



# Tails for You

a publication of Can Do Canines®



**Your generosity means that Ian can experience more opportunities.**

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# Ian and Dewey “walk on” toward greater security

Ian lives in a full house with a busy family, which includes his parents, an older brother, a younger sister, and several family pets. Yet making room for Autism Assist Dog Dewey was no problem for this 8 year old and his family.

Ian’s parents, Laura and Chadd, heard about Can Do Canines from friends whose son received an Autism Assist Dog from us not long ago. They were excited, but the moment Ian met Dewey was even more thrilling than they expected. Laura says, “I knew that Ian would love Dewey, because I had seen him around dogs, but it was fun to see Dewey’s reaction to Ian and the bond they developed so quickly.”

Just as their emotional bond is significant, the physical bond between them when Ian holds Dewey’s handle is crucial. Laura explains, “If he has Dewey with him, he feels more secure. He just knows he has his buddy and he’s more grounded.”

For Ian, wrapping his hand around Dewey’s handle came easily. For the past few years, Ian has been participating in hippotherapy, a type of horseback-riding therapy for individuals with disabilities. “During that,” Laura describes, “he holds the handle on the saddle and he tells the horse to ‘walk on.’ And so with Dewey, it just kind of was a nice transition into him because he has a handle. And so Ian holds Dewey’s handle and just tells him to ‘walk on.’”

“Walking on” also means more “walking in.” Before Ian had Dewey, he often preferred to stay near the doors of stores, not wanting to go in any further. Laura says, “Now that we have Dewey, it’s really fun to be able to take [Ian] to Target and he can go pick out a package of Oreos, or go look at the Roombas that are on display, or just be out in public and experience seeing new things.”

Increased experiences can also mean increased stress. Not to worry. Dewey can help with that, too, by what Laura calls “redirecting Ian’s upsets.” She says, “If we know that something’s going to potentially get him, then we’ll get Dewey to interact with him.” And Ian adores Dewey’s interactions, relishing every kiss and snuggle. In fact, when sleeping together they are “totally intertwined,” according to Laura, who has the photos to prove it. She admits, “I take a picture every night of the two of them, so I have lots.”

As the pair is up moving about the world together, there are even more benefits. Ian is able to work on his gross motor skills, which are important for his physical health. Plus, the family can leave Ian’s wheelchair/stroller at home, since Dewey allows Ian to be more a part of the action when they are out on the town. Laura stresses that having Dewey “has been truly life



changing for us as a family and for Ian.” She and the rest of the family are heartened by the “opportunities that Ian will have to experience life more fully and to be able to participate in more family activities and more fun things with his peers and just have a sense of calmness when he’s with Dewey.”

Understanding that amazing partnerships like this don’t simply happen, Laura says, “We are just incredibly grateful to the whole organization and to everyone who contributes in any way. We just really, really appreciate all the time and energy that is put into raising these amazing animals that help fulfill all these people’s lives. It’s just wonderful.”

## PAW Program is the “best buy” in town

“Let’s talk about what’s possible,” is the current slogan for Best Buy. So it was only fitting when Best Buy employee and long-time Can Do Canines volunteer Rebeca Sharpe approached us in Spring 2022 to talk about the possibility of a new program for fostering dogs.

Rebeca is a member of Best Buy’s disABILITIES Employee Resource Group, which was discussing having more assistance animals in training at their corporate headquarters in Richfield. She was already bringing Can Do Canine dog-in-training Waylon with her to work and recalls thinking, “What if we expand that idea and create a partnership with Can Do Canines to create employee/foster dog pairs of future assistance dogs in training?” She raised the idea with Can Do Canines staff members who were thrilled with the concept. After a few exciting meetings, “The Pups At Work (PAW) Program was born ... or whelped in this case,” Rebeca says.

In July, eight Best Buy employees were matched with dogs about 1 year old. These employees made a four-to-six-month commitment, with the option to renew the foster agreement if desired.

Puppy Program Instructor Lindy Luopa leads the PAW Program, conducting monthly classes on-site at Best Buy’s campus, making training especially convenient. Lindy adds, “Participants are also welcome to attend our standard group training sessions, outings, and one-on-one opportunities.”

Having assistance dogs in a corporate setting is proving to be valuable for the dogs. Lindy explains, “They have the opportunity to encounter large groups of people, elevator rides, visits to the cafeteria, loud noises, quiet work time, and children (Best Buy has a childcare facility on-site). Training in a corporate

setting provides an outing experience with the added benefit of being able to retreat to a cubicle or office when rest and recovery are needed.”

PAW Program participant Wyatt Widmer notes an emotional side effect his Can Do Canine seems to be enjoying. “My current and first foster, Braven, has a huge crush on my boss who sits in a cube kitty-corner to mine. He spends most days curled up (not on his mat) and staring at her for hours!”



*PAW Program participants work on loose-leash walking.*

The advantages of the program extend beyond the dogs. Lindy says, “Participants have met and formed connections with co-workers who they may not have otherwise had a reason to communicate with. This has allowed them to strategize and cross-connect in a way that was not previously available. PAW Program participants have a built-in support network; they share their victories, challenges, (and adorable pictures and stories) among their group.”

