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caninefriends pet therapy

Dogs helping people



First responders given some furry friendliness

People under stress can be helped by sharing some furry friendliness with dogs. And no group of people has been under more stress in recent months than those who work in emergency call centres.

All emergency calls are routed through one of three such centres and when the terrible events of 15 March unfolded in Christchurch many of the calls were taken by staff in the Wellington call centre.

Even though these people are trained to deal with stressful situations, and are experienced in handling all sorts of events and people, that day was tough.

Wellington Free Ambulance contacted Canine Friends and asked if we could organise visits for all their staff to interact with our dogs.

Margaret Ranum, Wellington liaison officer says, 'We were privileged to meet the people at Wellington Free Ambulance. Everyone was most welcoming throughout our visits and every face wore a grin from ear to ear. They were certainly happy to see our dogs. Because the call centres work on a shift system we actually made four visits so that we met every single person.'



Hard at work calming Wellington Free Ambulance are Twinkie the Chihuahua and Jack the tiny Sydney Silkie cross.



Canine Friends Waikato liaison team

Teamwork takes Canine Friends into the future

Canine Friends Waikato covers a widespread area and has teams visiting rest homes, hospitals and hospices in the region. As well, there are the extra visits requested by universities, schools and other organisations who want some furry friendliness at stressful times.

'Once upon a time we had one co-ordinator in each area, a liaison officer,' says Vicky Graham from Canine Friends. 'Now we have liaison teams in most places to cope with demand for our visiting dogs and to process and assess applicants.'

Vicky, who has been Canine Friends vice president for two years, is also one of the busy Waikato team. She works with Pauline Rukuwai, Liz Scott, Christine Neilson and Christine Johnson.

'We all have different strengths and interests,' Vicky says. 'With five of us working together we can harness those to make things happen.'

Meet the team members, and their dogs, and find out how they work together.

Christine Nielsen

Hi, I'm Christine Nielsen and I live in Paeroa with my husband Dennis, two cats and our two heading dogs. Mate is six years old and Team is six months old. We run a small dog day care and homestay.

I am a private trainer for Dogs NZ for the Canine Good Citizen Programme and run classes at my home for all dog codes. I've been involved in most dog sports for nearly 40 years and competed successfully in most codes.

Mate and I currently compete in Test C obedience and the highest grades in Tracking TD and TT3. Mate is the highest qualified dog in Rally-O (a Grand Champion), is a senior agility dog with JDX and ADX Silver awards, and also competes in the highest Flygility grades.

At the recent National Dog Obedience Assembly he gained his Companion Dog Excellent Gold with the highest qualifying points, after spiking a paw while competing in the tracking trials resulting in a vet visit and five stitches!

My puppy Team is training to work sheep and we will compete in sheep dog trials. I love assessing new members and their dogs for Canine Friends Pet Therapy and get a real buzz seeing the lovely dogs making people happy.



Pauline Rukuwai

Hi there, I am Pauline Rukuwai and have owned a variety of dogs for most of my adult life. I currently own a 12-year-old apricot miniature poodle, Jazz, and a five year old red standard poodle, Skye. I really enjoy the social and affectionate nature of poodles.

As we arrive at Trevellyn Rest Home for our fortnightly visits, Skye races up the hill to spend time with her favourite residents, to meet new residents and the staff. She is very gentle and leans in closely to enjoy pats and cuddles to the maximum!

Jazz visits St Andrews and enjoys meeting and getting to know people. Both girls have a well-earned nap when we get home.

I enjoy working as part of the Waikato team. I'm happy to help out with assessments and have taken several new members to Trevellyn for a visit orientation. It is a pleasure to work with the great group of people in the Waikato region.



Vicky Graham

My involvement with Canine Friends began in the early 1990s as a volunteer and committee member. With much pride I have witnessed the growth of our organisation from small beginnings in Wellington to a recognised and respected nationwide charity. In 2015 I was privileged to be recognised as an honorary member.

I established Canine Friends in Taupo in 2008 and have a small and very committed team of members visiting all five rest homes, Taupo Hospital and Taupo Hospice.

In May last year Judy McRae stepped down as liaison officer in Waikato and left big shoes to fill. Judy had travelled far and wide in this large region to assess new applicants, kept in touch with current members and visited Waikato Hospital with her Leonbergers.

