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# New York's First Pit Bull Police Dog

By Bernice Clifford

*Photos acquired via huffingtonpost.com and courtesy of Bernice Clifford*

**I**n November 2015, the City of Poughkeepsie Police Department welcomed a new narcotics detection and missing persons tracking dog to its force, a rescued pit bull dog named, Kiah. It wasn't long ago that K-9 Kiah was rescued and cared for by the Kirby Animal Care Services in San Antonio, Texas. After recognizing Kiah's drive to play, the staff reached out to Brad Croft, trainer and founder of Universal K-9 in San Antonio, to suggest Kiah as a candidate for The Detection Dog Program. Bearing witness to Kiah's potential, Croft immediately began training her in narcotics detection and tracking with funding provided by Animal Farm Foundation. Following weeks of training, Kiah was matched with Officer Justin Bruzgul and the City of Poughkeepsie Police Department in New York. K-9 Kiah and Officer Bruzgul, now a powerful pair working in the field, are ready to demonstrate their incredible skills and the underlying potential of sheltered and rescued pit bull dogs.

K-9 Kiah is not alone; a number of pit bull detection dogs have been placed to date, including K-9 Wilson with the Normangee Police Department in Texas. Also rescued as a stray, K-9 Wilson has joined forces with his handler, Chief Charles Herford, working tirelessly to combat the pre-existing narcotics issue in the Normangee community.

A few dogs and departments at a time, Animal Farm Foundation and Universal K-9 are working together to prove that pit bull dogs can perform the same law enforcement work traditionally reserved for pure bred, purpose bred dogs. The program gives an opportunity for officers and members of the community to witness the underlying potential of everyday dogs, which are not traditionally used for law enforcement work. By training rescued dogs to be detection dogs, the program is not only saving the dogs' lives, but also helping to support local law enforcement and saving valuable taxpayer dollars. Without the grant, departments may pay as much as \$15,000 for a pure bred, trained detection dog.

The Detection Dog Program, responsible for placing K-9 Kiah, K-9 Wilson and other pit bull dogs, is made possible by a sponsorship provided by Animal Farm Foundation, in partnership with Universal K-9 and Austin Pets Alive!. Shelter dogs, identified for the Detection Dog Program by Austin Pets Alive!, undergo a 4-8 week training process with Universal K-9. During training, the dogs master a variety of tasks by playing skill-developing games, such as finding hidden toys and retrieving items using their sense of smell. Once the training is complete, the dogs are then placed into police departments that have expressed a need for a detection dog. Animal Farm Foundation's sponsorship covers the cost of handler training, as well as care and housing for the dogs during training, making it possible to provide the detection dog at no cost to law enforcement.

The Detection Dog Program is one of several Animal Farm Foundation programs that features sheltered and rescued pit bull dogs in roles that help people and communities. Animal Farm Foundation, a not-for-profit corporation, has been rescuing and re-homing animals, as well as making grants to other humane organizations, since the mid-1980's. Animal Farm Foundation's related mission work includes the Assistance Dog Training Program, which trains rescued pit bull dogs to be service dogs. The program shines a positive light on the value of shelter dogs and pit bull dogs while giving independence to people with disabilities.

Both the Detection Dog and Assistance Dog Programs encourage the public to think of each dog (labeled pit bull or not) as an individual, and treat them as such. While some dogs have what it takes to become service dogs, and others shine in the police force, some are simply at their best at home as beloved family pets. Animal Farm Foundation also places pit bull dogs in need of homes with adoptive families.

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## K-9 Kiah, a Rescued Pit Bull Dog, Becomes Narcotics Detection and Tracking Dog for City of Poughkeepsie Police Department

Despite the stereotypes suggesting that pit bull dog owners are inherently reckless or irresponsible, the overwhelming majority love and care for their pets just like other dog owners do. To disarm the stereotypes, Animal Farm Foundation created The Majority Project, a photo collection demonstrating that the majority of pit bull dog owners are, in fact, everyday people with everyday dogs. The photos submitted to TheMajorityProject.com feature pit bull dog owner-families, neighbors, friends, public servants and valued members of the community, proving that together, they are not the exception; they are the majority. The Detection Dog Program, Assistance Dog Training Program and The Majority Project are just three of the many initiatives driven by Animal Farm Foundation to show that by treating all dogs as individuals and empowering pet owners to be responsible, we can create communities that are safe and humane. ■

Bernice Clifford is the director of behavior and training at Animal Farm Foundation, and a certified professional dog trainer. Bernice creates enrichment and behavior protocols for the dogs at AFF and in other shelters and rescues. She travels nationwide, speaking at conferences about enrichment, training, and behavior modification for shelter dogs. Clifford focuses on behavior follow-up for adopters, assisting with special adoptions, and working with other shelter and training professionals. She is originally from Brookline, Massachusetts. For more information about Animal Farm Foundation and its programs, visit [animalfarmfoundation.org](http://animalfarmfoundation.org).



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