

Believe in Dog Podcast
Episode 73
Creating Connection Beyond Sound with Your Hearing Dog
Episode Transcript

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[David] Not being able to hear a baby speak or a cat purr or bird sing. Those are some of the greatest pleasures of life.

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[Erin] You're listening to the Believe in Dog Podcast. I'm your host and resident dog mom, Erin Scott. Not only can a dog be your best friend, but I believe a dog can be a healer, a teacher, and an inspiration.

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[Erin] I can't wait to share with you stories of how the love of a dog is changing our lives and changing the world. This is Believe in Dog.

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[Erin] Welcome to episode 73 of the Believe in Dog Podcast. I'm your host, Erin Scott, and today's episode is very special, and I'm so excited that you're here. Did you know that dogs can be trained to be service dogs for the deaf and hard of hearing communities? I'll be honest that I didn't until recently. Today we are going to hear from two guests from the nonprofit organization Your Hearing Dog.

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[Erin] Now, I think most of my life I've been familiar with the concept of guide dogs, service dogs, seeing eye dogs for the blind. But for some reason, it had never occurred to me that members of the deaf and hard of hearing communities would also use service dogs or hearing dogs. So earlier this year, I connected with David Allery, the founder of Your Hearing Dog, in a Facebook group, and I was able to learn his story and of the organization Your Hearing Dog. And I was really excited and wanted to share this with you. Now, what I think is so special and through the magic of technology, right, is that David himself is hard of hearing.

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[Erin] He (David) will share with us how he lost more than 60% of the hearing in both of his ears after a medical condition in the 1990s. So we were able to conduct this interview by Zoom and using the "Captions" feature. So that's how David was able to understand what I was saying and respond back. Man, sometimes technology is very cool. We'll also be hearing today from Judith Mueller, a board member of Your Hearing Dog and when she connected with David, also online and learned about the mission of the organization and their desire to make hearing dogs more accessible.

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[Erin] She (Judith) is a huge dog lover and she wanted to do everything she could to help the organization grow. Your Hearing Dog was founded just last year, and I think you're going to be amazingly impressed by all that they have been able to accomplish in just a short amount of time.

[Erin] Now, before we get started, first I want to tell you about one of my favorite products for your dog. I know February was Pet Dental Health Month, but we really need to think about our dog's dental health all year round. I recently learned that 80% of our dogs over three years old have active dental or periodontal disease, and dental disease is actually a sign of other inflammation in the body and can be connected to everything from cardiovascular problems, kidney problems, fatty liver disease, diabetes, certain types of cancers, joint disease, pulmonary conditions.

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[Erin] Your dog's dental health actually can affect everything in their body. And you know that I am obsessed with finding the best and healthiest products for our dogs. So I was so excited to find out about Teef. That's right, Teef. Just a tiny spoonful of teeth powder in your dog's water bowl will make a huge improvement in your dog's dental health.

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[Erin] It's the only thing that ever made my vet stop and go, hey, what did you do with Penny's teeth? They actually look so much better. So forget trying to figure out how to get your dog's teeth brushed without them biting you. Forget those sticks or green chews. What you need is Teef powder, just a tiny amount in your dog's water bowl.

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[Erin] And listeners of this podcast can save 20% on your Teef order with the code ADM and you'll be on your way to a healthier smile for your dog without any anesthesia needed. Check out the link in the show notes to find out more about Teef and save 20% on your orders.

[Erin] So first we're going to hear a bit today from David, and he's going to tell us about his background. He's going to tell us about the medical condition that led to him losing so much of his hearing. And we're going to talk some about the experiences of the deaf and hard of hearing communities.

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[Erin] And this is important, not just for physical, lifesaving type situations such as a smoke detector going off, but also from an emotional perspective and quite frankly, for making people feel more included and part of the world around them. And then we're going to hear from Judith Mueller, and she's going to share how she got involved with the organization and all that she's learned in this past year and why this is important to her. And then David and Judith are going to share with us the goals for the organization, the vision, what they've been doing for the past year to grow this, and all of their plans. We'll talk about the different signals that hearing dogs are trained to do, how the dogs are trained, and the importance of matching the right dog with the right owner. I was so fascinated to learn all this, and I can't wait for you to meet David Allery and Judith Mueller.

