2

It’s interesting and I’m sure, there's a lot more to it than that as well.

Speaker 1

I think that I mean it, it makes sense. I've that's what I've been talking about the three way interaction because that's really what it is and that's why I'm hoping that this research is important because there's more than the one person in this interaction. So it’s important that the handlers and the dogs are also represented here, and that's what we're trying to do.

Speaker 2

Yeah. And one of the questions that we asked from the perspective volunteers when they're doing the course work is you know who benefits from therapy because we're asking the volunteers to understand that most and they do because they wouldn't be looking to do this work otherwise. But I find that more often than not, when I'm sort of marking and giving them feedback, I. I always say don't. Forget that the handler and the dog get something out of it as well, yeah, the nurses and the teachers and the students and the the patients and the whoever. But I get something enormous from doing it. And it's not just the sense of doing good. I'm I'm also benefiting from a lower heart rate and a lower blood pressure. And so I'm getting exact and better mental health. And I'm fairly confident looking. At the dogs that I've. Worked with that, they're benefiting as well because I can see that pepper. Loved it and I know that Ferris the Great Dane would have hated it. So there's. Yeah, there's. Evidence in their behaviour that they. That they are benefiting as well. And then I get a closer relationship with my dog because we've done this beautiful thing when I would go out with Pepper, she would see the vest she'd see me come downstairs in my uniform and she'd start to almost do backflips so she had the special recognition of the T shirt with the uniform. Then you'd get the the vest. But then you put the vest on her, and she wasn't always great when you walked on lead. She could be a bit of a rat bag. The best one. Suddenly she was the world's most behaved dog.

Speaker 1

Wow

Speaker 2

And she knew that she was going to work and she loved it, and so we bonded. Quite nicely over that that she. Would do her good work. And then we'd spend time together. That was something that just the two of us did. We didn't do with anybody else. That was our time. So that's part of it. Is for me that was at the heart of it. So when I lost pepper. It wasn't just losing pepper, it was also losing that connection to Other people that she and I very specifically had. And I really grieve not. Just the loss of her, but I. Grieve the loss of. Going out with her and and providing that. Benefit to other people. And it didn't take long before I was looking on the lookout for another dog that I could. Do that with. So yeah, it's It's definitely a. It's definitely a three way thing.

Speaker 1

Yeah, that's, that's so lovely. Wow. And you know what? Every single person I've spoken to has talked about that vest, and it must. Be magical because.

Speaker 2

It is. They don't get it straight away, but once they get it, it's they know that it's that's their job and they get some. They they're getting something out of it. If Pepper hated it, she wouldn't have jumped around. For joy when she saw it. Yeah, she didn't want to do it. She would have run to the back door and said leave me. Here I don't want to go. Yeah, but instead. She's sitting there with the tail going at a. 100 miles an hour going. Put the vest on, lets go. Even when she wasn't well, even as she was declining. You know, the last couple of visits we were like, well, we all won't we and then we didn't, but our last couple of visits where she was already showing signs of not being herself, she still loved doing the visits. Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 1

That's you've answered that so well and it's beautiful to to hear your experiences. And I'm sorry if that Pepper's not here anymore. That you have. To talk about. It so.

Speaker 2

She had a good life.

Speaker 1

Yeah, sounds like it. Well, my next two questions are about the dogs experience, which you've spoken about a lot. So the next question is what is your perception of the experience of the animal?

Speaker 2

I guess that is that for. Certainly for Pepper very specifically. She once she understood she liked it from the beginning because she got to have interaction with people and she thought that was fabulous. She would actively seek out. Attention from people. With the vest on, I think she. Noticed that there was. A job and that she that you know as a working dog as well. That was good for her that it gave her a purpose. I don't know how she defined that purpose, but she definitely had different behaviour once that vest went on. For her, We did a couple of visits. For aged care and they didn't go. Very well, like the. The energy was just wrong for her, and I remember walking away going. Maybe we maybe this isn't right. Talking to Sharon and then we did a couple of visits at the school. Yeah. And then that. Was it so that was fantastic. So for pepper, for Pepper, she was very specifically. Great. With the higher energy clients.

Speaker 1

Yeah. OK, that's.

Speaker 2

We went to conferences, we went to. What we did? Are you speaking to ………… with Reggie?

Speaker 1

I've already yeah.

Speaker 2

OK, so we did one together. That was for Tourette's syndrome.

Speaker

Yeah, he.

Speaker 1

Told me he told me about this. You. I want to hear.

