

CANINE LISTENER

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MAKING INDEPENDENCE POSSIBLE



Love at First Sight: Behind the scenes of Hearing Dog Skye's placement with Alexis

Apprentice Assistance Dog Trainer, Emilia, shares her experiences on one of her first in-home placements with Dogs for Better Lives (DBL). We also connected with Alexis on how it was when Hearing Dog Skye was placed with her. What we discovered was a heartwarming story that shows the power of Service Dogs – not only on the people who receive them, but also on those who help them prepare for their career.

The last five days have been five days that I will forever hold dear to my heart. As if I needed another reason to love what I do, assisting DBL Field Representative Ashley in placing Skye with Alexis definitely validated it.

As a staff member of DBL, I've read all the placement stories that have been shared over the years. I've teared up at pretty much all of them, but nothing prepared me for the emotions I would feel seeing it all firsthand.

Of course I could go on and on about how amazing Skye is. She was the first Certified Hearing Dog I have trained, and the first dog I have placed. But the truly amazing part of this experience was Alexis.

My excitement started when I got to learn more about Alexis. Hearing about all the places she plans to take Skye: camping trips, local hockey games, the beach, and other spontaneous adventures.

From day one it was obvious that Alexis did her research and really studied all the required materials. She asked all the right questions and followed through with all the information we threw at her – which was a lot! When she successfully worked sounds with Skye for the first time, I don't think there was a dry eye in the home.

By the second day of placement, it was as if Skye forgot all about me and Alexis was now her person. Other trainers have warned about the struggle of watching a dog you bonded with nearly every day for the last six months begin bonding with another person, but seeing the biggest smile on Alexis's face when Skye was already choosing to follow her and lay at her feet all day is something I will never forget.

Throughout the rest of placement, as we continued working sounds and obedience, I was holding back my tears as I admired this person I just met. Watching her blossom into this happy and confident human, quickly understanding how to help her and her new companion be a successful team in public and at home, it all made me realize; I don't think there could have been a better match for Skye, and I don't think I could have asked for a better first placement to observe.

Day four was when it really hit. We had a few struggles with getting consistent good alerts from Skye, but Alexis never gave up or lost her spark. We were sitting at the table with the oven timer set, going over what the final day of placement would look like. Mid conversation the oven timer went off. Skye popped up from under the table and alerted Alexis, who was just glowing with excitement. And as hard as I tried to hold back those tears again, there just wasn't a chance.

It was then that I thought "this is it." If I could capture one moment to show someone why I choose to do what I do, why Dogs for Better Lives does what we do, that would be it. I will forever be grateful for this beautiful, exhausting, and emotional experience.

From Alexis:

I remember the day I met Skye. She was more beautiful in person! I felt a bond almost immediately, I think it was like love at first sight. As we got to know each other, our bond started becoming deeper and stronger. I learned so much from Ashley and Emilia, along with training practices from them. They were a total team and I have many favorite memories from my week with Ashley and Emilia. I continue to communicate with them about Skye's adventures. Since Skye was placed with me, my life has changed for the better. I am no longer worried about missing sounds surrounding me. She's my best friend.



From Shelter to Service Dog Pupdate

Shelter dogs have always been a key piece of our mission and will always be an important part of our programs moving forward. We're excited to bring you an update on our "From Shelter to Service Dog" program, a collaboration between Dogs for Better Lives (DBL) and Operation Kindness (OPK). This initiative aims to give shelter dogs a second chance as a life-changing Service Dog, through our expert training.

"From Shelter to Service Dog" identifies shelter dogs at Operation Kindness in Texas with the right temperament and skills to become service dogs. These dogs receive specialized training from DBL to become Hearing Assistance Dogs, Autism Assistance Dogs, or Facility Dogs.

Current Program Stats:

2 Active Dogs in Training: These dogs are on their journey to become incredible Service Dogs, making a difference in the lives of those in need.

1 Career Change Dog: Ringo was career changed. He will be adopted out to a loving family through Operation Kindness.

22 Approved Foster Families: These dedicated foster families have completed training to support our mission.

Approximately 40+ Interested Fosters: We're delighted to see so much interest in our program, with so many potential foster families eager to join.