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[Erin] So we are here today with two guests from the organization called Your Hearing Dog. So we have David Allery and Judith Mueller. Hi, David. Hi, Judith.

[Judith] Hi Erin.

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[David] Thanks so much for having us. Hi, Erin. How are you? I appreciate you inviting us to the podcast. Thank you very much.

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[Erin] I'm so happy to have you here and to hear your story. So I always love starting out by talking about your childhood experiences with animals because I did not really grow up with pets, and I'm always curious what everyone else's experiences look like. So, David, let's start with you. Did you grow up with dogs or other animals?

[David] Yes, I grew up with animals, mainly dogs and cats.

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[David] I always kind of gravitated towards dogs, so much so I basically had a dog around my entire life. The face of Your Hearing Dog is Chloe. She was an Aussie shepherd with blue eyes. Everyone always commented about her gorgeous blue eyes. She's the tan, black and white dog on our homepage.

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[David] Funny story about how we got Chloe. My two daughters and I went to the pet store just to look, mind you. We were just looking. We were not going to be getting a dog.

[Erin] That's what everybody says, right?

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[David] Yeah, that's right. Well, my two daughters approached me in the store holding the most adorable puppy ever. My oldest daughter says, oh, Dad, look at her gorgeous blue eyes. Well, my heart melted in an hour, and \$400 later, we walked out of the pet store with Chloe driving her home. Yeah, dad's a big softie, right?

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[David] We unfortunately, I guess, going to some bad news here, but we unfortunately had to put Chloe down more than a year ago because of nasal cancer. I won't go into too much detail here, but let's just say we were heartbroken, of course, and we feel we did the right thing. Now YHD is dedicated to Chloe's memory.

[Erin] Well, I understand that because my whole podcast is dedicated to my dog Lucy's memory, because she's the dog that made me fall in love with dogs.

[David] Yeah, dogs are certainly special animals, that's for sure.

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[Erin] So do you want to give us just a little bit of information about your background and what led to you starting Your Hearing Dog?

[David] Sure, yeah. Thanks for asking that, Erin. I have about 20 plus years experience in the software as a software engineer, some as a defense contractor, most in the telecommunications industry. I worked for corporate giants such as MCI, obviously before they declared the largest bankruptcy in US history at the time.

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[David] I was laid off in 2009. Then I decided to go back to school at the ripe old age of 50. I decided to go to school with the University of Colorado upon graduating. I graduated with graduate level certificates in nonprofit management and fund development in 2013. It was truly a desire to serve others because I firmly believe that that's what we're called to do.

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[David] Being a serial entrepreneur like I am, it was always an option to create something from the ground up through a lot of successes and failures, usually more failures than successes. But YHD was eventually born to serve the deaf and hard of hearing community, and for which I'm gladly part of that community, and I'm proud of it.

[Erin] So would you tell us more about that? So my understanding is that you suffered a medical condition in the 1990s that led to you losing your hearing, is that right?

[David] Yeah, I would most definitely like to tell that story.

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[David] I think we all grow from stories. So although the doctors were never 100% certain that this massive weight loss was the definitive reason for the hearing loss, it was strongly suspected. We don't know for sure. Going from 160 pounds to 112 because of a medical condition called Crohn's Disease. And all the body changes in stresses and all that, according to the docs, likely contributed to the hearing loss.

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[David] My colon ruptured in '96, and I had to have emergency surgery because of the disease. My GI doc at the time mentioned the body can sometimes react to different stresses, different other passing issues, such as weight loss. Therefore, my hearing loss could have been caused by that. We don't know for sure, obviously, but that was likely to cause what could have caused it. I currently have more than 60% hearing loss in both ears.

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[David] Hearing aids don't necessarily help everyone with the type of hearing loss I have, hearing aids don't.

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[David] And trust me, I've tried many hearing aids trying to solve this problem. But then again, sometimes it's a blessing not to be able to hear some people. That may sound kind of odd, but I get it. I'm sure you understand.

