MIKAYLA GOT THE CALL

What is it like to learn your PAWS Dog is coming home?
Find out on page 3
A “CALL” FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends,

Is Autumn one of your favorite seasons? The leaves in Michigan turn vibrant colors of red, orange, and yellow, and the brisk wind whips them into the air. For our dogs, they love sniffing and playing in the fallen leaves and basking in the cool fall sunshine. For us, this often means more grounds keeping work! Along with all the other PAWS staff, pitched in during a clean-up day to keep the campus looking nice. We also started reflecting on the end of another year and looking forward to what is possible in the future.

At PAWS we have spent the last year refocusing on our commitment to empower all people to live with dignity, companionship, and confidence. We continue to dream of big plans as we move forward to meet the growing and evolving needs in our communities and to change more lives for future clients, the people who love them, and their communities. I have spoken with some of you over the past year, and I know you feel as strongly as I do about answering the call to help PAWS grow.

The calls inspiring our growth are already coming in. For example, when a volunteer Whelping Assistant answers a two-a.m. call to talk for hours with a breeding home volunteer as a new Mama has her first litter of PAWS puppies. Or when we receive a call from a long-time donor from Wisconsin, who is planning a trip to PAWS for the first time to learn first-hand how we custom train a dog and make that love match for our Client/Dog Teams.

As you read the stories in this issue of the PAWS newsletter, please remember you are at the heart of PAWS and our commitment to make the world a better place, one puppy and person at a time. Your gifts empower young adults like Mikayla and SAFFRON to illustrate a children’s book about service dogs, educating our next generation. You join together, like Paul and Sarah, to raise money for PAWS—ensuring the necessary resources to provide future generations of PAWS Client/Dog teams. And you generously answered our survey, sent in June, with your thoughts and feedback as we chart our course for the future.

Thank YOU for answering our call by sharing your gifts of time, talent, and treasure to make PAWS stronger for today and for the future.

Warm regards,

Michele Suchovsky, CEO

Paul and Sarah have raised two puppies for PAWS: PRINGLE, a female black Labrador Retriever and ORCHID, a female chocolate Lab. Paul and Sarah are taking a break from raising PAWS puppies, but they still wanted to find a way to support our mission to enhance the independence and quality of life for people with disabilities through custom-trained Assistance Dogs. They settled on raising money to name a PAWS litter after their favorite TV show, Game of Thrones.

It costs $5,000 to name a litter of PAWS puppies. “We didn’t have five grand sitting around at the time,” explains Paul. So they got creative! “I have been involved over the last eight years with a different charity that raises money for cystic fibrosis. My company, AbbVie, has always been a big supporter of that. They match our donations. Then they started to open it up to charities of our choice.” Paul and Sarah did the math and realized that with AbbVie’s match they only needed to raise $2,500 on their own.

And they did it in their own way. “We had no idea nobody had ever done it this way before,” laughs Sarah. “I have been hard. We didn’t see a lot of family because the COVID numbers had been bad. When PAWS called it was a big highlight!”

In January of this year, Paul and Sarah learned that their puppies, RENLY, GHOST, TULLY, GILLY, OSAH, PYP, and JOJEN were ready to meet them. “It was really cool,” says Sarah. “The holidays had been hard. We didn’t see a lot of family because the COVID numbers had been bad. When PAWS called it was a big highlight!”

Between their work as Foster Puppy Raisers and collecting half the cans in Michigan, Paul and Sarah have done a lot for PAWS. “It’s as simple as ‘We can do something.’ I can do something. Just give back to the community, if you are able to, or when you’re able to. Sarah volunteers with cheerleading and Girls on the Run, I coach youth soccer. This is just a different way to support the community.”

A CALL... FOR CANS!
I GOT THE CALL!

Mikayla waited for what felt like forever to get her PAWS Dog. PAWS very carefully matches each dog to their client, a time-tested process that can also take a bit of, well, time. But when Mikayla finally got the call that her PAWS Dog, SAFFRON, had finished training and was almost ready to come home? “It was so cool! I was so excited. It was like the best feeling ever,” she remembers.

