



Service Dog Program
Changing Lives - One Paw at a Time

This year, we celebrate 25 years of promoting the human-animal bond and transforming lives through professionally trained seizure response/alert, balance/mobility, and diabetic alert service dogs.

Life Skills Training Begins With our Volunteers

We proudly partner with the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women (NCCW) and the Reception and Treatment Center (RTC) where handlers train our service dogs in basic obedience and advanced service dog tasks. But much of their life-skills training happens in Lincoln and the surrounding communities, thanks to our dedicated volunteers.

- Puppy Raisers welcome the pups into their homes during their first year, teaching house manners and introducing them to public life.
- In their final year, Weekend Warriors take our pups on weekends, continuing socialization and public access training until service dog camp.

Service Dog Camp – A Journey to Independence

At about two years old, dogs are matched with their person and Service Dog Camp begins. Recipients stay in a local hotel while training alongside their new partners. We go to parks, restaurants, stores, malls—and of course, the pups favorite, a pet store.

Camp concludes with the Public Access Test, held at the Nebraska State Capitol. We take a tour of the Capitol, sharing Nebraska's unique Unicameral system and the spirit that makes our state special.

If you've ever been touched by a service dog, know someone who has, or simply believe in the incredible work they do—please consider giving.

Thank you for being part of the journey—one paw at a time.

Real Stories. Real Impact.

We invite you to read a few powerful stories from the past 24 years—stories of strength, courage, and transformation made possible by donors like you.

Their journey is our mission. And your support makes it possible.



Becca and Slater 2001 Balance/Mobility

When they brought Slater out, he began to pull on the leash as the handler was walking down the hall to the room we were in. Slater broke free and came bounding up to me, then gently jumped up on my lap with his paws turned under so he would not hurt me. He was definitely the dog for me. Slater was incredible. He was a fabulous balance dog. He was always steady, and always seemed to be my built in therapist.

Dale and Dudley 2009 Balance/Mobility

Dudley is the perfect assistance dog. On our cruise in May, we received compliment after compliment on Dudley's behavior and dedication to his task. The captain came up to me and said he had to meet Dudley because of what he had heard about him and how well he was trained and behaved. He stated Dudley would always be welcome aboard!





McKenna and Phoebe 2015 Seizure Response/Alert



McKenna experienced her first seizure at just eleven months old—once on Mother’s Day and again on Father’s Day. Since then, she has endured thousands of seizures, countless medical treatments, and a long list of medications that have significantly shaped her daily life.

Now entering middle school, McKenna longs for the simple freedoms most kids her age enjoy—riding her bike down the block or spending time alone in her room. Thanks to her service dog, Phoebe, that dream is becoming a reality. Phoebe is specially trained to detect McKenna’s seizures and alert those nearby, giving her the chance to get to a safe place.

Phoebe brings not only life-saving awareness, but also peace of mind to McKenna’s family and a new level of independence to McKenna herself. As she puts it, “My service dog gives me the freedom and security to help overcome some of my limitations.” One of her proudest milestones? Finally being able to walk across the street to the Dollar Store—on her own.

Brett and Taylor 2019 - Seizure Response/Alert



Mom Denise: When we first learned Brett would be receiving a service dog, I hoped for a companion who might alert to seizures and maybe give Brett a little more confidence. What we got in Taylor was so much more—truly nothing short of miraculous. The bond between Brett and Taylor has exceeded every expectation we had. Taylor not only detects seizures before they happen, giving Brett time to sit down and stay safe, but has also helped him grow emotionally and socially. Brett feels more secure, more independent, and more connected to the world around him—all because of Taylor.

I honestly can’t describe the difference between what we thought a service dog would bring and what Taylor has actually brought into our lives. He is 1,000 times more than we ever imagined.



Kelsey & Dani 2022 Seizure Response/Alert

Before Dani came into my life, I was afraid—afraid to go outside, afraid of having a seizure in public, afraid of being alone. Since meeting Domesti-PUPS and having Dani, everything has changed.

My anxiety has gone way down, and I have far fewer seizures. Most importantly, my independence has grown in ways I never imagined. I can now go to the movies by myself, spend time with friends, and even took my first solo flight to visit my sister—all because Dani is by my side.

One of my proudest moments with Dani was during my first solo seizure. I was at a restaurant, walking. I had a walking seizure. Somehow, she stopped me and when I came to, she had turned me safely on my side. I still don't know how she did it, but I am so proud of her.

There aren't enough words to truly describe what Domesti-PUPS means to me. Thanks to them, I received Dani and my life has completely changed. The people at Domesti-PUPS are some of the most loving and genuinely caring individuals I've ever met. They didn't just give me a service dog; they gave me confidence, freedom, and a sense of safety I never had before.