[Erin] I think we all have had those experiences. (laughs)

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[David] My wife Robin joke when he says, I have selective hearing.

[Erin] I think a lot of wives say that.

[David] Why would she say that, do you think? Well, because I won't hear her say, Honey, take out the trash, but if she says, Honey, you want to fool around, well, I'm sprinting to the bedroom.

[Erin] You're cracking me up. (laughs)

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[David] So technology does help, especially the closed captioning and apps specifically designed for the deaf and hard hearing community. I'm using captioning now. I use it around all my meetings. Otherwise I'm completely lost.

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[Erin] So one of the things that I've learned, and I think sometimes people who are trying to say things in a way that's compassionate end up accidentally saying the wrong thing. So one thing that I have learned over the years is that it's actually preferred to say either deaf or hard of hearing and that it's not considered accurate or helpful to say something like "hearing impaired". Is that right?

[David] Yeah. It's ironic because I'm hard at hearing and belong to the largest deaf and hard of hearing Facebook group. But I posted something in there one time and referred to hearing impairment and that I was hearing impaired. Well, some people took exception to that term and let me know, and we all know how some people can react on social media, right? So I'll just leave it at that. But the term hearing impaired offends some people.

[Erin] So we'll make sure to always say deaf or hard of hearing in our interview.

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[Erin] So we had done a meet & greet several weeks ago. And one of the words that kept coming up for me when you were talking and telling me about your experiences and the experiences of other people in the deaf and hard of hearing community is the word "isolated" and feeling isolation compared to the rest of the world. And I was wondering, especially since you had the experience of being able to hear for the first part of your life and then losing your hearing later, would you share a little bit about your experience or what you are familiar with about the feelings of isolation?

[David] Yeah, I'm not completely deaf, so I can't speak to that exactly. But as you must realize, not being able to hear a baby speak or a cat or bird sing, those are some of the greatest pleasures of life and not being able to hear those you can imagine.

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[David] But as far as people with hearing loss like myself, we tend to feel isolated because in part we grow tired of the way we're treated by others as those others become frustrated and irritated and sometimes downright mean. Someone who's hard of hearing can eventually just withdraw and not want to take part in social interactions at all or very little. So we just have to remember as a group that our hearing loss doesn't and shouldn't define us.

[Erin] So yeah, you touched on that a little bit here about people's perceptions and reactions to you. And I guess I was so shocked when you were sharing some of this with me about how frustrating and hurtful it can be for you in public when you need to ask somebody to repeat themselves and they're rude to you. Can you tell us more about that?

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[David] Right, I just think I did in a way. Of course, that interaction and the subsequent reaction by that person who hears, well, depends on the situation. If I'm a customer in the store, the salesperson isn't likely going to react angry or rudely to me simply because I'm a customer. But if the roles were reversed and I was, for instance, and this has happened, I've been in a job interview being asked questions, not being able to make out those questions or having them repeated two, three, four times, the person on the other side begins to think, oh, he's dumb, he's not capable.

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[David] Other ignorant things like that. Sorry, but not sorry. That's just kind of the way reality is.

[Erin] Thank you for sharing that. So we've been talking some about the emotional toll and impact that the loss of hearing has on someone.

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[Erin] And from an emotional perspective, how does having a hearing dog help someone who is hard of hearing? Does having a service dog improve the feelings of isolation?

[David] Yeah, well, first of all, dogs are, as the saying goes, man's best friend. And there's a reason for that. But this is even truer for a hearing dog or any service dog in general.

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[David] Most dogs are by nature extremely friendly, loving and happy unless they've been taught otherwise. The hard of hearing or deaf person who's withdrawn from social interactions will almost always become more confident and outgoing with their dog. Why? Because in part, the focus is taken off their lack of hearing and turned towards how cute Fido is or the silly, dumb thing Fido just did.

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[David] There are countless, countless, countless stories of Joe Hearing Dog Owner becoming a completely different person when he has his hearing dog companion.

[Erin] And obviously, it's not just important for emotional and companionship reasons. There's physical and even lifesaving reasons for deaf people to have a service dog, too. Can you tell us about some of these?

