



Tails for You

a publication of Can Do Canines®



Thanks to you, Blair allows Bennett and his family to go out in public together.

Fall 2018
V. 29 | Issue 4

OPENING DOORS FOR THE FAMILY

Blair lets the Zellmer's experience new things

"We tended to divide and conquer," Chris Zellmer says of life before Autism Assist Dog Blair. "One of us would take Jamison and go do things and the other would stay home with Bennett because it was easier." Jill Zellmer agrees. "It was difficult," she says.

But life looks much different now for the Zellmers. "In the month we've had [Blair] it's changed our lives; it's changed our ability to be able to go out in public," Chris says. "It's made our lives easier," Jill adds.

Chris and Jill's six-year-old son Bennett was diagnosed with Down syndrome when he was born. But when he was around two years old, they noticed he wasn't fitting the typical behaviors for a child with Down syndrome.



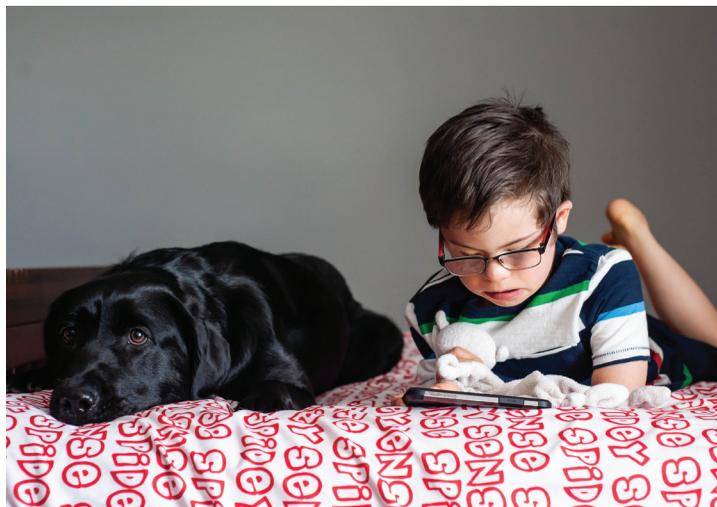
Bennett smiles for the camera

"He had a pretty big regression," says Jill. "There were a few words he could say, and then they just kind of slowly disappeared over the course of a few months." This regression prompted a trip to the Down syndrome clinic at Children's Hospital. They were then referred to Fraser, an organization that provides early

childhood mental health services, where they received a second diagnosis: Bennett also has autism.

Bennett struggles with any changes to his routine. He becomes stressed out and overwhelmed and wants to escape the situation by fleeing. "He has no awareness of danger at all," explains Jill. And Bennett doesn't respond when told to come back. "It was never an option for us to go out as a family," says Jill.

Jill and Chris thought an assistance dog would be able to help. They were hopeful that a four-legged friend could increase Bennett's engagement, ease his transitions, and possibly encourage vocalization—something Bennett hadn't done since his regression.



Blair and Bennett | Photos by Pam Dusbabek | www.heartoflifephotography.com

So the Zellmers applied to Can Do Canines. And after three years on the waitlist, Bennett was matched with Autism Assist Dog Blair.

The Zellmer's have seen many improvements in Bennett since Blair joined the family. "He's walking a ton more," says Jill. "[Before Blair] he wouldn't walk down to the end of the block and back. He wouldn't have the endurance to do that. And with Blair, he does."

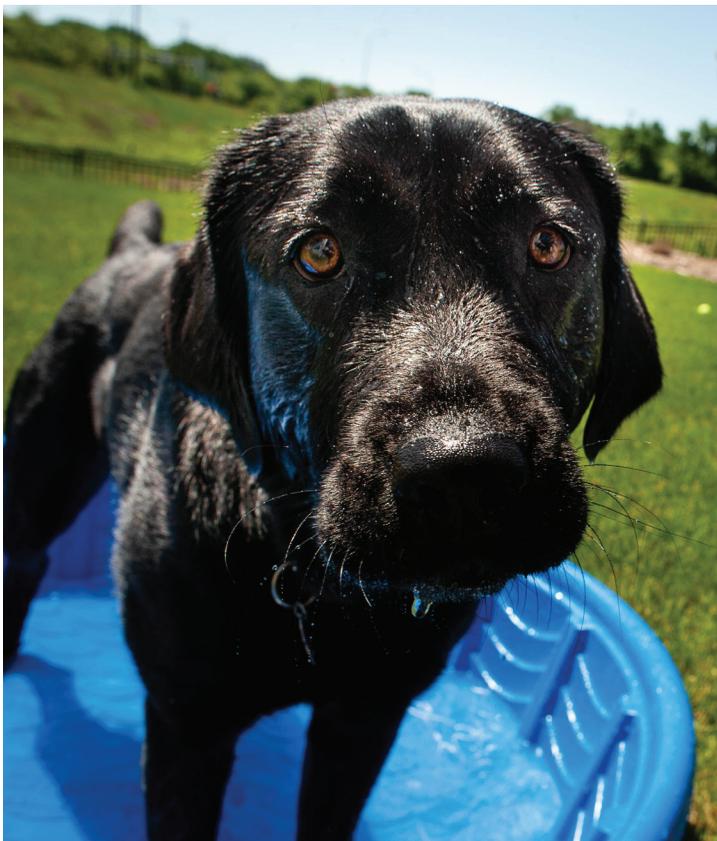
"Just his posture and his gait while he's walking [has improved]," says Chris. Leslie also sees the change. "I could notice a marked difference in Benny's posture while holding onto Blair. He was also walking in a straighter line than before."

