

CANINE LISTENER

DOGS FOR BETTER LIVES • JULY 2025 • NO.149

MAKING INDEPENDENCE POSSIBLE



CHD Poppy and handler Allison

Love, Loyalty, and Life-Saving Alerts

When Allison reflects on life before being matched with Certified Hearing Dog Poppy, she doesn't sugarcoat it. "I struggled," she says.

“ I was constantly late for classes and work due to not hearing my alarm clock. I was constantly burning food because I didn't hear the oven going off. I was missing important phone calls due to not hearing my phone ring.”

The turning point came after she moved out on her own with her now-husband. With him gone most of the day, the risks of sleeping through alarms or not hearing a smoke detector became too real. That's when Allison found Dogs for Better Lives.

The moment she received the email announcing her match with Poppy is one she'll never forget. "I immediately burst into tears," Allison remembers. When Poppy finally arrived, she walked in like she'd always belonged — grabbing a stuffed pineapple toy and making herself at home.

Since that day in 2021, Allison's life has changed in every imaginable way. Poppy alerts her to the oven timer, phone, smoke alarm, doorbell, door knock, alarm clock, and even when someone says her name — both at home and in public.



Certified Hearing Dog Poppy

“ She allows me to be independent and not rely on my husband to always wake me up, go shopping with me, be home while I'm cooking, etc. She is also the best companion and my absolute best friend,” says Allison. “Poppy has changed my life drastically for the better! ”

What's perhaps most remarkable is Poppy's dedication. "She absolutely loves her job," Allison says. "Even when we're out and about and something unexpected happens — someone says 'excuse me,' or I drop something — she immediately alerts me. No matter where we are, she's on it."

That reliability gives Allison the confidence to live life fully. "I do not have to worry about dropping my wallet or not hearing someone behind me talking to me, because if these situations occur, Poppy will be there to alert me."

Allison also uses her voice to advocate for Hearing Dog teams. "I wish more people understood that just because someone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing wears hearing aids, it doesn't mean their hearing is fixed. I have had many encounters where people think I'm training Poppy for someone else, or they ask what's wrong with me. All these instances can be frustrating as Poppy and I are out just trying to live our lives."

To give back, Allison serves on DBL's Northeast Regional Advisory Board. "I wanted to help raise money so other people can receive these amazing dogs at no cost and have their life impacted like mine was. Being part of the RAB is something I deeply cherish."

Perhaps one of the most touching parts of Allison's journey is her connection with Poppy's Puppy Raisers, David and Kellie.

“ Before being in contact with them, I felt like I was missing part of her story,” she says. “Now they've shared puppy photos, cards, and even paintings of Poppy. We have the sweetest relationship, and I'll forever cherish it.”

"Poppy and I's relationship is something special," Allison adds. "She never wants to be far from me, and I never want to be far from her. We are so bonded — I cannot imagine my life without her."

They were once overlooked. Now they're training to become Service Dogs.

When River and Alexa first arrived at the Atlanta Humane Society, their futures were uncertain. Like so many shelter dogs, they were waiting—hoping—for a second chance. *That chance came when they met Dogs for Better Lives Trainer Melissa.*

Melissa saw what others had missed: the focus, heart, and temperament to become Service Dogs. *In May, the two joined our From Shelter to Service Dog Program—now operating in Atlanta, GA and Dallas, TX,* two regions with some of the highest shelter dog populations in the country.

Today, these dogs are in loving foster homes, spending their days training with Melissa. And even if they don't graduate as Service Dogs, they'll leave the program with advanced training that makes them highly adoptable.

With us, every dog wins.

We've been transforming rescue dogs into life-changing Service Dogs since 1977. Thanks to your support, we're doing even more with the addition of our newest partnership in Atlanta.



River



Alexa

Finding the Right Career for Every Dog: Matching Talents to Service Roles

At Dogs for Better Lives, we believe every dog deserves a fulfilling career—one that suits their personality, strengths, and preferences. Just like people, dogs thrive when placed in roles that align with who they are. That's why our expert trainers carefully assess each dog in our program to determine the service path where they'll shine.



DBL Certified Assistance Dog Trainer Eli poses with Certified Hearing Dog Leaf before placement.

Some dogs are born with bold confidence and high energy—traits perfect for *Hearing Assistance Dogs*. These dogs enjoy being on alert and excel at staying focused in busy environments, making them ideal for clients who rely on sound alerts at home and in public.

Others are naturally calm, cuddly, emotionally in tune, and love children. These dogs are excellent candidates for *Autism Assistance Dog* work, where they support children and help create calm, structured routines.

And some dogs are social butterflies, adaptable, and have a laid-back demeanor, thriving in *Facility Dog* roles. These dogs work alongside professionals in schools, courts, or therapy settings, offering comfort and connection in emotionally intense environments.

Our trainers take time to get to know each of our dogs, recognize where they'll thrive, and set them on a path to meaningful work. Because when we honor who the dogs are, they give their very best in service to others.