[David] Oh, yeah.

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[David] Hearing dogs alert their owners to common sounds, like doorbells, text messages, alarm clocks, different things like that. But they're also trained to alert their companions to life threatening situations, such as fire alarms going on, which obviously a deaf person wouldn't be able to hear.

[Erin] So would you tell us about what the alert is that a hearing dog is trained to do when a smoke alarm or a fire alarm is going off?

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[David] That's a great question, but that hearing dog is trained to do two things. One, to make physical contact with the owner by jumping up on that owner. And then two, he's going to get down on his belly and crawl around on the floor. That lets the owner know that it's time to get out of the building, out of the house. And then this is covered extensively during the phase of the training when the owner and the dog work together, which we'll go into a little bit later. But yeah, that's just an amazing sight to see.

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[Erin] I can imagine. So we also have Judith Mueller here. So, Judith, do you want to tell us a little bit about your background? And did you grow up with dogs and pets in your life?

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[Judith] Sure, absolutely. So I've always been an animal lover from the very first time I can remember. And I grew up with lots of pets, anything ranging from bunnies to guinea pigs to turtles and even dogs. And when I was growing up, I had a German Shepherd named Timo, and he and I did a lot of agility training together. And then for the past nine years, I've had a mini Australian Shepherd named Oliver.

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[Judith] He's just absolutely amazing, love him to pieces. And we've learned lots of tricks together. And his favorite pastime is herding geese in the park.

[Erin] And so you live in New York, right? So Central Park and Riverside Park are amazing places for him to find, those Canada Geese.

[Judith] Yes, that's right.

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[Erin] I'm always curious about dog life living in a city. I've always lived in, like, a very suburban area so my dogs aren't on elevators or things like that. So do you have to do any specific training with them for living to get them used to city life?

[Judith] That's a great question, I think, because I've had Oliver from when he was pretty little, and I started just taking him everywhere, so he was getting used to all the noises. He actually loves fire trucks, so whenever he hears the siren go up, he'll sit on the sidewalk and howl along. We call it the "Ode to the Firefighters". (laughs)

[Judith] So I think overall, he's adjusted quite well to city life, and there's so many parks and dog parks, and it's from a socialization point of view for him pretty great because every block there's a new dog.

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[Erin] So do you want to tell us a little bit about your professional background and how you got here today?

[Judith] Sure, absolutely. So I guess by education, I'm an International Economics aficionado and a self-proclaimed data nerd, and I really began my career working in the area of climate change. But then I soon found my calling more in the nonprofit sector. So since 2012, I've worked with many small NGOs and also really big foundations all across the globe.

And I supported their grant making efforts, created strategic plans, implemented monitoring and evaluation systems, and also generally improved their grant making processes. And then currently at my day job, I serve as the Executive Director of the Mueller Health Foundation, which is a family-led private philanthropy that has made it its mission to really help find patient centered solutions towards eradicating infectious diseases, in particular tuberculosis.

[Erin] And so how did you and David meet and how did you become involved in Your Hearing Dog?

[Judith] So I had last year been actually looking to serve on a board for a while, and I found David and Your Hearing Dog through a board-matching service in September of last year.

[Judith] And I was just so absolutely impressed by David's passion and his willingness to want to make such a big difference for those affected by hearing loss. And on top of that, I just fell in love with the mission of Your Hearing Dog because it aligns with my own passions of just wanting to help others and, of course, my love for dogs. So I just also really want to commend David for kind of opening my eyes to the difficulties that the deaf and hard of hearing community often face. So I'm really grateful for him, and he did this on this podcast as well, for speaking so openly and candidly about his experiences. I think that makes him such a great champion in this area, and I just couldn't help but be inspired by his passion and determination to help.

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[Erin] I think we're all being inspired and touched by his willingness to share his story with us.

[David] Wow. I'm wearing my halo here on thank you. (laughs)

[Erin] Judith, I was just curious, have you ever had anyone in your life affected by hearing loss?