When you ask Mikayla what she loves, she immediately talks about drawing and SAFFRON, who is one of her frequent artistic subjects. “SAFFRON brings it full circle,” Mikayla explains. “She is such a symbol of hard times and good times. I wish people would ask what it was like before I got her. It was really hard, especially when I was younger. Not a lot of people knew about cerebral palsy. And I didn’t know there were service dogs for people like me.”

As soon as Mikayla got the call that SAFFRON was ready to come home Mikayla knew they would be the perfect match. When she went to pick SAFFRON up, Mikayla was told that it could take a couple of days for a dog and their new best friend to understand each other. “Oh, SAFFRON immediately walked me down the hallway and stopped when I did. It was amazing right away. She knew exactly what I needed.”

SAFFRON’s intuition knows no bounds. “About a month after I got her,” Mikayla remembers, “we were outside, and a storm was coming. I told her she needed to get inside quickly, and to use the side door. But I had never used that door with her, and I didn’t think she knew where it was. But she dashed away from me, went through the side door, and raced to the back door to open it from the inside to let me in. SAFFRON is wonderful.”

Together they navigate college, home, and anywhere that will serve SAFFRON the occasional puppuccino. On special days, they also visit SAFFRON’s favorite place in the world, Mikayla’s grandmother’s house. “She loves grandma time! SAFFRON literally can’t even walk in a straight line when we go there, because she gets so happy!”

No matter where they go, Mikayla is dedicated to educating people about service dogs. She wishes more people had PAWS Dogs, so that they were considered an everyday thing and the general public would be better educated on how to interact with them. People often try to pet or distract SAFFRON, unaware that when her cape is on, she is a dog on a mission. “It’s never frustrating to have to educate people,” Mikayla explains. “I’ve basically experienced that my whole life, with my disability.” And Mikayla is always happy to help.

In fact, Mikayla and her sister are working on a children’s book to teach kids about superhero service dogs like SAFFRON. She was invited to speak to a friend’s kindergarten classroom and explain how she and SAFFRON work together. Mikayla searched for a book to share with the kids, and when she could not find one, decided to create her own. Her sister is handling the words and Mikayla is drawing all the art – of course using SAFFRON as her model!
This year, PAWS received over 300 requests for applications for Assistance Dogs. Less than a quarter of those people will receive a PAWS Dog. At present, each year PAWS only has the capacity to match 40 new clients with a PAWS Dog, and 15 successor clients whose current dog is ready to retire.

“Our goal over the next five years is to grow to 100 placements a year,” says Client Relations Manager Becky Canale. Becky has been with PAWS for 26 years and has seen an incredible amount of change in applications for service dogs. Not only have PAWS Dogs become known for their excellence, but as Becky explains, “People are finding out how beneficial service dogs are. People are applying today that would not have applied 20 years ago because they used to think they were not disabled enough. Now people understand that service dogs aren’t just limited to people in wheelchairs. There are people with progressive disabilities that, with a PAWS Dog, might be able to put off needing other adaptive equipment for a long time. And even in the last five years, we have added new services allowing people who have POTS [Postural Tachycardia Syndrome] to apply.”

And as Becky puts it, with more dogs comes more, well, everything. “We need more kennels for more dogs. We need more trainers to train more dogs. We need more Field Representatives to support clients when they receive the dog. One of our biggest needs is human resources to bring in more dog resources: more kennel care, more vet staff, more grooming staff, more Purposeful Placement staff. We aren’t going to be able to meet more client needs without more dogs and we can’t have more dogs without more staff.”

All the way across campus, head veterinarian Dr. Jeanne Klynsma agrees. Her department is a perfect example of one needing changes to serve more dogs and the people who need them. Fortunately, even small improvements can have a major impact at PAWS, like the new lights the vet department recently received for their operating room. When you ask her about them, Doc Jeanne throws her hands up in the air and sings, “The lights are glorious!” She explains that the old lights made it difficult to keep both patient and surgeon at a safe temperature. The lights are also just one of a handful of small changes PAWS has made recently. As Doc Jeanne puts it, PAWS’s goal has always been to keep PAWS Dogs comfortable and in good care, but now PAWS can “provide care with the proper tools to care.”

