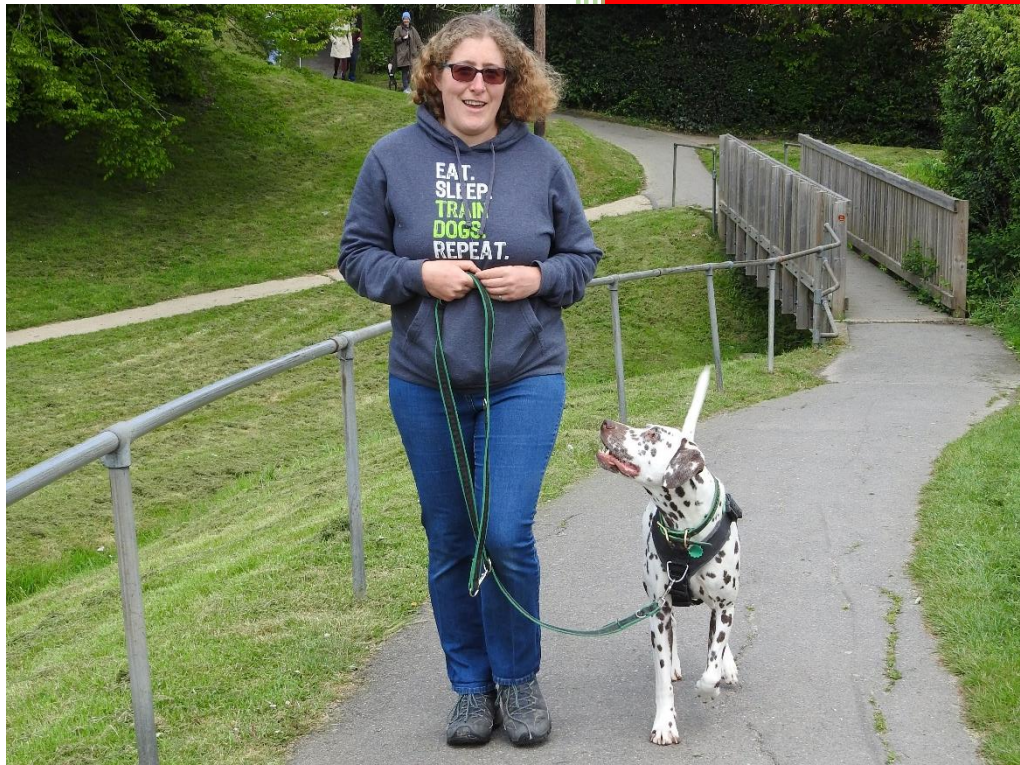


Don't Pull



**Laura
Carter**

A dog pulling on the lead is exhausting. The constant battle, the fight. It certainly isn't the picture you had in your head with you walking along, enjoying the fresh air with your dog by your side. As your dog pulls, walks have become a chore. No one in the family wants to help. On days out the dog gets left at home as no one wants the constant fight to spoil the day. You have followed advice online and from your friends and have bought enough headcollars, harnesses and equipment to stock your own pet shop, yet he still pulls. You find your dog is getting less and less walks. His behaviour has started to deteriorate round the house too, he is bored with the lack of stimulation.

No one wants this. A pet dog should be part of the family. They should be included in days out and strolls in the countryside. No one gets a dog to leave them at home all the time.



Let us address the first issue - what equipment should you use. It is the law that you need to have your dog on a lead in certain areas, as well as being essential to keep your dog safe. It is a confusing world out there with head collars, harnesses and collars all claiming to help with your pulling issue. Let us start off by looking at each.

Collars



In this category I am including anything that goes round your dog's neck, whether it be a fixed flat collar with a buckle or a chain that tightens.

A dog's neck is structurally the same as our own. The vertebrae (neck bones) connect the skull and the dog's body. These, along with the muscles, allow the dog to move his neck. Also in the neck are the larynx (voice box), the oesophagus (food pipe), the trachea (wind pipe), and many important blood vessels.

If your dog walks by your side, and the lead is just there as a safety line, then a collar may be perfect for your dog. However anything that that puts pressure on the neck is going to potentially damage these vital components. You might not see it straight away, but long-term damage can happen over the course of the dog's lifetime. The potential damage will be more likely if the device tightens round the neck.

