

Northwoods Humane Society – Deanna Persson, President

I had a call from a friend who was looking for a therapy dog to help those dealing with tragic loss in our community. I knew of only one person who had gone through a training program and whose dog was a certified therapy dog. Sadly, this dog has passed away.

There appears to be a hole in our community. There may not be a hole, but after many phone calls and on-line searching, I have not been able to see a source of therapy dogs or those that are training therapy dogs.

I have a call into Pet Partners Therapy which is a part of the Mayo Clinic in Eau Claire – it appears they may do training and possibly know of individuals in our community.

If you are reading this article and know of a therapy dog in our area, please give me a call. If you would like to explore this possibility of creating a trained group of people and dogs to do Pet Therapy, please give me a call at 715-634-4543. This subject is new to me and we may be starting from scratch.

When our son was hospitalized at St. Mary's in Rochester, he had several visits from a big German Shepherd named Doc. While visiting Ann McIntire at an assisted living place in Eau Claire, she got her weekly visit from a miniature horse. When I was very ill, it was my dog Joy, who was by my side for many conversations and naps. (Mike was there too.) I loved visiting Waters Edge in Hayward and running into Patty Patefield and Ed Haugen's golden retriever. Animals are a bright spot for many people. There are also therapy cats in the world.

Therapy dogs are dogs that are used to bring comfort and joy to those who are ill or under poor conditions, such as those who have been affected by a natural disaster. Many people are able to connect with dogs and feel the love that they provide, and this has a therapeutic effect on them. Therapy dogs are generally very calm and well-behaved, so that they do not upset or make uncomfortable those around them.

Therapy Dogs

Many people confuse Therapy Animals with Service Dogs. A therapy animal is most commonly a dog (but can be other species) that has been obedience trained and screened for its ability to interact favorably with humans and other animals. The primary purpose of a therapy animal is to provide affection and comfort to people in hospitals, retirement homes, nursing homes, schools, hospices, disaster areas, and to people with learning difficulties.

Therapy animals are privately owned and tend to visit facilities on a regular basis. A therapy animal is only half of the equation, however. A responsible, caring handler is an important member of the therapy animal team. At the end of a visit, therapy animals go home with their owners. Most commonly, therapy animals are dogs that have shown they like people and have the temperament to work with them.

Although therapy animals provide a very important therapeutic service to all kinds of people in need, they are NOT considered “service animals” and they and their handlers have no protections under federal law (ADA, the Fair Housing Act, Air Carrier Access Act, etc.). Some states, however, have laws that afford therapy animals and their handlers rights and protections.

There are three basic steps involved in certifying a therapy dog:

- Adopt a dog that has the appropriate demeanor and intelligence to serve as a therapy dog.
- Train the dog to provide comfort and support to others, including in group settings at a variety of locations.
- Optionally register your trained therapy dog with an organization such as Service Dog Certifications.

The Northwoods Humane Society has, in the early beginnings coordinated weekly visits to area nursing homes. The animals had to be fully vaccinated, well socialized, obedient and on leash. They were owned animals. There are those that take their animals to visit area care facilities on their own. Everyone wins when that happens.

So if you would like to explore this with me, please let me know.