

Tails for You

a publication of Can Do Canines®

Read about how Gregg gives Brea the chance to explore her independence.



LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

From the moment they met, Gregg was completely engaged with Brea, and her communication device.

The concept of “love at first sight” is a cliché often reserved for fairy tales and overly sentimental romantic comedies, not real life. But for Brea and Gregg, nothing could be truer. Brea’s father, Cedar, still recalls the first time they set eyes on Gregg, during a meet-and-match session early last summer at Can Do Canines’ headquarters.

“He was completely engaged with her and she with him.”

“We went in to meet a couple of dogs and Gregg immediately began responding to Brea’s communication device giving commands,” he marvels. “It was really cool to see. He was completely engaged with her and she with him.”

Brea has cerebral palsy, a group of disorders that affect movement and muscle tone. Cedar and Julie had never considered a Mobility Assist Dog for Brea until an employee at Kids’ Abilities, where Brea goes for physical therapy, recommended Can Do Canines.

While Brea’s sisters, Quinn (9) and Celia (6) had their hearts set on a guinea pig, Cedar and Julie decided an assistance dog would be a better fit for their family, especially with Brea desiring more independence. A year later, they went through the application process.

“Gregg has been great for our family,” says Cedar. “It is really nice to have a dog around. We have more confidence in letting Brea go off exploring on her own when she is with him.”

Finding Her Independence

Cedar and Julie are committed to helping Brea become more self-confident and eventually, more autonomous. Gregg is a big part of that effort. While Brea and Gregg have only been together a few months, the family already sees a difference in the way their oldest daughter interacts with the world.

“As their relationship grows, we expect Gregg will play a bigger role in helping her be more self-sufficient,” says Cedar.

Brea uses a portable speech generating device with a state-of-the-art eye tracker to communicate, and it’s how she voices her commands to Gregg.

“Gregg is a very eager helper and loves to work,” Cedar explains. “He picks up things Brea drops and places them on her lap. He can open doors with a tug attached, close doors, activate handicap buttons. He even puts her clothes in the hamper.”

Gregg especially seems to enjoy carrying Brea’s foot braces from the mudroom to her bedroom in the morning.

So, we know it was love at first sight for Brea and Gregg, but how does the rest of the family feel about the new member of their pack?





“I was super impressed with Gregg from the beginning.”

“I was super impressed with Gregg from the beginning,” Cedar admits. “He is a great-looking dog. When he walked into the room to meet Brea, I thought to myself ‘I hope we get a dog like him!’ But it was love at first sight for Brea. She was so excited to match with him.”

Cedar is quick to recommend an assistance dog to anyone with mobility challenges. “Not only does a dog help with tasks, but a dog also helps remove the stigma around the person it’s helping. What I mean by that is people are more willing to talk to you when you have a dog.”

Brea and Gregg were just one pair of the twenty-three new teams that began working together last winter. For every pair we train, the world becomes a kinder, gentler, easier-to-navigate place for our clients.

With Your Help

We can reach even more clients and even greater milestones. Your donations make it possible for Can Do Canines to provide one-on-one training with clients like Brea. Visit can-do-canines.org/donate.

