



Pet Therapy: Why Dogs Really Are Man's Best Friend



Caregiver
Volunteers
of Central
Jersey

SUBMITTED BY: CAREGIVER
VOLUNTEERS OF CENTRAL JERSEY
www.caregivervolunteers.org

*No judgment,
No prejudice,
Just love.*

When Rose met Carli, you could see the joy in her eyes. As Pat said goodbye to Jin Jin, there was no denying a new friend had been made. These are just a couple of the matches made recently at **Caregiver Canines**, a free program offered to the home-bound elderly of Ocean County, New Jersey by the non-profit organization Caregiver Volunteers of Central Jersey.

In recent years, pet therapy has become widely popular in hospitals and nursing homes. The **Caregiver Canines** program is a new addition to the seventeen year-old orga-

nization. Now visits are being made to homebound seniors and their caregivers in their own homes as a method of coping with isolation, stress, and loneliness. There's nothing quite like the bond between a dog and his owner but unfortunately, for many seniors in our area the responsibility of owning a dog is just too much. **Caregiver Canines** and their handlers make weekly or bi-weekly visits to seniors they have been matched with in their area. Running just over a year now, **Caregiver Canines** have reached dozens of seniors in the community.

Most traditional pet therapy occurs in a hospital setting or nursing home. These visits are limited on time and the therapy dogs visit with multiple people. **Caregiver Canines** is unique because the visits take place in the comfort of the client's home and are so personal. The one-on-one visits really allow the opportunity for a strong bond to form between the dog and the client. Special friendships among the dog handlers and clients also develop. Clients, handlers, and the therapy dogs all look forward to their visits.

Ocean County, NJ is home to the greatest concentration of senior citizens in the state. It is second in the nation to Dade County, Florida. Some of the people enrolled in the program have family that live far away, yet others never had children. The visit with the Caregiver Canine pair can sometimes be the only social interaction that they participate in all week. Some of those receiving pet therapy just look forward to a wagging tail and a friendly smile while others witness a real personality change in their spouse. When therapy dog Gracie Vegas visited Glen for the first time, his wife Sophia said that was the most her husband, who has Alzheimer's disease, had spoken all day. Another couple, Connie and Leonard (96 and 102 years old) have been receiving pet therapy visits for about six months now. Of their on-going pet therapy visits, Connie says, "Having visits from Denise and Nutmeg just make my day. I look forward to their visits, they make me happy and I enjoy their company. My whole spirit changes when Denise and Nutmeg come to visit."

The Caregiver Canine handlers are always surprised by the impact they make with their dog. While often saddened by the degree of isolation of their clients or by the extent of various illnesses, many come away knowing they've made a difference in someone's day. Denise, a Caregiver Canine handler says, "I feel truly blessed to be a part of it. All the people involved are so caring and committed to the program."

Caregiver Canines is currently partnering with the School of Nursing at Kean University on a research project. This study will investigate the effects of pet therapy visitation on older adults and their caregivers living in the community. The data collected in this project will show if there is a measurable benefit of pet therapy in combating ailments such as depression, immobility, social isolation, lack of companionship, and loneliness on the chosen participants. These common ailments are known to affect the physical and mental health of the elderly. The study is not yet complete but I think we already know that these therapy dogs bring love and joy to every person they visit.

*If you want to share the love and joy your dog brings to you with others, **Caregiver Canines** is a new fun and flexible volunteer opportunity you can feel really good about. You and your dog will be matched with a local senior to make friendly visits at a time that is convenient for you. By making a commitment to visit once or twice a month, you can really make a difference in someone's life.*



JinJin
and Pat

If you own a pet therapy dog or if you or someone you know would enjoy a visit from **Caregiver Canines**, please contact Jessica Pierro, Caregiver Canine Manager at **732-505-2273** ext. 202, or e-mail info@caregivervolunteers.org.

For more information visit **Caregiver Volunteers of Central Jersey** on the web at www.caregivervolunteers.org.



Rose
and
Carli

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