[Judith] So David was the first person I've actually met who is part of the hard of hearing community. I have had kind of from the sidelines, heard stories in my day job about patients who have tuberculosis and are put on antituberculosis medication. They often experience hearing loss. So this has actually made me a better person in my day job as well, to be more cognizant of what they're going through.

[Erin] Yeah, I saw a statistic online that up to 15% of the U.S. Population is affected by hearing loss, which would put it at about 40 million people. And that was shocking to me, that kind of number. I have a friend who has some hearing loss in one ear and she's very young, 40s, and she's always having to position herself to make sure that you're on the side of her good ear. And my husband's boss has that also. So it's really just made me, since we've been connecting, just be a little more cognizant of these things. And I hope that that's something that we can all keep in the back of our minds moving forward.

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[David] Well, if she wants a dog, send her our way.

[Erin] So let's talk some about the mission of the organization because we can see how hugely important it is in the life of someone who is deaf or hard of hearing to have a service dog in their life. So do you want to tell us the story of how Your Hearing Dog got started?

[David] Yeah, YHD was officially incorporated August 1 last year, 2022. After doing a lot of research leading up to August, we determined there was a tremendous need for hearing dogs to support the deaf and hard of hearing community. Some organizations at that time are simply not accepting any applications for dogs. The applicants were therefore put on a waitlist because the cost of training a dog is very high and the organizations couldn't cover the cost of that training. So YHD's approach to this will definitely address this area, this much needed area. YHD became officially fiscally sponsored by an organization based in Maryland on January 1 of this year. So we're still young and growing, but we have big plans.

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[Erin] So yeah, obviously there's this huge need and we've talked some just a little bit about these kind of statistics. So yeah, there's obviously a huge need for service dogs trained for the deaf and hard of hearing.

[Judith] Oh, absolutely. And I mean, just like we discussed, 15% of American adults really have some sort of trouble with their hearing. And if you think about it, that's about five times five New York cities.

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[Erin] Wow.

[Judith] Quite a lot of people managing daily life. Just to put it in perspective. And I think kind of the second need attached to this is that there's just simply not enough of these hearing dogs available. And those that are available are just prohibitively costly.

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[Judith]

I mean, one of those dogs costs up to \$25,000.

[Erin] Wow.

[Judith] Huge sum.

[Erin] Yeah.

[Judith] So we really made it our mission to therefore start Your Hearing Dog to provide those service dogs to that incredibly underserved population and at no cost to them. And I think we're pretty excited because we're starting in Colorado, but then are hoping to expand nationally kind of over the next few years.

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[Erin] So are there other organizations that provide this type of service?

[David] Yes, there are other obviously other organizations that provide hearing dollars to the deaf and harder hearing. There's one right here in Colorado, but their efforts are just absolutely fantastic. There's always a greater need than there is availability and affordability of trained hearing dogs, though. So we are therefore working just really hard to close that gap. That's basically what we're going to do.

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[Erin] You know, I'm always so amazed by dogs. And again, I didn't really grow up with dogs, I mean, obviously I saw them in the world, but as I've gotten older and I've really learned about the special abilities and how their sense of smell works differently from ours, and how much of their brain is taken up with the ability to smell and determine all these different smells, So much more detailed than we are.

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[Erin] I once heard somebody say that if we come home and are like, oh, my husband cooked beef stew for dinner tonight, whereas dogs can go, oh, there's carrots and celery and onions and garlic, they can actually smell each of these things so differently. And even their sense of hearing is so much more sensitive than ours. And so I just always think it makes them so uniquely qualified to help us as man's best friend in the world with things like this.

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[Judith] Yeah, absolutely. And I can only second that, which is why we enjoy working with these dogs so much. And like you said, they have incredibly sensitive ears. They can really pick up on electronic frequencies that we can't even perceive. And then just recently, as a fun fact, I learned that our furry companions can even hear like bodily vibrations of termites in the wall.

[Erin] Wow.

[Judith] I thought that was quite interesting.