A collar of course can have a second use – to attach your dogs identification disk too.

Head collars



This includes anything that fits on your dog head like a horse's bridle. There are many different designs out there.

Being predators like us, dogs have their eyes on the front of their head. Prey species have their eyes more on the side so have a wider range of vision. In order to see the world dogs move their heads around in the same way as we do. I am sure you have also seen a dog cock his head to one side when he hears a sound. Dogs have an amazing sense of smell. They use this to signal to other dogs. Sniffing is essential for your dog's wellbeing. Dogs also use body signalling to communicate with other dogs which includes their body posture, movement of their mouth and ear positions. A head collar can prevent the dog from freely moving his head.

A dog's nose is very sensitive and above, when discussing collars, we talked about components in the dog's neck. When wearing a head collar you are controlling the dogs neck movements so they no longer have control which can cause long term strain.

Most dogs hate wearing a head collar. They rub their head on the ground, the owner's legs or use their paw to try to get it off. If they do not take this approach then they shut down, giving the owner the impression that they have achieved the desired loose lead. The lead may now be loose, but this is not a happy dog that wants to be near his owner.

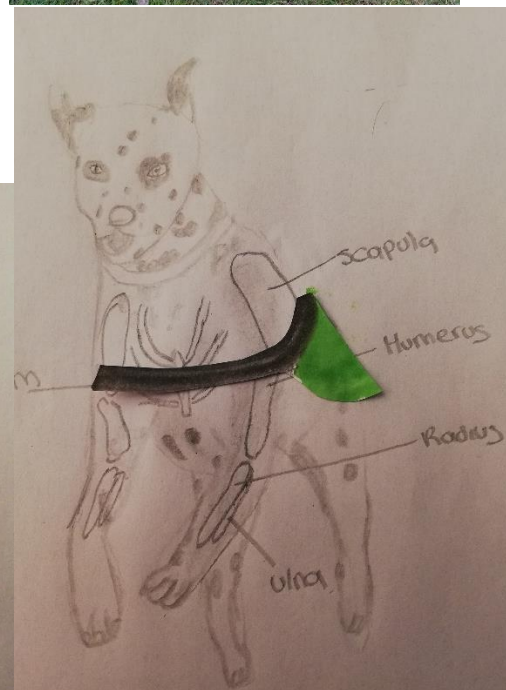
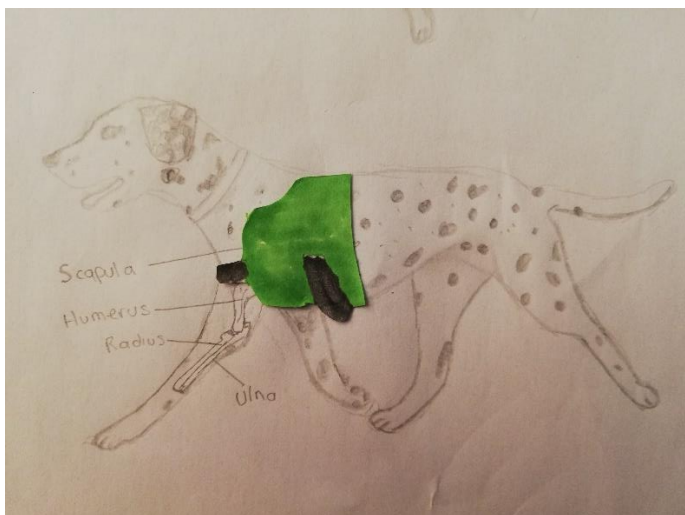
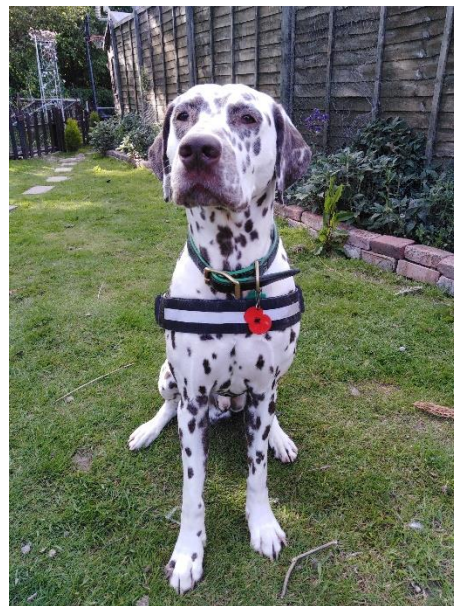
Headcollars can have their uses. If you have an extremely strong dog that you are unable to control, then a headcollar can be a good SHORT TERM solution. It is dangerous (and against the law) to be out in public with a dog that you have no control over. But owners need to be aware of the potential physical and mental damage they could be doing to their dog.

