

FALL NEWSLETTER 2024



SEE HOW
**LOVE
MAKES THE
WORLD
GO ROUND** AT PAWS

LOVE

MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

Dear PAWS Family,

This is the time of year our thoughts traditionally turn to cozy sweaters, pumpkin spice everything, and raking fall leaves. **But lately I've been thinking a lot about love.**

We began construction for our new Canine Village last month, a space where our PAWS Dogs-in-Training will one day sleep comfortably and quietly while they dream of helping their new Clients. A great deal of love for PAWS went into raising the funds for our reconfigured existing buildings and new construction. You'll hear from one passionate donor, Cindy, about why she's been supporting PAWS since the '90s on page 7.

My PAWS Mama Dog, HADDIE, has also had love on her mind with her new puppies. In my letter in our Annual Impact Report last spring, I wrote about HADDIE joining my family. A few months later, HADDIE brought her first litter of puppies into the PAWS Family. Her Papillon puppies are now living with their Foster Puppy Raisers, loving and kind people like Ainsley, who you will meet on page 5. One day, I hope they'll grow up to be fierce little loves like Hearing Dog LOUIS, who has stuck to his Client Sandi's side through highs and lows. You can read their story on page 3.

Love is what makes the PAWS world go round and is what drives us forward. Next year we'll debut our updated campus and begin building steam toward our goal of placing at least 100 Assistance Dogs annually by 2030. The need for PAWS Dogs continues to grow, and to meet that demand we are first increasing our physical space,



which is one step toward increasing the number of dogs we train each year. The next step is to increase the number of training staff, and we've already put a program in place that creates a stream of professional PAWS Staff Trainers. These additional trainers will help us meet our goals for placing more PAWS Dogs. You can learn about our Trainer Assistant program, now in its second successful year, on page 9.

I am so proud of everything we have accomplished together, and all the amazing ways the PAWS Family is going to change the world for our Clients, their families, and their communities in the coming years. I love working toward a brighter future with you, and I appreciate all the kindness and support you've given us to reach this point.

Warmly,

Michele Suchovsky, CEO

The PAWS Family Keeps Growing!

Meet a few of our newest certified teams.



Art &
JOPLIN

He has changed my life,
and I can't imagine what
I would do without him.

- Laurie & DEALER



Charlie &
TITO



Cherie &
GHOST



Marie &
WIDGET



Laurie &
DEALER



Toni &
SAGE



Gabe &
TULLY



Bob &
YARROW



Rorie &
TIGER



Annabelle &
COSMO



Ashley &
CAP'N



Heather &
OSHA



Vivian &
VALOR



Bradley &
ATHENA



Janet &
RAIN

A Fierce Little Love



“LOUIS is my ride and die,” writes PAWS Client Sandi. While the toughest thing tiny Papillon LOUIS will have to face on the job is a persistent doorbell or alarm, he does take his work as Sandi’s PAWS Hearing Dog very seriously.

LOUIS is Sandi’s second PAWS Hearing Dog. “I lost most of my hearing, and WALLY became my ears. When I lost him, I was devastated, and applied for a second dog. LOUIS is my constant companion and help mate. LOUIS is aware that he is my ears. He alerts me to all kinds of sounds. LOUIS is my key to the hearing world.”

Sandi and LOUIS made a big impression on their local PAWS Field Representative, Linda, who handled the final leg of training for the pair through to their official certification process.

“LOUIS is my key to the hearing world.”



Now that Sandi is back home, LOUIS has been happy to have things mostly back to normal. "LOUIS and I live alone. He is my support system, and we are a team. He senses when I'm not feeling well, and he'll just lay beside me which gives me much comfort and peace," says Sandi.

Of course, even though things are a little slower now, LOUIS and Sandi still love to be on the go. Whether it's a trip to the movie theater, a long car ride, or adventures on airplanes, the two of them spend plenty of time enjoying life together.

When I was in the hospital for two months, LOUIS visited me every day and lifted my spirits.

"Working with Sandi was always time I looked forward to," says Linda. "She was always positive and even when something was challenging, she stuck right with it. The love she had for both of her PAWS Dogs was always apparent!"

