



A Canine for Caden: Family Seeks Community's Help to Attain Service Dog for Epileptic Teen

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BRIGHTON – Seventeen-year-old Caden Smith has had seizures since he was 18 months old, but as of late December 2018, they have been getting worse.

Smith's epilepsy has developed into dangerous “drop” seizures, which attack the young man without warning and cause him to fall to the ground. His mother, Tammy Smith, said the sudden onset of these seizures have led to stitches in her son's brow as well as the back of his head. He now attends classes at Southwestern High School in a helmet and has been on every medication his family can muster – including Illinois's medical cannabis. The first cannabis regimen he was on assisted him for about three months before it was discontinued by the dispensary. Since then, finding something as effective has been a challenge for the Smith family. He is going to start a new regimen of synthetic CBD soon, but his family worries that will not be enough for his condition.

Because of that, they are looking into getting a service dog – a labradoodle to be exact – who will be able to alert Caden Smith and his family as much as 15 minutes in advance of an oncoming seizure, which would otherwise be undetected. The issue, however, is this dog comes with a hefty price tag of \$30,000.

“Insurance doesn't pay for anything,” Tammy Smith said. “We already checked into that, thinking it could help. We also don't have \$30,000 laying around, not a lot of people do.”

That price tag includes the dog, which was specifically bred for that purpose, its training, its delivery and coaching the family on how to interact with the dog once it has been delivered.

To cover that monumental cost, the Smiths have turned to family, friends and the community at large for assistance. Tammy Smith's cousin, Dottie Phillips created and manages the Facebook page, Canine for Caden, which currently has around 600 followers. People can receive information on fund-raising efforts and even purchase t-shirts for the cause on that page.

“The lunch staff at his school all wore them last week as a sort of uniform,” Tammy Smith said. “It was great, it was a great feeling for them to do so.”

While planning for a large fundraiser in the fall, Tammy Smith said the community and many businesses have already begun to back her family's cause. She said as many as three Texas Roadhouse locations, Roma's Pizza, and Riveria Maya in Brighton all pledged to donate a percentage of at least one night's profits to the cause of the Smith family. She also said Bishop Eye Care in Jerseyville will be accepting donations in the form of baskets and items for raffles in the future.

For those who want to donate financially, an account will be opened as soon as Thursday at Carrollton Bank titled “Canine for Caden.” Anyone wanting to donate into that account can do so after tomorrow.

Tammy Smith said they are preparing to send a \$1,000 deposit to the Indiana-based organization responsible for training the dog, sending the dog, and coaching the family.

When asked what Caden Smith thinks of everything, Tammy Smith said he operates around the level of a six or seven-year-old child, but is excited for the prospect of the dog – even if he does not fully comprehend it.

“We try to make everything as positive as it can be, because everything lately has been negative,” she said. “He's starting to realize something is wrong now, though. He's been dealing with seizures his entire life, so it's the norm to him.”

Tammy Smith said her son often has difficulty in school due to the amount of medication he is taking. Currently, Caden Smith takes three medications twice a day, and that number will become four Thursday when he begins his new regimen with the synthetic CBD. Tammy Smith said she wanted to attempt that new medication while he was on spring break from school to see how it affects him.

More information can be found on the Facebook page, “Canine for Caden.”