Why It Matters

The demand for Service Dogs remains high, with long waiting lists. Our program is helping address this need by training more shelter dogs to become Service Dogs, reducing wait times for those in need and transforming the lives of shelter dogs.

We are thrilled about the positive impact our "From Shelter to Service Dog" program is making on shelter dogs, their future families, and the lives of people with disabilities. If you want to learn more about the program or become a foster volunteer with Operation Kindness, visit www.dogsforbetterlives.org/shelter.



Walker, a Black Labrador/hound mix, gets ready for a training trip in town.



DBL Team Runner, Alex

Back to the Races in Falmouth

For the second year in a row, Dogs for Better Lives (DBL) was again a charity partner in this year's Falmouth Road Race (FRR). The iconic race was held in Falmouth, Massachusetts on Sunday, August 20th, and DBL had a team of 10 wonderful runners fundraising in support of Assistance Dogs.

Each runner set an ambitious goal, aiming to raise at least \$1,500. Collectively, they raised over \$26,000! This remarkable achievement wouldn't have been possible without the hard work and dedication of these runners. Their commitment to making a positive impact through Assistance Dogs is truly inspiring. Private donors helped to partially match these FRR donations with an additional \$7,000 raised, all in supporting DBL's programmatic needs.

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to each and every member of the DBL Team for their fundraising efforts and support of our mission. By participating in the Falmouth Road Race, they are not only pursuing their passion for running but also making a meaningful difference in the lives of our Assistance Dogs and those they serve.



FD Dallas and Sean

Sean and FD Dallas, located in Oregon, have continued their incredible journey together. Dallas, now over 8 years old, may be slowing down a bit with age, but he remains dedicated to his classroom duties. He spends at least three days a week practicing his skills, which include Place, Say "Hi", Stay, Sit, and Down.

According to Sean, Dallas has developed a remarkable sense of empathy over the years. He can intuitively detect when someone is in distress and provides that extra connection that brightens their day and allows them to focus on their tasks. The students adore Dallas, often reading to him and greeting him each morning. To Sean, Dallas is not just a Service Dog; he's his best buddy and a constant companion.

HHD Coal and Lauren

We recently completed our one-year follow-up with Lauren of Colorado, and HHD Coal. Since they first

joined forces, their journey has taken them on two moves, but Coal, undeterred, has remained a dedicated and enthusiastic partner in sound work. Coal's skills have only expanded over time, now flawlessly responding to name calls, smoke alarms, doorbells, knocks, oven timers, and phone alarms. Beyond their everyday tasks, Lauren and Coal continue to explore the great outdoors together, embarking on camping and hiking adventures. However, it seems Coal has set his own limits on long-distance hikes, as Lauren humorously notes, "He puts on the brakes and won't move another step!" Nevertheless, their bond remains as strong as ever, a testament to the remarkable partnership between Lauren and her remarkable service dog, Coal.



FD Rolanda and Alicia

Alicia and FD Rolanda in North Carolina share a remarkable bond that extends beyond their professional roles. Alicia, a dedicated pediatric nurse, provides essential care to young patients in need. Meanwhile, Rolanda's role as a therapeutic presence for anxious patients is invaluable. She possesses a unique set of skills that include Lap, Touch, Visit, Squish, and Settle. What makes Rolanda truly exceptional is her intuitive ability to sense when her presence is needed the most. In a recent heartwarming incident, Rolanda initiated a "visit" with a particularly anxious young girl without any prompting. Alicia witnessed the incredible transformation as the girl's anxiety seemed to melt away while she gently petted Rolanda's head. It's a testament to the power of the human-animal bond and Rolanda's exceptional sensitivity to the emotional needs of those she serves.

CHD Pringles and Sheryl

Sheryl and her CHD, Pringles, share a remarkable bond that has grown over the course of six years. Pringles is Sheryl's second CHD from DBL, and their partnership has been nothing short of extraordinary. Pringles takes on a wide range of tasks, from working the door knock and doorbell to handling the toaster oven, washer/dryer, and smoke alarm. Sheryl greatly values the independence and assistance that Pringles provides, allowing her to enjoy a new-found sense of freedom. Beyond Pringles' impressive skills, it's their warm personality and approachability that have made an even greater impact on Sheryl's life. With Pringles by her side, Sheryl has been able to relax and open up socially, fostering a deeper sense of connection with the world around her.





