

Northfield organization Believet places first service dog with client

By Kevin Krein kkrein@northfieldnews.com Feb 16, 2016



Service dog Claire is paired with Kristian Gaasland through Believet, a Northfield area organization.
(Photo provided)

Rescuing exceptional dogs to serve an extraordinary role is no easy task.

But for Believet, a Northfield organization that looks to pair service dogs, free of charge, with veterans suffering from combat-related injuries or disabilities, it was a welcomed venture.

“These folks, a lot of the time, are looking for hope, and are looking for answers,” said Sam Daly, proprietor of Northfield Kennels and one of the partners involved in Believet, of the veterans the organization works with.

For the U.S. veteran who now has a service dog by his side thanks to Believet, it provided a “second chance.”

Following 18 months of training, Believet placed its first service dog, Claire, with client Kristian Gaasland, a U.S. Army veteran living in Richfield.

“This gives me something more to do,” Gaasland said. “I live alone, and have for 10 years. And now someone is happy to see me when I come home.”

Daly was moved to start Believet following his time spent in the military where he trained explosive detection dogs. The longer he was involved with the Marine Corps as a civilian contractor, the more he felt like young service members needed his help in other ways.

Both he and Believet Executive Director John Sinning agree that this first placement with Gaasland was a unique situation.

“A lot of people get discouraged by the idea that it could take 18 months to train and place a dog,” Daly said. “Kristian was able to get out of the house, put us on his schedule, and come down here once or twice a week to train with us and Claire. The act of doing that is just hopeful.”

Daly said it doesn't provide instant answers, but it provides an opportunity for engagement, something both he and Sinning agree is paramount in the placement of a service dog with a veteran.

Funding the need

Since starting Believet, one of the difficulties Daly and Sinning have had to overcome was finding the funding sources to support their efforts.

Sinning said placing Claire with Gaasland came together with funding from multiple avenues.

“It was the combined efforts of in-kind efforts from myself, Sam and the third partner in Believet, Justin Ivers, as well as enough donations, that made it happen,” he said. “It's that same combination that will make the next placement happen, too.”

“We've done a lot of this out-of-pocket and from working with friends and family,” added Daly. “You might say this was a pilot program — we needed to prove we could deliver a very well-trained psychiatric service dog.”

Sinning said despite the difficulties finding donations for Believet, he and Daly both felt that 2015 was a successful year.

“We got organized, we have an infrastructure in place, we demonstrated success, we raised awareness, we raised money and we got the dog from where she was when we adopted her from an animal shelter, out to graduation and placement,” he said. “From that perspective, our goals were met.”

Looking ahead

In 2016, Sinning and Daly are looking to the next five years by revising their business plan, setting different goals and developing partnerships with other like-minded organizations.

Sinning said they will begin working with three new dogs this spring, all of whom are around 10 months old. He noted that they have already been in training for service since they were born. And because of that, it cuts down on the amount of training Believet will have to do and may allow them to deliver the dogs to clients before the end of the year.

The pair is also planning to place a second service dog with another client in the coming weeks.

For more information on the organization, its mission or how to donate, visit believet.org.

Kevin Krein covers arts and entertainment, non-profits, community events and people, and matters relating to Rice County and the surrounding townships for the Northfield News and the Faribault Daily News. You can reach him at **507-645-1106**, or follow him on Twitter: [@NfldNewsKevin](https://twitter.com/NfldNewsKevin).

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