

CCJHS Welcomes Canine Service Dogs



Thirteen year old Denny Belliveau's mobility has greatly improved with the assistance of his service dog Prince, who was trained at Nova Institution's Pawsitive Directions Canine Program. Denny and Prince have been attending Central Colchester Junior High School together for the past few months. (Harrington Photo)

By Linda Harrington

Thirteen year old Denali Belliveau (or Denny as he is often called) is a Grade 7 student at Central Colchester Junior High. He brings a very special friend to school every day, a four legged canine buddy called Prince.

Nova's Prince Edward is a trained service dog from the Pawsitive Directions Canine Program at Nova Institution, the Federal Prison for Women.

Heather A. Logan, Program facilitator, says Prince began his training at Nova Institution about 2 years ago. He was found at the Charlottetown, PEI Humane Society and Heather behaviour tested him before bringing him to the Nova Institution. "Prince is a purebred black and white dog of exceptional temperament," laughs Heather, in regard to the fact his breed is actually unknown. "His early obedience training took place without a hitch."

The Pawsitive Directions Canine Program has been written, implemented and facilitated by Heather A. Logan of Cloverfield Animal Behaviour Services. This program was first started in 1996 at the Nova Institution for Women, and has 3 phases.

Phase 1 introduces the women to the basics of dog training, grooming and animal behaviour; it allows the trainers to earn a total of 8 certificates using Heather's trained dogs.

In Phase 2 the trainer can adopt a fulltime dog that has been rescued from a shelter. In this phase they have an opportunity to earn 6 certificates.

Phase 3 moves the dog's training in the direction needed for that of a Service Dog. The Trainers work with the families or individuals requiring a Service Dog for a full year. Each dog is prepared to address the needs of the person doing the adopting.

The overall goal of the program is to train each dog as a Service Dog for clients with a variety of challenges. The challenges include autism, cerebral palsy, sight impairment, stroke victims, polio survivors and brain injuries.

In the past 15 years Pawsitive Directions has trained and placed 54 dogs. Each dog is tested and evaluated at each step along the way. If a dog does not make it through as a Service Dog, our next priority is to adopt them out to a senior citizen; the final

option is an adoption as a family pet.

The Trainers at Nova Institution care for and train the dogs 24/7. The method used is Operant Conditioning Behaviour Analysis. The dog learns to earn his living by being rewarded for good behaviour. Punishment is not used.

Denny's parents, Tina and Darrin Belliveau, first heard about Pawsitive Directions from Denny's friend Alex Chiasson, who was in the process of having a dog trained.

Denny has an undiagnosed global developmental delay (which affects areas of development from his fine and gross motor, cognitive, speech). He also has issues with his bones and joints which limit his mobility. This sometimes makes walking difficult for Denny and he has had to resort to using a wheelchair and/or walker at times.

Tina and Darrin were hopeful a dog, once trained with his harness, would be able to help Denny with his mobility instead of having to rely on his parents as had been necessary in the past.

Prince was adopted by the family in May of this year and the Belliveau's are very pleased with what this has meant for their son. "Prince has become inseparable from Denny. Since Denny has learned and assumed the responsibility of caring for Prince, his self-confidence has exploded, his language skills and independence has mushroomed beyond what we ever would have expected," says Darrin, "But most importantly to Denny, he has a new best friend."

Denny's parents feel having Prince in the family has reduced the stress level tremendously because they know while Denny is at home, in school and in the community he and Prince are together. They have each other for support, both literally and figuratively.

Prince travels on the wheelchair accessible bus with Denny, to and from school, assisting him on the stairs. He enables Denny to move about the school more easily, without the worry of being bumped over in the hallways.

Denny is able to take the stairs between classrooms with more ease than before says his mother, Tina, "Denny was not at all comfortable doing the stairs without Prince (when he first tried them during an orientation while he was still attending North River Elementary) but once he had Prince at the school with him, he didn't think twice about doing the same set of stairs."

