SSD Natalie Removes Barriers

Ceason Calabrese first learned about service dogs when she and her son, Carlisle, attended a music therapy class that was designed for children with autism. One of the other children in the class had a service dog, and Ceason started talking to the mother while they waited for their sons to complete their session. Those discussions continued over several weeks. The other mother highly encouraged Ceason to apply to Susquehanna Service Dogs to get a dog for Carlisle.

At that point, using a dog to act as emotional support for a child with autism was a new adventure. Carlisle had been diagnosed with autism early in his life, and was non-communicative, withdrawn, and was subject to bouts of anxiety that would result in periods of “meltdowns.” He would disappear in public and Ceason would not know where he was. She describes that as the “worst possible thing named Gnat. However, SSD ultimately determined to pair Gnat with another person who needed his size and strength. Carlisle was paired with another dog, but was insistent on the name. Of course, there couldn’t be two dogs with the same name, so for the first time in its history, SSD decided to change a dog’s name, and that’s how Carlisle’s new service dog became “Natalie.”

Since he’s been teamed up with Natalie, Carlisle’s verbal skills have improved immensely. In fact, Carlisle was a big part of the interview for this story. He said, “Before Natalie, my life was not good. I had problems with

“NATALIE” ON PG. 2
Decisions, decisions, decisions! We all make individual decisions every day. Some are simple. Some are not so simple. When will I get out of bed? What will I eat for breakfast? What car should I buy? How much money should I spend on entertainment this week? What insurance plan should I get? What do I want to do with my life? You get the picture.

It’s no different as a business. SSD makes decisions every day. Some are simple. Some are not so simple. Does the grass need mowed at the kennel? Yep, that’s simple. Which puppy should go with which raiser? Should we release a dog from the program? Should we change a process? Not so simple.

As individuals, what we all want to do is make informed decisions. We want to have the information we need in order to make the best decisions for ourselves and the people impacted by our decisions. We want to make decisions that align with our values. Again, it is not so different at SSD. We want to make informed decisions that align with our mission and vision. Many of our not-so-simple decisions might appear as though they are made easily and quickly when in actuality they are made with substantial thought and consideration, including consideration for industry standards and best practice, and more often than not have involved numerous discussions and action steps.

Providing information about how things are done—or even just confirming there is a decision making process—might be like a stitch in time. It is that thread that helps us draw together rather than pull apart. Not knowing or having information can create fear, panic, and distrust. Sharing doesn’t always alleviate those responses but more times than not it provides the forum for a healthy program culture.

We might make decisions today that we wouldn’t have made yesterday. We might make decisions next month that we wouldn’t make today. As we learn and grow we make decisions based on new knowledge, circumstances, values, and objectives. The important thing, as we transverse new (and old) territory, is to do it thoughtfully and with the goal of the organization at heart. When we do it together as a collective team of people working toward that goal, we will have a strong foundation for decisions and outcomes to strengthen our program mission.

“NATALIE” FROM PG. 1

communication and other issues. She turned everything around for me. Now my verbal skills are much better. Natalie is a good conversation starter. I have to communicate with others now.”

Natalie has learned to know when Carlisle is getting frustrated and is about to have problems with his behavior. She will automatically go to him and crawl up on his lap, apply pressure to him, and help him to forget the reason for his frustration.

Ceason is so thankful for Natalie and that she is in their family’s life. She has helped not only Carlisle, but also all of them. So much, that even though he is only in 7th grade, Carlisle started taking classes at Messiah College for engineering this fall. Natalie attends college with him, and is definitely a support. Another student in his class recognizes the importance of what Natalie offers and wishes that “there were dogs here for us when we get stressed out over tests and generally being away from home and having to deal with the pressures of college.”

For Carlisle and his family, Natalie has taken down barriers and become that bridge to understanding autism.
Nikon is a teenager! He’s grown to 81 pounds and is learning lap, visit, and comfort trainer. He’s had a great time with this semester’s game, Par for the Course.

