

Dear Family,

I am writing to update you on my progress in service dog training. This month, I primarily focused on learning... This month I took a trip to another service dog college where I spent 16 days with my brother Odin's trainer. Initially I was a bit stressed because of the novel environment but what caused me the most anxiety was having to navigate grated stairs, something I hadn't done before. It was really confusing because I knew there was a surface to step on yet I could see through it which made me believe I could fall through. Being shown patience and encouragement helped me to gain confidence on each step and with 20-30 reps per day, I soon conquered the stairs!! As an added bonus all that work, and a strict diet, served as a means of exercise which helped me lose two pounds. In addition to the stairs I primarily focused on "lets-go" and loose-leash walking" which means maintaining position and focusing on my handler when walking.

Some other things that I am learning include... I am learning to auto-settle when going into my crate and remaining in the down position when the crate door is opened and until cued "release". I am also learning "belly-up" which means turning over onto my back, showing my belly. I have accomplished two-thirds of this behavior. Additionally, I am learning "relax" which means that when I'm in the "down" position and my handler isn't engaging me, I relax my mind and body and place and maintain my chin on the ground. I am also breaking my habit of settling on my haunches and have gotten better at correctly turning into my handler when auto-settling. "Relax" also lets me know that my two-legged doesn't need me at that time and I can just chill or take a nap if I want.

I am good at... SLEEPING! I love to sleep! Training-wise I am good at loose-leash walking and focus when indoors and without other dogs around. I am also pretty good at "under" which initial and current expectations means going under my handler's legs and settling when he or she is in a sitting position. I am also good with my impulse control around strangers and while being petted.

I am still struggling with... maintaining focus outdoors and especially around birds. I am a dog, after all, and it always seems like the birdies are inviting me to play but I know I have a job to do and I will continue working on my impulse control. Although I know "sit" I struggle with duration as I tend to auto-settle very quickly thereafter. I also struggle with giving consent and allowing my sensitive paws to be handled and my nails trimmed but I have recently made progress therein and am confident that with consistent practice I'll get better. My trainers understand that they are asking a lot from me and that struggling is a normal part of the process and I really appreciate them and their patience.

I have the most fun when...

Take a wild guess?? Sleeping, duh! But I also enjoy free time running around the dog run and productive engagement with my handler because it means I earn food and praise.

My favorite toy is... a green "pickle" which I can extract kibble from but I also enjoyed a black KONG bone which I ran around the dog run with it in my mouth.

Wags & Kisses,

Olivia



Tender Loving
Canines

Unlike the guide dog training, the formal training for the service dog track does not take place on our campus. These pups receive their formal training in a prison setting where they are assigned to a specific inmate trainer and that person, under staff supervision, will teach the pup all the commands that a service dog must have to be successful. This is an extraordinary program that not only provides the pup with one on one training but also provides the qualified inmates that have been carefully screened to do this work, the opportunity to give back to the community as well as learn a skill that they can put to use when they are released.