

PET THERAPY PROGRAMS

Good morning everyone. I'm very pleased to have been asked to speak to you today about Pet Therapy Programs.

I'm sure you have all been wondering who my partner is and I'm very happy to introduce my own Pet Therapy dog Cassidy Jean.

Cassidy is an alumni of the WHS and my wife and I adopted her last August. Cassidy came to the Humane Society in late May of last year with two broken back legs. A schoolteacher found her dragging herself around and brought her in to us.

Cassidy had been abused; someone had stomped her and broke both bones in her upper legs. The easy way out for us at the shelter would have been to simply euthanize her and move on, but our veterinary staff insisted that we give Cassidy a chance and they operated and put pins in both of Cassidy's legs.

She was living in the clinic's cat recovery room, as the cages are smaller and she was only about five weeks old, and that is when I was first made aware of her. I started to visit her daily and discovered that she was a determined little dog with a wonderful spirit.

In June the decision was made to move Cassidy into foster care and let her grow up and determine if the operations had worked and see that she would be a mobile dog. I took Cassidy home with me. My wife and I have fostered 11 different puppies over the last two years and we always knew one of them would end up staying with us. Cassidy is that one!

Unfortunately Cassidy's right leg was too badly damaged and became totally fused with no movement whatsoever. She was having a hard time moving about with her club of a leg and stairs were impossible. So the decision was made and our vets removed her right leg last August and she has grown into a healthy, active and very happy adult dog.

Cassidy and I have been through two obedience courses and Cassidy now visits seniors centres, personal care homes, classrooms, accompanies me to speech's and attends other events both at the shelter and in the community.

She loves people and now is now doing visits without me and is in demand by our volunteers. She is especially good with children and is one of the few dogs in our program that we can allow the kids to swarm. She like nothing better than to be surrounded by 15-20 kids. She also loves any event that has food associated with it and we know that she can eat three hot dogs in a row, bun, mustard, relish and onions included!

I've brought Cassidy along with me today as an example of the types of dogs that we can use in pet therapy visits but also to showcase some of the other work that The Winnipeg Humane Society does.

Cassidy came to us as a disposable dog. We could have done nothing with her other than humanely euthanize her but we didn't, we saved her life, and now she is able to share her life story and she is living proof that adversity can be overcome.

I believed that Cassidy would be a good therapy dog and she is, especially with children.

I'm going to discuss with you today why the Humane society supports pet therapy visits and as well offer the scientific proof of the positive effect of pet therapy programs. I will also explain a number of the types of therapy programs underway here in Winnipeg and elsewhere.

I'd first like to start by explaining to you a little bit about the Humane Society as we have a long history here in the city.

Our organization was incorporated in 1894 and our original title was, *The Winnipeg Humane Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Women, Children and Animals.*

Women of course got the right to vote and began to fight for their rights and children slowly moved into the care of child and family services and we were left with the animals.

Our mission has not changed since 1894 and that is “To protect all animals from suffering and to promote their welfare and dignity.”

What does this mean when we talk about the day to day operations of a shelter. Animals, lots and lots of animals, many like Cassidy, abused and neglected. The WHS took in 9,293 animals in 2008.

The rough breakdown is 5,870 cats, 1,723 dogs and the balance rabbits, gerbils, mice, and other small critters. Of this number we re-homed or adopted out 4,278. A respectable number but what it really means is we also euthanized over 2,000 animals.

I have been told countless times, “Bless you; you are doing God’s work!” I also feel that The Winnipeg Humane Society is also doing this city’s dirty work when it comes to abandoned and neglected animals.

Our annual operating budget is \$4.8 million; we have a staff of 102 people and a volunteer base of just over 600 people.

We not only re-home cats and dogs, we also have an education program that undertook 329 classroom visits in 2008, an obedience training program running four times a week, a full service vet clinic that did 6,359 spay/neuter operations last year and several animal therapy programs that I am going to expand upon.

