

Mission Moment: Canine Assisted Intervention (CAI)

Chloe



Kobe joined Chloe on stage as she shared "light bulb" moments from her CAI sessions with guests at Rogers Foundation's 2024 Gala.

Since childhood, I have experienced an overwhelming amount of anxiety because of my OCD, which manifests as a preoccupation with perfectionism and symmetry.

While I was at Rogers for the second time, I had the opportunity to participate in the impactful Canine Assisted Intervention (CAI) program with Rogers' facility dog, Kobe, and his handler, Mariah. Of course, as a huge dog lover, I said yes!

Most of what I call my "light bulb moments" were during my 13 sessions with Mariah and Kobe.

In the beginning, I thought Kobe would just be in the room for emotional support. I was wrong. During each session, Mariah came up with activities for Kobe and me to do together that specifically aligned with my treatment goals and challenged my rigid thinking.

In one of our first sessions, Mariah assigned a difficult task: Teach Kobe how to spin in a circle with minimal advice from her. At first, we couldn't do it. During the activity, I didn't criticize Kobe. I praised him for any improvements. It taught me that I should practice self-compassion in my daily life. Instead of putting myself down, I should praise myself for improvements, whether big or small.

As my final challenge, Mariah introduced an activity where I had to apply the skills I'd acquired from previous sessions with Kobe to solve a stick puzzle. At first, I would freeze and obsess over options instead of trying them. I was very hard on myself.

The new insights I gained from Kobe helped me shift from my old results-oriented focus towards a healthier process-oriented mindset that allowed greater space for self-compassion and positive thought. With his help, I was able to solve two puzzles. Learning how to change my perspective and see the root problems of my mental health was a huge light bulb moment for me!

Mariah came up with the activities, but Kobe was my example on how to stay in the present and take life one step at a time. He helped me overcome fears of judgment and failure. Kobe was also a calming influence that helped reduce my anxiety over engaging with seemingly daunting tasks.

Today, I'm still a work in progress, but Kobe and Mariah have helped me to realize how much animals can assist in therapy. Since I left Rogers, I requested an emotional support dog, and the CAI sessions inspired me to enroll at Aurora University to major in Human-Animal Studies with a minor in Neurodiversity Studies.

My hope is that you can find a place in your hearts to support this rewarding cause. Thank you!