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[Judith] So given that dogs can hear about four times better than the average human, I think they're greatly suited to be able to alert humans to sounds and potential dangers. And then they have this amazing ability to hear, but then I think they also have incredible high emotional intelligence and their ability to form bonds with their owners is just amazing. So given that loyalty paired with consistent training, they not only make great service dogs to carry out tasks, but I think they offer something much bigger, which is a lifelong companionship and friendship and emotional support to their owners. And we all, as dog lovers, know that dog love is just so unconditional when you come in the door, they're just so excited to see you and they will just brighten your day.

[Erin] Dogs are amazing.

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[Erin] So talk to us more about Your Hearing Dog and the overall goal for the organization.

[David] Well, quite simply, we truly want to make a difference and bring a smile and support to the deaf and hard hearing community. We do that by training hearing dog, facilitating the matchmaking process and providing support for the lifetime, basically the working life of the dog.

[Erin] And so what is the process for selecting dogs for your program?

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[Judith] That's a great question. So we have recently partnered with a certified trainer in Colorado and she is the one who conducts an initial evaluation of the dogs that are to be trained. And the dogs are in that process with a checklist, generally screened for temperament but also for suitability to serve as a service dog.

[Erin] And so your organization is actually working with dogs who are in rescues and shelters. Do I have that right?

[David] Yeah, we're currently partnering with the rescue organization that is run by our trainer.

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[David] Like you just mentioned, it was really important for us to work with shelter dogs in particular because we truly believe that there are so many great dogs that deserve a second chance out there and there are so many dogs, I mean, it's overpopulated, but we just believe that they really deserve a second chance. They have so much to offer and so much love and support to give that you really can't go wrong.

[Erin] That part by the way, of your mission is just so close to my heart. I know you often hear about service dogs who are being bred for that specific reason, which I totally understand the thinking behind, but you also do just see dogs in shelters and rescue especially. I've been involved in that community for 15 years and you see so many dogs where you're like, oh, they have so much potential that they could be helping somebody in a really special way. And so anyway, that part of your mission is just extra special to me. I had to let you know. So what kind of qualities and characteristics would be on the checklist to look for in a dog?

[Judith] Yeah, David mentioned the hearing dogs are trained to alert their owners to common sounds like anything from doorbells, oven timers, smoke alarms, telephones, babies cries and even alarm clocks. And then they have to make physical contact with their owners by nudging or pawing at them to get their attention.

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[Judith] So what we really look for is that the dog is able to fulfill these tasks very consistently. And for that to happen, we really look for dogs that easily respond to the training. The trainer will go through some initial training with the dog as part of the evaluation. And then I think the second part to that is having just the right temperament because you don't want an overly hyper dog who gets overly excited when the doorbell rings. So I think those are all kind of characteristics we look for and we really rely on our trainer to best assess these qualities.

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[Erin] And so do they have to be puppies when they start training? or is it okay if they're a little bit older?

[David] Well, we all love puppies, right? Who doesn't love a nice, cute puppy? But slightly older dogs from two years onwards are actually more easily suited to go through the hearing dog training process.

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[David] A slightly older dog may have undergone some basic training, so adding an additional path to that will actually make it a lot easier and a bit faster on the training process. So that just means we can match more dogs with more owners.

[Erin] Oh, that's really interesting to think about because I feel like sometimes you see these pictures of these little puppies wearing their guide dog vest or something. But yeah, I guess it would be helpful. Again, I appreciate the dogs that are a couple of years older, so I understand that I would never want a puppy myself. So what is the training process and how long does it take to train a hearing dog?

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[Judith] Sure, I think that's a great question. So our training process is pretty straightforward and our lead trainer, Carrie, is the one who's conducting most of that training. So after the dogs have been evaluated and selected by her, they are matched to a volunteer trainer who also serves as a foster parent at Carrie's rescue. And that person has committed to teaching a list of hearing specific or related tasks to the dog.

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[Judith] So all of our volunteer trainers are under the guidance of our lead trainer and she really teaches them not only how to train the dogs in terms of the specific tasks, but she also trains the volunteer trainers how to be good dog parents. And that's important to us because our volunteer trainers are essentially the ones who will pass on this knowledge to the new owner once we facilitate a match. So since you asked about training duration, that can vary anywhere from as little over a month to several months and it really depends how quickly the dog is able to learn how to complete the tasks. And the key here is consistency since we want to make sure that that is always carried out correctly. So what we do is the initial training session is usually held on site with our lead trainer and then the volunteer trainers are kind of sent back home along with the dogs and are monitored with regular video calls and check ins as they continue training the dogs in their homes.

