



# WINTER IMPACT NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2021

CANINE COMPANIONSHIP AND UNCONDITIONAL LOVE



# JAKE AND FOSTER

We all need companionship and it comes in different forms for different individuals. For some, companionship looks like quality time spent with family while others see it as the support and dependability of a friend. Sometimes, it can look like a service dog assisting you when you need them the most. However, we define it, fellowship and friendship are universal needs.

Helping Paws Assistance Dogs increase independence and improve quality of life for their graduates. But for the 2021 Winter Impact Newsletter, we're focusing on the companionship our assistance dogs provide to our graduates and those in their surrounding community. With winter weather limiting our time outside and the COVID-19 pandemic affecting our ability to gather indoors with loved ones, we hope that the Helping Paws community will relate to these stories of the unconditional love that can be found in partnership, friendship, and companionship.

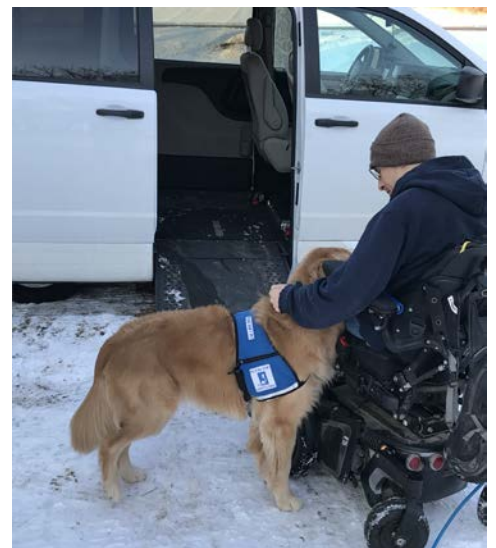
Our first story profiles Jake Beckstrom and his service dog Foster, who were teamed in 2016. Like many of us, Jake and Foster met 2020 with the hope of good fortune and new opportunities. Jake and Foster were able to move out of his family's house and into their own apartment in the Prospect Park neighborhood of Minneapolis, MN. This brought them close to a convenient and wheelchair-accessible light rail station which would afford Jake with independence and mobility. It was a new beginning and for the first few months, Jake felt confident and secure living on his own with Foster by his side.

Having (Service Dog) Foster by my side when we're out and about gives me a sense of identity and confidence. I'm not just a wheelchair. That stigma is broken as everyone sees the beautiful Golden Retriever and not the wheelchair. We're a team. Not only is he the perfect icebreaker, Foster is my sidekick and companion.

