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Kane & Wings

are a Lifeline to Independence

Vision Rehabilitation services that increase safety, confidence, and independence.

BY SUE DRADDY



Zach trains at Yates Cider Mill in Rochester Hills, Michigan.



Kane and Wings with their new family- Wings, sister Jennifer, Kane (back)- Zach, grandmother, Kayla, and mom Jeannine.



When high schooler Kayla decided to attend Leader Dogs for the Blind's Teen Summer Camp in Rochester Hills, Michigan, she hoped to meet new friends and further develop her independence as a visually impaired teen making her way in a sighted world. She could not have known how profoundly her decision would affect her entire family.

Both Kayla and her brother, Zach, have Retinitis Pigmentosa, a genetic eye disorder in which the retina degenerates and can sometimes lead to blindness. Both siblings experienced gradual vision loss that progressed more rapidly during their teens.

Kayla and Zach received orientation and mobility training that teaches people with blindness and vision loss how to orient themselves and to navigate safely and confidently from one location to another at home, work, school, and throughout their community. White cane training extends to effective techniques for traveling on roads, cross-

ing intersections, accessing public and private transportation, the use of travel-related technology, and sometimes includes a guide dog.

After becoming proficient in her orientation and mobility skills, Kayla became interested in a guide dog to help her meet the increased challenges of navigating a college campus. Kayla was 18 years old when she was paired with her guide dog, Kane. The intensive training she and this 18-month-old yellow Labrador received together opened the door to a world beyond blindness. "I got Kane right before I moved in for freshman year," said Kayla, and he is the first service dog on campus. "I'm shy, and he helped me make friends during orientation."

Kayla also became increasingly engaged in college life – joining the freshman orientation staff, becoming involved in student government, and even joining the track team. Mom is ecstatic about the tremendous impact. "For those moments, Kayla didn't have that fear. It was great to cheer her on and support her. I also don't have to keep having the conversation of 'You can do whatever you

Kayla and Leader Dog Kane.



Leader Dogs for the Blind offers a Teen Summer Camp, Orientation and Mobility Training and pairs people of all ages who are blind and visually impaired with guide dogs free of charge. Learn more at leaderdog.org. Locate local Vision Rehabilitation services at [Time to Be Bold](https://TimeToBeBold.org). Call the [APH hotline](https://APHHotline.org) to receive support and practical coping strategies for everyday tasks with vision loss, join remote discussion groups, and access free online resources at the [APH Connect Center](https://APHConnectCenter.org) and [VisionAware](https://VisionAware.org). Learn more about Vision Rehabilitation Week and VisionServe Alliance at: VisionServeAlliance.org/VRW. Learn more about Retinitis Pigmentosa from the National Eye Institute (NEI) at: bit.ly/RetinitisP

want' vs. 'No, I can't,' because now she knows that she can."

Kayla's brother, Zach studied history and pre-law in college and tried to conceal his vision loss until his sophomore year. As his vision continued to worsen, he struggled and retreated. But, as he observed his sister's increased confidence, mobility, and optimism, Zach realized he too could benefit from welcoming a guide dog into his life. "When I had the chance to go walking on a trail and see how Kayla's dog was able to take her around things, it just clicked for me," said Zach. "When I was younger, I was stubborn and refused help. Now I realized help would be good for me."

It wasn't long before Zach, then 20, was paired with a 17-month-old black Labrador retriever named Wings. Like Kane, Wings was raised by a volunteer puppy raiser and received extensive training at Leader Dog to become a guide. Wings helped Zach enjoy increased independence and embark on an exciting new path that he would never walk alone. Zach became more outgoing and engaged in all that college life had to offer – joining a fraternity, attending storytelling sessions on campus, becoming a freshman orientation guide, and serving as a resident advisor

in his dorm. "My close friends are amazed at Wings' training. Before, I would go out at night with a friend because I have no night vision. Now, if there is something I want to do alone, I'm down to just go with Wings."

Mom is equally thrilled with Zach's progress. "The clubs and activities he's involved in now... he really came out of his shell."

Serve Alliance leads a national consortium of organizations offering services that vastly improve the lives of people with blindness and low vision.

To raise awareness of the crucial role Vision Rehabilitation can play in empowering individuals with blindness and low vision and connect people with these life-enhancing services, VisionServe Alliance is launching Vision Reha-

"I'M SHY, AND HE HELPED ME MAKE FRIENDS DURING ORIENTATION."

Kayla and Zach continue to thrive and have high praise for Alyssa, their Guide Dog Mobility Instructor at Leader Dog who trained them both.

"Orientation and Mobility, and Guide Dog training are forms of Vision Rehabilitation services that increase safety, confidence, and independence," says Lee Nasehi, President & CEO of VisionServe Alliance. "Although Vision Rehabilitation provides life-changing benefits, it's estimated that less than 5% of people with vision loss who could benefit from Vision Rehabilitation actually receive these vital services." Vision-

bilitation Week in collaboration with its partners and member organizations. Vision Rehabilitation Week, a new global holiday celebrated in early June, will highlight incredible success stories of people like Zach and Kayla, whose lives are forever changed. Thanks, in part, to Vision Rehabilitation and a pair of very special dogs named Kane and Wings.

As dog lovers we understand how dogs become our best friends, and for people with blindness and low vision, guide dogs can also become a lifeline to independence. 🐾



Leader Dog Guide Dog Mobility Instructor Alyssa shops for supplies with Zach and two other clients at a local pet store.