

# HELPING HANDS

## MONKEY HELPERS



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### Winter 2016 Newsletter

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## Letter from the co-Chairs

We hope this newsletter finds all of our friends and supporters enjoying a great start to 2016. As many of you know, in 2015 we shared the responsibilities of leading Helping Hands' Board of Directors as co-Chairs – it has been a privilege to steer this group of talented and thoughtful volunteers that make up our Board of Directors.



The responsibility to plan for the long-term sustainability of the Helping Hands: Monkey Helpers program is one we all take very seriously. In January, Bob Sanders was elected Chair of the Board of Directors, and Susan Keyes was named Chair Emeritus and Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee. As we enter the third year of our five- year Strategic Plan, there is much work to be done. This year, we will take steps toward envisioning and designing the future home of The Monkey College, including its location and funding.

Two of the key aspects of Helping Hands' mission are our lifetime commitment to the care of our service animals and providing active placement support services for all of our recipients across the country. As we honor that pledge, it is critical that we anticipate the future housing and staffing needs that will be necessary to care for both of these treasured groups – our recipients and our monkeys – long into the future. It is an exciting time for the program and we will need help from our dedicated community of supporters to achieve our goals.

Concurrent with our efforts in planning for the future is the need for the Board of Directors to champion the day-to-day work of our amazing staff members. Their passion in the training and care of the monkeys, as well as the guidance they provide to the community of individuals sharing their lives with these service animals, is inspiring. Each new year brings with it a host of opportunities to change the lives of people living with disabilities. The energy generated from those possibilities fuels our mission.

We look forward to updating you all throughout the year as we take strides toward a bright and successful future for Helping Hands: Monkey Helpers.

With gratitude for your support,

Susan Keyes

Bob Sanders

# Learning at The Monkey College

Here in Boston at the Thomas and Agnes Carvel Foundation Center (affectionately known as The Monkey College) you will find our trainers hard at work with their monkeys: getting them ready to be matched and placed with our recipients. But what does that process entail? How do we teach our capuchins to be service monkeys? What do they learn as students?

There are 3 distinct levels of training: The Cubicle, The Travis Roy Training Room (also known as the B-Room), and The Melvin R. Seiden Training Room (referred to as "the Apartment"). Each monkey is assigned their own trainer and moves at his or her own pace through a series of classrooms, learning more sophisticated tasks at each level. Working one-on-one, our trainers use



a laser pointer and simple words to direct the monkey's behavior. Imitation based training (Monkey See, Monkey Do!) and positive reinforcement are the cornerstones for our training. Praise, affection, and small food rewards reinforce new skills. Training is customized to each monkey's personality, ability, and learning style. At every stage, trainers make sure their monkeys have fun while they learn. When they graduate, our service monkeys can accomplish many tasks, while also providing companionship to their human partners.

## **What sort of tasks are taught to a Helping Hands Monkey?**

Fetch is the most widely used task that our monkeys are taught. Imagine that you are home alone and you drop

## Staffing Update: Welcome Angela Lett



Helping Hands is pleased to welcome our new Director of Development, Angela Lett. Angela has ten years of experience as a non-profit fundraiser and is excited to join the Helping Hands team.

*"I'm so impressed with the mission of the organization and the great care that everyone takes to ensure that recipients and their monkey helpers succeed in their partnerships. I'm eager to meet all the wonderful people that support Helping Hands and make sure this important work continues for years to come."*

your phone on the floor with no way of picking it up - it's 18 inches away, but it might as well be 18 miles away. Not a problem for a 6 pound monkey! Using a laser pointer, the trainer points at an out of reach object and says "Fetch". The monkey then brings the object and places it in the lap of the trainer.



One of our monkeys' favorite tasks to learn is how to appropriately use power buttons. Because they love to manipulate and explore objects, monkeys know how to perform this action from a very young age. Here, we teach them the importance of waiting for a laser light to indicate which button to push, and to push that button only once. Our students love being rewarded for doing a task that they find fun.



Itch is one of the most complex tasks that our monkey helpers learn. Taught in The Apartment, a monkey will eventually be able to gently scratch an itch on a person's face with a soft cloth using facial cues.



This task is initially taught using an "itch board" with tape on it so the monkey can get used to the feeling and motion needed to use the itch cloth. From there, the trainers start putting tape on their arm and asking the monkeys to "itch". As the pieces of tape are made smaller and smaller, they eventually move them up to their face where they introduce facial cues such as lifting up their chin to show the monkey where to use the itch cloth. If you visit our website, [monkeyhelpers.org](http://monkeyhelpers.org), you can watch the episode "Itch" from our *Monkeys in a Minute* series.



# Save the Date for 2016

## THE MONKEY HELPERS' ANNUAL FOOD FESTIVALE

Visit [monkeyhelpers.org/festivale](http://monkeyhelpers.org/festivale) for updates.

**Saturday, October 22, 2016**  
**WGBH Studios, Boston, MA**

Join us for an evening of friends, food, fundraising, and fun! Help us make the Year of the Monkey extra special.



View of the festivities



Some of the delicious offerings

Marissa Cuda receiving the Charles Evans Trainer Award of Excellence from Executive Director Megan Talbert and Director of Training Alison Payne in 2015.

## Thank you to our Event Chair, Lisa Flores, and to our 2015 Sponsors and Restaurants

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## Meet a Monkey: Daisy

Daisy is a very sweet and loyal monkey, so humans and monkeys alike enjoy her company. She is also very photogenic, which is why you will be able to see her in an upcoming issue of *O Magazine*! Her favorite task to practice is drink, which involves going to a mini fridge, getting a bottle of water, putting it in a bottle tray, taking the top off, and finally inserting a straw.



When she is not in training, Daisy loves climbing on the jungle gym in the Enrichment Room with her friends, Bonnie and Tucker. And, she really enjoys her healthy snacks of cucumber and oatmeal.

