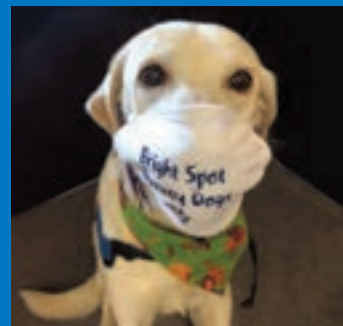


Bright Spot News

The Annual Publication of Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc.

2021

Proud to be an
American Kennel
Club recognized
Therapy Dog
Organization



Continuing Our Mission in a Pandemic World

Read-to-a-Corgi, with Machete and Knives...

Keeping a Special Read-to-a-Dog Program Going During the Pandemic

by Rae Becerra



Our therapy dog journey has taken some interesting twists and turns over the years, none more unpredictable than the curveball 2020 threw our way. We got our start through a mutual friend who trains therapy dog teams for Bright Spot, as a way to further develop our relationship with our two corgis, Machete and Knives. Both corgis have taken to therapy work quite well, they know when they're "on the job" and they love the attention. Machete, 8, is a very empathetic soul and Knives, 6, has never met a stranger in her life; both dogs love to show off their tricks and thrive on praise and attention. We have visited a few nursing homes and made some home health visits, but where they really shine is through our local library. Shortly after both dogs were certified through Bright Spot, we saw the Friends of the Ashland Public Library booth at the local farmer's market and got to chatting. One thing led to another and before we knew it, we were piloting a Read-to-a-Dog Program.

Three years later, we are still going strong, and a few other therapy dog teams have joined the library crew. We have custom stickers and bookmarks we give out and the corgis even have their own story book for kids who cannot pick something to read (the library even has a copy of the book we donated to check out). Therapy dog work has always been a literal bright spot in our lives, for our corgis — and hopefully the children that come to share stories — so one can imagine how devastated and concerned we were when the pandemic first hit.

Obviously, all in-person visits and events were canceled in an abundance of caution and safety. A few weeks into it though, inspired by the live feeds from zooms across the country, our Children's Library Director, Louis McAuliffe, broached the idea of "virtual read to a dog" and given my experience with social media and technology, it seemed a no brainer. Initially we tried a full hour of streaming live on Facebook (the library's preferred platform), but to not tax the dogs, we cut it back to 30 minutes weekly. By streaming live, anyone can read to Machete and Knives from anywhere without the limitations of geography and physical access. And though the dogs cannot hear the stories being shared, they know they're working (in their Bright Spot gear) and we always post the videos to our page afterwards for any-

- Continued on page 2



MISSION STATEMENT

Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, Inc. is a registered 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to placing well-trained certified therapy dog teams in meaningful programs that provide comfort and caring through the human-canine bond. Our special volunteers serve in a wide variety of settings including hospitals, nursing homes, hospice, schools, libraries and other facilities where therapy dogs are needed.

Bringing comfort to those who need it most.



Dear Friends,

Over the past year, the pandemic has challenged all of us in unprecedented ways. We are deeply grateful for the steadfast commitment and flexibility of our Bright Spot Community of volunteers and those we serve. Our teams stepped forward and found creative ways to reinvent how we carry out our mission of bringing comfort and caring to those who need it most.

In partnership with our colleges, schools, public libraries, and long-term care facilities, we have held virtual events, reaching individuals and groups as large as 500. When the weather was warm, we engineered outdoor events using masks and proper social distancing. Although our group Therapy Dog Team Training classes have been on-hold since last March, our evaluators have found innovative ways to conduct evaluations for those ready to complete the certification process.

With the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, we are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel and are now able to revisit the ambitious strategic plan our board of directors prepared for 2020. We are optimistic that our classes will commence in the spring, combining virtual programming and outdoor space, rather than being held completely indoors. We have learned interesting ways to adapt out of necessity, some that can be applied as we safely advance forward.

Bright Spot is extremely grateful for the overwhelming support we have received from foundations and donors. Your commitment to our mission has been most critical during this challenging year. It has energized us as we approach 2021 ready to train new therapy dog teams, look to start new programs and enrich our existing programs that provide comfort and caring to people of all ages.

It is with great pride that we share with you in this issue of *Bright Spot News* some highlights of the special work our amazing Bright Spot Therapy Dog Teams have done throughout the pandemic.