Speaker 2

It was unbelievable. I mean, it's unbelievable. These kids are sitting there and they, you know, they're ticking and their interesting language coming out of their mouth and the families. Just saying this is amazing to have this space where we don't have to explain ourselves to anybody else. And then the dogs just walked in. And they were completely and 100% non-judgmental and they just sat there with these kids who didn't have to explain anything. And the one I mean the the blue, are you offended by language because I can tell. And there was one young. Ohh.

Speaker 1

No, go for it. He he swore in his too.

Speaker 2

We had, I'd say, she's somewhere between 14 and 16, and she was really quite extreme with some of the ticks and the movements. And she was she was giving, doing this the whole time to people. Go see this. Your \*\*\*\*\*\*\* dog. See this, you. \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*. I mean, it was really extreme language. And we've been warned. And you know, that's whatever. That's part of having living with Tourette’s and all Pepper’s. So she's doing this and she's getting up. Close and it it felt quite. And Pepper just looked at her and went. Will you rub my tummy? That's really hard to. I mean, I'm gonna get leaky eyes cause. Sorry, nothing that these kids or these people with the the Tourette's could do would bother the dogs. They just saw them as beautiful human beings, which they were. Yeah. And there was no. Well, you shouldn't be using that language or using that facial expression or that hand expression. All Pepper did was put her head on this girl's lap. Roll over and give her her tummy. And so just you know, however, you wanna do it. Tell me that I'm fabulous cause I think you're. Fabulous, that's that. That's kind of my perception of how the dogs. You know. That that I. Think a lot of the handlers will say that they feel that their dog has an intuition and most of us will have stories of unusual moments where the dog just does something. How did they know that? So with Pepper, I did a visit at a school and it was a bring your dog to school day for the staff and I had a a friend who worked at school and she knew that I did the. The paws work. So we went in as the kind of the. Professional the official kind of therapy team and we were assigned to kids. Who actually 1, 2 particular children who had? Some learning difficulties and some. Issues going on and the first. Boy, his name? Let's call him Joe. Was being bullied OK? And I think he might have. He might have been. neurodiverse and I can't remember the details. But there was some there were some issues. He wasn't having a. Great time, but we knew he liked dogs. And as we walk into the classroom, the. My friend said, look, I'll introduce you to him when we get in there. He doesn't know we're coming. The teacher knows, but he's in with the class at the moment, and we're sort of hoping that it makes him feel a bit special and gives him a great space. And we walked into the classroom and all of a sudden, pepper. Very unusually, just pulled. And dragged me to. The end of the classroom and. I thought Ohh this is just not good like she's being so unprofessional. This is terrible and my usually beautifully behaved dog and she landed. At the feet of this kid.

Speaker 1

The same one that you were going to see?

Speaker 2

And my friend came over. And went ohh that's really. Interesting pepper that you've come here because this is Joe who we were, who we wanted you to meet today. Yeah, and ohh we all just stood there. It was just unbelievable and everybody has a story like that of one form or another where the dog's done something so deeply intuitive.

Speaker 1

They're amazing.

Speaker 2

They are amazing.

Speaker 1

Yeah, I have goosebumps. That's so beautiful and crazy.

Speaker 2

Isn't that it's it's crazy how?

Speaker 1

I don't know why I’m shocked because they are so cool.

Speaker 2

How would she have known there were 28 boys in that classroom? How did she know? And yet she just happened. And she just happened. To land right at. The the person that we were there to see. Yeah. And I I've got a full list of stuff of that pepper. Did that. How did you know that Darling? how did you know that? She did good stuff. She did really amazing stuff and we went to primary. School out of. The OOSH, out of school care? Yeah, something like that. We took over from another team who went into a. Sort of stopped visiting because she had a baby. And the brief was. To help the kids get used to having. Dogs around because there were. A few. Kids who had deep. Fears of dogs. OK, so I would have and it was. Yeah. It was really interesting. And the other dog had been a little one sort of. Littley kind of thing? And Pepper being a big dog. And it was my local primary school wasn't the one that my kids went to. But it's in our suburb. And the kids who started off being the most terrified became her biggest fans and need to get there, and they'd be they'd be waiting at the gate for you. So just by learning and regularly being given access to this dog. Yeah, I went to running races where I'd be on the lead. And so, you know, I always had. Control of her. We do these running races and then, deary me, Pepper was always a bit slow. So kids would always. Back and you know, we'd play games where they take treats and and hide them, and she'd have to go and sniff them out and just by that regular interaction. They learned that they didn't need to be frightened of a dog, and you're doing education the whole time as well. Like “What do you do if you see a dog in the park?” You know, “you think you wanna go and say hello?” “What's the best way to Do it?” And “who do you talk to and who do you ask” and some of the the biggest successes with those visits were actually some of the carers who worked there, who there was one woman who hadn't long immigrated to Australia from India. Yeah, and she said, look, in India, we don't do pet dogs. Scary creatures on the street and they had to be feared. And it's been a big cultural change for me to come to Australia and learn that we love these dogs. And Pepper was only the second dog she'd ever patted.

