



# The Barker

## NOR'WESTER READERS THERAPY DOGS

Canine Partners in Education

... all the news that's fit to bark!

### NEWSLETTER

#### EDITOR:

Deborah Glessner

#### Issue Highlights:

- MAGICAL MOMENTS
- XYLITOL
- GREAT DOG BOOKS
- THERAPY DOG'S BILL OF RIGHTS
- BRANDON'S AWARD

Nor'wester Readers teams are currently visiting classrooms in:

♦ School Districts of:  
Bensalem Township  
Council Rock  
New Hope Solebury  
Pennsbury

♦Chester County IU Child & Career Development Center Coatesville, PA

♦MCC Warwick House (BCIU)

♦Private Schools:  
The Center School  
Abington, PA  
Olney Charter High School  
Mastery Charter  
Philadelphia, PA

"Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read."

~Groucho Marx

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## THOSE MAGICAL MOMENTS!



We are often asked what the concept is behind placing therapy dogs into school classrooms or other types of educational environments. The common answer, based on scientific research, is that the presence of the dogs lowers blood pressure, induces relaxation, decreases anxiety, and increases endorphins and oxytocins. In addition, dogs are non-judgmental which also removes stress from the pressure to achieve.

Our therapy dog teams work in a wide variety of classes, including public schools K through 12, private schools, a residential facility, special education classes (resource room, multiple disabilities, life skills, brain damage, emotional support, autistic support, etc.)

The teachers and handlers are often observers and participants in magical moments when the therapy dog team facilitates a breakthrough that would not have been possible otherwise.

We asked our handlers to share some of those magical moments. The incidents are real, but fictional names of students have been used to protect privacy.

### CAROL WAGNER

We were volunteering at the public library, and Kody was lying on her side relaxing while a child was reading to the her. A family arrived with a little boy, about 6 or 7, who obviously had behavior and speech challenges. I invited Billy to share a book with Kody or just come and pet her. He knelt by her and gently petted her tummy. Kody enjoyed it and felt at ease, so she rolled further onto her back to fully expose her belly. Billy showed pleasure that Kody wanted his attention. I told him that Kody liked his petting and that's why she rolled over. He continued to pet her and suddenly she sneezed (it's normal for her when upside-down). To reassure him at this "startling" behavior, I smiled and laughed and said, "Kody sneezed!" He laughed and repeated, "Kody sneezed!" His parents became very emotional. Evidently, it was the first clear speech they had heard from him in a long time. The following week's visit, the little boy came back and asked, "Kody sneeze?"

We only saw him those two times...but it was an unforgettable experience.

### MICHELLE LECKER

My experiences at Sloan Alternative School are often unusual. For three years I have been assigned to work with seniors who have been extremely resistant to completing their Graduation Projects. Last year Amy wanted to learn to sew and make a dress. I don't do buttons so I called a retired home economics teacher I know and asked her to help. The school borrowed a sewing machine, and I got a donated ironing board and iron.



Every week, for four months, we had the sewing project going on with Rory on the floor. The dress was fantastic when completed, and the presentation brought tears to the eyes of the staff, myself, and the sewing teacher. Amy thanked us appropriately, but her last power point slide pointed out that she could not have done it without Rory. No wonder Rory is so tired after school! This is not the first time Rory has gotten the credit for work accomplished, and I find it amazing and precious.

**BONNIE PELBERG**

About two years ago Sasha and I visited a kindergarten class. Joey was very fearful of dogs. The teacher let Joey sit outside the circle where Sasha and the other children were sitting. After about 5 months, he started sitting closer until one day he finally joined the circle. He still wouldn't touch Sasha at first. More time passed and Joey started touching Sasha very quickly and then would pull away since he was still uncertain. As time went by he began to pet her more. The last day of class we all sat in a circle, and each child completed the statement, "I liked having Sasha in my class because....." When it was Joey's turn he said that he liked having Sasha in class because he thought all dogs would bite, and went on to say that Sasha changed his life. I still get goose bumps thinking about it, especially considering the boy was only six years old. It brought a tear to my eye, and, I'm sure, to the eyes of the teacher and her assistant as well.