THE GIFT OF A GREAT START

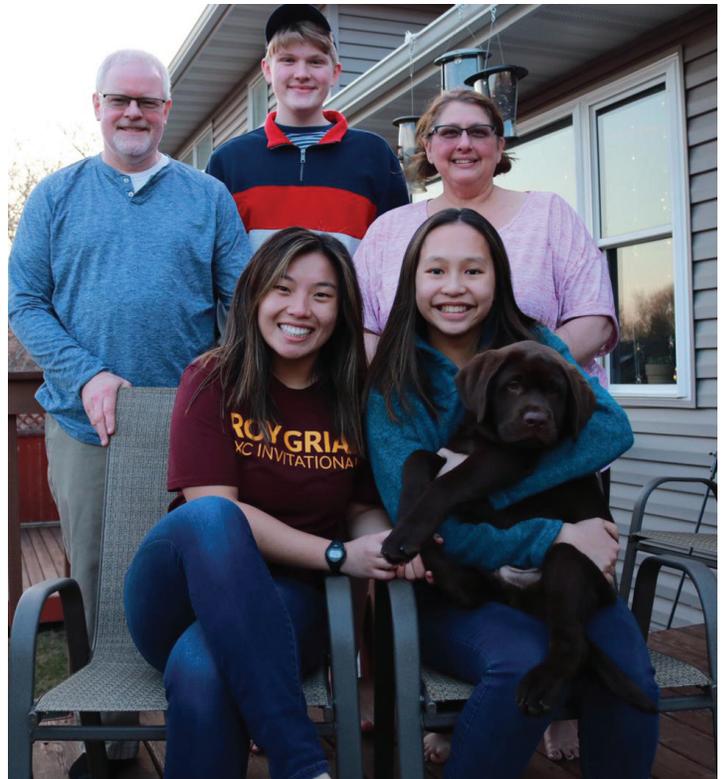
Learn how the love of a family helps shape our future service dogs.

During every stage of a future assistance dog’s journey Puppy Program Volunteers are involved in shaping our dogs’ futures. When our puppies reach 10-weeks of age they take one of two paths through the remainder of the program—either raised in prison or raised in one of our volunteer’s homes. Before pups go into the Prison Program they get a jump start on the basics in a Great Start Home. From 10–20 weeks of age these pups will continue work on potty-training, crate training, basic obedience, house manners, and social exposure.

We caught up with the Cerar Family as they entered week four as a Great Start Home for Heath, a Chocolate Labrador Retriever in training.

The Cerar Family is not new to fostering dogs for Can Do Canines, in fact they’ve hosted 19 dogs during their three years of volunteering! They found Can Do Canines by chance.

Lori Cerar remembers how they got started.....



“My 19-year-old daughter Lily was doing a research paper on service animals and though we had driven by Can Do Canines thousands of times, we’d never visited, so we attended a Tails to Tell presentation. We became so enamored with the thought of helping prepare a service dog that we called right away. We thought that as a homeschooling family we’d have time to train and exercise the dogs and were interested in learning more. A couple of weeks later Can Do Canines staff and trainee Acer came out to visit and we fell in love and couldn’t wait to get our first foster- Fallon the Fabulous!”

“It’s been amazing to learn and see what a huge impact the dogs have.”

While Heath is the fourth Great Start puppy to stay with them, they haven’t had a young puppy in a long time, and that took some adjusting to.

Lori says, “I think we were surprised by how much time and attention Heath needed, especially the first two weeks. We had forgotten how busy puppies can be. But we’d also forgotten how adorable and snuggly and soft they are and what cute noises they make.” When reflecting on the biggest challenge thus far, Lori says “... Heath is such an early riser and we are not.” To divy up the responsibilities of caring for Heath, the Cerar Family takes turns getting up with him in the morning.



Being a Great Start Home isn’t all work and no reward. As you usher this puppy along its path there are many moments to savor and Lori reflects on this:

“It’s been rewarding to see how quickly he learns—from being afraid of steps to running up and down with confidence, from ignoring our commands to responding with just quick reminders. It was amazing to see his success at his first puppy class at Can Do Canines. He learned so quickly and had great eye contact. It’s also so helpful that he’s responding to sit and wait commands when getting fed and when coming out of his kennel.”



“...Now we feel confident training them and fall in love with each dog.”

Observing them now, you would not suspect the Cerar Family never had a dog before their time volunteering with Can Do Canines. Lori says, “... now we feel confident training them and fall in love with each dog in training that we meet. We have felt affirmed and encouraged by all of the trainers and staff and feel very appreciated. We have met so many wonderful, big-hearted people, staff and volunteers alike. It’s been amazing to learn and see what a huge impact the dogs have on the volunteers, the staff and finally on their client. It’s been so eye-opening to see how much these dogs have to offer.”

