

IN OUR OWN WORDS: VOLUNTEER INSIGHTS

By Ann Davidson, Operations Manager

I began working at Canine Therapy Corps (CTC) in 2014 and certified my first therapy dog in 2015. The experience of volunteering with my dogs gave me a different perspective on my position. I am constantly reflecting on the volunteer experience, and it occurred to me that you, our supporters, might also like to hear from our volunteers - the individuals who overwhelmingly deserve credit for CTC's rich history of providing free services to special needs populations. Without them and their incredible dogs, our programs would not be possible. Their empathy, commitment, and imagination are the foundation of our work, and we are grateful for all they do and all they give.

Canine Therapy Corps dogs don't just help people *feel* better; they help them *get* better.

This holiday season, give the gift of therapy dog services to adults and children in need.

Your tax-deductible donation allow or dogs to bring healing and hope to thousands of individuals each year.

The joy of sharing their dogs is a recurring theme when volunteers describe what drives them. "Seeing the joy that my dogs bring to people who are going through a difficult time" is satisfying to Mary Dellorto, who has certified and worked with 10 therapy dogs since 1994. "I get so much out of my dogs, and I am happy to be able to share them, if only for a small amount of time," she said.



Volunteer Rhonda Milkowski with therapy dog Rivet

As much as our volunteers relish helping others, they too reap the benefits of volunteerism. Eric Davidson said volunteering helps him "not take certain things for granted and gives me a sense of purpose that I don't get in my day job." Alyssa Cunningham has embraced living in the moment, a common therapeutic goal for our participants as well. "During volunteer work with [therapy dog] Aliyah, I have to be present, and I can't be worried about school or work," she said. Rhonda Milkowski recalls her long tenure of service, "Over the past eight years, CTC has given me a sense of pride in being part of service to the community through the wonderful and varied programs they provide," she said. Lori Schneider reminisced that volunteering "has been the most educational and rewarding journey" of her life. And Robbie Evans said, "I am very surprised at how much I have gotten out of volunteering."

Therapy dogs are special, and there is great responsibility in selecting dogs who are not only good at, but also enjoy, therapy work. When Gayle Blitz brings out therapy dog Rudy's vest, "he comes over with a wagging tail and pokes his head through the opening." She is sure Rudy understands that when he is at program, all "the clapping and cheers are for him." After a program session, Alyssa often gives Aliyah a high five or a big hug to tell her she did a great job. Josh Walsman said that Buddy makes it clear that he is eager to work. Every time Josh picks up the green bag with all of their CTC goods, he says, "wanna go see the kids?" and Buddy darts to the back door, ready to hop in the car.

Many roads lead volunteers to CTC. Sara Gawenda has a Master's degree in psychology, and she reminisced that "growing up as an only child, I placed great importance on the comfort and support my dogs provided me. After graduate school, I knew I wanted to work with an organization that had the same passion and mission." Renee Riggio noted that as a nurse, she has "long understood the healing power of unconditional love from dogs." Josh was looking for a way to contribute to something bigger, and he wanted Buddy "to be more than just a wonderful companion to our family."

The impact these volunteers have on participants in our 12 programs is undeniable. Mary, who has been working in our program at Lawrence Hall for children with behavioral challenges since it started in 2011, notes how she continues to be amazed "to see the bond develop between the kids and dogs from week to week, and see the kids' confidence grow." Josh, who helps children with autism at Easterseals Academy reach their educational goals, shared that "nothing beats working with a special-needs child who, before working with Buddy, had never even touched a dog. Watching their self-esteem and confidence grow by facing a deep-seated fear is incredible."

At Swedish Covenant Hospital, Robbie Evans sees "participants' progress in attitudes, cognitive skills and some physical skills" but adds "it is most rewarding to see how happy our participants are to see us every week." Alyssa regularly observes patients at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab who are having a rough time in their rehabilitation, but come to our program week after week and become stronger. Gayle, who also works at Shirley Ryan AbilityLab, points out that "if we can help someone who is sick, depressed, or in pain forget about their circumstance for even ten minutes, we have left a small, but positive imprint on someone's life."

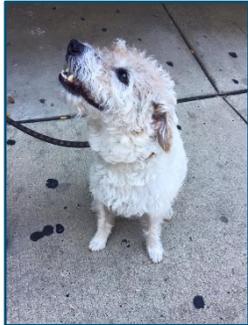
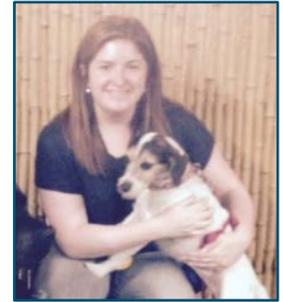


Volunteer Mary Dellorto with therapy dog Bliss and campers at Camp I Am Me

We are indebted to these remarkable volunteers for giving so much of themselves and their therapy dogs. To continue the healing and joy they give to the individuals we serve (as well as to themselves and each other), please donate today.

"I am a current therapist working on my doctorate in clinical psychology. I learned about animal-assisted therapy through another classmate and loved the idea of helping others with my personal dog."

- Alyssa Cunningham, Volunteer

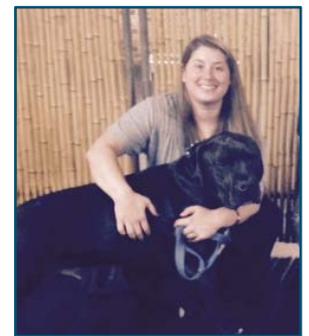


"Almost every participant is thrilled to see a dog, and depending on the program Hank and I are volunteering in, I see participants progress in attitudes, and cognitive skills and some physical skills. But it is most rewarding to see how happy our participants are to see us every week."

-Robbie Evans, Volunteer (Hank pictured left)

"When I found Canine Therapy Corps, I could not have been happier with the accessibility, the wide range of populations served, and the therapy experiences. I have participated in volunteer events, fundraisers, and led a program and there is no better animal-assisted therapy company in the Chicagoland area. I feel so fulfilled helping others and watching my dog make bonds with people in need."

-Sara Gawenda, Program Leader and Volunteer



My favorite thing about volunteering at Canine Therapy Corps is the people I have met within the organization, the program leaders at our hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and social service organizations and, of course, those people we serve.

-Lori Schneider, Program Leader and Volunteer

"When I was in high school, I spent a summer working as a volunteer for the Rochester School for Leader Dogs. It left a fond and lasting impression on my memory. Then, much later in my life I adopted my Whoodle, Rudy. Yes, he was a wild and headstrong puppy, but very loving and accepting of strangers and especially children. The timing was right to see if I could work with this puppy to become a therapy animal. I thought I knew how to train a dog. However, the demanding requirements of certification taught me what I didn't know."

- Gayle Blitz, Volunteer



"Buddy and I get to bring joy, learning, and growth to the very special kids we work with. Buddy gets more exercise and treats on Canine Therapy Corps days and I get to play, too!"

- Josh Walsman, Volunteer

