



# Tails for You

a publication of Can Do Canines®

**You made  
Team 800  
a reality!**

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# Viggo's dedication reinforces Carden's dedication to future plan

Thanks to you, this 800<sup>th</sup> team will mean healing for more people.

Carden, who just became one half of Can Do Canines' 800<sup>th</sup> team to certify, says of his desire to get an assistance dog, "I was just really hoping to have a companion to help me to do things that could enhance my daily life, that could make my disability less of a hindrance for me and have a partner to help me with things." The disability Carden's referring to is cerebral palsy. The partner, now helping him manage it, is Viggo, a 3-year-old black Labrador Retriever.

Now in his 20s, Carden says that his chronic pain has been worsening in recent years, and also shares, "I'm getting to the age where I'm trying to move out of my house and I'm in graduate school, so I'm living on my own a lot more. I realized that a dog could help me feel so much safer and give me more stability."

It didn't take long for the critical bond to start forming between this pair. Carden explains that within the first couple of days, "I feel like he already knew that

I was his person." He adds that Viggo "fits so much of my lifestyle. I'm more of an introverted, low-energy person, and that's exactly who he is as well...in dog-form, of course." Even throughout the training process, the two relished their connection. Carden considered it an "empowering experience—physically, emotionally and mentally" and says, "He's so in tune with me."

On a regular basis, Viggo tunes in to perform a variety of skills for Carden, including tugging off socks and slippers, retrieving items, closing drawers, assisting with laundry, bracing Carden to help him get back

**He's just changed my life in so many ways that I have never really felt before or been able to experience.**

up if he falls and pressing access buttons (his favorite skill!). Viggo also helps Carden manage his muscle spasticity. "He'll lay on my legs and feet, and the pressure helps stop muscle spasms and stretch tight muscles," describes Carden. "He also can help my spasticity by retrieving an ice pack from a special spot in my room."

Plus, Viggo flies into action to light the way for Carden. "The dark interferes with my ability with balance and walking," Carden says, "so he'll go turn on a lamp that's down a hallway near my bedroom." Considering all the ways Viggo makes his life safer and easier, Carden reflects, "He's very, very dedicated to me and I'm very grateful."

Carden wants others to be able to experience these same benefits. He is expecting to graduate in 2024 with a master's in social work, believing, "Dogs are really healing in more ways than one." He hopes to start a private practice that includes animal assisted therapy in the future. While he wouldn't use Viggo in this way, since Viggo already has a job, he would depend on the support and confidence his sweet counterpart offers to introduce others to similar experiences. He says, "I'm really interested in doing therapy with other people



*Viggo demonstrates his favorite skill.*



with disabilities and using animal-assisted therapy as a way to interfere with trauma, like medical trauma. Dogs have always been such a therapeutic presence in my life, and I feel like the disabled community could benefit from that too.”

Carden doesn't take his own pairing with Viggo for granted. Fighting back tears, he shares, “He's just changed my life in so many ways that I have never really felt before or been able to experience. It's so incredible that so many people have been able to

impact my life and I don't even know them.” To those who so lovingly raised and cared for Viggo, he says, “Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I don't know where I would be without him.”

So even if he is modeling doggy drool stains on his pants from Viggo resting his head there, Carden feels “honored and grateful” to not just be part of Can Do Canines' 800<sup>th</sup> team milestone, but to have such a life-changing teammate as Viggo.

## Former inmate brings Puppy Program experiences to her life beyond prison

Your support ensures our continued partnerships with prisons.

As a young child, Hali loved being around animals. So when she was incarcerated in 2016, she immediately applied to the Can Do Canines Prison Puppy Program to be able to live with, raise and train assistance dogs. Like so many inmates that participate in this program, Hali believes, “I knew that I had done a lot of wrong in my life, and I wanted to do something good, and it gave me that chance.”

During her nearly four years at Federal Correctional Institution-Waseca, Hali trained or closely helped others with about 10 different dogs, and she still thinks of them fondly. Whether she and her fellow inmates were pretending to brush blush on Dahlia, making Halloween costumes for Jackson and Diego, playing in the snow with Jedi, crocheting items for Helen, snuggling with Boris during some emotionally tough days, teaching Daphne to sit without sliding several feet backwards or making Christmas stockings for Hank and Hansen, Hali says the dogs brought plenty of smiles. “It gave us so much joy and so much to look forward to. We were taking care of something other than ourselves,” she states. “We had a responsibility.”

Adhering to the philosophy that the people who have the best careers are those who do what they love, she had a revelation in those early months. “Very quickly, it turned into ‘This is what I want to do with my life.’ And it gave me those tools to be able to do that.”

Even before Hali was released, she began collecting contact information for animal organizations in her home state of Missouri, with the intent of landing a job at a dog-training organization. She admits, “I had kept every single piece of paper that was ever handed out to me by Can Do Canines. I made sure that if I was going to be able to do this on the outside, I was going to have every tool that was given to me and I was going to use it.”

When the time was right, she created business cards for herself, picking up some clients on her own. Soon, she had the confidence to apply to organizations and was exceedingly honest about her background. Of the four job offers she received, she accepted a position with a company known as Yuppy Puppy.

Given her experience in the Can Do Canines program, Hali wasted no time working her way up to be their lead trainer. The most meaningful aspect of her job is saving dogs from local shelters from being euthanized. “When I walk through shelters, it's like walking through jail,” says Hali. The situation seems to trigger something within her. She shares of her own journey being in prison, “I definitely went in with no self-confidence, no hope, no goals. By the end of it, I had a full-fledged business plan and goals that I'm still fulfilling right now.” She gives all the credit to being involved in the prison program, saying that by the time of her release, “I was super driven and super responsible. And now I'm able to do what I'm doing, and it's all because of that.”

