



# Tails for You

a publication of Can Do Canines®

Read why Jayden has more  
dignity, thanks to you.



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# Jayden Gets a Hold on Friendship with Autism Assist Dog Paxton

Your support means a new sense of independence for this pre-teen.

Not too many 11-year-old boys like having their hand held by their mom. Jayden demonstrates a similar preference for independence when out with his family.

This is just one of many reasons Autism Assist Dog Paxton is bringing great relief and happiness to this family. Jayden, who has Autism Spectrum Disorder with Global Developmental Delay, has a tendency to wander or even run off in public spaces, so keeping him safe takes constant vigilance. Now, since receiving Paxton from Can Do Canines, Jayden can be tethered to this calm canine, who won't allow his human partner to veer into dangerous territory. As Jayden's mom, Tanisha, explains, this new reality is more than just safety though. "Jayden can have more dignity while in the community because I don't have to hold his hand all the time by trying to keep him safe. Now he can stay attached to Paxton and have that level of independence while still under my supervision."

In addition to bolting, Jayden has difficulty understanding social cues, has speech delays and engages in self-aggression with harmful behaviors. Once again, Paxton isn't fazed. Tanisha says that Paxton has helped Jayden develop social skills, "by giving him something to talk about during his speech sessions or when someone else asks about [Paxton]. Sometimes Jayden talks to

Paxton in conversation when they are together, which is an expression of friendship. [That's] something that I thought that Jayden would never explore or know how to have," she reveals.

Paxton is not only a friend and "safety net," as described by Tanisha, to Jayden; he's also a fellow Uno player. Within a half-hour of the two first meeting, Jayden decided that Paxton needed to be dealt into the card game so that they could play together. Tanisha says, "It continues to this day." Other fun moments for the team occur when playing with bubbles or a Frisbee, listening to music or taking selfies with the iPad.

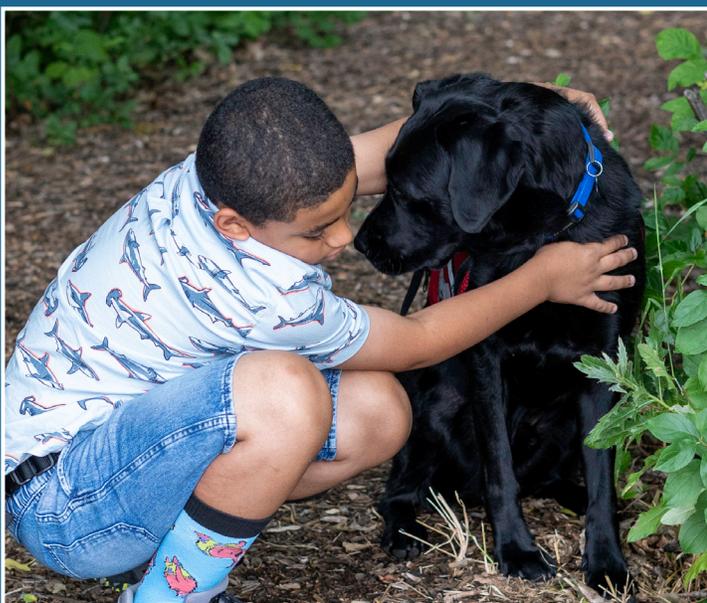
**You generated a miracle that helped my son reach the unthinkable...**

Just as Paxton has become proficient at providing stress relief for Jayden, he is easing Tanisha's anxiety too. She recalls times when Jayden didn't want to go with her into the Autism Center, but with Paxton, that has changed. "If Paxton were not around, [I would have] to carry Jayden out of the car to bring him inside, creating more agitation with him." Jayden and Paxton now head into the center together as one confident team.

For this and all that Paxton is bringing to this family, Tanisha wishes to share the following with Can Do Canines supporters: "The work that was put in to take care of Paxton, to nurture his development, feeding, and raising is beyond just a thank you. You generated a miracle that helped my son reach the unthinkable of building his social skills, developing responsibilities, knowing what the bond of friendship consists of, and keeping him safe while in the community . . . Thank you for planting the seed to create hope and structure in the lives of families [Autism Assist Dogs] serve every day."

This is a sentiment that Jayden's family will surely hold onto for years to come.

Read next about how Jayden's family expresses gratitude for having their gift of Paxton being covered by a generous donor, Ron Knutson.



*Jayden and Autism Assist Dog Paxton*

## Meet Trainer Sharon Grant



“I decided I was going to be a service dog trainer in sixth grade,” says Program Trainer Sharon Grant, who has been with Can Do Canines for nearly four years. A New Jersey native, Sharon attended the Bergin University of Canine Studies in California, interned in Massachusetts at American Poodles at Work and was working as a trainer in Ohio when she saw a Can Do Canines job posting for a trainer on the Assistance Dogs International website. She packed her bags for Minnesota in January 2018 and has been helping our dogs prepare for their own careers ever since.