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Kind of at the end of that process, the lead trainer then conducts a final evaluation to just determine and kind of sign off that the newly trained pupper is really ready to be matched to a new owner. And then kind of what we are looking forward to and want to roll out is a yearly or annual doggy graduations for the dogs that successfully complete our program.

[David] Woo-hoo!

[Judith] So that would be the grand finale.

[Erin] That's one graduation I would like to attend. And so how are the people chosen to be in your program?

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[David] Well, given that we're still in the pilot phase of our dog training program, we're working on creating an online application process. We already have created a list of criteria that the owner should meet in order to be eligible to be matched to one of our dogs. It's basically anyone who meets that criteria is welcome to submit an application and we'll work with the individual.

[Erin] So how are the people then matched with the dogs? Is there a process for that?

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[Judith] Yeah, sure. So we really try to match a dog and the new owner based on need, lifestyle and temperament. And then of course, there is always going to be a meet and greet at the beginning of the potential match just to see how they interact and just kind of give both a chance to sniff each other out, if you will, before making the commitment to be matched. And I think what's important to remember here is that we want to be very thoughtful in this process because we truly want to avoid making a match that doesn't last because that can be very traumatic not only for the dog and specifically actually for the dog, but also the owner. So we want to just be very mindful.

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[Erin] And is there a training process for the person also?

[David] Oh yeah, absolutely. Once the match is made, the new owner does receive onsite training support from Your Hearing Dog, from the volunteer trainer, and he's also taught to be a good dog parent. Additionally, we will provide that ongoing support to answer any questions and provide professional training courses as needed. We're also working on creating a community around our matches, like maybe a Facebook group or something to allow owners to share experiences and connect with one another.

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[Erin] Yeah, I'm thinking the person obviously then has to learn what these different signals mean as well. Right?

[David] Right.

[Erin] So I've been really impressed with all that you've accomplished in just this short time. Can you tell us some of the exciting things that have been going on with the organization?

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[Judith] Yeah, sure. Thanks so much also for your kind words. So we're obviously very excited about where we are as an organization and we're just absolutely thrilled that in the past couple of months, since we're fairly new, we were already able to kind of line up our lead trainer and create that partnership with the rescue in Colorado. So we're just super thrilled to kick start our pilot program of training the dogs and then we just can't wait to make many wonderful matches in the near future.

[Erin] And so what are the big goals and the big vision statement for Your Hearing Dog?

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[David] Well, that's a great question Erin. The vision of Your Hearing Dog is to become a recognized leader in the hearing dog agency industry and create a better everyday life for the deaf and hard of hearing community. The pilot program, as Judith just mentioned, is our goal for the remainder of this year. But as part of our five-year plan, we intend to establish a museum. That museum will showcase the historical journey of prominent individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

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[David] The museum's main objective is to communicate the message that individuals with perceived disabilities are still capable of realizing their dreams and aspirations.

[Erin] I really love that. So what is next to look forward to?

[Judith] I'm so glad you asked that question. So we are planning a hybrid kickoff celebration on Giving Tuesday, which is November 28.

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[Judith] It'll be held in person in Colorado and also streamed online to really showcase the skills of some of our newly trained dogs. And as part of that, we're also working really hard to provide entertainment such as a mentalist and a dog tricks act to make the event extra fun. And we also will have a live option to just garner more support for our organization. And we're just really thrilled and looking forward to a great turnout.

[Erin] Oh, that sounds really exciting.

00:42:36

[Erin] I love those dog trick acts, right? I'm lucky when my dog sits when I tell him to. I'm just always so impressed by what people can do with their dogs. And so what can all of us do to help Your Hearing Dog and to support those in our lives who are affected by hearing loss?

[David] Well, that's a fantastic question Erin.

