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Editorial

Working with volunteers brings with it special considerations, benefits and challenges. We look at the many advantages volunteers bring to the goals and objectives of our organization. We explore ways to recruit, train, guide, motivate and recognize our volunteers. And we seek various approaches to the challenges that arise whenever new recruits are added to the mix. We all know how demanding yet fulfilling this responsibility is. Now imagine how working with volunteers may change when an animal is added to the equation, whether the animal is part of a volunteer alliance or is a recipient of volunteer services.

Anyone who has ever had a pet knows that your household is transformed when an animal is introduced to your home. When my husband and I adopted our latest dog, we needed to make a few changes to accommodate him: a spot on the kitchen floor reserved for his food dishes, time slotted into our schedules for vet visits, puppy training and grooming and changes to our budget to accommodate all this plus dog food and the prerequisite dog toys. But we also had to make some new rules: some for the dog (i.e. no dogs allowed on the bed) and some for visiting grandchildren (i.e. no rough play with the dog in the house).

This issue of the Journal focuses on animals and volunteering. We start off with an article by Carrie Landry that provides an overview of how the strong animal-human connection leads to volunteering both for and with animals. The diversity of animal welfare is noted in articles about providing rehabilitation for wildlife that have been injured or orphaned (Andrea Hunt) and supporting aquatic animals that are sick or injured (Lindsay Baker).



Volunteering with animals also includes working with animals that provide services to people who are in need of support. Steven Doucette writes about raising guide dog puppies which will be trained to work with people who are blind, and Kim Kilpatrick provides a personal perspective as a recipient of the guide dog service.

Programs involving therapy pets are becoming widespread. Irene Valmas and Juli Balinsky focus on making their therapy dog program safe and successful. Lian Ellis identifies some risk management techniques for pet therapy programs. Sophie Soklaridis and Theresa Conforti discuss the benefits of a therapy dog program in a psychiatric hospital setting. Understanding that not all programs involving animals are well received, Mary Anne Mampe provides some advice on how to handle negative reactions to therapy dog visits. And just to ensure we do not think that all pet therapy programs are about dogs, Inika Anderson tells Fiona Kearney's story of a therapeutic horse riding program for persons with disabilities.

In each of the articles involving animals and volunteering, the authors have recognized many unique challenges that arise when animals are part of the mix. The reader is presented with targeted recruitment ideas, myriad benefits of volunteering with animals, the value of intrinsic rewards, risk management strategies and mediation techniques.

While you relax and read about the diversity of volunteer programs that encompass animals, be sure to consider how you might take the tips and advice offered by our authors and extrapolate them into your own program – whether you are working with animals or people or both.

Ruth Vant, Editorial Team

Helping with Horses: A Therapeutic Riding Program for Persons with Disabilities

by Inika Anderson, Ottawa, ON

in conversation with Fiona Kearney, Program Coordinator, TROtt

Enjoyment. Achievement. Challenge. These are experiences that most of us strive for every day. However, these goals can be more difficult for some individuals living with disabilities. The Therapeutic Riding Association of Ottawa-Carleton (TROtt) can help persons with disabilities live these experiences through therapeutic riding programs.

TROtt is a unique program in the Ottawa area for children, youth and adults with primarily physical, developmental or learning disabilities. Therapy, sport and education come together in TROtt's enjoyable, challenging environment where milestones are reached and achievements are celebrated.

A team of Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association (CanTRA) and Equine Canada certified instructors, qualified therapists, staff, trained volunteers and specially selected horses ensure safe physical, social,



cognitive and educational activities. TROtt's very special, well-behaved horses are specifically chosen for their temperaments and carefully trained.

The benefits of therapeutic riding may be physical and cognitive. Participants may be able to normalize muscle tone, build strength and develop flexibility and coordination. Riding can help improve balance, posture, core stability and endurance. Therapeutic riding can help increase concentration, attention span and memory capacity. Riders may develop a sense of responsibility by helping to care for the horse and bond with the animal. Lessons can create opportunities for social interaction with fellow riders, instructors and volunteers.

Volunteers are the backbone of TROtt. The Riding Program recruits and trains more than 150 volunteers who donate more than 7,000 hours each year. This dedicated group assists with grooming, tacking up, leading and side-walking during the lessons, cleaning and putting away tack.

Many volunteers have no horse experience before they start with TROtt so particular attention is paid to training to ensure the safety of riders and horses. Training sessions teach how to handle, groom and tack up the horses. Volunteers are also taught how to side-walk with a rider during the class and are guided to learn how they can best help their rider. For safety reasons, only the more experienced volunteers are asked to lead a horse during the class.

Horses are animals of habit and with at least 100 different volunteers going through the barn in a week, routine is essential to minimize the stress on the horses. Set routines are followed in the barn and during classes so that all volunteers are familiar and comfortable with their roles. Training emphasizes safety concerns working around horses, including how to move safely and what signs to look for when the horse is not happy.

TROtt volunteers appreciate the opportunity to establish rewarding relationships with riders and horses. Both riders and volunteers can experience enjoyment, achievement and challenge by participating in TROtt programs.

Inika Anderson is a Liaison Officer with the Canadian Bar Association, providing support to volunteer-led committees. Inika has 15 years' experience in non-profit, working with a variety of volunteers, and has significant experience writing and editing newsletters and proposals. Inika joined the editorial team in 2012.