**MICHELLE ROTHSTEIN**

Max was terrified of Darcie, even though he had a parental approval slip. This sweet little boy would not even come into the room to meet me or Darcie. The second time we visited, he came into the classroom but inched his way around the perimeter. By the third visit, he was involved with the group, still shy and quiet, but less afraid. Each time we visited, he made progress. I began to fall in love with him; he was so sweet and vulnerable.

His reading improved quickly, and he began lying on Darcie's belly, quietly and calmly stroking her. By the end of the school year Max was always by her side hugging and kissing her and hugging me. He thanked me for helping him to read better. I still miss Max. I hope we made a difference in his life, and that he will remember the fun he had reading to a sleeping, calm, and beautiful golden retriever. It's one of my fondest memories, especially now that Darcie is retired from therapy dog work.

**DEBBIE GLESSNER**

Sean suffered from a genetic brain disorder which caused his movements to be very jerky and spastic. It affected his ability to read fluently because he had trouble tracking the sentences with his eyes and finger. The teacher had tried many methods to assist him, and most were short term fixes. One day I had the idea to position Hannah right next to him so that her body was in full contact with his. Not only did I hope that the dog's calm energy would transmit physically, but also that Sean would be encouraged to pat stroke her while reading. And it worked! Who can explain the magic, but there was something about the body contact and the rhythm of patting the dog that must have triggered something in the child's brain to calm the spasticity and enable him to read more fluently. The teacher's jaw literally dropped.

**NAN MUSKA**

When we first met Sam, he threw dirt, leaves, and stones at Jillian. He was terrified! Over many months of slow and steady interaction, Sam became comfortable touching her, reading with her, and walking her to the office. Two years later at a graduation party in the high school for a fellow classmate, Sam and Jillian met again! Although a bit unsure at first, Sam quickly remembered their friendship. At the conclusion of the party I asked Sam if he would like Jillian to walk him back to his classroom. It took us almost 15 minutes to get there because Sam stopped everyone he met to introduce his "friend" Jillian. I watched him take her second leash and saw him become confident, well spoken, and interactive. These were some acquired skills that were cultivated over his time spent with her. A big plus for a lasting educational impact!

**LYNNE TATAROWICZ**

When Julie, an autistic child, first started reading to Obie, he jumped when she went to pat him. It startled her, and she almost lost it yelling "I'm sorry Odie!" (she says Odie) over and over again. I told her, "It's fine Julie, doesn't mommy sometimes surprise you when you are sleeping? That's all it was." The next time she came to read to him she sat a little closer, but if he moved she was noticeably worried. Her teacher aide encouraged her to pat him. It was so interesting; she took one finger and barely stroked the tip of his ear, a paw, his ribs, his foot, and his tail – just a split section in each area, it was very obvious she was pleased with her accomplishment. Obie, bless him, wagged his tail the whole time. Today she came charging over, and started to sit on the floor by Obie, but when he moved she backed away. So I encouraged her to sit in a chair to increase her comfort level but urged her to move the chair close to Obie. And she did. When she was finished reading, she got up and came over and stroked him several times, the entire length of his body.

**KAREN MCALLISTER**

I remember one incident at Council Rock High School South that was very touching. Ryan was very upset because there was a lot of noise and commotion in the classroom one day. Another student had become very irritable which was acting as a trigger for Ryan to have an explosive incident. His one-on-one aide suggested they go into the stairwell by the classroom where it would be quiet. I suggested that Moose and I come along. All of us sat in the stairwell while Moose sat against the boy's leg and let him pet him while the aide talked quietly to him. Moose's calm presence had much to do with helping the boy settle down and avoid an undesirable incident.