But the whole family is benefitting from Blair's presence. The Zellmers' other son, Jamison, plays baseball. Before Blair, attending Jamison's baseball games wouldn't have been a family activity. Bennett wouldn't be able to come at all, or if he did, Chris or Jill had to be with him at the park while the other watched Jamison play. But with Blair's help, now the whole family can attend and everyone can watch. "We got to watch Jamison bat, we got to watch him run home, we got to watch him slide into first," says Chris. All thanks to a 55-pound Labrador Retriever.

"It was never an option for us to go out as a family."

The Zellmers are actually first-time dog owners. So how has Blair fit in with the family? "I thought it was going to be a bigger adjustment and I would say after day two it kind of felt like she'd always been here," says Jill. "It just felt like another family member," adds Chris.

It seems all that's left to adjust to is the "hair factor" as Chris puts it. "I was unprepared for the amount of hair that can come out of a Lab," Jill laughs. "We ended up



Blaire takes a dip in the pool

buying a robot vacuum to help. That seems to work real well so I'd recommend that," Chris laughs.

But even with all the hair, the Zellmers are grateful. "There would have been no way we could have financially been able to afford a dog to support Benny," Jill says.

And to the people who made Blair the dog she is today, the Zellmers express their gratitude. "I don't even know how you say thank you for all the work and dedication and hours and training and love that they gave her because she is just the sweetest," Jill says. "They did such a wonderful job with her, she is just so well tempered."

"When you have a child with a disability, it's kind of a disability for the whole family in a way because you're limiting so many things that you want to do with your kids but can't," Jill explains. "It impacts siblings and you kind of feel really isolated from being able to do things, so this will open so many doors for our family."

Thank you for making this partnership possible:

Great Start Home: Jennifer Schroeder
Puppy Raiser: Susan Garnett-Thomas
Special Thanks: University of Minnesota FETCH Program, Angie and Larry LaBathe
You: Thank you for your donations!

WE HAVE PUPPIES!

From the whelping box:

Thanks to your support, we have welcomed **three** litters of puppies!

Venus gave birth on June 15 to her 'P' litter: seven adorable puppies. She was hosted by whelping home volunteers the Herr family.

Clover welcomed her troop of eight puppies in her 'Q' litter on July 4. The Kelley-Pegg family kindly whelped mom and pups.

Saffron proudly presented her 'R' litter of four puppies on July 11. She stayed with whelping home volunteer Sherry Fonseth-Lais.

How you can help:

We are looking for Puppy Program Volunteers for short and long-term opportunities! Your commitment means changing someone's life for the better.

Contact volunteer coordinator, Robyn Rodrigue, at rrodrigue@can-do-canines.org or 763-331-3000 x119.

CAN DO WOOFAROO

Thank you!

Give yourselves a huge pat on the back! Because of your fundraising, this was our most successful Can Do Woofaroo fundraiser to date. Your hard work means that we are able to fully fund almost three new assistance dog teams.

Thanks to your generous contributions, we raised

\$1,000,000



LIVING LIFE SPONTANEOUSLY

Now Claire can live like a young adult

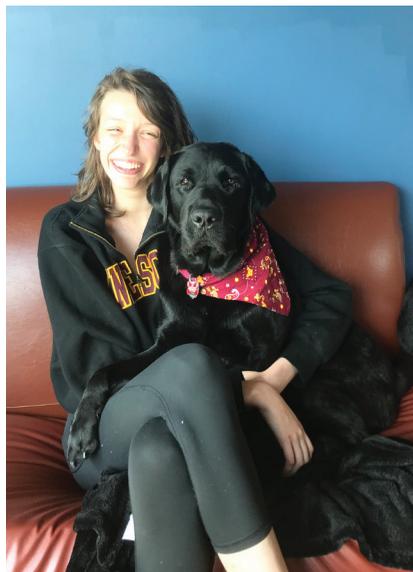
Recent high school graduate Claire Holmgren always found herself to be extremely flexible, yet clumsy. But during her senior year, constant back pain sent her to the doctor where she was eventually diagnosed with Ehlers Danlos Syndrome Type 3.

