

Rescued greyhound finding new life helping others in many ways

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There is plenty of talk in today's world about re-inventing yourself and second chances, but there is a four-legged phenom here in Douglas County that brings those phrases to life.

Cleo was a racing greyhound that had finished her career and had been put out to pasture, looking for someone to give her a home and a new purpose in life. Enter Lynn Abass.

Abass, who is the director of victim services with the Douglas County Solicitor's Office, heard about Douglasville's Second Chance Greyhounds and once she met Cleo, she made her a member of the family. But instead of living out her life as an overgrown lap dog, Cleo has shown talents that are paying dividends to everyone she meets.

"We got her last December and she is just so sweet and good with people and especially kids," Abass said. "People are just drawn to her and she has this calming effect on people. So we started looking around at ways that she could help people. Since I work with victims and had heard about that, that was a natural – especially with young victims. But then we realized that there was so much that she could do, so we

started doing research and got started."

Cleo is just 3 years old, but wasn't a great racer so she retired young. She left a track in Birmingham to go to a prison in Florida where inmates worked with her to help develop her people skills. That's where the rescue group came in and Abass met her new best friend.

Abass took Cleo through an extensive animal therapy seminar at Auburn University where therapy dog certification and R.E.A.D. were taught. She proved to be a natural. She unofficially began pet therapy at Douglasville Nursing & Rehabilitation in January and then started shadowing others. From there she began process of being certified through Therapy Dogs Inc. (TDI).

When Douglas County Solicitor General Matt Krull saw Cleo with others, he saw that she could help in the office.

"Lynn brought her in and we found she had such a great personality and calming quality we felt that with young victims and witnesses, they were at ease when she was around," Krull said. "When you have to get someone that young who has been through something traumatic, it is amazing what having a dog there does. So she is part of our staff unofficially, but home to find more ways that she can help."

Krull and Abass said they would be glad make Cleo available to the Sheriff's Office, the Douglasville Police Department and other agencies who deal with victims of crime.

But Saturday was Cleo's official debut as a reading dog at the Douglas County Public Library. Youngsters signed up to spend 15 minutes reading to Cleo and judging from the reaction, the kids and Cleo had a blast.

"It was fun reading to her," said 6-year-old Theresa May Tamondong. "She was so sweet and listened."

Cleo would look at the pictures and listen carefully, often paying extra attention to the items that Theresa pointed to as she read.

Abass said there are plans to begin the program at the Boundary Waters Library in a few months.

"She really enjoys being with people. I was proud of how well not only Cleo did, but how the kids responded," Abass said. "It wasn't all that long ago that once these dogs were done racing they were just disposed of. We are so glad that's not the case anymore. She has this whole new life. She is having fun and the best part is that the kids and those she visits are too."