



## Good Dog! Autism Companion



Good Dog! Autism Companions is the natural result of the journey we are all taking through autism. Like so many families with ASD children, we have explored numerous therapies and modalities in our attempt to find just the right combination to unlock and unleash the beauty living within our son, Elliot. Our journey led us to getting a service dog for him. The decision has delivered on all we had hoped for and so much more. Elliot's service dog Orbit unlocked and unleashed our entire family. The lessons we learned in acceptance, unconditional love and deeper understanding are life changing. It's with great joy that we now share our experience and our teams' expertise in autism service dog relationships. The results we are seeing through our programs across the country have been life-changing for all of us involved. We are truly blessed to be serving those in our community.

We are so grateful to all of you who have helped support our vision and our programs!  
- Rick and Laura Sylvester

**SEE PAST PRESS COVERAGE:** <https://www.gooddogautismcompanions.org/in-the-press.html>



## Good Dog! Autism Companion

### **Mission**

Good Dog! Autism Companions helps children and families living with autism live better lives through service dog companionship.

### **Vision**

We believe that every child living with autism deserves to be accepted, connected and participate in their community.

### **About Blurb**

Good Dog! Autism Companions is California's leading family-run provider, trainer and matchmaker of service animals for parents wishing to make powerful positive changes to the quality of life of a child experiencing autism. Since its founding in 2011 by parents of a child with autism, the Good Dog! Team of therapy professionals, dog trainers, philanthropists, and volunteers has successfully trained and placed more than 45 dogs with families across the U.S. Good Dog! only uses positive reinforcement training methods and follows Assistance Dog International standards and guidelines for all aspects of their program.

Good Dog! is a 501(c) (3) tax exempt non-profit. EIN number #45-2627922

Anyone interested in volunteering, making a donation, or learning more about its service dog programs should visit [www.gooddogautismcompanions.org](http://www.gooddogautismcompanions.org) for more information.



## **A companion dog provides a bridge for a child with autism to connect with the world around them.**

Studies have shown that autism service dogs reduce stress hormone levels in children with autism. Parents are reporting many other benefits that these faithful, hard-working companions provide as well. Here are more of the life-enhancing experiences that can be attributed to owning a companion dog:

### **CALMING**

- dog provides a sense of security
- decreases meltdowns
- decreases anxiety and acts of aggression
- increases willingness to try new things
- increases ability to face fearful situations

### **SOCIAL**

- increases social interaction due to the dog taking the focus off the child's disability
- decreases self absorption
- decreases undesirable behaviors (dog can redirect the child)

### **COMMUNICATION**

- improves social skills due to added motivation
- encourages verbal communication, increased vocabulary

### **COMPANIONSHIP**

- loyal and constant companion
- unconditional and non-judgmental friend
- teaches concepts of friendship like compassion, patience and empathy

### **INDEPENDENCE**

- increases feeling of empowerment
- dog can help with daily living skill
- increases sense of responsibility

### **QUALITY OF LIFE**

- improves motor skills and increase physical activity level
- improves quality of sleep
- provides positive community buffer

and, of course, less stressful family outings like really nice walks



## Braden Sanchez & Linc

Braden is an 11yr old boy who has had his amazing Good Dog "Linc" for just about a year. He has a twin sister Mia, and older 18yr old brother Trystan in college. The very first thing you notice about Braden is his ear to ear smile which in turn immediately puts a smile on your face. Then from there you get to experience his deep brown eyes which then melt away at your heart. At that very moment... he has you... and will proceed to try and talk your ear off about US Presidents, Star Wars, Harry Potter, Lego's, or any type of subject he is passionate about at that time.

If he isn't interested in speaking about any of these subjects he will then tell you how happy Linc is. He will walk you over to him and give him a hug and point out the big smile on Linc's face. It hasn't always been like this. When Linc first came home Braden didn't want much to do with him and wouldn't spend a lot of time with him. Linc would spend most of the day upstairs while the twins would be downstairs playing lego's or with other toys. If they were to go outside on the trampoline, he would want Linc to spend that time inside.



We knew that it would take some time for Braden to get used to Linc. He has never been the type of child to like dogs, and it took him years to get used to the cats. We thought we were in trouble and always questioned if what we did was the right thing. From when we brought Linc home in May 2015, and over the course of the next 5 months we had serious doubts as to whether or not they were going to really bond. We had to keep reminding ourselves that the bonding takes time and it would eventually work out.

October 2015 rolls around and we decide to take our first trip with Linc and the twins to see their older brother at Montana State University in Bozeman, MT. We were nervous and anxious about how it would go. We leave the house and head to SeaTac

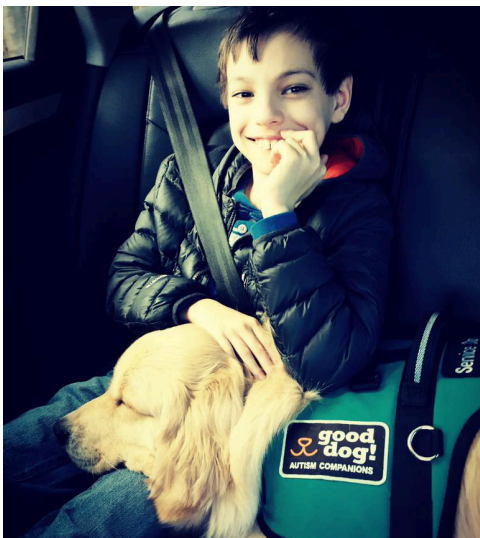
Airport in Seattle. As we are at the airport we notice one specific thing about Braden in that he doesn't have his headphones on as we are walking through the airport. **THIS HAS NEVER HAPPENED!!!** He wears the headphones as comfort item in the airport and on the plane. During that weekend we walked around the campus with their older brother Trystan, went to restaurants, and just explored with no issues and in every experience Braden & Linc were side by side and as confident as can be.