Warmest regards,

Cynthia J. Hinckley
Founder and Executive Director

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Please submit stories, news bytes, and/or photos
for consideration to cynthia@bright-spot.org



one who missed it. Currently we are broadcasting on Machete's Facebook page (both corgis have a social media presence, of course) every Wednesday evening at 6:00 pm EST. We have people joining in from our local community (we definitely miss our regulars), and from across the country. There is even a girl that tunes in weekly from Switzerland! It's not exactly the same, but we're working hard to encourage reading, support our local library, and bring some joy into people's lives during this incredibly challenging time. In the meantime, we are carrying on with our weekly broadcasts and eagerly looking forward to a time when we can safely visit our friends and our library again.



Broadcasts can be viewed here:

<https://www.facebook.com/machete.corgez>

Event details:

<https://fb.me/e/3GEym1OWi>

Machete on IG:

<https://www.instagram.com/machetecorgez/>

Knives on IG:

<https://www.instagram.com/knivesthecorgi/>

Ashland Public Library:

<https://www.facebook.com/AshlandPublicLibraryMA>



Group Visit at Charlene Manor Extended Care Facility



Teams in attendance, left to right: Kevin Russell and Duncan, Gail Moran and Murphy, Cynthia Hinckley and Teach, Wayne Desroches and Gwen, Liesl Swogger and Pepe, and Ned Polan and Brinkley

The activities director in the Alzheimer's Unit at Charlene Manor was thrilled to receive our calling asking if there was some way we could manage a safe small-group visit with the folks there on the unit. A quick response, "Yes! We can make that happen!" set the planning wheels in motion.

Charlene Manor Extended Care Facility in Greenfield, MA is where we hold all of our Bright Spot evaluations. Administrators there are pleased to have us come, offering a steady flow of well-trained dogs coming in for the residents to enjoy. Due to the pandemic, this much-loved form of entertainment is dearly missed.

Working together, we arranged a small outdoor event where



residents interested in seeing the dogs at a distance were rolled out to the patio on the side of the building. Six Bright Spot teams, handlers masked and standing a safe distance apart, gathered in the parking lot outside the fenced-in patio. Our group was introduced, then one team at a time stepped up to the fence where the handler talked about his/her dog.

It was a sunny, warm day in early October. The residents engaged in conversation with each handler and dog. Smiles and laughter filled the air. When it was time for us to leave, one resident said, "Just being able to see your dogs all together like this will stay with me for a very long time." 🐾

Continuing Our Mission in a Pandemic World with Children



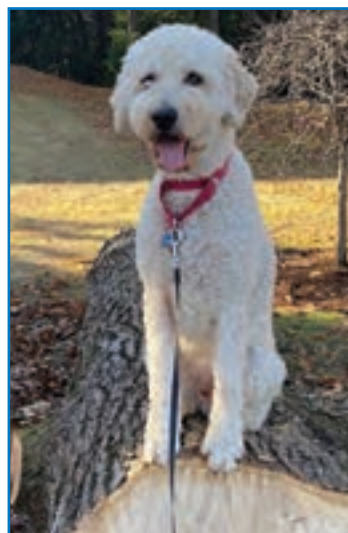
Laura Hanratty and Harper

We have been doing some Zoom sessions with the kids at Zanetti Montessori School in Springfield, MA where Harper and I were visiting pre-pandemic. When the adjustment counselors are checking on some of the students, we have popped into the zoom. Harper has done really well with sitting at the screen or showing them how she learned to play fetch while we've been home. It's been great to still do something, and she lights up when she sees and hears the kids. 🐾



Joann Amberson and Parker

I realize how lucky Parker and I are. Parker has been able to come to school with me every day. Students and faculty know that in order to touch Parker they must use hand sanitizer. I tell them to "apply and dry." Parker enjoys seeing everyone and I think having him in school is so important. We have had a few students come in that are visibly stressed but always leave with a smile and a sense of calm. 🐾