She's convinced she will continue to incorporate rescue adoptions in her career, and would like to implement training for assistance dogs too, saying it is part of her five-year plan. Yet, she realizes



*Hali (at right) with her inmate co-handler  
and Can Do Canine Boris*

the program had an impact on her beyond dog-training skills. She says, "I was able to not just work with the dogs, but it taught me how to be around people, how to communicate, how to work as a team. Everything I now use in my job today, I did not have before I did this program."

Getting to this point was no easy feat. Hali says, "I didn't think I could do it at the beginning. I didn't think that I'd ever, ever even make it to 26. I am now, and I'm doing what I love, and I'm happy. It's all worth it." She finally believes in herself and believes in other inmates' chance to turn their lives around too. She begs to tell them, "Just don't give up. If you love it and you're passionate about it, there will be a place for you out here."

Hali sums up her experiences so far, stating, "It brings it all full circle. This is confirmation that I really did make it."

## Efforts to increase DEI continue

We continue to take a close look at how we embody diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) as an organization. While we will always be focused on our mission of creating mutually beneficial partnerships between people and dogs, we can also always be better at what we do, including in the area of DEI.

For example, we want to make sure we're casting our net for clients, volunteers, staff and donors far and wide. There are people in some communities who could benefit greatly from an assistance dog but know little or nothing about us because we haven't been successful in reaching them. There are also potential employees, volunteers and supporters in these same communities. We want to make sure we're effectively networking everywhere in Minnesota and Wisconsin so we can serve and engage as many people as possible.

To this end, since 2019, a committee of board members, employees and volunteers has been actively working to improve in this area. The committee's focus goes beyond racial barriers and covers the full spectrum of human demographic differences, including race, disability, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status and others. The group has worked diligently to improve as an organization and establish several goals to guide its work. The three primary objectives being actively pursued are as follows:

- Collect demographic data of staff, volunteers, and clients to better assess opportunities to improve diversity
- Strengthen Can Do Canines' training and development focus to enhance cultural competency
- Increase diversity of staff, clients and volunteers and foster an inclusive environment for all by openly discussing this issue and casting a wider net in recruitment of clients, volunteers and staff

Jeff Johnson and our DEI Committee welcomes your thoughts, input and ideas at any time. Jeff can be reached at [jjohnson@candocanines.org](mailto:jjohnson@candocanines.org).

# Flying is yet another of our dogs' skills

Five times each year, Can Do Canines dogs get situated under airplane seats and prepare for takeoff to the same destination: nowhere. That's right, our popular Flight to Nowhere Program allows dogs to experience what it is like to be on a real plane in order to ease anxiety of future flying travels.

Since 2014, our Puppy Program staff members have been coordinating these two-hour sessions and offering them to foster volunteers (and occasionally, certified clients). The registered group meets for these "fake flights" at Terminal One of the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport. They are escorted together through the airport, going through all the normal security procedures, visiting the pet relief station and riding the tram to a special, private room. There, they board a previously used plane fuselage that Delta Airlines donated for this purpose.

Another team that took advantage of the program was Claire and Mobility Assist Dog Slammer. Prior to her senior year in college, Claire chose to study abroad in



*The mock fuselage for practicing boarding*



*Heading through the security checkpoint*

Although Flight to Nowhere is not part of certification for the dogs, our adaptable pups usually pass the experience with flying colors.

Lisa, who has Hearing Assist Dog Cleo, shares that the Flight to Nowhere "definitely helped to get a feel for how the process works going through TSA, talking with gate agents, and how the dogs fit under the seats in the planes." Lisa says they have taken about 45-50 flights together for various reasons. Cleo is a big help, whether by alerting Lisa to someone calling her name in a noisy airport or by picking up a dropped item so Lisa doesn't have to risk experiencing vertigo. "I feel much safer and more confident traveling alone when Cleo is with me," states Lisa.

Denmark. She said the Flight to Nowhere opportunity helped ease any worries she had about traveling with Slammer and the thought of not bringing him with to Denmark made her panic. She shares, "Going to a whole new country without knowing anyone is nerve-racking for anyone, but when you have to worry about your health, you have more anxiety about what could happen if no one is there. I do not think that I would have been able to participate in this program without him."

Regularly hearing from countless teams how Flight to Nowhere has benefitted them, Can Do Canines is grateful for this partnership with Minneapolis Airport Commission, TSA and volunteer Delta pilots.

We are thrilled you've allowed this program to take flight!



*Although Slammer is able to sit under the seat ahead of Claire when they travel, when going to Denmark, Claire scored bulkhead seating for them.*



# Can you spot the difference?

Pictured from left to right are Izzy, Louann, Ilka, Marvin and Bronze.



Bronze is the latest addition to the Can Do Canines family. This friendly feline loves to play and has a very curious disposition. Our two facility cats, Marvin and Bronze, help the dogs learn appropriate boundaries. Thank you to Pet Haven Inc. of Minnesota for donating Bronze to our program.



## NEXT OPEN HOUSE: MAY 21

More information is on our website: [candocanines.org](http://candocanines.org).

If you or someone you know might want to learn more about us, check out our open house being held at our campus on Saturday, May 21, from Noon-2 p.m.

Switch to receiving emails rather than postal mail for our marketing materials by visiting [can-do.link/mail](http://can-do.link/mail).



### 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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