

# The A-Team

asera<sup>care</sup> Hospice Volunteer Newsletter



## An Encouraging Word:

Nothing quite compares to the comfort offered by an affectionate and kind-hearted dog.”

Anonymous

## You Did It!

Well, it's time to say goodbye to 2009. The 2009 reports for the volunteer program have been calculated and tabulated. After driving **29,000** miles for **700** hours, providing a presence for our patients for **1,500** hours, **one by one** our patients' lives were touched, witnessed, and loved. Thank you to all who helped us reach this point.

Before saying a final goodbye to 2009, take some time to do some personal reflection. How have your experiences changed you? Have your patients brought healing into your own life? Did you take home all the benefits of love, forgiveness, and surrender that end of life has to offer?

Also, as I take this time to thank each of you, I ask you to continue extending this thanks to our patients.

Remember that your patient is giving you purpose as a volunteer for 2010. Also, thank your friends and family for encouraging, sustaining, accommodating your endeavors as a hospice volunteer.

**And with that, ready or not here is 2010!**

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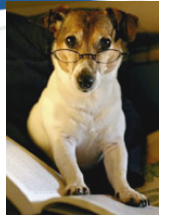
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## Timely Tips and Reminders

## The Book Nook:

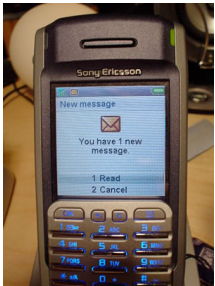


### Recommended Books, CDs, and Media

**Tip:** On a bi-weekly basis, direct volunteers will be receiving patient status updates. This information will be added to the volunteer needs assessment form on the HVA. You will be notified by an HVA e-mail that the form has been updated. In the e-mail subject line you will see the letters IDG. IDG stands for “interdisciplinary group.” This is a meeting where our whole team discusses and reviews the patient’s continued eligibility for hospice, and medical and psychosocial changes.

**Tip:** Sign up for text messages from the HVA.

This does not have to be a permanent choice you make. If you haven’t signed up for texts, please reconsider. It’s a great way to stay updated as a volunteer (for meetings and patient changes) and only a few texts are sent out a month (with the exceptions of those who receive vigil updates).



**Tip:** Do you have a dementia patient who enjoyed fishing? Ruth did this idea with her patient and he LOVED it! Ruth brought in her husband’s fishing box - they looked at each of the colorful lures, and discussed what kind of fish might be caught with the different lures. This led to the patient telling some of his fishing tales. The patient’s eyes just lit up that day!

**Tip:** Pet therapy volunteers, encourage people not to crowd around the dog as this can frighten the animal. Gently remind others by saying, “One at a time please. One at a time.”

**Tip:** Pet therapy volunteers, your dog needs to sniff strangers to help itself get acquainted. Often times, new people will reach over the dog’s head which can again frighten the animal. Help introduce these new comers by saying, “Sammy really loves to be scratched under his chin.”

**Reminder:** Submit your volunteer notes in a timely fashion. If you have not sent in your note by the second day after your visit you are getting L-A-Z-Y.

There are many moving books that tell the story of the deep impact pets have, not only on their owners, but on others they serve and love. We even found some about therapy dogs in particular. Here are suggestions for those who are interested in reading about the difference our four-footed friends can make in the lives of hospice patients as well as many others.

***Transformation of the Heart: Tales of the Profound Impact Therapy Dogs Have on Their Humans*** by Teri Pichot. 2009. 236 pages. This touching book tells 18 stories of how therapy dogs transform the lives and hearts of those they serve and help each person they visit. Written by a therapy dog handler.

***Moments with Baxter: Comfort and Love from the World’s Best Therapy Dog*** by Melissa Joseph. 2009. 223 pages. In this book that is specifically about hospice service, the author presents 36 true stories about the poignant connections between the therapy dog, Baxter, and the hospice patients and families to whom he brings comfort, love, peace, and dignity at the end of life.

***Therapy Dogs Today: Their Gifts, Our Obligation*** by Kris Butler. 2004. 88 pages. Ms. Butler is a nationally recognized trainer and authority on animal therapy programs. Her book explores technical and ethical issues regarding the use of therapy dogs. It is described as an important book for professionals who oversee pet therapy programs and those who handle therapy dogs.

