

EDITORIAL OPINION»

Guest commentary

Therapy project strengthens human-animal bond

By **Karen Lasker**

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"We see miracles every day," says Janet Rossano, who, along with Simon, her 8-year-old McNabb border collie, volunteers with the Brody Project for Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT), a Naples-based not-for-profit.



Lasker

For the past two years, Rossano and her dog and other Brody Project volunteer teams have been working side by side with therapists to treat residents of Moorings Park continu-

ing care retirement community.

Launched in 2009 by part-time Naples resident Paula Brody, the project was founded in memory of Brody's mother Sarah after she had witnessed firsthand the benefits that animal bonding brought to her mother in the last years of her life. "Although my mother could not remember my name, she was able to recall the names of all the dogs who visited her on a regular basis," said Paula Brody.

During a therapy session at Moorings Park, Brody Project volunteer Vivian Aiello prepared her dog Bella's toys that would be used as therapeutic tools. The therapist asked a patient (we'll call her Mrs. C., for privacy) who was seated in a wheelchair, to throw Bella's



A patient pushing Mocha in a wheelchair had a physical therapy goal to stand and walk for 10 minutes. Having the dog there provides extra incentive and motivation for the patient.

The Brody Project

ball down a corridor. Bella caught the ball and returned it to Mrs. C.

This simple game of fetch, which lasted 30 minutes, progressed with the patient eventually standing with the aid of her walker and alternating throwing arms; and it accomplished the therapeu-

tic goals of socialization, vocalization, standing balance, upper body strength and endurance, while making therapy more pleasurable for Mrs. C.

"It's always easier when Bella is here," the patient said smiling.

"When the residents work

with the therapy animals, they are engaged socially and are more motivated to walk, exercise and perform their physical therapy. Sometimes it encourages them to get out of their rooms," said Celeste Lynch, Moorings Park director of wellness and recreational therapist. "More therapeutic goals are reached and the residents are outgoing and happy in the process."

A total of 14 Brody Project AAT teams assist physical, occupational and recreational therapists, social workers and nurses in individual or group sessions. The teams help residents achieve therapy goals that previously had seemed out of reach for the patients.

Part of the Brody Project's mission is to educate members of the Southwest

Florida community about the power of AAT and to further the knowledge about the human-animal bond and its health and therapeutic benefits.

On May 14, the Brody Project will bring Dr. Alan Beck, director of the Center for the Human-Animal Bond at Purdue University, to Naples to host a seminar in conjunction with Florida Gulf Coast University. We invite veterinarians, therapists and representatives of local organizations whose patients and clients could benefit from animal-assisted therapy.

For more information about supporting the Brody Project or becoming a volunteer, contact me at klasker@thebrodyproject.org or 239 325-9328.

