

ROARING SUCCESS THANKS TO VERNON LIONS CLUB

AUTISM SERVICE DOG TEAM

Team Sponsor: Vernon Lions Club

RECENT
GRADUATE
2023

Shay is not just a dog; he's a lifeline, a companion, and a source of hope for Reece and our family.

The addition of Shay, with his four furry paws, has truly been a transformative blessing for my family. When we were all feeling burnt out and in desperate need of help, we could never have imagined that this help would arrive in the form of such a beautiful dog.

Reece's journey and challenges are not just his alone but also our family's. Every night, the simple act of teeth brushing became a battleground, and bedtime required my presence for Reece to settle down.

Despite the numerous therapies I've pursued for Reece, there are moments of exhaustion and frustration that seem insurmountable.

The toll on my family was palpable. While loving their brother deeply, my daughters couldn't help but feel frustrated at times. They saw him as the reason for missed family activities and disrupted meals, but deep down, they knew it was the weight of autism that bore down on us all.

Shay became a part of the family in May. From day one, he and Reece have formed an incredible team. The changes in our daily life are nothing short of miraculous. I no longer spend my nights lying beside Reece to help him fall asleep. Instead, like clockwork, Shay and Reece will sit side by side to brush their teeth and prepare for bedtime, with Shay tucking himself in next to Reece.

Dinnertime, once a source of dread, has become a pleasant part of everyone's day. Reece no longer hides under the table; he sits confidently on a chair with Shay by his side. I can even be in another room away from Reece, knowing that Shay is there to provide support and comfort.

Shay has brought Reece a newfound sense of independence, allowing him to practice important life skills like buttoning up a shirt, holding eye contact, and following two-step directions while caring for Shay. Reece's confidence has grown, and my family has gained the security to take him out to try new experiences. Thanks to Shay's calming presence, Reece could sit through his brother's graduation in June, marking a significant achievement.

As a family, we've ventured out to places like the fair, camping

trips, and the zoo, all made possible by Shay's invaluable assistance.

My daughters have also noticed the positive changes in our family dynamic since Shay's arrival. His presence has brought peace into our lives, and now that Shay helps put Reece to bed, I have more time to help my daughters with their school assignments and enjoy one-on-one moments with them.

One of the most remarkable developments Shay has facilitated is Reece's ability to voice his needs. Reece can now express himself, preventing potential tantrums and improving his interactions with others. For example, during a recent BBQ, Reece tugged on my arm and said, "Shay is feeling done and would like to go home."

I am eagerly looking forward to witnessing the new opportunities and doors that will open for Reece with Shay by his side. I never imagined an extra set of hands or paws would make such a difference.

Reece and Shay form a "Team Terrific," and Shay's impact on our lives is immeasurable.



Reece

Shay

COMMUNITY OF CARE

Whelpers: Mark Bunsko
Brood Bitch Caregiver: Mark Bunsko
Stud Dog Caregiver: Guide Dogs UK
Puppy Raiser: Amélie Schumacher
Boarder: Kim Yee & Jordan Hauschildt

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The unconditional love and companionship that Jovie provides has made an immeasurable difference in our lives.

We are incredibly grateful to BC and Alberta Guide Dogs and all the individuals involved in bringing Jovie into our family.

From an early age, Benjamin was meeting his milestones on time or even ahead of schedule. However, around 10 months of age, we noticed that his sensory seeking became more intense. Between ages two and three, he had limited awareness of his environment, struggled to follow verbal directions, and exhibited significant delays in social communication. It wasn't until his

Since Jovie joined our family in May, our lives have been positive. The changes we have witnessed in Benjamin have been nothing short of remarkable.

Often, when Benjamin becomes overstimulated, he wants to hide. This would result in running or crouching into a ball. Since having Jovie, Benjamin automatically reverts to crouching. Now he has somebody happy to be on his level and lay on the floor whenever he must take a moment.

He has a positive connection with her locked eyes, and this interaction has significantly reduced meltdowns in public.

Having to get Jovie's attention before giving a command has already started to help Benjamin develop the same connection when communicating with people, which had been an ongoing challenge with minimal progress.

The bond between Benjamin and Jovie is genuinely heartwarming. They spend much time cuddling, and Benjamin takes immense joy in learning basic commands and observing Jovie's response. Simply following through on commands has instilled a sense of thrill in Benjamin and contributed to his emotional growth.

sixth birthday that he was diagnosed.

Over the past year, Benjamin's world seemed to shrink, and we found ourselves exhausting all available support. As a family, we began isolating to meet his needs. Benjamin requires full-time one-on-one support. His bolting behaviour had escalated to the point where he would attempt to leave school property. Furthermore, his social communication delay hindered his ability to engage in meaningful conversations, often resulting in one-sided monologues.

Jovie has already made a significant impact in terms of play and physical activity. Benjamin had been interested in playing soccer and joining a team for two years. However, previous attempts at engaging in such activities always resulted in frustration and overwhelm. With Jovie by his side, Benjamin is gradually developing soccer skills, learning to aim for the net, navigating around Jovie, and exploring his physical boundaries through play.

Given Benjamin's increased risk of bolting and experiencing meltdowns, having Jovie present ensures smoother transitions.

Family outings have become more enjoyable, more frequent, and stress-free since Jovie joined us. Previously, trips to the playground were complicated. We had to search for empty playgrounds to avoid triggering selective mutism and bolting. However, with Jovie's support, Benjamin requests more walks to the nearby playground.

Words cannot adequately express gratitude to everyone involved in bringing Jovie into our lives. We will forever be grateful for this remarkable gift.



Benjamin

Jovie

COMMUNITY OF CARE

Whelpers: Mark Bunsko
Brood Bitch Caregiver: Mark Bunsko
Stud Dog Caregiver: Guide Dogs UK
Puppy Raiser: Linda Chitwood & Cyndi Park
Boarder: Kim Yee & Jordan Hauschildt