

Healing Paws

Cree Hayuga is at an age when most kids like to play video games or hang out with their friends. Instead, this fifth grader from Santa Fe, N.M., spends three hours each Wednesday afternoon training dogs.

She volunteers at Assistance Dogs of the West. It is one of several programs around the country that train dogs to be the eyes, ears, and hands for people with disabilities.

Cree joined the program when she was in fourth grade because she loves animals. Dogs in the program learn how to open and shut doors, turn lights on and off, throw away trash, and pick up items for people in wheelchairs. "The hardest command to teach [a dog] is the stand-stay position," Cree told *Senior Edition*. She is referring to the position in which the dog stands at its owner's side when it is not doing anything else.

Cree says that training dogs has taught her patience and responsibility. "It's really fun," she said. "The animals get really attached to you, and it's hard to say good-bye."

Although saying good-bye isn't easy, Cree knows that she has helped both the dog and its grateful owner. Cree wants to be a **veterinarian**¹ when she grows up.

¹ **veterinarian:** a person who is qualified and has been given the authority to treat diseases and injuries of animals