

One Paw at a Time



WHEN I MET KATIE, what I first saw was that she only had three legs, certainly hadn't led the sweet life and, at 10 years of age, was considered to be a senior dog. But she had a gentle spirit and pardoning eyes. She still loved. She still wanted to be loved.

Six months earlier, my staff moaned when I told them I wanted a dog for animal-assisted therapy (AAT). A dog seemed to be an outlandish proposition, so I gave out a homework assignment: Research the benefits of AAT. What they found surprised them.

Although documentation of AAT in the United States began as early as 1919, it wasn't until 1962, when child psychologist Boris Levinson wrote the article "The dog as a 'co-therapist,'" that research supported the human-animal connection in therapy.

Levinson showed and documented that withdrawn and uncommunicative children interacted positively when in the presence of his dog, Jingles. About the same time, equine-assisted physical therapy began as a formal treatment modality.

Dr. Johannes Odendaal measured human chemicals and hormones after interaction with a dog.² He found that six neurochemicals known to reduce blood pressure—endorphin, oxytocin, prolactin, phenylethyl acid, and dopamine—increased significantly while cortisol, a hormone associated with increased stress levels, decreased significantly, thus supporting the notion that pets decrease stress and lower blood pressure levels in humans.

Therapists of varying professions realize that animals provide compassionate and stimulating therapy designed to facilitate human client recovery. This connection is not just physical as Odendaal demonstrated. The bond is unconditional. Animals don't

laugh because of hearing aids, funny speech, or missing limbs. Animals don't judge.

It wasn't long before my clinicians started asking when we would be adding the AAT dog. After researching the outcomes of patients with anxiety, depression, behavior disorders, dementia, and disabilities, the team realized we were missing out on a great opportunity to facilitate language in a whole new way. The populations we serve generally have multiple handicaps and traditional methods of facilitating speech fall short.

As a team, we decided to rescue a breed known for being intelligent and good-natured. That could be many breeds, but I wanted a collie.

I pored over the Internet, eventually meeting Michele with Collie Concern Rescue in Knoxville, TN. She told me the story of Katie, their recent intake that had lived most of her life outside, either in a pen or tied to a tree where she became tangled and lost a leg. She was then taken to a high-kill shelter where she was found and rescued.

Katie wasn't the dog I thought I was looking for, but I couldn't think of a better ambassador for our clinic than a dog with a disability. My son and I drove 12 hours to meet her. It was love at first sight.

Since then, I've been asked numerous times why I drove 1,200 miles to get an old, three-legged collie. When I show the photos of my 11-year old friend, Truman, with Katie, they understand. Because of a cancerous bone tumor, Truman lost his right leg along with much of his hearing due to the chemotherapy he received. Somehow, he and Katie understand each other.

Katie is still learning to be an AAT dog while we are figuring out how to create the right environment and therapy. It's going to take time before everyone is comfortable. What I do know is that Katie brightens



A picture worth a thousand words: Katie and Truman, who have each lost a leg, seem to communicate and understand each other.

everyone's day and there is a different atmosphere in the clinic when she is around. People seem happier and more relaxed.

We are anxious for all the new possibilities Katie brings to our clinic and patients. We are eager to create therapy goals where she is the catalyst for speech, language and literacy for children who otherwise would never communicate. She is changing lives—including ours—one paw at a time. [http://](#)

REFERENCES

1. Levinson, BM. (1962). The dog as a "co-therapist. *Mental Hygiene*; 46:59-65.
2. Odendaal, JS. (2000). Animal-assisted therapy - magic or medicine? *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*; 49(4):275-280.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Collie Concern Rescue
www.collieconcern.org

Katie's Blog
www.TheSchollCenter.com

Delta Society
www.DeltaSociety.org

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