

# Daisy's Rescue

By: Matt Hunt



This is the story of volunteers Maureen and Glenn Matto, who are taking on the

challenge of a special-needs dog, first as foster parents, and finally as adoptive parents. It demonstrates the best of what The Animal League of Green Valley is all about: selfless devotion to the long-term needs of those in our care, especially when those needs are special.

Several of our dogs at TALGV struggle to adjust to life in a shelter. This is especially true for dogs that have been relinquished after one or more stints in an adoptive home. Success for these dogs requires not just food, exercise, and temporary shelter but also compassion, understanding, help in acquiring social skills with humans and/or animals, mastery of some basic routines and commands, and getting re-acclimated to living in a home with a family.

Daisy was such a dog. She had a long history with TALGV—since arriving in 2016, she had been in and out of three unsuccessful adoptions. When she finally landed back at the League in March 2021, she was fearful and psychologically shut down. Very few volunteers were able to build trust or establish a rapport with Daisy, and she soon was designated as a special-needs dog with a limited number of approved handlers.

Maureen, a Saturday dog walker, was one of the handlers who quickly developed a rapport with Daisy. “When I met her,” Maureen recalls. “She was shut down and shy. She wouldn’t eat and would only allow certain volunteers into her kennel space.” Fortunately, Glenn, an outdoor cleaner, was another of those “certain volunteers” that Daisy warmed up to.



The couple recognized the telltale signs of Daisy's difficulty in adapting to the shelter environment: Lack of appetite, weight loss, social withdrawal, and anxiety (for which she was being medicated). The Mattos are experienced dog owners and have fostered several dogs before and during the pandemic. With the passing of their beloved Bella, they were prompted to seek out a new dog. They decided to foster Daisy because they both believed that that she had potential if given the opportunity outside of the kennel environment. They knew it would take time and unending patience to help her overcome her anxiety and fearfulness.

The first month at home with the Mattos was challenging for both dog and foster parents. They staked out a safe area for her in their master bedroom (she had been trained to understand this concept while at TALGV using the “place” command). For most of that month, she willingly stayed in her area, where she felt safe, leaving the room only to go for walks. The Mattos worked to build Daisy's trust slowly. She accepted them into her safe space and gradually began to get comfortable in other areas of the home, including the kitchen where she now takes her meals. But getting from her safe place to the kitchen took



weeks of gentle coaxing with lots of praise. “We went slowly with her,” Maureen remembers. “Letting her take her meals in her safe place for three weeks, moving to a spot halfway to the kitchen for another couple of weeks, and finally getting her comfortable where we wanted her to eat. Even now, she sometimes looks to Glenn or me for approval before taking a meal in the kitchen.”

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The Matto's persistence has paid off as Daisy now regularly explores other parts of the house of her own volition without needing to be coaxed. The summer storms tested Daisy's new-found confidence and have



caused her to seek comfort in her safe place with a thunder shirt, but her overall anxiety has decreased to the point where her medication could be reduced.

Outside of the home, Glenn and Maureen have worked diligently to get Daisy acclimated to her environment. Like any neighborhood, it's full of a plethora of stimuli, much of which Daisy was ill-equipped to handle. Fortunately, the Mattos had experience and perseverance in abundance and proceeded methodically to introduce her to the situations, people, and animals in Daisy's new surroundings. They

did things at her pace; walking on a leash, greeting people and dogs, learning to leave unsafe things alone, and getting used to vehicle traffic. She's learned to love people, walk with another neighbor dog, and respond to commands while on a leash. Daisy is still working on socializing with other dogs she meets on her walks and remains skittish around loud traffic noises. She is slowly becoming a confident dog, which will free her to be the smart and fun-loving companion she truly is.

Maureen: "Each fostering experience is unique because each dog is unique. Daisy had to learn from us how to act like a dog and interact appropriately with her environment, situations, people and animals." Like many foster parents, the Mattos had very little information about the antecedents at the root of Daisy's behavior. Through their compassion, dedication, and patience they gained Daisy's trust and guided her on the path of becoming a happy, loving, and confident dog.

"Shelter life for a dog," Maureen continues, "is very different than being in a home. Some of these dogs are used to being in a home setting. Shelters,



while they give all the necessary things for a dog, are not like being in their own *pack*. Shelter dogs need time to settle in when they are in a home setting, whether they're being fostered or adopted. It's like being in a new country and all of you—family members and dog—need routines that work best for the whole pack. We (Daisy, Glenn and Maureen) are still a work in progress."