

THERAPY DOGS – Unit Meeting Opportunity

The following information has been put together from messages received at Bridging Rivers Area office from Dayna - a Provincial Evaluator and experienced long-time handler with the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog program, in addition to being a local dog trainer and national judge for dog Rally-obedience, and former Girl Guide!:

The St. John's therapy dog program works to certify handler and dog teams for regular visitations to hospitals, care homes, rehab facilities, etc. The handlers are screened through referral letters and criminal background checks, and the dogs are all evaluated for temperament, manners, stability, health and cleanliness. In addition to our regular adult visitation program, we have a special program for child visitations. Dogs certified to visit children are put through a more rigorous screening process to ensure their suitability for working with kids.

Two of my own dogs are currently certified for adult and child visits, and I am looking for potential locations to set up regular visits. As a young girl, I was involved in the Girl Guides, and always look back fondly on those years.

Therapy dog visits could be to any of the Girl Guide groups in Saskatoon and area. I'm personally located in Saskatoon, so would be willing to speak with groups within the city or surrounding area (I guess within 20 minutes or so, Martensville, Warman, etc.). I can put you in touch with our provincial coordinator for groups outside of Greater Saskatoon.

There are a number of options for how these visitations could work. Following are a couple of options, though I am certainly open to working with you or individual leaders to develop a plan that fits!

- Demos of tricks, questions and time to visit with the dog
- Reading programs for children learning to read who would benefit from an unbiased doggy-audience to read to, can build confidence and enjoyment of reading
- Presentations to groups on basic pet dog care, training, grooming
- Participation in "spirit" events such as holiday celebrations or activity days
- Discussion of the therapy dog program and how older kids (16+) can get involved in volunteering

Depending on the type of visitation desired, we could arrange a one-time visit, or a regularly scheduled appearance once a month or at a frequency that works for us all. I would be happy to meet with you to discuss options. The SJA therapy dog program is a volunteer organization, so there is no cost for visits or demos/presentations.

Generally, when we place a therapy dog team in a facility (hospital, school, nursing home, etc.) for regular scheduled visitations, we require a meeting with a St John Ambulance therapy dog evaluator, a coordinator for the group receiving the visits, and the therapy dog handler. But if a Girl Guide group wanted a one-time visit with a therapy dog, a demonstration, or anything less than regular monthly visits, I don't imagine this step would be necessary.

If groups are interested in a visit from a therapy dog, or have questions about the program, they are certainly welcome to contact me.