Nikon had a very busy summer with lots of opportunities to practice greetings and demonstrate appropriate public behavior. He enjoyed a vacation to the Finger Lakes that included three other dogs, a hike at Cayuga, swimming in a creek, and visiting wineries. He visited the Ned Smith Festival in Millersburg and spent time at the SSD booth. Nikon’s first visit to church was also his first experience with a live band. He was relaxed and calm during the service, and happy to tuck under the seats. But the very best part of the visit was all of the hugs that he got from children after church. I stopped counting! We hosted a family reunion for Ted’s family with attendees ranging from toddlers through seniors, and a tiny dog. Nikon’s behavior was stellar—four paws on the floor, no barking, and no begging!

Nikon had the opportunity to attend Highmark’s United Way Scale of Hope event, and was rewarded for good behavior with a vanilla ice cream. He also did a meet and greet to kick off the Keystone Human Services Golf Tournament. It was hard to share the spotlight with 8-week-old SSD Scout and 4-month-old Honeysuckle, but he got his share of attention and lots of positive comments on his calm demeanor.

Nikon loves to interact with other dogs and it’s helpful to see how he adjusts his behavior and handles himself. He seemed a bit lost when his favorite playmate and “big brother,” SSD Barracks, went to Advanced Training in June. He enjoys Barracks’ weekends at home and their time outside. On class nights, we try to arrive at the kennel a bit early; the pre-class play allows Nikon to burn off some energy and interact with dogs that he doesn’t see often. Nikon also enjoyed a week-long visit at volunteers Peter and Betsy’s home, and the opportunity to spend time with their demo dogs SSD Midge and SSD Rossi. They helped him to understand the boundaries for interacting with mature canine ladies! And at the opposite end of the age spectrum, he welcomed 4-month-old Rosemary into our home and discovered how sharp puppy teeth are! We also welcomed SSD Patriot for a few weekends and SSD Midge for two weeks. Nikon was flexible and eager and willing to share his toys—and our vacuum has gotten a lot of use!

Our biggest challenge this quarter was the recent puppy outing to the Army Heritage Center in Carlisle. Did I mention that Nikon is a teenager now? There were dozens of dogs of all ages! We had power treats—hot dogs! We all gathered at the entrance and I was able to keep his attention with frequent clicking and treating and he finally relaxed in a down-stay. The trail walk was tough. Nikon wanted only to sniff and I was happy to get a few loose leash walking sprints. Our walk through the museum was calm and enjoyable. And the music for my drive home was Nikon’s snoring!
Summer Dog Camp for youth ages 10-14 kept us hopping and smiling for two weeks in July. A total of 24 campers had the opportunity to participate in fun activities while learning about our program and how to train service dogs.

Puppy Palooza! That is what the summer of 2016 will be known as for some time to come. We had 6 litters (48 puppies!) born in July and August. Thank you to the whelping volunteers and everyone else who made Puppy Palooza awesome!

The United Way Day of Caring allowed us to have some much needed projects accomplished at the facility. The hard working employees of HB McClure volunteered their time to stain part of our deck, weed and weed whack around the dog yard fence, weed the garden beds, paint a picnic table, and do general landscape work. Two weeks later volunteers from Highmark finished staining the deck, power washed our porch railing, and painted shutters. Not only are we very grateful but we look a lot better too!

Susquehanna Service Dogs was honored to host the 2016 ADI Trainers Conference in September at Camp Hebron. For three days, we learned from speakers Marina Phillips, Jane Russenberger, Helen West, Dr. Eldin Leighton, Dr. Kevin Conrad, and the many North American service dog organizations who attended. We’ve already implemented some of the great things we learned!

Dogs on Campus is growing! Shippensburg University has been added to the universities raising puppies for SSD. We now have one dog at Shippensburg, one at Bloomsburg University, four at Millersville University, twelve at Penn State University, and three at Dickinson College. We are currently in discussion with several other universities as well.
Meet the Staff: Training Department

Trainer by definition means a person who teaches skills to people or animals and prepares them for a job, activity, or sport. Trainer in reality means that, and much more.

SSD Trainers, Lauren Holtz and Katie Grube, teach skills to our SSD dogs and prepare them for the jobs that will mitigate the disabilities of their future partners. And they do much more.

Dogs coming into Advanced Training already know Katie and Lauren. They are involved with each dog, often from birth. One of the first things they do is conduct the Behavior Checklist (BCL) around 8 weeks of age in order to observe and score the puppies. (This is a scoring system developed by Dr. James Serpell, University of Pennsylvania, in collaboration with guide dog and service dog organizations and is used corporately by many ADI accredited programs.) In addition to that early assessment, Lauren and Katie help conduct 12 month and semester evaluations on the older dogs.

