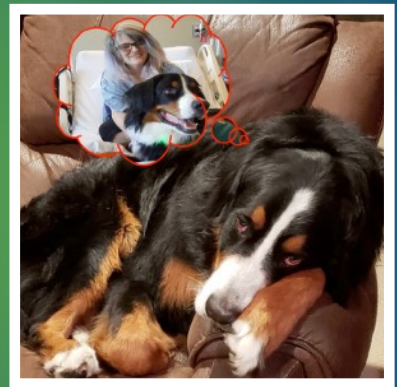
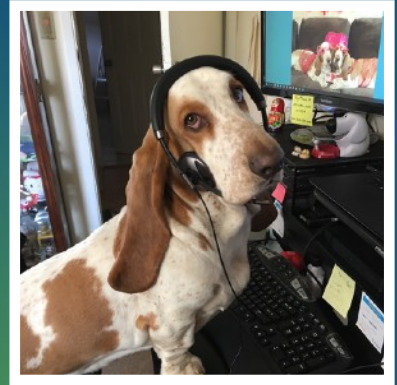
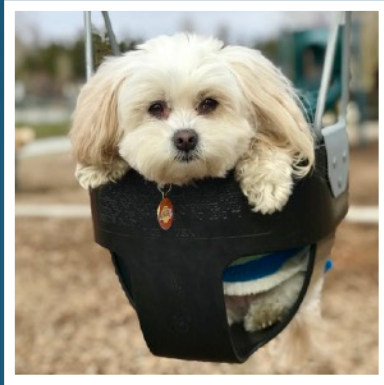


spring 2020 newsletter

# Love On 4 Paws



Whether enjoying outdoor activities, listening to music, offering to make postal deliveries, patiently waiting, or daydreaming of a past visit; these photos show what some of our pets are doing while waiting to get back to being ambassadors of love.



## A Message to Our Clients and Friends

In recent weeks we've all felt the change that the Coronavirus (COVID-19) has made to our daily lives. Many people are suddenly working from home, helping to keep everyone healthy. Unfortunately, we can't accomplish our mission from home. The comfort and joy our animal friends bring to those in need can only be done by a live visit.

Like many of the facilities we visit, we are dedicated to protecting our volunteers and others from unnecessary exposure to this disease. Accordingly, we have cancelled all volunteer visits until we receive word that it is safe to continue.

We thank you for your understanding and pledge that we will continue our mission of bringing happiness and comfort to those we serve as soon as possible.

## A RAY OF SUNSHINE

Each one of us enjoys special moments while visiting patients as we bring them a ray of sunshine into their gloomy days in a hospital room. I was asked to perform a special visit with a young woman in the LA County General Hospital. The doctor met me at the front door and briefed me about the situation. This young woman in her early 30's was hospitalized for nearly a month with terminal cancer. She was going to be discharged for the weekend so she could celebrate her birthday with her loved ones. Unfortunately, her condition worsened and she was not permitted to leave the hospital.

The staff decorated her room and brought a birthday cake. They felt that a therapy dog would cheer her up as a special treat. When I brought my dog into the room, her eyes lit up with a big smile on her face and immediately she sat in her bed, hooked up to number of tubes and wires, but was so happy to pet Bosco. The more she connected with him, the more love he returned to her. We spent nearly a half hour with the patient. And after I left the room, the doctor told me that this was her last birthday and she will not last the year.

Two weeks later I was asked to return. This time, she was

unhooked from the medical equipment and was accompanied by her doctor and nurse and together they strolled around the hospital grounds for about 20 minutes. Again at the end of the visit, the doctor informed me that since the last visit her condition improved so much that she is scheduled to be discharged and go back to her family.

Our therapy dogs are performing miracles with patients as they brighten their day on their way to recover from their ailments.

