

Tiverton Lions Club Fundraising for Autism Service Dog

The Lions Clubs of Canada are a service club of volunteers who believe in the motto of 'We Serve', and the Tiverton Lions are putting that motto into action with the goal of helping five-year-old Lucas Mullen of Tiverton by fundraising to help his family purchase a specially trained Autism Assistance Support Dog. Lion Hank Van Moorsel explains.

"The Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides program provides service animals trained in one of seven different areas. There are Canine Vision dogs, Hearing, Seizure Response, Service, Diabetes Alert, Facility support, and of course, Autism Assistance. In an ideal world the Foundation would always be able to meet the demand for dogs, but sadly, that is not the case. Typically, there is a two-year wait from the time the application process starts until the family gets matched with a dog, but the demand for Autism Assist dogs is such that currently we have a four year wait." That minimum four-year wait was one that Lion Sandra Parry, Lucas' mother, felt would adversely affect Lucas, so the family searched for alternatives.

"We contacted K9 Country Inn Service Working Service Dogs by Dundalk. Their program provides two dogs every two years, and we were able to get Lucas into their program. Typically, people will get to bring a puppy home when they are about eight weeks old, but Murphy, the dog we are getting for Lucas, has to be fully trained before he joins us. He will be able to stay with us for longer stints starting in March of 2026, but he will not be with us on a permanent basis as Lucas' Autism Assist Dog until he is two years old in September 2026."

Murphy is a Golden Retriever, once the training is completed, Murphy will be able to sense when Lucas' anxiety increases, and help Lucas by serving as a calming and grounding point of contact, but that is just a small portion of the role he will play.

Lucas has severe Autism, is non-verbal and an eloper. Being an eloper means he will unexpectedly leave a supervised safe space or care of a responsible adult without warning. Additionally, he has a mental condition known as PICA, where he will eat items that are not edible. Once fully trained, Murphy will also be an anchor for Lucas, being tethered to Lucas when they spend time outdoors, and if Lucas tries to run away, he will sit, preventing Lucas from going too far. He will also alert an adult if Lucas tries to open an exit door, will return Lucas to an adult if he elopes, and will take items from Lucas that are inedible during a PICA incident. These skills require an immense amount of training hours, which means they carry an expensive price tag.

When the Tiverton Lions learned the scope of the expense that the family would be taking on to provide Lucas with much needed support, they wanted to help in any way they could, as Lion Hank Van Moorsel details.

"The Lions are working on expanding our Dog Guides Foundation, with plans underway to construct a new facility in Oakville in the next few years, but we understand that Lucas and his family need support now. There is the saying that it takes a village to raise a child, so we are hoping that people of Tiverton and area will get behind our thinking that it takes a village to help out this family."

The Tiverton Lions Club has a fundraising Easter Bunny Sale for \$6 each, with the funds raised going toward the Autism Assist Dog. To participate in this event, reach out to a Tiverton Lions or check Tiverton Lions Facebook page, or call or text 519-706-5667 for more information. There is also a Go Fund Me set up, you can search for Autism Assist Dog for Lucas Mullen or donations can be made by e-transfer to tivertonlions368@gmail.com, remember to please put LUCAS in the memo line.

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