

Includes:

High-functioning

Social isolation

Covers:

Family time

Activities

Siblings

Family Dog Success Story

Harry and Barnaby

Harry was diagnosed with high functioning autism (aged 7) in 2010. Life then was strictly structured around Harry in order to help reduce his anxieties, especially any change in routine.

Harry used to spend a lot of time on his own, not joining in with the family. Mum Ceri investigated ways to help Harry and found Dogs for Good's Family Dog workshops. Back then, introducing a dog to the family seemed an unlikely solution because Harry disliked the one dog he knew, a Labrador who had to be moved to another room whenever they visited. Ceri attended a series of three workshops which were very clear about the benefits and challenges that dog ownership would bring.

Soon afterwards she discovered Harry disliked big, heavy dogs and he didn't like the Labrador's colour. "He was quite open to having a dog in the family but wanted a small one – simple!" says Ceri. A border terrier puppy was found nearby and, using the Family Dog Team's expert advice and techniques, Ceri prepared the whole family for the day he joined the family.



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All decisions, including the puppy's name, were made by the whole family. Everyone wrote and crossed off names until they all agreed on Barnaby (one of Harry's suggestions, after a dog in Minecraft). The family shopped together to choose everything the puppy would need and once they had chosen him, they visited every week until he came home.

"In advance we established family rules, such as leaving Barnaby in peace when in his crate, praising good behaviour and never shouting at him or making him fearful of us, initially all written down and displayed because Harry is very visual," says Ceri. Harry didn't want Barnaby to be allowed in his room, because he felt this was his space, and this too was respected.

"We worked on expectations about having a puppy: how to act around him, how he might behave (including how he might communicate his feelings) and this was invaluable," adds Ceri. The family carefully planned looking after Barnaby for the first five weeks, with both parents and older sister Beth sharing Barnaby duty. "I'm sure this is what made it successful for us. We still had lots of challenges during the puppy stage - particularly Barnaby's obsession with toes when Harry needed to go barefoot (solved by croc shoes), but it was definitely worth it," she says.

Ceri has been careful to continue family inclusion around decisions and expectation-setting regarding Barnaby. Harry still accompanies him to the vet, goes shopping for his food and loves choosing new toys for him.

There were still occasional issues Ceri hadn't anticipated: "I didn't realise how different Barnaby would look after his first visit to the groomer," she says. "Harry was upset; he thought I'd brought home the wrong dog for a couple of days. He still finds it unsettling.

"It feels as though Barnaby has been part of our family forever," Ceri says, "and there have been so many benefits. We get out and about as a family far more now. We'll often go down the local fields or the beach and play football with Barnaby, which



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Harry wouldn't have entertained before." The family has also been on successful holiday trips to Center Parks and to the Forest of Dean with Barnaby.

Now 15, Harry spends much less time on solitary activities. He's taught Barnaby to play find-the-treat and push-the-button games with him. He loves to set up the agility equipment in the garden and practise what he's taught Barnaby. Harry and Barnaby enjoy it so much they go to an indoor dog park for agility sessions in bad weather.

Barnaby senses when Harry is anxious and will sit by him. Ceri explains: "He doesn't ask for anything or need communication from Harry, and Harry allows him to be next to him (whereas if we tried to touch him he might become more upset). He helps Harry relax after a challenging school day too."

It's obvious that Barnaby means a great deal to Harry. He keeps a photo of his special dog under his pillow, "Just looking at it makes me happy", he says. Harry used to hate having his photograph taken, but it's alright now as long as Barnaby is with him in the photo.

As Harry memorably declares: "Barnaby helps me with my autism. He is really helpful if I get upset. I have got so used to life with Barnaby, I can't remember life without him."

Ceri sums up how introducing Barnaby to help Harry has improved life for the whole family: "The biggest, most positive change has been the change of focus for us as a family –this has been beneficial for all of us but particularly Beth. Our world isn't all about Harry any more, it's about Barnaby. "Francesca is learning about responsibility and enjoys joining in with activities and training. I see her and Dessy developing a lovely deep bond and we're all looking forward to seeing how things progress.

"I always knew Dessy was a lovely dog but attending the Dogs for Good Family Dog workshops has showed me that she's actually so much more than that – she's amazing. Being able to understand her on a far deeper level ensures that I can meet all her



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needs and give her the best life possible and as a happy consequence, she'll be that lovely, devoted, dependable friend for Francesca.”



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