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# Latham Letter

VOLUME XXXVII, NUMBER 1

WINTER 2016

PROMOTING RESPECT FOR ALL LIFE THROUGH EDUCATION

SINGLE ISSUE PRICE: \$5.00



By Sarah Aguiniga

## What a Difference a Year Makes

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# What a Difference a Year Makes



Sarah

By Sarah Aguiniga

training better which made her more comfortable and excited to come to class. In one of the last classes we had, with her she was letting us pet her, and she was showing affection back by licking our faces. Glinda reminded me of myself when I first started the program. I was shy and even felt anxious about going to the classes; but, just like Glinda, over time I began to feel more comfortable with my surroundings and felt more confident about going and training. Glinda made me realize how important your body language is toward the animal.

After the program ended I took a small break before starting to volunteer on my own. When I began volunteering I wasn't using clicker training with the dogs, I was cleaning dogs' dorms and sitting with the dogs giving them TLC in those dorms. I love going

**W**hen I first heard about the program with Baden High School, the Pryor Foundation, and the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA over a year ago, I was excited to have a chance to work with animals and help train them to better their chances at being adopted. When I got accepted into the program, I would have never thought that a little over a year later I would be mentoring this year's students, volunteering on my own time while attending college, and interning in the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA's behavior department. Joining this program was the best decision I've ever made. I learned the right way to approach an animal, what their different body language means, and how to teach good behavior by using clicker training. This program helped me gain confidence in myself as a person and a trainer. But my favorite part about the whole program was being able to see all of the animals we worked with get adopted. It shows that all of the training was effective and was important to the animals. No matter what the animals' past experiences were, they were able to find their forever homes with their new families.

There was one dog in particular that I will always remember. Her name was Glinda and she was an Akita mix. She came into training timid and cautious of her surroundings. When I would click for good behavior, I would try to give her a treat, but when she would take it she would take two steps back to eat it. To make sure Glinda felt comfortable, I adjusted my body language by facing her at an angle so she wouldn't feel like she was in danger and lowered my hand closer to her nose. After a few clicks she was backing away less and less. By the end of that class she was comfortable enough to take the treat from my hand. Over the course of the program she began to understand clicker

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Sarah working with Francisco, one of this year's students

these great opportunities and to everyone who has helped me. I honestly don't know what I would be doing if I hadn't been accepted into this amazing program.

When I was asked if I would be able to help mentor this year's students I was more than happy to accept. I was

“ Glinda reminded me of myself when I first started the program. ”

excited to go back and learn how to handle different dogs. This year I am able to bring the dogs to class and help give advice and teach the students about clicker training. Another thing I like about helping with this year's students is that you not only get to see the dogs progress and start

into pit bulls' dorms because they always seem to cuddle with you the most. This was a little different from the Baden program. A few months later, I was able to start walking dogs and taking them on my own into the inside play yard. As a result I began to build a bond with some dogs, and it's the best feeling when you find out they finally got adopted. The program with Baden High School, the Pryor Foundation, and the Peninsula Humane Society really helped me kick down the door to all of these opportunities. Without this program I wouldn't have begun to volunteer on my own, and that led to an opening as an intern at the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA. It also helped me realize how much I want to work with animals as a career choice. I am still so thankful for all of

to open up but you also get to see the students grow as well, just like I did. This year I get to handle all sorts of dogs from hyperactive puppies to shy older dogs. With each module of the program, the students become more knowledgeable about body language and also become more precise at timing their clicks for good behavior. When the students become more skilled, they start to use clicker training to help the dogs cooperate with a veterinary examination. They use clicker training to relax the dog while the vet is listening for the heartbeat. They also begin to work with dogs who can be a little more timid than others. This means they need to focus more on dog body language as well as their own. So far it has been a pleasure working with the students. You can really tell they love working with all of the dogs. I can't wait to see how skilled they will become as trainers in the upcoming semester. Maybe they will follow my footsteps and help mentor next years' students or even begin volunteering on their own time!



Glinda