Harnesses

Harnesses come in many different shapes and forms, with many different uses. Huskies wear harnesses to pull sleds. Guide dogs wear harnesses when leading the blind.

In collars I briefly mentioned the internal structure of the dog, and this is important when looking at harnesses too. If a harness prevents a part of the dog from moving as it should, then it is going to cause problems. This in particular applies to the dog's shoulder joint. The scapular is the dog's shoulder blade. This is attached to the humerus which makes up the dog's upper leg. The humerus attaches to the ulna and the radius to form the elbow joint. You should be able to feel these bones and joints under your dog's skin.

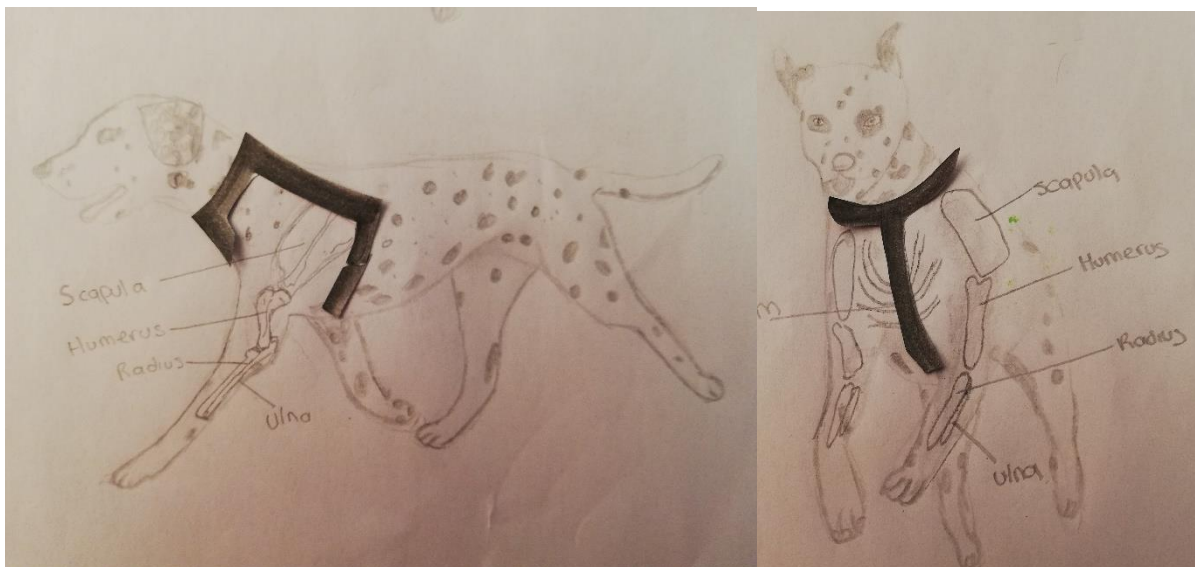
Some harnesses have a band that goes across your dog's chest parallel to a collar. These prevent the dog's legs from moving naturally as they should. When a dog is moving at full speed or jumping there is a lot of movement in the front legs.



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A Y harness goes round your dog's neck, then vertically down their front. Its sits on the front of the rib cage on a bone called the sternum. The sternum has no movement in it.



Your dog's chest is primarily made up of their rib cage, and then the vital organs within it. The rib cage is there to protect these delicate organs. Most harnesses attach round the dogs back on top of the ribcage. This is a stable area as long as the harness is loose enough to allow the ribcage to fully expand. Avoid a harness if it sits back further than the dog's ribcage as this area has nothing to protect the delicate organs within.

Some harnesses have more than one place to attach the lead, often with a ring on the dog's chest and one on the dogs back. These are a great tool to teach your dog what you expect of them but need to be used as part of your training programme. This is what I would advise you to use.

A harness on its own will not stop your dog from pulling.