Yeah, it was in. That was incredible. And by the end of it, and she was terrified she was absolutely terrified. And by the time we've been doing these visits for, you know, year and a half that she was always putting her hand up saying I'll be the person that goes with you and you know, interacting and patting and playing with and. Yeah. So that's that's pretty. Pepper found that pretty amazing as well. She’d just lean into people being a big dog. She'd put a full 32 kilos against you and just. Let you be.

Speaker 1

That's so beautiful. Wow. It sounds like you just had so many amazing things. I wish I could talk to everyone forever. And to hear all these things.

Speaker 2

I hope you keep going with this research you're planning on PhD or?

Speaker 1

Well, I've already. Been in Uni, This is my 9th year so I'm ready to to buy a house and have some children I think.

Speaker 2

Now I understand this is not your first. Degree is it either?

Speaker 1

No, this is my second degree and. But there have been times where people have followed on from other research. So maybe one day and but. More likely would. Be that I become a dog handler like a therapy handler myself so.

Speaker 2

Goody, goody. We can. We've probably got heaps of places to send you.

Speaker 1

You. I might be like you. I'll just have to borrow other people's dogs because mine are a little bit too. naughty, but that's OK.

Speaker 2

That's the other way to do it too, yeah.

Speaker 1

OK, I've just got one last big question, not big, but one more question for you. So how does this organisation, so Paws, ensure inclusive and safe practises for the dogs involved?

Speaker 2

I think it's. Through multiple angles. So firstly, it's the screening process when people first want to come on board, I think we're very transparent with what is required. Of our dogs. So that people know what they're asking. Their dog to do. Sometimes that doesn't fully get translated and we have people come through the training days. We don't pass them because we look at the dogs. And so this dog's not happy to be here. Just because you want to do it doesn't mean your dog's gonna necessarily be passed. And I think that's important. You know, we've got professional people who are trained. To know this stuff about dogs. I'm not. I'm a dog. Lover and I'm a handler. And I work at Paws, but I'm not a dog trainer so. That's not my.

Speaker 1

Do you have dog trainers?

Speaker 2

We have two dog trainers who come in and they. Do the assessment.

Speaker

For the the training days?

Speaker 2

Yeah, that's right.

Speaker 1

OK, alright.

Speaker 2

And a big part of the the training. Itself the the the written work. And the the videos. It really talks about how do you recognise? The well being of your dog and how do you recognised when that goes off track, So what are? The signs of stress. For example, it's really important to know that if your dog's doing lots of panting or yawning or whatever, that they might need a. Break. Be aware of. You know, we don't want to create. Burnouts. So there's a. Big section on understanding what burnout in. Dogs is and how to avoid. It and what to do if you. Think that it's creeping in. We would never, ever. Get cranky or not be supportive of a volunteer who says I had to leave for the. Well being of my dog. It's just goes without saying. And that's also with the safety. As well of the volunteer and the. Dogs have there. Ever a situation that the handler feels is compromising to their well being, their dog's well being or safety. Remove yourself and we'll always be supportive of that and that might be physical. It could be to do also with things I I cancelled a visit with. I got to a visit with Pepper at the wayside Chapel and it was 42 degrees and we had nowhere. We were able to. Get there in the air con. And we started the visit and it was just we didn't have anywhere to go. That was. Safe for her. Right. And so we abandoned the visit after 15 minutes and said sorry, we'll come back when it's. Yeah. When it's a bit cooler. So that's it's built in to. Into that, and that's also something Sharon. So we tell that to our volunteers and the volunteers know that the, the, they, they have to know. So it's so important. But also a big part of what Sharon does is when she's. Talking to the facility, she's. Finding out what's available for the dogs, so things like. Have you got parking nearby so that they don't have to walk too far? Have you got somewhere for the dogs to sniff and have a wee and and have a drink? Before they go in. Have you got a space that's safe for the dog to go and rest? If they need to, but we can safely put down a water bowl. That's not gonna be a trip. Hazard and the dog can access. And the facilities also know that if there is any danger that we will always support our volunteers to remove themselves. So whenever so the facilities are on board as well that they know that it's, I mean for them it's safety first for their patients or clients. For us it's safety first for our dogs and then by meeting and it becomes. Something that works quite nicely. Does that answer that question? Is there anything I left out of that. Yep.