Since there are approximately 25 dogs in for final training on any given day, each of our three full-time trainers is responsible for 7-9 dogs at a time. While our dogs average 2-3 months of final training, Sharon cautions people to realize that that timeline can vary a lot. Many factors, including situations in a client’s life, can adjust that. Yet, doing some quick calculations, Sharon figures she has assisted in training “easily 200” of our dogs. Photos and videos of many of them live on her cell phone.

When asked which type of dog she likes training the best, she cites mobility dogs, due to the wider variety of skills they need to learn. However, her consistently calm demeanor works well when interacting with any dog...or cat, since she is also responsible for feeding and “training” our two campus cats. (Yes, she has taught them both tricks.)

One of her most memorable training experiences involved preparing Mobility Assist Dog Gregg to work with a girl who uses a speech-generating device. Sharon enjoyed the innovative teaching needed to play a cue for Gregg on the computer and then back it up with a verbal cue to help him connect the communication styles.

Sharon keeps busy with her own two dogs as well. River is a 12-year-old Golden Retriever, and Journey, age 6, is a mix of American Staffordshire Terrier, Boxer and Labrador Retriever.

Luckily for us, Sharon stayed focused on her early career goal. We’re grateful she’s on this journey with us, and know that the dogs she trains change lives.



*Ron; Ron’s girlfriend, Maureen; Jayden; Tanisha and Paxton*

## Sponsorship Creates Loving Gift

Ron says that for a long time, he felt a need to give back. “I explored a variety of options and chose Can Do [Canines], in part because they are so intimately involved with the people they serve.”

A retired high school teacher and taxidermist, Ron started his connection with us in 2014, attending an event with a close friend. Since then, he has consistently supported our organization financially and has participated in additional events.

This year, Ron decided to take a larger step in his mission to give back by sponsoring a team. This \$25,000 commitment brought Jayden and Autism Assist Dog Paxton into their lives, as the team who would receive this sponsorship. “I saw, through Can Do [Canines],” says Ron, “how the life of an autistic child could be positively impacted by a canine companion. To quote my mother, ‘Dogs are God’s gift to us.’ Well I think there is no better gift for a young, autistic boy, than a loving dog.”

Jayden and his family are finding this to be true. Tanisha says, “The team sponsorship has meant a great abundance of joy and pride to my son Jayden and me. The gift of sponsorship can’t be outmatched with the ability to allow my son to have dignity and safety while in the community.”

If you too would like to give the gift of a loving dog to someone by becoming a team sponsor, please contact our Development Team at [development@candocanines.org](mailto:development@candocanines.org).

# Paul and Nina Sound the Alarm to the Value of Assistance Dogs

Because of you, a community is learning from a new type of resource.

Dalmations have traditionally been associated with fire stations, but an 8-year-old black Labrador Retriever named Nina is the dog that is making her mark on the Richfield, Wisconsin, fire station.

A Hearing Assist Dog, Nina was paired with Paul in 2015, making them Can Do Canines' 500th team. Paul began to lose his hearing in 2002 and went profoundly deaf in 2015, following an allergic reaction to a yellowjacket sting. This caused him to retire from his first career as a software programmer, designer and manager, but he still wanted to keep busy. He said, "I discovered the fire station and that I could apply my skills there to help serve my community."

He began by assisting the fire department with public relations, social media and website development and then became certified to drive the vehicles. Both he and his wife, Cate, are volunteer firefighters, but Paul also realized the contribution Nina could make in this line of work.

A few years ago, Paul, Cate and Nina led an in-service for the fire company, teaching first responders about service animals and how to interact with them. With the help of fellow Can Do Canines client Terri Krake, Paul created a presentation to share with his colleagues. He also educated them about different types of working dogs, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the responsibilities that first responders have when handling assistance dogs and how service dogs are allowed to go almost anywhere with their partner. He emphasized, "If the patient is alert and capable of handling their partner, they should not be separated to reduce stress and trauma on the patient." The skill demonstrations he and Nina performed particularly sparked interest. Paul stated, "We hope to do another session this winter with our company and take the show on the road to a few neighboring communities."

Nina starred in another recent training experience. "The scenario was that Cate and Nina were lost in the woods," Paul describes. "Cate pretended to break her leg and the firefighters had to find them and carry her

out." Participants were taught how assistance dogs are different from pets. They covered topics such as the dog riding in the ambulance, what jurisdiction different first responder organizations have regarding a service dog and what to do with a service dog whose partner is unresponsive.

Paul has also been training Nina to respond to the tone he gets from an app, summoning fire fighters to a call. She is learning this new skill well, but since they can only work on this when an actual alarm is in progress, Paul said, "The training is an ongoing process for us."

As a certified CPR instructor, Paul brings Nina with when he teaches community classes. Although she's happy to nap during much of the session, the hands-on portions with the mannequins get her attention. Paul said, "Nina sometimes wants to join in and help the students with their practice."