Thank you, Cerar Family, for volunteering as a Great Start Home for Heath!

Want to track Heath’s journey?

Follow us on Instagram @candocanines for weekly updates.

You can help give a puppy a Great Start!

Inquire today at can-do-canines.org/volunteer

A SENSE OF A NORMAL LIFE

How many times have we all wished for a spare set of hands? Now imagine suddenly losing the two you have. In 2017, Mark sustained an injury that crushed the nerves in both of his upper arms. The accident took away sensation and mobility in both of his arms and hands. That day, he says, “I lost all sense of a normal life.”

Mark no longer had the ability to touch or feel and required assistance on many levels. For a long time, Mark felt like he didn’t have any independence, and required assistance from others to get through everyday, until a volunteer with Can Do Canines told him about their experience helping to raise future assistance dogs. After learning about the possibilities, Mark took some time to decide if he wanted to go through this journey, but now he is very glad he did.

In October of 2019, Mark’s life changed again when he began training with a two-year-old Yellow Labrador Retriever named Xan (pronounced Zan). At first, training had its challenges, since Mark had difficulty rewarding Xan with treats without the use of his hands. After trial and error, and a few failures, Mark and Can Do Canines staff came up with a system that worked for them.

Before Xan joined him, when Mark needed to get an item out of the fridge, he would have to open the refrigerator with his teeth and a velcro strap. “It wasn’t very helpful - my dentist wasn’t very happy with that.” He continues, “But Xan can help with that now. It’s one of his favorite things, because he gets to see what’s in the fridge.”

“He is becoming a great partner and enjoys the work he does.”

Once they learned their system, Mark said training got a lot easier. “Xan is so patient, watching me, learning my process, or he waits so patiently while I get his collar on.” The collar is adapted with magnets that make it possible for Mark to put it on and remove it, on his own.

This pup now acts as Mark’s hands and arms to pull open or shut the refrigerator door, retrieve any items Mark might drop or pick up many of the things that Mark can’t. Xan can help clean up by putting items into containers where they belong. “Now, Xan is able to do a lot of things for me,” Mark says, and all of these tasks, large or small, give back to Mark his independence and a new sense of a normal life.



It is because of all this hard work that Mark can say he is proud to have accomplished so much for himself, and that he is glad he decided to take this journey. He says, “I realize it’s an ongoing process and it feels great to complete this chapter of training. I’m excited to move forward. He (Xan) is becoming a great partner and enjoys the work he does and he’s being very helpful.”

Mark and Xan didn’t get here on their own. It has taken a lot of support to reach where they are and Mark’s wife Tara has been there every step of the way. “My wife Tara has been extremely involved. Without her I don’t think this would have been a possibility. She fell in love with him (Xan) the first day she met him. He’s got those big brown eyes.”

Family and friends are excited to see how the team continues to progress and learn together. They all see that Xan opens all kinds of doors for Mark every day and can help Mark close the ones that need to be shut.

Looking back Mark says, “The wait is worth it. It’s just a pleasure to work with people at Can Do Canines. Everyone is very helpful and understanding. They recognized what my needs were and matched me with the perfect dog for me. That might be why it takes some time, but it’s worth the wait.”

You can help more people like Mark get help from assistance dogs like Xan by donating today at can-do-canines.org/donate.

YOU HELPED

make this possible.

At our Winter Graduation Ceremony, you made it possible for



23
teams to graduate

Dogs and puppies currently receiving training in

7 prison programs



48

25

New puppies born into our program



Thank You!

Over
\$256,000

Raised during
The Fetching Ball Gala

Volunteers providing safe foster homes



140

Active working teams who receive continuous follow-up and support from Can Do Canines

333



CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL 23 GRADUATE TEAMS



Read full-length versions of these stories and more at can-do-canines.org/blog



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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