Speaker 1

I'm really glad that I've spoken to you because it's good to hear from, you know, different sides, because everything that every, everyone, everything that everyone else has said is it very much in line with what you've said. But it's just nice to hear it from. I guess it's a slightly Different perspective.

Speaker 2

I probably have a slightly more formal understanding of it. Now that I'm working. In the office? Yeah. Know that I was always aware of that. As well, I mean so the fact that I've cancelled a visit with Pepper, that was before I was working. In the office. But I knew that that was the right thing to do, and I knew that Sharon and Lisa would be supportive. Of that in the office. So it was. There's never any question about that. You just don't ever ask your dog to do something's. Not right. Yeah. And that come and talking about the training. You know, if you do. End up with somebody who comes through with a, you know, somebody might say I really wanna do it with my dog, but they don't might not recognise that their dog can't. And in relatively recently, we have had dogs that have got there and at the training day and they haven't been comfortable and they're sort of sitting under the chair and they're removing themselves and they don't want to engage so well. We know that we'd love to have you on board, but we can't. We can't because it's not fair on the dogs. So there are times and we will. We will say thanks, but sadly no thanks.

Speaker 1

Yeah, and that was something that I think you brought up many, many times in this interview. Is that like you you like when the dog's not OK when the dogs not. OK, can you tell me more about like, how you know? I guess you said before the yawning and this thing is it. Just from the training or like how do you?

Speaker 2

Partly ohh look, I mean I guess there is a certain amount of. When people ring to become or make initial enquiries, we're relying on people seeing that there's something in their dog. So you're you're hoping. Or relying on a certain amount of information. That they have. Understand. So you've said yourself I might need to borrow a dog, cause it might not. Be for my dog. So there's that. Where there's a bit of a self selection. Process that goes on in that regard. So most people, once you have that conversation, will either say. Yeah, that sounds good for my dog. Or what a shame, nevermind. And very occasionally get people who go. Look, I just don't know. And if that happens, then we would invite them, maybe for a meet and greet, so we can do a bit of a screening for them. Yeah. And then that's when you can talk through some of those. Signs you know what looks good for a dog in that. Environment and we've already done that over the phone. In the training package, there's also, like very specific information about what a dogs well being looks like and what what the signs are of a dog not being. Happy. So it come. And then also at the training and assessment day, there's a lot of focus given on that. Looking at the dogs body language, it's yeah, we're not expecting people to become. Trained in the same way as somebody who's working as a dog behaviourist, but you need to understand what your dog's Body language is. Which so. You know, if the ears are sitting back too much, what? Does that. Mean, yeah. If they're hiding under. The chair, just be aware. Of that. And so it comes across in the written work, probably in the the conversations that we're having over the phone and then very. Much on the training and. Assessment day. Yeah, yes, it's it's absolutely paramount.

Speaker 1

Yeah. Well, that's. I mean, that's the other part of what I'm doing is looking at the the dogs behaviours and you know it's so important to. They can't tell us how they're feeling so.

Speaker 2

Yeah, so it's. The sorts of things as a volunteer that I would have looked out with with Pepper were signs for her. She was such an active dog, so signs of withdrawing for her would have been a sign that she was a bit tired. She was a big shaker so she if she was needing to do tension or stress relief she was one who would shake a lot, so she started to shake a couple of times. I'd know that it was time to just. Take her away. Licking, licking the lips was a sign. Sometimes she wasn't much of A Panter that some dogs would show their stress through the panting. So it's all Of those things. Yeah. Well, and it's as I said, I've not studied it. It's just by watching and learning. And most of it I know through the stuff with Paws and through the training with Pepper, I had a. Don't ever do it. Anymore since post COVID I used to take a. Blanket. When we did work with the. Kids and Pepper knew that that was her space and the kids were told you're not allowed on the blankets. That's Peppers, blanket have Peppers on the blanket. That's her saying she needs space.

Speaker 1

Yeah, OK. Oh, that's lovely. That's nice.

Speaker 2

So things like, yeah, yeah, I guess it's and it's very individual. One dog might do that. Sharni was different. Her little signs of stress were a little bit sort of moving. She tended to move away on the visit that I did with her when she wanted to break, so she made it really obvious just by physically moving herself away. And then I knew that I needed to. Go and just take. A 5 minute break. And just say to people she's just having. A rest. She's gonna have a drink. We'll. Be back with you in a. Minute, but please don't touch her for the next few minutes. While she just resets, but yeah, it's. Dog specific, but I think the course, and I think you know, Sharon's put together an amazing package of information and with the trainers as well.

