



# Tails for You

a publication of Can Do Canines®

Thanks to your support, Levi  
feels safer and happier with  
Dempsey by his side.



# A LIFE-CHANGING ADVENTURE

## *How Dempsey helps Levi live independently*

Cerebral palsy is a disorder that affects body movement and muscle coordination. But Levi Dokken hasn't let cerebral palsy slow him down. A full-time employee, Levi's average day consists of a mile commute to and from the train station, a 45-minute train ride, and then working the sales floor at Best Buy at Mall of America. He travels, on average, six to seven miles a day.

In fact, after Levi was matched with Mobility Assist Dog Dempsey, he purchased a FitBark, a device that tracks a dog's steps, to see just how far the two ventured each day.

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**“He’s my right hand man.”**

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Dempsey loves the exercise, and Levi appreciates how Dempsey helps him throughout the day. “He’s my right hand man,” he says.

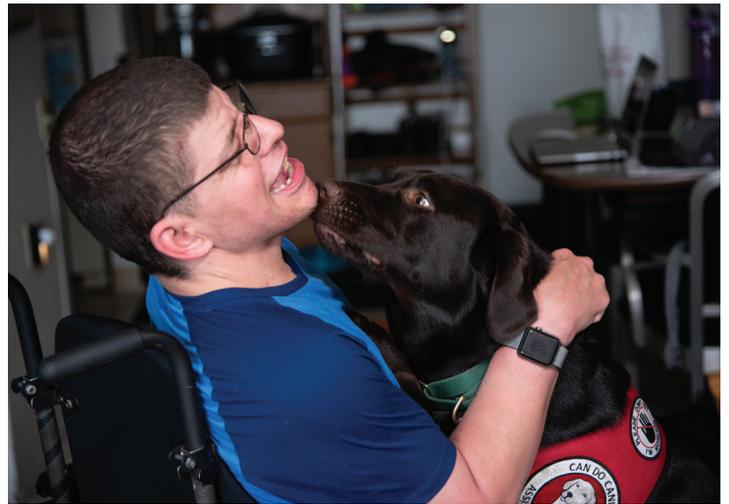
Rewind back to before Dempsey came along.

Levi has trouble bending over. “With this chair, it’s got an elevator so that puts me up a few inches higher than I would normally be, which makes picking up things off the floor difficult, especially if they’re thin things like debit cards,” he explains.



*Dempsey strikes a pose* | Photos by Sharolyn B. Hagen | [www.sbhphotography.com](http://www.sbhphotography.com)

If Levi dropped something in public, he had to rely on a stranger to help him. Unfortunately, this could be a risky decision. “Sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do,



*Dempsey gives Levi kisses*

and you cross your fingers and hope they don't run off with your phone,” he explains.

In the fall of 2017, Levi noticed a change. “I realized things were getting a little bit more time and energy consuming: opening up doors, pushing buttons, picking up keys that I dropped regularly,” he says. “It was just taking more time and energy.”

He felt he was ready for an assistance dog and remembered Can Do Canines, which he learned of through his employer. He thought, “I’ve heard of this organization. Let’s give them a shot.”

And that shot paid off. Now Dempsey is there to bridge the gap for Levi. He says, “If I drop my wallet on the light rail station, [Dempsey’s] there to pick it up, and I don’t have to worry about maneuvering correctly to pick it up ... he’ll just grab it ...in the five seconds it takes him to grab it, it would take me two minutes.”

But Levi isn't the only one happy to have Dempsey around. “Everyone at [Best Buy] is super excited and has seen the benefit that we bring to each other,” Levi says.

Dempsey even has his own ID badge. “My co-workers wanted to get him a blue shirt like I wear. I kind of had to put my foot down and compromise with a name tag.” he smiles. “Occasionally it comes flying off if he shakes. But for the most part it stays put,” he laughs.

When asked what it’s been like working with Dempsey, Levi looks up, smiles, and thinks a moment. “Everyday’s an adventure. It’s been a life-changing adventure.”

“He gets up, I get up, and we’re both excited to start our day,” Levi says. “He knows that we’re gonna go to work and we’re gonna meet people from around the world.”

“We took a trip to Chicago a few weeks back, and it’s about an eight-hour train ride,” he says. “It wasn’t until we got off the train back in St. Paul that anyone even noticed that he was on the train. He laid there quietly the whole entire time.”

