



*Alison connects with adopted Border Collie, Sadie*

## **The Power of Pets**

*by Heather Wennergren, Media & Training Coordinator*

It is easy to get lost in the daily details of managing care. We may be advocating for the best therapies or highest standards of care, or working overtime to get the social calendar filled. With all of the tasks and demands, some of the simple pleasures in life get overlooked.

Having the right pet can be deeply enriching. They aren't called "Man's Best Friend" for nothing; we work with them, sleep with them and play with them. In return, they help us in many ways. Having an animal to pet or curl up with can be deeply satisfying, perhaps more so for individuals with developmental disabilities. Assisting with feeding or grooming results in a sense of

personal responsibility. The very act of caring for another being may be therapeutic.

Our pets don't judge us. . .in fact, most of them think we can do no wrong. Interaction with pets is simple, perhaps providing a reprieve from the more demanding communications required by humans. They don't get frustrated if speech was a bit labored or something was not perfectly stated.

The bond between person and pet goes deep. . . Some dogs may even have the ability to sense a seizure just before it occurs. Diane LaDouceur was aware of this potential when she decided to

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adopt a Border Collie for her daughter Alison. In time, she learned that Sadie was not a seizure dog. However, her pet did have the right temperament to be a therapy dog. Diane trained her accordingly, and takes her to work in care centers for the elderly and with people with disabilities. Alison, 11 years old, is learning to serve in her community alongside her canine companion. Diane reflects on her daughter's relationship with Sadie, "Adopting Sadie has changed Alison's life. Being an only child, it gives her a connection."

Diane, Alison and Sadie also attend local events. Sadie enjoys her work and people love her. According to Diane "kids lay all over her, they just love her." The trio make



*Sadie becomes a pillow*

themselves available for visits to Day at the Park, Birthday parties, or any other event where kids with disabilities might benefit from meeting Sadie. By facilitating Alison and Sadie's ventures into the community, Diane is creating opportunities for her daughter to learn skills that may one day help her in a career. "My goal as a parent is to help my daughter learn some great life and work skills." She adds, "Working with Sadie has really boosted Alison's self confidence."



*Wendy Guerrero Photography*

*Alison & Sadie visit program offered by City of Oxnard*

Diane LaDouceur began her pet search at Petfinder.com. "The best way to find the right animal is to learn about its' personality," suggests Diane. Petfinder.com connected her with Border Collies in Need, where she found Sadie. Sadie was once abused, but with the right care and training has become a perfect therapy dog. Diane explains, "I only adopt rescue dogs. The personality profile from Sadie's foster mom was a big help." Diane believes in doing research before getting a pet. This is one way to select an animal that can be properly cared for and is the right fit for the pet owner and the family or residence.

If you live near Simi Valley and would like for Sadie to visit your event, Contact Diane at 805-331-9899.



Pet overpopulation is a widespread problem in the United States. The Humane Society estimates that three to four million animals die in shelters each year. This primarily due to lack of adoptive homes. Many of these animals are purebred. Petfinder.com connects homeless animals with the right people via the internet. It has a search feature that allows prospective adopters to search a database of available pets by location, breed, age, size and gender. There are all types of animals up for adoption, including barnyard animals and reptiles. The list of various breeds is extensive. Learn more at [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com).