Alerting to sounds is the basic job description for a PAWS Hearing Dog, but last year LOUIS took on an additional role during his time with Sandi: stroke recovery buddy. Strokes are terrifying, life changing, and getting back on your feet can be a long and difficult process. But Sandi reports that LOUIS was happy to tackle the challenge with her. "When I was in the hospital and rehab for two months, LOUIS visited me every day and lifted my spirits. He sat on the bed with me until it was time for him to leave. He's been part of my recovery, too. I walk slower now, and so does he. He has a lot of patience with me!"

"We go to the movies, and he sits quietly the whole time. People are amazed at how well behaved he is when we are out in public or at a restaurant. But I wish people would learn to ask to pet him first!" Sandi and LOUIS also enjoy sitting on the front porch and passing time with their neighbors. Just like WALLY before him, LOUIS is an important part of the local tapestry of life in their neighborhood.

When asked what she wishes she could say to LOUIS if he could understand her perfectly, Sandi doesn't hesitate. "I would like him to know how loved he is. How much I appreciate him. He has made a difference in my quality of life even after the stroke. After all, he is my ride and die!"

Dear PAWS, Love Ainsley

People often ask, “How do Foster Puppy Raisers handle the heartbreak of giving their puppy back to PAWS?” One young woman wrote into PAWS with the answer.

Ainsley’s family lives on a small hobby farm. Her parents have a passion for helping others, and her mom wanted to become a PAWS Foster Puppy Raiser and take care of, as Ainsley puts it, “A dog that we get to love, raise, and send off to do great things.”

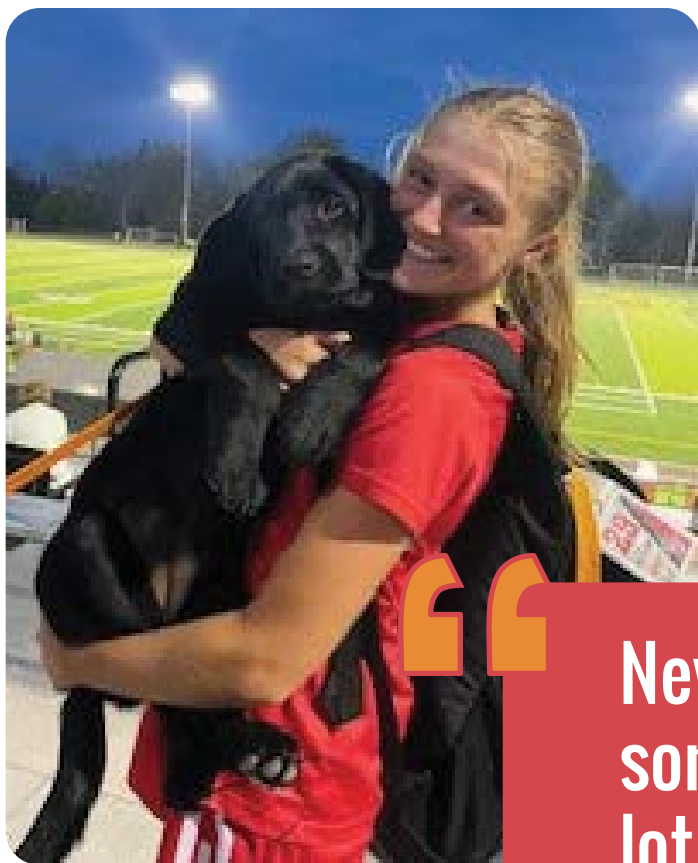
But none of them expected just how big of a splash little FLOUNDER would make!

Dear Paws With A Cause:

When we decided as a family to pursue being Foster Puppy Raisers, I don’t think we realized how much of an impact it would truly have on us. As well, I don’t think we realized how important this puppy would become in the next year. FLOUNDER was the perfect addition to our family.

She immediately won all our hearts. Her sweet, happy-go-lucky personality drew everyone in. FLOUNDER is a people pleaser through and through. She always wants to do good and make people smile. She followed around our old yellow lab like her own personal shadow, learning and growing just like a mother pup and puppy. I think they were meant to be best friends.

“From the bottom of
my heart, thank you.”



Along with her own blessing on my life, FLOUNDER blessed my entire family. She brought us together in ways we could never have imagined. She drew people in, always has. Her personality is contagious and her brightness lights up any room.