“Get that damn dog out of here!”

by Mary Anne Mampe, Toronto, ON

A volunteer holds the elevator door open and the nurse screams at her. While visiting with a friend, a passing resident glares at the volunteer. Verbal abuse and curse words may fly at our volunteers. This sounds strange since we visit healthcare facilities to bring comfort and companionship to the people who need it most.



Did I mention it is *canine* comfort and companionship?

Keeping volunteers active and engaged can be challenging. Add in a dash of negativity toward your best friend, the difficulty doubles. Volunteers in our Therapy Dog Program believe their dog can make people's lives better. And they generally do. So, how do you handle the negativity?

Dealing with difficult residents

People in long-term care (LTC) facilities may be lonely. When the dog visits, residents who love the dog get attention and interact with the dog's handler. Others are not so comfortable. What can someone do who is allergic or scared?

When a volunteer talks about a resident's negative reaction to their dog, it is often with frustration and a why-bother attitude. To alleviate the sting of the nasty words, I tell volunteers to simply say something to the resident that shows you are interested in them too, such as "I hope we can still be friends even though you may not like my dog!" Then I tell them the story about Doris.

When I started visiting a LTC home with my dog Michigan, Doris would always cry out "Here comes that damn dog again!" On our third visit, I said to her, "I know you're not a fan of Michigan. That's okay! Did you ever have a dog?" I sat with Doris as she told me about a neighbourhood dog that terrorized her when she was a young girl. She never did pet Michigan but, as we kept coming in for visits, Doris would ask me if Michigan was thirsty and she would sit conspicuously close to the water cooler where Michigan would have her mid-visit drink. We made a positive difference to Doris's life, even though it was not a typical visit.

Dealing with difficult family or friends

There are times when our volunteers' visits overlap with those of the residents' family or friends. Most times, the result of the convergence is a tail-wagging time with lots of smiles. Often, the dog is the one thing the resident has that is all theirs. The dog is their friend and not something their family has done for them. The resident is so excited to share their dog with their loved ones but what if a family member responds negatively?

This situation is not only difficult for our volunteer but also for the resident. I heard from a volunteer that a resident's son said to his mother that a dog in her room would just leave hair and mess behind. When the volunteer told me about this incident he felt angry toward the son because he did not know how much the therapy dog meant to his mother. The volunteer was shocked that he continued to make negative comments about the dog even when his mother became visibly upset.

There is not much we can do to ensure such run-ins do not happen. It may be best to avoid a resident when that family member visits. If the family member arrives during a visit, tell the resident you will come back later when they are free. In the case above, I asked the volunteer to see the resident on their next visit to make sure that they were okay. By switching the focus from the volunteer's emotions about the incident to the resident's, I was able to defuse the situation.



Dealing with difficult staff

You think I was joking about a nurse screaming? Not at all! It may seem strange to dog lovers but even a sweet little Westie can cause extreme fear or aversion in people. For cultural reasons or past experiences, staff may have a negative reaction to any dog, from a mini-poodle to a Rottweiler. When you volunteer at a facility because you want to improve the lives of the residents, it can be difficult to cope with negative reactions.

In these cases, I tell the volunteer that I will contact the facility to handle the situation. By taking action, our volunteer knows that we value their commitment and we ensure the situation does not escalate. When I speak with the coordinator of volunteers, I am sensitive to the situation while stressing that the negative reaction has impacted the enthusiasm of our volunteer. The facility's coordinator is best able to deal with staff, perhaps starting with posting the dog's visiting schedule or adjusting a staff shift.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with difficult residents, family or staff. But, there is always a way to handle the situation so that your volunteer feels valued for the work they do.

Mary Anne Mampe volunteers with St. John Ambulance as the Advisor, Therapy Dog Program in Toronto. She joined the Program in February 2011 with her German shorthaired pointer Michigan and became the Program Coordinator in October 2011. Since that time, the Toronto T-dog Pack has grown from 17 members to 198 serving over a hundred healthcare facilities, schools and day programs in Toronto. For more information on St. John Ambulance and its Therapy Dog Program, please email torontotherapydogs@on.sja.ca.

What Happens at the Hospital Does Not Stay at the Hospital: The Informal, Indirect and Unintended Benefits of Having a Therapy Dog Program in a Psychiatric Hospital

by Sophie Soklaridis and Theresa Conforti (with editorial assistance from Hema Zbogar), Toronto, ON

Animal-assisted therapy is an intervention that uses animals (mostly dogs) for therapeutic benefit across a wide variety of medical conditions (McConnell, 2002; Nolen, 2000; Moretti et al., 2011). At the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto, the therapy dog program is organized through Volunteer Resources. Volunteers and their dogs visit patients on a weekly basis so patients can experience the therapeutic benefits of canine interaction. These are short-term interventions provided in a group or one-on-one within a psychiatric inpatient unit. The volunteer and the dog agree to a one-year contract and are assigned to a specific floor of a unit. The goal of the program is to improve patients' sense of well-being and to reduce loneliness through informal interaction with the dog. It bridges the gap for people who are separated from their dogs when they come for treatment and for those who cannot have their own dogs due to financial or other personal barriers.

