

Our temporary pup and future guide dog By Erin Greco



Our family thought about raising a puppy for Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind for a while. One reason was that we wanted to help someone who would need a guide dog, but another was to see if a dog could fit into our crazy life. Our hesitation was that we weren't sure we had the time for a dog. Also, we weren't sure we could give the dog back once we were done puppy walking. After our kids got older and they decided they could think of the puppy as their temporary puppy, we decided to go for it.

In January 2016 we welcomed Elanco into our home; a sweet black puppy, a cross between a golden retriever and Labrador retriever. Never having a dog as an adult, it was a bit of a learning curve, especially for our cat. We all adjusted fairly quickly to each other, except for the cat. She's still not convinced! Elanco and I have learned a lot from each other over the past ten months. My fitness has definitely improved. He's obviously very concerned about my health and ensures that he walks me at least twice a day, whether I want to or not. I've mostly convinced him that leaves aren't food or toys, even when they fly around his face. I've learned that he would be really bad at poker because he has a very obvious guilty face when he has a hair clip, a rock, a tissue, or a sock - his favorite.

Being new to puppy/dog care, I was really happy to have a great support system at Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind. I received answers to my questions, obedience training, no vet bills, free dog food and free boarding. Obviously, there was still all the day-to-day care of a puppy that had to happen, but some of the decision making and work was definitely alleviated. The training hasn't been too onerous but sometimes it's like taking a toddler to the store. At first I was nervous about taking him into places so I started with a bank, which was the easiest place I could think of, and worked up to harder places, like pet stores. We've gone from the toddler stage where I had to watch him all the time to make sure he wasn't eating random stuff (pretty much anything on the floor), and as fast a shopping trip as possible, to a full on trudge around the store to fill the grocery cart up for a long weekend at a cottage. He's been on the bus, to high schools, a museum, a movie theatre, water polo games, soccer games, coffee shops, restaurants, and the list goes on. He gets bored on occasion (really, who doesn't) but is generally just happy to be with us wherever we go. Everyone at all the places we've gone have been really accommodating and happy to be contributing to his socialization.

One side benefit of puppy walking is that I get to meet a lot of people. It is mostly because Elanco is really handsome in his jacket, but also because people want to know about the training and my role. The two most common questions I get asked are: "Does he like working?" and "How are you going to be able to give him up?" Given all the wagging of his tail when he sees me get his jacket before we head out, he doesn't seem to view it as work and is pretty happy to be coming with me rather than getting left behind because he can go where 'regular' dogs can't. As for how can we give him up; it will definitely be hard but we call him our temporary dog on purpose to remind ourselves that we are lucky to be able to love him for 12-18 months before he gets a permanent owner to assist and to love him. While we don't think we could fit a permanent dog into our life right now, we are happy having our temporary dog to love for now and know he will be well prepared to leave the nest, just like the human teenagers we have at home, once our puppy walking job is done.

Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind is always seeking volunteers to act as puppy raisers. You must be willing to take a dog into your home for 12-18 months, have an active lifestyle, take the puppy nearly

everywhere you go, have a vehicle to attend veterinary appointments, and be open to training instruction. You can learn more and sign up for an information session on the program by contacting Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind at 613-692-7777 or email info@guidedogs.ca.

***Please note this program is active only in the following areas: Ottawa, Ontario; Greater Toronto Area; Eastern Ontario.