CHD Echo and Christina

Certified Hearing Dog Echo (aka Annika) and her client Christina recently completed their 1-year follow-up—and what a year it's been! Shortly after placement, Christina welcomed a new baby and moved to a new home, and through it all, Echo has remained a steady presence. Echo helps Christina stay connected and confident in her day-to-day life as a beloved companion. From family walks to grocery store trips, this team continues to thrive together with a bond built on trust and love. We're so proud of all they've accomplished!

FD Houston and Tami

Facility Dog Houston and his handler Tami wrapped up their 1-year follow-up—and they are absolutely ROCKING it! Since switching jobs, Tami now brings Houston along to reading programs, crisis call-outs, sports events, and other community outreach efforts. She's noticed a significant increase in the number of people she's able to connect with, thanks to Houston's presence. Many of the stories she shared involved children who were initially hesitant but quickly opened up once Houston was in the room—some even come looking for him when he visits! Houston continues to do great work with his cues, including settle, down/stay, sit/stay, visit, and a modified paw shake. This team is making a powerful impact everywhere they go!



CHD Jetty and Donna

Certified Hearing Dog Jetty and his client Donna recently completed their 1-year follow-up and are doing wonderfully! Their bond is strong and clearly visible. The pair recently took an exciting trip from Phoenix all the way to Barcelona, where Donna's grandson was invited to train with the big team through his football club academy. Donna shared that Jetty was an absolute champ on the trip—calmer than she was! At home, Jetty is reliably alerting to the smoke alarm, door knock, kitchen timer, and microwave. This duo continues to thrive together, and we're so proud of all they've accomplished this past year!

CHD Emerald and Joyce

Certified Hearing Dog Emerald and her client Joyce just completed their 1-year follow-up and are thriving! Living in Washington State with Joyce and her husband Mike, Emerald enjoys lazy mornings and active afternoons. She reliably alerts Joyce to the door knock, kitchen timer, smoke alarm, and her name being called—and continues to work with enthusiasm thanks to Joyce's consistent practice.

In public, Emerald draws attention everywhere she goes, giving Joyce the chance to share about DBL and her hearing dog journey. Emerald's favorite outing is Sunday church service, where she gets to cuddle up with the Sunday school kids she adores. This team is doing great, and it shows!





FD Major and Kristen

Facility Dog Major and his handler Kristen just celebrated their 3-year follow-up in Washington and what a team they are! As a school psychologist, Kristen shared that Major has become an essential part of her work, helping students feel safe, supported, and seen. At the high school, Major is a total celebrity—students and staff light up when they see him, making Kristen even more approachable.

Major continues to do touch, place, visit, settle, lap, and more. He's also mastered a few fun tricks, including high five, rollover, and his signature move—"pretzel!" Kristen says he brings joy and connection everywhere he goes.

You can follow their journey on Instagram at @majortherapylab.

CHD Marshall and Stacy

Certified Hearing Dog Marshall and his client Stacy just completed their 3-year follow-up and are doing wonderfully! Stacy shared that she can't imagine life without him. At home, Marshall alerts to the oven timer, home alarm, smoke alarm, and driveway alarm—and at her early education center, he alerts to the doorbell.

While Marshall is her dedicated Hearing Dog, he's also become a beloved part of the school community. Staff stop by for cuddles and stress relief, and the kids get great practice using polite manners when asking to pet a service dog. Marshall has made a lasting impact not just on Stacy, but on everyone around him!



CHD Spruce and Dawn

Certified Hearing Dog Spruce and his client Dawn are a playful, upbeat pair, and it's been a joy watching their bond grow! During their follow-up, Spruce showed off his goofy side until those alert sounds kicked in, and he snapped right into work mode. Dawn matches his energy and shared how much she loves every aspect of him.

Spruce is alerting to a wide range of sounds including the smoke alarm, diabetic alarm, oven timer, name call, microwave, and toaster. He also loves joining Dawn and her husband on outings to dog-friendly places, where their community is always excited to see this dynamic team in action!

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



FD Quest and Kimberly

Facility Dog Quest was placed with Kimberly, a Social Emotional Behavioral Health Lead at an elementary school in Iowa! Kim is thrilled to welcome Quest into both her home and her work, where he'll support students who need a little extra help navigating emotions and learning healthy coping strategies. Quest will be using his trained tasks—lap, squish, visit, settle, and touch—to bring calm, connection, and comfort.

