



Regaining Independence With Man's Best Friend

A common misconception is that service dogs only play a role in the lives of people who have visible disabilities. There are many types of service dogs that range from guide dogs to medical alert dogs. The exact role that a service dog plays in a person's life will vary by need, but the goal is still the same: to help enhance the quality of someone's life through the emotional and physical benefits that these specially trained dogs provide. At Fidos for Freedom in Laurel, Maryland, trainers take care to match those who are in need with a dog that they feel would make the best partner. "The trainers watched the way that Tank and I worked together during training, how he responded to me, saw that his gate matched mine whether I was walking or in my power chair," Cara L. Gregg says of her now-9-year-old English Labrador retriever. "They decided that he and I worked well as a team."

Gregg's multiple sclerosis (MS) was holding her back from living the way she had before her MS symptoms began, and she knew a service dog could help her regain her independence. "I wasn't hesitant about getting a service dog," she says. "There were times that I needed help and struggled if there was not someone around to help me. I knew that a service dog could do many of those things for me." Activities like going to the mall to shop for clothes or making an unplanned stop at the grocery store are things that people who do not have a disability may not think twice about. When you want a new outfit or need ingredients for dinner, you simply

leave home and go to the store. For Gregg, those activities weren't so easy before Tank came into her life. "I, like many others who have mobility, balance, or other limitations, first had to think if there is anyone to ask to accompany me at the last minute," she says. "Why? Because when I drop things, which I do all the time, it can be dangerous to lean over to pick up the item." Life changed for Gregg after she was matched with Tank seven years ago. "After I got Tank, the world was open to me

again," she says. "Tank has made me much more independent. I'm able to go out without the worry that I'll need help when no one is around." For veterans who have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), psychiatric service dogs can play a large role in helping the veteran feel safe and regain independence. Those who have PTSD are hyper vigilant when it comes to their safety. A properly trained service dog can do things like enter a room first, turn on lights with a floor pedal, and place themselves



Brian McCrady with his service dog Chauncey at a local deli. Chauncey is focused on Brian.



New service dog puppy, Flynn, is named for Nathan Flynn, a fallen Howard County firefighter who lost his life in the line of duty.

between the handler and other people to create more personal space. These dogs can even help interrupt a flashback episode.

Sergeant Brian McCrady, who is medically retired from the U.S. Army, was hesitant at first about getting a service dog, but then warmed up to the idea.

"I was injured in Iraq, but my physical injuries are mostly invisible, as well as my PTSD," he says. "I knew getting a dog was going to make me more visible and I wouldn't be able to hide my disabilities anymore. I had tried lots of other things to help and when I saw the impact a dog made in another veteran's life that I was friends with I knew I had to look into it. I hoped that getting a service dog would allow me to re-engage with my family, community, and the world. I didn't want to be locked inside my house any longer."

After visiting a few local programs, McCrady ultimately chose to apply for a service dog at Fidos for Freedom.

"They felt so welcoming and accommodating," he says of the staff and volunteers at Fidos for Freedom. "They knew that it was very stressful for me to be out in public because of my PTSD, but encouraged me in all the right ways. There was a spirit of caring inside the building, and they felt like a big family."



Service dog Tank fetching items for Cara Gregg in a grocery store.

PHOTO BY JULIE WU

McCrady was matched with Chauncey "Bigboy" McCrady, an English Labrador retriever that is now 5 years old. Chauncey truly changed McCrady's life.

"I'm back to being myself," he says. "Chauncey and Fidos helped me get my confidence back,

they helped me grow. I can do so many things that were not possible before getting my dog, Chauncey. My wife is so grateful and so am I to this wonderful organization." •

**Story by Tara Shubbuck
CFC #41908**



Let's work together for lasting change

Join us to facilitate healthier, more fulfilling lives in communities struggling with hunger, poverty, disaster and disease.

Your generosity empowers women, cares for children and helps families adapt to rapidly changing weather patterns.

Make a positive impact today!



Episcopal
Relief & Development

episcopalrelief.org  