Speaker 1

Absolutely. Well, that is the end of my questions. Is there anything else? I know it's gone a little bit over time, so I appreciate it, but you've given me. Such amazing points that I can't wait to get into.

Speaker 2

I'm so curious to read the the final. Findings. I don't have any other questions.

Speaker 1

Yeah, well, OK, is there anything else you'd like to add or anything else you think is important that, you know, people should know about animal therapy or handlers experiences, dogs experiences?

Speaker 2

I mean, I'd just go into PR mode, but then I would say that if you, if you like working with people and you've got a dog that likes to work with people and has that temperament, there's just. There's so many reasons to do it. It's just so satisfying. Yeah, when it works, it's an it's an extraordinary experience.

Speaker 1

Ohh that's so. Beautiful. Ohh, I've really. Really enjoyed speaking with you today. It's been so lovely to see your passion and you know it's I I knew you wanted to be interviewed and I'm so glad. I did because when we met. I could feel it beaming out of you like.

Speaker 2

It's the ethnographic side that you're taking. It's really interesting and it's.

Speaker 1

Well, I don't. Know too much. Well, look, that is what my aim is. But when you read it, don’t judge me if it's not too. I'm a healthcare person, so I'm yeah.

Speaker 2

Good. I I did my honours thesis in 1993, so it's a long time since I've done any official. Yeah, that's it. And then I. So I also, I have a midwifery degree, so.

Speaker 1

What was yours on?

Speaker 2

So I was an early adopter of the concept of intersection. So you we talk about the in culturally we talk about how race, class and so I did my thesis on the intersection of race, class and gender in. Wait for it. Jamaican fiction. Wasn't necessarily what I wanted to do it I actually. Really, really wanted to look at the lived experiences of migrant women in Australia, but my my. A supervisor retired and I got bumped over, but somebody else did something else. It was. Very interesting, yeah.

Speaker 1

Oh, that's cool though. What Uni?

Speaker 2

Sydney.

Speaker 1

OK, cool. Oh, that's awesome. Yeah, I never thought I'd wanted to be honours and then I saw that there was one about dogs and I was like I’ve gotta do it. Yeah. Have to.

Speaker 2

Ohh look and if you ever decide. To go on and. Do any more research on it, let me know, I'll be a happy participant.

Speaker 1

Ohh, if you've done your Honours we can do our we can do a double. We can do a matching PhD.

Speaker 2

Maybe I've I've been toying with the idea of a PhD for a long time.

Speaker 1

Or you can continue on from my research.

Speaker 2

Maybe yeah. Ohh, which? I don’t know which area I’d do it in. Cause it's. I'm more midwife now than I am. Anthropology so so.

Speaker 1

You can do it on puppies, maybe.

Speaker 2

Thank you. Maybe therapy. That's the way to go.

Speaker 1

Thank you so much for your time. You know honestly, it's been so lovely to speak with you and I hope you.

Speaker 2

Thank you. Yeah, and we're Really excited that you're flying the flag, so that's that's excellent.

Speaker 1

Thank you so much. I'm sure you'll see Sharon tomorrow and just let her know that everybody has been so passionate and amazing. And you can just tell how much everyone that I've spoken to, it just like beams out of them, how much. They love what they're doing.

Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, it's definitely. It's the equivalent of a vocation. It's whatever that is. That surface gene that that we many of us have that comes out with the volunteers. Am I the? Last interview are you? Ready to start writing now? Well. You still got more.

Speaker 1

No, no, no. I’ve got at least three more. I've got. One was supposed to be last night. We had a blackout and my computer died. I've got one. That's tomorrow. And then I've got another one booked in potentially for tomorrow and maybe one more and two more observations. So then I have to. Stop. I wanna do more, but I've gotta stop because I've gotta get writing. So, yeah, it's qualitative. So I can only do that many. But yeah, it’s been really good so far, so.

Speaker 2

Well, if you if you need any clarification down the track, don't be shy to ask.

Speaker 1

Thank you. You've been amazing. I really appreciate your time and I know you just got back from your holiday, so I even more appreciate it because I’m sure you want to go to bed.

Speaker 2

It's all good. No, it's all beautiful. Good luck with it all and I look forward to seeing the finished product and you know, let. Us know if you need anything in the meantime.

Speaker 1

Thank you so much. Alright, all the best. Thank you so much,

Speaker 2

Thanks you too.