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Lollypop's \$60,000 Golisano grant brings pets to patients

Sean Dobbin
Staff writer

STORYCHAT: Post Comment

(January 4, 2008) — As he played fetch with Kira, a 7-year-old border collie, self-proclaimed dog lover Jeff Yarmel decided that Kira was his favorite dog in the room.

"My aunt had the same dog," Yarmel of Pittsford, 34, typed onto his mobile keyboard.

Yarmel, who suffers from cerebral palsy, is one of many developmentally disabled consumers of CP Rochester who benefit from Lollypop Farm's Pet Assisted Therapy program.

The program allows people of all ages to undergo physical therapy treatment while playing with the domesticated animals.

"They'll take the collar on and off to improve their motor skills, so we actually become a part of their treatment plan," said Jamie Bishop, program director at Lollypop Farm.

Lollypop Farm recently announced that they are expanding the PAT program with a \$60,000 grant from the Golisano Foundation, the largest grant for a program that Lollypop Farm has ever received. The money will allow Lollypop Farm to add staff and provide more personalized therapy to patients.

"Pet assisted therapy is a relatively new and creative way to improve physical mobility, social interaction, and stimulate the cognitive development," said Ann Costello, director of the Golisano Foundation. "It's just a wonderful opportunity for young and old."

While Lollypop Farm coordinates the visits, the animals belong to Rochester-area volunteers, who bring their dogs, cats, guinea pigs and ferrets to various sheltered homes throughout the area.

In addition to physical therapy treatment, the animals also can provide emotional support for some of the shy residents.

"I've met patients that won't speak to anybody, but they'll talk to my dog," said Melissa Masiello of Bloomfield, the owner of Kira the border collie. "There's such a reward you get from it."

The emotional connection among volunteer, pet and resident makes it easy to stay committed. Bill Lenhard, a retired toolmaker from Hilton, has been volunteering with his dog Fuzzy for the past five years. The pair has made around 450 visits across the region, including weekly sessions at Hilton East Assisted Living Community.

"The thing we found ... about going to one home is the residents count on us, so we've only missed five weeks in five years," said Lenhard. "You become attached to a lot of the people."

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SHAWN DOWD staff photographer

Tom Greenwood visits with Maggie, a 6-year-old Ihasa apso, during a stop by Lollypop Farm's Pet Assisted Therapy Program at CP Rochester on Thursday in Henrietta.

Day in Photos

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- Lollypop Farm's PAT

Video:



Pets share more than smiles

You can help

As part of the PAT program's expansion, Lollypop Farm needs 72 more volunteers with domesticated pets. If you and your pet would like to volunteer, or for more information, call (585) 223-1330, ext. 243.

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STORYCHAT

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I think the proven therapeutic value of having pets as companions for both sick and elderly folks should support thoughtful plans to expand making pets available in hospitals, nursing homes, drug rehab units and the like. I know it would be costly but maybe we could offset the cost with an offsetting reduction in some of the hundreds of Medicaid supported employees. I suspect you could "hire" at least three qualified pets for the same salary and benefits required to keep a social worker or other public