CHD Reno and Shirley

Shirley and CHD Reno form an inseparable team in their everyday life in South Carolina. Reno takes on multiple roles, from working the phone and tending to the smoke alarm to answering the doorbell for Shirley. Their bond grew even stronger when Shirley underwent Cochlear Implant Surgery, with Reno providing crucial support during her recovery. Shirley affectionately refers to him as her sidekick, a constant source of comfort and companionship. At night, Reno's presence helps her feel safe, and their conversations bring joy and warmth to her days. Together, they navigate life's challenges with unwavering companionship and mutual love and support.

HHD Nikki (Nectarine) and Brenda

One year after Brenda and HHD Nectarine, now Nikki, were paired together in Washington, their bond has grown stronger. Nikki has brought love and joy into Brenda's life, lighting up the faces of her friends and making her days brighter. Nikki's abilities have expanded, from working with household appliances to offering crucial support during Brenda's unexpected health problems and hospital stay. Brenda considers Nikki her savior during this challenging time and is immensely grateful for their partnership. In Brenda's words, her life is better with Nikki in it, and their connection remains a source of strength and companionship.



FD Hilton and Rebecca

In the seven-year follow-up of Rebecca from Oregon it was clear that FD Hilton continues to make a profound impact on the lives of Rebecca and her students. Rebecca enthusiastically shared how Hilton's presence has been a source of immense support. Through the 'go say hi' technique, Hilton aids students who are struggling with regulation, offering them comfort and a friendly interaction. Additionally, Hilton's ability to provide much-needed body breaks allows students to momentarily detach from their thoughts and engage in play with him. It's heartwarming to hear that Hilton's favorite activity involves spreading joy throughout the school by visiting the main building and offering his warm greetings to the front office workers, who fondly refer to it as their "emotional support break." At the age of 10, Hilton is still as active as ever, joining his humans on runs and enjoying long hikes during the weekends. Hilton's continued dedication to his role as a source of comfort and joy is truly commendable. Kudos to Hilton for his unwavering commitment!

CHD - Certified Hearing Dog: Certified Hearing Dogs respond to sounds in the home and have public access with their person.

AAD - Autism Assistance Dog: Autism Assistance Dogs are specially trained to enhance the safety and well-being of children and families living with Autism by providing a minimum of three tasks to assist with keeping children grounded and focused while presenting a social bridge for relationships and friendships.

HHD - Home Hearing Dog: Home Hearing Dogs are trained to respond to sounds in the home but are not trained/certified to accompany their person in public.

FD - Facility Dog: Facility Dogs go to work with and assist professionals such as physicians, teachers, counselors, police officers, and child advocates.

FEATURED PLACEMENTS



CHD Mañana and Samantha

Samantha, a dedicated employee at Disneyland's California Adventure, graciously welcomed CHD Mañana into her life and workplace. Their connection was instant, and Samantha proved to be an exceptional handler right from the beginning. Together, they embarked on an unforgettable day at Disneyland, where Mañana's impeccable behavior shone brightly. Mañana's skills extend to working with Samantha's cell phone, responding to doorbells and knocks, and alerting to smoke alarms. Moreover, Mañana excels in providing vital environmental awareness both in public spaces and at Samantha's job, particularly at the Soarin exhibit in California Adventure. Their partnership promises a bright future filled with mutual support and success, as Mañana continues to enhance Samantha's life both personally and professionally, while Samantha offers Mañana a loving and fulfilling home in the magical world of Disneyland.

FD Archie and Mackenzie

Mackenzie, a dedicated police officer at Central Washington University, has fulfilled her long-held dream of becoming a Facility Dog (FD) handler by welcoming Archie into her life. With over seven years of tireless effort, she successfully initiated the Facility Dog program at her police department. Archie's role with Mackenzie is multifaceted, as he will serve the university community through community engagement, crisis response, and providing stress relief to students and staff. The duo's skillset includes Lap, Settle, Place, Touch, and Shake commands, making Archie a versatile asset to the campus community. In addition to his official duties, Archie will enjoy safe rides in a temperature-controlled K9 unit with Mackenzie. Mackenzie's home is a welcoming haven for animals, with two pet dogs, an indoor/outdoor cat, and two horses, all of whom quickly formed a close bond with Archie. Together, Mackenzie and Archie are poised to make a positive impact on the university and its surrounding community.