They also teach Purple and Green puppy classes that begin early in the dog’s life. This provides the opportunity for them to observe dogs, support raisers, and impart knowledge and SSD criteria. Throughout this time, Lauren and Katie develop relationships with both dogs and raisers. Those relationships are invaluable and provide a strong foundation for the work they do.

Another key responsibility is helping dogs and partners through team training. This is the two and a half week intensive training that occurs in order to certify the new teams and provide the assistance needed to start off the partnerships with the best chance for success.

They also oversee the public training that occurs Tuesday and Thursday morning with the dogs in advanced training and volunteer help, as well as the Walk and Cuddle program. Good trainers are fully aware of the people they are preparing dogs for and Katie and Lauren are no exception. They get to know partners by participating in applicant interviews, reviewing applications, meeting with the Partner Coordinator, and participating in Meet the Dogs. This not only gives them information they need to train for specific tasks but also provides the human connection that motivates us all to be part of changed lives.

Lauren and Katie help update the team training manual and puppy manual, help with Summer Dog Camp, conduct home visits, act as liaisons to teams for the working life of the dog, and help with annual retesting, Partners Day, Puppy Raiser Day of Fun, special puppy outings, and Owner Trained dog private sessions.

Some of the not so glamorous roles they do with excellence? Maintain training equipment, clean kennels and kennel yard, pick up dog food orders, and help maintain the SSD property and vehicles.

Both trainers are enthusiastic and passionate about their work and about the mission of SSD and are willing to do whatever is needed for all of us to be successful. Their energy and desire to do what’s right for the dogs, raisers, partners, and the overall program is evident. SSD is fortunate to have both Lauren and Katie on the team!

“I love watching dogs learn to work with their partners and having all the training, from puppies to adults, come together.”

-Katie Grube

“My favorite part of my job is the fact that I get to take my passion for canine cognition and behavior and harness it to make people’s lives better. To watch a beautifully working human-canine team, who are working in sync with each other’s needs, is such a dream to watch. I feel lucky to play a small part in everything that went into making them a successful match and team.”

-Lauren Holtz
Advanced Training marks the next phase in a puppy’s training. Puppy raisers drop the dogs off at the kennel at the Susquehanna Service Dogs’ Complex and the dogs live there from Monday through Friday. From then on, raisers only see the dogs on weekends.

Orientation and Evaluations

We’re excited to start a new orientation program for our new Advanced Training dogs, based on ideas we learned at the Assistance Dogs International North American Trainer’s Conference! Raisers will now officially “turn in” the dog they raised. Each dog will get their new collar, be fitted for their new green harness, and meet their kennelmates. Raisers will get a tour of the kennel and learn about the process of picking up and dropping off the dogs during weekends.

The first two weeks in the kennel are an evaluation period. We go over the Star Behaviors, observe how the dog reacts to life in the kennel, and take the dog in public. We want to find out if the life of a service dog will make that dog happy. Each dog tries wearing a balance harness to see if they’re comfortable in it. We do some hearing work with the dogs and practice walking next to a wheelchair. During this time, we may make decisions to release dogs from the program if they show us that they aren’t happy with the lifestyle.

A Day in the Life of an Advanced Training Dog

In the morning, our staff take the dogs outside to potty, feed them, and let them run in the field to release some energy and just be dogs. If it’s Monday, Wednesday, or Friday, each dog will then have a training session. If it’s Tuesday or Thursday, we load the dogs into the sprinter van and go out in public, where our public volunteers work with the dogs.

At noon, the dogs go outside for a long play break. In the afternoon, they each have another training session. Throughout the day, the dogs also get crate time. This is one of the reasons why crate training is so important!

On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, volunteers come to the kennel for the Walk and Cuddle program. Each volunteer takes a dog on a dog walk, where the dog is free to sniff and explore (on a loose leash, of course!); spends time snuggling with the dog; and gives the dog playtime with stuffed toys.

In the evenings, the dogs are fed and spend more time in the field. We rotate which dogs run in the field together. Thanks to volunteer Matt Makara for redesigning the field with enrichment items for the dogs!