The benefits of animal-human interactions, particularly with dogs, across diverse medical and psychiatric settings are well established in the literature. For example, animal-assisted therapy with dogs has been documented to reduce cardiovascular stress (Muñoz et al., 2011), enhance immune factors (Chametski



et al., 2004), decrease pain (Marcus et al., 2013), improve mood (Sockalingam et al., 2008), decrease fear and anxiety (Beetz et al., 2012) and create an overall humanizing atmosphere within a hospital setting (Coakley et al., 2009). However, there is a dearth of literature about the influence of animal-assisted therapy on health care staff (Rossetti et al., 2010) and no literature about the unintended benefits of informally interacting with a therapy dog outside of the unit as a non-patient. This article documents the perspectives of some CAMH dog therapy volunteers on the informal and indirect benefits of the program, both inside and outside of their assigned hospital unit.

Outside of the hospital: Dog therapy and the example of public transit

CAMH is located in downtown Toronto. Several volunteers and their dogs use the city's public transport system, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), to travel between home and hospital. Most TTC riders who encounter a pet therapy dog from CAMH react positively. Many riders ask if they can pet the dog and then start an interaction, which can include having quiet conversations or (with permission) giving the dog treats. These riders often thank the volunteer for allowing the interaction and the conversation usually ends with "This made my day!" or "I really needed this!"

Therapy dogs can also play an informal role in breaking the stigma around mental health issues. They do so in two ways. First, when a transit rider has a positive experience with a CAMH volunteer and their dog, it reflects well on the hospital. Second, when transit riders ask questions about the dog and why she has a purple scarf around her neck, it creates an opportunity to talk about CAMH and the therapy dog program. The volunteer can challenge the negative images and stereotypes that persist about psychiatric hospitals and mental health issues. The interaction between the dog and the transit rider provides a safe space in which the volunteer can explore these perceptions and fight stigma, which might not have been possible without the dog's presence.

Inside the hospital walls: Elevators, lobbies and hallways

Visitors, family members and healthcare staff indirectly benefit from the therapy dog program. Volunteers and their dogs are often stopped by patients and visitors as they walk through the hospital lobby or hallway en route to their scheduled unit visit. Volunteers have noticed how people's expressions change: their faces light up when they see the dog. The lobby and the elevator area are the most popular places for visitor interactions with the therapy dog. Volunteers describe these interactions as contributing to an overall positive hospital environment that enhances the comfort of patients, their family members and other visitors. That comfort is evident in broad smiles and relaxed shoulders. Family members often share their feelings of comfort with volunteers when they witness their loved one interacting positively with a therapy dog. Several family members have told volunteers and staff how much they appreciate the therapy dog, particularly when they see how much their loved one's symptoms improve during a visit.

The majority of healthcare staff feel positive about having a therapy dog program on their unit. Some staff will engage with the dog when it is between visits with patients. They express their enjoyment with comments like "I needed that little pick-me-up!" or "Pet therapy for us too!" One volunteer described the emotional transformation that happens when the elevator door opens and the dog emerges:



healthcare staff instantly break into smiles. The therapy dog changes the mood of the entire unit, from staff to patients.

Animal-assisted therapy contributes to humanizing the hospital experience for patients and their families. We briefly described how the therapy dog program at CAMH informally extends beyond patient care to reach the public, hospital visitors, family members and healthcare staff. Hospital leaders are striving to find ways to increase patient satisfaction and community engagement. The therapy dog program provides an indirect opportunity for community engagement and education through the public's interactions with the well-trained pet therapy volunteers. The dog becomes a conduit for a non-judgmental conversation aimed at reducing the stigma of mental illness. Hospital leaders have the opportunity to leverage these unintended positive benefits to deliver better patient, family, staff and community care. What happens at the hospital therapy dog program does not stay at the hospital and this is a very good thing.

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Ms. Theresa Conforti is a co-ordinator for clinical volunteer programs at CAMH. She has implemented the CAMH pet therapy program for the past ten years.

Preparing for Pet Therapy Programming: Reducing the Risk at Start-up

by Lian Ellis, Hamilton, ON

Information about the benefits of pet therapy can be found online or at the local library. While much of the information is anecdotal, health professionals have begun taking note and clinical studies are now becoming more common.¹

Interestingly, or perhaps disturbingly, tools to help organizations recognize and reduce program risk appear to be less available. The purpose of this article is not to endorse pet therapy but to highlight program elements where risk may be high and to help organizations plan a program that is safe and humane.

Some pet therapy programs involve volunteers visiting with animals taken from a collective, while other organizations have pets in situ. This article will review the most common scenario: a canine-based visiting program where handlers bring their own pets.

There are two generally accepted definitions of animal-assisted programming: animal-assisted activities (AAA) involve animals in various recreational activities; while animal-assisted therapies (AAT) are goal-directed and must be overseen by a therapist or other medical professional.² The term “pet therapy” is used here to include both AAA and AAT.

Another often confusing distinction is the difference between a *service dog* and a *therapy dog*. To be certified, service dogs in Ontario must meet arduous training and performance standards. They are afforded access privileges into stores, movies and public transit.³ Therapy dogs do not qualify for this.

No matter what breed of animal is involved, or how the interaction is structured, there are commonalities regarding program safety.

Program Manager/Evaluator Knowledge

Experience reading canine body language is crucial for program safety. Not recognizing subtle warning behaviours may lead to a mild concern, such as disengagement of the dog and a less rewarding visit for the client, or may escalate into a devastating bite. An evaluator should be able to recognize signs of low level canine stress such as licking, yawning, scratching, shedding, sudden sniffing or vigorous shaking.⁴ An evaluator should also be able to gather a team of three to five people and deliver a consistent evaluation that challenges the applicants adequately but fairly.



