



# Tails for You

a publication of Can Do Canines®

Celebrating 30 Years  
1989-2019



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Ethan is more independent  
and feels more confident  
thanks to Stevie.

# ROCKING HER NEW ROLE

*Ethan loves his “snugglebug” partner*

Ethan DeLisi almost didn't become a Can Do Canines graduate. Originally, he applied to a national assistance dog program for a Mobility Assist Dog. But the travel requirements proved too much for the 13-year-old. His family learned of Can Do Canines, and being local, it was the better choice for Ethan.

Ethan was diagnosed with duchenne muscular dystrophy at the age of 3. The genetic disorder causes progressive muscle degeneration and weakness throughout the body, first beginning with muscles in the hips, thighs, and shoulders. The arms, legs, and torso become affected later. Right now, Ethan struggles with picking things up off the floor due to balance trouble, as well as carrying things up and down the stairs.

When the family applied to Can Do Canines, they said they needed a Mobility Assist Dog that would help Ethan with daily tasks, but it also needed to be hypoallergenic due to Ethan's dad's allergies.



*Ethan loves Stevie and Stevie loves Ethan*

Luckily, a sassy, confident Standard Poodle named Stevie (aptly named after the rockstar Stevie Nicks) was waiting for her perfect match. The two were paired in September of 2018, Stevie moved home in October, and they became a certified team by December.

Ethan loves his new partner. “She’s a snugglebug,” he says with a smile. “Having a friend that understands him is really a gift,” says Melanie, Ethan’s mom.

Stevie gives Ethan the independence a 13-year-old wants. She tugs open his dresser drawers each morning, helps him carry things up and down the stairs, drags his backpack to him, and picks up anything he drops. She



*Two peas in a pod | Photos by Greg Bissen | firstlightpictures.tv*

also helps him with balance, acting as a stable surface Ethan can hold onto if he needs to get up. Stevie also gets help or retrieves a phone in case of emergency. She even knows how to tug off his socks!

Ethan was used to getting attention when he went out in public, but not the kind he liked. Before Stevie, when Ethan would use his scooter in public, people would stare but they wouldn't engage in conversation. Now he gets a new kind of attention with the spunky Poodle by his side. “I like it when people ask what type of dog she is ... what she does for me,” Ethan says. It makes him feel better than he did before; he says he even feels “special.”

The two haven't been together long, but their bond is already apparent. When Ethan goes to the clinic for x-rays, Stevie has to stand behind a protective wall. “Oh my gosh, when she can go back to Ethan it's like he was gone for a week,” says Melanie.

Although not her primary job, Stevie provides emotional support for Ethan as well. “She’s a comfort for him,” says Melanie. “When he has fallen, she comes right over and licks him and stays with him and wants to make sure he’s okay.”

“She does get Ethan out of his shell too, because he could just be in his shell, in his own bubble, and just sit and not be aware of what’s going on. But she’s made him be more aware and come out,” Melanie says while Ethan nods in agreement.

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**“Having a friend that understands  
him is really a gift.”**

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Those who took the time and love to raise Stevie make Melanie and Ethan smile. “They must have been wonderful people with big hearts because she is so snuggly, so sweet. Ethan needs that,” says Melanie. “And how she listens is good, too,” adds Ethan.



*Stevie opens the drawer for Ethan*

The family is grateful that Stevie came to them at no charge and appreciate all the donors. “It’s good to have dogs that can help you and love you when you need them,” says Ethan. “It’s a great program and it’s local ... it’s a program that has to stay ... [Stevie] makes quality of life a lot better,” says Melanie.

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**“It’s good to have dogs that can help you and love you when you need them.”**

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And suddenly, as if on cue, an uncontrollable squeaking erupts. Ethan and his mom break into smiles and laughter. “Her favorite green squeaker ball,” laughs Melanie.

It’s safe to say Stevie is definitely rocking her role as a Mobility Assist Dog.

**Thank you for making this partnership possible:**

- Puppy Raiser: The Melson family
- Special Thanks: Marianne Malko
- Dog Donor: Lake Sai Poodles
- Team Sponsor: Ramsey Lions Club
- You: Thank you for your donations!

## EVENTS

If you have special communications needs, please contact us at least two weeks in advance of an event so we can accommodate your request. Thank you!