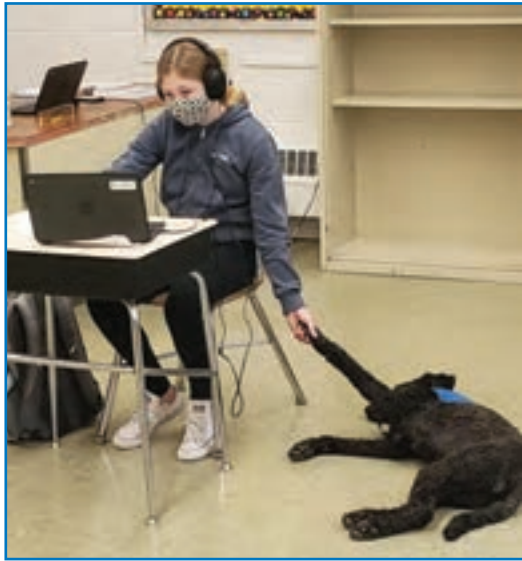
Chris Edler and Beamer

Beamer and I live and work at Northfield Mt. Hermon School in Gill, MA. In the fall and again in January, when students returned to campus, they spent 14 days quarantining in their dormitory rooms and staying with their floor "pod." They ate, did Zoom classes, and socialized within these roommate and floor groups for two weeks, before they could return to in-person activities and learning. During this stressful time, Beamer and I went through the dorm in which I work offering socially distanced friendliness from the doorway of each room. His wagging tail and happy face made everything a little more bearable! 🐾



Michelle Karb and Sophie and Betty

Custodians, office staff, administrators, and other adults at the Melican Middle School where I am the principal look forward to Mondays when Sophie accompanies me to school for the day. Students learn remotely on Mondays, and the adults in the building are appreciative that Sophie attends for the sole purpose of spreading comfort and joy to them.



Betty works at the Melican Middle School three or four full days each week. Students who struggle attending often admit to coming to school simply to see Betty. To help combat the added stress that the pandemic has brought to students and staff, Betty provides unconditional love and comfort to all who need her. 🐾

Continuing Our Mission in a Pandemic World with Assisted Living



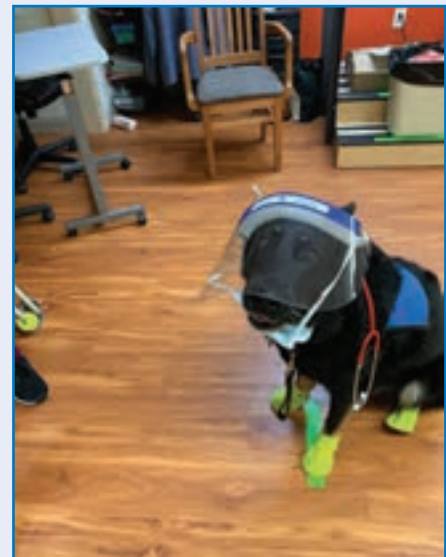
Nancy Lowry and Niko

Niko and I were able to visit Lathrop Home on South Street in Northampton, MA at their suggestion. It was set up as an outdoor, socially distanced and masked visit. Lathrop had NO positive tests or cases of covid. Our visits were held in July and were wonderful. I send them periodic photos of Niko and me "waiting it out." 🐾



Martha Blunt and Daisy

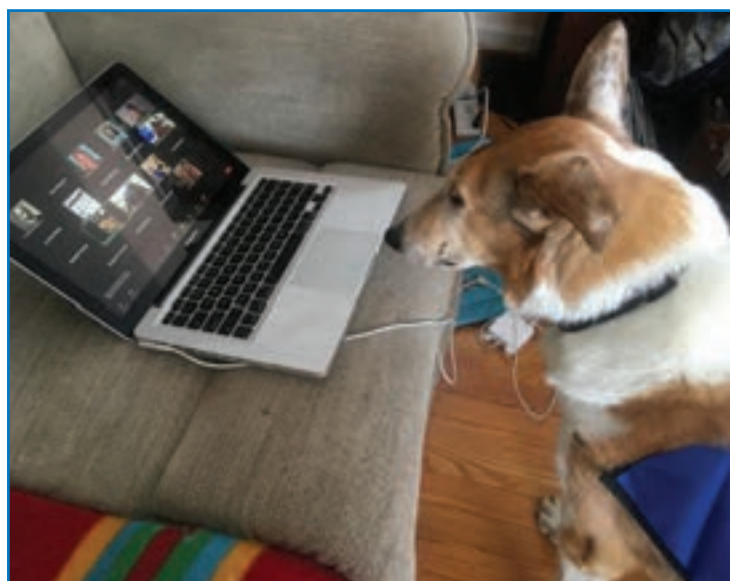
My Havanese Daisy and I have been with Bright Spot for about three years. We have visited primarily Tatnuck Park of Worcester, MA, a Benchmark Assisted Living Facility, where my daughter is the activities director. Although we have not been able to go since last March, we were invited back for a Halloween costume contest. Daisy slipped right back into her role. The residents were so happy to see her. It felt wonderful to be able to start taking steps towards the normal that we all took for granted. 🐾



