



Tails for You

a publication of Can Do Canines®

Nyleve hears
your support
loud and clear.



Yasmin's voice helps Nyleve be a voice for the voiceless

You are helping Nyleve live life to the fullest.

Born profoundly deaf in both ears, Nyleve grew up relying on hearing aids to hear sounds. However, considering the variety of noises hearing aids take in, the devices can easily cause a person to feel overwhelmed. Nyleve often took them out at times throughout the day, and then during the night. But even with her hearing aids in, she sometimes had to strain to try to make sense of sounds.

Relief for these feelings of insecurity recently came wagging her way through a yellow Lab named Yasmin. Now it's Yasmin who sounds the alarm when Nyleve needs to be aware of a noise, by alerting her to a door knock, a fire alarm, a weather alert, a person calling her name and more. "I am now able to hear the sounds that I would not typically hear with my hearing aids and without my hearing aids in," says Nyleve.

She remembers a couple of moments early in their time together when Yasmin was all ears. She shares, "I set an alarm on the Alexa and was able to hear it due to Yasmin's nudging my leg and alerting me to the Echo Dot in the living room. Shortly after that [my son] Ethan knocked on the patio sliding doors and Yasmin alerted me to the patio to let Ethan in."

She shares, "Life is a lot easier now with Yasmin around. She makes it easier for me to hear sounds that I normally would not hear without her. I am able to continue to go to community events and relax because I am not overly stimulated to hear or concentrate on sounds around me."

Community events are especially important for Nyleve, who considers herself "an active social justice warrior." She explains, "I love to be the voice for the voiceless." Similarly, Yasmin loves to provide her voice to help Nyleve, who says, "Dog sounds are a lot easier for me to hear." Plus, Nyleve gets a kick out of seeing Yasmin react so positively when this proud pooch does something well.

It's easy to imagine Nyleve grinning from ear to ear as she thanks Can Do Canines' donors and volunteers for their support. "Without the donations and supporters, from the puppy raiser to the prison puppy programs, we would not have the assistance dogs in our lives." She adds, "To the trainers at Can Do Canines, thank you as well. Y'all make it possible for us to live our lives to the fullest."



Can Do Canines and the U of M partner on research to benefit families

Families who receive our Autism Assist Dogs (AADs) usually don't need to be asked if their assistance dog is making a difference in their lives. The answer is obvious. However, University of Minnesota researchers are asking that question and others with specific goals in mind.

Dr. Angela Tseng works in the U of M's Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences. She's also a big fan of Can Do Canines. Angela first became involved by volunteering with Can Do Canines when she was in graduate school at the U of M. After receiving her degree, she moved away from the area for a few years and then returned when offered this new position with the U of M. It didn't take her long to want to connect her passion for assistance dogs with her interest in autism research. Specifically, Angela was analyzing brain development to see how children's brains respond to different stimuli. She wanted to prove that AADs offer quantifiable benefits to both the children who have these dogs, as well as their family members. She states, "The more I researched this topic, I realized that there's not a lot of evidence."

Due to that lack of concrete proof, families with an AAD sometimes run into barriers with public interactions. While the law permits service dogs in public places, the handler must be in control of the dog at all times. In the case of AADs, the handler is technically a parent or other adult. The child is actually part of a triad, being tethered to the dog.

Angela's motivation for performing research was to give leverage to families of children with autism to validate the need for their assistance dog in public settings. Meanwhile, Can Do Canines had similar interests and was in discussion with Angela and the U of M to partner on this research opportunity. Together, they applied and received a grant from the Maslowski Charitable Trust in order to move forward with this project.

Enlisting about a dozen Can Do Canines AAD teams, Angela began collecting data to be able to compare each family to itself over time. She wanted to understand the changes in stress in both the child and the parents that occurred with the addition of an AAD in their lives.

Just before receiving their dog and then again 8-12 weeks after certification, families submitted multiple questionnaires and provided hair samples or fingernail clippings, along with saliva samples for DNA studies. By analyzing a person's saliva, hair and fingernail material, researchers can measure cortisol concentration, a biological measure of stress.

