

Licking Loneliness



Our Therapy Visit Journey Continues — Carol Bond

Cooper and I have continued on our journey of therapy visits for two years now, being actively involved since September of 2011. He earned his AKC Therapy Dog Title in October of 2012, by completing 50 visits to various facilities. We have made visits to nine different facilities/organizations.

We continue to visit the skilled nursing facility where we began our journey two years ago. Cooper visits various residents for an hour each Saturday afternoon. Only two of the original residents on his visitation schedule are still in the facility. These two ladies continue to look forward to his visits each week and Cooper engages other residents and their families as he walks through the facility, so he always has a full schedule of visits. When one of the original residents on his schedule passed away, her relatives were so impressed by his work they made a financial donation to a therapy organization in his honor.

The types of facilities we visit have widened to include a variety of individuals who benefit from visits. Cooper has engaged individuals with serious mental illness at adult community residences, adult outpatient day programs and an inpatient children's psychiatric hospital. He demonstrates his Noseworks as well as Rally Obedience skills during these visits and impresses his audience with his abilities.

He has been a therapy dog ambassador at a children's day camp to inform the children on what a therapy dog is and what they can do. His newest audience includes preschool children with learning disabilities. Each week Cooper visits four different classrooms and brings along an educational lesson on living with dogs. He has even shown a video demonstrating a herding instinct test to illustrate what a Beardie's job is. Of course he was the star in the video! Another audience was a group of 16 - 18 year old girls who were incarcerated in a youth detention facility. This was a brand new experience for both of us. Upon entering the facility, I had to relinquish

all of my possessions to a guard at the front door. We were both wanded with a metal detector and Cooper managed to set it off with the metal tags on his collar. He was allowed to keep them as we entered the residential units where the girls were waiting for his visit. There was a wide range of

reactions from the inmates from some wanting to immediately interact with him to another who cowered in a corner because she was afraid of dogs. Some of the inmates asked questions about the breed and what skills Cooper has, while others wanted to share stories of dogs they had owned. The guards kept a close eye on each girl, and did not allow them to leave their seats or to approach us. Needless to say it was a very different type of therapy visit.

Cooper has become a founding therapy dog of a new program called "Dogability". This program serves all types of individuals who can benefit from interacting with therapy dogs.

It is the goal of the program to work with children with disabilities, children who are bullied, overweight children, veterans, as well as boy scouts and girl scouts. The therapy dogs demonstrate skills they may have such as agility, obedience, noseworks etc, encouraging the participant to assist the dog in practicing the skills. The handlers also provide education on working with dogs, and the various breeds. There is a quiet corner where the participants can sit with a therapy dog and read to the dog, or simply talk to them. The program is evolving each week and hopefully will become a not for profit agency in the near future.

This year we received our Level II Therapy Certificate and walked in the Therapy Parade at the BCCA National Specialty in St. Louis. We encourage all active therapy dogs

to submit documentation of therapy visits to the Therapy Committee so that you may be recognized for the commitment you and your dog make to improve other's lives.

