Without Hellion we would not be where we are today. She was bright, curious, and always full of life. Hellion’s adaptable nature and intelligence made for a quick study. Many of the tasks she performed with Robert laid the groundwork for the training methods that we use to this day. We are indebted to Hellion for paving the way for successful future placements.

While at The Monkey College, Sophie worked under the same training methodology that Hellion helped establish 40 years ago. This January, Sophie celebrated her one-year anniversary with her newest recipient, Brett. (Read their story inside.) After Brett’s accident, he wanted some semblance of normalcy back in his life. Sophie provides warmth and companionship for Brett. Her clever antics keep the whole family amused! Brett’s wife, Kristen, coined the term “Sophie’s mail” for their junk mail. Once a week, junk mail is “delivered” to Sophie. She’ll open the mail, grab her own set of crayons, and draw for hours. Talk about a special delivery!

Sophie is also a mimic. If Brett has a drink, Sophie knows that it’s her time to have a drink!

Helping Hands Trainer Marissa speaks fondly of her time with Sophie, “While at Helping Hands she would occasionally play with other monkeys or trainers, but her favorite activity was just sitting in my lap as I groomed her. She’s a curious monkey who likes playing with toys, magazines, and boxes. She is a staff favorite because she’s just so sweet!”

According to Brett, Sophie provides more than he ever anticipated, “I mean there are some days if you are around her she’ll make you smile and laugh. That’s for sure.”

Over 40 years, your support has made it possible for us to provide exemplary care to our service monkeys in training, placement, and retirement. Thank you for continuing to support our service monkeys who give so much to our recipients.
From the Executive Director

Can you believe Helping Hands has been providing service monkeys to recipients across the country for 40 years?

Support from people like you helped us reach this milestone, so thank you for making it possible! While much has changed over the past 40 years, we are still committed to placing our special service monkeys with people around the country who will benefit from their unique skills. People like Robert Foster and Brett Shaw, who you can learn more about on the following pages.

Robert and Brett’s stories are part of a special series this year that will highlight 40 monkeys in honor of our 40th anniversary. You can read these stories on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and in our print and e-newsletters.

Would you like to help us celebrate our 40th anniversary? Then I hope you will join us at Festivale on Saturday, May 11. You can join us in celebrating the life-changing work our service monkeys and raise critical funds to continue to support these special partnerships. We can’t do it without you!

With deepest gratitude,

Angela Lett
Executive Director

Brett Shaw and Robert Foster:
Bridging 40 Years of Success

The story of Helping Hands: Monkey Helpers began with champions just like you who believe in our vision—and a man called Robert Foster. In 1975, Boston-area resident Robert suffered a spinal cord injury when he was involved in a car accident. His injury paralyzed him from the shoulders down.

Three years post-accident, Robert discovered Helping Hands on a news program. Intrigued, he reached out to inquire about the application process. Robert’s agreeable character was a close match in personality to a little capuchin named Hellion. In 1979, Hellion came to share a home with Robert. The trainers at Helping Hands worked with Robert and Hellion on in-home training techniques such as fetching objects, opening doors, and feeding recipients (a task no longer in practice). Robert confirmed that the training process worked “excellently.” That didn’t mean that Hellion didn’t have a wild side as her name implies. During interviews, Robert spoke of the time she got into his bottle of Brut Cologne and splashed herself while playing with the bottle!

“We both kind of live for each other.” — Robert

Their unique partnership garnered a lot of media attention. Both Robert and Hellion were featured on 60 Minutes, in a variety of books, and in a number of articles. All the publicity helped to put Helping Hands on the map as a nationally recognized nonprofit organization.

Robert and Hellion were together for 28 years until Robert’s death in 2007. Forty years later, your support continues to transform the lives of recipients like Robert and Hellion and Brett and Sophie, who you can learn more about on the following pages.

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With deepest gratitude,

Angela Lett
Executive Director

Brett and Sophie

Robert makes a donation at monkeyhelpersdonate.org

Robert and Hellion were together for 28 years until Robert’s death in 2007. We are eternally grateful to Robert and Hellion for providing the foundation on which we created our institutional legacy. A legacy that continues because of you.

Twenty years later, Brett and Sophie continued to enjoy their service monkey. They know he’s happy and having Sophie at home brings something else into his life.

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Forty years later, your support continues to transform the lives of recipients like Brett Shaw. Brett makes a home with Kristen, his wife and primary caregiver, two adult daughters, horses, and dogs. In 2012, Brett was on his way home when he fell asleep at the wheel. His vehicle crashed into a concrete barrier and he suffered a C4-C5 complete spinal cord injury.

Over the course of a year, Brett watched Helping Hands videos on YouTube and fell in love with our monkeys. A service animal—and a monkey at that—did not take a lot of convincing for this family of animal lovers. Kristen explained her rationale, “We thought, how many people can say they get to have a service monkey?”

In January 2018, the Shaw’s welcomed Sophie into their home. Sophie’s room is a converted office in the house and Brett and Sophie’s sanctuary. Kristen states, “[Brett and Sophie] will just sit there for five minutes and just have their own conversation. She’ll hold onto his hand and get more at eye level. Then she snuggles right next to him and takes a nap.”

Welcoming a new family member involves a level of commitment from everyone. Kristen attests, “I do think our girls enjoy watching Brett hanging out with Sophie. They know he’s happy and having Sophie at home brings something else into his life.”

“Not many people get this opportunity. To take an unfortunate event and try to get something that would bring some interest and joy.” — Kristen

Brett found what he was missing in Sophie. Her companionship brings a sense of comfort and her playfulness brings a smile to his face.

Because of you, Brett and Sophie celebrated their one-year anniversary in January 2019.

Look at all that you helped accomplish over the past 40 years! We honor Robert, Brett, and all of our recipients and service monkeys that have made us who we are today. Life-changing partnerships are timeless and your continuing support will help write the next success story.

To continue supporting partnerships like Robert and Hellion and Brett and Sophie, make a donation at monkeyhelpersdonate.org