Being a geographical neighbour of Waikato I offered to fill this role but obviously needed help to assess new applicants. Along came Christine Neilson, Liz Scott and Pauline Rukuwai.

These three lifesavers have extensive experience in the dog world and are a pleasure to work alongside (albeit a bit remotely!). Christine takes care of assessments in northern Waikato, while Liz and Pauline do the same job in the greater Hamilton area.

More recently, Christine Johnson has joined our team as a new member support person. Christine has been a member of Canine Friends for 10 years and sadly lost her third pet therapy dog last month. Christine's knowledge and experience is invaluable.

She is accompanying and encouraging new members on their first visits to their assigned facilities.



Christine Johnson

I joined Canine Friends Pet Therapy in 2008 with Drew, my standard poodle. He was big, black, curly and friendly and with his ability to smile, enjoy cuddles and “top-knot” patting, he was especially welcomed by the residents at Radius St Joans Rest Home. I worked in the community health sector at that time and realised the great worth of pet therapy. Sadly Drew suffered a stroke and died at 13.



My next dog was rescued by the SPCA and my family fostered her. We named her Rosie and I could tell this young greyhound/huntaway X had the ideal temperament for pet therapy. We adopted her after four months of TLC. One couldn't say Rosie was a beautiful girl, her facial scars and hair loss would remain forever, but her lovely nature overcame any physical flaws. Everyone loved Rosie.

Following a request from Hilda Ross Special Care Unit, I took Rosie to visit. As she and I stepped out of the lift and I pressed the security button, she knew her work had started. Time passed quickly while we were visiting and sometimes I had to remind myself the recommended time for visits is 45 minutes! After visiting I took her to our favourite park on the riverbank as a reward.

With my work in the community health sector I sometimes suggested I bring Rosie with me to visit children in their own homes and she also excelled during her visits to schools providing education to special needs children.

After eight wonderful years she was diagnosed with cranial nerve neuropathy. Rosie holds a special place in my heart.

The sudden loss of Rosie at Christmas 2015 was very difficult for me and with weeks of feeling heavy-hearted, I knew only another dog could fix that. Handsome Ted arrived in February 2016. A German Shepherd/huntaway X, he was a retired working dog, not familiar with city life, but very obedient, loyal and calm. Ted passed his assessment but I felt he wouldn't be happy visiting a large facility. At that time Aspire had requested visits for folk at their smaller residential mental health care homes. One of the many happy moments when introducing Ted and explaining he felt a little anxious and had the shakes, a sweet lady said 'that's OK, Ted, I have anxious moments too'.

Later on when Ted developed lameness I had a ramp made so he could still travel in my car. I proudly showed our friends at Aspire and

one lady said, 'Ted, you are just like me, I have mobility issues too'. I believe there is a dog for every purpose.

We said goodbye to Ted on 18 April — rest in peace.

Knowing I wanted to continue to be part of Canine Friends, Vicky Graham approached me asking if I would like to be a support person for new members. I was happy to fill this role and have already enjoyed meeting three new members and their dogs.

I recently met Ashley and her golden retriever Ella at Radius St Joans which is where I first started visiting in 2008 with Drew.

I believe accompanying and encouraging a new member on their first visit is an ideal introduction to Canine Friends Pet Therapy work. Sometimes it may be helpful for a new member to have support for their second visit or to be on the end of the phone for a chat if needed.

My years with Canine Friends have passed very nicely for me with three different visiting dogs. Our visits were always worthwhile and every visiting experience was different.

I feel honoured to have been asked to be the New Member Support person here in Hamilton and look forward to many happy times with new members and the wide variety of lovely dogs.

Liz Scott

I have been into dogs for more years than I care to remember, including breeding, showing, obedience, training, agility and more. I have been visiting Trevellyn Rest Home in Hamilton with MacDuff my beardie/huntaway cross and Tui my cavalier/pug cross for around three years. I get great pleasure from sharing my dogs with others and leaving the residents with smiles on their faces.



When I started visiting with MacDuff some residents were a little wary of him because he is so big. So Tui was then assessed and visits monthly — the ideal size for those who prefer small dogs. Although the residents are all used to MacDuff now they enjoy Tui as she can sit on their laps or beds if they wish.

I've been assessing new applicants in Waikato for a year now. It's enjoyable putting the dogs and their owners through the necessary steps to ensure they are suitable for Canine Friends Pet Therapy work. 🐾



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