**MARGO LANGLOTZ**

Brian developed a significant stutter while reading aloud. His teacher thought it was due to nerves, but reading to Nelly and Leo was much less intimidating for him. He improved his read aloud skills and was more comfortable practicing with the dogs than with others.

**MARILYN CAMPBELL**

Brian, for lack of a better description, would emotionally implode – truly shut down when things were too overwhelming or difficult, particularly in Math. With Frisco and Ms. Marilyn's help, his behaviors improved as the implosions became less. . . much less. In addition, reading fluency is a HUGE goal in our new LA Journeys program. It was a weekly goal for kids to work on using Frisco and Ms. Marilyn as their audience. The kids would clamor to be first to meet with Frisco and receive feedback from Ms Marilyn. Having their help to work on this goal kept all the kids excited about reading aloud – my best year fluency-wise yet!  
(contributed by the teacher)

**MIKE NELSON**

Mr. Nelson and Bubba are an amazing team. They were sensitive to my students' emotional and learning needs. He was always willing to ask for suggestions and if he should be doing anything different. Bubba got really comfortable with my students, and by the end would snuggle up next to each of them. My students were more eager to write when I asked Mr. Nelson to take pictures of Bubba doing various different things around the house. The students also were motivated to learn their sight words because they wanted to work their way up to reading a book to Bubba. The social skills they practiced with Bubba and Mr. Nelson was also very valuable. The interactions and taking turns is very important. My classroom is not easy because the functional academic levels range from pre-primer (not even on Kindergarten level) to some students reading at a 6<sup>th</sup> grade level. I cannot say enough good things about how wonderful Mr. Nelson and Bubba were with my students. I can tell my students will always remember their time spent with them.  
(contributed by the teacher)



## **CAUTION!! CHEWING GUM DANGER**

There are often wads of chewing gum on the sidewalks or in the grass around the school entrances. One day as I was leaving my school, my dog went onto the grass to relieve herself. Shortly thereafter I noticed that she was chewing on something. I immediately put my hand into her mouth and retrieved the object — a wad of chewing gum.

I think most handlers are aware that **XYLITOL** is used to sweeten sugarless gum and is extremely toxic to dogs. There's no way to know if the gum I retrieved was sweetened with xylitol, but I always feel it is better to be cautious when in doubt. Not only is xylitol present in chewing gum, it is used frequently in other food products that are found in the home. Products that may contain xylitol include candies, breath mints, baked goods, cough syrup, children's chewable vitamins, mouthwash, and toothpaste, to name a few. Hopefully the following FAQ by the Pet Poison Hotline will help you be more informed.

### **Why is xylitol toxic to dogs?**

Pet Poison Helpline, an animal poison control based out of Minneapolis, MN, has had thousands of calls for xylitol poisoning, due to the growing awareness of this common kitchen toxin. In both humans and dogs, the level of blood sugar is controlled by the release of insulin from the pancreas. Xylitol does not stimulate the release of insulin from the pancreas in humans. However, when non-primate species (e.g. a dog) eats something containing xylitol, it is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream, resulting in a potent release of insulin from the pancreas. This rapid release of insulin results in a rapid and profound decrease in the level of blood sugar (hypoglycemia), an effect that occurs within 10-60 minutes of ingesting the xylitol. Untreated, this hypoglycemia can be life-threatening.

### **How much xylitol is poisonous to a dog?**

The dose of xylitol that can cause hypoglycemia in the dog has been reported between 50 milligrams (mg) of xylitol per pound of body weight (100 mg per kg). The higher the dose ingested, the more the risk of liver failure. The most common source of xylitol poisoning that Pet Poison Helpline gets called about comes from sugar-free gum. With certain brands of gum, only 9 pieces of gum can result in severe hypoglycemia in a 45 pound dog, while 45 pieces would need to be ingested to result in liver failure. With other common brands of gum (which contain 1 g/piece of gum), only 2 pieces would result in severe hypoglycemia, while 10 pieces can result in liver failure. As there is a large range of xylitol in each different brand and flavor of gum, it is important to identify whether a toxic amount has been ingested. **Xylitol is estimated to be 100 times as toxic as chocolate to dogs.**

Intake of very high doses of xylitol (225mg/lb or 500 mg/kg body weight) has been implicated in liver failure in dogs.

