

Lawn mom thankful for Lions organization's autism guide dog program



LAWN, N.L. - The Lions Foundation of Canada's autism assistance dog guide program is helping to saves lives.

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You have to look no further than Lawn mother Lisa Morhart and her daughter Sonnet for proof.

Sonnet graduated from the program in December, according to a news release from the organization.

Morhart recently shared a story involving the family's dog guide Trenton.

"Our first outing – where my daughter was tethered around her waist to Trenton – went really well," she explained in the release.

"I found myself thinking, I won't need to use the 'Halt!' command today. Sonnet was very calm, and she walked in an orderly fashion at a consistent pace. Normally, she is frantic and all over the place. Trenton stopped every once in a while to look up at me for little assurances and approval."

Morhart said things were going great until six-year-old Sonnet's fascination with water nearly lead to tragedy.

Sonnet hasn't met a puddle yet that she doesn't want to jump in, Morhart said.

“That day, as we were leaving the grocery store, I noticed that daylight was fading. It was getting quite dark outside. As we walked towards the car, Sonnet noticed a gigantic puddle in the middle of a very busy parking lot. She ran for the puddle – and straight towards an oncoming pickup truck and car,” Morhart said.

Morhart screamed her daughter's name but Sonnet was unfazed, so she tried a different tactic.

She yelled, “Halt!”

Trenton immediately dropped to the ground, stopping Sonnet in her tracks, a split second before both vehicles drove through the puddle.

“It could not have been a closer call,” Morhart said.

Some 348 clients of all ages have graduated from the Lions Foundation of Canada's autism assistance dog guide program since its inception in 2009.

The dog guides provide safety, companionship and unconditional love for children with autism. They also provide life-changing physical, emotional, and intellectual support. By offering a calming relief for children in high anxiety situations, they reduce the stress commonly experienced in public places.

Lions Foundation of Canada created Canine Vision Canada in 1985 to assist Canadians with visual impairments. In addition to vision and autism, dog guide programs now include hearing ear, service, seizure response and diabetic alert.

More than 2,600 dog guides have been placed with individuals across Canada so far.

The cost of raising, training, and placing a dog guide is approximately \$25,000, none of which is passed on to the applicant. The Lions Foundation of Canada receives no government funding.

“We have taken to calling Trenton our ‘hero dog’, so I want to express my thanks to the donors, supporters and staff at Dog Guides Canada,” Morhart said.