

TRUE STORY

Joel and Caddie

Joel was diagnosed with autism when he was seven, and has ADHD, speech, language and sensory impairment, and a sleep disorder.

With the help of Dogs for Good, Joel was matched with yellow Labrador Retriever, Caddie. He is an expertly trained autism assistance dog and, in Joel's own words, has been his 'guardian angel' since they were matched when Joel was nine.



“ Before we got Caddie, our world was full of darkness. We felt there was nowhere to go and no help to be had. Caddie and Dogs for Good changed all of that; bringing light, hope, happiness and a world of change.”

Joel's mum, Janet

Janet says that the single biggest thing that Caddie has done is bringing Joel into the wider world. “Before Caddie came along, Joel was very much locked in his own bubble. He wouldn't go outside further than the few metres across the road to his school, he wasn't speaking and was constantly pacing. Added to this, I was terrified he'd stop breathing at night because of his sleep apnoea.”

From the very first day that Caddie joined the family, Janet noticed a difference. “It was the first time that Joel smiled,” she remembers. “It was a little smile, but he smiled. Something I'd never seen before. During lockdown, Joel's school was closed, and he was extremely anxious about the situation as it affected his normal routines, but Caddie's soothing presence helped to keep Joel focused and calm as he sat his mock GCSE exams at home.

It was also a challenging time for Joel when it came to venturing outside, as he felt anxious that people were going to get too close to him. But Joel's mum, Janet, managed to persuade him to walk Caddie locally with her. She says: “Caddie is his comfort and reassurance when everything is worrying him. Caddie's presence is keeping us all calmer and reducing our stress levels and in turn, that's really helping me to give the best support I can to Joel.

“Sometimes, it's the cheeky things that Caddie does that make you smile and bring you together as a family – Caddie's getting older but he's still a character.

“He's always pinching our socks and wanders around the house with them. He definitely relieves any tension in the house!”