### **What should I do if my dog eats something containing xylitol?**

If you suspect that your pet has eaten a xylitol-containing product, contact your veterinarian or Pet Poison Helpline (800-213-6680) **IMMEDIATELY**.

Do not induce vomiting or give anything orally to your dog unless specifically directed to do so by your veterinarian. It is important to get treatment for your dog as quickly as possible. As some dogs may already be hypoglycemic, inducing vomiting can make them worse!

### **What are the symptoms of xylitol poisoning?**

Symptoms of xylitol toxicity develop rapidly, usually within 15-30 minutes of consumption. Signs of hypoglycemia may include any or all of the following:

- Vomiting
- Weakness
- Incoordination or difficulty walking or standing (walking like drunk)

- Depression or lethargy
- Tremors
- Seizures
- Coma

In severe cases, the dog may develop seizures or liver failure. Dogs that develop liver failure from xylitol poisoning often show signs of hypoglycemia.

### How is xylitol poisoning diagnosed?

A presumptive diagnosis of xylitol poisoning is made if there is a known or possible history that the dog ate something containing xylitol, coupled with symptoms of hypoglycemia. Since toxicity develops rapidly, your veterinarian will not wait for a confirmed diagnosis before beginning treatment. Rapid diagnosis and treatment is imperative!

### Is there an antidote for xylitol toxicity?

No. There is no antidote for xylitol toxicity, although treatment with sugar supplementation, IV fluids, and liver protective drugs are beneficial.

### How is xylitol poisoning treated?

Fast and aggressive treatment by your veterinarian is essential to effectively reverse any toxic effects and prevent the development of severe problems.

If your dog has just eaten xylitol but has not yet developed any clinical signs, your veterinarian may induce vomiting to prevent further absorption, depending on what your dog's blood glucose level is. If clinical signs have developed, treatment will be based on the symptoms that are being shown. Since xylitol toxicity can cause both low blood glucose and low potassium levels, your veterinarian will perform blood work to determine whether these problems need to be treated. In all cases, your dog will require hospitalization for blood sugar monitoring, dextrose administration, intravenous fluids, liver protectants, and any other supportive care that may be needed. Blood work should be monitored frequently to make sure that blood sugar and liver function remain normal.

### What is the prognosis for recovery from xylitol poisoning?

The prognosis is good for dogs that are treated before symptoms develop, or for dogs that develop uncomplicated hypoglycemia that is reversed rapidly. If liver failure or a bleeding disorder develops, the prognosis is generally poor. If the dog lapses into a coma, the prognosis is very poor.

### How can I prevent this problem?

Do not share any food that may contain xylitol with your pets. Only use pet toothpaste for pets, never human toothpaste. Keep in mind that there are some veterinary products that contain small amounts of xylitol (eg, gabapentin medication, mouthwashes). At prescribed doses, these should not result in xylitol poisoning; however, if ingested in large amounts, can potentially result in poisoning. If you personally use products containing xylitol, make sure they are stored safely, out of reach of your pets.

The toxicity of xylitol for cats and other species is not documented at this time, although there has been some concern that other non-primate species (e.g., cats, ferrets, etc.) may react to xylitol in a similar manner as dogs.

With any poisoning, prompt decontamination and treatment is always warranted, as it's less dangerous to your pet, and less expensive for you to treat early! Rapid diagnosis and treatment is imperative!

