

Canine Partners in Eastbourne. How an amazing dog is helping Eastbourne resident, Claire

Claire lives in Eastbourne and she was matched to a specially trained assistance dog called Ulli, who was trained by charity Canine Partners in 2005. The two of them had a bond like no other and soon became inseparable.

Not only did Ulli help Claire, who has the spinal condition transverse myelitis which affects her mobility, with everyday tasks, including getting dressed, fetching the post and anything she dropped – he also gave her back the confidence to go outside again.

But when the black goldendoodle was becoming too old to continue working and retired at the age of 12 from his role as an assistance dog, Claire had to make a big decision – whether or not to apply for another canine partner.

Although the decision was tough, she had at that point spent 10 years with Ulli, since he was two – years -old, and she knew the difference that having a working canine partner made to her life and how much more confidence she now had.

“I didn’t realise how much I was struggling until Ulli started to help. He boosted my energy levels,” said Claire, who is now one of Canine Partners’ trustees.

“Also, having to look after Ulli helped improve my health because I was using muscles I hadn’t been using because I was grooming him every day.”

But the pair had built such a close bond that she knew that no other dog would ever be the same. In the end, she decided that she should apply and see if the charity could provide her with the perfect match – a dog that would suit both her and Ulli.

Claire, who used to work for the Bank of Scotland, said: “Ulli worked until he was 12 years -old but by that time he had slowed right down.

“When Ulli retired, I knew I couldn’t be without a canine partner for any length of time because I knew the difference that having one made to my life. And as Ulli got older and couldn’t do so much I realised just how much he had been doing.

“I thought I may as well apply for a successor dog because you never know when a dog will come along but Ulli was my priority.

“It wasn’t that much different to apply for a successor dog as it was when I applied for Ulli but this time, when I was asked what difference a canine partner would make to my life I felt I could answer a little better because I knew how much difference Ulli had made.

“I felt disloyal to Ulli but I knew it was the right thing to do and that it was part of the process I had to go through.

“I’m sure a lot of people think a successor dog won’t be able to do things like the first. You have to approach it with a clear emotional mindset.”

Then Claire and Ulli met black labradoodle Frankland at the end of 2015 and she knew she had made the right decision.

Frankie came home to live with Claire and the now-retired Ulli. “Frankie was respectful of Ulli and they got on like a house on fire. Wherever Ulli went Frankie would follow.

“Ulli had to get used to watching Frankie help me with jobs and I had to leave Ulli behind when I went out with Frankland. It wasn’t easy but I had to do it for both Frankie and Ulli’s benefit.

“He picked up lots of things just by watching Ulli do them.

“Frankie is as mad as a hatter. He’s a very clever boy. He picks things up so quickly. He’s cheeky too and so much fun.

“I didn’t want another Ulli so I’m pleased at how different they are.”

Then Ulli died on the 22nd June 2016 – 10 days before his 13th birthday and six months after two-year-old Frankland moved in.

“When Ulli died it broke my heart. He was one in a million.

“Ulli was irreplaceable but I am lucky that I have been able to have two canine partners. I wouldn’t have had it any other way because it’s meant I have my Frankie Doodle. I think it was just meant to be.”

Frankland is one of over 400 working canine partners in the UK.

For more information about Canine Partners, future events or details on how to help, call 08456 580 480 or visit caninepartners.org.uk.

About Canine Partners

Canine Partners is a registered charity that assists people with disabilities to enjoy a greater independence and quality of life through the provision of specially trained dogs, whose well-being is a key consideration.

More than 1.2 million people in the UK use a wheelchair, and a significant number of those would benefit from a canine partner. The dogs are carefully matched to the applicant’s needs and lifestyle, no matter how challenging. They are trained to help with everyday tasks such as opening and shutting doors, unloading the washing machine, picking up dropped items, pressing buttons and switches and getting help in an emergency. The Charity is working in partnership with Help for Heroes, and aims to train dogs to meet the needs of people with even the most complex disabilities including members of HM Armed Forces.

These life transforming dogs also provide practical, physiological, psychological and social benefits including increased independence and confidence as well as increased motivation and self-esteem. A canine partner also brings companionship, a sense of security and increases social interaction.

Canine Partners receives no government funding and is wholly dependent on public donations and legacies.

**For further press information contact Rebecca Pearson,
P:01730 716115, E: rebeccap@caninepartners.org.uk**

**Canine Partners, Mill Lane, Heyshott, Midhurst, West Sussex GU29 0ED
T 08456 580480 F 08456 580481 E info@caninepartners.org.uk**

Visit Canine Partners’ Website - www.caninepartners.org.uk

Registered charity number 803680
Registered in Scotland SCO39050