

SPRING 2026

The Newsletter of KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc

VOLUME 27 ISSUE 1

The PATHWAY

GUIDE DOGS
SERVICE DOGS
FACILITY DOGS
www.ksds.org

Transform a Life
Through the Power
of an Assistance
Dog

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INSIDE:

Fall 2025 Graduates
Winter Facility Graduates
Step Inside KSDS Breeding Program
New Litters and More

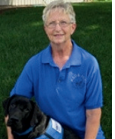
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Dear Friends,

At KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc., every partnership begins with dedication, careful training, and a community that believes in the life-changing power of an assistance dog.

In this issue of The Pathway, you'll see how our program supports each team from the very beginning, from the thoughtful planning behind our breeding program to the inspiring stories of graduates who are gaining greater independence and confidence.

These partnerships are made possible by the many individuals involved in this effort. Puppy raisers, trainers, volunteers, and generous supporters all play crucial roles in preparing these extraordinary dogs for their future companions.

Because of your support, KSDS teams are changing lives every day. Thank you for being part of this mission and for helping create new opportunities for independence and connection.

With gratitude

Duane Toews
CEO

**The Journey Continues:
Madelyn & Mordecai**

Spring 2025 graduates Madelyn and her service dog Mordecai are just getting started.

Follow their journey on Instagram or to read their latest update, scan the QR Code:

Congratulations

FALL 2025 GRADUATES

*Unleashing Potential
Through Partnership,
One Dog at a Time*



Izabella Marsano and Jephthah
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Angel Shaver and Philly
Puppy Raiser: Maggie Votruba

For more information
about our graduates
and puppy raisers,
scan the QR code.



Megan Seliger and Bon Jovi
Puppy Raiser: Sheila Johnson



*Save
the
Date*

**Grad Retreat
July 13th-15th**

The Beginning of Every Partnership

Inside the KSDS Breeding Program

Before a dog learns commands or has a harness put on, the journey starts with careful planning, intentional breeding, and global collaboration.

Under the leadership of Annette Kohlmeyer, who has 19 years of experience at KSDS, our breeding program ensures that each future partner possesses the health, temperament, and mindset necessary to change lives



A Global Team Effort

KSDS is a member of the International Breeding Cooperative (IBC), which is a global network of assistance dog schools collaborating to enhance the success of working dogs.



Through the cooperative, KSDS:

- Shares genetics with schools from various countries
- Exchanges puppies and breeding dogs
- Monitors health and behavior in the International Working Dog Registry (IWDR)
- Utilizes decades of data to determine pairings

Goal: healthier dogs + better matches = more successful partnerships

Only the Best Become Breeders

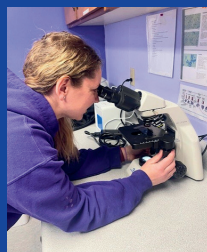
Fewer than 5% of dogs qualify.

Each potential dog must pass:

- PennHIP hip analysis
- Elbows, eyes, and heart certifications
- Full genetic testing
- Behavioral Checklist (confidence + calm “on/off switch”)

This careful selection helps puppy raisers begin with a strong advantage, years of proven genetics behind each puppy.

Then:
cytology slides and outside lab timing



Now:
in-house progesterone testing, AI procedures, semen storage, and international genetics

The First 8 Weeks

From 3 days old to 8 weeks, puppies receive intentional early development:

- Handling & body awareness
- Sound and tactile exposure
- Car rides and kennel experiences
- Foundations on early obedience

We give puppy raisers a head start, and puppies the confidence to learn.

Why It Matters

Our trainers match each dog to a person’s lifestyle - calm companions for quieter homes, energetic partners for active handlers.

Read the full story of how every partnership begins.



A New Way Forward: Brooklyn and Bubba



Getting Bubba changed everything; before him, leaving the house felt complicated, sometimes even impossible. Brooklyn Shada was diagnosed with Stargardt's disease when she was just eight years old. This hereditary retinal condition affects central vision and gradually worsens over time. While her parents are carriers of the disease, Brooklyn and three of her brothers also live with it. As her vision changed, so did her world.

"I feel like all we did was stay at home before I had him."

Today, that story is very different. Brooklyn received her KSDS guide dog, Bubba, in October 2024. Now married and the mother of three young children, including a toddler and newborn twin girls, Brooklyn is a stay-at-home mom with busy and demanding days. Gaining independence isn't just a personal goal; it's essential to her family's daily life.

