

Our boy, Scout

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When Joye H. found Scout in the Oakland shelter last December, he was one scared dog. Most dogs don't do well stuck in a shelter environment; others do really poorly and become almost unadoptable. Who wants a trembling animal cowering in the back of their kennel? Those animals rarely make it out alive, and sadly, that was Scout.

He had been adopted out twice and returned both times for "not bonding". Joye coaxed him out and did her best to evaluate him. She could tell there was a really good dog in there somewhere and brought him into the program. Ann H. opened her home to foster him. Would he overcome his fears?

Scout improved but he remained fearful. New situations and new things really caused a meltdown. This was not a dog we could adopt out. What to do? GSRNC turned to Heather at Koru K9. After struggling for 30 minutes to get him into her car, she took him in as a "board & train": Scout went to live with Heather and into near-constant training.

Heather soon figured out that Scout's lack of confidence could be improved in a couple ways. First, he couldn't be coddled when he freaked out about something. Distracting him with a quick correction and focusing on something else – quick turns while walking, or sits & downs – helped him regain his self-control. Second, he needed to be trained aggressively so he could feel good about doing something "right". When he figured out what "leave it" meant and received praise for doing it right – what a boost to his ego! Active play helped with that too; successfully chasing and retrieving a ball is great fun and feels so good!

Over 3 weeks, Scout became a REALLY well-trained dog. Heather enjoyed him so much, she took Scout on a camping trip for a week where he hiked and romped along with her dogs. But then it was time for him to go into foster care again. Would his training hold up when he wasn't with an alpha leader?

At first, his new fosterer Allison K. wasn't sure. She lives in San Francisco, and at first city life was really hard for Scout. It took a day of repetition before he could successfully walk down her street, cross to the other side, and come back without panicking at every stroller, bicyclist, and runner. At Heather's recommendation, Allison spent the first 2 days constantly training him and playing with him to keep his mind active, and focused on things that boosted his confidence.

Within a few days, he was taking 45-minute walks each day with ease. In another few days, he was letting his hair (fur?) down in the yard and romping like a puppy. By the end of the week, he was actively soliciting affection – "bonding" was clearly not a problem!

Scout shows why GSRNC insists on fostering dogs before adoption. Fostering moves dogs from a depressed shelter resident to a confident new family member. It took a long time for this "brain transplant" to take place, but Scout made it! Our "Boy Scout" will be adopted this week by an experienced GSD family in San Francisco.