Emily Rinaldo and Blitz

I am the Director of Rehab at a skilled nursing/long term care facility in Rhode Island. It worked out extremely well, since no visitors were allowed and I had to come to work, that I happened to have a therapy dog. Blitz has come many days and the residents love seeing him. Since they couldn't see their families and many of them couldn't even touch people without having gloves on, petting Blitz was a wonderful sensory activity. Blitz even dons some of his own PPE! He also wears booties every time he goes to work just in case, so he doesn't bring home something in his feet. 🐾

Virtual UMASS PAWS Event



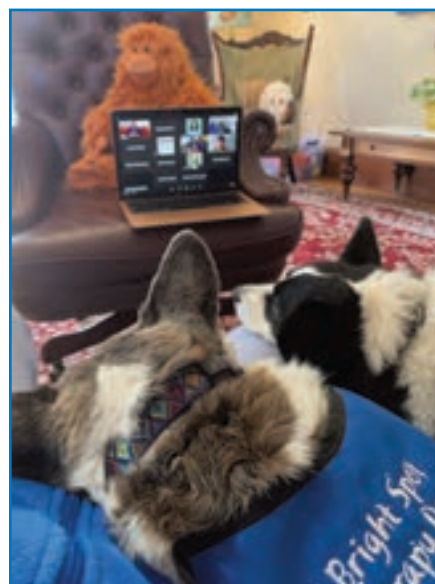
Lucky interacts with students virtually from home.

Each semester during mid-term and final exams, students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst look forward to spending time with our Bright Spot Therapy Dogs. Typically, twenty-five dogs of all sizes, breeds and mixed-breeds gather in the Campus Center for the much-anticipated PAWS Event. Students get to hang out with the dogs, pet them and simply take a break from the stresses surrounding studying for tests and writing papers. As many as 1,200 students come and go over a two-and-a-half hour time span. Some go to a class and come back for more de-stressing time with the dogs. This event is so popular on campus that as soon as the date is publicized, students mark it on their calendars. Seniors have remarked that they have attended every PAWS Event held on campus since they were freshmen. In addition to the Campus Center, two Bright Spot teams are stationed in the library for those students who are unable to leave their studies there to go over to the Campus Center.

With the onset of the pandemic, all such events Bright Spot held on college campuses were cancelled. The presence of the dogs on campus is sorely missed. Covid restrictions have drastically altered life on college campuses, leaving students with little opportunities for having fun and making connections with others. In search of ways to help students, we partnered with our friends at the University of Massachusetts Amherst to do the next best thing... hold a Virtual PAWS Event.

Our Bright Spot volunteers embraced the idea to offer students the opportunity to spend time with the dogs via a webinar. In fact, more volunteers were able to sign up for this plan because an evening option was offered, making the event available to our volunteers whose work schedules normally would not permit their attendance at the regular daytime, in-person events. Thirty volunteers and 36 dogs participated in what really was an experiment for all involved.

Students and Bright Spot volunteers were given the option of signing up for either the 11:00-12:30 session or the 7:00-8:00 p.m. session. The Bright Spot Teams were made the *pawnelists* and grouped in 15-minute time slots with four teams in each slot. Students were able to spend time with each of the dogs in each of the time slots throughout the entire session. What truly was a leap of faith turned out to be great fun for all involved. Students reported feeling less stressed after spending time with the dogs; they loved learning about each of the dogs and what types of visiting they do. Some students had their families sign-up for the event, too, spreading the comfort and joy even further. 🐾



Henrietta and Eloise sign in as pawnelists.

