

The Team Who Takes Care of Your Dogs at Home

By Joseph Grammer

We love sitting down with canine experts to get the story behind where they are now, such as how they landed in the animal industry, what drives them, and how their passion for pets brings out meaning in their lives. This issue we talk with Karen Rosenberg, owner and operator of KSR Pet Care, which serves the McLean and Falls Church area with dog walking and pet sitting services that focus on in-home care. Last year they started the KSR Pet Care Dog Training school, which offers both group and private lessons. Karen's family includes three dogs—Lexie, Jiffie, and Cody—as well as a cat named Harry.

NOVADog Magazine: Why is it important to care for dogs in their own home?

Karen Rosenberg: We've noticed that most dogs are just like cats: they like to stay in their own house, in their own environment. I'm not against dog boarding at all, and in fact we refer clients to boarding situations sometimes, but we notice that especially adult and senior dogs have an attachment to home. On top of that, it's important for puppies to have a routine, which you can only really get in a place they're familiar and comfortable with.

ND: How important is communication for you?

KR: We leave a written report for every single visit. And we don't just check boxes, either—we leave sentences. Today we noticed this or that on the walk, he started nipping grass, etc. Sitters may text with the client, too, and they can send pictures. Sometimes they do this on a daily basis.

It all depends on the client. Some people don't want to hear everything, and other people do.

Right now I'm taking care of Ernie, a dog who has mouth cancer. His family is gone for a whole month, so we've been monitoring his vitals frequently. We've got a group email list going to keep our team posted on his condition. For example, "He got his pill today, but he didn't eat, so he still needs food." If the owner wants to know, we'll always send updates.

ND: What issues do you often see when running your dog training classes?

KR: A client is often like, "This and this is wrong—here's a whole list." But our trainers guide them, tell them, "Let's start here." The beginning is just a bit of obedience training. If there's a counter surfer, for example, we may not start with that issue first. We'll start by getting them to walk and exercise well. We fix the listening bond between dog and parent that is at the core of the issue. That doesn't happen overnight.

We have a trainer who works with our dog walkers and helps

them work with clients' dogs. For example, I'm visiting a dog later, and I asked our trainer Kathryn to come with me. Together we found a way of leashing the dog, Max, and getting him out on a walk. When Max sees a stranger, he runs away, and the client doesn't use a collar and doesn't crate him. If you grab Max's harness, he freaks out and tries to escape. It's a tough situation, but Kathryn literally warms up some hot dogs, approaches him, and every time he comes closer we give him some more. That's been helpful so far.

ND: What are your own dogs like?

KR: All of my dogs were rescues, so it was tough for them in the beginning. Lexi, my Shepherd, came from South Carolina—she was almost killed back then. Luckily a rescue stepped up, and she became ours. I saw her picture when she was first picked up from Animal Control, and she was skin and bones. She'd been put in an apartment with another dog and several cats, and the Animal Control report said they were surprised the cats were not eaten, because the conditions were so bad.

Lexi was scared for a while; blue mailboxes would freak her out, for example. But it was really rewarding to see her grow over time. She still has her quirks, but we're finding ways to keep her happy. She really loves what we have to offer, even if she isn't 100% acclimated, and the same is true for all dog training: it's not about creating the perfect dog without any fears or quirks. That doesn't exist.

ND: What would you say to an aspiring dog walker?

KR: Learn on the job and make time for it. If the dog you're in charge of ever escapes and gets hit by a car, it's a tragedy for everyone, so walkers need to make that investment and really train. If you have another job at Starbucks, you may not be able to handle this kind of work at the same time. Flexibility and organization skills are definitely needed, and we have a tough application process. But if you're committed, you can do it.



Dogs can be energetic, so it takes training to become a professional walker or sitter.

We're trying to change the idea that pet sitting is just for a little while—it can be a rewarding career, and you can make a living out of it. Also, because I know how challenging it can be, I insist that my sitters take time off. If they haven't taken vacation in a while, I tell them to go do it.

That flexibility is important, though. There are often last-min-

ute changes from the owner, and of course the dogs may have their issues. Sometimes there's a fearful dog who won't walk. In that case, the sitter will just sit on the couch, and several visits might pass where the dog is still fearful. Then all of a sudden the relationship changes, and the dog trusts you. Those are the most rewarding times, because it shows that even if you don't understand their language, dogs can trust you. When you see that change, that click in their head like, "I can trust you and go on a walk with you," it makes us really feel good. That's what being a dog walker is about.

Please visit <https://ksrpetcare.com/> or email info@ksrpetcare.com to learn more about KSR's dog walking, pet sitting, and training services. **ND**

Joseph Grammer is managing editor for NOVADog Magazine. He lives in Alexandria, VA, but grew up in New Jersey with a bunch of adopted dogs, including a mutt (Blizzard) who he found on the street.

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