

Therapy Beardies have big hearts!

Licking Loneliness

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Beginning Our Journey Into Therapy Visits

Deciding to do therapy work with a dog was an easy decision for me, as I have been working with mentally disabled individuals for the last 36 years. I just had to find a dog that thought the same way. My search led me to Larry and Debbie Furlow at Sweetwater's Kennel. They were kind enough to entrust one of their puppies born in January of 2009 to live with me and help me carry out my plans.

Cooper participated in a variety of classes and greeted thousands of people at an AKC Meet the Breeds in New York City at the age of 9 months. After participating in that event I knew he would make a great therapy dog, so we continued with our obedience and rally classes to hone our skills of working around people and objects. Cooper became a Canine Good Citizen in October of 2009. He was evaluated by Therapy Dogs International in February of 2011, but did not pass the skill of "leave it." The evaluator encouraged me to continue with his training and be reevaluated as she felt he would be an outstanding therapy dog. We went home and practiced walking over, through, and around food left on the floor in various areas around the house and in the yard. On May 1, 2011 he was evaluated again, and passed all skills with flying colors. And so we became registered as a team with Therapy Dogs International.

Ready to begin our journey of providing therapy visits we went in search of facilities that had dog therapy programs. During the summer of 2011 my 91 year old father had hip surgery and was recovering in a rehabilitation facility. The facility just happened to have a dog therapy program and welcomed dogs into the facility at any time. Cooper traveled

to Connecticut to visit his "grandfather" and assist him in recovering from his surgery. Other residents in the facility and their families would request a visit from Cooper to provide them with visits as well. We were on our way!

Back on Long Island, NY we found a facility that provided services from assisted living to skilled nursing care. Cooper and I were interviewed for their dog therapy program and were accepted to begin visits. Since I am still employed full time, we could only make visits on Saturdays. The staff provided us with a list of residents in both the assisted living units and skilled nursing units that would enjoy visits from Cooper. We began

visiting each Saturday afternoon and Cooper now has his "regular" friends that he visits each week. He knows where their rooms are located and makes his rounds. The staff enjoys his visits as much as the residents and greets him with great enthusiasm. The residents in the assisted living units enjoyed hearing of Cooper's adventures at the Specialty in Maine in October. One resident requested photographs of Cooper to keep in her photo album of all the dogs that visit her. Residents in the skilled nursing units have their rooms decorated with pictures of dogs they had owned and tell us stories of their pets.

This year, Cooper and I have added another facility to our visiting

schedule. We have begun to work at a day hospital for seriously emotionally disturbed children. Cooper is able to assist these children in overcoming their fear of dogs and teach them how to approach and pet a dog. We plan on demonstrating Cooper's Noseworks skills as well as his Rally Obedience moves during future visits.

It is clear to me that participating in dog therapy programs with Cooper brings great joy to the individuals we visit. I get a great deal of personal satisfaction knowing that Cooper and I have brightened up someone's day. I consider it "paying it forward" to be able to own a Beardie.



Cooper