Evaluation Focus

A dog may be an obedience champion but that does not automatically mean it is a good candidate for pet therapy. Obeying commands and tolerating a judge's touch are things a show dog must do without protest. Standing quietly does not necessarily mean the dog enjoys the activity. This is where the evaluator's knowledge of canine body language and subtle stress signals becomes invaluable.

It is vital not to focus solely on obedience. An evaluation should give weight to the dog's attitude and willingness to engage and the handler's aptitude for supporting their pet with positive conversation and contact. A dog that is comfortable on a visit contributes more to the inherent safety of the program than a dog displaying extreme obedience.

Pet Health

A minimum requirement of pet health includes proof of an annual veterinary exam, external and internal parasite control and any vaccinations required by law. Some facilities may have additional vaccination requirements such as bordetella (kennel cough); others make it mandatory to bathe the pet before every visit. Health requirements should be based on client population, geography and veterinary recommendations. It is generally accepted that a dog must be at least a year old before visiting to allow their immune systems to develop.

Equipment

Equipment for a pet therapy program is simple: a flat collar and a four- to six-foot leash. Devices such as prong, choke, e-collars or leashes with chain are not appropriate. They imply the pet is not easily managed and the devices could cause injury. Retractable leashes may be a tripping hazard and should also be prohibited. In our organization, Haltis³ and Gentle Leaders⁴ are not permitted because they are another type of augmented control device. They are also often mistaken for muzzles.

Handler Support

The handler must be comfortable advocating for their pet, not just in situations of potential mishandling, but also in the day-to-day business of visits. Even if a handler is extremely shy, they should be able to converse and offer motivation to engage the clients with their pet.⁵ For the organization, handler support means the handler will model positive pet handling at all times.

The outcome of education and a well-planned evaluation is a handler and pet team that is reflective of the goals of the organization. The addition of consistency and solid communication results in a skilled, attentive and relaxed team. This calm state of mind is key to keeping program participants safe.

Footnotes:

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² Delta Society, *Pet Partners Training Course*, Bellevue, WA, Delta Society, 2008

³ *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 they – Accessibility Standards for Customer Service*, Service Ontario e-laws, Retrieved from http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/source/regs/english/2007/elaws_src_regs_r07429_e.htm

⁴ Chandler, Cynthia K., *Animal Assisted Therapy in Counselling*. Routledge, New York NY, 2005

⁵ Howie, Ann, R., *The Handler Factor*. Anne R. Howie, Bellevue, WA, 2008

Lian Ellis is the Manager of Volunteer Services of Brain Injury Services. Lian has an ABI Rehabilitation Therapist Certificate from McMaster University and further Animal Assisted Therapy Training from the University of North Texas.

A Safe and Successful Pet Therapy Program: Therapeutic Paws of Canada

by Irene Valmas and Juli Balinsky, Toronto, ON

The value of a bond between an animal and a human cannot be quantified, but for those of us who are pet owners, we can attest to the positive impact our special friends have on our lives. Therapeutic Paws of Canada (TPOC) is a nonprofit organization of volunteers, providing animal resources for human needs (physical, mental, educational, motivational and social) through regular visits by members of the community with their pets. We participate in both senior and child programs and provide visits to hospitals, long-term care centres, retirement residences, schools, libraries, nursing homes and anywhere else there is a need.

Prospective volunteers contact us because they realize first hand through their own experience the benefits they receive from interaction with their pets. There are strict policies and procedures in place that must be adhered to before a pet and their handler are official TPOC members and acting volunteers. To begin, the handler must participate in a telephone interview and, if determined to be eligible candidates, they proceed to an evaluation with their dog/cat. To meet requirements, we look for animals with a great temperament, well mannered, friendly and sociable with strangers. Animals do not require special training to participate; as TPOC states on its website, "In our experience, pet therapy animals are usually born with the required temperament, though some basic obedience skills are required."

Before visiting care facilities on their own, pets and handlers are put through an evaluation in real-life settings while the evaluator reviews the dog's sociability and manners. We have designed our evaluations to mimic real-life settings to account for any potential occurrences in the field. Through this process, we ensure that prospective volunteers understand the guidelines and ensure both handler and pets are comfortable in the environments they will be working in. Behavioural categories include



negotiating around children and people on crutches or in wheelchairs and reacting calmly to loud noises and being handled.

TPOC also has therapy teams that are Child Certified. These are teams that are already certified as regular therapy teams and go through an extra certification process to work with children in programs such as Paws to Read®. To qualify as a Child Certified dog/cat, the pet must be evaluated in our Interaction With Children (IWC) evaluation. During the certification process, potential teams are tested around children in situations involving motion/movement, toys, food and just sitting still. Child Certified teams must be calm at all times and show interest when a child is reading to them. A pet that is distracted by other things in the room, tries to get up or moves around will not be certified. A Child Certified pet must be able to draw out the child by showing interest and attention to what the child is doing. It has been proven that a child reading to a pet will read 30% better than when reading to an adult.

For the protection of our visiting facilities, any pet showing signs of aggression is dismissed immediately and will not be invited back to take another test. In addition, TPOC requires references and conducts police background checks for all volunteers.

