Your support means that Bronson is taking the fear out of seizures for Cole.
A FOUR-LEGGED HERO TAKES THE SCARE OUT OF SEIZURES

Bronson has become Cole’s constant companion, bringing greater freedom to Cole and more peace of mind to not only Cole, but also his family.

N o one expects a medical mystery to strike in the teen years, but a sudden onset of seizures caused Cole to lose his independence almost overnight. Cole experiences several tonic-clonic or grand mal seizures each month, several minutes in length. He has no warning sign in advance; Cole loses consciousness and convulses wherever he falls, which puts him in harm’s way and can result in injuries.

Any time there is a thud or long silence in their suburban Minnesota house, Cole’s parents, Mike and Michele, and brothers, Jack and Henry, would rush to check on him. They were all constantly on edge to mitigate Cole’s seizure activity at a moment’s notice. Since he was unable to keep up his extracurricular activities, Cole tried to stay busy around the house, but it was difficult to maintain his independence due to the seizures. It was devastating when the doctors shifted Cole’s treatment plan from seizure control to seizure management. So, after nearly two years of struggling with frequent seizures, Cole applied for a Seizure Assist Dog as part of his healthcare team.

Bronson has Cole’s Back

Both Cole and his parents were equally concerned about his well-being, and then a lovable black Labrador Retriever changed everyone’s world. Two-year-old Bronson is so finely attuned to Cole’s every move that one might think he was Cole’s shadow. Never leaving his side, Bronson is happy to take on the role of persistent supervisor.

If Cole falls suddenly, Bronson rushes to a family member to alert them and then leads them to Cole. Bronson then retrieves a bag of supplies that help Cole get through his seizure safely. The bag contains a pillow and other supplies that the family member uses while Bronson prepares to support Cole through the seizure recovery. If Cole is lying on his back, Bronson uses his nose to nudge Cole’s shoulder off the ground and then “visits” by placing his head over Cole’s arm, keeping his one side propped slightly off the ground. If Cole seizes while sleeping, Bronson responds to his movements by tugging open his door and rushing to alert a family member, then going downstairs to grab the bag and pull it all the way back up. Celebrating the chance to finally be able to be alone in the house again, Cole, himself, can ask Bronson to retrieve the bag with recovery supplies or get help if necessary.

After a seizure, Cole may not be immediately aware that he had just seized and is returning to a conscious state. He tends to feel like he’s been in a deep sleep. When he regains consciousness, he goes back to a true sleep to rest. Without Bronson, Cole would start to become responsive after a seizure and be extremely disoriented, often stressed and confused. But now Bronson is able to help revive him faster. When Cole comes out of a seizure, the first words Michele hears him say are, “Good boy, Bronson.”

Cole is finding freedom in going to more places and social events independently. A tonic-clonic seizure can be
alarming to the general public. In his disorientation, people coming to help may seem like a threat to Cole. By wearing his cape, Bronson brings awareness of Cole’s disability to the people present, helping them to understand there is a medical need and to get proper help. Before Bronson was with him, Cole would miss extensive school and activities because he “wouldn’t feel right” and would sit in the nurse’s office worried about the possibility of a seizure. Now, Cole feels confident in Bronson responding to a seizure, and remains more engaged.

In an exceptional moment of need, Cole had a seizure while walking outside by himself. No one saw or heard anything, and if it hadn’t been for Bronson staying by his side and vocalizing his distress, Cole would not have gotten the care he required. Cole sustained injuries from hitting the pavement, but Bronson is a hero by responding with his intuitive skills and simultaneously notifying neighbors. “He is a super dog. He saved Cole’s life,” shares Michele.

A Gathering of Gratitude

Cole’s family has been a collective support system. His siblings and parents are always looking for the best ways to help him. Recently, they’ve been trusting Bronson with Cole’s care and feel a relief to let go of their strenuous role in Cole’s safety. Cole is excited for the prospect of going to college with Bronson to keep him safe, and is thrilled to work with his electronic projects in his garage without constant check-ins and interruptions.

Cole is sincerely grateful for this new grasp on a life so abruptly changed, and embraces the return to some normalcy. Michele has collected thoughts on behalf of the family to share with everyone involved with Can Do Canines: “Your commitment to Can Do Canines is such a gift. Bronson has helped Cole regain much-needed independence and confidence. After two years of a medical roller coaster and disappointment,...Bronson has introduced stability and a future of new opportunities for Cole with Bronson by his side. All of this is possible because of you. ‘Thank you’ isn’t enough, but we are all so inspired by the people that touch Can Do Canines.”

HEFFERNANS SHARE ENTHUSIASM FOR CAN DO WOOFAROO

Couple shares why they have made this annual fundraiser a tradition.

Pat and Dee Dee Heffernan, volunteers and puppy raisers for Can Do Canines since 1992, have raised money and attended the Can Do Woofaroo almost every year during that time. According to Dee Dee, in 28 years they’ve missed only four. So to say they love the event is putting it mildly! One of the things they like best is seeing client teams and longtime volunteer friends they might only see annually at this event. “It’s a community,” Dee Dee said.

