



# **Beyond Parody: Canine and Handler Giving Back in Crisis Interventions**

by Ty Bechel

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Over the years, there have been many devastating crises that have caused deaths, financial burdens, and a change in the way society views those elected to protect the American people. In May of 2011, an EF5-rated tornado touched down in Joplin,

Missouri, killing approximately 150 and causing over \$2 billion in damages. The Great Flood of 1993 spanned its devastating reach from May to Sept., causing an astronomical \$15 billion in damage and killing 32. In the event of a large crisis, many people are not prepared for the unexpected instability, whether short or long-term. Soon after a crisis's destruction is cast, the communities rally together in the recovery and healing process. In some cases, a crisis canine unit is deployed to help those that are scared, angry, or hopeless.

Merriam-Webster defines a crisis as an emotionally significant event or radical change or status in a person's life. Some crises affect a larger demographic, and other crises happen on a more intimate and molecular level. Once a 5th-grade teacher, Erin Hampton was faced with her own uncertainty. What was once careless and fun-inspired drinking took a drastic turn and covered her and her family with the insidious cloud of alcoholism. Struggling with her mental health and sanity, her family began falling apart. Her children, husband, and parents were worried about her declining health and increased alcohol consumption. Blackouts, emotional outbursts, and her disconnection from her family was a crisis that needed attention. Her alcoholism kept raging on and her family finally had to approach her with an ultimatum to seek professional help or they would have to keep her children from her for their safety.

Angry and shocked, something inside of Hampton convinced her to go to treatment. She received help from the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation. The foundation is a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility with 17 locations that helps individuals find stability and recovery in their lives through support and evidence-based practices like therapy and counseling. At Hazelden, Hampton met fellow peers from all over the United States needing help too, and one female peer specifically caught her attention. The peer was isolated, withdrawn, and never seemed to smile, but that all changed when an outside organization brought in a therapy dog, and suddenly, she smiled, laughed, and connected with the canine. "I was inspired immediately," says Hampton, "I vowed at that very second I would someday have a dog that would help people heal."

With over 5 years of long-term recovery from alcohol addiction, she has fulfilled the compelling and gnawing purpose she felt that monumental day at Hazelden. 4 years ago, Hampton began looking for a canine for therapy and crisis work. Her search took her to the Windy City of Chicago where she picked up her Goldendoodle, Serenity's Peace Within the Storm, or Serene for short.

Hampton was influenced to name her Goldendoodle after a prayer that was written by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. The Serenity Prayer is a mantra that many healing people use, especially in the recovery community, to help slow down and remind themselves to



focus and work through whatever situation (or crisis) they may be experiencing. The short version is quoted, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Serene went through extensive training that took almost a year to complete, which began with becoming a therapy dog. Hampton and Serene received their credentials through the National Crisis Response Canine (NCRC) volunteer organization. The NCRC requires the canines to undergo a temperament assessment that has 24 examined traits to determine if the canine can work in a crisis. The canine must be in their handler's home for six months and 18-months-old. They are required to have up-to-date rabies vaccinations among a few other requirements. Moreover, Hampton and Serene also went through FEMA Incident Command 100/200 and CPR/First Aid/AED training.

Hampton's work doesn't stop with Serene. She also has a 5-year-old Doberman Pinscher, Macy, that is a therapy dog that was credentialed through Got Your Six Support Dogs. Macy has visited college students during finals week, nursing homes, local reading programs, and other locations to help people cope and lessen their anxiety. There are different classifications of canines used for various situations like crises, individual care, and group therapy. There are therapy, emotional support, service, and crisis canines, and all of them must meet specific requirements and possible credentialing. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a service animal is defined as a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability, so the other classifications of canine helpers/workers do not all have the same privileges.

Hampton has a 10-month-old Goldendoodle, Moxi, that she plans on training as a therapy dog to accompany Macy. Over 5 years ago, Hampton was in a dark and lonely place of alcohol addiction as it eroded her from the inside emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. She has dedicated her newfound happiness and freedom to servicing others in need and being the amazing mother, wife, and daughter, she always intended to be. “No matter the magnitude of a crisis or disaster, people can be left feeling scared and hopeless. Being able to help others in crises by reducing trauma-induced stress also helps me in my recovery,” says Hampton.

To schedule any services with Erin, Serene, Macy, and Moxi, they can be reached at [evonah3@hotmail.com](mailto:evonah3@hotmail.com). Learn more about crisis, therapy, emotional support, or service canines, by visiting: [National Crisis Response Canines](#), [Got Your Six Support Dogs](#), and the [U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division](#).