Although this may be considered a rigorous process to follow, it has certainly proven to be well worth it, as TPOC serves on a national level by offering roughly 80,000 hours of visiting time per year.

Pet therapy has shown to have both physiological and psychological benefits and is increasingly becoming widely recognized. Visits by a pet encourage socialization and create pleasant associations during the visit both with the animal and with others present. Also, interest in the animal creates mental stimulation and increased communication and is a positive distraction from feelings of distress. For a senior who has been removed from their home and may have had to leave a pet behind, a visit can change their entire day and make it a brighter one. For a child who is bravely facing a distressing situation, the pet visit is a positive and engaging experience. The presence of the animal allows the individual to relax and experience feelings of calmness, both during and after the visit. Decreased blood pressure and heart rate have also been seen as physical benefits of pet therapy.

While not all pets that come through our program are certified due to the rigorous screening that takes place, it does not mean they are any less special to their owners. We take pride in knowing that our certified teams meet the organization's high standard for safety for both its clients and its volunteers. The benefits of pet therapy are repeatedly proven strong as our programming and requests continue to grow. This is an equally rewarding experience for our volunteers. By sharing the unconditional love of our wonderful pets and being part of enhancing the quality of life, it is a priceless gift. "Paws with love to share": such a simple thing to do and yet so significant.

Irene Valmas, Director of Public Relations and Communications at Therapeutic Paws of Canada, is the founder of Core Kinetics Fitness, Wellness and Exercise Rehabilitation Inc. (2009). She serves as a fitness coach, lifestyle consultant, mentor and educator and dedicates herself to projects of "making a difference". With a true love of children and animals and a passion for helping others, Irene is a strong advocate of pet visitation in alliance with her own goals to improve the overall quality of life.



Juli Balinsky is a member of the Board of Directors of Therapeutic Paws of Canada and has been a regular volunteer for the last three years.

Service Animals at Work with Volunteers

Kim Kilpatrick, Ottawa ON

I have held many positions, both paid and volunteer throughout my life. I have volunteered in palliative care and I have also worked and volunteered with seniors and people with disabilities in long-term care facilities, peer mentoring, volunteer resource management, teaching, public speaking and much more.

Over the past 20 years, I have shared my life with four wonderful guide dogs. I have been totally blind since birth and my amazing guide dogs help me navigate my world safely, independently and gracefully. They are hard workers, ice breakers, conversation starters and partners.

Whenever and wherever I work or volunteer, they are with me. The dogs primarily assist me, but they often provide great benefit to those around me. They have given comfort and calmness to colleagues and clients who are agitated and scared. Their wagging tails make others smile. Their comic antics provide relief in stressful situations. For example, my third guide, a lovely and dignified golden retriever, would hop into my fur-lined guitar case as I played music for seniors. My dogs show unconditional acceptance to those around them. They model how a calm, quiet and well-mannered dog can be an asset in any environment.

As managers of volunteer resources, the following should be kept in mind:

- Guide dogs are service dogs. They are primarily there to assist their handlers.
- The service dog is legally allowed to be in any public place.
- If the dog is badly behaved, dirty or exhibiting out-of-control behaviours, bring this to the attention of the service dog owner and you can ask for the dog to leave the location.
- You can ask for credentials that indicate where the dog and dog handler were trained.
- Do not pat, feed or call the dog without getting permission to do so.
- Always give directions to the handler so they can direct the dog.
- If you feel that your volunteer location or experience may have areas that might be unsafe, dangerous or stressful for the service dog, talk this through with the dog handler.

The most common service dogs are guide dogs for people who are blind. However, there are many other types of service dogs. These can include:

- hearing dogs for people who are deaf;
- service dogs for people who use wheelchairs;
- dogs that alert people to seizures and other medical issues; and
- emotional support dogs.



If you are unsure which services the dog provides, ask the handler what they do and how they are certified. A service dog and handler team can be a huge asset to your organization.

Kim Kilpatrick has worn many hats in her career. She is a music therapist, radio show co-host, professional storyteller, manager of volunteers, access technology trainer, disability awareness presenter and writer. Kim has been totally blind since birth and has enjoyed the great pleasure of being accompanied by her guide dogs for more than 20 years.

Volunteers Raise a Puppy Only to Give it Up a Year Later

by Steven Doucette, Manotick, ON

Imagine having a dog in your home, caring for it, falling in love with it and then twelve to eighteen months later, you have to give up that dog. Most people would say, “No thanks”. It is a challenge faced by Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind (CGDB) on a regular basis.

The organization has a program called Puppy Walking, although there is a lot more to the program than walking pups or dogs. The first year of a puppy’s life is very formative and of vital importance in the temperamental and physical growth of a young dog. The Puppy Walking Program is the first stage in guide dog training.

CGDB places puppies into the homes of volunteers at approximately seven to eight weeks of age. The puppy walker is asked to provide a loving home and basic obedience training. This includes trying to familiarize the puppy with as many different environments and situations as possible and in all weather conditions. The puppy stays with the volunteer for twelve to eighteen months, after which its potential as a future guide dog is assessed. If the dog is of the right calibre, it returns to the National Training Centre CGDB and enters into formal training with a professional Guide Dog Mobility Instructor.

All activities with the puppies should be directed to the development of habits and characteristics that form the basis of a guide dog. At all times, the volunteer should be judging the puppy’s behaviour and asking, “Would this be a help or a hindrance to a future guide dog?”