At right: The Heffernan family at the Woofaroo, previously named the Heel and Wheel, in 2009
Pat’s enthusiasm for the event is obvious too. “The Woofaroo is fun. It’s always evolving with new things to do, whether it’s games, contests or entertainment.” Being “evolutionary” will certainly be the case this year with the Woofaroo going virtual. Yet, some of the traditional highlights will remain. One of the returning favorites will be the dog costume contest. In the past, the Heffernan family has shown quite a talent for costumes and themes, and currently with two Can Do Canines Poodle pups in training at home, their creativity will be on full display again this year.

Are they planning on raising funds and attending the virtual event? “Absolutely!” they both proclaimed. Pat and Dee Dee also look forward to doing a walk in their neighborhood on Woofaroo Day, September 12. There are quite a few nice places near them that will do nicely, they say.

The Heffernans are ready to get started with fundraising—whether it’s registering as individuals or again joining a fundraising team like Dogs R Us. For several years, Dee Dee has been one of the top ten fundraisers for the event.

After meeting many clients who have been matched with dogs they’ve raised, they know firsthand the impact these dogs make. With that in mind, they know the funds are crucial to continue training dogs for people who need the freedom, independence and peace of mind a Can Do Canines assistance dog can provide. The Heffernans encourage everyone, “Join us in raising money for the Woofaroo!”

You too can be part of this year’s Woofaroo!

SEPTEMBER 12, 2020 | A Virtual Event

Visit www.candowoofaroo.org for more information and to register.
Diagnosed with sickle cell anemia shortly after birth, Sharmaine has had her share of hospital visits during her 28 years. However, about a year ago when she was living on her own, she suffered her greatest scare yet. She explains that one morning, “While I was eating, my hip started hurting real bad, and it just kept hurting.” By the time she got to the hospital, both of her legs were already weak and sore. Once admitted, she lost consciousness and spent two months in a coma. Against the odds, she awoke, but had limited use of her legs. She began rehabilitation to regain her strength and mobility, and had to move in with her mom.

Wanting to resume her independent lifestyle, Sharmaine put her computer mouse to work, researching assistance dogs. She came upon Can Do Canines and began asking others about it. A social worker recommended the organization, so Sharmaine began the application process.

**A Love Cycle**

A sweet, female black Labrador Retriever won over Sharmaine within their first few minutes. “That’s my child,” says Sharmaine in her southern accent. Her “child” is her new Mobility Assist Dog, Marie, who has even earned an appropriate middle name. “Her name is Marie Luv,” explains Sharmaine. She feels it is appropriate for dogs in her life to have a loving middle name, and had christened her previous dog “Shorty Love.”

Living up to her lengthened name, Marie is bringing safety and confidence back into Sharmaine’s life by picking up Sharmaine’s wallet and keys for her, opening the refrigerator and apartment doors, and more. For this assistance, Sharmaine expresses gratitude to everyone involved with Can Do Canines. “Thank you all very much. I appreciate all the stuff that y’all did—all the training, all that time. I understand that it’s very consuming, and I appreciate all that walking, all that training, all of that. I appreciate it!”

**Walking Side By Side**

Marie’s walking regimen now includes Sharmaine’s hand on the other end of the leash, as Marie and Sharmaine enjoy the Minnesota outdoors near their Brooklyn Park home. More importantly, Marie is no fair-weathered friend, but a constant companion. “I don’t feel alone. That’s the main thing,” Sharmaine shares, with a relieved smile. “I don’t feel like I’m by myself.”

Mobility Assist Dogs like Marie give people like Sharmaine freedom, independence, and peace of mind. Contact Cari Bishop at cbishop@can-do-canines.org for more information on how to apply for an assistance dog.
YOU HELPED
make this possible.

Applicants interviewed during 2019

125

Can Do Canines assistance dogs rated as “excellent” or “good” in a 2019 survey of past graduates

97%

1,153

YouTube views of first virtual graduation within 3 days after the event. Find it on our YouTube channel.

Dogs fostered in volunteer homes while our facility was closed due to COVID-19

130

individuals donate monthly to support our programs

197

Teams we’ve certified or started working with since resuming on-site client work on May 4

24

Protect What Matters Most With Our Free Will-Writing Tool

Do you have an up-to-date legal will? Writing a will is a powerful way to plan for the future, protect the people and pups you love, and can be used to create an optional legacy gift to support our assistance dogs, forever. Given a rising interest in estate planning, we wanted to share our free resource to help make this important task quicker and easier for you!

Take 20 minutes today and get started on writing your free will at FreeWill.com/CanDoCanines.

Read More Inspiring Stories About Those Who Are Involved With Us

New stories about our dog-human partnerships are posted on our website approximately once each week. We also enjoy highlighting our incredible volunteers.

Visit candocanines.org > About > News & Features to treat yourself to these heartwarming articles. You’ll be glad you did!