Never-ending love is something I learned a lot from FLOUNDER. I truly believe that she will continue to love whoever she comes into contact with. Her presence is a blessing.

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FLOUNDER just happened to be a part of my life at a time when I needed her most.

This past year I experienced a knee injury that took me out of my sport at the collegiate level. I underwent two surgeries and experienced the darkest of depressions. At every step, FLOUNDER was there.

She would lay with me while I was recovering, lick the tears off my face when I felt like my whole world was crumbling, and do something goofy to make me smile when I felt like I couldn't. There were days when I couldn't imagine getting out of bed, but FLOUNDER always had a way of waking me up and encouraging me to get up. Sometimes I look back at these difficult times and think about what it would have been without FLOUNDER.

I often wonder how my life would look if she had never been there to dig me out of my own mental ditches. I truly believe she is responsible for getting me out of my darkest days, and I will forever be grateful for that.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you. Thank you for your work. Thank you for your mission. And thank you for giving my family the gift and honor of raising FLOUNDER.

While our parting has been heartbreaking to say the least, I know that she will continue to bless the lives of others. Her purpose in this world is much greater.

Take care of my girl for me, just the way she took care of me.

Sincerely,

Ainsley



Passionate About PAWS

Dr. Cindy Kooima's love of PAWS goes back 30 years. "I was in med school from '94 to '98 at Michigan State University. I did my third and fourth years in Grand Rapids, and one of our projects was researching, visiting, and reporting on an organization that provides a community service. I was already aware of PAWS from living in the area, so I called them up to ask for information. They welcomed me for a tour, which included the training apartment and a demonstration of what PAWS Dogs could do for people with disabilities." After that, she was hooked. "I think it's amazing what they can do on so many levels. It made me eager to stay in touch."

Over the years and miles, Cindy did just that. She now lives in Arizona, working as an orthopedic surgeon specializing in treating athletic injuries, and believes strongly in giving back. "I feel like I'm very fortunate in my life, and I love PAWS, so I kept donating. Because of that, you get the newsletter, and it was exciting to read about the work that was being done and how the money's being spent. I'm fascinated by what PAWS does, and how we've expanded what we've done over the years: reaching out to more people with different disabilities, dogs for people on the autism spectrum, all those different things that we weren't doing in the '90s."

When PAWS realized that we would need to upgrade our facility to meet our goal of increasing the number of Assistance Dogs we place by 2030, we knew we wanted to include longstanding members of the PAWS Family like Cindy. When CEO Michele Suchovsky and Teresa Newmarch, Director of Leadership and Legacy Giving, were planning a trip to visit supporters in Arizona earlier this year, they reached out to Cindy for a personal visit.



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Every single person you meet in the PAWS Family is really dedicated.

“PAWS has accomplished so much, but Michele explained there’s a growing need. I came to understand that the space I visited back in medical school hadn’t changed much since that time. PAWS is going to need an updated facility, so more people can be served. That has a huge impact, not just on Clients but their families, too. It’s not a redecoration. It’s expanding and updating to provide more and better service.”

Taking in the information, Cindy decided to make a gift to the campaign. The surgical suite in our new Veterinary Clinic will bear her name in recognition of this generous commitment to PAWS’ future. “Surgery is what I do for work. To help support the medical team that takes care of the dogs? It’s so nice! There are a lot of worthy causes,” she explains. “But this structure is going to continue to be used by PAWS to meet its mission for a long, long time.”

This long-term vision is vital to ensuring a strong future for PAWS. However, in the present. PAWS still needs to keep our lights on, our kennels comfortable, and our PAWS Dogs-in-Training full

of kibble. Cindy also has made a commitment to continue her operational giving to PAWS in addition to her capital campaign donation. “I’ve been making my yearly contribution for a long time. At first, I thought that I would just switch my gift this year. But all that money is going to the renovation. Meanwhile, all the day-to-day needs for supporting volunteers during the fostering process, training the dogs and Clients, all the field work— those costs are not being covered by funds donated to the campaign. So, there’s still a need.”

“The thing about PAWS is how much everyone cares,” she says. “Every single person you meet in the PAWS Family is really dedicated. It’s a commitment to serving the community, and the more you get to know people, the more you see it. Nobody phones it in— everyone is engaged in what they’re doing and working together.” Paws With A Cause is fortunate to count Cindy as a member of the PAWS Family.

