

weap: The People

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Animal Angels with a Special Task

Furry friends give autistic kids a link to the world around them

By Kathy Lauer-Williams | Of The Morning Call

<http://www.mcall.com>

When Sandra Gerencer of Bethlehem adopted her son Terry five years ago, she was told the boy, who has been diagnosed with autism, would never speak in full sentences.

But a bouncy black shepherd-mix puppy named Chance changed that.

Within a year of adopting the dog from a shelter, Terry spoke his first complete sentence -- to the dog.

"I stood outside his room and heard him asking the dog 'Are you hungry? Do you want to play?'" Gerencer says

Although she says Terry, now 13, still doesn't use complete sentences when talking to people, he continues to talk to the family dogs and even pretends to read to them from books.

'It's helped him to cope with some of the issues he's dealing with,' Gerencer says. "We don't know what's going on inside an autistic child's brain, but there's something different in his thought processes when it's the dog.'

For children with autism, a disorder characterized by impaired social interaction and communication abilities, families are finding a pet often can provide friendship, teach responsibility and serve as a tool to communicate.

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Obama Pledges \$1B for Autism

Courtesy of A-Champ

<http://www.a-champ.org/questionnaire2007Obama.html>



A-CHAMP asked through the Schafer Report serious questions of all presidential candidates. Here is Barack Obama's response.

Q) *Will you fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act?*

Obama) As a member of the Illinois State Legislature I fought to support special education and as a U.S. Senator I have continued that fight. As President, I will fully fund IDEA so that we provide children with the support they need to receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment based upon best practices and with the goal of fully including them in schools and the community. As the number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) increases, we must ensure that teachers, classrooms and school districts are prepared to meet their special needs.

Q) *Do you believe that the Combating Autism Act provides enough money to find the cause, or causes, of autism and effective treatments?*

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There are many studies that have shown that animal-human interaction provides benefits to people, from lowering blood pressure to easing loneliness. But the use of animals with autistic children is a new area that shows "a lot of promise," according to a Washington State University researcher.

In 1999, a two-year study by Dr. Francois Martin examined the effects of using dogs as therapy with autistic children ages 3-13. Martin says the children were more playful, more attentive, more likely to stay "on-task" and laughed more easily in the presence of a dog.

Gerencer is a former Lehigh University program specialist for adults with disabilities. She's now a special education teacher in the Bangor School District. She took Terry to a shelter to pick out a dog as soon as she adopted him because she knew having a pet would be good for him.

She says the boy and dog bonded immediately.

"He was more animated with the dog," Gerencer says. "They played together constantly. I think animals can sense the good in people."

She also discovered communicating "through" Chance helped her reach Terry when he had behavioral problems such as ripping posters or throwing toys.

She would tell him "Chance is sad," when Terry misbehaved. Then she'd ask him, "What would Chance want you to do?"

"He always wanted to make Chance happy," she says.

Gerencer says when she asks Terry a question directly, it might take him five minutes to respond. But "when I put it in terms of the dog, he answers right away."

Although the Gerencers had to give up Chance to live on a farm, when the dog got too big for the family's twin home, Terry, now has bonded with Ramsey, a smaller mixed breed dog and is "doing fantastic," says his mother.

Recently, California-based Canine Companions, which has offered assistance dogs for people with a wide range of disabilities since 1975, began pairing dogs with autistic children, said Kendra Bushong, marketing coordinator.

The group, which provides the dogs free of charge through private contributions, has placed nearly 100 dogs with autistic children out of its 1,300 nationwide. A New York City mother got a canine companion for her son in 2007, and reported that the boy, who had been

nonverbal, said his first word -- "fetch" -- to the dog within the first week, Bushong says.

There are several organizations that offer trained dogs for autistic children, but most require the family to raise the \$11,000 to \$15,000 cost of training. Raising the money for a dog can be daunting for a family struggling with the needs of an autistic child

Ellen Hunt, vice president of the Lehigh Valley Chapter of the Autism Society of America, doesn't know of any local families who have gotten trained companion dogs, although she has met families out-of-state who have.

"A lot have talked about it, but it's very expensive," she says.

