

Tummy Rub Therapy

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Every month the Health and Counseling Center of UNC Asheville sponsors therapy sessions, but they are not with your ordinary therapists. The positive atmosphere and friendship dog therapy offers can reduce anxiety, reports the Alliance of Therapy Dogs.

"Oh, I need this. Oh, I'm in the middle of exams and I miss the dogs. Oh, give me a kiss," Noel Thurner said, repeating the comments she hears as owner and handler of therapy dogs Sapphire and Parker. "A lot of people come in feeling stressed and they need that distraction."

Sapphire, a three-year-old dog, has been doing pet therapy for two years and is completely at home in the library lobby. Bryanna White, a sophomore accounting student, reaches out to pet him.

"I come here every time. I used to have a dog at home. I love animals, especially dogs," White said. "They really just make me happy. I like being around them."

Claire and Jim Waller, owners of Brodie, are stationed a few feet away to greet the constant ebb and flow of visitors seeking contact.

"We hear them say things like, 'I just had a calculus exam. I need to pet something,'" Waller said.

Brodie, a four-year-old bea-

gle mix who was rescued from Brother Wolf at eight weeks old, sits calmly waiting for the next hand to reach out to him.

"Within a year, we knew Brodie would make a good therapy dog," Claire Waller said. "He doesn't bark. He stays right with you."

Therapy dogs need good manners around both people and other dogs, said Thurner.

"They can't be reactive with other dogs," Thurner said. "They have to be able to tolerate a lot of noises, distractions and have a real solid foundation and temperament."

All therapy dogs must first pass obedience class and then take training with a certified organization, such as PAWS for People or the Alliance of Therapy Dogs.

Since his graduation, Brodie went on to achieve a sort of superstar status in his job, visiting hospices about 16 times per month in addition to the child development center at Mission Hospital.

"He has different empathy levels. With the children at the development center, he's really active. He can sense the kids aren't sick and can play," Claire Waller said. "But at the hospice, he can sense when he is with someone close to death and he'll snuggle up real close."

At under 50 pounds, Brodie is allowed up on hospital beds

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