Before Bubba, outings were unmanageable. Crossing streets was intimidating, and navigating busy spaces required constant mental effort. Even simple outings required careful planning and hesitation.

Then Bubba arrived.

"He knows what I'm going to do before I do it... He knows our routes. He knows when I'm anxious or hesitant to cross a street."

Crossing streets has become one of Brooklyn's greatest achievements. Bubba is attuned to traffic patterns, senses Brooklyn's uncertainty, and waits calmly until it's safe. Then, together, they take that first step.

"I've gotten very comfortable and more confident. Just getting out is a huge thing."



Brooklyn and her daughter now visit the children's museum and library almost every day, turning their overwhelming experience into a regular routine.

Brooklyn did extensive research before applying for a guide dog and determined KSDS to be the best fit, not just because of proximity, but also due to the trust she felt in the organization. That trust has paid off.

"Bubba has not only given me independence," she said, "but he's been a great companion. Each team has their own unique bond."

The bond between Brooklyn and her guide dog, Bubba, is something that donors help make possible. She was amazed by how much Bubba could do, how seamlessly he adapted, and how intuitively he responded to her needs. Perhaps the most profound change has been this: her world is no longer shrinking; it is expanding.

Donors should understand that guide dogs do much more than help people get from point A to point B. They restore confidence, reduce isolation, and open doors, both literally and figuratively, to participation, connection, and everyday joy. Thanks to supporters like you, Brooklyn isn't just watching life pass her by; she's living it fully, confidently, and independently, alongside a dog who understands her world almost as well as she does.

"Thank you for allowing me to share our story," Brooklyn says.

And thank you, donors, for helping to write it. Your contribution isn't merely funding a program; it's creating freedom, building confidence, and providing families like Brooklyn's a new way forward, one step at a time, together.

WHEN JUSTICE NEEDS COMPASSION

Your support brings calm, confidence, and connection to the courtroom.

Meet our two newest KSDS facility dog graduate teams, Lynn Rasnake and her dog, McFly, in Bristol, Virginia, and Shelli White and her dog, Belgian, in Adrian, Missouri. Although their paths look different, their purpose is the same: bringing calm, courage, and connection into courtrooms where fear often arrives first.

Lynn is a licensed clinical social worker serving young victims of abuse at the Children's Advocacy Center of Highlands Community Services. McFly is her second KSDS facility dog, following in the pawprints of Alpha, whose quiet presence helped countless children share their stories over the past five years. In a region with one of the highest child abuse rates in Virginia, Lynn knows how fragile trust can be.



Lynn Rasnake and McFly

“There have been children who did not trust me with their story,” Lynn shares, “but they said, ‘I will tell Alpha.’ They whispered their story to him because they believed he wouldn’t tell.”

Alpha and now, McFly, don’t ask questions or rush answers; instead, they patiently meet children where they are. Lynn explains, “They shrink into the sofa, and he lies across their lap. They relax, and then they’re able to tell their story.”

Meanwhile, hundreds of miles away, Belgian, lovingly called Bel, is starting similar work at the Bates County Courthouse. Working alongside Circuit Clerk Shelli White, Bel’s role is to provide gentle support to victims as they navigate an intimidating courtroom environment. Shelli raised Bel herself as a puppy, right inside the courthouse, making her return as a trained facility dog especially meaningful.



Shelli White and Belgian

“These dogs are a gift,” Shelli says. “What a blessing to see a silly puppy grow into this great work companion.”

**Different courtrooms. Different communities.
The same quiet impact.**

Because of you, your generosity, your belief in this mission, children are finding the courage to speak, and adults walking beside them are finding the strength to continue. Your gift isn’t funding a program. It’s writing a new chapter of independence, trust, and hope - on a leash.

Thank you for standing with KSDS, and for helping compassion show up exactly where it’s needed most.

Because in moments of fear,
no one should stand alone.





Growing Independence – One Journey at a Time

The Peter Pan Litter: A Legacy of Love in Motion

Love has a way of continuing long after goodbye. The Peter Pan Litter was born from that belief, a tribute to Wendy Taylor's life, heart, and deep compassion for others.

After Wendy's passing, memorial gifts were made in her honor by many who loved her. Her husband, Shawn Taylor, chose to use those memorial funds to create a litter theme and name six Labrador puppies in Wendy's memory, thereby establishing a lasting tribute that reflects the joy and kindness she shared with others. Married for 34 years, Shawn knew this was a meaningful way for Wendy's love to keep reaching people in need.

