

Includes:

Non-verbal

Dyspraxia

Tourette's

Social isolation

Covers:

Leaving the house

Road safety

Responsibility

Confidence

Family Dog Success Story

Rowen, Oak, Boogie and Dorothy

“Having Boogie and now Dorothy, the workshop advice and ongoing support from the Dogs for Good Family Dog Service has made a huge difference to all our lives.”

Thirteen-year-old Oak was diagnosed with autism when he was two years old and after the initial shock, his parents Rowen (44) and Eric Saunders (52) decided to empower themselves by researching the condition to find out what activities might help Oak.

Mum Rowen, said: “Our little boy, who had loved us, cuddled and responded to our touch and voices, was no longer there; instead he was a frightened, isolated shell. The Oak we knew and loved disappeared from our lives. He stopped communicating with us, lost all his speech and no longer made eye contact.

“As a parent, your instincts to help, support and protect your child kick in, and that’s exactly what we decided to do. We tried lots of different things, but a breakthrough really came because of Oak’s fascination with animals.”



For getting out



For making life possible



The family spent a weekend at a horse therapy centre and this resulted in incredible leaps forward for Oak – the main one being that he started to talk again. Another big part of Oak’s progress was down to the family’s two dogs; a cocker spaniel called Gypsy and a Cocker Spaniel x Cavalier King Charles Spaniel called Boogie.

Rowen’s research into available help pointed her towards Dogs for Good’s Family Dog workshops. The service, which has been running for 10 years, provides parents of children with autism with advice and long-term support about how to get the best out of their family dog, and Rowen found that the workshops were a brilliant source of help. Using the techniques she’d learned, she worked with Boogie to help Oak (then aged three years old).

“Boogie relished the training!” says Rowen and very soon, the family started to see lots of positive behaviour changes.

Rowen said: “Oak would get stressed and anxious when he had to get dressed and put his shoes on; he associated this with leaving the house and having to do something he didn’t want to do. The Family Dog workshops helped us come up with a plan where Boogie would bring Oak his socks, shoes and a jumper from Oak’s bedroom down to where he was playing in the living room.

“Boogie loved doing this and it was a delight to see and hear Oak smiling and laughing as he put on his socks and shoes, rather than the previous protests.”

They also noticed Oak was far happier to go out if it involved walking Boogie, so they took Boogie with them to the shops and park which made it much easier.

Boogie’s now ten and needs to rest his paws a little so the family, who live in Harlow in Essex, decided to get a new puppy - a spaniel/poodle cross called Dorothy Fraggie – who is continuing to build on the life-changing work that Boogie started.

Rowen’s refreshed her knowledge by attending some more Dogs for Good Family Dog workshops and found new ways to train Dorothy to help Oak, who has now also been diagnosed with dyspraxia and Tourette syndrome.



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Oak, who attends the autism hub at Passmores Academy in Harlow, is learning how to look after Dorothy, which gives him a new level of responsibility. Rowen said: “Boogie is still Oak’s number one and best friend, but having Dorothy teaches him how to be responsible; for example he has to pick up shoes and toys so that she doesn’t chew them.

In addition, Oak’s dyspraxia means that he can’t always judge how close moving cars are or how fast they’re travelling. “We’re teaching Dorothy road safety, which in turn is helping Oak, but the emphasis is being placed on Dorothy,” explains Rowen.

“Oak’s Tourette’s gets bad when he feels stressed but a cuddle with Dorothy helps to calm him down and Dorothy also helps to build his confidence to go out. He loves when people stop to admire her and chat to him.”

Recently, the family were even able to stay the whole evening at a friend’s birthday party because Oak was content with Dorothy by his side; usually he’d want to leave after five minutes.

Rowen added: “It was wonderful to socialise with friends properly instead of feeling that we have to rush away because Oak’s unhappy.

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