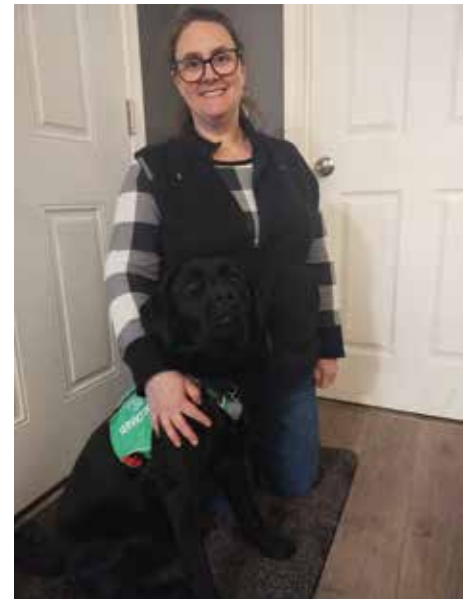
Within just a day, Quest was already shadowing Kim around the house, clearly recognizing she's his person. At home, he joins a busy household of two kids, two cats, and two other dogs—plenty of fun during his off-duty hours! During placement, we visited the school where Quest will work, and even before the first bell, teachers and administrators showed up during their summer break to support his training.

Kim is keeping Quest's arrival a surprise for the students and can't wait to see their reactions on the first day of school.

CHD Frankie and Leah

Certified Hearing Dog Frankie was recently placed with his new partner Leah in Oregon! Frankie came to DBL through our partnership with Project to Heal and quickly formed a strong bond with Leah and her family during placement week. Whether curled up near Leah during training or lounging on his new bed surrounded by toys, Frankie settled right in. Frankie will be alerting to the oven timer, smoke alarm, door knock, name call, and dropped items—providing Leah and her family peace of mind, especially when her husband is away for work and her son is at school.

Leah shared how much she loves Frankie's personality—from carrying his food bowl to her to doing zoomies in the backyard! She knew they had a special bond when, on their first morning together, she let him up on the bed and he gently rested his head on her chest. Leah was feeling under the weather that week, but Frankie's quiet comfort helped her push through and focus on learning everything she could to give him the best life possible.



FD Killian and Ashley

Facility Dog Killian has been placed with Ashley, a Deputy District Prosecutor in Idaho, where he'll play a vital role in supporting victims of violent crimes. Killian will accompany Ashley and her team during initial meetings, follow-up conversations, and potentially all the way to the courtroom—providing calm, comfort, and reassurance every step of the way.

Killian will utilize trained tasks like lap, visit, settle, touch, pass, and fetch (which doubles as a great stress reliever for everyone!). With his rock-solid down/stay and under skills—huge thanks to trainer Dana—he's even prepared to quietly support victims while on the stand.

Ashley and her team have already fallen in love with Killian's calm focus on duty and his playful personality off the clock. He's a fan favorite around the courthouse, greeting everyone politely and soaking up the attention. Ashley is thrilled to have him as both a professional partner and walking buddy. We can't wait to see the incredible impact this duo will make!

Change Lives, One Puppy at a Time

Dogs for Better Lives is calling on caring individuals and families to become volunteer Puppy Raisers — a critical role in our mission to serve more people with disabilities through professionally trained Assistance Dogs.

With multiple litters being born this summer, the need for Puppy Raisers is greater than ever. Without enough volunteers, we simply can't meet the growing demand for Service Dogs from the people who need them.

Puppy Raisers provide a loving home to an 8-week-old puppy, guiding them through the first 14–16 months of life. With support from DBL, Puppy Raisers attend classes, practice basic obedience, and help their pup experience new sights, sounds, and situations — laying the foundation for future success as a Service Dog.

No prior experience is needed — just time, love, and a commitment to helping a dog grow into their full potential.

Being a Puppy Raiser is a deeply rewarding journey filled with purpose, joy, and pride in knowing you helped change someone's life.



Learn more and apply today at dogsforbetterlives.org/puppy-raiser

2025 Bone AppeTREAT Recap

Dogs for Better Lives' 3rd Annual Bone AppeTREAT, presented by Boehringer Ingelheim, was our most successful yet — raising just over \$200,000 to help place more life-changing Service Dogs with people with disabilities. This one-of-a-kind virtual culinary competition once again brought together passionate supporters from coast to coast in a fun and flavorful celebration of community and purpose. Our National Watch Party Host, Harry & David, offered treat baskets and prizes for viewers.

Five creative chef contestants wowed viewers with their treat-making talents, earning top honors across multiple categories:

- Kelly Hall of Texas took home Most Chomp-Worthy Treat
- Catharina Armstrong & Laura Pickett of Massachusetts won Re-Bark-Ably Beautiful Treat
- Tom Pierson in Washington claimed Most Paw-Some Video
- Brad Hicks in Oregon was awarded Ulti-Mutt Chef
- Randy and Nancy Gordon of California were crowned our overall Top Dog Winners.

We are deeply grateful to our contestants, sponsors, judges, production team, and every viewer, donor, and volunteer who helped make this event unforgettable. Whether you joined a watch party or cheered from home, you played a part in something special.

We can't wait to serve up more heart and fun at next year's Bone AppeTREAT on May, 15, 2026!





10175 Wheeler Rd., Central Point, OR 97502



Day of Pawsitivity

ON NATIONAL DOG DAY
AUGUST 26TH

CELEBRATE DOGS



SUPPORT SERVICE DOGS