Luba Schmidt of Ottawa wanted to start volunteering in the community. She has loved dogs all her life, and her retirement was a perfect opportunity to combine her love of dogs with a desire to remain active and social, all while making a contribution to someone’s life. Schmidt raised a dog named Lydia, a cross between a golden retriever and Labrador retriever, two breeds predominantly used by Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind.

Some people are hesitant in taking on this volunteer position. Usually, there are two reasons. One is the lack of experience in training and fear of not doing things right. The other is giving back the dog. One of the most common responses from the public in regard to this program is, “I would do it, but I couldn’t give up the dog”. CGDB must consider this when canvassing individuals to take on this lengthy but very rewarding volunteer experience. It is also a reason why the organization retains ownership of the dog at



all times and requires the volunteer to sign a legal contract agreeing to this. For CGDB, recruitment comes in many forms. Displays at community events and public locations are often fruitful, especially when accompanied by a young pup or dog in training. However, requesting assistance from the media is usually the most successful method. Most media outlets are pleased to provide coverage for a cause such as guide dogs, and when cute puppy photos are included it draws interest from the public.

Luba Schmidt addresses both points. "Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind provides great support. There are regularly scheduled visits to help you socialize the puppy and answer all your questions ... obedience training ... all the food, crate, toys, training courses, boarding and veterinary services the puppy will need. You couldn't ask for more."

As for giving up Lydia, Schmidt says, "I look at this philosophically. You raise your children knowing that one day they will have lives of their own. And this is exactly how I looked at raising Lydia. One day she will go on to do wonderful things with her life. She may walk a young bride down the aisle or walk a graduate across the stage at convocation. Is it difficult to give up the pup? Absolutely! Will there be tears? Absolutely!"

The Puppy Walking Program requires a huge commitment and should not be taken lightly. While there are a lot of positives, there are some challenges along the way. For Schmidt, some of the challenges were the special rules that may not apply to pet dogs, such as Lydia not being permitted to play fetch or sleep on the bed. The positive side though is being able to take Lydia to public places such as grocery stores, restaurants and hotels. Schmidt says, "The greatest reward is to know that I am helping to make the life of a visually impaired individual a little easier. A guide dog will provide independence and companionship."

You do not have to be retired to participate. Volunteers have included post-secondary students, part-time workers, homemakers and individuals who work from home or own a business. Some volunteers have arranged with their employer to take the dog to work daily. The main thing is that the pup or dog is not left at home alone all day.

The Puppy Walking Program is active in certain geographical areas only, including near Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver and Victoria. CGDB has provided its services to visually impaired and blind Canadians from coast to coast, training guide dogs since 1984.

Steven Doucette is Events Coordinator and Assistant to the COO at Canadian Guide Dogs for the Blind. This encompasses the roles of public relations and volunteer recruitment and management. Doucette has been with CGDB for sixteen years and considers guide dogs as his vocation.

Mission Critical Volunteer Roles with Animals

by Lindsay Baker, Vancouver, BC

Volunteers have been involved with the Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Centre since its opening weekend more than 58 years ago. During that time, they have become an integral part of the organizational fabric and are involved in nearly every aspect of the aquarium's operations. Now the <http://www.vanaqua.org/volunteer> volunteer services department engages 1,000 people in volunteer activities annually in a variety of roles. The range includes educating school groups, preparing food for our animals to eat, recording cetacean sightings in our database and live streaming our public programs. Our myriad roles are diverse but so is our volunteer team, which ranges in age from 10 to 90, with experience from professional marine biologists to high school students gaining their first taste of volunteering.

While each volunteer brings a unique set of skills, knowledge and experiences to our team, there is one thing that they all share: a deep commitment to protecting the oceans. This is why each volunteer role is designed to help fulfill our mission: to affect the conservation of aquatic life.

When most people think of volunteering with animals, they usually envision behind-the-scenes hands-on work cleaning and directly caring for the animals. In fact, animal husbandry roles at the Vancouver Aquarium make up a very small fraction of the volunteer opportunities we offer (approximately 10%). The most sought-after role is the chance to volunteer over the summer at the Marine Mammal Rescue Centre (MMR) which is an off-site hospital for sick or injured marine mammals. The goal at MMR is to rescue, rehabilitate and release these animals back into the oceans and volunteers play a vital role making this happen.

More than 150 volunteers spend their summer scrubbing tubs, sorting fish and mixing milk matrix for sick or injured harbour seals, the most common patient at MMR. It is cold, wet, smelly, hard work but MMR volunteers will tell you there is nowhere else they would rather be. At the end of season seal releases they get to see the direct results of their efforts as the now healthy, chubby seals awkwardly slide into the water. Check out this <http://vimeo.com/115947641> video produced by our volunteer videographers Susannah and Leanne about the 2014 MMR season, another example of how our volunteers fulfill our mission.

In certain cases, the volunteers are able to track the movements of their former MMR patients like <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqZJoa-FjKY> Levi, the rehabilitated harbour porpoise, when they return to the ocean. While the rescue of every animal counts at MMR, the information and experience gained from caring for and studying these animals helps researchers learn more about these creatures and what we can do to protect them.

