



Kids As Self Advocates

How My Service Dog has Taught Me to Serve

By Brandon Scott

Brandon is 14 years old and lives in Indianapolis, IN with his mother, father, and two younger sisters. He will attend high school in the Fall. He was born missing most of all four limbs. He wears 4 prosthesis most of the time but is fairly independent without them too. He enjoys being a sports spectator, singing in the Indianapolis Children's Choir, and hanging out with friends. His goal is to be a radio/TV announcer someday...maybe even for ESPN.

Two years ago my life was changed forever. But how it was changed was different than I expected. After three years of being on a waiting list for a service dog through Canine Companions for Independence, I received the long awaited call that I was being invited to Team Training in February 2000. There I spent two weeks learning how to work with and care for my new "best friend", Elaine a black lab. Now having a service dog was all that I had expected. She not only was a companion to me every where I went, she also picked up items for me, opened the refrigerator door, takes things to the laundry for me, and retrieves things up high. Of course the social benefits are also great! I can't get through the mall without lots of people stopping and talking with me and Elaine...and of course some of those are girls!

The unexpected benefits still had to do with service. But the service did not have to do with my disability and a dog helping me out. This service was in getting me out in the community to serve and reach out to others. I started out by going to different groups to educate them on what a service dog is and what they can do for a person with a disability. I went to elementary classrooms, support groups, day camps, and even a couple college social work and education classes. I was surprised at each place at what Elaine and I had to offer these groups of people. We opened their worlds up to a whole new world!

Recently Elaine and I have started going to the Rehabilitation Unit at a local hospital. We spend our afternoon roaming the halls and visiting patients in their rooms. It is great to see them smile and interact with Elaine. She has such a way of breaking down barriers and starting conversations. Lastly, Elaine and I are committed to raising money for Canine Companions for Independence. We raised over \$3,300 on a "dog walk" last year. This is one small way that we can help others with disabilities get matched up with a dog. We also enjoy "showing Elaine off" to other kids with disabilities so they can start fulfilling their own dream of more independence through a service dog.

Service....it all starts with one dog matched with one fourteen year old boy to make his world more independent...then doors open up to serve others...the possibilities are endless!

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