



Wagging Tails

I R I S H T H E R A P Y D O G S

SUMMER 2009

A Message from Irish Therapy Dogs' Chairman

It has long been recognised that there is a special bond existing between dogs and humans.

In today's world, the family dog brings comfort and happiness to the elders of the family and fun to the younger members. Many would like to share their happiness with others beyond the family – those people in day care centres, hospitals, nursing homes, schools and other places. This then is the mission of Irish Therapy Dogs, to provide physical, therapeutic and educational benefit to people – old and young – of these institutions where people may be restricted from having pets and where the presence of these delightful creatures and their volunteer handlers will add comfort and support.

Irish Therapy Dogs' volunteers bring comfort and affection to patients who may be lonely. When a volunteer and an happy dog enter a day care centre or even a family home, something remarkable happens; the patients react immediately to stroke the dog and there is an instant rapport. It brings instant therapeutic benefit to the patient who becomes more active and responsive

during and after the visit. Those who receive our weekly visits love to talk to the volunteer and the dog and share with them their feelings and memories.

We greatly appreciate the substantial number of applications we have had to join and support our organisation. The owner and dog are assessed as a team for suitability and assigned to a Centre that has applied to have a visiting team.

At this point, I sincerely thank all our visiting teams and the Care Centres around the country especially in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Sligo, Leitrim, Wicklow, Wexford, Kildare, Kilkenny and Meath. I thank our sponsors and all who have given donations. I pay tribute to our management committee and local co-ordinators for their loyalty and hard work, to our team of assessors and to the trojan work of our office staff.

A significant event took place at the end of January when Maureen Hennis, the Chief Executive Officer of Pets as Therapy our English counterpart organisation came to Dublin at our invitation for two days to meet us.



Maureen gave us much encouragement and advice and continues to be a great friend of Irish Therapy Dogs. (Full report on her visit on page 2)

Many reading this will be visiting our stand at the European Winner Dog Show at the RDS in Ballsbridge on 30th, 31st May and 1st June. Full information about our work will be available at our stand. Our junior volunteers will also be in attendance.

My lingering thought is of an organisation of all age groups with vibrant, enthusiastic and friendly members.

We can be contacted at Irish Therapy Dogs, St. Mary's Centre (Telford) Ltd., 185 – 201 Merrion Rd., Dublin 4. Tel. (01) 2189302.

Website www.irishtherapydogs.ie
Email: info@irishtherapydogs.ie

Brían O'Sullivan
Chairman

Office Staff

We are delighted to welcome Tracy Fennell, Ireland, Marta Cwiertnia, Poland and Jenny Faison, America to our organisation. They have volunteered to do the administration work at our busy office at St. Mary's. They are all highly qualified and experienced

in office management and systems and will ensure the smooth running of Irish Therapy Dogs. We greatly appreciate their commitment and enthusiasm.



Jennie, Marta and Tracy

Irish Therapy Dogs meets Pets As Therapy, PAT (UK).

In January, we were honoured that Maureen Hennis, CEO of Pets as Therapy (PAT, UK) visited Irish Therapy Dogs over two days and shared her experience of her 26 years working in pet therapy in the UK with PAT which has 4,000 visiting teams of volunteers and their pets visiting 6,000 caring institutions every week.

Both of our charities have similar aims and objectives and are willing to share ideas and work together to produce a first class service to the patients and residents of care centres visited by pets registered with Pets as Therapy and Irish Therapy Dogs..

On her first day in Dublin, Maureen visited St. Oliver's and Loyola House at St. Mary's Centre with Brenda Rickard and her Cocker Spaniel, Irish Therapy Dog, Willow, who was in her element working among the residents. With her wonderful temperament Willow was a great ambassador for Irish Therapy Dogs.

Later the same day many Irish Therapy Dogs' volunteers attended a

meeting where Maureen gave a presentation on the work of Pets As Therapy in the U.K., after which the question and answer session flowed on much longer than expected, such was the enthusiasm of all present. The commitment of those present was amply demonstrated by the attendance of co-ordinators from Cork, one of whom took a flight specifically for the presentation session, returning back later that evening.

The following day Maureen was taken to Sallins National School to observe the reading programme undertaken by Special Needs teacher Denise Chambers and Irish Therapy Dog Setanta. Mr Noel Lanigan, the School Principal spoke about how very valuable this programme had been and that the reading skills of many children improved because of it.

Now that the link between Pets as Therapy and Irish Therapy Dogs has been forged it is intended that the two charities will continue to keep in touch to their mutual benefit and share infor-

mation to promote best practice.

We were also very pleased to welcome Kate Turner (who is a sister of Joy Saville, our west Cork co-ordinator) from Northern Ireland to Maureen's visit. Kate is a registered assessor with Pets as Therapy.



Maureen Hennis with one of the pupils and Therapy Dog Setanta during her visit to Sallins National School



Maureen with Willow chats to some of the residents of Loyola House.

Mikasch

Baerbel Schultz-Voss is German with an Irish dog with a Hungarian name. This wonderful combination is bringing great joy and comfort to residents at Perrott House, Skibbereen Hospital Co. Cork.

Baerbel writes "I have been visiting the residents at Perrott House now for about seven months. Every Wednesday, Mikasch and I visit them for about an hour in the afternoon. I have found it to be very rewarding and Mikasch appears to think so too because as soon as I have my uniform on and his little coat on he's at the door ready to go!!!

