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Ailing woman, dog bring out generosity

By Maura J. Halpern
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For once, Karen Morin has a reason to cry tears of joy.

The 43-year-old Glendale woman has struggled with lifelong health problems that have left her disabled.

Since an article about Morin and her service dog, Woody, appeared in The Arizona Republic in mid-January, readers have contributed more than \$18,000.

The donations, organized by two groups, will help fund Woody's long-term veterinary care, grooming, food, future training and equipment.

"I'm just so overwhelmed," Morin said of the outpouring of support. "I never would have imagined that my medical mayhem could make me feel like the luckiest person on Earth."

Morin's medical history spans nearly 50 surgeries, more than 30 related to her temporomandibular joint, or TMJ.

The TMJ makes it possible to chew, swallow, speak and make facial expressions.

In the 1980s, Morin received synthetic TMJ implants to correct a congenital jaw deformity.

Those implants disintegrated and sent toxic particles throughout her body, leaving her disabled.

Morin now suffers from epileptic seizures, nerve damage, joint pains, cognitive problems and a damaged immune system, among other issues.

Woody, who assists Morin when she has seizures, developed severe allergies that require weekly grooming and expensive medical treatment.



Karen Morin's story has brought a flood of donations to help care for her service dog, Woody.
(Michael Ging/The Arizona Republic)

He also needs additional training and special equipment, such as a harness.

To help raise money, Hallis Anderson of the Glendale Evening Longhaven Lion's Club set up a fund for Karen on behalf of Lion's Club International.

In two weeks, Anderson has received \$16,215, with checks ranging from \$5 to \$5,000.

"Her story has touched so many people," Anderson said. "Several people have called to give her prayers, with many crying on the phone."

Donations, accompanied by cards with heartfelt notes and well wishes, have come from around Arizona and across the country, including Alaska, Massachusetts and Missouri.

The Orthodox's Silver Lining Foundation, an Oklahoma-based organization that raises funds for dogs with medical needs, also stepped in.

Since The Republic article, OSLF has received \$3,100, of which \$1,975 is designated for Woody. The rest will go into a general fund to help other dogs.

Brenda Osbourne, OSLF's treasurer, said the organization is working with a donor who wants to contribute \$600 a year for Woody's long-term care.

"We're completely blown away with the response," Osbourne said. "It's just wonderful."

Morin's health problems began long before she needed a service dog for her seizures.

She was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis at age 3. By age 10, she had an ileostomy, in which doctors removed her colon and rectum.

Morin underwent a hysterectomy at 27.

The worst pain stems from her never-ending TMJ problems. She received titanium implants in 2001, but last year those metal plants started to shift.

Now, the broken implants could puncture her ear canal or brain.

For five months, she has battled with her insurance company, which denied coverage for replacement implants.

Outpouring of support

In addition to more than \$18,000 in monetary donations, Karen and Woody have received other important gifts:

- Through Orthodox's Silver Lining Foundation, K9 Topcoat (www.k9topcoat.com) donated a Lycra bodysuit to provide relief for Woody's skin allergies.
- Aussie Pet Mobile (www.aussiepetmobile.com) will provide two free grooming appointments for Woody every month. Each session typically costs \$75.
- Local residents donated a golf cart and electric wheelchair for Karen so she can take Woody on walks.

"As a result of people's generosity and compassion, I have one less major worry," she said. "That is I know Woody is now taken care of."