~ Shlomo Nitzani

“Our therapy dogs are performing miracles”

“THE DOCTOR INFORMED ME THAT SINCE THE LAST VISIT HER CONDITION IMPROVED”



# WE PASSED!

“ ***"Sometimes she 'worked the room' in patient groups wagging her tail eagerly greeting each person"*** ”



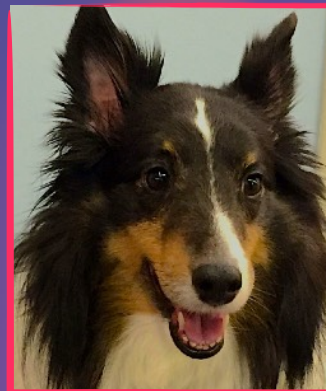
Five years ago, my dog Madison and I became volunteers for an animal assisted therapy organization serving the greater Los Angeles area since 1997. She was a natural from the start - leaning her body in, wagging her tail and showing off her submissive grin to anyone who looked her way. We quickly filled our visits with a variety of locations, which requested her form of therapy - “instant happiness” with fur on four legs. I humbly became her loyal

“assistant” as she charmed her way into people’s hearts.

We met many patients, young and old, pet owners and non-pet owners. One man had been in the hospital for three weeks and missed his five

dogs at home. One man, totally immobilized from the head down, said he had been looking forward to a therapy dog visit all week. Madison knew and she would give “kisses” to these overjoyed patients. Sometimes she “worked the room” in patient groups wagging her tail eagerly greeting each person, especially for a dog treat. She was blessed by a Chaplain, and doctors and nurses alike thanked her for her gift of stress relief.

We also were fortunate enough to visit children in hospitals, community events and special schools.



She had a knack for finding a comfortable spot right next to the patient and laying her head down until they would say, “Madison can stay here as long as she wants!” One of her most challenging locations was a hearing-impaired elementary

school. On our first visit, we were surrounded by 22 kids and their six teachers from Pre-K to 5th grade age. I used every prop I had - toy, brush and treats. The kids asked over 60 questions about Madison and her life. Together, we took 21 photos of that memorable visit - she had done her magic!

~ Lisa Hsu

“ ***"I feel fortunate to have such a wonderful pet and to be able to volunteer and share these amazing experiences together - pet therapy is a terrific way to give"*** ”



**“Maya seems to sense her role and purpose”**

One of Maya’s favorite facilities to visit is Little Company of Mary Transitional Care Center. The patients in this facility are generally in a recovery mode, needing some additional time and treatment from their illness, surgery or injury. Much of their stay in this facility consists of rehabilitation.

Because they have gotten to know her, when we walk down the hallways, a number of the staff will call out, “Maya is here!” She gets very excited and can’t wait to see her

“friends.” Maya especially enjoys visiting the intense physical therapy section. On a couple of occasions, the staff has been able to include her in the patient’s session.

For some patients, the rehabilitation process involves exercises designed to encourage the use of a compromised limb.

On a couple of occasions, Maya was asked to sit within reaching distance of the patient. Then, the patient was instructed to use their injured

## **EXCITED AND CAN’T WAIT TO SEE HER “FRIENDS.”**

hand or wrist to pet Maya. She seemed to catch on right away and sat calmly as the patient reached out to pet her. With Maya involved, the task of petting a friendly dog was a natural one and easily performed. The physical therapist was pleased, because the patient was willing to work harder with Maya there.

As a therapy dog, Maya seems to sense her role and purpose. It is her job to bring comfort and joy to people. And, she happily gets the job done. I think she even has a bit of a smile on her face during her visits.

~ Jim Kelly

**“THE PHYSICAL THERAPIST WAS PLEASED, BECAUSE THE PATIENT WAS WILLING TO WORK HARDER WITH MAYA THERE”**

me position her to be petted, navigating around the medical equipment with lots of beeping sounds and concerned- looking people.

We had some extra time, so the escort brought us into a large indoor play area. There were eight toddlers there, each with a mobile respirator and a caregiver helping them. Each had a spot to watch videos, play with blocks, or do physical therapy with a staff member. The feeling in the room was cheerful, quite unexpected given the grim circumstances. Now, what to do with Bella?

We did a few tricks: sit, shake, high five, and cross your paws like a lady. There was soft cheering from the staff and giggles from the kids. Over time, I maneuvered Bella nearby each child, and the nurses rolled the portable respirators so that the children could get near enough to pet the dog.