From Jennifer, Austin's mom:

Since receiving Sierra from Domesti-PUPS, she has truly transformed Austin's life in ways we never imagined possible. Sierra has given Austin something he didn't have before - confidence. She has played a pivotal role in helping him not only apply for but secure and maintain a job as a welder's helper. At work, Austin functions independently in the shop, with Sierra providing both safety and comfort. Through taking care of Sierra, Austin has taken on a new level of responsibility. These responsibilities have brought out a level of maturity and independence in him that we hadn't seen before. As parents, Sierra has also given us a gift—the ability to relax. We no longer live in constant fear or feel the need to hover over Austin very moment. Thanks to Sierra, Austin is living a fuller, more independent life. She has allowed him the freedom to grow, to mature, and to truly thrive. We are forever grateful to Domesti-PUPS for bringing Sierra into our lives. She hasn't just helped Austin—she's changed our whole family for the better.

Austin and Sierra 2024 Seizure response/Alert



Therapy Dog Program | Established 2000

Since 2000, our Therapy Dog Program has grown into a vibrant and beloved part of our mission. With 38 active teams, our therapy dogs make at least 18 visits each month to nursing homes, universities, hospitals, and community events—bringing comfort, connection, and joy wherever they go. Because sometimes, love really does come on four paws.

Over the past 25 years, this program has flourished thanks to the dedication of volunteers and their incredible dogs. Their stories reflect the heart of what we do—offering kindness, companionship, and a calming presence to those who need it most. Here's a glimpse into that journey, as told by the teams themselves—from then to now.



From Trudy Conroy & Donut in 2002

One of our first visits was to a local nursing home, where we met a resident named Carl.

As we were leaving, Carl softly whispered, “Come back—you bring the sunshine.”

Those few words touched me deeply and captured the true moment, I realized that our visits were about so much more than just spending time with a dog—they were about bringing light, comfort, and connection to someone who needed it.



Susan & Fred Mausolf with Zoe and Haggis 2007

We started in 2007. We have gone to multiple nursing homes and every time we go, there is always at least one resident who responds so positively to the dogs that it gives you goosebumps! People who seldom or never speak will talk to the dogs and tell you stories about their past canine friends. There are small moments and big moments of touching people's lives through the dogs and every one of them is amazing.





Angela Herbert & Colby

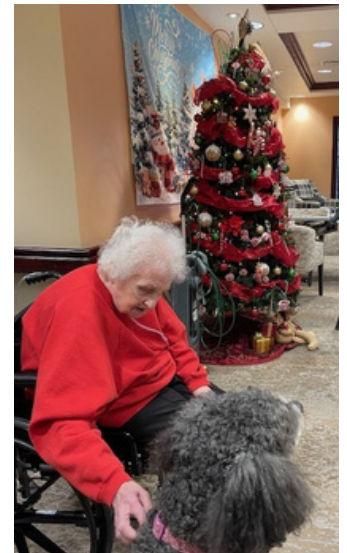
While visiting my grandmother at the nursing home, Colby and I met a 103-year-old woman named Esther. She was engaging during our visit, sharing stories about her childhood on the farm, her sister, her love of music and dogs—she spoke more than anyone else in the room.

As we were leaving, the social director thanked me for bringing my "Mountain Dog," saying Esther hadn't spoken that much in years—usually just a word or two at a time.

That day, Colby helped bring her voice back. Esther passed away just a couple of months later, and I'm so grateful we had the chance to share that moment with her.

Amy Canine & Hope

Amy and Hope provide smiles to residents in assisted living. Some of these residents get so excited when it's a "Hope" day that they are up out of bed, showered and dressed waiting for her arrival. The nursing staff say it's always a battle to get some of them to shower and dress....but never on a "Hope" day! Domesti-PUPS provides so many smiles and comfort to so many people and events in and around Lincoln.



From Canice Kobus & Sterling in 2025



Sterling and I visit the mental health floor at Bryan West several times a month where we visit seniors, adult, youth and those in affective units. His favorite game-fetch-makes each visit playful and engaging. Patients toss the ball, laugh, and share stories about their own pets. Even those who are quiet often move closer, watch intently, or open up in small, meaningful ways.



Some patients are hospitalized for weeks, and their faces light up when Sterling returns. Youth run the halls with him, while others gently remind him to get a drink—showing care and empathy even while facing their own struggles. The staff look forward to our visits too. One doctor who works with the youth thanks me every time, telling me how much it means to his patients—and to him.

Sterling may be the one carrying the ball, but he's also carrying connection, healing, and hope. I'm just lucky enough to hold the leash.

25 Years of Domesti-PUPS

A Legacy of Pawsitive Change. And a Future You Can Help Build

For 25 years, Domesti-PUPS has been changing lives. One dog, one person, one moment at a time. From our very first Edu-PUP, therapy dog, and service dog to the puppies just beginning their training today, our story is one of compassion, community, and transformation.