Bradley International Airport Bradley Buddies Program

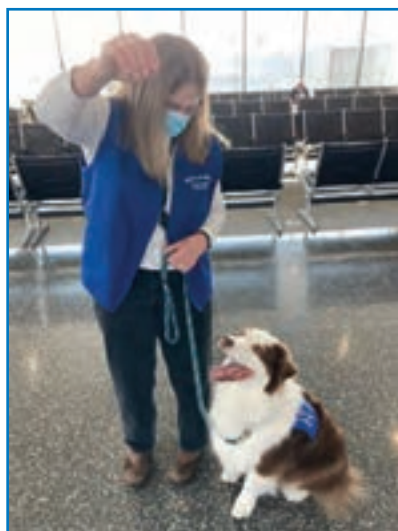


Photo: Bradley International Airport

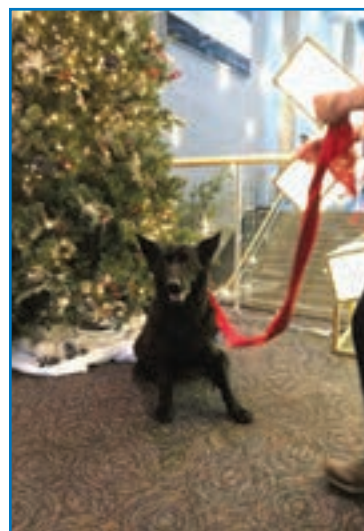
Our popular Bradley Buddies Program took flight in 2018 and rapidly grew from two volunteer teams to 18 teams. Travelers loved interacting with the dogs while waiting for a flight and the dogs enjoyed all the attention they received while traversing the terminal. Like everything else, the pandemic brought the Program to an abrupt halt.

Pre-holiday season, we were contacted by our point person at Bradley to discuss the idea of creating a Bradley Buddies Holiday Collage with each of the 18 dogs dressed in festive gear. The volunteers embraced the idea, happy to do something to keep this special Program going. The collage appeared on Bradley's media pages during the week leading up to Christmas.

In addition, the Airport invited interested volunteers to make an escorted solo, masked, and socially distanced, short visit through the terminal during Christmas week. The team would be escorted by Airport personnel to be certain travelers just looked at the dog. No petting was permitted. Three teams signed up for the safely engineered visit. Sally King and James visited on Monday, Karyn Cordner and Raven on Tuesday, and Brian Schick and Jeeves were scheduled for Wednesday, but Jeeves had an unfortunate accident and was unable to make his visit. All Bradley Buddies Teams look forward to the time when they can all safely visit the Airport again. 🐾



Pictured are Sally King and James making their escorted tour of the terminal.



Raven and her teammate Karyn Cordner stop by Bradley's holiday display.

Why We Give Louanne and Leo Clavette



The Caitlin Clavette Memorial Foundation strives to perpetuate the ideals that Caitlin believed in and that always guided her life. First and foremost, Caitlin was a teacher - dedicated to her students and committed to their love for learning and celebrated their achievements both great and small. Caitlin was also an advocate for animals, volunteered at Nevin's Farm, and cared about animals of all sizes and shapes.

So it is fitting to keep Caitlin's memory alive and her ideals and her passion for her work ongoing by donating to Bright Spot Therapy Dogs where teaching, children and dogs are a perfect fit - where you *bring comfort to those who need it most*. The Caitlin Clavette Memorial Foundation thanks you for your work and for recognizing our Caitlin. 🐾



Friend of Bright Spot Lesléa Newman, Writer

Lesléa Newman has written 75 books for readers of all ages including the poetry collections *October Mourning: A Song for Matthew Shepard* (novel-in-verse) and *I Carry My Mother* (a memoir-in-verse).

To honor her father, gone three years now, Lesléa wrote *I Wish My Father* (also a memoir-in-verse) that was just released in January. One of the poems, "Is That Angus", refers to the therapy dog who visited her father's hospital room. Lesléa says that her father was always so cheered when a four-legged friend visited him.

An animal lover, herself, Lesléa is donating \$1.00 for every copy of *I Wish My Father* purchased directly from her website to Bright Spot Therapy Dogs. To purchase your signed copy of *I Wish My Father*, go to Lesléa's website:

<https://lesleanewman.com/books.../poetry/i-wish-my-father>



Thank You to Our Donors

2020 Annual Report of Giving

We extend our deepest appreciation to our donors, foundations, and sponsors. Your generous support during the Covid-19 pandemic has been critical to our ability to weather this storm and stand prepared to advance our work in the coming years.

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- Judith Clark
In honor of All Bright Spot Volunteers
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In honor of All Bright Spot Teams
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