Doc Jeanne also notes that her department has always been a bottleneck for the whole system at PAWS. An updated veterinary facility with better traffic flow, a separate room for dog dental care, and other thoughtful details would make the exam room more available and allow PAWS to treat more dogs each day. “It would also let us concentrate on communication with Foster Puppy Raisers instead of being interrupted while I’m in the middle of a procedure,” she laughs.

The need for PAWS Dogs may be growing every day, but Doc Jeanne is confident that the PAWS Family will find a way to meet that need. Clients, volunteers, and staff are some of her favorite parts about working at PAWS. “We have had people go through some very tough times, and everybody has immediately pulled together and helped answer the call for the PAWS Family member. The compassion of people here is amazing, and that’s a really good feeling to work with those people.”

Last spring, during our virtual PAWS To Celebrate event, we called for your support to provide more Assistance Dogs to kids with autism, like Rocco. And you came through! Because of you, PAWS has been hard at work matching kids, like Mason, with their PAWS Dogs, like BALI. As Mason’s mom puts it:

“When we first learned that BALI was coming home with us, we were so excited. We showed Mason a picture of her and told him that she was going to be his new best friend. When she arrived at our house, we were all so excited to meet her! She settled in right away and now we couldn’t imagine what it was like before we had her!”

We would also like to send a special thank you to Masco, a longtime friend of PAWS and a top sponsor of this year’s PAWS To Celebrate. Masco believes in delivering better living possibilities. They support PAWS because they believe that together, the possibilities are endless. We could not agree more!

Want to imagine YOUR impact? Join us for PAWS To Be Thankful this November!
PAWS believes that all people deserve opportunities to live with dignity, companionship, and confidence. We also believe that each of our dogs deserve an opportunity to thrive and to serve their best, highest purpose helping people and communities. Over the past 18 months, with these two beliefs as our bedrock, PAWS started to envision our dream for the future.

We set two ambitious goals for the next five years:

- Double the number of people we serve through a life-changing Assistance Dog
- Purposefully place 90% of all our dogs in working careers that change lives and communities

Critical to achieving these goals is support from you.

You have stood by our side and answered our call for over 40 years. You were called upon to help us move from our founder’s garage to a small shop on Leonard Street in Grand Rapids, Michigan. And like any good friend, you picked up when we called for help to move again to our current facility on five acres in three buildings with 67,000 square feet of space in Wayland, Michigan.

You also answered the call to help us train more than Hearing Dogs when we realized there was a need. We changed our name from Ears for the Deaf to Paws With A Cause and began serving people who needed help with their mobility. You bolstered PAWS once more when we launched the training of Seizure Response Dogs and Service Dogs for children with autism.

And we thank you once again for answering our call to provide your wisdom as we take these next steps into the future of PAWS. In June, we sent an electronic survey to all of you for whom we have a valid email address. And you responded!

You affirmed that you believe in PAWS and, in fact, 63% of you shared that PAWS is one of your highest (or even the highest) philanthropic priorities. You shared that our mission is our biggest strength and that we are powered by our people, our volunteers, clients, staff, and donors, all of whom join together to make our work possible. You recognized our world class breeding and training programs and our unique, tailored approach to serving our clients.

You also understand our challenges. You know that the demand is high for a PAWS Assistance Dog and that the need is greater than we have the capacity to serve. You understand that PAWS remains a "best kept secret" and needs to grow our community of volunteers, donors, and supporters.

And you recognize that we need to build sustainability in our buildings, infrastructure, and operations, if we are going to continue our legacy for the next forty years and beyond.

Thank you for your wisdom and candid feedback. You are helping us to chart our next steps and to continue to honor our past as we dream of the future. If you missed the survey and want to share your thoughts with us or if you are interested in joining us as a volunteer as we start these next, strategic steps, please reach out to Carrie Simmons, PAWS Director of Advancement at csimmons@pawswithacause.org, or to Michele Suchovisky, PAWS CEO, at msuchovisky@pawswithacause.org or call us at (616)-877-7297.

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I was super excited to hear I was approved for a service dog. And they found such a beautiful dog to help me! YASMIN is very smart, loving, and helpful around the house. She has a big personality that I love!”
— Shawn and YASMIN
Get ready for our annual online fundraiser!

PAWS TO BE THANKFUL

How to Help

Beginning November 16 until Giving Tuesday on November 30.