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[David] And there are many ways to get involved with us with Your Hearing Dog. You can, for example, one, volunteer at an event or as a foster trainer or any of the other various positions we have posted on our website. We have many positions open currently on our website to become a board member and assist with the overall setting, the overall direction of Your Hearing Dog. Three, obviously you can make a donation of any amount. We have costs obviously associated with training, feeding, preventative vaccinations of our hearing dog and we have other costs of running our organization, so contributions will be fully tax deductible.

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[David] Number four would be planned giving. Planned giving is another way you can definitely assist us. Reach out to us and we'll be happy to discuss the details. Five for businesses such as your business, I'll put a plug in here but become involved as a YHD sponsor and enjoy the many benefits of our program. And the last one probably, but it's a simple one, but could be the most effective is if people would follow us on social media, Facebook and Instagram and share our posts and announcements with their friends and family.

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That would just help out tremendously. All of this will help Your Hearing Dog with our mission of providing especially trained service dogs to their deaf and harder hearing community. So if you or someone you love has hearing issues or simply you identify with what we've just talked about with Erin, please reach out to us. We very much appreciate it.

00:45:05

[Erin] Well, thank you so much. I'll make sure that we have links in the show notes so that everybody can find you guys online and on social media. I'm going to encourage everybody listening to start following you guys. And it's been really exciting just to see all that you've had going on these last several months. And it's really special experience for me to get to do this interview with you both today and I thank you so much for your time.

[Judith] Thank you so much, Erin.

00:45:28

[David] Well. Thank you, Erin. Yeah. We very much appreciate the afternoon to be on this podcast. Wow, thank you.

00:45:45

[Erin] Oh, my goodness. I had so much fun learning about hearing dogs and all that they can do. I had no idea that it costs up to \$25,000 to train a dog like that. And Your Hearing Dog's goals to be able to provide these dogs trained at no cost to the person. And it always just speaks to my heart when people are working with shelter dogs and rescue dogs, because I think so many of us in the shelter and rescue communities see these dogs sometimes that, you know, have so much potential and they just need the right trainer, the right opportunity. And these dogs can really fulfill their calling, their potential, their particular set of skills. Also, I just have to mention that David cracks me up. He definitely had me laughing many times during this interview. I get to listen to it back when I'm editing and when I'm preparing this for release, and I'm just like, oh, my gosh, David, you're a trip.

00:46:43

[Erin] I'm so glad we got to meet. I'm always so grateful for the opportunity to learn and practice more empathy in my life and have recognition for the challenges of other people in the world. I had mentioned to David and Judith that one of my husband's bosses has some hearing loss. And over these past couple months of connecting with David and Judith and learning more about Your Hearing Dog, I had mentioned this to my husband and we had been talking some, and then we connected with his boss and she was sharing some of the challenges that she's faced. Oftentimes in their line of work, she's dealing with people who are often new immigrants to the US.

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[Erin] And a lot of times they have an accent. And because of her hearing loss, she spends her whole life being really strategic about how she's positioning herself to be able to stand with her good ear towards the person she's facing. And there have been times, maybe there's a lot of background noise or maybe for whatever reason, she's not able to position herself in the right way and she has to ask people to repeat themselves. And then because there's also this slight language barrier issue, it can sometimes get really heated and people feel like she's being very rude. And it was just one of those big reminder moments of how we don't always know the situation, the challenges that someone else is facing, and that's why having extra empathy and compassion and being the person that our dog thinks we are is a great motto to live by in life.

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[Erin] So I'll make sure that we have links in the show notes so you can find out more about Your Hearing Dog, follow them on social media, sign up for their new email newsletter, the Barkley Post, and also make a donation and get involved with the organization. They have such a genuinely beautiful mission to improve the lives of so many people. And that'll do it for this episode of the Believe in Dog Podcast. Thank you again to David and Judith of Your Hearing Dog. If you like this episode, remember that you can always leave a five star rating and review on Apple podcasts. It's pretty much the biggest compliment that you can give a podcaster.

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You can always find me at Believe in Dog Podcast on Facebook or @erin_the_dog_mom on Instagram. So until next time, this is Erin Scott sending you hugs and belly rubs.

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