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Leads

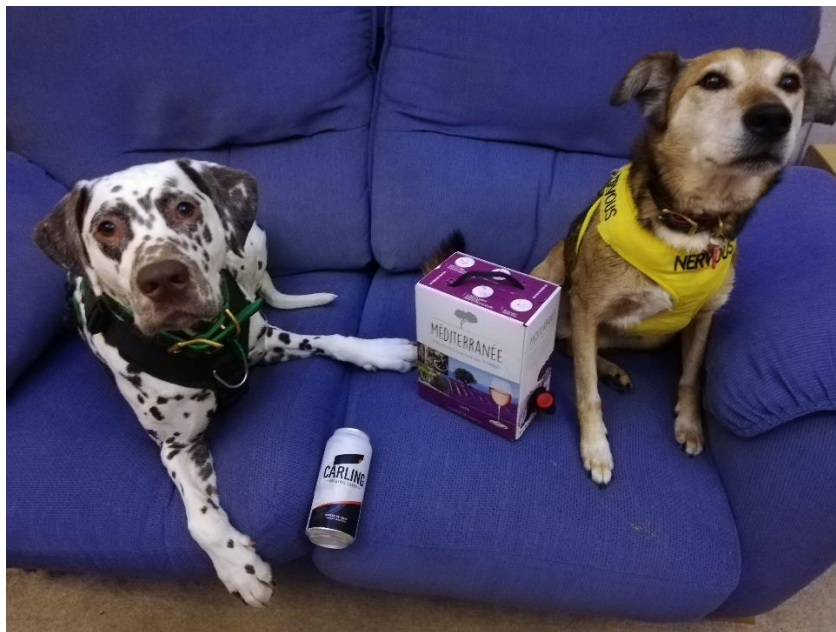
Even something as simple as a lead can take many different forms. To teach loose lead walking you want a basic lead with a clip on one end (or a training lead with a clip on both ends), and then somewhere comfortable for you to hold. Avoid a flexi / extendable lead for teaching loose lead walking. The lead needs to be long enough so that you can stand up holding the handle and the other end touches the floor.

Let us get started.

You go to get your dog's lead out, and your dog jumps about excitedly. You fight to get your dog's harness on while they bounce around. You struggle to get your boots on while being bombarded by your dog. You battle to open and then lock the front door as you are dragged out the house. Sound familiar?

Loose lead work starts before you leave the house. An excited dog wants to get somewhere fast, which usually results in a drag down the street.

The first step is to get your dog in the right frame of mind before you start. When getting your dog saddled up and ready to go, try to keep yourself calm. Stand still when putting on your dog's harness. If they bounce around, wait for them to come to you rather than you increasing the excitement by chasing them and trying to fight them to get the harness on. Sometimes put the dog's harness on when you aren't leaving the house, or for when they are just going out to the garden. The harness isn't the cue to act like a sugar filled child at a birthday party. Can your dog just chill out at home with his harness on?



Once your dog is ready to go try this little test. Ask them to do a behaviour they know really well, like sit. If they do it instantly, they are listening to you and you can head for the front door. If they are so excited that they are unable to listen to a simple command in your house, I can guarantee they are not going to be able to listen to you once they step outside the front door. Sit down, make yourself a coffee and wait for them to calm down. This may take a while, but it is really important.

Your dog will not be leaving the home at any time if they are hyped up and unable to complete a simple command like 'sit' inside the house. If you are short of time, take your dog out to the garden and give them their daily exercise out there. Exercise does not have to mean crazy running around. Get them using their brain to hunt around for treats hidden round the area, do some training or set up another enrichment activity (there are loads of ideas on the internet).