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*The Book Nook continued from page 2*

**AND JUST FOR FUN**

**Greyfriars Bobby** by Eleanor Atkinson. This is the classic story of the devotion of a little terrier who faithfully visited the Edinburgh grave of his former owner every day for years. The true story dates to 1843 and was first published in 1912. It has since been published in many versions for adults and children and has been made into a Disney movie. It is a heartwarming and lovely story. The most recommended version is the adult story first written by Atkinson in 1912 and re-issued many times since then, most recently in 2008.

All books are available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or local bookstores and are under \$20.00.



**HELPFUL HOSPICE HINTS**

**FOUR-FOOTED HOSPICE HELPERS**

**Therapy Dogs Comfort and Cheer**

What is Animal Assisted Therapy or AAT? It is defined as the introduction of an animal into the environment of an individual for therapeutic purposes. But that definition doesn't begin to describe the comfort and joy to hospice patients by the visits of canine companions and their volunteer handlers. Dog lovers know what

comfort the companionship of a beloved pet can bring to an owner's life, especially when the human it belongs to is feeling down or depleted. Now those gifts are being brought to many others who can benefit from the presence of an animal companion, including hospice patients, through Aseracare's Pet Therapy Volunteer Program.

The idea of using animals, particularly dogs, to provide therapeutic care for many kinds of patients dates at least as far back as 1792 when Quakers asked canine friends to visit facilities for the elderly in England. As early as 1919 the U.S. military enlisted dogs to provide therapy for psychiatric patients at its facility in Washington, D.C. In the last forty years there has been increasing recognition of the therapeutic benefits of employing dogs and other animals to serve people with all kinds of needs. In 1995, in the Journal of the American Medical Association, physicians endorsed the importance of canine companions for rehabilitation care.

Today, therapy dogs are used to serve the needs of many different patients, including children with autism, the mentally ill, disabled and recovering veterans, the developmentally disabled, cancer patients, and many others. There seems to be no limit to the help and nurture man's best friend can offer.

**Benefits of Therapy Dogs**

Studies of dog therapy programs have shown that hospice patients benefit particularly from visits by canine companions. Therapy dogs provide psychological, spiritual, and physical benefits by offering emotional connections, stress reduction, and reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation. In elderly patients with dementia and Alzheimer's disease, visits by trained canine companions usually result in reduced depression, decreases in agitation, lowered blood pressure,

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*Helpful Hospice Hints continued from page 3*

and increased social and verbal interaction between patients and visitors, staff, and other residents in care facilities. The presence of a furry, friendly Fido noticeably increases laughter, smiles, touching, and talks and even provides a unique entertainment factor for elderly people living in care facilities.

As if all these benefits aren't enough, studies have also shown that visits by therapy dogs increase overall staff morale as well as patient morale. It is also known that when a pooch comes to call, patient-family relations and visits are often eased, making family time together more relaxed and cheerful.

**Training**

Therapy dogs are created through careful training which has been developed by experts in canine behavior and with an eye to the needs of the patients the dogs will serve. It is important for all patients, especially the elderly and vulnerable, that the therapy dog that comes to visit has been chosen for both its temperament and its skills.

Approved certification programs assure that a certified therapy dog will provide a safe and truly therapeutic experience for the patients it visits.



**Cautions**

While it might sound like animal therapy is so beneficial that everyone would welcome visits from friendly Fido, experts caution that those involved in such programs must be alert to the fact that some patients are not appropriate for pet therapy. First of all, not all patients are comfortable with dogs or cats. Some might have

a fear or dislike of these animals and their feelings must be considered and respected. Also, some patients or staff could be allergic to animals. Fido and his handler will need to keep their distance from these patients.

Patients or family members should always be consulted before beginning pet therapy with a patient. Volunteers who bring even certified, well-trained dogs to visit a facility should be alert to the fact that they might encounter patients who do not want contact with their canine friends and should accommodate both patients and staff who don't want to interact with Sammy, Minnie, or Lucky.

Therapy dogs should always be specially trained and certified as pet therapy dogs and have regular veterinarian check ups. In some cases the dogs might be covered to minimize dander. A patient's clothing or bed can also be covered with a towel or sheet if the dog is going to sit on the bed or in the patient's lap.