The syndrome is an inherited connective tissue disorder that causes joint hypermobility, meaning, large joints like knees and elbows and small joints like fingers and toes can overextend to the point of coming out of their sockets.

It also means that Claire struggles with balance and coordination. She's able to control her muscles, but cannot control her joints because they have no stopping point. So Claire needs to create her own stopping points for her joints by carefully planning her movements, along with wearing adaptive equipment.

She started wearing finger ring braces to help keep her finger joints in place, but she still can't push or pull heavy objects or they'll hyperextend. She wears leg braces from her hips to her feet to keep her knees and ankles in place, but this limits her movement and makes everyday tasks difficult.

Claire's condition worsened, and her body was trying to overcorrect for her hypermobile joints—so much so that she developed scoliosis. She had her spine fused at



Lisa and Cleo when the team was first matched

L5-T8, which helped her from further damaging her back, but it meant even more limited mobility.

"I did not like asking for help," Claire says. "I didn't do it before the surgery ever." But she wasn't able to do her laundry, clean, pick things up, or even go to the store alone anymore.

And Claire was closing in on the fall when she will attend

the University of Minnesota Rochester for pre-med undergrad classes. She'll be living on her own and won't have family with her to help anymore.

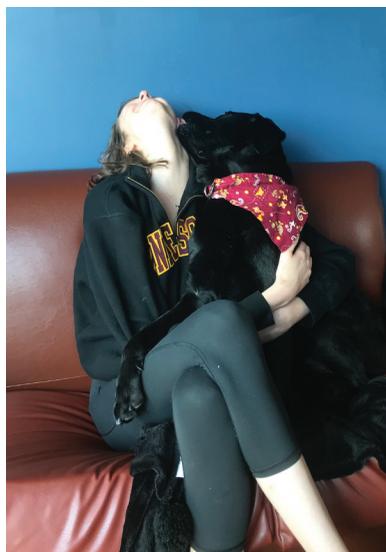
Her adaptive equipment could only help so much, and she needed something additional to give her the independence needed to attend college. So she applied for an assistance dog from Can Do Canines.

Luckily, the perfect match was waiting for her. Just as Claire was going through the application process, Mobility Assist Dog Slammer was finishing up his final training. Claire stands at 6' 4" which requires an equally tall partner. Coming in at 66 pounds and mostly legs, Slammer was just the gentle giant she needed.

The Labrador Retriever helps Claire with things she can no longer do on her own. "My room is definitely a lot cleaner," she laughs. "He helps pick up a lot of my clothes that I drop."

"He helps a lot with independence and just going places spontaneously."

She has poor proprioception, meaning she has difficulty sensing her own body, and therefore has trouble balancing. Slammer helps by standing next to Claire so she can see him and feel him on her legs, and the leash against her arm, which helps her feel more present in her body. "He's like a reminder that [I'm] on flat ground," she says.



Cleo at Disney World

Claire will be able to live more like a young adult because of Slammer. "He helps a lot with independence and just going places spontaneously," she explains. Instead of needing to tell her family where she's headed, or ask if someone can come with to assist her, she can get up and go with Slammer's help.

Claire has shared her appreciation for Slammer and their training throughout the entire process. But it's hard to express her gratitude for all they can accomplish together. The team has since moved to their college home and are excited for this new chapter in life!

Thank you for making this partnership possible:

Puppy Raiser: Anita Boucher and Jeff Bangsberg
Name-A-Puppy Donor: Meghan Thull
Breeder Host: Anita Boucher and Jeff Bangsberg
You: Thank you for your donations!

A COUPLE OF WORKER BEES

Buzz keeps Jennifer safer

Jennifer Torres and her Mobility Assist Dog Buzz have quite a lot in common. They have both spent their lives, busy as bees, working in service to others.

Jennifer got her start in the service as a member of the U.S. Navy. But after 13 years, she retired due to Ménière's disease, a disorder of the inner ear that causes dizziness, imbalance, and some mild hearing loss.



Jennifer Torres with her pet dog, Teddy and Buzz at her feet

Undaunted, Jennifer went on to serve as a registered nurse in the intensive care unit of a Twin Cities hospital. There, she sustained a back injury that rendered her unable to continue her work in patient care.

