

Bubbles enchants Emma's school—year in and year out!

Marie Walker



In 2007, Emma and Bubbles graduated from 4 Paws for Ability's rugged training course to provide Emma a Multipurpose Assistance Dog.

Besides the safety issues (she is tethered to him) and the friendship issues (they are *so* incredibly cute together!), we have seen *major* improvements in her behavior, frustration levels, calmness, and attention span. I don't know how I would scientifically document those--but Bubbles is the only thing that has changed in her life!

Let's go back a couple of years. Here's a letter from Emma's teacher dated December 20, 2007:

My name is Amy Miller and I am writing this letter in regards to Bubbles, a service dog attending school with Emma, a child in my classroom. We are a special needs self-contained classroom with 10 students. Bubbles has an effect on most students in the room.

Bubbles rides to school in the school transportation van or school bus depending on what the district sends for that day. When he comes in, he finds his mat and lies down after saying hi to most of the students. He stays on that mat until he is called on by me or one of the classroom assistants. He walks with the class when we leave the room. He has had a calming effect on other students in the room and helps to keep them walking with the class. Also, calling Bubbles helps Emma know we are leaving the room and eases the transition for her.

The rest of the school is very tolerant of Bubbles and we have noticed a shift in the students' responses to him. At the beginning of the school year, all students were very excited to see Bubbles and enjoyed calling out to him in the hallways. Now, when they see Bubbles they look for and say hi to Emma who is walking with him.

The presence of Bubbles in the room has required some minor adjustments but we have not had to make any shifts in our schedule to accommodate his attendance. We did have to learn his commands and his functions.

The hardest change we have had to adjust to is our choice of words. I am used to encouraging my students by saying, "Let's go! You can do it!" However, when I say that now, Bubbles gets up and ready to leave. I am still working on only saying, "Let's go" when I want Bubbles to get up. We also had a student who did not like dogs. After getting close to that student once, Bubbles has since left him alone and the student can handle Bubbles being in the room as long as he does



not get close to him.

Overall, Bubbles' presence in the room is welcome even though there are some difficulties we are working through.

August 2009. Emma just finished her first week of the school year. She attended a self-contained Multiple Disability class at Willard Central Elementary for the past two years, and Bubbles has attended with her.

I have been very pleased with her teacher and the classroom assistants. They genuinely love Emma, have her long-term best interests at heart, and have helped her achieve many physical and academic goals.

The week before school began, Emma's teacher, Mrs. Miller, called me. For the first time since Emma started in this class, they were getting new students, and one of them was scared of dogs. Mrs. Miller wanted to know if there was a 4 Paws protocol for introducing a child who was scared of dogs to a service dog.



I called Jeremy at 4 Paws, and he gave me good advice, which I passed on to Mrs. Miller. On Saturday, August 29th, she called me to report on how the week had gone (and having the teacher call me still makes me nervous that there may be major problems!).

She apologized for not calling during the week, but since I know how crazy the first week of school always is, I hadn't been concerned about hearing from her—I figured if there were major problems, she would have contacted me sooner.

She said, "I want to thank you for letting us have Bubbles. One of our new students has lots of emotional issues, and from the information in his file, we expected him to have between three and six major meltdowns every day, lasting up to half an hour each. This is the student who is scared of dogs, so I was really nervous for the first day of class.

"Emma and Bubbles came into class and took their places, Emma at the table, Bubbles on his 'place,' and the new student looked pretty alarmed, but then he went over and inspected every inch of Bubbles—including opening his mouth to look inside it! I was a bit concerned, but Bubbles was totally mellow.

"Whenever the student was getting ready to melt down, he told me 'I pet dog,' and went over to Bubbles and petted him three times—one, two, three, then said, 'I better now,' and returned to his place. **We have not had one meltdown, and I know it is because of having Bubbles in our classroom.**

“Also when we had a police officer come in to visit our classroom, he asked who had the service dog, *both* of our new students claimed Bubbles was theirs! When we walk down the hall, Emma holds onto her handles and the boy who used to be afraid of dogs walks on Bubbles’ other side, holding onto his harness, while the other new student holds onto Bubbles’ tail like a rudder! Bubbles just *loves* all the attention!”

Emma has settled into her classroom routine perfectly, and the only time she has had any issue at all was when Mrs. Miller corrected one of the new students, and Emma thought *she* had done something wrong!

Also, the new superintendent stopped by their classroom, and Bubbles behaved so perfectly that he totally won him over! Yay for 4 Paws!

Do not get discouraged—It really is *all* worth it in the end!

Marie, Wife of the Amazing Spencer, and Mom to Katie, Alex, Emma and Bubbles the Wonder Dog! Her motto: “If you think my hands are full, you should see my heart!”