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Canine Friends in Hospitals

by Vicky Graham .

It was 30 years ago that Canine Friends Pet Therapy began visiting rest homes in the greater Wellington area. Today we also have member/dog teams visiting 16 hospitals and 12 hospices.

Placing our member/dog teams in hospitals requires careful consideration both of the member and dog. Hospital environments can be challenging for both people and dogs for many reasons so placing a team requires some time, however those members who do visit find it extremely rewarding, in fact we have members waiting for vacancies to arise.

We work with the hospital Volunteer Manager who guides

prospective volunteers through a standard process and then arranges visits to start in specific wards, whether it be Intensive Care Units, Oncology, Orthopaedic, Rehabilitation, Children, General and Mental Health Units. Staff say they often see visible changes in a patient's mood which is very beneficial for their recovery.

It isn't only patients who benefit – we are told our visits are also a huge morale boost for staff.

In the February issue we featured "Truffle" and Jennifer Spencer who recently retired from visiting Middlemore Hospital after three years. Here are a few more lovely accounts of hospital visiting. 🐾



Willing Visitors in Palmerston North

On 17 December 2020, a team of five members with their dogs took on a Christmas theme and visited Palmerston North Hospital, starting in the Children's Ward.

Naturally the children were delighted to see this lovely team with a mix of small and large four-legged friends.

They also visited the Star wards (Rehabilitation) and the Opal Ward where the elderly are assessed for residential care.

The staff were pleased to take this photo at the Christmas Grotto which is set up by the staff for patients to enjoy.

Thanks to Ann Evans and Kaye Harkness, Manawatu Liaison Officers, for arranging and being part of this visit.

Christopher Sarson and Moska

Chris says: "Moska, our nine-year-old Border Collie, and I love working as a Canine Friends team.

"Six years ago Moska was a homeless feral dog on an American Indian reservation in New Mexico, USA. When we brought her home she didn't like people, didn't like other dogs, was frightened of getting into a car, going through a door or up stairs, she didn't do anything except look for food! After six months of care, loving and training, she became a gentle, friendly, tail-wagging animal that brought smiles to patients, residents, nurses, doctors and staff of the hospitals and residential care homes we visited in and around Boulder, Colorado. In 2019 we moved to New Zealand and the same magic happened.

For us, the key to a successful visit is to assess the situation in the ward/room as we go in and Moska is exceptionally good at this. Does the resident or patient want a tail-wag from a distance, a hug from a bit nearer, or a kiss on the hand? (Moska's a big kisser!) Depending on the circumstances, Moska sits on the floor, or puts her front paws on the bed so the patient can get a better look at her. She spends five to 20 minutes with each person.



Interestingly, these visits take energy out of Moska. I can tell when she is getting tired and it's time to go home. But, as I said, we both love the visits and the smiles we bring to the faces of everyone we meet.

Thanks to Middlemore Hospital, Remuera Rest Home Facility and Canine Friends for making these visits possible."

John McGuigan and Arlo

Arlo is a White Swiss Shepherd owned by John McGuigan.

Our Whitby/Johnsonville Liaison Officer, Jan McKenzie (pictured with Arlo to the right) writes:

"I ended up in Ward 7 at Kenepuru Hospital after taking a fall and smashing my right knee when I was about to start Search Training with my Shetland Sheepdog, Geordie. I was fairly new to the Liaison Officer role at that stage and had met John and Arlo via email but that was all.

"Consequently, when they walked into Ward 7 on their weekly visit, I recognised who they were, but John was very surprised when I greeted him and Arlo by name! 'Who is this?' they must have wondered.

"It was not a fun time for me and I was missing Poppy and Geordie very much so John and Arlo's visit cheered me up immensely! I was also there the following week when they came through so I enjoyed two lovely visits.

Arlo is very highly thought of at Kenepuru Hospital and everyone knows and loves him. The doctors and nurses and all the patients look forward to his visits.

John and Arlo visit three other wards and several areas including the Rehabilitation and Stroke Unit and the Psychogeriatric Unit.



If you and your dog would like to join us, please visit: www.caninefriends.org.nz