The Lower Macungie mom says she has seen the positive effects of animals through her son Ty's pet cat.

"I felt a pet would be very beneficial," she says. "These children don't like to socialize, and a pet can relate to them without speech."

She says the black and white cat named Farley, Ty's Christmas present in 2006, has been "wonderful for him." The cat lies in bed with Ty, 7, licking his toes or batting at his toy cars.

"They kind of have their own communication," Hunt says. "Without saying anything, you can tell they're bonded. He wants her to be a part of his world."

Pris Taylor, director of Autism Service Dogs of America, an Oregon group that she founded in 2002, wishes her organization were able to subsidize the cost of training the dogs.

Taylor draws no salary and has put her own money into it. She says the \$13,500 ASDA asks a family to raise to get a dog doesn't cover the cost of two years of feeding, training, socialization and veterinary care, as well as trainers that work with the family.

AUTISM ASSISTANCE DOGS

Organizations that offer assistance dogs for autism

Canine Companions for Independence, P.O. Box 446, Santa Rosa, CA 95402. 1-800-572-2275 or <http://www.cci.org>

Autism Service Dogs of America, 4248 Galewood St., Lake Oswego, Oregon 97035 <http://www.autismservicedogsofamerica.com>

4 Paws For Ability, 253 Dayton Ave., Xenia, Ohio 45385 937-374-0385 OR <http://www.4pawsforability.org>

kathy.lauer@mcall.com 610-778-2235

Obama) I supported the Combating Autism Act of 2006. It was a good start. As President I will make sure that money appropriated by Congress for autism spectrum disorders reaches the organizations and people that they were intended for. Research is important but it is only one of the steps we need to take. Americans with ASD should be supported throughout the lifespan. Early diagnosis and early intervention has been proven to lessen the amount and intensity of services Americans with ASD need as they grow older. We must appropriate the funds needed to support all Americans with disabilities. As President I will go beyond the Combating Autism Act to develop a comprehensive autism policy that invests \$1 billion annually by the end of my first term in office to address ASD on all fronts. I will also ensure that all federal efforts to combat ASD are coordinated through a central Federal ASD Coordinator who will work across agencies to better coordinate ASD research, awareness, treatment, and support for families.

Q) How much funding will you request to study potential environmental triggers of autism?

Obama) There is much evidence to suggest ASD is a genetically-based neurological condition with environmental triggers. As President, I will lead an effort to conduct research to confirm these findings and study the potential triggers. We must find out why many Americans have ASD and other special needs, the causes, and best treatments and interventions.

Q) Do you believe there is an autism epidemic in the United States?

Obama) Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is the fastest growing developmental disorder in the United States and, perhaps the world. One in 150 children is diagnosed with ASD. These numbers can not be explained solely by increased awareness or changes to the diagnostic criteria. It is a health crisis and I will act accordingly. There are many Americans with special needs. They will have a partner in the federal government under my administration.

Q) What will you do to stop health insurers from discriminating against people with autism and their families?

Obama) Many parents and state legislators have led the fight to prevent medical insurance companies from delaying and denying coverage to those with ASD, claiming it as a preexisting condition. Because of this, too many Americans with special needs and their families have struggled with a crushing financial burden. Many Americans have tried to do something about this, and I applaud their efforts. In South Carolina, for example, parents Marcella Ridley and Lorri

Unumb and state senators Joel Lurie (D) and David Thomas ® led the way in passing Ryan's Law, which ensured that children with ASD would get the treatments they need. Of course, after we create universal health care by the end of my first term as President, all Americans with ASD will have access to affordable health care, regardless of "preexisting" conditions.

Q) What will you do to ensure that health insurers pay for the promising new treatments and behavioral therapy?

Obama) As President I will work to create universal health care by the end of my first term so that all Americans have access to affordable health care. My health care plan will also improve the quality of care available to Americans and uphold the principle of mental health parity. I will also work to bring Americans with ASD, their families and experts together to deal with important issues, like standardization of treatments, diagnostics, screening, and support for promising new treatments and therapy.

Q) Do you think vaccines should be investigated as a possible cause of autism?