When asked about everyone involved in raising and training Dempsey, Levi takes a deep breath. “Wow, I think about this and I go, these people put in so much time and energy and love for these dogs and they give them up selflessly because they know that they’re gonna go on to do greater things,” he says. “Even me just saying thank you I don’t feel is enough because [they have] done so much for people like me.”

And to those who make it possible for Can Do Canines to provide these dogs free of charge, Levi explains, “These dogs impact not only their handler’s lives, but the lives of the people around them. You are making a dog’s life and a person’s life better by donating.”

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**“These dogs impact not only their handler’s lives, but the lives of the people around them.”**

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“These dogs are gonna go into homes where they’re gonna not only be helpful ... but they’re going to have unconditional love. And I think any animal deserves that.”

“So, thank you, and a whole lot more.”

### Thank you for making this partnership possible:

Great Start Home: The Gorman Family  
Puppy Raiser: The inmate handlers at FCI Sandstone  
Special Thanks: The U of M FETCH program, The Leech Family, Karin and Elroy Balgaard  
You: Thank you for your donations!



*Dempsey is attentive to Levi*

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# PUPPIES, PUPPIES, PUPPIES!

### *From the whelping box:*

Thanks to your support, we have welcomed **three** litters of puppies!

Widget gave birth on March 25 to her ‘M’ litter: nine adorable puppies. She was hosted by whelping home volunteers the LaBathe family.

Sugar welcomed seven puppies in her ‘N’ litter on April 6. The Schultz family kindly whelped mom and pups.

Issy proudly presented her ‘O’ litter of seven puppies on June 8. She stayed with whelping home volunteers the Nervick family.

### *How you can help:*

We are looking for Puppy Program Volunteers for short and long-term opportunities! Your commitment means changing someone’s life for the better.

Contact volunteer coordinator, Robyn Rodrigue, at [rrodrigue@can-do-canines.org](mailto:rrodrigue@can-do-canines.org) or 763-331-3000 x119.



*Five puppies from the ‘N’ litter hitch a retro ride | Paige Doughty Photography*



*The ‘M’ litter crowds around for dinner*



*An ‘O’ litter puppy opens her eyes*

# SHE IS EXACTLY WHAT I NEEDED

*Lisa can live in the moment thanks to Cleo*

Lisa Wirkus has Cochlear implants, electronic devices that replace the function of damaged parts of the inner ear and send sound signals to the brain. The implants help her hear, but wearing them for too many hours will give her headaches, so she doesn't wear them all day. Additionally, when she's sleeping, showering, swimming, or having a medical procedure done, Lisa needs to take the Cochlear implants off.



*Lisa and Cleo when the team was first matched*

Thankfully, Lisa has Hearing Assist Dog Cleo, a Yellow Labrador Retriever trained to alert Lisa to sounds. Cleo acts as Lisa's substitute pair of ears (yellow floppy ones, in fact), allowing Lisa to feel more safe and secure home alone and in public.

Lisa and Cleo aren't a new team—but that doesn't mean they aren't still learning new things.

In fact, Lisa and Cleo have learned quite a few more skills since graduating in October of 2016. Cleo now knows how to alert Lisa if she's left the water running, can go get help from Lisa's husband, Patrick, and alert to ambulance and police sirens while in the car. As it so happens, when Patrick was using a wheelchair, Cleo even learned a few mobility skills. She can pick up and throw away trash and can close and open doors with a tug.

Since graduating, Lisa and Cleo have been busy. Lisa married her husband, Patrick, and the trio moved to Maryland where Lisa works as a video interpreter. She helps communicate between someone who signs with someone who speaks. She hears the hearing caller through a headset that transmits to her Cochlear implants, and then signs to the video caller through a computer screen.

Recently when leaving a restaurant, Cleo started nudging Lisa. "What is it? Show me," she asked. Cleo then tried to get something from underneath the table

next to them. Lisa assumed she was trying to get food that had fallen, but after Cleo's persistent nudging, Lisa checked underneath the table. And there, hidden by a black table leg, was Lisa's new iPhone.

But Cleo has saved the day more than once. In fact, Lisa left the kitchen sink running right before they were to leave for vacation. Luckily Cleo was there to alert her to the potentially disastrous situation. "Now with Cleo by my side, I can be sure that I won't miss anything important," Lisa says.