According to Angela, the data provided clear results. An AAD handler's level of stress was significantly lower after integrating the dogs in their lives. The child with autism also had a reduction in stress. Angela says, "That's not surprising to us who know the dogs, but now I had data that I could report. I think that's really promising."

The hope that Angela and Can Do Canines both have is for families to be able to take this type of data to an insurance company, a school or other companies/institutions in their lives to make a case for allowing the assistance dog to have more presence with the child and to validate how the relationship benefits the child.

Angela and her team, which now also includes Emma Persoon, who interned and worked at Can Do Canines before attending graduate school at the U of M for canine genetics, have more in store. They have recently begun a new study to learn more about selective breeding for service dogs. This knowledge may allow us to better predict the potential that a very young dog might have to become a service dog.

Both Can Do Canines and the U of M are finding this partnership and the work it is producing meaningful. Can Do Canines Director of Training Julianne Larsen says, "The work that Angela and Emma are doing could have a huge impact on the assistance dog field. I am very excited to see where their research leads and how it might help organizations like Can Do Canines produce even better dogs to assist people with disabilities."

Angela too, sees not only the benefits, but also the joy her work brings. She jokingly says of these studies she's leading, "They're not my day job, but I'm trying to get them to be."

Understanding the monetary value of our assistance dogs

We at Can Do Canines pride ourselves on being able to place each assistance dog with a person at no cost to that client. Since the dogs are generally 2-3 years old at the time of placement, a lot of time, energy and yes, money, go into making each team a reality.

For many years, we listed that monetary figure at \$25,000 to raise and train each dog. However, that number was first determined about 15 years ago. Since then, that cost has risen but was never adjusted in our materials.

In late 2021, we estimated that the actual cost to raise and train a Can Do Canine is about \$45,000. That figure accounts for all non-administrative expenses. Executive Director Jeff Johnson explains, “We took all program expenses and divided that total by the number of teams certified that year.” He clarifies that the exact figure might fluctuate slightly from year to year, but we anticipate that for at least the next few years, “it’s going to be right in that range.”

When you know how debilitating life is with seizures, you want to do anything you can to spare someone else from going through that.

Jeff also comments on the method for reaching that statistic. He says, “It’s maybe oversimplified, but that’s how Assistance Dogs International (ADI) organizations make that measurement.” Since Can Do Canines is one of two ADI organizations in Minnesota, we follow their suggested guidelines.

What’s **not** changing is the cost for someone to sponsor a team. That support will stay at \$25,000. Jeff says, “We feel it is important to continue to allow donors at this giving level to make this meaningful gift in an attainable way.”

One person who knows about team sponsorships is Elmer Schindel. In August 2017, five years after his wife, Bonnie, passed away, Elmer sponsored a mobility-seizure assistance team. Sponsoring a dog that performs seizure response skills was important to Elmer because Bonnie, as well as their daughter and grandson, experienced seizures. Elmer says, “When you know how debilitating life is with seizures, you want to do anything you can to spare someone else from going through that.”

Elmer has recruited two others who have also sponsored teams, and his commitment to Can Do Canines expands far beyond sponsorships. Since 2014, when he attended a Tails of Independence event, he has provided ongoing support as a monthly donor—a way of giving that is vital to sustaining our organization. Additionally, several puppies answer to names that Elmer has chosen for them through our Name-A-Puppy Program, including Hogan, Alfie, Malcolm and Ivy so far.

Happy to help, yet humble about it, Elmer wants to do everything possible to ensure those who need help get the assistance they need. Then, he says that once they are able to benefit from one of our dogs, “You can’t put a dollar value on that.”



Elmer (at right) with David and Mobility-Seizure Assist Dog Jewel, the team Elmer sponsored in 2017

If you would like to sponsor a team, become a monthly donor, name a puppy or learn about more giving opportunities, please contact Janet at [jacobus@candocanines.org](mailto:jcobus@candocanines.org) or 763-331-3000, ext. 153.