Sometimes volunteers will have a unique opportunity to help staff with round-the-clock animal observations. For instance, this summer a false killer whale named



<http://www.aquablog.ca/2014/07/the-rescue-of-a-false-killer-whale-calf/> Chester was brought to the rescue centre. When the rehabilitation process is over, Fisheries and Oceans Canada determines whether or not an MMR patient can return to the ocean. In some cases, an animal's injuries are too severe to be released such as the sea otter that was riddled with gunshots and lost his eyesight as a result. Wally has now found a home at the aquarium and is an ambassador for his species.

Sharing Wally's story and stories of other animals with guests in our galleries is the focus of the Gallery Educator role at the aquarium. Gallery Educators can be spotted next to animal habitats with carts complete with information, tactile props and activities used to engage guests in conversations about our animals. In the case of Wally, they share his personal story of recovery and help make meaningful connections to the guests' own lives and experiences. His story made such an impression on one eight-year-old that the child held a "toonie" birthday party to raise money to help with Wally's ongoing care!

Throughout their interaction, volunteers also educate the guests about sea otters, their role in the ecosystem and the threats they face in the ocean. Essentially, our volunteers in education-related roles are ambassadors of change who foster connections between people and animals. This, in turn, inspires them to take action in their personal lives to help protect these animals and our oceans. In many cases, this involves choosing Ocean Wise sustainable seafood at restaurants, helping to keep our shorelines clean or reducing the use of plastics and other pollutants.

As you can see, MMR Assistant and Gallery Educator are two very different roles volunteering with animals but they work in tandem to help forward our mission. One is through direct action and the other through education. These roles appeal to volunteers who have different skills, abilities and interests but who ultimately share a love for animals, a desire to help them and a passion for realizing a future where all aquatic life is diverse and flourishing.

Lindsay Baker is the Manager of Volunteer Services at the Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Centre. She has more than 14 years' experience leading volunteer teams and is currently President of the Administrators of British Columbia (AVRBC). Lindsay holds a Bachelor of Arts degree, diploma in Public Relations and is Certified in Volunteer Administration through CCVA.

Lifblood

by Andrea S. H. Hunt, Calgary, AB

For many organizations, volunteers are their lifblood. They provide vital community connection and reflect the meaningfulness of the work being done. This is very true for the Calgary Wildlife Rehabilitation Society (CWRS), a charitable nonprofit whose mandate is to rescue and rehabilitate injured and orphaned wildlife in Calgary and the surrounding areas.

CWRS was formed in 1993 to address the growing need within the city of Calgary for wildlife rehabilitation services. As the city expands, the intersection of human activity and wildlife increases which results in unnatural wildlife injuries and orphaned animals. Animals come to our centre after



being electrocuted, caught in barbed wire, shot, trapped, poisoned, stuck in garbage, attacked by pets, run over by cars and striking windows. Every year the number of animals treated increases while funding availability is unreliable at best. In 2014, CWRS treated over 2,000 animals. CWRS receives no direct government funding and relies on the public, granting boards and charitable giving through corporations to create a minimal budget each year. This covers necessary and life-saving medical supplies, food, housing, maintenance of our 12 enclosure outbuildings, staffing and basic administrative needs. Volunteers are a fundamental element of our organizational structure, allowing CWRS to maintain a small core of trained, professional staff members while keeping staffing costs, the most expensive budgetary item, to a minimum. This allows CWRS to provide a true public service to people living in and around the city of Calgary without the benefit of government funding, by being open to accept wildlife admissions and to answer distressed wildlife-related calls from the public 365 days a year.

From our inception, CWRS has been heavily supported by volunteers whose tasks are fully integrated into the functioning of the organization as a whole. There are numerous volunteer streams, which replace what may be paid positions in other organizations. Volunteers clean cages, feed animals, pick up injured wildlife at veterinary clinics, educate the public about native wildlife, fundraise, build and maintain enclosures and make decisions on behalf of our organization through the volunteer board of directors. Volunteers participate at every level of the organization creating a symbiotic relationship between CWRS as an organization and the volunteers that help to provide the labour and services necessary to keep CWRS running year after year. Not only do our volunteers find value in giving back to their community, they also find meaning and peacefulness in caring for the helpless victims of industrialization and in connecting with the natural world.

It takes a special type of person to volunteer at a wildlife rehabilitation centre. Death, while unsavoury, is a constant companion to this type of work. The volunteers attracted to CWRS have an affinity for wildlife and care deeply about the health and well-being of animals and yet are required to acknowledge suffering and accept death. It is not an easy balance to find, even for professional staff. Yet our volunteers come day after day, week after week finding the counterweight of joy in every small success, from the increased weight of a malnourished skunk to that hawk that takes flight on its release day. Here, the cycles of life are felt keenly, our volunteers gifted with the presence of ephemera, the enjoyment of singular moments of connection, fleeting as they are. Our volunteers do not develop relationships with our animal patients for that would be counter to our mission to keep wildlife, wild. Rather, they find the fierce wildness of each creature that passes through our days resonating within them and take away with them a renewed passion and engagement in the world around us.

