



## PARTNERSHIP STUDY

### **JAMES CROSSLEY AND WINTER**

**DoB:** 8/3/1979  
**Location:** Shropshire  
**Disability:** Paraplegia

**James was partnered with canine partner Winter in Feb 2012. This is his story:**



When I left school I attended a Woodland Management college course for a year and then moved on to an Arboriculture (tree surgery) course. I was asked by the instructor if I would like to work for him doing tree surgery which I was thrilled about because I wanted to take it up as a career. I enjoyed the work tremendously and my life took on another dimension when I joined a group rock climbing in North Wales. It was a good time because I enjoyed being outdoors with friends and the views and countryside were breath taking.

In my job I was taught to think things out and be safe but one day whilst I was gradually dismantling an ash tree something went wrong. I ended up in hospital on life support having sustained a severe head injury, two broken vertebrae, and many broken bones. At some stage the specialists gave up on me but my family did not and somehow I pulled through. My recovery took a long time as I had to learn everything from scratch even with something as basic as how to drink, and to build up from there.

When able to, I was moved to Gobowen Orthopaedic Hospital for spinal repair operations, the transition to life being wheelchair bound because of paralysis from the chest downward, and recuperation from head damage. A year after my accident I went to a halfway house to adapt to outside life. This was a hard time but with the positivity and encouragement of my family, friends and carers I eventually progressed to more independency and was able to purchase my own home.

I love my home which has a fair amount of land and gives me a sense of freedom. After living here for a year I had a minor stroke which luckily only knocked me back a little. I bought a large off road electric wheelchair which has extended my abilities and freedom tremendously enabling me to get around the garden, and across country.

One day my mum said she and my step dad were going on an organised day visit to an assistance dog centre in Oxfordshire and would I like to come? Of course I did and we had a lovely day. I realised how helpful one of these dogs would be for me and was told to get in touch with Canine Partners in West Sussex. Having applied and after waiting a year I was asked to attend an assessment day there to find out if they could help me. A puppy was in training and a year later I had the joy of meeting my hoped to be canine partner, Winter. I don't know if they had read something in my character but Winter came in the training room 'a bundle of energy'. We had a day together and I felt very happy with her. Thankfully I only had three months to wait for the final two-week Partnership Course. I

really enjoyed this course. I found it to be enlightening and informative and the instructors did their utmost to help Winter and I become partners. I thank the trainers and everybody involved with Canine Partners for their help and everything they have done to enable me to have Winter.

Since having Winter my life has changed immensely for the better. It has done me good to have the responsibility of looking after her and for something to be reliant on me, to see to her general physical and mental well being and it has helped me move forward from just thinking of myself. Winter is a great help by picking up specific items I ask for and passing them to me, e.g. the post, dropped keys, gloves, the odd tool and shoes. If anything falls from my bed to the floor she picks it up and places it in my hand. This means I don't have to get into my chair, pick the item up and then have to get back on the bed again. It's amusing when I have visitors and they take their shoes off only to find Winter standing there having picked up their shoe and handed it back to them. Sometimes, when asked to bring the phone, it was a bit difficult for Winter to grasp it in her mouth. So I placed the phone on the floor and attached a phone cover to it for easy pick up. It's now straightforward and she even learnt to fetch it for me with just a hand signal. What a step forward from when I first had her and it was good youthful fun for her to grab the phone, dash outside and gallop round the garden with it.

When out Winter will press the button to call the lift, also pull a door open via a pull cord if it has one or going up on her hind legs and paw the handle down. She became quite cross one day when neither of these methods worked and I could see her trying to think out a way to do the job. I enjoy keeping her training refreshed and gradually teaching her new things I think will be useful to me. .

Having her in the house has made me feel more secure and I have a companion with me all the time. I feel less concerned in the fact that if I have a problem, another stroke or come out of the chair, Winter will fetch the phone and between us I can cope better and I have her companionship until help comes. I have a more structured life getting up earlier and planning the day to incorporate both of us. I have become more confident going out and am able to tackle more. Where I may have felt shy and held back a bit, having Winter with her effervescent character has been an ice breaker and thrown me right in the heart of things.

After my accident I wouldn't have had the happiness, security and confidence that Canine Partners has given me without Winter by my side.

[www.caninepartners.org.uk](http://www.caninepartners.org.uk)

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