Once again, Jennifer found a way to leverage her strong work ethic and health care interest, now serving in the computerized registries department at the Minneapolis Heart Institute. But her back injury and imbalance issues due to Ménière's disease left her vulnerable to falls, particularly when bending over at home or work.

“He’s extremely attentive, always checking to see where I am and what I might need.”

“I was falling more frequently and needed someone nearby to pick things up for me,” she explained.

A friend put a bug in her ear, suggesting the possibility of an assistance dog from Can Do Canines. “She said her assistance dog, Phyllis, enabled her to do many of the things she used to do,” Jennifer recalled.

It wasn't long before Jennifer gave Can Do Canines a buzz. And soon after, Can Do Canines called to say Jennifer would be matched with Buzz, a Black Standard Poodle.

Buzz helps Jennifer retrieve various dropped items. “When I drop things—my pencil, my computer mouse, my billfold, my cane—he picks them up for me, which keeps me from falling,” she said. “I feel safer at home, steadier at work, plus I’m able to get out more for walks.”

Teddy, her miniature schnauzer, and Buzz have become fast friends. Jennifer says Teddy thinks Buzz is the bee's knees. “Teddy runs after Buzz—and under Buzz—to get him to play,” she chuckled.

But when Jennifer is in need, Buzz makes a bee-line to assist her. “He’s extremely attentive, always checking to see where I am and what I might need,” she remarked.

Jennifer is grateful for the trainers, volunteers, and donors that brought Buzz and his amazing talents into her life. Their generosity also took the sting out of the cost that would have otherwise been out of reach.



Mindy, Buzz, and Dollie in the yard at Can Do Canines

So, for those who wonder how an assistance dog can make a significant difference in someone's life, just look what happened when we gave Jennifer a “Buzz”!

Thank you for making this partnership possible:

Puppy Raiser: Pat and Dee Dee Heffernan
Special Thanks: The inmate handlers at FCI Sandstone
Name-A-Puppy Donor: Rory Boucha
Dog Donor: Tes Ingebritson

EVENTS

Fall Graduation Ceremony

October 27, 2018 | 1 p.m. | Can Do Canines

Graduation ceremonies recognize and honor those who played a role in making the graduating assistance dog teams possible.

Join us as we congratulate these new teams and wish them the best of luck in their futures together.



30th Anniversary Fetching Ball Gala

February ?, 2019 | ? p.m. | Hotel?

Help us celebrate our 30th anniversary at this year's Fetching Ball Gala! Enjoy entertainment, live and silent auctions, dinner and drinks, and learn about the next 30 years for Can Do Canines.

Communication Needs

If you have special communications needs, please contact us at least two weeks in advance of an event so we can accommodate your request. Thank you!

763-331-3000 | info@can-do-canines.org

YOU HELPED

and made the following possible in the summer of 2018.

You made 19 graduate teams possible at the Fall Graduation Ceremony.



Can Do Canines was able to put their best paw forward and represent the assistance dog industry at the ADI conference in August.



From June to September, ### dogs were walked by volunteers.



_____ donated \$75,000 worth of new chairs for our facility, making our graduations and presentations more comfortable!



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.

9440 Science Center Drive, New Hope, MN 55428
763-331-3000 | info@can-do-canines.org | can-do-canines.org



@candocanines



EVENTS

Fall Graduation Ceremony

October 27, 2018 | 1 p.m. | Can Do Canines

Graduation ceremonies recognize and honor those who played a role in making the graduating assistance dog teams possible.

Join us as we congratulate these new teams and wish them the best of luck in their futures together.



30th Anniversary Fetching Ball Gala

February ?, 2019 | ? p.m. | Hotel?

Help us celebrate our 30th anniversary at this year's Fetching Ball Gala! Enjoy entertainment, live and silent auctions, dinner and drinks, and learn about the next 30 years for Can Do Canines.

Communication Needs

If you have special communications needs, please contact us at least two weeks in advance of an event so we can accommodate your request. Thank you!

763-331-3000 | info@can-do-canines.org

YOU HELPED

and made the following possible in the summer of 2018.

You made 19 graduate teams possible at the Fall Graduation Ceremony.



Can Do Canines was able to put their best paw forward and represent the assistance dog industry at the ADI conference in August.



From June to September, ### dogs were walked by volunteers.



_____ donated \$75,000 worth of new chairs for our facility, making our graduations and presentations more comfortable!



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.

9440 Science Center Drive, New Hope, MN 55428
763-331-3000 | info@can-do-canines.org | can-do-canines.org

