

## *Mandy and Chaco's Story*



I must begin by saying that Chaco and I feel so honored and humbled to be featured as the team of the month. I am among an incredible group of people that I am so fortunate to call friends and mentors.

When people ask how I found Chaco my only response is "I did not find him, he found me. He was sent from Heaven straight into my arms".

Chaco is my 6½-year-old Australian Shepherd. When I say Chaco is mine, I am stretching the truth. Chaco really belongs to my father, Larry, but we share him.

In December of 2004 an angel was found. He came with fur and four legs. We are so blessed to have him. He was nine months old, and full of life and love. Even though my dad found him, brought him home, Chaco decided he was going

to take care of me. I always knew Chaco had a special gift, but I just did not know how big his gift was until he got a little older.

We had Aussies since 1968 so the family knows the breed well. Growing up they were my dad's dogs, even though they loved all of us. I was busy riding and training horses, but I loved watching my dad train dogs.

I have had health problems for most of my adult life. I have Neuropathy, which is a form of nerve damage that causes pain every day. This pain changed my life in many ways including where I live and how I live. I moved back home for support, both emotional and physical.

Chaco immediately took to me. He wanted to be with me. He even sleeps with me. It was such a comfort on my long nights having a dog in bed with me. On my surgery days after I would come home, he was my protector and my nurse.

A few years ago I begin having seizures from the pain I was in every day. I had no knowledge that I was going to have a seizure, however Chaco knew. Chaco alerted me that I was about to have a seizure by jumping up on me and mouthing the hand that held my keys. Within minutes I had my first seizure. During my seizures he stays with me and lays across me until I wake up. He licks my face, and it is such a comfort knowing he is there for me. He is now my medical alert/service dog. He goes in restaurants and lies under the table and falls asleep. The hardest part for him is knowing he cannot go and love on the wait staff.

I have been with American Humane Association AAT for over 2 years. I knew that the animal assisted-therapy work would be wonderful for him and me. Aussies need a job and this would be his job. I wanted to find something that I could volunteer for and be passionate about.

We found our job and passion! We both love children so we volunteer to work with children a few days a week. I joined an amazing group called Canine Healers at Excelsior Youth Center in Aurora. Excelsior is a school for girls from 11-18 with emotional and behavioral



difficulties. Canine Healers is a trauma-based group. The girls form a close bond with Chaco and the other dogs and then are able to discuss their issues.

I am the team lead at Mental Health Center of Denver. We have worked with many children that have touched our hearts. On one day Chaco just may listen by lying in someone's lap as they tell him why they are crying. On another day the child may be able to take him for a walk. This delights the child he is with. It boosts their confidence and their smile is contagious.

I am so proud to be a part of American Humane Association and the volunteering that we do together. I am so lucky to have Chaco. And each time he helps a child my day even gets even better!