*Paul, Cate and Nina*

Recognizing Nina's value not only to the community, but to his own life, Paul has chosen to raise \$25,000 to help fund a successor dog for when Nina retires, despite the fact that Can Do Canines dogs are provided free of charge. Nobody wants that day to come though, including the city of Richfield, Wisconsin. Paul shared, "When the community members, EMTs and firefighters bring their kids to the station, they are delighted that there is a fire dog there just like they see on TV."

**Know someone who might benefit from a Can Do Canine?**

We have a minimal wait list for certain types of assistance dogs right now. Please encourage potential applicants to contact us at [apply@candocanines.org](mailto:apply@candocanines.org).

# FETCH Program with the U of M Develops Both Students and Dogs

At Can Do Canines, we sometimes joke that dogs in for final training are “picking their college major” for which of our five type(s) of assistance dog they want to be. However, dogs in our FETCH Program actually attend real college before final training. FETCH, which stands for “Fostering Education Through Campus Housing,” is the result of a partnership we established with the University of Minnesota Twin Cities Campus in Fall 2016. For almost an entire semester, some of our dogs live in Bailey Hall dormitory suites with college students.

Six dogs usually participate each semester, with two dogs living with four students. Though the dogs are happy to be returning to “in-person learning” this year, COVID adjustments mean that each dog is now sharing space with two to three Gophers, combining to make four teams total.

Both species must be selected for the program. The student handlers apply to be part of one of the university’s Living Learning Communities (LLCs), of which FETCH is an option. Can Do Canines Puppy Program Instructor Emily Lyons, who has been coordinating our FETCH Program since beginning with us in Summer 2018, earned an animal science degree from the U of M herself. She mentions that just as there is an LLC for engineering majors, students who wish to be part of FETCH may be (but are not required to be) on a related track. One previous FETCH student says, “I’ve always wanted to work with service dogs and to be able to do so while working towards my goal of becoming a veterinarian seemed like a perfect thing for me.”

In true college-experience fashion, orientation kicks off the program for the newcomers, as the students visit the Can Do Canines campus for training with Emily. Then the canines don their capes, rather than backpacks, and hit the campus.

Bailey Hall has a designated fenced area for the dogs outside, and Can Do Canines makes sure each team is set up with the needed food, crate, toys and other supplies.

The dogs are immersed into their new surroundings, riding the campus buses and going to most classes (though not lab courses) with a handler. The students must coordinate their “parenting” schedules, and also communicate with their professors about the situations. Those professors might even be humbled when an animal starts moaning or snoring during their well-prepared lecture.

Every two weeks, Emily gets the chance to visit her alma mater to provide new training to these handlers, who are working to perfect their dog’s basic obedience skills. In terms of maturity, the dogs, roughly 18-24 months in age, are about parallel with their handlers at this point, and the dogs’ next stop will be final training at Can Do Canines. Thinking about the benefits to the students, some of whom repeat the program for multiple semesters, Emily shares, “It’s a good learning experience as a whole for them.” As part of the partnership with the university’s veterinary school, the students are also required to take the dog to a wellness appointment, where they can meet the staff and see the vet clinic. One student confirms, “The experience I gained over the years is unparalleled to any other organization I have volunteered at. They have equipped me with a better understanding of individuals with disabilities, LLCs, and animals, which are my life.”

Another adds, “Being a part of FETCH also taught me a lot including leadership, confidence, and patience.”

Imagining an expansive future for FETCH, Emily says, “We hope to add more dogs in coming years in Bailey Hall and then maybe in other dorms.” There is also the possibility of branching out to other campuses down the road. From a student’s perspective, this could only be good news. As one relates, “I love this program with all my heart. It was my driving force to live in Bailey again this year. The dogs, Can Do, and the handlers are so incredible and so fun to work with.”

All things considered, FETCH appears to be fetching incredible results for all.



*U of M students attending FETCH Orientation*

# Meet a Few Puppies You Are Supporting on Their Journey

Dogs pictured from left to right are Anton, Haiku, Sonnet, Zet, Wylla and Yoko.



## COMING UP

### Fall Graduation — October 23

If you are signed up for our e-newsletter, you'll receive an email on Saturday, October 23. The email will include a video link so you can meet and celebrate the 13 new teams you helped create.

### Open House — November 11

If you or someone you know might want to learn more about us, check out our open house, being held at our campus on Thursday, November 11, from 6-8 p.m. More information is on [our website](#).

### Give to the Max Day — November 18

Support Can Do Canines for Give to the Max Day 2021! The first \$85,000 in donations will be matched thanks to the Fred C and Katherine B Andersen Foundation and the Jeanne M Mithun Foundation, but only until November 18! Plus, if you donate at least \$100, you can submit your cutest puppy name choice for a drawing on November 19!

## GO GREEN

In our recent marketing and communication survey, several of you asked about “going green.” You can opt out of our marketing postal mail by visiting [can-do.link/mail](https://can-do.link/mail).

Once you switch over to email only, you can always change your preferences or unsubscribe using the links in the footer of emails, but we hope you'll always feel pawstitive about our communication.



#### 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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