



Tails for You

a publication of Can Do Canines®

**You've helped Steve and JoJo
travel together through the
unchartered waters of cataplexy.**

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STEVE AND JOJO NAVIGATE STEVE'S CONDITIONS TOGETHER

Your support has formed a team whose activities together promote better health and safety.

The Can Do Canines Facebook Graduates group—a closed community where our clients can network—contains some wonderful glimpses into the successes of our graduate teams. One of those teams has been showing how they have dipped their toes in the water with some fun summer activities.

Steve was matched with Mobility and Seizure Assist Dog JoJo in 2014. He was the first person we worked with who had been diagnosed with both cataplexy, which results in sudden, severe muscle weakness, and narcolepsy (a sleep disorder). Steve reports that before JoJo, he experienced sleep paralysis, not being able to move, for up to five consecutive hours at times.

JoJo, trained to offer relief with these symptoms, nudges and licks Steve when an attack comes on, helping him regain awareness and use of his muscles. Still, Steve wants to do all he can to avoid these episodes as much as possible. He knows that living an active lifestyle can keep the symptoms at bay, so he and JoJo are fully on board with taking advantage of living on a lake.

Though not a huge fan of water, JoJo took to kayaking like a duck to water. Steve had kayaked for many years prior to JoJo, but could never go alone. With his service-dog-symptom-suppressor on deck, though, Steve can enjoy the sport with his loving Lab. He says, “All you have to do is say, ‘Do you want to go kayaking today?’ And boy, he perks up.”



Steve reports that sometimes JoJo can be a bit dramatic when having to put on his service cape. “But with his life jacket,” Steve reports, “he just comes, puts his head

right through it, and we snap it on, and he’s good to go.” Then, once down at the kayak, this 58-pound passenger of Steve’s “hops right in, turns around, lays down and puts his head in my lap. I put the spray deck (a small, nylon cover) over him, and [we go].”

With their lake connecting to several others, it’s not unusual for the paddling pair to spend three to four hours on the water, three to four times each week. Since the sport offers stress relief, combating Steve’s conditions, cataplexy attacks aren’t typical when he’s kayaking. However, he sometimes kayaks with fellow military veterans and a recreation therapist. Steve recalls one experience when he and another man were discussing past experiences and the topic got emotional. With the stress beginning to trigger an attack, Steve says, “All of a sudden, JoJo started licking my hand. Our therapist saw it happen. She was pretty amazed.” Another medical professional, during an appointment, noted, “You and JoJo have about the best service dog relationship of any I’ve [seen].”

Kayaking just skims the surface of the activities Steve and JoJo enjoy together. They have also tried paddleboarding, with Steve standing and JoJo lying down in front of him. “I thought it would be more tippy with him,” says Steve. “But it was almost like, if I leaned one way, he would lean the other way and counterbalance.”

Steve also cross-country skis competitively in a sit ski and shares, “One time at the end of the race, I had a really bad cataplexy attack.” Right after crossing the finish line, he went over to his wife, who had JoJo with her. Steve says, “JoJo came right away and started working on me, licking my face and my hands.” Steve explains that the other athletes know JoJo, and just “let him do his job. He’s kind of famous that way.”

Biking and walking are other shared hobbies. When biking, Steve uses a Burley trailer for JoJo’s accommodations. And since Steve doesn’t drive a car, he and his sporty sidekick might walk four to six miles each day.

Steve and JoJo are just one example of so many teams who are experiencing smooth sailing with their new freedom, independence and peace of mind, based on their own life-changing connection.

You can help make more of these relationships a reality by visiting our website, candocanines.org, to make a donation.



PRISON DOG HANDLERS REAP BENEFITS FROM PROGRAM

A “win-win situation” is how Can Do Canines Prison Program Coordinator Kaity McGinn describes our prison program. By having those who are spending time in prison help train our puppies, the dogs get consistent, careful training, and less stress is put on our local volunteer network. For the inmates and the prison facilities, overall, the benefits are equally rewarding.

Lizzie Tegels, the warden at Jackson Correctional Institution in Wisconsin, says the program has a “calming effect on the institution overall.” However, the impact that helping in this way has on the individuals involved with the program is beyond measure. Tegels says this affects the men at Jackson by “teaching them compassion and to look beyond themselves.” She adds, “It gives the handlers a purpose.”

