



HELPING PAWS

# SUMMER IMPACT NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2021

HELPING PAWS ASSISTANCE DOGS AND WHO THEY HELP



Assistance Dogs: An umbrella term encompassing all types of working dogs.

Here's how Helping Paws fits in.

# SERVICE DOGS: PHYSICAL DISABILITIES



Helping Paws places service dogs with individuals with physical disabilities. Some disabilities occur from birth, and some are acquired later in life through an accident or a degenerative disease such as multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, or post-polio. In this type of placement, Helping Paws service dogs assist with a large number of activities of daily living including retrieving objects, opening doors, and 80 other cues/commands.

Deb Blakeway is currently partnered with Mitzi, a service dog who is as excited to work as Deb is to get out of the house! Their day starts with the same routine. They wake up together in the same bed and Mitzi helps Deb get going. When it's time for work, Mitzi even sits in the chair next to Deb while Deb is on Zoom calls. When it's time to go out and get groceries, Mitzi will grab whatever is needed for the adventure. Returning home, Mitzi will execute the "Brace" cue allowing Deb to more easily get out of her wheelchair. If Deb needs her crutches, Mitzi will then grab and deliver them. It's a seamless transition that allows them to get on with their day and helps Deb with an activity that we may take for granted.

## DEB AND MITZI

*"Mitzi is dedicated, astute and always focused. She is by my side 24-7. Mitzi is the mother duck and I am one of her ducklings. I'm proud of the service she provides, how she looks, and how she connects me with the community."*

*- Deb Blakeway  
Helping Paws Graduate*

# SERVICE DOGS: VETERANS AND FIRST RESPONDERS WITH PTSD

Helping Paws places Service Dogs with Veterans and First Responders with PTSD. These service dogs are trained to do specific tasks that allow their partners to feel more comfortable in public settings, reducing isolation, depression and anxiety. For some of our Veteran/First Responder graduates partnered with a service dog, they have seen a reduction in the need for medication and an improvement in sleep.

Service Dog Kevin plays two important roles for Peter Johnson. First, Kevin is his “lifeline to the outside world”. When Peter is in social situations or in public, his anxiety from PTSD can cause him to panic, hyperventilate and even lose consciousness. Prior to receiving Kevin, trips to the grocery store were impossible for Peter. Remarkably, Kevin is so in tune with Peter’s emotions and body language, he can recognize any anxiety, signal to Peter, then instantly provide support and comfort. In rare moments of lost consciousness, Kevin has placed himself underneath Peter’s head. It’s beautiful to listen to Peter talk about receiving the assistance he really needs and deserves.

The other role is that of best friend. The relationship and partnership of Peter and Kevin comes naturally. From the moment they met, it was a perfect match. Kevin’s goofy side is a wonderful reminder of the simple joy of making your best friend smile. Every day, they connect and have full-blown conversations. Kevin’s eyes remain focused on Peter as if he can truly understand. The first duty of love is to listen and Kevin listens, without judgement.

Their companionship saved Peter’s life and marriage. Whether it’s exploring Walmart or the North Shore, Peter has a best friend who always has his back.



## PETER AND KEVIN

“I am proud of my service. There is a culture in the military of being tough, strong warriors, but we're human beings. Part of my therapy is discussing and admitting, the military didn't train me for the things I've seen. Being a strong combat vet is recognizing when you need help.”

- Peter Johnson



# FACILITY DOGS



Helping Paws facility dogs work with professionals in a variety of settings and environments. This includes partnerships with mental health, educational, first responders, courthouses and health care professionals

Courthouse facility dogs are trained to work in a variety of settings such as the prosecutor's office, child advocacy centers and family court. Primarily, they provide a calming influence for children during stressful legal proceedings.



## MOLLY AND FINNEGAN

Molly DePrekel, MA, LP, works with patients affected by trauma looking to explore options of therapeutic healing and treatment. In her practice, she partners with Finnegan, a Helping Paws Facility Dog. At the beginning of each session, patients can interact, play or practice cues with Finnegan as a way to relax and focus. Patients respond with smiles, deeper breathing and a lighter disposition.

Molly tells us that throughout the session, patients will pet Finnegan as a self-soothing regulative tool. It's hard for anyone to get out of their head and previously learned thought-patterns but the act of petting Finnegan while discussing traumatic events allows the therapist and patient access to memories and emotions that are otherwise beyond words and cognition. Sometimes Finnegan is key in unlocking revelations and moments of self-actualization. Finnegan doesn't just provide support and comfort, but also acts as a conduit for patients to process trauma on a deeper level.

## ABOUT US

Helping Paws is a Minnesota volunteer-based non-profit 501(c)(3) organization with 32 years of experience training and placing service dogs with individuals with physical disabilities or veterans and first responders with PTSD as well as facility dogs. Our mission is to further people's independence and quality of life through the use of Assistance Dogs. Since 1988, we have placed over 250 people with a service dog, giving individuals the gifts of dignity, independence, peace of mind and companionship.

Helping Paws is an accredited member of Assistance Dogs International. We train and place Golden Retrievers and Labrador Retrievers as hard-working partners and companions. Foster Home Trainers take a puppy into their home for approximately 2½ years, during which time they oversee the dog's training and development. Foster Home Trainers and dogs attend weekly service dog training classes led by our professional staff and develop the dogs' repertoire of more than 80 cues.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Davanni's Day 2021**  
Tuesday, August 3, 2021  
Join us by stopping by one of Davanni's 21 locations on Tuesday, August 3. All day, Davanni's will be donating 10% of orders placed for dine-in or carry-out back to Helping Paws to support service dog training.
- **Tail Waggin' Virtual Gala**  
Saturday, September 11, 2021  
The 2021 Tail Waggin' Gala will be virtual one more year. Registration for this event is FREE! We will get started with pre-event festivities at 6:45 pm. Our program will start at 7:00 pm and wrap up around 7:40 pm.
- **Putts for Paws Golf Tournament**  
Saturday, September 18, 2021  
More Information Coming!
- **Helping Paws Graduation**  
October 2021  
More Information Coming!

**Photo Credit:** Deb Blakeway, Molly DePrekel, Peter Johnson and Steve McCuskey



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