Finally, it is always a good idea for both patients and the dog handler to wash hands after interaction with the therapy dog.

**Aseracare Program**

Aseracare's Hospice Volunteer Program provides opportunities for volunteers to provide the wonderful gift of canine love and companionship to hospice patients through its pet therapy volunteers. Aseracare partners with Home for Life, a recognized and respected pet sanctuary located in nearby Wisconsin. Home for Life was started ten years ago by Lisa Laverdiere

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*Helpful Hospice Hints continued from page 4*

to provide a final home for dogs and cats which are not adoptable for various reasons. The program has expanded to train and certify appropriate dogs for pet therapy using its own program that serves at-risk youth while also training the dogs, who love to serve. Home for Life's certified pooches now visit nursing homes, Children's Hospital cancer patients, domestic abuse shelters and recovering veterans, as well as hospice patients.

All these loving dogs need us to help them with their mission of compassionate care and volunteers who are willing to take the canine comforters to visit their patients. The good-hearted therapy dog is ready to go visit whenever a volunteer can take him. Home for Life even delivers the dog to the Stillwater facilities, meeting the volunteer there.

If you are interested in becoming a pet therapy volunteer, contact Renee at [reneegasch@asera.com](mailto:reneegasch@asera.com) or at 952.943.0009

**BE SURE TO SEE INTERVIEW INSIGHTS BELOW FOR A STORY ABOUT VOLUNTEER ANGELA HERUTH AND HER BUDDY, SAMMY, WHO LOVES TO VISIT HOSPICE PATIENTS IN STILLWATER.**



## **INTERVIEW INSIGHTS**

### ***Angela and Sammy: Teamed to Touch Others***

Angela Heruth is an Aseracare Therapy Dog Volunteer who, along with her cockapoo buddy, Sammy, touches hospice patients at the Golden Living Center in Stillwater with comfort and cheer. Read on to hear what Angela has to

say about what it's like to serve with a canine companion.

### **Can you tell us something about yourself and why you became a therapy dog volunteer?**

Angela has been an employee at Target Corp. for 15 years and is currently a Team Manager in loss security. She has found that Target is a great place to work. Angela has always been an animal lover and grew up with dogs and other pets. She has a kitty at home, but no dogs. Angela explained that she had long felt she would like to do some kind of volunteering that included work with animals, but didn't know just what that might be until she heard about Home for Life and Aseracare.

### **How did you get involved in working with therapy dogs?**

When Angela learned about Home for Life and how the organization trained its rescue dogs to do community visits, she contacted them to learn about volunteer opportunities. HFL dogs are trained to visit veterans, domestic abuse centers, cancer patients at Children's Hospital, nursing homes, and hospice patients. After considering the options, Angela found she was drawn to visit hospice patients. HFL partners with Aseracare to arrange therapy dog visits so Angela volunteers with both HFL and Aseracare---and with Sammy, of course.

### **What kind of training did you need to become a therapy dog volunteer?**

Angela took the companion volunteer training through Aseracare as well as one additional session offered by Aseracare. The special session taught her specifically about the unique role she and the therapy dogs play in visiting hospice patients.

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*Interview Insights continued from page 5*

**What kind of training did Sammy get?**

Sammy and the other Home for Life dogs are trained by HFL. HFL teaches at-risk youth to train the dogs, thus serving a multiple purpose by helping young people find a focus and a sense of accomplishment as well as helping the dogs and the people they visit in the community. So, Sammy and HFL's other therapy dogs come already fully trained and certified.

**How are hospice visits with Sammy arranged?**

Angela and Sammy are matched with their hospice patients by Renee at Aseracare. Once a match is made, Angela sets a time for their visits. Then she reports to the Golden Living Center. Sammy is brought to the facility by an HFL staff member to meet her there. Then Angela and Sammy team up for the fun of visiting their patients. Together they visit two patients at the Center every Saturday morning.

**How do you handle concerns that there might be some residents at Golden Living who don't care for dogs?**

When Angela and Sammy enter the facility, Angela is careful not to let Sammy interact with residents unless they first reach out to Sammy and demonstrate that they want to touch and talk to him. Sammy is so well-behaved that there has never been a problem with any residents being disturbed by him. In fact, Angela and Sammy are always welcomed with happy smiles and enthusiasm.