Here you will see the faces that built our legacy:

- Riley, our first Edu-PUP
- Slater, our first service dog
- Donut, one of our first therapy dogs
- Charm, our first professional therapy dog
- And our founder, Michelle Ashley O'Dea, whose vision brought it all to life

And beside them—you'll see the faces of our future:

- Cindy and Sally, starting their journey to become professional therapy dogs
- Link and Wheeler, two service dogs preparing to graduate this year
- Our current therapy teams spreading comfort and joy

These photos are more than memories. They are milestones—proof of what's possible.

But while our programs are growing, the need is growing even faster.

- We now have over 65 therapy dog teams helping others daily—but we still can't meet the demand.
- Requests from hospitals, mental health centers, and nursing homes continue to rise.
- And there's a two-year waitlist for our life-changing service dogs.

We have a bold vision:

- ✨ A therapy dog in every school that needs one
- ✨ Expanded community training programs here in Lincoln
- ✨ Faster placement of service dogs to those who need them most

Thank you for believing in the power of paws. Together, let's make the next 25 years even more life-changing.

A Brief History of Domesti-PUPS



Michelle Ashley O'Dea Founder

In 2000, Michelle Ashley O'Dea and her Westie, Gertie, turned personal healing into a mission that would touch thousands. What started as one woman and one dog grew into the life-changing work of Domesti-PUPS. Michelle retired in 2022, leaving behind a powerful legacy of love, service, and the belief that one dog can change everything.

2000 Our First Edu-PUP

Our very first Edu-PUP, a West Highland Terrier named Riley, began visiting classrooms at Robin Mickle in 2000 alongside teacher Jean Keister. Today, we have over 26 Edu-PUP teams bringing comfort and connection to 11 schools each month.



2000 Our First Service Dog

Our first service dog team, Becca Williams and Slader, launched our mission of life-changing assistance. Today, we've placed over 90 service dogs across the country, empowering individuals with increased independence and confidence.

2002 One of Our First Therapy Teams

Trudy Conroy and her sweet pup Donut—paved the way for what has become an incredible community impact. Today, we're proud to have 38 active therapy teams visiting at least 18 different facilities each month, spreading joy, comfort, and connection wherever they go.



2009 Our First Professional Therapy Dog

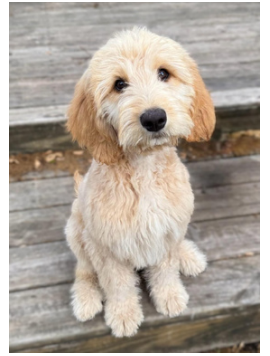
Our very first Professional Therapy Dog—Charm—at Taylor Physical Therapy with Leah Thier and Jennifer Nus. Today our Professional Therapy Dogs can now be found in dental offices, psychologists' practices, school campuses, and more.

Domesti-PUPS 2025

Sally and Cindy



These adorable pups are just beginning their journey to become professional therapy dogs. They already love people, and with faces this cute, they're sure to bring smiles wherever they go!



Link and Wheeler



These two incredible dogs are preparing to graduate as certified seizure response dogs. Soon, they'll meet their forever person and begin a lifelong journey of support, independence, and unconditional love.



Scarlet and Libby Edu-PUPS

These dedicated Edu-PUPS spend their school days bringing comfort, joy, and plenty of smiles to students and staff alike. They're making a big difference each and every day.



Therapy Teams in Action

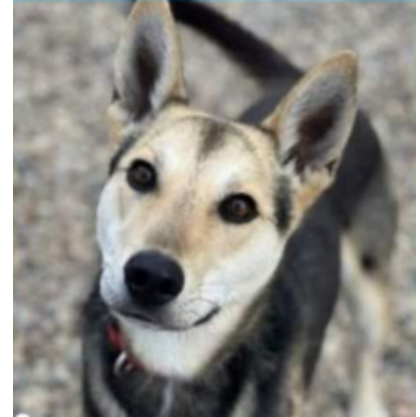


These dedicated therapy dog teams are out in the community, offering comfort, connection, and plenty of tail wags. Whether it's a hospital, nursing home, or community event, they're spreading love—one visit at a time.

Adoptable Program

We don't just train dogs, we provide family companions

Domesti-PUPS is partnered with the the Tecumseh State Correctional Institution (TSCI), to provide vocational training programs for inmates. In this program we pull dogs from local shelters or private rehoming situations and provide them with 12 weeks of obedience training. The adoptable dog's training begins in this facility, and then continued in the community and your home to help make your relationship successful.



The dogs from our adoptables program will all make wonderful companions. Some are even well suited for emotional support dogs, other dogs may make great therapy dogs either for individuals or facilities.

PUPPIES

From time to time we do have puppies available for adoption. Unfortunately not every dog can go on to become a service dog so these dogs are dogs that have been determined not to be service dog candidates but will make wonderful pets or maybe even therapy companions!



CAREER CHANGE DOGS

What is a career change dog?

A career change dog is a dog that has been raised and trained in our service dog program and has been determined not to be a good fit for service work. Dog raised in the service dog program have advanced obedience training as well as health testing (depending on age of the dog).