Society has long recognized the animal human bond and this bond stretches as far back as the first contact between our cave dwelling ancestors and the wolf type animals that they befriended. These creatures eventually became the guardians of the caves as the world's first guard dogs. Humans came to trust and value these very first canine companions

We have long recognized the human/dog bond and I'm sure you have all heard of the story of Grey Friars Bobby, one of the most famous stories of the animal/human bond.

Grey friars Bobby was a Skye terrier that was owned by a City Of Edinburgh Police Officer named John Gray.

John Gray worked the nightshift in Edinburgh for many years with Bobby along as his own watchdog and the two were a familiar sight to thousands of people.

John died of tuberculosis in February of 1858 and was buried in the church yard of the Greyfriars Church. Bobby soon touched the hearts of the local residents when he refused to leave his master's grave, even in the worst weather conditions.

Bobby's fame spread throughout Edinburgh. It is reported that almost on a daily basis the crowds would gather at the entrance of the churchyard waiting for the one o'clock gun that would signal the appearance of Bobby leaving the grave for his midday meal at a nearby pub.

The kind folk of Edinburgh took good care of Bobby, but still he remained loyal to his master. For fourteen years the dead man's faithful dog kept constant watch and guard over the grave until his own death in 1872.

Bobby was buried just inside the gate of the churchyard not far from the grave of John Gray.

I tell you this story to illustrate the animal/human bond and how strong it can be. In our work at the shelter we can see this bond occurring every single day with dogs that we have never met before. It's not scientific; it's just what we see!

As part of our adoption process, every dog undergoes a behaviour assessment. We are looking for four things:

Does this dog like or hate people?

Does this dog like or hate other dogs?

Does this dog like or hate cats?

And does this dog have any food or object issues?

We scale the dogs from a one to a ten. A ten dog being a dog that is so aggressive that we automatically euthanize it before it harms anyone.

We also then colour code the dogs we deem suitable for our pet therapy program and these are the dogs our volunteers will take out on visits.

It's really quite simple, what we are looking for is the answer to the question: "Does this dog want to visit?" Many don't, many do, including Cassidy here with us today.

To those of us who work with animals every day it seems natural to have them help out in personal care homes, hospitals, senior centers, classrooms, everywhere in fact. We have always been helped by our animal friends.

The information attained through animal research has helped prevent disease and ended an enormous amount of human suffering.

We would still be living in terror of bubonic plague, cholera and suffering from polio and tuberculosis if our animal brethren had not contributed to medical progress.

The research shows that our animal friends are continuing their good work by participating in animal therapy programs, and they come with different names including: animal assisted activities, animal assisted therapy, pet therapy, pet visitations, service dogs and assistance dogs.

Our task is quite simple: My role as the handler is to present the dog. The dog's role is to meet the clients and produce that moment of companionship. The staff's role is to facilitate the meeting of dog and client.

To my mind it does not really matter what we may call the program as long as we have people who want to meet the animal and we have an animal that wants to meet the people.

Keeping in mind how simple a pet visitation actually is I would now like to explain to you what the visit actually does.

The first Russian to ever win a Nobel Prize was Dr. Ivan Petrovich Pavlov. Famous for making the connection that dogs would begin to salivate with the ringing of a bell prior to meal time.

Interestingly, Dr. Pavlov had an American resident in internal medicine working with him from 1922 to 1929.

Dr. Horsley Gantt returned to the United States and continued “Pavlovian” research with dogs and by 1962 made the discovery that “merely petting a dog could cause an immediate reduction in the dog’s heart rate of 50 percent.” Dr. Gantt called this “The Effect of Person.”

A student of Dr. Gantt’s, Dr. James J. Lynch, undertook further research with dogs and people and took Dr. Gantt’s Effect of Person and simply reversed it in a number of experiments.

Dr. Lynch has determined that owning a pet effected a person’s survival and recovery after suffering a heart attack.