A glimpse into our whelping homes

Can Do Canines' Breeding Program is an essential part of our mission of providing life-changing assistance dogs to people with disabilities. Our dogs not only produce puppies that grow up to be superheroes for their clients but also are critical for how we are continually striving to improve the health and quality of our dogs, generation after generation.

Volunteers who open up their homes to care for a pregnant dog and her puppies are a vital part of that success. Whelping homes welcome the expecting mom about ten days before her due date and continue the care through the first 5-8 weeks of her puppies' lives.

While short in duration, whelping is a time-intensive and tiring, but deeply rewarding, experience. The volunteer whelper's hands are the first human touch the puppies receive. It's those hands that break each baby's fluid sack, suction out their mouth and rub them vigorously to stimulate their nervous system and get them started on their remarkable journey. One volunteer says, "Bringing these puppies into the world is by far one of the most amazing things we have done. From the second they are born, you are teaching and nurturing them to become the best possible service dogs they can be." Another shares, "Puppy breath, slurpy kisses, frog-legged belly flops, nudging noses, excited happy barks, topsy turvy napping positions, wiggly butts and tails, protruding pink tongues and lazy yawns, and learning each dog's unique personality all fill that basket of emotional treasures."

Young pups are dressed in baby onesies to help them get used to wearing something, preparing them for their future assistance cape.



Despite the incentives, whelping is incredibly hard work, with the first few weeks being especially precarious for these newborns. It's quite common for a whelping volunteer to sleep on a cot or sofa next to the pen of puppies for many consecutive nights. These dedicated humans rarely leave their charges unattended during their round-the-clock stint. They are not entirely alone though. Can Do Canines sets up a camera in each whelping home, not to surveil the

scene, but to provide 24/7 support to the whelping volunteers. The whelpers can easily have a virtual call with a staff member, usually Breeding Program Coordinator Karin Balgaard, to show and talk through a birthing situation, ask questions about the puppies and more. Also, "whelper helpers" are available to our whelping homes so that these volunteers can have a break to leave the house for necessary errands.



The area the canine siblings and Mom share during these early days is not unlike a miniature carnival, with toddler play equipment and toys galore. Also decorating the environment is a homemade hanging scale, used to weigh each little bundle of joy twice a day to monitor every miniscule change. A heat lamp is another vital tool, as tiny pups can chill quickly.

What won't be seen on the variety of floor textures are shoes. Anyone coming to the house must take off footwear outside to prevent any excess germs from entering. Also, a thorough hand-washing is a must for those coming near Puppy Central.

Gradually, the puppies get to explore new surroundings. Whelpers take each puppy on field trips around the house to hear new sounds, touch new surfaces and see new items. A volunteer explains, "This is a whole new part of Can Do Canines that I really didn't know or understand until we did it! It is a wonderful, special event to be a part of, [which] begins at birth and is with you until the puppies graduate with their human."

If you might be interested in becoming a whelping volunteer, contact Karin by emailing kbalgaard@candocanines.org. If you would like to donate items for use in our whelping homes, see our Whelping Wish List on our website.

A little pup that's melting our hearts these days



Karin, our breeding coordinator, is currently raising Kiwi. A sweet, chocolate Lab, Kiwi was the sole puppy that Billie gave birth to on March 14.

A variety of dogs share our kennel this summer



Of the 25 dogs in our kennel at the end of June, several different varieties were represented, including these four shown here: Castle (Golden Retriever), Alayna (Black Labrador), Gucci (Goldador) and Tamara (Standard Poodle).

Notice a change with the font in this newsletter?

We have recently begun using a new font, called Atkinson Hyperlegible, which is one known for its high readability. It is important for us to make sure we are making our content accessible to all readers whenever it is possible for us to do so.

In the illustrations to the right, you can see how Atkinson Hyperlegible differentiates common misinterpreted letters and numbers using various design techniques, such as zeros having a diagonal line through them.



UPCOMING EVENTS

More information: candocanines.org/events

Open House, August 4

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, August 4, from 6-8 p.m.

Can Do Woofaroo, September 24

Bring your friends and well-behaved dogs and join us at the Can Do Woofaroo for a one-mile walk and festival that benefits Can Do Canines!



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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