**\*Pet Poison Helpline**, is an animal poison control service available 24 hours, seven days a week for pet owners and veterinary professionals who require assistance treating a potentially poisoned pet. Pet Poison Helpline is available in North America by calling 800-213-6680. Additional information can be found online at [www.petpoisonhelpline.com](http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com).



This article is based on material written by: Cheryl Yuill, DVM, MSc, CVH and Justine A. Lee, DVM, DACVECC, Associate Director of Veterinary Services, Pet Poison Helpline

**NOR'WESTER READERS  
WELCOMES:**

**Sharon Sudell and Nilla**

**Mitch Cohen and Cooper**

**Elizabeth Hayes and Rachel**

**Karen Horan and Sampson**

**Denise Yanaluvich  
(administrative volunteer)**



**THERAPY DOG TEAMS NEEDED!**

Our waiting list of school districts and classrooms is growing. We desperately need more therapy dog teams to meet the demand.

Please see our website for more information and an application form.

**WWW.NORWESTERREADERS.ORG**

**NOR'WESTER READERS APPRECIATES YOUR DONATIONS!**

Your contribution can:

- ~ Make a great teacher gift
- ~ Celebrate a graduation or learning milestone
- ~ Honor a person, pet, or favorite volunteer
- ~ Honor an anniversary or birthday



Your generosity and thoughtfulness will enable *Nor'wester Readers Therapy Dogs* to grow and to improve our services to the children and classrooms visited by our therapy dog teams.

Please use our PayPal button on our website or mail your tax-deductible donation to:

Nor'wester Readers  
485 Worthington Mill Rd.  
Richboro, PA 18954





# THE THERAPY DOG'S BILL OF RIGHTS

by Ann Howie



## As a therapy dog, I have the right to a handler who:

- Obtains my consent to participate in the work
- Provides gentle training to help me understand what I am supposed to do
  - Is considerate of my perception of the world
  - Helps me adapt to the work environment
- Guides the client, staff, and visitors to interact with me appropriately
  - Focuses on me as much as the client, staff, and visitors
    - Pays attention to my nonverbal cues
    - Takes action to reduce my stress
- Supports me during interactions with the client
  - Protects me from overwork
  - Gives me ways to relax after sessions
- Provides a well-rounded life with nutritious food, medical care, physical and intellectual exercise, social time, and activities beyond work
  - Respects my desire to retire from work when I think it is time

## BCIU CARING COMMUNITY AWARD GOES TO . . . BRANDON!



Brandon and Cathy Larrick were nominated by Katie Lang who is employed as a special education teacher by the Bucks County Intermediate Unit. Katie wrote, "I was matched with Cathy and Brandon in January 2012, and we've been a collaborative team since. Cathy has a peaceful, gentle nature to which the children respond. The students love Brandon, and he becomes an important part of each class I teach. Brandon sparks communication with my students; they are motivated to ask Cathy questions, to take turns

petting him, and describing how he feels and what he is doing. They also read their sight words and their independent readers to him. He is the most patient listener that nervous early readers could have. I feel so lucky to have Cathy and Brandon in our lives. Therapy dogs rock!"

**Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole."** -

~Roger Caras



## WANT TO DO SOME WINTER READING?

### Great dog books (for adults) recommended by Whole Dog Journal

***ALL DOGS GO TO KEVIN: EVERYTHING THREE DOGS TAUGHT ME***

*(that I didn't learn in veterinary school)*

by Jessica Vogelsang, DVM

***BEWARE THE STRAW MAN: THE SCIENCE DOG EXPLORES DOG TRAINING FACTS AND FICTION***

by Linda P. Case

***DECODING YOUR DOG: THE ULTIMATE EXPERTS EXPLAIN COMMON DOG BEHAVIORS AND REVEAL HOW TO PREVENT OR CHANGE UNWANTED ONES***