Dr. Lynch details these result in his book, *A Cry Unheard: New Insights into the Medical Consequences of Loneliness*. And I quote,

“we discovered that the strongest predictor of sudden death one year after release from a coronary care unit was the extent of damage suffered by the heart muscle during the heart attack itself. The second strongest predictor, however, came as a complete shock. It was the presence, or absence, of pet companionship.”

Dr. Lynch has called his concept *The Orienting Reflex* and states that “research studies show that focusing attention outside of oneself elicits immediate reductions in heart rate and blood pressure.”

To put it in the most simple of terms, petting and interacting with a dog will lower your heart rate and blood pressure!

Some seniors suffer depression, often associated with isolation and loneliness. These mental health issues can contribute to physical health issues. The physical health issues can add on more trips to the doctor, more medications and an overall increase on the public health care system.

By having a pet therapy program in place the mental health of seniors can be improved, which can lead to improved physical health.

Go to any web-site concerning pet therapy and the list of benefits is lengthy. This is from the Paws For People: Pet-Assisted Visitation Volunteer Services.

Benefits of Pet Therapy

It's well-known (and scientifically proven) that interaction with a gentle, friendly pet has significant benefits.



Physical Health:

- lowers blood pressure
- improves cardiovascular health
- releases hormones that have a calming effect
- diminishes overall physical pain
- the act of petting produces an automatic relaxation response, reducing the amount of medication some folks need



Mental Health:

- lifts spirits and lessens depression
- decreases feelings of isolation and alienation
- encourages communication
 - provides comfort
 - increases socialization
 - reduces boredom
 - lowers anxiety
- helps children overcome speech and emotional disorders
- creates motivation for the client to recover faster
 - reduces loneliness

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In Physical Therapy

- increases joint movement and improves recovery time
- maintains or increases motor skills
- provides motivation to move more, stretch farther, exercise longer

There are hundreds of pet therapy programs offered across North America. In Canada, St. John Ambulance is very well known for their work in hospitals in every single province.

St. John also has a number of programs dedicated to one particular health issue. Their “Special Paws for Special Kids Program” is currently underway right here in Winnipeg. St. John provides specially trained Therapy Dogs to visit children with autism.

Another organization, Therapeutic Paws of Canada operates a number of programs as well and has a simple message about their goals.

MISSION STATEMENT

Enhancing quality of life and health through the animal/human bond

PURPOSE

Non-profit organization of volunteers providing animal resources for human needs (physical, mental, educational, motivational, socialization) through regular visits to hospitals, residences, schools, etc.

MOTTO

Paws with love to share

As you can see pet therapy comes in many forms from the simple visit at a care home to the more complex issues such as autism.

One of North America's experts on Animal Assisted Therapy is Dr. Aubrey Fine, who I had the pleasure of meeting with this past winter as he was on his way to Churchill to view the polar bears.

Dr. Fine visited our shelter and gave a talk to our staff and volunteers of our See Spot Read Program.

Dr. Fine is a psychologist and professor at the California State Polytechnic University and was the editor of the classic book on the subject, *The Handbook on Animal Assisted Therapy*.

He has also written about his use of animals in his therapy practice. *Afternoons With Puppy: Inspirations from a Therapist and His Animals* is simply a wonderful read on how he started using his dog Puppy as a "co-therapist."

He starts his book with the quote. "*There is no psychiatrist in the world like a puppy licking your face.*" By Bern Williams.

I know this works because whenever I am having a rough day at the shelter, all I have to do is go into the puppy area and do a short meet and greet with some puppy and it is simply impossible to leave in the same mood as I entered.

Dr. Fine weaves his animals into stories of recovery in each chapter and illustrates how his animals assisted him in breaking through to patients.

One chapter in particular, Fending Off Loneliness, brings me to comment about long term care and how you people are looking to make life better for people in care.

