Rescue Animals
How dogs, cats, and even monkeys can improve lives.

Small Hands, Big Help
These monkeys are specially trained to assist their clients with everyday tasks, by TAMIEA REECE

Though dogs might be the best-known service animal, the Boston-based nonprofit Helping Hands has been providing trained capuchin monkeys to assist people with spinal cord injuries and other mobility impairment since 1979. “[Capuchins] are highly intelligent, have dexterous hands, and can live for 30 to 40 years,” says Alison Payne, director of monkey care. At Helping Hands, monkeys spend their first eight to 12 years with a foster family learning basic social skills. Then they graduate to Monkey College, where they master tasks such as operating light switches, remote controls, and computers as well as learn how to fetch drinks, turn pages, and even scratch an itchy spot.

Each capuchin is placed with a recipient based on specific needs and personality. Grants and private donations cover the cost of food, vet care, and a cage. “Helping Hands retains full ownership of the monkeys, and we take care of them in every way for life,” Alison says.

Mary Kay Young, 58, from Wisconsin, was paralyzed in a car accident in 1896 and has limited use of her hands and arms. Her capuchin, Amy, has been with her for 13 years. “I drop things constantly, and Amy happily retrieves all of it,” says Mary Kay. “She’s given me the gift of independence.”

What a Cat Wants! Trigger your feline’s hunting instincts by filling this mouse-shaped feeder with his favorite dry food (we like Blue Buffalo’s Blue Wilderness recipe) and hiding it. Hollow Cat Feeding System, $40, uncommongoods.com.