

Love, Comfort and Joy 7-24-11

How can a person bring love to a teen-ager suffering from depression and the burdens brought upon by mental illness?

How do you bring comfort to a child spending long days in the hospital recovering from organ transplant or even suffering from a terminal illness?

How will you find a way to bring joy into the heart that shines forth from the eyes of a 98 year old woman in her last days of life here on earth?

Love, comfort and joy are the very essence of what you can bring to others and experience yourself through the volunteer work of Animal Assisted Therapy.

In the late 1980's I was introduced to therapy dog work through visitations conducted by members of the Jefferson County Kennel Club under the guidance of the late Mrs. Vivian Martin of Imperial, Missouri. Most of us had well trained obedience dogs and Vivian encouraged us to give back to our community by visiting the sick in area nursing homes and up at the Jefferson Barracks V.A. Hospital. We did not receive any "formal" training on how to conduct ourselves during therapy dog visits. Somehow, we just we allowed our trust in our well behaved dogs, our compassion for those in need and good old common sense to guide us along our way.

Some years later, I was able to dedicate my personal career in the teaching of other volunteers to spread the love, comfort and joy as Director of the T.O.U.C.H. Program (Therapy of Unique Canine Helpers) through SUPPORT DOGS, INC.

Now live has come full circle again and once more I find myself available to encourage others to volunteer their time and talents in this most unique of canine experiences.

The Jefferson County Kennel Club is please to offer the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen Program with adaptations in training for Animal Assisted Therapy Certification for area volunteers. Graduates from our first classes are now working with their handlers at St. Anthony's Medical Center.

The Kennel Club also wishes to extend an invitation to area nursing homes, rehabilitation facilities and hospital to contact us if they would be interested in having qualified volunteer Canine and Handler Teams conduct visitation sessions at their facility.

Training classes are offered throughout the year at the Kennel Club's training facility located at 2075 Jenneman Road (just off Jeffco Blvd. behind Fazoli's)in Arnold, Missouri.

If you have a gentle, well-trained dog that you feel might be a candidate for work in the field of Animal Assisted Therapy, please check the Jefferson County Kennel Club web-site: www.jkc.org or contact the club via phone (636) 464-2324 for information on how you can volunteer.

To be able to offer Love, Comfort and Joy to those in need and bring your "best friend" along with you, is an experience you will always treasure.

Christine Curtis, Vice President Jefferson County Kennel Club

AKC. Certified Canine Good Citizen Evaluator #3074.