**Do you and Sammy work only with your assigned individual patients or with other groups at the Center also?**

Sammy and Angela's visits are with specific hospice patients, but Sammy sometimes has the chance to spread his love and cheer to others too. One of Angela's patients likes to sit in the community room so sometimes she and

Sammy meet with him there. The other patients who know and like Sammy then enjoy interacting with him too. Some will go get treats for the pooch, others will become more alert and wheel their chairs over to pet Sammy or "talk dog talk" to him. One woman, who has very limited verbal skills, becomes more animated and vocalizes in her own way so that Sammy will engage with her. Sammy, of course, always responds patiently and willingly. So, although Angela's and Sammy's purpose is to visit their own patients, Sammy often spreads his cheer to many of the residents just by being there.

**Can you share some more stories about your visits with Sammy and how he affects your patients?**

One of Angela's patients, who suffers from dementia, has extremely limited speech. Angela and Sammy have been calling on R once a week since September so he now recognizes them, particularly Sammy. Staff members have related that when Angela and little Sammy come to visit, they notice that the patient smiles much more and is happier as well as more alert and animated.

Angela notices that R is also easier to engage and able to focus more than he was before Sammy started to visit. When Sammy comes to call with his tail wagging and his soft, warm coat to stroke, the patient reaches out to pet Sammy and tries hard to talk to Sammy, saying "Ohh...good dog. So pretty. So nice." Sometimes Sammy's role is to be a calming influence for R as he relaxes and just enjoys Sammy's accepting, affectionate, and warm presence.

Other patients are also cheered by Sammy's visits. Angela has seen that one Alzheimer's patient even perks up and responds to the little pooch, while another patient tries to get and give little doggie kisses from Sammy.

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*Interview Insights continued from page 6*

**How does SAMMY respond to the visits he makes with you?**

Angela reports that “Sammy **loves** going on visits.” When they enter the Center, Sammy perks up and begins to wag his tail happily. If patients reach out to him, he goes to them and lets them pet him and talk to him. He always sits when told and he knows who might have treats for him! The love just goes round and round, from Sammy to patients, to staff and back to Sammy and Angela. Wouldn't it be heart-warming to see them all in action?

**Finally, do you have any suggestions for others who volunteer with therapy dogs?**

Some suggestions from Angela are:

1. Make sure the pooch goes potty before you go inside. (We won't ask Angela exactly how she learned this one!)
2. Set boundaries. Remember you and the dog are there to visit your patient. While you can certainly take some time to share the friendly dog with other patients, be careful not to use up too much of your time or your dog's energy with others.
3. Remember to read your canine friend's needs too. Sammy sometimes gets tired himself from all the attention he gets and the affection he gives so willingly. Angela has learned that Sammy is getting tired when he curls up under her chair and lies down.

Summarizing her experience as Aseracare Therapy Dog Volunteer, Angela said it is a joy to work with Sammy and her patients and to be part of the loving, cheerful interaction they both experience between Sammy and his hospice friends.

**Thanks, Angela and Sammy, for the comfort and joy you both share so lovingly with those whose world had become smaller and more limited. Wouldn't their visits make a wonderfully inspiring movie?**

**!! Mandatory Meeting !!**

**EDUCATION ASPIRATIONS**

**Monday, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010  
7-8pm**

**“Annual Mandatory Volunteer Meeting”**

Once a year it is important that we all gather together and do a little bit of house keeping. Each year regulatory work must be done to keep each of your files up to date. We will be covering all six of your annual mandatory Aseracare University courses for 2010.

If for some significant reason you are not able to attend, alternative arrangements **must** be made with the Volunteer Coordinator.

It is the volunteer's responsibility to stay up to date on this file work. These requirements are serious as they are a part of Aseracare's conditions of participation with government guidelines. **Any**

**volunteer who has not met these annual update requirements by the end of February 2010 will be put on suspension until these requirements are met.**



**QUAINT QUIPS AND FUNNIES**

To Bring a Laugh.....

**Great Truths That Little Children Have Learned**

You can't trust dogs to guard your food!

(Well....maybe you can if they are a therapy dog!)

Editor