

# A ray of SUNSHINE

A puppy rescued from Romania is now helping to brighten the lives of residents in a Surrey care home. **Joanne Bednall** reports.



A DNA test revealed that Bruno was a mix of 22 breeds!

Right: Bruno and Hayley were made for each other.

**W**ith her heart firmly set on adopting a rescue as a companion for her Belgian Malinois, Hayley Flynn felt disappointed and deflated when most of the charities she approached failed to reply.

But just when she was on the verge of giving up, a Basingstoke-based non-profit animal rescue not only acknowledged her application but responded that very same day.

"I applied to loads of rescues in the UK but many didn't get back to me," explained Hayley, who's 22.

"But Helping Dogs and Cats UK Rescue contacted me straight away, and I actually got to speak to a real person rather than just filling in forms online."

Hayley explained that she initially applied to the organisation for a Belgian Malinois called Zoe, thinking she would be the ideal match for 18-month-old Rocket, but a family in Germany pipped her to the post. Then, just as Hayley was about to apply for a "big, fluffy, wolf-like dog", the commercial import of pets from Belarus, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine was suspended, and she lost out again.

So, when Hayley heard about a six-month-old puppy called Blizzard, who had arrived in the UK from Romania with his siblings before the borders shut, she hoped it would be third time lucky. It hadn't worked out with his previous adopters, and the puppy, since renamed Bruno, had come into emergency foster care with rescue volunteer Debra Peltz, until his forever home could be found.



"Everything happens for a reason," continued Hayley, who, aged just 11, trained her family dog, Bo, a Border Collie X Labrador, to pass his bronze, silver, and gold Kennel Club Good Citizen Awards.

"My first thought when I saw Bruno was that he was a lot smaller than I expected. He had the friendliest, cutest face and was excited by everything."

However, Hayley had two main worries: firstly, that the pup would be fearful of many sights and sounds, and secondly — and most crucially — that he wouldn't get on with Rocket.

"On the way to meet Bruno, I had a word with Rocket in the car, telling him: 'Now look, don't mess this up!'" continued Hayley, whose initial concerns evaporated when Bruno



Bruno gets a fuss from two care home residents.

Right: Despite Hayley's concerns, Bruno and Rocket got on from the moment they met.

Below: Bruno's special badge.



greeted her confidently with an enthusiastic lick on the face.

"The two dogs got on instantly and ran around playing like they had known each other for years."

## A NEW HOME

A week later, and with the paperwork in order, Bruno arrived at his new home in Aldershot, Hampshire. At first, the black street dog was reluctant to go in Hayley's house, instead preferring

## "Bruno has even helped build bridges and open up dialogue..."

to stay outside in the garden.

"But by the following day, he had totally settled — it was as if he wanted to sleep on it," said Hayley, who added that a DNA test has recently revealed Bruno is a mix of 22 different breeds, but mainly terrier.

Just two months on and the now eight-month-old puppy has already established a close bond with Hayley, who continued: "Ninety per cent of the time, he has the soul of an old man, and is delicate in everything he does. Then, at 7pm every evening and on walks, he suddenly has the zoomies! I have never allowed dogs on the sofa but I've given up with Bruno! I wouldn't be human if I kicked him off!"

Impressed by the positive effect her dog, Bo, had had on residents at the care home where she worked previously, Hayley was keen to take her next dog into the office.

"But Rocket would have found it too exciting," said Hayley, who felt sure Bruno's trusting, loving nature would endear him to both staff and residents at the animal-friendly Princess Christian Care Home near Pirbright, Surrey, where she works as the resident liaison officer.

"Just two weeks after having Bruno, I decided I'd give it a go. He was very keen to come with me and sat quietly in my office while I did admin.

"Then, in order to see colleagues in another office, we had to walk past the residents' bedrooms. The man in the first room started whistling at Bruno, who went straight up to him, sat by his side and let him pet him.

"When Bruno met my colleagues, he was super-excited, jumping up and loving the attention."

Hayley was blown away by her dog instinctively knowing the difference between elderly residents or those with dementia, and her co-workers.

"I couldn't believe it — Bruno was a natural! He just picked up on the different vibes in the residents' bedrooms and lounge and knew to be calm.

"Some residents are rude to people but gush when they see a dog. Even those for whom you think it wouldn't be a good idea, become gentle, friendly, and calm when interacting with Bruno.

"One gentleman with dementia is convinced Bruno is his black Labrador puppy, Dennis, and doesn't understand why he can't do the tricks he taught him, like rolling over!"

Bruno, who goes into work with Hayley every week and even has his own official 'well-being support dog' badge, has an uncanny knack of bringing out the best in people.

"Another resident is prone to loud, aggressive outbursts but loves Bruno and always wants him to stay for hours," explained Hayley. "As soon as she sees him, she comes straight out of her room and follows us to the lounge, asking me for treats to give him."

## BRUNO FITS IN

Bruno has even helped build bridges and open up dialogue with a new resident, who had become very depressed after a recent disability and didn't like being in a home.

"He was in a wheelchair, uncooperative, and just wanted to go home," recalled Hayley. "But as soon as he put his hands around Bruno's face, he burst into tears. He opened up about owning Jack Russell Terriers, and said that he thought people didn't deserve dogs, believing them to be 'too good for this world!'"

Hayley can't believe her luck ending up with a dog that has fitted in so perfectly to both her home and work life, and has even had a calming effect on Rocket.

## MORE INFO

Nominated for an Animal Star Award 2022, Helping Dogs and Cats UK Rescue supports the local community in Basingstoke and the wider area by rehabilitating and rehoming animals, as well as helping dogs and cats in Romania. For more information about fostering or adopting a dog, or to donate towards shelter, transport, veterinary, microchipping, spaying, and neutering costs, visit [www.helpingdogsandcatsuk.org](http://www.helpingdogsandcatsuk.org) or call 01256 593373.