

## **What Every Adopter Should Know Before Adopting a STAR Aussie**

### **Letter To Adopters**

Thank you for applying to adopt one of our STAR Australian Shepherds. We have prepared this document for all potential adopters to read and sign. It contains important information about Aussies in general, our dogs, and our services.

Australian Shepherds were originally bred to be herding dogs, tirelessly working cattle and sheep. This means they are smart, independent problem solvers that enjoy the challenge of managing a herd of animals. While most Aussies these days are bred as pets, they still retain their working dog drive and energy. If they do not have strong leadership from their owners and a positive outlet for their herding instincts, they can resort to behavior that is not desirable for most pet owners. This could include herding children, nipping at their heels, barking at neighbors, not tolerating other animals in "their territory" (which we humans perceive as "our home"), and generally doing what their working dog instincts tell them to do. This sometimes conflicts with what we want them to do as pets.

Aussies can also react undesirably to infants and toddlers. This is why it is STAR's policy to not place our dogs in homes with young children. None of our foster homes have young children, so we cannot evaluate any of our dogs for behavior with young children and toddlers.

Aussies tend to look to their adult humans as leaders, but are frequently confused by the behavior of young children, especially children that run around the house yelling and playing. To a smart working dog, this might be perceived as a small person that needs to be controlled and directed back to the herd, and this is accomplished by heel nipping, barking, and intimidation. This is exactly what they are bred to do with their herd. Some Aussies can be trained to be tolerant with children, but we strongly recommend that all our dogs be separated from all small children until it is clear that they are 100% trustworthy—both with your children and with children and toddlers visiting your home. This is a process that takes time and often professional training. It's important to understand that this is not aggressive behavior on the part of the dog. He's just trying to do his job; it's the owner's job to understand the dog's behavior and train him to act appropriately.

Experts would surely agree that the most important key to successful and happy dog ownership is training your dog. Please, do not consider adopting an Australian Shepherd if you have no interest in training your dog. If you do not train him or her, he or she will certainly train you, and the result will not be fun for anyone in the family.

Aussies are smart, energetic, and highly social dogs that need to establish their role in the family. This requires leadership and direction from their owner. Professional training, obedience classes, etc...can really help. Ultimately, however it is the owner's responsibility to provide their dogs with the training they absolutely need to become well behaved family members. Aussie owners should look forward to this experience; your dog certainly will, and it is a great way to deepen the bond between you and your dog.

Our foster volunteers work with the dogs in their homes—usually for two to four weeks before they are placed. In that time period, we work on house training, crate training, and identifying and discouraging any undesirable behaviors. This is NOT a substitute for training. Even if STAR dogs were trained, each adopting owner would still need to establish the correct relationship with their dog through training and gaining better understanding about how that dog communicates and socializes instinctively. A good professional trainer can be a great resource to help with this. This is an ongoing process, and it is fun.

However, avoiding it will very much lower your chances of success with your dog. One of the reasons STAR and other rescue organizations exist is because so many dogs have problems in their homes. When your dog first comes into your family, you can expect some undesirable behavior; poor recall, unwanted barking and protective behavior, destruction of property, etc. This would also be true of practically any dog, not just STAR dogs or Aussies. Please take ample time to help your dog adapt to your house. This can take months.

We at STAR thank you for taking the time to read and sign this information as you embark into owning one of the most intelligent, loving and loyal companions you will ever experience in the years to come.

**I HAVE READ THE LETTER TO ADOPTERS**

Potential Adopter(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_