When we arrived back home to Seattle, we notice something so special that I don't think I can really describe. Braden began to greet Linc anytime he saw him, and what we thought was even more amazing

was initiating the interactions with Linc. Part of what Braden does for comfort is to squeeze his mom's face as he puts his cheek on hers which tends to hurt her, however, he doesn't do it anymore and gets down and gives Linc big hugs.

Sedona homeschools the twins; however, the district here is required to provide resources outside of traditional homeschooling for kids. They go to our local Home Education Exchange (HEE) 3 days a week and take PE, Art, Music, Cooking, Science, and other classes with friends. The administration & teachers from last year to this year have noticed a considerable difference in Braden. Where in the past he has been quiet and not forward in participation, he is now actively a participant in all of his classes. He is a leader and has confidence in what he is doing. He has Linc with him in every class as he walks the halls with his friends to each class. Mom is still nearby to help but he is filled with confidence as he is with his bestie. Because of Linc he is never alone, and has also made some best friends at school and outside of school. Kids and families at school understand that Braden has a service dog and respect the boundaries of having such an important ally. They come over to Braden and ask to interact and it brings up conversation, and is simply amazing to see.....

Autism is a disability that you can't see and people are cruel and quick to judge your parenting skills when they see your child act up in public. Now, outbursts are few and far between and in public if something is not going the way he wants, people can look at Linc with his vest and rather than giving judgments or nasty looks, there's compassion and understanding.



Since birth Braden & Mia have slept in the same room, but shortly before Linc came home Braden began sleeping in his own room. Linc would sleep in the room and in the crate until morning; however, in the last 3 months Braden has asked he not be locked up to sleep wherever he wants in his room. Braden has a trundle bed, and Linc is usually on the cold hardwood floor next to Braden or on the trundle bed.

Our lives have completely changed with Linc as part of our family. We have gone to see "Wicked", which would have never happened. Braden & Linc loved it! Braden loves going to movies with Linc, and give him little treats of non-buttered popcorn ☺ He doesn't think we notice.....

Another important piece that means so much for us is that we feel safer having Linc in our lives. He is so in tune with what Braden needs and when he needs it. If Braden is having a rough time, he senses it and simply walks over with a gentle nudge and Braden will hold him and continue doing what he was doing and not be frustrated. I can't describe it but it's similar to what we have experienced with Braden and his twin sister.

It's pretty simple to say that our lives have been turned a full 180 in ways that are so amazing great and give us more freedom and confidence in ourselves and in Braden. For this, we are forever grateful for Good Dog & the incredible trainers that worked to bring Linc home.



## Where Art thou Romeo?

### Sabrina and Romeo

Life was good, very good, our family of four did what most young families do, with one exception, autism...still in the beginning life was good... We had friends over with their kids, parties, park play dates, beach days, school activities and dance, we socialized and had a community of friends, even vacationed with them, we were accepted and embraced by family and friends even after the diagnosis of autism.

Sadly for our family and many families like ours, the good life once lived changes to a life of loneliness and isolation as your child grows up...the behaviors of autism once accepted as a young child are now shunned in many ways. The piercing pain is felt as you see your child shut out, talked about, complained about, laughed at, teased and bullied. School and social activities, friends even family who were accepting and inclusive your child and family begin to fade as they do not know how to react to an older child with the still younger autistic behaviors they once would tolerate. Our world went from wide open to almost completely isolated. A child who once attended school, church, had friends, went to birthday parties is now at home, all said is now gone as she grows older, life becoming completely isolated.



Enter Good Dog Romeo! How can a dog change a world of isolation into a world wide open and full of promise once again? We got the gift of hope and promise when Romeo was matched and placed with our daughter! After meeting with Good Dog and learning of all a Good Dog could benefit our daughter we started talking and preparing Sabrina for a Good Dog, and even in the beginning stages of talking about Sabrina's own dog, her own best friend, excitement mounted, Sabrina began to have hope, happiness, something to look forward to, we all had something to look forward to, yes, all four of us anticipated Romeos arrival just as much as Sabrina, little did we know how we ALL would be blessed!

Opened doors....Since Romeo has joined our family life is happening! We all have gone back to church as a family of Five (Romeo being the greatest addition)!! Sundays, something to look forward to...When we bring Romeo we are welcomed, people smile when seeing Sabrina and Romeo every Sunday, happiness happens! Sabrina has now joined the youth group with teens every



Thursday night, something she could never do before. Excited and with great confidence she walks into the group with Romeo always to great greetings from the teens “Hey Sabrina, Hi Romeo” big smiles from the group, and Sabrina is once again welcomed back into the world, kids are happy to see her, not afraid of her and her differences, she is now supported and welcomed. Doors are opening!



Romeo comes with us everywhere, and I mean everywhere everyday and its joyful! People where we frequent know Sabrina and Romeo even by name! We all recently toured a college campus my son is going to in the fall, and something tells me Romeo was his good luck charm into acceptance to this school....having Sabrina and Romeo joining in with the family on the tour showed this particular college the character of my son, the love and support he shows for his sister and her dog, so much so that Romeo's already been invited to campus on a regular basis, again, our family is welcomed and included in life with Romeo by our sides. Romeo is the greatest part of our family giving all four of us a happy connection, joy to share with each other, fun and life to live once again! Out of isolation, each of now bursting with pride instead of embarrassment or shame as we take such an amazingly trained, happy, devoted family member such as Romeo into the community and little by little back into this great world with huge hopes for the future of Sabrina and Romeo to keep moving back into a very very good life!

Romeo is everything to us, he really is our world, a world of happiness, hope and love :)



## Good Dog! Autism Companion

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