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NAMI
National Alliance on Mental Illness

**High
Country**

Chanda & Oliver



"So I guess I should give those who don't know Oliver a little history about this amazing little hound.

I had always wanted an oversized grey Italian greyhound and I wanted to name him Oliver. When my vet called saying there was an IG that needed a home I jumped at the chance. He was an oversized grey IG named Oliver. I thought it was some kind of weird fate or something.

The foster home did too because even though he was mauling me with love he hadn't gone near another person ever. He was normally too scared.

I also hadn't left the house in about 3 years because I was afraid of these weird seizure things I would have. Going to meet Oliver was my first outing.

So I started socializing him right away because I knew he needed it, this also got me out of the house. He started acting funny by pawing at me and licking fiercely under my nose at these random times. I was clueless as to why. Took me months to connect that he was doing it about 10 minutes before I would have one of these weird seizures. I was a little dense about it.

I tracked it for a long time and realized he was really accurate and started reinforcing it. Then I started researching service dogs because I knew he had the temperament for it.

Back then, 11 years ago, I joined a list that was mostly for MI but also for other invisible disabilities and that is where I learned almost everything.

Funny thing was that I ended up with more MI diagnosis than 10 people put together! As I finally started meds they took care of my seizure problem because most of the meds for bipolar are seizure meds anyway...

So Oliver continued his training and I added on more and more and more things. Some of his things were natural things that he just did on his own that I reinforced with clicker and treats. Some of the things were just specifically trained things I taught him.

He has been an amazing dog for the last 11 years. He is 13 years old now. He has saved my life way too many times to count. He has released me into a world that was closed off to me for years. He has allowed me to speak to people I would never have spoken to before. He has helped me feel safe in a world that was never safe. He made me feel loved in a world where I was never loved. He allowed me to love where I never loved before. He is my soul mate. He is my first service dog."

Chanda is a member of an online support community to which I belong. The community is composed of people who utilize psychiatric service dogs as a recovery tool in managing their severe mental illnesses. She is the Co-Vice President, Co-Treasurer, a Moderator AND a member of the list!

At the time of this writing, Oliver had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Oliver died on May 26th, 2015. He worked up to his last day. Chanda is now training her

second psychiatric service dog, Peregrine, another Italian Greyhound pup who does a remarkable impersonation of a four legged pogo stick.

Please join us for our August 3rd meeting where I will be speaking on psychiatric service dogs.

Submitted by:
Justin G Mikel
NAMI Board Member



Monday, July 6 Meeting 7:00 pm

Come out to the Public Library in Boone this Monday for an Open Mic Night. Bring your poems, writings, artwork, theater, music - or anything you'd like to share. We can't wait to see your creativity! If you'd like, you can tell how it impacts your life, how it helps you cope or feel free. This is for ALL - those who live with mental illness, family members, friends, and professionals. We all have something to offer.

Our meetings are in the Watauga County Public Library conference room. Watauga County Public Library in downtown Boone is located at 140 Queen Street, behind Mast General Store. If you get there before 7pm you will be able to go in the main door. After that we will enter and exit through the side door.





A PDF of this newsletter can be found at <http://namihighcountry.org/newsletter/>

National Alliance on Mental Illness, High Country Chapter

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