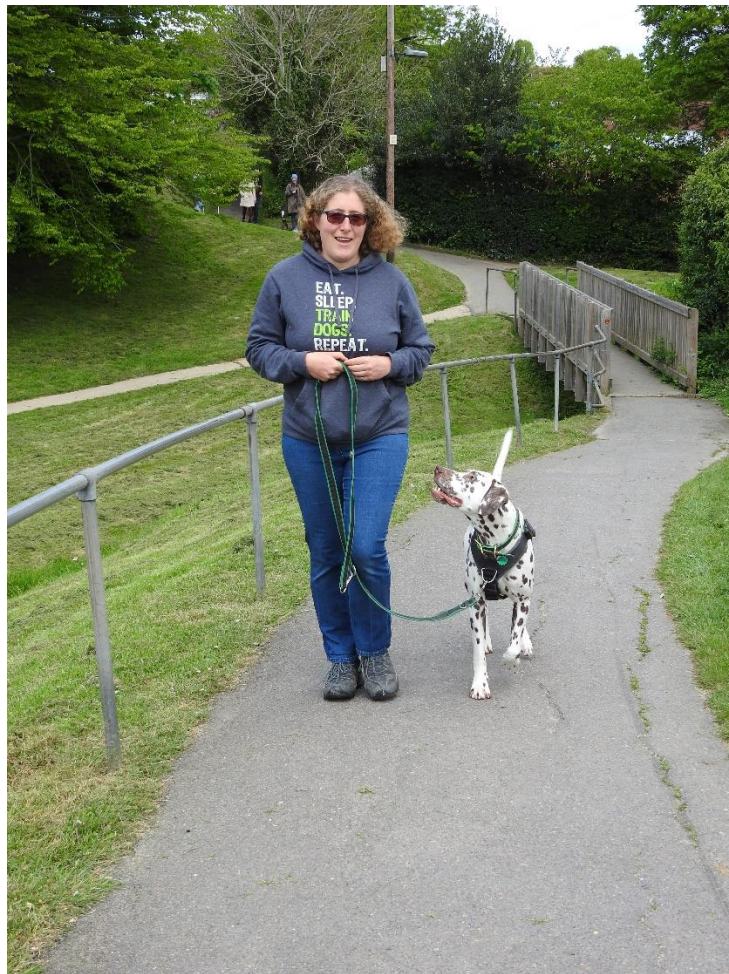
So, once your dog is calm enough to listen to you inside the house with their lead on, you can then start to head out of the front door. This again should be a controlled process. No barging you out of the way as you go through, or leaving you feeling like Mr Stretch while you attempt to lock the door.

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Once on the doorstep, stop. Look around you. As they say, take time to smell the roses. Check to see if your dog is still able to complete some basic commands. Spend some time in your front garden or driveway if you have one. Just chill.

All dogs will get the hang of this, but some may take longer than others. By slowing down the walk process and reducing the excitement you will get a dog that is able to listen to you. Think of it like the difference in the energy levels and compliance of children sat at school verses running round like crazy at a birthday party. It is so worth investing the time to ensure that walks are not considered 'lets go crazy and riot' time. Watch other peoples' dogs when you are out – those walking on a loose lead are always much calmer than those that are not!



Laura Carter (author) with her dalmatian Siri.

Training mode and Leisure mode

Dogs need to sniff. They need to be able to explore the environment around them. Walking on a loose lead, by your side, gazing up at you is as unnatural to them, as us going for a walk blindfolded. As a compromise we use two different types of leadwork.



Left: Leisure mode in a nature reserve with dogs allowed to sniff but leads loose.

Right: Training mode in a town centre with focus on the handler.

In leisure mode the lead is clipped on the back of the dog's harness. The dog is allowed to stop and sniff and explore the environment. They can walk in front, behind or on either side of the handler. The only rule is the handler stops when the lead goes tight. Therefore any pressure on the lead is a signal that the dog must stop, not try to continue to move forward. No food treats are used. The reward is when the lead is loose they get access to the smells etc in the environment. This leisure mode is what you will do most of the time your dog is on the lead.

Training mode is when the dog walks by your side, at your pace. The focus is on you and the reward comes from you in the form of a food treat. This is essential when walking along a busy road, or in a crowded area. Training mode looks flashy but involves concentration from you and your dog. It also involves a fair bit of training.

In training mode, the lead should be clipped onto the front of the dog's harness. This is the signal to them that they must walk by your side. You will need to use treats to reward your dog in training mode. In leisure mode access to the environment is the reward for keeping the lead loose. Ideally you will carry a treat bag – this makes the food easy to access. Treat bags are readily available at most pet shops.

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To get started with training mode, teach your dog to sit by your side. It can be a good idea to have a cue such as tapping your leg to get your dog into this position while you are standing still. This takes lots of practice but is worth teaching.

Once your dog knows the 'close' position, take a step forward. When your dog moves with you, use your voice to praise them. If your dog looks up at you, reward them with a treat. If the dog's front feet are in front of your toes, stop and give your command to get your dog back into position by your side before continuing. Don't forget to have the lead clipped onto the front of the dogs harness. Practice this for short periods, before moving the lead clip back onto the back of the harness and going into leisure mode.

