



Support HB981: Therapy Dogs - Certification and Use in Schools

Thursday, May 26, 2011

NCTD

Dear Madame Chair and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Matt Nechin and his lovely dog Shira have been volunteering at the Johns Hopkins Children Center for some time now. They work directly on the Child and Adolescent Acute Psychiatric unit and often bring a calming presence to not only the staff but the children.

During our May visit our unit was having a tough and challenging morning. We had several young, very active children and some very sad and frustrated adolescents. Often times children and adolescent act out behaviorally and they are anxious or sad and that was what happened this particular morning. It was chaotic, loud and would appear very disorganized. The younger children were beginning to argue with each other and get caught up in the negativity of others, it was a hard morning. Prior to Matt's arrival on the unit at 10am I actually thought we would have one out of 12 children visit with him because the others were so out of control. In fact we had to move the group twice because of two separate incidents all before 10 am. Even when Matt and Shira arrived, I brought them in and they needed to be escorted out immediately for safety reasons. This is not a typical morning at all on a child and adolescent unit.

Matt was very patient as was Shira. When they were able to come in we had 5-6 children who were available in the play room. They had been through a rough morning and were highly anxious and active. When Shira and Matt walked in the entire atmosphere changed. The children relaxed, they were soft and had positive interactions with staff and each other. Shira usually goes around and sniffs the table and the room, but this time she came in and sat down. She did not move for some time until the children were completely relaxed. She then lay down and they all spent about 45 minutes laying on the ground with her, brushing her, petting her and talking softly to her. Matt and Shira were complimented by staff, even those who usually do not try to come to AAAGroups. One nurse said, "This dog is amazing, she just lays there and there can be eight kids laying all over her, what a good dog."

We feel very lucky to have Shira and Matt visit us, and really look forward to each monthly visit, because it so strongly impacts the lives of these children. Thanks Matt and Shira!

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