

Canine Therapy Program Defined by Companion Newf

by Barbara Frey, Companion Newf Committee and Linda Shannon-Challiet

I don't believe I've ever met a Newf that doesn't have a natural nurturing attitude where therapy is involved. The word Newfoundland seems synonymous with therapy. Many years ago we sold a Landseer girl out of state to an older couple. She was their sole companion. A few years later, an injury at home required the EMTs to be called to assist the wife.

The lady was being taken to the hospital by ambulance and the inconsolable and worried Landseer girl jumped into the van and remained at her mistress' side. She was firm in her devotion and showed a toothy warning to anyone who tried to remove her. Since time was of the essence, and they didn't have much choice, she rode along to the hospital, licking her mom's hand and sticking closely to her side. Dad brought her back home to wait for her ailing mistress. The reunion was delightful, and the owner was moved by the dedication and concern her pet had shown.

I tear up every time I think about the devotion and love this companion Newf that was just a "pet" showed for her loved one. That's what canine therapy means to me.

Linda Shannon-Challiet shares her definition and asks, "What are your first thoughts when you think of the term Canine Therapy Program?"

—Barbara

What do I think when I hear the term Canine Therapy Program? Maybe because I grew up in a large family filled with life-challenged family members, my first thoughts are, "How can I teach this person the life skills he/she needs by using my Newfoundland dog as a communication and therapy tool?"

To understand my thoughts, one has to first define the term "therapy." Wikipedia offers the following definitions:[1] "Therapy, or treatment, is the attempted remediation of a health problem, usually following a diagnosis. In the medical field, it is synonymous with the word 'treatment.' A supportive therapy is one that does not treat or improve the underlying condition, but instead increases the patient's comfort. [2] Supportive treatment may be palliative care."

Miller-Keane's Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine and Nursing defines the term as: "Treatment designated to eliminate disease or other bodily disorder as derangement."

My Window Dictionary Program revealed:

1. "Treatment to cure; treatment of physical, mental or behavioral problems that is meant to cure or rehabilitate somebody (often in combination).
2. Psychotherapy: psychoanalysis or techniques from another school of psychotherapy, intended to treat mental and emotional problems with psychological methods."

Using these definitions as a basis, several 4-H leaders and I developed four mission goals for our 4-H club for youths with disabilities using their canines and my Newfoundlands, Jack, Cree, Sam, Charlevoix, Mariah, (all demised), and now Mackinaw, as communication and learning tools.

Mission Goal 1: To provide an educational experience to youths that otherwise might be omitted from competition and denied the experience and growth it provides.

Mission Goal 2: To provide members an opportunity to learn about canine training and handling in a safe, supportive environment.

Mission Goal 3: To build positive relationships between club members and his/her own volunteer team canine.

Mission Goal 4: To provide canine therapy and motivation with physical and mental stimulation while having fun.

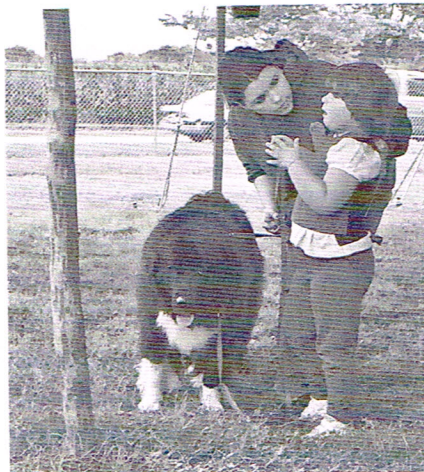
Our 4-H club has members who have Downs Syndrome, autism, Asperger, are learning, hearing and emotionally impaired, as well as, physically and mentally

challenged. And yet, our 4-H summer canine therapy program—meeting one night a week for three hours and practicing how to communicate to his/her Newfoundland to sit, down, come and stay—has been a success for 22 years.

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A goal of the 4-H canine therapy program is to provide youths with disabilities opportunities to learn about canine training in a safe, supportive environment.



In the canine therapy program, 4-H members with disabilities work with a canine/volunteer team.

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Working with a team instructor on a one-on-one basis, these 4-H members learn how to successfully communicate and coax their Newfoundlands to go through a tunnel, jump a bush, and sit on the pause table, and lie in the pause box.

At the same time, these 4-H members are learning eye-hand coordination and foot and body coordination, while stimulating the mental process and finding it's okay to touch a Newfoundland dog with praise. But the most precious lesson of all is socially acceptable sportsmanship behavior and good manners for both Newfoundland dogs and 4-H members.

You may ask, "We've taught the 4-H members with disabilities how to work, train and communicate with their volunteer team Newfoundland. Where do we go from here?"

Using these same therapy mission goals and working with the Berrien County Youth Fair in Berrien County, Michigan, our 4-H club developed a canine judging program in obedience and agility for these 4-H members with disabilities. They now have a competition to enter! And trust me when I say these 4-H members have fun! Not only are these special education children in a social environment, but each is learning how to communicate with judges and team instructors, each is learning to be aware of his/her environment and team Newfoundland's behavior, and each is able to give encouragement to his/her fellow 4-H members in the competition rings.

This is what Canine Therapy means to Linda, and we thank her for sharing her thoughts.

If you have a companion Newf story to share, please send to Barbara Frey, 11120 Broadway, Alden NY 14004 or email bfrey.jollyrogernewfs@verizon.net.