

PUPPY LOVE SPARKS TASTY BUSINESS VENTURE

YOUNG MILTON GIRL THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND ALIYAH'S PET BITES

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As each transaction closes, Aliyah Brito anxiously awaits the real payoff.

It comes with an inevitable tail wag and flapping tongue, signalling approval of her new business venture.

With an immeasurable fondness for animals - especially dogs - the nine-year-old Miltonian is the driving force and emotional cornerstone of Aliyah's Pet Bites.

With good word of mouth and expanding social media reach (<https://www.facebook.com/aliyahspetbites/>), what began as a summer project two months ago has blossomed into a steady stream of customers, with more than 200 bags sold to date.

It's an inspiring success story for a girl born intellectually and physically "delayed," whom doctors figured may not even learn to walk.

Of course they didn't factor an adorable little shih tzu into the equation.

"We got Charlie when Aliyah was two and he's the reason she learned to walk (at age three) ... she was always trying to catch him," recalled mother Sandra, adding that her daughter functions at a five-or-six-year-old level, but that what she can do now is night and day compared to the



initial prognosis. "Then she learned to talk because she wanted to communicate with him. They're inseparable."

Charlie's role as a developmental catalyst wouldn't end there.

Determined to please her ultra-picky eating pal, Aliyah - who's always enjoyed feeding animals, be it rabbits in the family's backyard or geese at a pond - asked mom if they could make their own doggie treats.

A lot of research and experimentation later, Charlie's finicky tastebuds were satisfied.

And if he was sold on these treats, why not other dogs?

Thus Aliyah Pet Bites were born - with peanut butter/banana and apple carrot varieties now being offered.

"There was a lot of fine-tuning with ingredients, nutrients and amounts," admitted Sandra, whose special needs daughter - aided by plenty of therapy over



Sandra Brito photos
(Left) Aliyah Brito and her first dog treats customer, Charlie. (Above) One of Aliyah's Pet Bites customers reaches for his bag of treats.

the chauffeur for Aliyah Pet Bites deliveries. "She's Aliyah's No. 1 fan and my right-hand when it comes to helping her."

Initial business came from friends and social media exposure - with a growing stream of favourable reviews (some accompanied by videos) on Facebook - though Aliyah and company recently snagged plenty of new customers during a baseball tournament in Brockville.

Said Sandra, "It's (business) really spiraled."

Along the way Aliyah has learned some basic skills like counting her profits, and has shown enthusiasm when going out to purchase packaging supplies.

And as much as she enjoys the baking aspect of the business, her true thrill lies in interacting with her appreciative customers.

"Yeah!," blurts out the youngster, when asked if meeting new dogs is the best part of the family enterprise. "It makes me happy."

Aliyah's mom admits that she'll always be playing catch-up with children her age, and has rather limited potential for future employment.

However, the family's dog treats endeavour has provided a window - albeit a small one - into what may be possible.

All that was needed was a generous serving of passion and a splash of culinary creativity.

Said Sandra, "As long as it's something she enjoys and wants to continue, we'll do everything we can to support her."

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