HHD Charlie and Joannell

Joannell of Wyoming, experienced a heartwarming transformation when HHD Charlie entered her life. From the moment they met, Joannell and Charlie formed an instant and unbreakable bond. Charlie's affection for Joannell was palpable, and the feeling was mutual; their connection was undeniable.

Charlie's incredible abilities shone brightly as he seamlessly handled tasks like managing the oven timer, responding to Joannell's cell phone, alerting her to the smoke alarm, and promptly answering to his name. Joannell was not only impressed but deeply moved by his incredible skills. Charlie's unwavering dedication and impeccable behavior left no doubt in Joannell's mind that he was destined to make a significant impact on her life.

For Joannell and her family, Charlie's presence promises a dramatic change for the better. With his steadfast companionship, they look forward to a future marked by enhanced security and an overwhelming sense of safety. More than just a Service Dog, Charlie is set to be a cherished member of the family, bringing not only assistance but also immeasurable joy and comfort to their lives. His arrival has undoubtedly ushered in a new chapter filled with boundless possibilities, and Joannell is eager to embrace the countless positive transformations that lie ahead.

National Service Dog Month Recap

In September, we celebrated National Service Dog Month with multiple outreach events and educational initiatives. This year's National Service Dog Month was a great opportunity to connect with people all over the country about our favorite topic – Service Dogs.

Our Regional Advisory Boards planned and hosted outreach events, including "Barks and Brews" in Seattle, San Francisco, southern Oregon, and California. These gatherings provided opportunities for people to come together, enjoy some beverages, and learn more about Service Dogs. We also shared ways people can get involved with Dogs for Better Lives.

Online, we hosted a free webinar, Service Dogs 101, where we discussed topics like how to interact with a Service Dog and their handler, and the protected rights of Service Animals under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). There was a wealth of information shared, and we fielded some great questions from the community.

We also took our educational efforts to social media through a fun "myth or fact" campaign where we debunked myths and answered common questions about Service Dogs and the people they serve.



DBL Program Field Representative Laura Encinas (left) with DBL Hearing Dog Cobbler, and CA RAB Members Hana Kim, Trent Jewett, and Viviana Mendoza at Black Hammer Brewery

Thank you to all the volunteers who worked tirelessly to plan and put on great events – we couldn't have done it without you!

Canine Copilots Take Flight



Puppy Raiser Sheila (left) with Rowan and Pilot Martyn

Dogs for Better Lives (DBL) recently launched a program called Canine Copilots, and it's already making a big impact! This volunteer transport program involves kind-hearted pilots and aircraft owners who help transport future Assistance Dogs in training. Thanks to these amazing volunteers, DBL can save valuable time and resources.

Rowan's Adventure The very first Canine Copilots flight took place on August 10th. Martyn, a private pilot and business owner, volunteered his time and aircraft to fly Rowan, a future Assistance Dog, from Santa Rosa, California, to Medford, Oregon. This journey would usually require 16 hours of staff time and a lot of vehicle travel. But thanks to Martyn's generosity, it cost DBL almost nothing.

Liberty Takes Flight On September 2nd, Yoram, a professional pilot, and his son Aidan flew from Brentwood, CA, to Santa Rosa, CA, to pick up DBL puppy Liberty. They then flew Liberty to her Puppy Raiser, Tania, in Ojai, CA. Yoram is eager to participate in future flights with DBL because he believes in our mission.

How Canine Copilots Works DBL's Canine Copilots program invites private pilots, businesses with corporate aircraft, and fixed base operators to be part of this incredible journey. DBL needs more flight partners to transport puppies to and from their campuses in Oregon and Massachusetts.

For more information about the Canine Copilots program and how you or your business can get involved, visit DBL's Canine Copilots Program: www.dogsforbetterlives.org/canine-copilots



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