### Summer Graduation Ceremony

June 29, 1 p.m. | Can Do Canines facility

Graduation ceremonies recognize and honor those who played a role in making the graduating assistance dog teams possible. Join us as we congratulate these new teams!

The photo below is of the teams from our Winter Graduation Ceremony. Congratulations, graduates!



### The Can Do Woofaroo

September 14, 10 a.m. | Can Do Canines facility

Join us at the Can Do Woofaroo! Bring your dogs and friends to celebrate the amazing partnership between assistance dogs and those who need them. This family-friendly event includes a fundraising walk, dog costume contest, dog-centric vendors, activities, food, music, and more. Stay tuned for more information to come in the next few months.



# KISSES FROM LINUS

*Linus knows just what Gage needs*

“Squeak, squeak, squeak, squeak...”

Linus, a Yellow Labrador Retriever, is on the floor with his human buddy, 9-year-old Gage Gasper. They play tug o’ war with a plush toy while Gage’s mom describes life before their Autism Assist Dog.

“Gage used to have a lot of meltdowns,” says Lindsey. “He was hurting himself—and me as well. It was coming to the point where I thought he might overpower me.”

It was almost impossible to bring Gage out in public. Any number of factors was likely to trigger an intense reaction: The fluorescent lighting. Too many people. Too much noise.

“We’d be shopping, and right in the middle of the aisle, we’d have to sit on the floor. I’d hold him in a big bear hug to help him stop screeching and scratching his face,” Lindsey explains.

They eventually applied to Can Do Canines and were put on the waiting list. “It was a long wait. Three or four years. But it was sooo worth it!” Lindsey exclaimed.

Then just before last Thanksgiving, the family met a wiggly Can Do Canine named Linus with soulful eyes and the skills to soothe a child in distress.



*Linus and Gage strike a pose*

Lindsey remembers, “They connected the first day we had him. Gage was overwhelmed with emotion and lay down on the floor. Linus went over and lay down right next to him and put his head on Gage’s back.”

Usually Gage has no reaction to being touched. Sometimes he has an extreme adverse reaction. But the touch of Linus is different. “When Linus goes to snuggle with Gage, it’s instantaneous. Gage starts to feel better,” Lindsey explains.

One night Gage was particularly anxious. He started making noises. He didn’t want to get ready for bed or take his nighttime pills. He went downstairs to his bedroom and slammed the door.



*Gage gives Linus a hug | Photos by Brian Magnuson | bfmagnuson.photoshelter.com*

“Pretty soon we heard Gage say, ‘Linus, off!’ So we could tell Linus was trying to comfort him before he got to the point of hurting himself,” Lindsey recalls. “I went down there, and Linus was lying right on top of Gage with his head over his shoulder.”

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**“Linus is a gift. He has the ability to give Gage a better quality of life.”**

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“Linus is a gift. He has the ability to give Gage a better quality of life,” says Lindsey. And a bigger life. Before Linus, Gage didn’t want to leave his bedroom. It was hard on Lindsey, her boyfriend, Jon, and Jon’s daughter, Ella, because going somewhere as a family was almost impossible. But now Gage wants to get out and do things—as long as Linus comes along.

Linus wears a special harness with a leash for an adult to hold and a handle for Gage to hang onto. Concentrating on the handle helps Gage ignore sounds and sights that might otherwise trigger a reaction.

The Gasper household is a more peaceful place now, with a lot fewer meltdowns. “When Gage is ramping up, I just say to Linus, ‘Go lay by your boy.’ He’ll go lay against Gage, and Gage cheers up right away,” Lindsey says. “I feel overwhelmed with gratefulness.”

Now Lindsey’s son has someone he loves to snuggle with. “Even if Gage doesn’t want me to give him kisses at bedtime, he asks for kisses from Linus.” And his loving friend is only too happy to comply.

**Thank you for making this partnership possible:**

Puppy Raiser: The Hollerud family  
Whelping Home: Holly and Ken Schultz  
Breeder Host: Holly and Ken Schultz  
You: Thank you for your donations!

# KEEP THE POODLES COMING

## *Volunteering 20 years and counting*

When Mike Ferber and Betty Otto started volunteering, they planned on raising one puppy. Things couldn't have turned out more differently. "I thought it was a one-and-done!" Mike laughs, looking at Betty. The couple never imagined that twenty years later they'd still be Puppy Raising. But they're not the only ones.