by American College of Veterinary Behaviorists

***THE DOG LIVED (AND SO WILL I): THE POIGNANT, HONEST, HILLARIOUS MEMOIR OF A CANCER SURVIVOR***

by Teresa Rhyne

***HOW DOGS LOVE US: A NEUROSCIENTIST AND HIS ADOPTED DOG DECODE THE CANINE BRAIN***

by Gregory Berns

***THE BLACK DOGS PROJECT: EXTRAORDINARY BLACK DOGS AND WHY WE CAN'T FORGET THEM***

by Fred Levy

***THE DOGIST: PHOTOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS WITH 1,000 DOGS***

by Elias Weiss Friendman

***SHAKE and SHAKE PUPPIES (2 separate books)***

by Carli Davidson

***UNDERWATER DOGS and UNDERWATER PUPPIES (2 separate books)***

by Seth Casteel

***MAN'S BEST HERO: TRUE STORIES OF GREAT AMERICAN DOGS***

by Ace Collins

***REAL DOG YOGA***

by Jo-Rosie Haffenden

***TEAMING WITH YOUR THERAPY DOG***

by Ann R. Howie

***WHAT THE DOG KNOWS: THE SCIENCE AND WONDER OF WORKING DOGS***

by Cat Warren

***A WOLF CALLED ROMEO***

by Nick Jans

***THE OTHER END OF THE LEASH: WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO AROUND DOGS***

by Patricia McConnell





NOR'WESTER READERS  
485 Worthington Mill Rd.  
Richboro, PA 18954

215-504-0154  
Lab324@aol.com  
Dglessner2@comcast.net

Directors:  
Wendi Huttner  
Deborah Glessner

## OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

The goal of the *Nor'wester Readers* Canine Assisted Learning Program is to utilize registered therapy dog teams who will work cooperatively with public school teachers to support and build student motivation, enhance focus, and increase task persistence. The presence of our therapy dog teams will offer a stress free learning environment which will increase student self esteem and confidence.

## OUR VISION STATEMENT

*Nor'wester Readers* therapy dog teams will enhance the educational environment in ways which will prompt students to fully realize their learning potential.

[www.norwesterreaders.org](http://www.norwesterreaders.org)



## THOUGHTS FROM THE DIRECTORS:

Greetings!

Happy New Year and warm wishes for an exciting 2016!

The start of the 2015-2016 school year was certainly challenging! Not only were we confronted with the new Pennsylvania laws for child abuse clearances, we were starting the year with only 34 teams. This meant that many teachers who had been hosting therapy dogs suddenly found themselves without a team. Given that we are in our ninth year of putting therapy dogs into public and private schools, the demand for our services has increased exponentially.

We are working on plans to do an advertising campaign to recruit more teams, especially in the Bensalem and Pennsbury School Districts. We are also hoping to expand our services into other local school districts whose teachers have contacted us for therapy dogs. But all this takes money. Our **GO FUND ME** campaign was essentially unsuccessful. To date we have raised just over \$1,500 towards our goal of \$10,000. This means we will have to get very creative and look for ways to advertise that are either free or inexpensive.

Special thanks to our webmaster, Janine Monico, for her help with search engine optimization and Google Ads in an attempt to reach a wider audience via our website. We are grateful for her expertise and generosity.

Congratulations to Cathy Larrick and Katie Lang for Brandon's Caring Community Award conferred by the Bucks County Intermediate Unit. Cathy and Brandon have been visiting Katie's class for four years. Just imagine the magic they've sparked and the difference they've made in the lives of their students. Indeed, we see this happening in ALL of the classrooms where our Nor'wester Readers teams work. Hopefully, our feature article "Magical Moments" will leave you with a new appreciation for the impact of therapy dogs in the educational environment. They really ARE canine partners in education.

Get that friendly, well-socialized dog off the sofa and earn your CGC and therapy dog certifications. Nor'wester Readers would love to have you join our team! See our website for more information.



*Debbie Glessner and Wendi Huttner*