"[Cleo] allows me to be less focused on what I might miss and focus more on being in the moment and enjoying life," says Lisa. In fact, the family took a trip to Disney World, where Cleo got her own pair of Mickey ears. She wagged her tail on the Pirates of the Caribbean and the Frozen Ever After rides, but the It's a Small World ride didn't seem to impress her much. She groaned in discontent and hid beneath the seat.

As fun as Cleo is to be around, she's really changed Lisa's life. "I used to be somewhat paranoid when at home or out in public while not wearing my implants," she says. "I feel much safer with Cleo around."

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**"Cleo couldn't have been farther from what I asked for, but she is exactly what I needed."**

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*Cleo at Disney World*

When Lisa was first waiting to be matched with a Hearing Assist Dog, she wanted a small, black dog that wouldn't drool. "Cleo couldn't have been farther from what I asked for, but she is exactly what I needed," Lisa says. "She is such a blessing in my life, and I can never thank Can Do Canines enough for the gift of Cleo."

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

Puppy Raiser: Kari Johnson

Special Thanks: Christopher and Cheryl Gibbons, the inmate handlers at Minnesota Correctional Facility Faribault, Julie Mach

Name-A-Puppy Donor: Cologne Leos Lions

You: Thank you for your donations!

# A CALMING EFFECT

## *How Xerxes is helping his community*

Xerxes, one of Can Do Canines most recent graduates, will be leading a life quite different from other graduates. The Black Labrador Retriever was placed not with a person with a disability, but with the Orono Police Department.

He's a Community Service Dog, and the first in Minnesota to serve in this capacity for a police department. As a member of the Orono Police Department, Xerxes will have the important role of comforting and connecting with individuals impacted by trauma or experiencing a mental health crisis in the community.

When individuals are experiencing fear, anxiety, or a mental health crisis, "Having a K-9 partner introduced into those situations can have a calming effect," says Orono Police Chief Correy Farniok. The department has seen that when a uniformed officer is introduced, it tends to escalate a situation, whereas a dog can be used as a de-escalation technique.



*Xerxes and Officer Kyle Kirshner*

In addition, Xerxes will participate in public education demonstrations with human officers, helping to increase community engagement by being a hairy conversation starter that makes officers more approachable.

Although Can Do Canines doesn't typically provide assistance dogs in these situations, Al Peters, executive director of Can Do Canines, says, "In this case we decided that this was sort of a match made in heaven. Xerxes was the right dog for this situation. We were really pleased that we were able to develop the partnership, and we're excited about trying something that's new."

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

Great Start Home: Laura and Michael Pierce  
Puppy Raiser: The inmate handlers at FCI Sandstone  
Special Thanks: Darlene Blomberg White and Merle White, Verna and Dave Ittner  
You: Thank you for your donations!



*Xerxes and Officer Kyle Kirshner*

Sergeant Chad Stensrud explains, "There's a department in California that we connected with that they've used [an assistance dog] for probably five or six years in the same manner and they've had just enormous success in doing that."

# EVENTS

## ADI Conference

Can Do Canines is proud to be selected to host the 2018 Assistance Dogs International Conference in August at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Bloomington.

More than 200 assistance dog trainers and administrators from around the world will gather to learn from experts, share their knowledge and best practices, and decide on joint projects that will improve the industry and impact the welfare of their clients.

The conference happens every two years and alternates between North America and Europe.



### Can Do Woofaroo

September 29, 2018 | 10 a.m. | Can Do Canines

This outdoor family-fun event includes a fundraising walk, dog costume contest, dog-centric vendors, food, music, and more.

Visit [candowoofaroo.org](http://candowoofaroo.org) to learn more!

### Event Communication Needs

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!

763-331-3000 | [info@can-do-canines.org](mailto:info@can-do-canines.org)

# YOU HELPED

and made the following possible in the spring of 2018.

You made 13 graduate teams possible at the Summer Graduation Ceremony.



You helped us train the first Community Service Dog in Minnesota for the Orono Police Department.



You helped provide food and medication for the 221 dogs in our program.



Tennant Company donated repairs and parts for our floor scrubber so we can keep our facility clean.



#### 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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