In just over 60 days, more than \$10,000 in memorial gifts helped bring the Peter Pan Project to life. As Shawn shared, "My deepest gratitude goes to everyone who helped make this possible. Your support has turned remembrance into a living impact."

The puppies were turned out to their puppy raisers on January 9, beginning journeys that will change lives.



The Peter Pan Litter Puppy Raisers: Grace Douglas with Pixie, Kylie Bitcon with Ace, and Rita Jones with Hook (continuing training at CPV). Kneeling: Katie Krehbiel with Nana, Brittany Triner with Rufio, and Lynn Bagby with Chief. These dedicated raisers are helping the puppies build confidence and foundations for their future.

Hill's Science Diet: Nourishing Our Mission



Hill's Science Diet is KSDS Assistance Dogs' largest corporate sponsor, providing nutritious food for our puppies in training and for our graduates' dogs. For more than 30 years, this incredible partnership has helped fuel healthy journeys and life-changing outcomes. We are deeply grateful for their continued support.

Firecracker Litter and Friends!

Stars, stripes, and new beginnings! Our Firecracker Litter, born on July 4, 2025, officially met their puppy raisers at a joyful puppy turnout celebration. From left to right: Eliza Hauschel is standing in for Judy Norton with Cannon; Fox is raised by Ray Riggerbach; Hayley Van Amburg is with Rocket; Amanda Randazzo is with Blaze (who will continue training with Thomas Bachert and Monica Funk); and Kit is raised by Deb Lange. Kaboom, who is being raised by Judy Boye, is not pictured.

Each puppy and raiser received a beautiful handmade red, white, and blue quilt, lovingly donated by local Washington resident, Myrna Skrabel, a heartfelt gift to wrap these new journeys in warmth from day one.

Here's to the first chapter of many life-changing stories.

Calling All Kids!

Hop on over to KSDS!



Join us for our KSDS Easter Party on Wednesday, April 1, from 3:30–5:00 PM for arts & crafts, games, cookie decorating, and a special visit from the Easter Bunny.

Just like our dogs, this afternoon is all about connection, joy, and sharing smiles.



Welcome Our New Puppy Raiser Coordinator: Katie Krehbiel



We are excited to introduce Katie Krehbiel as KSDS's new Puppy Raiser Coordinator! Katie's journey with KSDS began as a high school junior when she raised her first puppy, Sterling, who became a service dog. She later raised two more KSDS puppies, Ven, now a guide dog, and Esther, who was career-changed. This experience deepened her connection to the KSDS mission.

While earning her degree in Animal Science at Kansas State University, Katie interned with KSDS for two summers, gaining valuable hands-on experience in training and daily operations. Now based in Central Kansas, she works remotely in her new role while also working at a plant nursery and owns a small swine operation.

As a current puppy raiser, Katie brings firsthand understanding, enthusiasm, and compassion to her work, supporting the incredible volunteers who shape every KSDS dog's journey.



Behind the Mission

Every dog's journey is supported by a dedicated team behind the scenes.

- Duane Toews - Chief Executive Officer
- Adell Aubert - Pooches and Pals Trainer
- Karen Chapman - Director of Marketing Education
- Kenny Cook - Maintenance
- Tulene Farwell - Apprentice Guide Dog Trainer
- Eliza Hauschel - Canine Housing Unit Coordinator
- Annette Kohlmeyer - Lead Service Dog Trainer / Breeding Technician
- Sandy Nutsch - Office Manager / Client Services
- Jenny Pachta - Donor Manager / Grant Writer
- Brooke Pfizenmaier - Facility Dog Trainer
- Debbie Tegethoff - Lead Guide Dog Trainer

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know?**

88% of every dollar
donated is allocated
to program support.

2026
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Bleach
Trash Bags (12 ga./39 gal.)
Swifter Pads (dry/wet)
Paper Towels
Toilet Paper
Toilet Bowl Cleaner
Lint Rollers w/refills

Use the QR Code
for additional
wishlist items



Items may be shipped directly to:

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or can be brought to the
KSDS campus

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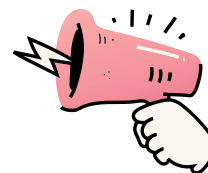
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Spring Graduation

Saturday, April 18, 2026

11:00 AM

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703 D Street
Washington, KS 66968

Luncheon Following
See what independence looks like.
Feel what connection means.
Join us for graduation.

Families welcome!