He says in this chapter, *“In many ways my animals have helped me appreciate the fact that being surrounded by good company is worth its weight in gold.”*

Dr. Fine then adds, *“Allowing people to age without dignity is shameful. But it is a sad reality for some who live their final years in imposed isolation, filled with loneliness.”*

For me this is why my organization, The Winnipeg Humane Society, is so proud of our visitor program. When a volunteer brings Cassidy back to my office after a visit I often hear of some small moment that took place and it is then that I feel that my small dog Cassidy is indeed worth her weight in gold.

On average our volunteers undertake 20 to 25 pet visits a month. We range far and wide across the city and the visits include places like Beacon Hill Lodge, Villa Cabrini and the Tache Center.

I could tell of many stories that Cassidy has generated but I will only mention a recent visit. An elderly gentleman who had farmed all his life is now in a personal care facility because he had become blind.

The staff had told him that a dog was coming to visit next week on a Thursday. The gentleman talked to the staff about the upcoming visit for the three days preceding Cassidy's visit and people were eagerly waiting for her to arrive because so many residents knew the farmer was very excited to have an animal visit.

Cassidy and the volunteer went to his room first and the gentleman was very happy to have her with him and was petting her all over her body.

He of course quickly discovered that Cassidy only has three legs. This simple discovery made the gentleman start to cry.

Here is a man who has spent his life around animals and outside in the sun, the rain and the wind now in a facility and crying over one little dog who does not know she is disabled.

He was not crying about his condition in life, he was crying over Cassidy's condition in life!

To be able to bring this level of emotional life into this situation has again made my Cassidy a dog of gold!

So where are we at? We know the animal/human bond is deep; we have the story of Greyfriars Bobby, the blind farmer and Cassidy and others to prove it.

We know that the simple act of petting a dog or cat will reduce our blood pressure and heart rate. Dr. Lynch and his Orienting Reflex study proved that.

Animal Assisted Therapy Programs work in healing both the body and the mind. Dr. Fine gives us some incredible examples of his co-therapists helping in healing both emotional and mental health.

Bonding with people, healing people and reducing loneliness are the key rewards of any type of pet therapy or animal assisted therapy program, but we have one other activity that our canine friends do for us. They teach!

The Humane Society's *See Spot Read Program* is a dog therapy program that has the dogs playing the role of teacher.

When children are learning to read failure to progress is often associated with reading out loud to other children or adults.

Children may question their reading ability and this in turn can contribute to low self-esteem and frustration. The most common comment from the kids themselves is that: "the other kids laugh at me."

The See Spot Read Program is quite simple. The children read out loud to a dog. Reading to the dog creates a relaxed and positive environment as the dogs offer zero judgment or criticism.

The Humane Society is very proud of this program. We started last year in partnership with the Pembina Trails School Division, who select the children and transport them to the shelter.

Our other partner is St. John Ambulance. St. John has a volunteer pool of owners and dogs who have undergone the St. John dog therapy training program.

The program was funded for the first year of operation by The Winnipeg Foundation and we are just now finishing the third group of children.

The children are tested prior to the program and once again upon completion and the results are very satisfying. Each course has 12 children in it and after the eight week course of one hour per week all of the children have improved reading scores and four of the children advanced a grade level in reading ability.

In the fall of 2009 we will be conducting the See Spot Read Program again in partnership with St. John Ambulance and a number of school divisions.

Our financial support is being provided by the Province of Manitoba through the Healthy Child Program under Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross who spoke to you this morning.

The dogs who participate in this program are of various breeds and sizes and it is incredibly heart warming to see a young child sprawled across some dog and intently reading to it.

As a shelter director I have seen both the good and the often very bad of our society when it comes to our relationship with animals.

I can also assure you as a veteran of the shelter and a life-long pet owner I have experienced the power and ability of our pets to heal and enrich the lives of people, both young and old.

The best part of working with partners like Cassidy, and many, many other dogs is what I call “the look.” When they look up at you and the expression is clear. “I love you man!”

I will close with some advice from Dr. Marty Becker, a veterinarian. “*the best medicine may not be found in the medicine cabinet but could be at your side – tail wagging or purring – if you know how to activate it.*”

Thank you all very much!