We worked together like this until each child had his or her turn, and then I asked Bella to lay in the middle of the room. She lay down on her side, breathed that deep sigh of contentment, and relaxed as I petted her for the remaining time. We weren't rushed and there was a sense of stillness as the visit unfolded. At one moment, I stepped back in my mind's eye to take in the scene. Here was my nearly 100 lb. dog, white as snow, gentle as the breeze, lying in the middle of a room surrounded by these little ones and their caregivers. There was no fear. There was just her calm, healing presence.

There was just love.

~ Jennifer Kunst



“Beautiful Bella is a pure white gentle giant”

First, a bit of background. Three years ago, my husband and I adopted a dog from a local rescue organization, a three-year old female Great Pyrenees. Beautiful Bella is a pure white gentle giant, bred to guard sheep in the Pyrenees mountains between Spain and France. Since there aren't too many sheep in Los Angeles, however, Bella's guarding is limited to barking in the air while lying on the living room sofa! As it turns out—and to our great surprise—Bella is gifted for an entirely different job.

“THE NURSES ROLLED THE PORTABLE RESPIRATORS SO THAT THE CHILDREN COULD GET NEAR ENOUGH TO PET THE DOG”

We discovered Bella's gift by watching her interact with people during our neighborhood walks. Bella wanted to say hello to everyone, both young and old. She set the nervous person at ease and delighted the dog lover to no end. Through these experiences, people repeatedly remarked that she would make a great therapy dog. At that point, we didn't know anything about animal assisted therapy. So, we researched, we trained, we passed the test, and we began to visit local hospitals, psychiatric facilities, and nursing homes through a local volunteer animal assisted therapy program called Love On 4 Paws.

One particularly special therapy visit was to a long-term nursing care facility. All the patients there are on respirators because they cannot breathe on their own. Some have been in an accident, others have had a stroke, and others have had serious health difficulties since birth. There are babies, children, and adults.

On this visit, as usual, we visited the rooms of child and adult patients. Bella was so tolerant as she let





**"OUR ONGOING RELATIONSHIP WITH LOVE ON 4 PAWS HAS BEEN ONE WE CHERISH DEEPLY"**

~ SHRINERS FOR CHILDREN MEDICAL CENTER

The benefits of pet therapy are known to help with both physical and mental support. Our pet therapy visits begin as they exit the lobby elevator into our clinic lobby and continues to our second-floor ambulatory surgery unit and Rehabilitation center. These doggies and kitties help encourage our patients during therapy and help manage the anxiety they may be feeling before entering an operating room. Our partnership with Love On 4 Paws



has been a wonderful one. It gives our patients, families, and staff that added level of care. The volunteers, pet and handler, that visit our facility make such an impact in the lives of everyone at Shriners for Children Medical Center. Pet therapy helps our patients and families by providing comfort, reducing the feeling of loneliness, and at times decreasing anxiety. Our ongoing relationship with Love On 4 Paws has been one we cherish deeply. We see firsthand how their visit benefits our patients,

families, staff, and we thank each one of them for bringing comfort and smiles to our kiddos.

~ Mayra Pereyra  
Public Relations  
Shriners for Children Medical Center

**"These doggies and kitties help encourage our patients during therapy and help manage the anxiety"**

“**“THEN AGAIN, 'DAAWWG.' SUDDENLY HER VISITING FRIEND GLEEFULLY JUMPED UP AND SHOUTED, 'SHE TALKED, SHE TALKED! MY FRIEND TALKED!' SHE SAID DOG!”**



With shaggy Charlie leaning against her arm, the young patient laying in a stiff fetal position with a motionless face strained to say one word, “daawwg.” Then again, “daawwg.” Suddenly her visiting friend gleefully jumped up and shouted, “She talked, she talked! My friend talked! She said dog!”

This is but one of the hundreds of patients that Charlie and I have visited who have made a profound impact on me.