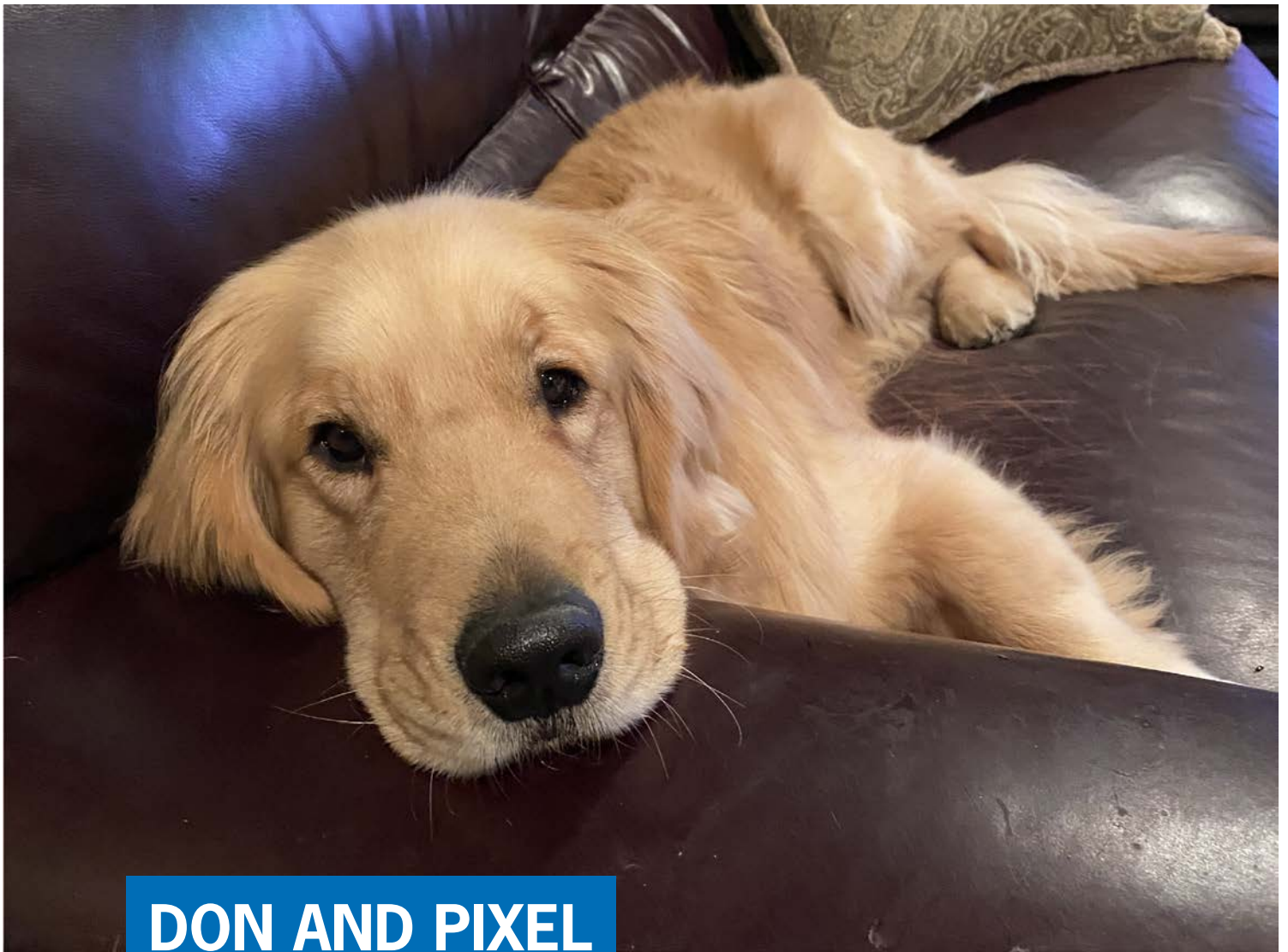
- Jake Beckstrom  
Helping Paws Graduate

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic forced Jake and Foster to make the challenging decision to move back home. Dealing with feelings of disappointment, Jake, understandably, felt depressed. Foster's intuition quickly picked up on this and he supported Jake when he needed comfort the most. Jake calls Foster's companionship an "instant shot of love" and the only medicine that helped him survive 2020.

Jake also acknowledges that it's the consistency of Foster's companionship that keeps him grounded. It's the foundation for Jake to keep pushing forward. This unconditional love warms his heart and reminds him he isn't alone. Whether it's 2020 or 2021, Jake and Foster's mutually beneficial relationship reminds us that home is wherever you have unconditional love and companionship.







## DON AND PIXEL

*We're close. Pixel and I do everything together. He's a great friend. He is always by my side and matches my speed.*

*- Don Ellwood  
Helping Paws Graduate*

Amid all of the stress and worry of 2020, Don received some incredible news: He was being partnered with a Helping Paws Service Dog named Pixel. Don's independence and quality of life instantly improved as Pixel assisted him with daily tasks and challenges. If an item was out of reach or dropped on the ground, Pixel would grab it and hand it to Don. The team even connected together cues so Pixel would pull off Don's socks and then place them in the hamper at the end of the night.

As they spent more time together, their friendship and companionship continued to grow. Pixel is a calm and laid-back partner who is happy to match Don at whatever speed he is at. With Don's mobility limits, Pixel understands when it's time to work and when it's time to rest. No matter his role, Pixel is engaged, willing and loving.

