I am writing to inform the community of pet lovers, there are individuals with disabilities, that are visible and non-visible. We can make a difference in the community and in the impact of others needs as well as ourselves. We want to be accepted. Many look at us as being different, unable, and put to the wayside. I would like to express my feelings. I am blind, and have mobility issues, along with physical limitations. This world is made up of all kinds of people. Just because I am blind, does not mean I cannot do. I do the same things you do, but in different ways. Your perception of me and others needs to be examined. I serve as the MS state coordinator, board member, and an ADA, Service Dog Handler, along with a Disability Rights Advocate for Paws for Friendship, Inc.  
  
Discrimination still exists everywhere. Yes, including pet therapy organizations, and pet affiliates. I tried over thirteen years ago, to get into the pet therapy area. I was turned down by an internationally known therapy dog group, because of my blindness and that I needed two dogs for the group. One had to be for seeing eyes and the other a therapy group. I kept searching, I felt I could make a difference and I knew my capabilities as well as the ability of my dogs. Persistence pays off. I found Paws For Friendship. I explained my situation, my dogs proved themselves as well me proving my abilities. We need to feel a part of the community/society, to be accepted for our capabilities, and the difference we make within our world and the world around us.  
  
I worked very hard to work my service dogs and meet the criteria for therapy dogs. I met the criteria through Paws for Friendship. I applied to the AKC and was denied. I questioned, “Why”? I was told it could not be done. They do not know the difference between working and therapy. I explained that they did. I had people from AKC that knew my dogs and had seen they knew. Federal laws for disabled individuals state if you offer an opportunity for the public, you must afford that same opportunity to a disabled person. I was told no by the AKC. I filed a complaint with the Department Of Justice. Now service dogs can be dual certified by the AKC. A rule that stood for over 135 years with the AKC was changed.  
  
I have been denied access because of my dog. They did not realize it was a service dog, no problems with the dog, the businesses did not understand. Food courts and restaurants want us away from the others, we are put in corners and away from others which I’d also, discrimination. The list goes on. The point I am trying to make is, afford us the opportunities to meet the criteria, educate, and let us be contributing members of society for a positive venture.  
  
Our program is all about sharing the love of our pets, companions for the enrichment of all. When you have an individual who is capable and wanting to make a difference, open your heart, your mind, and let them succeed, for they are future, and just may have a different perspective of changes.  
Sent from my iPad

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Beverly Hammett ADA Representative & Advocate/Service Animals & Disability Rights

Gouda Anne & Syros Palmer’s Mom

Chapter Coordinator, Mississippi