Prince is also trained to pick things up for Denny, useful at times when Denny's mobility is suffering. He can also find Denny by scent (not that Denny wanders off but he speaks very low, and when you call to him sometimes his reply can't be heard).

Darrin Belliveau has noticed Denny has more confidence to stand up in front of his peers, something he was quite uncomfortable with before adopting Prince.

CCJHS teacher Susan Smith has nothing but high praise for the canine student in attendance and for the acceptance by the student population. "Our Junior High students have been amazing; we haven't had to talk to one student about misbehavior around Prince. They all go out of their way to make sure any bits of food are picked up and to make sure they don't interfere in his work with Denny," says Susan.

Prince wears a special vest when he is working. The students attended an assembly before Prince started coming to the school, which helped them understand what they needed to do when they see Prince wearing his vest. No one is allowed to approach or feed Prince when he is working, which Susan says can be a challenge. "Prince is such a beautiful dog and he wags his tail when he sees you, so the first instinct, even with staff, is to reach out and pat him. The students have shown great discipline and maturity."

Susan is very impressed by the positive influences of having Prince in the school. "Seeing Prince working with Denny allows the students to have an understanding of other people, and the differences they experience in their daily lives. They are able to see how we all need different types of support to be successful," she says.

Tina and Darrin Belliveau are very appreciative for the support of both North River Elementary (where Denny attended last year)

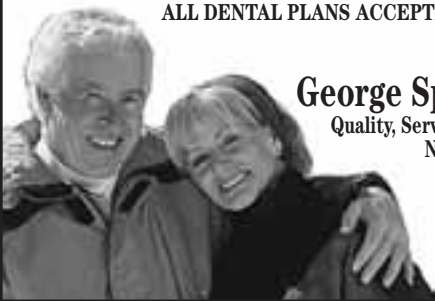
and Central Colchester Junior High. "Susan Smith has been extremely supportive and has put many hours into preparing the school environment and preparing staff and students for Prince's presence in the school. The students have been amazing in their vigilance to follow the rules around Prince, so Prince can stay focused on what he is supposed to be doing for Denny."

Heather Logan often drops by the school to check on Prince's progress. "In late May, Denny and Prince were welcomed at North River Elementary School. The Principal and staff, as well as the entire student body were incredibly positive and helpful as this team learned to work in the school environment. I was concerned when it was time to make the move to the Junior High in Onslow with 500 new students. The principal, Verta Miller, teacher Susan Smith along with every other staff member welcomed the new student and his wonder dog "Prince" with open arms. I was given permission to be at the school as often as necessary to help with the transition. Susan Smith gave up several days of her summer vacation to allow us to train in the empty school. Denny, Prince and Denny's exceptional family put in many hours of training to make this project a success. The feeling of absolute joy the trainers and I experience when we see this young lad and his dog working independently is incredible," says Heather.

CCJHS is the only school in Nova Scotia to currently have service dogs on site. A second service dog has been undergoing additional training and will be returning to CCJHS in about a month.



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DATE	SITE	TIME
Sat., Oct. 30, 2010	Hospital Auxiliary Hub Bub Cobequid Education Centre Lorne St., Truro	9:00 – 1:00
Thurs., Nov. 4, 2010	Truro Fire Station Victoria St., Truro	1:00 – 6:00
Mon., Nov. 8, 2010	Village Hall (Fire Hall) Pictou Rd., Bible Hill	10:00 – 12:00 1:30 – 4:00
Thurs., Nov. 18, 2010	Debert Fire Hall Carter Rd., Debert	10:00 – 12:00 1:30 – 5:30
Sat., Nov. 20, 2010	Truro Fire Station Victoria St., Truro	9:00 – 11:30 1:00 – 3:00
Tues., Nov. 23, 2010	Faith Baptist Church Station Rd., Great Village	3:00 – 7:00
Thurs., Nov. 25, 2010	Village Hall (Fire Hall) Pictou Rd., Bible Hill	10:00 – 12:00 1:30 – 4:00

For more information call Public Health Services, Colchester East Hants Health Authority - 893-5820.