



ON

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HOMES &amp; CONDOS

# Cold paws, warm hearts find each other

A unique dog relocation program is shortening the distance between tundra and Toronto

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TORONTO STAR

Jennifer Palacios and Jan Hannah have been friends since they were three-year-olds, growing up on the same street in Leaside.

So when Hannah was looking for someone to adopt a dog from a remote Cree community in James Bay she knew her friend would be the right fit.

Palacios is now the owner of Nessy, a medium-sized, four-year-old black lab and shepherd cross.

"She came with the name Princess — a common name in the north because children often name the dogs. So I (wanted) to change it," says Palacios, who works in real estate. She picked the name Nessy for its similar sound to Princess.

Nessy had been identified through the Northern Dogs Project for relocation and had produced 22 pups through two heats when Palacios and Hannah, now both 43, picked her up in Ottawa two years ago.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare created the Northern Dogs Project in Ottawa in 2002, and since 2004 Hannah has managed it from IFAW's Guelph office. The project — nicknamed "the Shaggy Wagon" — was initiated to address dog issues in isolated native communities.

"There are so many remote communities with absolutely no access to veterinary services that unchecked population growth and lack of simple veterinary care leads to too many dogs and dogs with inadequate care," says Hannah.

Hannah, who holds a bachelor's degree in marine biology and a masters' in education, travels with a team of veterinarians, vet technicians and humane educators twice each spring to the isolated James Bay area.

The team, she says, stays at each of the eight communities for about two days, running 30 to 120 dogs through their veterinary clinic and making presentations in the schools. They usually visit four communities at a time.

She says IFAW will find a home for a dog of any age, breed or size that has been identified by a community contact.

The 30 dogs that have arrived from northern Ontario over the years have included ones whose owners no longer wanted them but also didn't want them kept in the community or euthanized.

Some no longer had owners and were identified as a nuisance, says Hannah, who adds that there are no programs in Canada, that she knows of, that have the "scope or depth of Northern Dogs."

Although Nessy comes from a community where dogs roam freely and constantly interact with each other and humans, she adapted surprisingly fast to Palacios's 800-square-foot, one-bedroom condo. She was good company for her 14-year-old dog Suki, who looked to be a cross between a golden retriever and a black Labrador.

"I've had Suki since she was six

weeks old and the relationship and habits that you form with your dog over 14 years are a big part of your life," explains Palacios.

Suki passed away from cancer six weeks ago and having Nessy helped fill the void for Palacios.

She says she is also thinking about adopting another dog through the Northern Dogs Project. In the meantime, she is enjoying Nessy and her condo, in an area of Leaside that she loves.

Unlike Suki, who enjoyed the outdoors and lounged on the patio of Palacios's ground-floor unit, "Nessy prefers the comfort of the indoors — probably from her time living on the streets, especially during the frigid winters."

On weekends, the two go to a small place in Caledon that Palacios recently purchased. Nessy runs with canine friends, including three other transplanted Northern dogs. And the two childhood friends — Palacios and Hannah, who lives full-time in Caledon and has three dogs of her own, including Bosum, a relocated husky mix from James Bay — enjoy hiking the scenic trails together.

Hannah says Nessy and the other Northern dogs in the neighbourhood "run through the woods like they still live in the north."



Jan Hannah, shown earlier this year, takes a break in Caledon with Layla, Bosum and Stella, dogs relocated from the north. The Northern Dogs Project gives unwanted canines in James Bay a new home in southern Ontario.

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