He enjoys the visits and he seems to get a sense of purpose and importance

out of it. The residents at Perrott House all love to pet him and get great pleasure and joy out of Mikasch's visits.

Both Mikasch and I greatly enjoy the visits and hope to continue them as long as possible.

I got Mikasch in Ireland, in Cashel from an animal rescue centre called 'Cottage Rescue'. Initially I found him on their website and then drove up with my daughter and her boyfriend to meet him and took him home the same



day! It was love at first sight!!! Although he apparently had a fairly bad start in life according to the animal rescue people, he fits in perfectly with my cats

and my home and turned into a lovely companion.

He's a Giant Schnauzer and the name is from Hungary, I just liked it because it suited him although it is a little hard for people to remember sometimes"

A Therapy Dog in School

A therapy dog visiting a school brings many advantages. My Irish Therapy Dog, Scottish Deerhound "Setanta" assists children with autism, reading or learning difficulties, dyslexia, physical disability or social, emotional and behavioural problems.

Children with autism will often react to and speak to a dog more readily than to a person. They seem able to understand the dog and can speak through him or identify a feeling in him that may be much more difficult for them to do when dealing with people. Perhaps it is the dog's non-judgemental acceptance they recognise. Both Setanta and the children enjoy the sessions where they all sit on the floor and take turns to read to him. The reading is at a level where the child will make very few errors. There is no correction of reading during these sessions, we tell them to keep reading as Setanta just listens, he doesn't notice mistakes! This greatly increases their fluency and self esteem and there is great interest and excitement in choosing a book that Setanta might like! Some of the answers they give when asked why they like reading to the dog are enlightening. "Because he listens." "Because it's kind of fun." "He lies beside me and he likes my Fuzzbuzz books." "Setanta



Denise with Setanta, School Principal, Noel Lanigan, Anne Bagnell, Maureen Travers and pupils from the school. (photo courtesy of Brendan Burke Shootmydog.ie)

likes us reading to him and that's how he goes to sleep and relaxes." "He's my friend." "Setanta likes to listen to the story with his ears. I like reading for him." "Because he enjoys it and he loves books about dogs."

For children with a physical or learning disability, walking, brushing and being seen with the dog by their peers in the school increases their confidence. There is also a noticeable increase in the use of language and social interaction with their peers after Setanta has been in school. The other children come

to the children with special needs for information about the dog. Children with emotional and behavioural difficulties relax in Setanta's company and talk quietly to him about their worries. Often I see an arm going spontaneously around Setanta's neck or back as they speak to him.

Together, the children with special needs and I visit the junior classes to organise the Christmas collection of presents for the abandoned cats and dogs and give a short talk about how to behave around dogs in general.

There is also a lot of language and early maths work based around dogs with the younger children and the older pupils with special needs prepare Powerpoint presentations, photo displays and posters based on Setanta's visits and activities concerning dogs and caring for them.

Irish Therapy Dogs intend to develop this programme in other schools. If you are interested in introducing a similar reading programme to your school, please contact our office at (01) 2189302 for further information.

Denise Chambers



Three happy pupils relax with Setanta. (Photo courtesy of Brendan Burke Shootmydog.ie)

Mala

Mala and new arrival Molly

Mala got his name from a private safari lodge called Mala Mala near the Kruger National Park in South Africa where I had holidayed.

The name means "sable antelope". A Labrador who was rescued from the ISPCA at one year old, Mala is truly a gentle giant with melting dark eyes and a passive disposition, which makes him a wonderful therapy dog. He is visiting the Anna Gaynor ward in Our Lady's Hospice in Harold's Cross. Mala and his new friends are enjoying getting to know each other. As the other half of Mala's visiting team, I can see the many benefits dog therapy brings – the gentle

patting by people who have had strokes, the reaction from people with limited mobility, the chats with people about their former pets and the smiles when Mala is present. Mala has recently been joined by his baby 'sister' Molly - although she will take a lot of training



before she is ready to join the ranks of Irish Therapy Dogs!

Finola Kenny



Andrea Askey presents the cheque to Brian O'Sullivan, Chairman

A special word of thanks to Andrea Askey, Briga Townsend, Edel Conway, Tina Sweeney, Karen Kennedy, Janice Curran, Deirdre Mulligan and Joan Hargadon from Sligo who ran the Sligo Mini Marathon on May 4th on behalf of Irish Therapy Dogs and raised €802 towards our funding.

A word of thanks to the Doughcloyne Hotel, Togher, Cork for sponsoring the refreshments at a recent meeting of Irish Therapy Dogs volunteers in Cork. A lovely thoughtful gesture.

**When the Man waked up he said,
'What is Wild Dog doing here?'
And the Woman said,
'His name is not Wild Dog any
more, but the First Friend,
because he will be our friend
for always and always and
always.'**

*– Rudyard Kipling
"Just So" Stories*



UPCOMING EVENTS

May 30th, 31st and June 1st 2009 :

The European Winner Dog Show will be held at the RDS Dublin. Irish Therapy Dogs will have a stand (B 10) adjacent to the entrance to "Best in Show" ring.

September 13th :

Irish Therapy Dogs sponsored walk. Start from our office at St. Mary's, Merrion Rd. at 2.30pm. Sponsorship cards available from the office by phoning (01) 2189302

October 4th 2009 :

The annual Parish Blessing of pets will take place at the 11.30 am Mass in St. Joseph's Church, Glathule, Co. Dublin. All are welcome.