Lindy confirms a hope that Rebeca had for the program as well, stating, “Maneuvering through a corporate environment with a dog allows participants to help identify areas where accessibility can be

improved (location and ease of use of ramps, location of accessibility buttons/plates, access to outdoor resources, etc.)” Rebeca mentions that movement throughout the campus has its perks for her too. “Taking Waylon out for ‘busy’ time or short walks gets me up from my desk and moving around rather than sitting all day.” She goes on to say, “People see us in the hallways and smile, say ‘hi’ to the dogs as they pass by, or just put their hand to their heart and say, ‘Awww.’ These dogs just spread joy wherever they go.”

Wyatt experiences positive feelings himself, sharing, “I feel so moved and honored to be able to normalize service animals ... It’s education and a reminder that some disabilities aren’t necessarily obvious or visible.”

Looking ahead, Lindy says, “Our hope is to continue to grow the PAW Program and double or triple participation among the Best Buy staff members. We are in the process of identifying and training Pack Leaders who will function as on-site liaisons who can provide support as well as coordinate group outings and social gathering opportunities.” Can Do Canines is also in conversation with other businesses that are interested in implementing a PAW Program.

When asked what she would share with businesses considering this program, Rebeca says, “DO IT! It’s such an easy program to implement and the benefits are far-reaching.”



*Wyatt with assistance dog in training Braven.*

*If you know a business that might want information about participating in our PAW Program, please have them reach out to our Puppy Program at [puppyprogram@candocanines.org](mailto:puppyprogram@candocanines.org).*

candocanines.org/fetchingball' in white."/>

The Fetching Ball

*Celebrating  
Can Do Canines*

February 25, 2023  
Begins at 6 p.m.

Radisson Blu Mall of America  
2100 Killebrew Dr, Bloomington, MN

Get your tickets at [candocanines.org/fetchingball](https://candocanines.org/fetchingball)

# Meet Client Services Coordinator Jen Gravrok



*Jen Gravrok and Gucci*

As a dog lover growing up in Minnesota, Jen Gravrok wanted to be a veterinarian. While studying at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, her fascination with animal behavior—especially dogs—surpassed that original interest. Jen recalls that as she was completing her undergraduate degree, she wanted to learn more. “I applied to study anthrozoology (human-animal interaction) with a professor who specialized in dog-human interaction. This professor was able to get me a full scholarship to study with her in Australia, so I packed my bags and moved down under for four years while I completed my Ph.D. under her supervision.”

During that time, Jen was approached to do a project with Guide Dogs Victoria about the effects guide dogs could have on kids—an underrepresented population. She says, “While researching guide dogs, and assistance dogs in general, I found that the literature was full of good stories about the benefits that assistance dogs bring. However, the challenges that handlers face when working with an assistance dog were not well reported.”

Jen began to study the experiences that first-time handlers face during their initial year with an assistance dog. Working with several assistance dog

organizations throughout Australia and handlers with various disabilities, she gained invaluable knowledge and published multiple scientific papers.

Upon receiving her Ph.D. in December 2019 and moving back to the U.S., Jen checked to see if Can Do Canines was hiring. She had been aware of our organization since high school and says she had aspired to work here since college. With no position available at that time, she took one at a North Carolina assistance dog organization, Eyes Ears Nose and Paws (EENP), as a Client Services Specialist.

A Can Do Canines Client Services Coordinator at that time, Sarah Schaff, had previously interned at EENP, and the two women built a connection. When Sarah decided to return to her southern roots in 2021, Jen traveled the opposite way back to her home state after being hired to fill the open position.

With over a year of service at Can Do Canines now, Jen is thoroughly enjoying her role. In addition to appreciating the problem-solving skills that her job calls for, she admits that a favorite aspect of her position is “seeing people’s lives open up even more once they start working with a dog.” She adds, “Throughout my Ph.D., I realized that clients having realistic expectations of what their dog can and cannot do for them is incredibly important to their success as a team.” Jen is excited that this position allows her to help set those expectations and ease the challenges.



*Jen with her Seeing Eye Dogs Australia foster puppy*

We at Can Do Canines are thrilled to have Jen on staff and know that her enthusiasm and expertise are beneficial to clients and all the lives she touches.

# You helped make this possible in 2022

Thank you for all the ways you support us. We're excited to see what you make happen in 2023!



51 teams certified.

Photo credit: Liz Banfield



171 dogs spent time in one of our prison programs.



154 new volunteers joined our pack.



38 puppies were named by Name-A-Puppy donors.

Photo credit: Tiffany Hendrickson



98 new puppies began their assistance dog training.

Photo credit: Jodi Elkins



378 active working teams are receiving continuous support from us.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

More information: [candocanines.org/events](https://candocanines.org/events)

### Fetching Ball Gala February 25

Join us for this fabulous annual fundraiser. Buy your tickets today by visiting [candocanines.org/fetchingball](https://candocanines.org/fetchingball).

### Open House March 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 Saturday, March 4, from noon-2 p.m.

### Spring Graduation March 25

If you are signed up for our e-newsletter, you'll receive an email on Saturday, March 25. The email will include a video link so you can meet and celebrate the new teams you helped make possible.



#### 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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