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## Community welcomes service dog for autistic kids

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Posted: Sunday, August 10, 2014 6:00 am

by Jennifer Reed



Courtesy photo

**Drake, a 12-month-old Golden Retriever, is trained to service children with autism and their families.**



It's a homecoming worth waiting for: After nearly a year of fundraising and service training, a 12-month-old golden retriever named Drake will soon arrive in San Diego to begin her career as a facility dog for local children with autism.

Drake is the first of her kind at Good Dog! Autism Companions, a local nonprofit that specializes in training personal service dogs for children with autism and their families.

With the help of her namesake, Encinitas-based animal hospital [The Drake Center for Veterinary Care](#) and its clients—who successfully raised over \$10,000 for the service dog in 2013—Drake's extensive training at Good Dog! will allow her to help not just one, but many children at the Comprehensive Autism Center (CAC) in Oceanside starting in August.

According to Good Dog! executive director, Laura Sylvester, the idea to train a service dog for facility work came from a touching phone call she received from a local teacher working with special-needs children.

"She called us one day to tell us what it has been like to have our dog in her class," Sylvester said. "She said, 'In 15 years of being a special education teacher, I have never seen anything impact a child, a class and an entire school the way this dog has.'"

Since then, Sylvester has been working tirelessly with The Drake Center, CAC and Drake's trainer, Samantha, to make that impact a reality for local families.



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Drake will arrive in San Diego August 12 and will officially begin her work at CAC August 18.

Though Drake is owned by The Drake Center, she will live and work with CAC's regional director, Susie Jordan, her husband and twin daughters. Jordan will be responsible for Drake's overall care, facilitation of her daily duties and maintaining her mastered skill set. In addition, The Drake Center will provide all veterinary care free of charge.

As a facility dog, Drake will help to increase motivation, promote gross and fine motor activities, provide opportunities for language and calm and comfort children with autism spectrum disorders.

She has also been trained to "read" commands using visual cues, which will allow non-verbal children with autism to communicate with Drake using flashcards. Children may use the cards to give Drake specific commands, such as "come" or "sit," or request a specific activity with Drake, like giving a high five or going for a walk.

In addition, several of CAC's current graduate students will become trained on how to work with and utilize a service dog in therapy sessions.

Most importantly, however, Drake's unwavering love, compassion and patience will promote a positive influence on CAC's children and families for life.

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