

# MOBILITY DOG

by Poppy

**Hey guys! Poppy here.**

I think working dogs are amazing, just amazing! It's so cool how they can help our community. Police dogs help the police catch criminals, search and rescue dogs that look for people if they are stuck under rubble or in snow, guide dogs help blind people. Dogs that help the disabled are truly awesome as they can be trained to do something as helpful as opening a door. Recently I met Michael and Friend. Friend is a Mobility Dog that helps Michael at home, school and out and about.

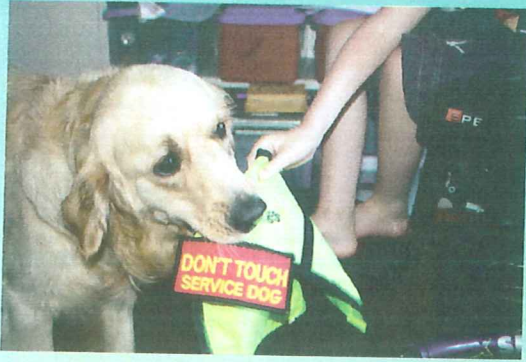


Michael is 9 years old and has Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type 3 and a muscle weakness which means he can't walk. Friend is a 2 year old golden retriever that helps Michael with the little things in life that we take for granted such as retrieving something dropped on the floor. While we can easily bend down and grab it, Michael cannot because he is in a wheelchair. Thankfully he has Friend to pick things up for him.

Michael got Friend when Friend was 21 months old after he had finished his 18 months training with Mobility Dogs. When Friend arrived he already knew 100 commands! There are around 40 basic commands such as:

- ' Fix It ' - if the dogs leg gets tangled in the lead,
- ' Bizzy bizzy ' – if the dog needs to go to the loo,
- ' Push ' - dog jumps up and pushes open door with its paws.

Please do not touch a guide dog without first asking its owner if it would be okay to do so.



Michael and Friend trained together and got to know each other well in just 2 weeks .

Michael is the youngest person in New Zealand to be partnered up with a mobility dog and they couldn't be a more perfect match. They both love to play soccer with each other and both love getting wet. Michael does swimming a couple of times a week and Friend loves to play with the hose in the backyard.

Mobility dogs like Friend are very good dogs. If he hears a loud noise and gets a fright he will not run away, he will always stay by Michael's side. Friend trusts Michael and Michael trusts Friend.

At mobility dogs they don't just train golden retrievers like Friend, they also train labradors, german shepherds, labradoodles, labrador retrievers, huntaways and standard poodles.

### INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL:

*P. Michael what does Friend do to help you ?*

M. He does a lot, he helps me open doors, retrieves stuff like remotes, phones, his mobility dog jacket, his lead, he sometimes brings his food bowl when he thinks it's time to eat. Friend also picks up things I drop like Lego.

*P. Have you trained him to do anything ?*

M. Yes I taught him to get mum. I say ' Find mum ' and he will go get her.

*P. Do you exercise him ?*

M. We go for walks mainly in the weekend but we also play soccer after school. He walks around school with me too.

*P. Is he at school with you everyday ?* M. Yes all day every day.





*P. What does Friend do for you at school ?*

M. Friend picks up pencils and things that I drop, he sits next to me in classes except for science because of the chemicals. When he can't come to a class he goes in his crate. He also goes in his crate at lunchtime. He was really funny the other day because we have to stand when our principal comes into the class. The other day our deputy principal came in so everyone stood and so did Friend.

*P. What is his favourite treat ?*

M. Friend loves dried Cherrios and so does Ted our other dog. I make them with Mum at home. The recipe is on my blog.

*P. That's cool, you have your own blog !*

M. Yeah There are not many websites for kids my age with my condition. Most of them use complicated words for adults and doctors so I thought that my site could help some other kids understand SMA Type 3, better.

*P. What signals does Friend do if he needs to go 'bizzy' ?*

M. He doesn't do his commands very well.

*P. Can Friend go anywhere with you like to the movies, or on planes, trains ?*

M. Yes, when we go to the movies Friend sits under the seats. He's good with loud noises; when we went to see 'Tron' he snored though the whole thing. He's allowed to sit in the plane on the floor next to me if we go away on holiday but he's not allowed to go to the zoo for quarantine reasons. Friend sometimes comes out to dinner with us; though guide dogs are legally allowed into restaurants, we always call the place first to check with them as a courtesy.

*P. Here's a big question, how has Friend changed your life ?*

M. Mum and dad don't have to do so much for me now. Friend is always there to practice hockey skills with me; he gets the ball if it gets stuck or rolls away and he is there to pick up my hockey stick if I drop it.



Michael and Friends blog website for cherrios, pictures and more information :

[http://web.me.com/wheelerfamily/Michael\\_Wheeler/Welcome.html](http://web.me.com/wheelerfamily/Michael_Wheeler/Welcome.html)

Mobility Dogs website : [www.mobilitydogs.co.nz](http://www.mobilitydogs.co.nz)