With our seven prisons usually taking between five and 20 puppies at one time, depending on the program details for that site, only a small percentage of the individuals at that facility are selected to participate, based on a number of factors. The dogs may be cared for by one or two handlers at a time. Group training sessions occur regularly in addition to the private experiences, so Tegels stresses that this program helps the men in their care work with other handlers in a team-oriented way.

“ It gives the handlers a purpose. ”

This topic also serves as a neutral conversation subject to improve interaction between the dog handlers and staff, as well as other men not participating in the program. Tegels explains that some of the individuals in prison haven’t even seen a dog in 10, maybe 20 years, so when they encounter one, they desperately want to pet it. While they might not typically say the word “please,” this is one occasion when that word passes their lips.

Dyan Larson, who coordinates our prison program in Wisconsin, witnesses similar moments of emotion. Since men in prison are not allowed to have any physical contact, the presence of a live creature that cuddles and loves unconditionally without judging can bring out soft emotions in the toughest humans. She recalls how one man shared with her that since he had trained two dogs already he felt he could only do two more. He reasoned, “I have four chambers in my heart, and I have two left to fill.”

To those who feel people in prison do not deserve this positive opportunity, Tegels reminds them that the Department of Corrections is named that purposely. Time in prison is meant to serve as a chance for rehabilitation. By all accounts, the feedback we receive from our prison liaisons and inmates—both men and women—supports that this program works toward that outcome. Tegels says, “This is the best program I felt I’ve brought into an institution in my 33 years.”

The prison program provides a clear opportunity for those involved to give back to society, and Can Do Canines is fortunate to be part of that equation.



Handlers at Stanley Correctional Institution enjoyed their time with Liam.

URSA BRINGS MAJOR, SWIFT IMPACT TO SAMMY'S LIFE

You helped make a much-needed transformation possible.

Unique. Responsive. Skillful. Adorable.” That’s how 26-year-old Sammy describes her Mobility Assist Dog, Ursa, based on the spelling of Ursa’s name.

Sammy and Ursa were matched in early 2021, and soon afterward, Sammy’s mom, Julie, reported, “It’s almost unbelievable to see how much transformation has happened.” Thinking they had had Ursa for what felt like about six weeks, they were surprised to look at the calendar and realize it had only been two and a half weeks. “There’s been so much change in such a short period of time.” Noting that previous transitions for Sammy had been rather difficult, Julie says, “This just seemed to come naturally to her.”

Sammy, who has had cerebral palsy since birth and now also has Complex Regional Pain Syndrome, struggles with walking, picking up items and bending over. Luckily, Ursa is a major factor in alleviating some of the fears Sammy has with these actions. Sammy even shares, “She also knows that when I say ‘Uh oh,’ something has dropped and she has to pick it up.”

“ It’s almost unbelievable to see how much transformation has happened. ”

Ursa has also “picked up” Sammy’s ambition. Julie says that prior to receiving Ursa, Sammy did not have “a lot of drive or purpose in life.” Now, with her loving yellow Labrador Retriever, Sammy “is like a whole different person,” Julie observes. The change is not lost on Sammy, who confirms that Ursa has helped her to feel stronger, safer and more independent. She admits that previously, she used to spend a lot of time inside. These days, regular walks for this duo is the norm. “The other day she went all the way around the block,” says Julie. “She would not have gone on the road by herself, ever. Ever. She would have a hard time even when I went

with her.” Julie also describes that having Ursa has “really helped Sam to open up and talk to people. On one of her walks, she actually met one of the neighbors and had this whole conversation.”

Ursa’s not opposed to using her own voice when the situation calls for it. One day when Sammy wasn’t feeling well in bed, she prompted Ursa to “get help.” Julie, however, had the door to her room closed at the time. Deploying her problem-solving skills, Ursa whined through the door until she could get Julie’s attention to assist Sammy.

It seems that the stars aligned to make this pair perfect for each other. As Sammy says of her Can Do Canine, “She makes my life complete and enjoyable. I wouldn’t know what to do without her.”



Contact us at apply@candocanines.org
to learn how to apply for an assistance dog.

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

A common misperception is not having a “severe enough” disability to receive an assistance dog.

