

Alex's Story

A Long Version

Alex is scheduled to receive his Service Dog in 2009. His dog is currently being trained at USP - Hazelton, Bruceton Mills, WV



The volunteers of **paws4people™**, **paws4prisons™** and the **SlammerDogZ™** Programs are proud to announce the selection of Alex, a six-year old, who has Mitochondria Encephalomyopathy, as a Private Placement Candidate for a Service / Rehabilitative Assistance Dog.

Here is Alex's story as told by his Mother:



My husband and I started out our journey with a special needs child nearly six years ago. Alex came into our world on February 20th 2003. Our first few months with Alex were pretty uneventful. Our only challenge was that his Father is a quadriplegic due to a car accident. When he was four months old we began to question things with Alex; the first being Alex's low muscle tone and the absence of head control. His eyes were also turned in and he suffered from reflux. From that point on our world was turned upside down. Over the next two years we strived to find the cause of many different symptoms that emerged; constant involuntary movements, strabismus, FTT, seizures, severe scoliosis, paralysis of eye movements, delayed gastric motility, asthma, and severe hypotonia. After numerous blood tests, EMGs, a nerve conductivity test, two lumbar punctures, two muscle biopsies and two MRIs, we finally received an answer from a physician in Atlanta, GA. Alex was diagnosed with

Mitochondria Encephalomyopathy. This disease is a defect in the way one processes energy and the mitochondria are considered the "powerhouses" in our bodies. If there is a defect in the mitochondria, it can affect any of the organs in the body.

The day we received this dreaded test result packet, our whole world came crashing down. Since then, we have done nothing but fight for our son, and Alex has done nothing but strive to be totally amazing. He still has no head control and cannot sit or stand unsupported. Speech and eating are very difficult for him due to his movement disorder. He had fundoplication surgery for his reflux in August of 2006 and he is now fed by a G Tube which provides him with 75% of his nutrition. In July of 2008 this surgery had to be redone and due to complications, Alex spent the week following the surgery in Intensive Care. Alex will also eventually have to have growth rods surgically placed in his spine in order to control its curvature. This surgery will have to be done every six-to-nine months until his spine is thoroughly fused. Alex has also had two eye surgeries to correct his strabismus and has had to be put under anesthesia more times than I can count.

Alex receives homebound instruction through our public school system, due to his extensive medical needs and his high risk of infection. He has one teacher, a physical therapist, an occupational therapist, a feeding therapist, and a speech therapist, all of whom come to our home each week to provide his treatments. Alex also participates in a therapeutic horseback riding program and attends private therapy twice weekly at a pediatric therapy clinic. Additionally, Alex has a special room in our home which was created and provided by the *Make A Wish Foundation*. His special room contains swings and extensive therapy equipment he must use regularly. All of these therapies, doctors appointments, and tests leave little time for our boy to be "just Alex." However, he knows nothing different in his life and continues to smile through it all. He does understand everything going on around him, but is unable to speak.

Alex has a pure, unconditional love for animals. He loves to pet them, feel their soft fur, and "communicate" with them in his own special way. He is truly drawn to them. We owned a very special Cocker Spaniel named Macey for 15 years. She was our "baby" until Alex was born. She would be the first one up looking over Alex's bassinet when he awoke in the middle of the night as a newborn. She followed me into his room every morning. She became the most docile loyal dog when it came to Alex. She was his protector and sensed every movement he made in the middle of the night. Macey could hear his cry before we ever did. Sadly, in September 2008, Macey developed lung cancer and was coughing up blood. Just 12 hours later we had to make the most heartbreaking decision of our life to have her put to sleep. I

know the void of having our Macey will never be filled, but we know we must move on. Alex needs a special companion.

We found out about the paws4people foundation through a friend of ours and what an amazing organization! We were thrilled when they contacted us to say they wanted Alex! We are so excited to have been chosen to be a part of this incredible program and we are so looking forward to all of the possibilities that lie ahead with Alex's new dog!

There are so many benefits we see to having a Service Dog for Alex. The main benefit we see for Alex is the companionship and social reasons, especially on walks around our neighborhood. I also feel like a dog would help Alex cope with hospital visits and different doctor's appointments. The dog would also be perfect for helping Alex during some of his therapies. I believe the dog will enable Alex to be more independent. The dog could pick things up that Alex drops, intentionally and unintentionally. The dog could also protect Alex from running into hard surfaces when he scoots across the floor on his back. Alex's dog could retrieve syringes and other medical equipment when my hands are tied up with Alex. The dog could turn off lights and push the elevator button in our house. Maybe the dog could even push Alex on his swing. There are just so many possibilities. Alex's Dad could really use the help when caring for Alex also, even when transporting him from room to room. There are just so many possibilities with a paws4people dog for Alex and we are thrilled to be a part of this process. Alex has been through so much in these last 6 years, more than you could ever imagine. It will be so nice to have such a warm friendly companion to go through this journey with him.

Thank you, Kathy and Matt

Click Here to Watch a Video about Alex's World: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUBRTCyk6V0>

To help Alex and others get their Assistance Dogs, please go to: <http://www.Alex.paws4people.org>