Obama) I believe that the next President must restore confidence and open communication with the American people. This includes environmental policies and government funded research. An Obama administration will go where the science and the facts lead us, whether it is about climate change or toxic heavy metals in our environment.

Q) What will you do to provide for the lifetime care that 250,000 to 500,000 current children with autism will need in the future?

Obama) ASD is not just a medical issue nor a children's issue. ASD affects behavior, communication and socialization and means that Americans with ASD will have a lifetime struggle to fully integrate within the community. However, the nation must also work to recognize the valued role that Americans with special needs have within our communities. Americans with special needs must be supported throughout their lifetimes. As President, I will work with the special needs community to ensure that those with ASD acquire the skills and education they need, achieve to their fullest capabilities and live the independent life of a full citizen in their community. I will support programs that create opportunities, improve the quality of life and maximize potential for all individuals with ASD and their families.

Although Senator McCain has so far not responded to this questionnaire, he and Hillary Clinton are co-sponsors of the Combating Autism Act.♦

Upcoming Events

(courtesy of sarnet.org)

Autism Journeys: Today, Tomorrow & Beyond

A two-day conference concentrating on how to help parents & families prepare for the transitions their autistic children face as they pass through adolescence toward adulthood. The conference is for professionals & practitioners working in the field of autism. It also is appropriate for families living with autism & related syndromes.

Aug 11-12 Milwaukee 9am-4pm, \$195 (\$175 by Jun 15- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee - Mary Pick sce-autism.uwm.edu mpick@uwm.edu 414-227-3312



Effective Behavioral Interventions in Wisconsin

Registration form on web page!

Notable Workshop Presenters - Sundberg: The VB-MPP

Sallows: Funding/Advocacy Hess: Direct Instruction Hartman:

Functional Assessment Bondy: PECS Presentations - Research to Practice; Practice to Research Functional Communication Training

Aug 13-14 Kenosha 53141 1pm 8-13; AM andpm 8-14; \$89 (\$49 - students) by Jun 5 ; \$110 & \$59 after. Carthage College, Lentz Hall; Alford Park Dr - Dr. Roger F. Bass www.wisaba.org RFB53074@aol.com Cell: 262-853-1951

Marine Corps Marathon

Run for Autism in the Marine Corps Marathon! OAR is a national organization that helps persons with autism, their families, teachers, & caregivers by providing practical information drawn from sound, science-based research. Oct 26 Washington 8 am Pentagon

www.researchautism.org

run@researchautism.org

703-243-9710

Solving the Social Equation

Carol Gray Solving the Social Equation in Autism Spectrum Disorders

Sep 17 Appleton 8:30 a - 3:30 p, \$179 \$149 adv by Aug 15 Liberty Hall

Conference Center - Maria Wierichs www.lakeland.edu/

wierichsma@lakeland.edu

920-565-1477

Groups and Classes

Location	Group	Age/Level	Facilitator	Fee	Days	Time	Start Date
Madison	Parent Group	Open to Community	Chris W	\$30/session \$4/child daycare (register 2 wks in advc.)	2 nd Tues ea.Month	4:00-5:30PM	Ongoing
Madison	Teen Group	Open to Community Ages 12 +	Matt N	\$40/session	Thurs E/O Is outing	4:00-6:00PM	Ongoing
Milwaukee	Kid's Group	Ages 9-12	Maggie D	\$30/session +any outing fee	Mondays	4:30-5:30PM	June 16- August 25
Milwaukee	Social Skills	Kindergarten Readiness	Stephanie B	\$30/session	Mondays	9:30-11AM	June 16- August 18
Milwaukee	Social Skills	Ages 6-8	Stephanie B	\$30/session	Mondays	4:00-5:30PM	June 16- Aug 18

Current Openings

GREEN BAY 920-338-1610 Manawa Cato Oneida Green Bay	MILWAUKEE 262-432-5660 Milwaukee Wauwatosa Greendale Oak Creek Racine Genoa City Elkhorn Waukesha Muskego Mukwanago	MADISON 608-288-9040 Beaver Dam Blanchardville Monroe Portage Ft. Atkinson Janesville Mineral Point Madison	EAU CLAIRE 715-832-2233 FULL	LA CROSSE 608-781-6500 FULL	
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