Due to the sensitivity of the work, CWRS has a rigorous screening process for all new volunteers. Potential volunteers are asked to complete a lengthy online application form that is then reviewed by staff to ensure a good fit. Once an applicant has been green-lighted, they are invited for an all-access site tour which emphasizes the stark realities of the wildlife rehabilitation world, including a frank discussion about euthanasia and feeding protocols. Applicants sign volunteer contracts and are required to read our volunteer manual prior to their first shift. Once applicants have successfully completed the site tour, they are trained by staff and senior volunteers during their first three shifts. New volunteers are also required to attend a two-hour CWRS level 1 orientation, a session that covers safety, identifying



wildlife stress, rescue kits, basic daily chore protocols and photo/social media protocols. All new volunteers have a six-month probationary period during which they can voluntarily leave or be terminated if it becomes evident that they are not a good fit with the organization. CWRS offers ongoing multi-level training for senior volunteers, focusing on more advanced animal handling and rescue skills. A cohesive team is vital to such emotionally laden work. As such, volunteers are supervised by staff and are offered regular conversations to ensure they are receiving the support and guidance that they require. Staff work hard to ensure that our volunteers are shielded as much as possible from spontaneous death, euthanasia and our more traumatic cases.

CWRS is a unique charity. Our goals are always immediate, manifesting every day through the care of our wildlife patients. Euthanasia is common and as difficult as it is to perform, is part of the compassionate care offered to wildlife that have no other way to end their suffering. The work is hard but satisfying. Each success CWRS experiences is intricately linked to the hundreds of volunteers that consistently show up and give their best to create a new tomorrow for our wildlife patients. Because of our volunteers, there are thousands of wild animals that came to us injured, scared and alone that have since been released back into their natural habitats to live the life they were meant to live. So while our volunteers are the lifeblood of CWRS, they are also the lifeblood of all those saved lives.

Andrea S. H. Hunt is the business administrator as well as the volunteer and education coordinator at the Calgary Wildlife Rehabilitation Society (CWRS). Andrea's eclectic background includes work with at-risk youth, managing a small software company, and writing and performing as a professional singer/songwriter under the stage name Sora. Andrea's varied skill set, which includes marketing, grant-writing, communication and business administration, allows her to flow easily into whatever roles CWRS requires of her.

Volunteering with Animals: The Human and Animal Connection

by Carrie Landry, Cambridge, ON

The book "The Rescue of Belle and Sundance" by Birgit Stutz and Lawrence Scanlan describes an amazing animal rescue by a group of Alberta volunteers. Two abandoned and starving horses were trapped in a small space that they had dug out of a two-metre snowbank. Upon discovering the horses, four volunteers from the nearby town of McBride had a choice to shoot them or rescue them. They chose the latter. This meant transporting hay and water by snowmobiles over several kilometers. It also meant shovelling a one kilometre path in two metres of snow that the horses could use to escape. Why would this group with no connection to these horses attempt such a rescue? A deep and abiding respect for horses and the horses' will to live.¹

The animal-human connection is a strong one. Volunteering with animals represents a very broad category of volunteer opportunities. Volunteer work is done with humane societies, animal rescue organizations, therapy/guide dog programs or wildlife programs. Within these areas, volunteers can choose many options including fostering and rehabilitation, shelter cleaning, public education and



animal walking, socializing and grooming. Other volunteers may provide advocacy rather than working directly with the animal. Growing up on and around farms and having constant animal companions set the stage for my life-long journey with animals. I have been asked why I would want to help animals when so many people need help. My answer is that we are all interconnected and animals provide endless benefits to human beings. Animals, like humans can be in vulnerable situations and need our help. J.J. Kelso was a news reporter with the Toronto Star over a hundred years ago. He was concerned about the conditions of cart horses in Toronto as well as for the newsboys (children who sold newspapers) who were often orphaned and living on the street. His voluntary acts of advocacy made a huge impact on both child and animal welfare. He later became the first Superintendent of neglected and dependent children in Ontario which launched our modern day Children's Aid Society and also founded the Toronto Humane Society.

Veterinarians Doug Allan and Susan Beacock of the Holliday Veterinary Hospital in Cambridge volunteer with National Service Dogs/Autism Dogs. They raise puppies that will go on to be trained for service to individuals with physical or psychological challenges. These veterinarians smile and talk about how satisfying this is. The puppies they raise and train may make the life of a person with challenges more comfortable while also enriching their lives.

Not everyone who volunteers with animals has as constant a connection as these examples. Some people work in unrelated fields. Some may not include animals in their lifestyle. While volunteering for the Donkey Sanctuary of Canada, I had the opportunity to meet volunteers with many different backgrounds. Some found the physical labour a nice change from their office. Others found the environment and the animals calming. But all volunteers there had a deep commitment and wanted to help abandoned, abused and homeless donkeys have a better life. Being with these wonderful animals forces you to slow down, be more observant, communicate in a new way and understand another creature's perspective. Volunteering with animals can also mean more contact with like-minded people and friendships may develop.

More than three decades ago, my spouse and I started volunteering with the Sault Ste. Marie Humane Society. As new graduates and apartment dwellers, we had no opportunity to be around animals. This represented quite a void in our lives. The Humane Society gave us the opportunity to work with animals on a weekly basis. We bathed and groomed cats and dogs once a week, leaving after four-hour stints with wet clothes covered in hair and grime. It was so rewarding to know that we may have helped find homes for hundreds of dogs and cats. Years later, we have our own pets and continue to volunteer with our local humane society by walking dogs and being on the society's board. Volunteering with animals will always be a part of my life. The work involved is not only enjoyable but it plays an important part in being human and humane.

1. Sources: *The Rescue of Belle and Sundance*, Birgit Stutz and Lawrence Scanlan. Harper Collins, 2011.

Carrie Landry is a Supervisor of Volunteer Services with Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region.