



Meet Our Clients | Case Study

Ruth Spurr and Willow

Ruth Spurr (24) from South Buckinghamshire suffers from Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, which causes multi systemic problems throughout her body. Her pet dog Willow has recently fully qualified as her Assistance Dog, after training with Dog A.I.D., one of the fastest partnerships to qualify.

This is their story...



I live at home with the support of carer's/PA's and of course my Willow. I used to work as a support worker for young adults with complex brain injuries, before my health deteriorated in 2014. Due to my illness I can't work anymore but when I'm well enough and able I do talks to Brownies, Guides and local groups on disability, being different and showcasing Willow and the difference she and Dog A.I.D. have made to my life.

I have Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, (officially diagnosed in December 2015 after years of not knowing/being told nothing was wrong/seeing doctor after doctor). EDS are a rare group of genetic connective tissue disorders affecting the quality of collagen in every part of the body. I have EDS Type 3, (the hypermobility type) and it causes multi systemic problems throughout my body and organs including my joints, bladder, bowel, heart and immune system. I also have secondary conditions and complications including POTS (Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome), MCAD (Mast Cell Activation Disorder) and over the last four years I've fought and overcome sepsis (a serious blood infection) nine times now. I'm also a full-time wheelchair user.

My conditions mean daily life is harder than most and you rely heavily on family, friends and carers to do the smallest of things. Being a full-time wheelchair user means just bending down to pick things up is difficult, carrying items to and from one place, opening doors, doing household chores, getting undressed and basically being anything other than independent. Then Willow came along and changed all that.

I got Willow on 12/05/2016, she is a Tibetan Terrier x Bichon Frise and will be three years old in January. I didn't get Willow with the intention of her becoming my Assistance Dog, she was my pet first. It was only through a close friend I found out about Dog A.I.D., and for the first time thought maybe having an Assistance Dog could be possible. Because Dog A.I.D., helps you train your own pet dog, no matter the breed (if they have the right temperament) I realised that maybe Willow could be that dog and change my life - not just emotionally but practically too. I applied to Dog A.I.D. at the end of 2016 but unfortunately there was no trainers in my area at the time. So, in the mean time I put all my efforts into training Willow until I could work with Dog A.I.D. officially and that amazing day came in April 2018.

The training with Dog A.I.D. was brilliant, everyone was so welcoming and supportive, I loved every second of it. The lady I had been using locally to help with training volunteered to become a Dog A.I.D. trainer, so we progressed quickly as she knew both Willow and myself so well. Training is so empowering to me and gives me something to focus on away from my illness and treatments. So much so, we became one of the fastest to qualify - completing all three levels to full qualification in just under five months, which is incredible in itself!



Willow's tasks are so varied, from opening and closing doors in my flat to fetching the post, helping me get undressed and then taking the washing out. She is always on hand to pick up anything I drop when in my chair and she knows specific items like 'find medicines', 'find drink', 'find phone' and can fetch these from anywhere in the flat no matter where I've left them. We've also trained her to fetch my alarm when I collapse and find help if I'm unconscious.

In June this was put into practice, when I suffered a severe burn and collapsed onto the kitchen floor. When I woke up minutes later, there was Willow lying on my chest, with my phone in her mouth that she had just fetched from the lounge. With that I called the ambulance and once in hospital I spent the first 12 days in intensive care, before stepping down to a ward. Willow is not only my Assistance Dog, she is my real-life hero too.

Willow has not only made a difference to my life, she has transformed my life. Before I got her I was really struggling to see beyond my illness, my hospital stays and my time back and forth to intensive care - I wasn't living, I was just surviving. Willow gave me hope again, gave me a purpose and a zest for life that had been lost for so long.

Now I have Willow by my side anything is possible, I can be so much more independent because the tasks others used to have to do for me, Willow can now do. Willow gives me confidence when out and about, she is a focus and an icebreaker for strangers who very often used to just ignore me. Being in a wheelchair is difficult enough without feeling isolated and cut off.

With Willow that's no more, everyone warms to her and wants to say hello, they see her working and see what a difference she makes and they want to ask questions. Then before you know it, they've realised I'm just a normal young woman in my 20's like anyone else, I just happen to be in a wheelchair and have some tubes to do the jobs my body doesn't. However, that doesn't define all of me and I'm so much more than that, people just have to take the chance to get to know me and with Willow by my side they do.



I'm so grateful to Dog A.I.D. and my trainer Laura Ward, as without them I wouldn't be where I am today. They've given me a new lease of life and best of all I'm doing it with my best friend by my side. Willow is everything to me and although I can't change my illness or what the future holds, I know it'll be okay as whatever happens Willow is with me and together we're an unstoppable team.

In 2019, Willow was honoured with a "Shining World Heroine Award for the life changing difference she has made to Ruth's Life ...

By helping us to transform lives, you are helping many more people throughout the UK just like Ruth ...

Please consider supporting our work today in whatever way you can ...

Thank You

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