Making Sure There's Plenty of **LOVE** in the Future

Professional Assistance Dog Trainers are a rare breed. Especially ones who have the expertise and creativity to custom-train each PAWS Dog for each unique Client.

We plan to place at least 100 Assistance Dogs a year by 2030, and in order to do that we need to have a steady supply of well-educated

Service Dog training is eye-opening. It is a whole other world that you don't think about until you're in the thick of it. It's a very humbling, surprising, and fulfilling experience. - Brandon

Trainer Assistants Lexi, Heather, Tiffany, and Brandon.



Trainers who specialize in training Assistance Dogs the PAWS way. This was a challenge, which we solved by creating the PAWS Trainer Assistant (TA) Program.

Led by Staff Trainer, Kirstin Allan, the PAWS TA Program follows a plan with progressive levels of education and responsibility, designed to take someone who has never trained dogs before from the very basics all the way to a full-time PAWS Staff Trainer. "At PAWS, Trainers don't only train dogs," explains Kirstin. "We interact with Client Services to understand everything our Clients need to build a customized training plan for them."

Trainer Assistant
Tiffany and TAIGA
practice hugs.



Eventually, each TA will begin training their first PAWS Dog. Because of the incredible demand for Service Dogs for Children with Autism (SDA), the Training Assistants will begin by training a single SDA Dog. TA Tiffany, who is currently in her second and final year of the program, recently celebrated sending her PAWS SDA Dog home to a Client. “It was inspirational,” she says with a smile. “Knowing how he was around kids, I knew how good he was going to do for his Client. From what I hear, they’re doing phenomenal! It was very good to know that what I did to make a difference in a dog’s life is making a difference in his kid’s life.”

It was very good to know that what I did to make a difference in a dog’s life is making a difference in his kid’s life. - Tiffany

We interact with the Vet Department to keep our dogs healthy. PAWS Trainers are part of a large and complex team, and we ask our dogs to do complicated, advanced work. In recent years, we haven’t been able to find outside professional trainers who can handle everything we need. So, we decided to train our own.”

After an open call for applications in late winter and early spring, two TAs a year are selected for each cohort. They begin by learning about Paws With A Cause, PAWS’ unique approach to training Assistance Dogs, and setting the Client/Dog Teams up for success. They then get a thorough understanding of the history and evolving methods of dog training, as well as getting hands-on experience caring for every aspect of our PAWS Dogs-in-Training.

The newest cohort of Trainer Assistants are Brandon and Lexi. Brandon comes from the John Ball Zoo, and explains, “Service Dog training is eye-opening. It is a whole other world that you don’t think about until you’re in the thick of it. It’s a very humbling, surprising, and fulfilling experience.”

Tiffany is one-half of PAWS’ first Trainer Assistant cohort. She and her fellow inaugural TA, Heather, who has also placed an SDA Dog, are now training Hearing Dogs. PAWS was originally founded to train Hearing Dogs, and their importance in the curriculum cannot be overstated. From there, Tiffany and Heather will have the opportunity to become Assistant Staff Trainers, and learn how to train Seizure Response Dogs, before mastering the many skills needed to train a PAWS Service Dog. Eventually, they may become Staff Trainers with up to 10 PAWS Dogs in training at the same time.

PAWS Staff Trainers provide the bridge between a Client’s needs and a PAWS Dog’s eagerness to please. With a great deal of care and dedication, they translate love into action and independence. The Trainer Assistant program ensures that PAWS will help us provide more PAWS Dogs to create more opportunities for people to live with dignity, companionship, and confidence.



MAKE A DIFFERENCE WITH EVERY UPDATE!

Join our mission to transform lives through the power of service dogs. By subscribing to our newsletter, you'll stay informed about our latest success stories, upcoming events, and how you can get involved. Each edition offers insights into our work, updates on our incredible teams, and opportunities to support our cause.

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Bring home a PAWS Puppy and become a member of the PAWS Family today!

I've been raising foster puppies for as long as I can remember. I used to do it purely because I love the puppies. Now I continue to raise because I still love the puppies, and I love seeing the amazing things my puppies go on to do. - Lauren

Visit pawswithacause.org/raise-a-foster-puppy to learn more!