"Who thought you'd be doing this 20 years later?" Pat Heffernan asks, glancing at his wife, Dee Dee. "Where do you have organizations that have people that stay around that long?"

They're known internally as "the Poodle people," a rare breed among Can Do Canines volunteers. And although Labrador Retrievers seem to grow on trees here, these couples prefer a fluffier variety. Some may call them fickle, some may call them stubborn, but Mike and Betty, and Pat and Dee Dee think Poodles rule.

The Heffernans began volunteering in mid-1992 when Can Do Canines looked much different than it does today. At the end of 1991, we had placed a total of 11 dogs. There was no breeding program and most dogs-in-training came out of the local shelters. Puppy Raising didn't exist yet; instead, volunteers were fosters who took shelter dogs into their home so they could acclimate to life outside the shelter. If they proved to have the right temperament, dogs were matched with a client and continued training. And the only type of dogs we trained were Hearing Assist Dogs.

As Can Do Canines grew, we created the Puppy Raiser volunteer opportunity. The Heffernans were hesitant of the long-term commitment and hadn't taken the plunge. "My daughter was a senior in high school and needed a senior project," says Pat. "She had asked for years 'can we raise a puppy?' and that's a lot of time and it's expensive." They told her if she would put in the work they would take her to training classes—and so it began. After they'd Puppy Raised once, they were hooked.

Mike and Betty began their journey with Can Do Canines in a different way. Mike was a fundraiser doing consulting work for the organization in the late 1990s. By then, Can Do Canines had graduated a total of 82 teams and placed Mobility Assist Dogs in addition to Hearing Assist Dogs.



Pat, Dee Dee, Mike, Betty, and Poodles Jangle and Jingle

With a lot of persistence, Al Peters finally convinced Mike to try puppy raising, but Betty only wanted to raise a Poodle. So in 2000 when one became available, they began their journey and the rest was history. They had caught Puppy Raising Fever.

But it's really *Poodle Fever* for these couples. They've both raised Poodles or Poodle-mixes almost exclusively. Pat and Dee Dee are raising their 15th dog and Mike and Betty are raising their 17th. The couples even often have two dogs in their home at once! In fact, when they were interviewed, the couples were raising two siblings: chocolate Poodles named Jingle and Jangle. Just four days later they picked up another set of Poodle siblings: Harry and Ron. Jingle and Jangle have since arrived at our facility for final training, leaving the couples with one dog-in-training, but we have a feeling that won't last long.

In 2018, Mike and Betty tried their hand at whelping a litter of Labrador Retrievers. "That was on my bucket list. That was my only choice!" Betty pleads to her friends, trying to justify her temporary diversion from Poodles.

For the couples, Puppy Raising is an opportunity to be together. "For Betty and I, it's something that we can do hands-on together," says Mike. "I think it brought us closer—working together," Dee Dee says to Pat who nods in agreement.

They've also grown relationships with other people through their time at Can Do Canines. "I think we've stayed long-term because we've made friendships with the volunteers and the staff. They've been there through thick and thin," says Mike. "It's not always pretty, sometimes there are things that don't always go right. They're there for you then too."

When asked if they'll volunteer for another 20 years, everyone is in agreement that if they can, they will. "Keep the Poodles coming," Mike says, to which Betty, Dee Dee, and Pat all nod in unison. "We can easily do two at a time," Pat smiles.



Top: Betty, Mike, and Poodle Romeo in 2002

Bottom: Pat, Dee Dee, Katherine, Sam, and Miniature Australian Labradoodle Griffin in 2009

# CONGRATS, GRADS!

Thank you to **everyone** who played a role in helping 16 teams graduate at our Winter Graduation Ceremony. These photos show volunteers who helped raise assistance dogs and the clients they were matched with.



Photos by Tiffany Hendrickson | Tiffany Hendrickson Photography

You can make a difference. Help raise an assistance dog for someone with a disability. Contact Volunteer Coordinator Robyn Rodrigue at [volunteer@can-do-canines.org](mailto:volunteer@can-do-canines.org) to learn more.



### Our Mission

Can Do Canines is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities by creating mutually beneficial partnerships with specially trained dogs.

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