Don is persistent and positive; some might say persistently positive. But even the sunniest day can be darkened by a cloud. It can be frustrating when you used to be able to do an activity or task, and now you can't – or when you can do them some days, but not others, and you can never anticipate what kind of day it will be. In addition to physical limitations, his physical disability can be accompanied by emotional challenges. When Don isn't feeling himself, Pixel comforts him. He'll rest his head on Don's lap or ask for snuggles. With every new challenge Don will face, whether physical or emotional, he has a companion who is always there and who has a "personality that fits my life circumstances perfectly".





He never lets me out of his sight.  
He loves his work.

-Don Ellwood



# MICHAEL AND LUCA



Michael Drury and his service dog Luca are always up for an adventure. Last month, they spent time exploring the Bloomington park system and discovered new sights, sounds and scents. Luca loved it. Back home, they walk 5-10 miles every day on different trails around St. Cloud. Their 4 daily walks are split up and scheduled around meals and belly rubs, of course. This team thrives on consistency and structure. Michael, a veteran living with PTSD, believes the routine and responsibilities are a foundational part of his life.

*I chose to get a service dog, he chose to go with me. I believe in integrity. I made the commitment to take care of him and he takes care of me. He's always with me. Recovery and Luca are the two focuses of my life.*

*- Michael Drury  
Helping Paws Graduate*



Luca's intuition gives him an innate understanding of his role and where Michael's head is at. He is a smart and responsive service dog and is a second set of hands and eyes for Michael. He understands Michael's body language; always aware of his moods sometimes before Michael does. When Michael is energetic, the two play catch inside or visit a local retail shop.

Michael also works hard to stay grounded and in control of his emotions. When his hypervigilance or PTSD keeps him up at night, Luca is comforting and understanding. Michael may check the locks on his apartment's front door 20 times a night, but Luca always reminds him to stay centered, let go of emotions and move forward. Luca helps Michael enter into a state of relaxation. Michael tries to be more laid back like his friend, Luca. Together, they are active participants in their lives rather than watching it go by. And the life they're living is full of adventure and belly rubs.

Michael and Luca are roommates, companions and partners. Both made the commitment to be there for each other; to be each other's lifeline.

# SANDY AND FRITZ

*Service dog-in-training*

Not only do our graduates receive unconditional love and companionship, but the individuals who train and care for the service dogs-in-training do as well. Late last year, the Fun Litter and their volunteer Foster Home Trainers embarked on a 2.5-year journey. Sandy Sinclair welcomed a new addition to her household, service dog-in-training, Fritz, a Golden Retriever puppy.

When Sandy comes home, Fritz is there, always happy to see her. His unconditional love and happiness is contagious. They talk to each other ensuring that neither of them are lonely. It's someone to have a meal with, cuddle with and play with. Fritz also ensures they both go outside every day for their daily walks. He keeps Sandy in the moment, focusing on the present. Their training together helps her stay grounded and is a powerful example of the reward one gets from helping others grow and develop.

Now teaching and caring for her second Helping Paws service dog, Sandy appreciates the renewed sense of purpose her new companion brings.

*I love to work and teach Fritz cues. I find it fascinating to watch him as he processes what I'm asking for. It's a thrill to see the light bulb appear. I'm filled with a sense of pride when he finally gets it. Whether it's a new cue or new stage of his life, Fritz is always teaching me to slow down and focus on what's really important. Knowing all of your hard work will change someone's life is a reward upon itself.*

*- Sandy Sinclair  
Foster Home Trainer*

Sandy is excited to start class with the other Fun Litter Foster Home Trainers. It's easy to see how a group of like-minded individuals (Foster Home Trainers) can come together and create a beautiful community. Until then, Sandy and Fritz are proving companions help each other grow.





## 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

- Target Circle - January 1 - March 31, 2021 - Target Circle is a loyalty program for Target shoppers allowing shoppers to vote for their favorite non-profit usings votes earned at each transaction. Visit our website for more information.



**Photo Credit:** Jake Beckstrom,  
Michael Drury, Don Ellwood, Judy  
Michurski, Sandy Sinclair

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