



Making a Difference, One Gaze at a Time

Sitting down with Andy Germann, we talked about some of her most iconic memories of therapy work with her Newfoundlands, she told us, “Several years ago, I regularly visited a Nursing home, there was a man there, who wouldn’t speak to anyone, staff, doctors, no one! He used to be a clown at Barnum Bailey Circus and his wife (who had passed away, was an acrobat in the circus) when his wife passed, he quit talking to people, he had given up! It took several weeks, but one

day he said my dog’s name, gave her a hug and a tear or two fell from his eyes! It was a big breakthrough, I did weekly visits with her, he would whisper to us some short sentences (showed us his wife pics and him in the circus), some days the staff would call me to bring my therapy dog up when they thought he was having a sad day, so we would go to visit him to cheer him up!”

As an RN, Andy relates how she saw many patients years ago, before Pet therapy was even a “thing”, ask if their loved ones could bring up their dog (hospital stays were much longer than they are today), it would break her heart that they didn’t allowed dogs in hospitals then! Ever since it has been her goal, to have a therapy dog that can visit others in need.

When asked what a typical visit in the life of a therapy dog looks like she talked about working in a Memory Care setting, “A typical





visit for my dog and I, is going to an Assisted Living Facility where we visit in Memory Care and the assisted living section. Our visits are usually meeting in the activity room, going around to each resident who wants to give a hug or a pet. In Memory Care, it's a bit different, those folks will reminisce about their past dogs, some pet, some give hugs, some of the residents even tell the dog a story."

Andy relates that not every setting clicks for every dog, telling how a few years ago she had a dog who didn't enjoy Memory Care settings as it

wasn't active enough for her, but that girl really shined in outpatient Physical Therapy, or schools working with children.

Therapy work can also be challenging for handlers. "It's hard sometimes to leave your feelings of wanting to do more for the residents behind," Andy says. Getting attached to certain residents is another challenge, they become dependent on your visits and as a volunteer we can't always get to them as often as they would like. Another challenge is having eyes in back of your head, keeping your dog as your number one concern is first and foremost! Sometimes we get rushed in different facilities and different situations, so a handler always need to be their dog's advocate.

For those who would like to get started in Therapy Work, Andy describes what makes a good candidate: "First off, the dog must enjoy meeting strangers from all walks of life. They mostly need to be "bomb proof" as you never know in hospitals, medical facilities, school programs, career days, etc what you may run into as far as people, medical equipment and noises! Obedience is the biggest training tool to begin a therapy dog career, loose leash walking is a must for sure plus generally good manners!"

Meredith Johnson,
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