Distractions.

A distraction is anything that interferes with your training, and the big wide world is full of them! Other dogs, people, scents, litter, traffic, wildlife... the list is huge. When teaching your dog anything new it is important to minimise the distractions as much as you can. This usually involves starting at home.



Distractions are a major problem in training classes. The dog is going into a new environment with other people, dog and smells and often struggles to concentrate on the task in hand. This is a massive benefit with online training programmes. You can introduce the exercise to the dog at home then slowly build in the distractions when they are ready.

Distance is your friend when faced with distractions. It will be easier for your dog to ignore another dog if you cross over the road, than if you pass by nose to nose.

The plan.

You need to be able to exercise your dog, so here is the plan. As long as your dog is calm, you can leave the house. This may involve a day or two of garden exercise, but if you really persevere your dog will get it. Once calm you are then going to head out of the door in leisure mode, with the lead clipped onto the back of your dog's harness. The dog is allowed to stop and sniff as much as he likes in this mode. Potter along enjoying your walk. You should not be going anywhere fast. If the lead goes tight you are going to stop. The brakes go on. Once your dog has stopped, you can continue forward on a loose lead.

If you can plan to walk in quiet areas where you are less likely to encounter distractions. Avoid road walks / busy areas where training mode close walking is required. You aren't ready for this yet.

When you encounter a distraction, create distance from it if you can (if you think it is going to drive your dog crazy). This may mean you have to alter your planned route, or cross over the road, but it will help your dog to stay calm. If it still causes your dog to surge forward, you simply stop. They may have a tantrum, but a tight lead will not move you.

If your dog has a good recall, build in some off-lead exercise into every walk in a safe place.

Meanwhile practice getting the dog to sit by your side on command whilst at home. Slowly build in some steps forward in your house. Once you can get close training mode lead walking round your house, then progress out to the garden. Keep sessions short and run.

Only once you have perfected training mode in the garden can you then make it part of your walks. Even then, carefully choose where to practice - quiet areas with minimal distractions at a distance so your dog can still focus. Use lots of tasty food treats in training mode to keep your dog's attention. It is hard, and it will take lots of practice. There are no short cuts, but it will all pay off to get the results that you want.

What now?

Practice, practice, practice. Training does not just build behaviours; it also develops the relationship with your dog. The result will be a happy dog that wants to walk by your side, rather one that is forced to be there. By allowing your dog to perform natural behaviours such as sniffing, but having these under control, will help you and your dog be understanding of each other's needs. This in turn will help with all aspects of your bond with your dog.

I would love to hear how you and your dog get on with the training in this booklet.

I offer an online course featuring videos of the exercises described in this booklet, along with other features including full tutor support and feedback which can be purchased from <http://dogownertrainingschool.co.uk/online-dog-training/>

Happy training

Laura x

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The Dog Owner Training School runs training for owners of pet dogs from puppies to adults in a range of accessible options. These include 1-2-1's, group classes and online courses. DOTS specialises in a personalised approach to training with small classes and training tailored to you and your dogs needs. We train owners and dogs using motivational techniques to make training enjoyable as well as successful. . The Dog Owner Training School runs training sessions in Hawkhurst, Kent as well as having online training options for clients in other areas.

Laura Carter is the owner and instructor at the Dog Owner Training School. She has completed 2 years of a FdSc in Canine Behaviour and Training as well as many relevant courses with various trainers in the field. Laura is a member of the Kennel Club Accredited Instructor Scheme. She is also a Scentwork UK instructor. Laura has a science based approach to her training methods.

Laura got her first family pet dog when she was 9. She has been professionally training dogs for over 10 years after starting out as one of Gwen Baileys Puppy School Tutors. She also ran a successful dog daycare business for 7 years,

Laura's dogs have qualified for Crufts 3 years, and she has helped train dogs for a channel 4 TV show.

Laura has 3 dogs of her own, a Dalmatian called Siri, a rescue cross breed called Orla and her autistic daughter has a chihuahua as a support dog. She shares her home with many other animals including cats, geese, chickens and tortoises.

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I do a range of online training courses as well as run face to face sessions in Hawkhurst, Kent.