About a year after I adopted Charlie, I realized that with his temperament, he may be a good therapy dog. Being a people person, I knew I should give it a go, too. After some research I found and proceeded to train Charlie on the required commands. It took 3 months of training on a daily basis. Then the day came; the big test! In addition to the commands testing, we faced the temperament testing. He passed both! I passed! What an exciting day when he was crowned with his official Love On 4 Paws vest! But my excitement soon turned to frustration when I learned that I couldn't begin patient visits for a couple of months. What? Why? I want to go now! Don't they know we passed our test? Well. Being a new volunteer requires an extensive background check, attending a hospital orientation, and taking a HIPAA course, which is all dependent on the hospital's schedule. This was explained during the testing/orientation, but I was so excited and nervous that day, I had forgotten. But the day finally came for my first visit. Wearing my new Love On 4 Paws shirt, carrying my supplies bag, and Charlie in his new vest... we were ready. Of course I was nervous, but my dear Coach



had a calmness about her, along with the knowledge and experience that I admired. Under the watchful eye of my Coach, I finally had a few visits under my belt, and was approved to be on my own. At last! It felt like I graduated! I was finally a real Love On 4 Paws volunteer. When our first day came to be on our own, Charlie and I were welcomed with open arms, not only by the patients, but by the staff and visitors, as well. Walking out of the hospital and smiling from ear to ear, I looked at the end of the leash and saw Rin Tin Tin. In reality, Charlie's a spittin' image of Benji, but that day he was Rin Tin Tin to me.

After conducting multiple visits each month to a variety of facilities and participating in special events, my rookie days were behind me.

I was more than happy to support when asked to Coach new volunteers. It's always a joy to see the excitement that a newbie brings on their first day. And to see their 4-legged side-kick in their new vest is simply a delight.

Ensuring that their supply bag contains all the required necessities, getting their official, security badges (including their furry partners), emphasizing timeliness, and reviewing all the guidelines and protocols is just a part of the general process that goes along with coaching a new volunteer. But for me, the most important part of coaching is to bring a calmness to the table just as my coach did for me, because that's what we want our new volunteers and patients to feel.





In addition, it's important to develop a kind, caring, patient, and compassionate individual who is about to make an ever lasting impression with those they encounter, and having fun along the way with their best buddy. To watch a new volunteer enter a patient's room that was filled with anxiety, engage in a delightful chat, and leave behind a smiling patient with a cherished photo, then I've accomplished my job as a coach.

Becoming a Team Leader means supporting a group of volunteers and being available in case they have questions, need clarifications, or encounter an issue. Since Love On 4 Paws conducts visits on a daily basis, the Team Leader has to be on-call throughout the week. A Monday through Friday position, it is not. Plus, the Team Leader needs to stay abreast of their pet's status, i.e., vaccines and vet check-ups. Also, before signing up with Love On 4 Paws, the new volunteer must commit to a specific number of visits on a monthly basis, so tracking visits is important. Sure, there are times when a volunteer gets behind on visits due to illness, vacations or pet issues, but working with them to catch up is part of the job. There is a tough part to being a Team Leader, too; and that is offering critique to volunteers when necessary, but making it a positive interaction is the key. Love On 4 Paws expects their volunteers to adhere to the guidelines set forth by the organization, and remain committed to the program, so it's critical that all volunteers demonstrate the utmost care and passion for the program, which includes patients and the community we serve.

When I was asked to join the Board of Directors, I was deeply honored, but at the same time I must admit, I accepted the position with some trepidation. I was aware that with the position comes more responsibilities, time and that a Director must feel speaking, have the ability to presentations, maintain a level provide a positive interaction through with supporting the members, volunteers, clients, these traits are important assets Having a business background multi-million dollar projects, and working with all levels of executives, professionals, support teams, and the general public, I realized I was up for the task.

“***It's been nearly 4 years, and I still get thrilled at visiting patients***”

In addition, I knew comfortable with public create and conduct head in all circumstances, with executives, and follow President, other Board and the general public. All that a Director must possess.

throughout my career, managing

The most rewarding part for me is that I still conduct patient visits on a regular basis and gladly take part in special events, including testing and evaluating new volunteers. It's been nearly 4 years, and I still get thrilled at visiting patients, calming the nerves of a new volunteer on their first day, supporting a team, and participating in critical activities with the Board of Directors. Why? Because I truly believe in the good work that it does, and especially the phenomenal work of our beloved 4-legged partners. Also, it's not that difficult when you believe in the wonderful impact that Love On 4 Paws has with patients and others, which I have experienced from my first patient visit with my partner, "Rin Tin Tin," to this very day as a volunteer, Coach, Team Leader, and a proud member of the Board of Directors.

~ Linda Guevara



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# Love On 4 Paws