



Survey Says: "100% Would Recommend Dog Therapy"

The Magical Interaction Between Canines and Humans

Not many will dispute that animals can have a positive effect on emotional well-being. Many also believe that animals can be a positive force in physical health and healing as well. This is something our members and their working therapy dogs know and believe to be true. The magical interaction between dog and human is unmistakable-tears dry, frowns becomes smiles, silence becomes laughter, hands caress fur.

Dogs have a calming and therapeutic effect. They help people cope with the emotional issues related to illness. They also offer physical contact with another living creature, something that is often missing in the lives of residents and patients in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. They might invoke pleasant memories of past pets. Best of all, they divert a person's attention from the pressing problems of the day. Further, our dogs can:

- Bring joy and laughter to everyday life
- Give people something to do, talk, and think about other than the illness
- Provide a source of touch and affiliation
- Heightened self confidence, esteem and sense of achievement
- Encourage communication
- Break the ice
- Boost overall morale
- Stimulate exercise and activity
- Help people cope with illness, loss, depression
- Lower stress levels

No, we don't have to convince the more than 120 Therapy Dog of Vermont members that dogs possess the profound ability to touch people often not engaged by other kinds of therapies.

Survey Supports the Benefits of Dog Therapy

While the magical interaction between canine and human is difficult to quantify by statistics and empirical facts, we CAN research the effects of dog therapy by simply asking those most qualified to offer us insight-patients, family and friends of those patients, and the health care staff.

A recent survey conducted by the University of Vermont with student, Holly Grant, bore out what we already believe to be true.

The survey, conducted in the Fall of 1999, was administered to various hospitals and nursing homes throughout the state of Vermont, including Central Hospital of Vermont, Pillsbury Manor Retirement Home, Fletcher Allen Hospital, Fanny Allen Hospital, and Porter Nursing Home. While this is only a sampling of the many, many organizations and institutions visited by Vermont's Therapy Dogs, it provides good data to support the work we do. The data comes from 74% of the patients or residents on each ward visited-and all of the 74% experienced dog therapy. The remaining 26% was made of people not visited because they were resting, unable to receive visits for medical reasons, or were simply not interested in a therapy dog visit. In other words, participants were surveyed after a therapy dog visit and all participants thus had experienced dog therapy.

In order to provide a more rounded picture of the impact of dog therapy, data was also collected from the friends and family of patients as well as hospital and nursing home staff members.

Patients themselves, hospital and nursing home staff, friends and family members were asked to rate the moods of patients and residents during a therapy dog visit on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the highest). The results:

Happy	4.79
Relaxed	4.50
Calm	4.35
Lowered Stress/Anxiety Level	4.45
Increased Cooperation	4.05
Created More Positive Attitude	4.73
Reduced Stress/Anxiety of Staff	4.62
Reduced Stress/Anxiety of Friends/Family	4.69

As you can see by the numbers, positive moods were indicated as being high on the scale, reinforcing that dog therapy does affect mood and feelings positively - which in turn benefits the healing process.

Most importantly and most striking, when people were asked if they would like to see the therapy dog program continued, 81% said they would like to experience dog therapy more often.

And, a remarkable 100% of those interviewed said they would recommend dog therapy to other hospitals and nursing homes.

Moreover, survey participants were asked to indicate how long the effects of dog therapy last after the visit is over. The answered:

Visit lasts... HOURS	50%
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DAYS	20%
Minutes	16%
Permanently	12%
Does not last	2%

Comments from people who participated in the survey:

- Loved it! Great Dogs. They are very special, and the owners too!
- I have seen a patient go from depressed to animated. Very positive program.
- The most foolproof, beneficial treatment I see for 99% of patients.
- We have appreciated the therapy dogs for many years, thanks!
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I strongly believe in animal therapy and its effects on patients and everyone who comes in contact with a therapy animal.

More programs should be available to hospitals and nursing homes. Every effort should be made to create more positions for therapy animals.

- The dogs are great. We all look forward to Thursday night and their visit.
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We are very blessed to have a therapy dog visiting-the one we see seems to be very sensitive to patient's (and staff's) moods and needs. She is never imposing but makes her sweet presence known. We love her!

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I am not here when the therapy dogs are visiting, however, I hear from residents, as well as families, how much they enjoy the visits.

- Everyone just loves the dogs and hope they will continue to come.
- Compares with medicine!
- Today was my first visit from the dogs; I wish they would come every evening. It's nice to see "different" faces.
- Wonderful program-we love the dogs!
- The dogs make everyone happy!
- Thank you for letting me enjoy the benefits of this wonderful program. God bless your volunteers.
- They are all very good!