Finally, the dogs get one more chance to go outside before they go to sleep for the night.

Training

Advanced Training is broken into two semesters. In the first semester, the dogs are taught more general behaviors, such as formal retrieves, and polish the cues they already know. This is the time when we figure out what type of work the dog will be good at. By the second semester, the dogs are usually tentatively matched with their partners, so they begin learning the tasks and behaviors their partners need them to perform.

For example, if the person speaks quietly when interacting with the dog, then we will speak quietly when we train that dog. We take note of a person’s gait and train the dog to work with someone with that gait. Formal retrieves become more specific so the dog is retrieving and delivering items to the person just the way the person needs them.

This is also the time when we learn where the dog will sleep at night and whether they’ll be allowed on furniture.

A lot goes into each dog to make sure they are individually trained to meet the unique needs of their partner!

DID YOU KNOW?

The cost of training a dog increases as soon as the dog enters advanced training. SSD pays for staff time to train and care for the dog, vet bills, transportation, and food. It all adds up, which is why a fully trained service dog is worth $30,000.
All of our service dogs in training are crate trained. Until they’re 16 weeks old, they ride in a crate in the car. At home or at the office, our puppies spend time in crates. They’ll spend time crated while they’re in advanced training, and they will most likely spend some time in a crate after they’re placed as working service dogs.

The goal is for the dog to go into their crate on cue (“kennel”) and then be able to spend at least 8 consecutive hours quietly relaxing inside with the door closed. The dog should be able to relax quietly in their crate overnight, during the day, when they’re alone, and when people are around.

There’s a misconception that crate time is a punishment, but that could not be farther from the truth. A dog’s crate is their safe spot. Think of the crate as the dog’s bedroom. It’s a place to relax, where they don’t need to think about working.

**How to crate train your dog**

To help your dog enjoy being in their crate, start by putting the crate in an area where your dog will still be able to see people. You don’t want your dog to be isolated from everyone when they’re in their crate. You can also include a soft blanket and a safe, favorite toy.

Introduce your dog to the crate simply by tossing a piece of dog food inside. Let your dog go inside to eat it, but leave the door open. If your dog chooses to stay inside the crate, great! Leave the door open and keep tossing kibble inside every few seconds. If your dog chooses to exit the crate during this exercise, that’s okay, too.

Once you’ve introduced the crate, feed your dog a meal inside it at least once a day. Soon, your dog will associate good things (food and mealtime!) with the crate.

When your dog is inside the crate, it’s really important NOT to let them out if they whine or bark. If you let them out every time they whine or bark, they’ll learn that making noise is the way to get out of the crate. Only let them out after they’ve been quiet for a little while. This part of crate training can be very challenging for puppy raisers because some dogs can be very determined barkers! But stay strong and wait them out. You, our trainers, and the dog’s future partner will all benefit.

Once your dog is comfortable being quiet in their crate, move the crate to different locations and add challenges! Your dog should be able to relax quietly and calmly in their crate when:

- Other dogs are crated nearby
- Other dogs are off leash around the crate
- You’re working with another dog (Team up with a friend, if you don’t have two dogs.)
- The crate is outside
- Adults or children are playing or working nearby
- The doorbell rings or someone knocks on the door
- There’s a thunderstorm

If you have questions about crate training your SSD dog, please don’t hesitate to ask a trainer or a mentor puppy raiser.

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**Save the Date!**

Nov 29: Support SSD on #GivingTuesday

Jan 28-29: Chocolatefest Weekend, Hershey, PA

More information is available at KeystoneHumanServices.org/SSD

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**Thank you to everyone who donated to support SSD!**
Black Friday. Cyber Monday.

#GIVINGTUESDAY™

November 29, 2016

Join Susquehanna Service Dogs for 24 hours of giving to support vet care for our puppies in training!

By the Numbers

July-September

6 Litters born
48 puppies total

9 Dogs joined SSD from other programs

13 Dogs left SSD for other programs

117 Total puppies in training

14 Dogs in Advanced Training
Aunt Laura, Bahama, Barracks, Coco, Cookie Dough, Curie, Fiji, Hunter, Louis, Massey, Maya, Patriot, Tiffany, Wes

34,000 Average volunteer hours