Often when we talk with clients, one of the perceptions they share with us is that they debated considering an assistance dog because they didn't feel their disability was severe enough to warrant receiving one. Sometimes it's because they are relatively young, or they do not use an assistive device, or their disability is not noticeable to others, or for whatever reason, they feel that someone else is more deserving.

However, our Client Services Department explains the careful screening process to applicants, and frequently, those who felt they would not qualify are exactly the ones who might benefit the most from an assistance dog.

Maya, one of our recent graduates, voices the way so many of our clients felt when deciding whether or not to apply for a dog.

In Maya's Words

When I first started looking at service dogs, I did so because I found myself leaning on my friends and significant other to be able to make it through a typical day. Things like getting breakfast, making it to class, and sometimes safely showering were very difficult for me to do without help. For a long time, however, I struggled with the idea that I was not disabled enough to qualify for a service dog. You see, I could do whatever I put my mind to. I could go to amusement parks and the mall, I could do my chores and walk across campus, all without any assistance from friends or mobility aids. My disability is not an impenetrable barrier between things I can do and things I can't do. Instead there are things that I can do, and things that I can sometimes do, and things that will cause me pain to do. I can walk a few miles or stand in place for an hour, but I will be exhausted and miserable and in pain.



Maya and Uzi

I felt for a long time that even if these things make me exhausted or cause me pain, I was still able to do them, and that meant that I wasn't sick enough to need help. I still feel this way sometimes. When I have good days or good weeks, I

could get by just fine without Uzi, and that makes me feel like a fraud. But inevitably a bad day comes around again and I am so grateful for Uzi.

Before Uzi and I began to work together, I had no idea how much I would be able to benefit from a dog. My healthcare team talks about “balancing your energy budget” sometimes, which is all about not over-extending yourself whether you feel good or bad. And having Uzi on my good days lets me save up my energy for my bad days.

I know a lot of people, especially young people like me, have these very dynamic disabilities where our level of disability constantly fluctuates. I worried a lot that this would make me ineligible to get a dog, or make me a less “legitimate” service dog user. I was so wrong.

Casey, who received Hearing Assist Dog Fallon in 2018, echoes some of these same thoughts.

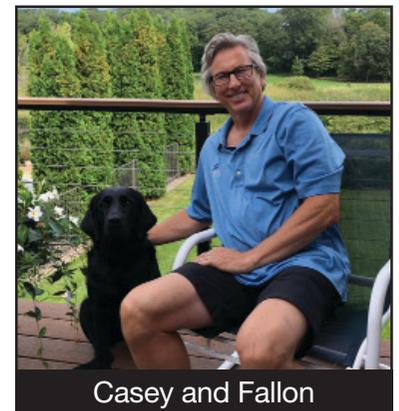
In Casey's Words

Due to my disability, I lost my career. Although no longer working, I pressed on with life as if nothing had changed. I unknowingly refused to accept the reality of my disability. I was consumed by my desire to be independent making it difficult to admit I needed help. How could I possibly qualify for a service dog, as I really am not that disabled? I felt unworthy knowing there were many people who (I felt) needed and deserved the support of a service dog more than me.

What I know now is I could not have been more wrong. Fallon, my service dog has changed my life! She alerts me to things I thought were not necessary, but most definitely are! My family has less anxiety knowing Fallon is there for me. They can enjoy life with me instead of worrying about me.

Life with Fallon has flipped my thinking from reminiscing on the past to being excited about my future!

If you or someone you know might be experiencing similar doubts when thinking about the need for an assistance dog, reach out to us at apply@candocanines.org. It might be the best decision you ever make.



Casey and Fallon

HERE ARE A FEW DOGS YOU HELPED GET TO THEIR FINAL STAGE OF TRAINING



Dogs pictured from left to right include Clark, Xolia, Yeti, Whisper and Lewis

RETIREMENT CELEBRATION FOR AL PETERS TO BE HELD AUGUST 4

You are invited to join us for an open house to celebrate Al Peters, our founder and our executive director for over 30 years.

Stop by to share your retirement wishes with Al anytime from 5:30-8:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August 4, 2021.

A 6:30 p.m. program will include brief messages from a client, a volunteer, a board member, a staff member and Al, a video made for Al and other fun surprises.

Hors d'oeuvres and beverages will be served.

Contact Kathy Broten at 763-331-3000, ext. 152 or kbroten@candocanines.org if you have any questions.

Please RSVP by July 26 at can-do.link/rsvp.



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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