

Denice Norby and Chief



It became instantly apparent Samoyeds would make great therapy dogs because they love people. When I got my first Samoyed, I knew he loved people and would be a therapy dog. It took 6 years before I found Denver Pet Partners and my first Samoyed was certified as a therapy dog with the then Delta Society (now Pet Partners). That was 20 years ago and today I am partnered with Bark Bark's Indian Outlaw, more commonly known as Chief. He is my 6th Samoyed therapy dog.

When I was looking for a show dog and found Chief's litter, I told his breeder he would be a therapy dog as well as a show dog, so I want the

most social, people loving dog in the litter. He came at the perfect time as I had just lost my daughter. He filled my days with love and training. Although I can't take full credit for the training, as Kismet, my previous therapy dog was very alpha (bossy) and taught Chief house rules and what it took to be a good therapy dog. During training, we had some issues due to Chief not being motivated by treats or toys. We found that his motivator was touch. Pet him, hug him, rub ears, massage chin, etc. and tell him he is a good boy and he would do anything you asked of him. That isn't good for competition obedience, but fantastic for a therapy dog. He was so calm, nothing bothered him. He passed his therapy evaluation at 13 months old as an intact male at the complex level, the highest in Pet Partners.



Chief was a show dog for a while, but was happier seeing people. He won 2 US and 2 International championships, and rally obedience titles in 4 venues including international, herding titles with sheep and goats, and 2 trick titles, but the love of his life is therapy work. At a show in Albuquerque, there was an old veteran sitting on his walker seat near the ring. I told the handler to take Chief over and let the veteran pet him. Chief was so happy; he went into the ring and got his first major win after making the veteran feel better.

Right after we were certified as a therapy team, we started visiting Denver Children's Home. He loved seeing the kids. We visited weekly for years. When he was in puppy kindergarten, he learned to shake hands. I hadn't taught any of the previous girl therapy dogs that because I didn't want

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them to scratch the seniors we visited. The kids loved it. He learned “other hand” and would switch which front paw he gave you. They would tell him “other hand” over and over just so he would keep switching paws.

We worked with Namaste Hospice and visited multiple nursing homes across metro Denver. The balance between visiting children and the elderly seems to be good for him. He gets a little depressed when visiting seniors all the time. Chief has also participated in some of the University of Denver graduate school seminars and multiple college finals de-stress events. He amazed the DPP Team leads at one de-stress event when 20 students were petting him at once and he had an ear-to-ear smile and was loving all the attention. His favorite part of the therapy evaluation is when multiple people are petting him at once.



Chief is the therapy dog for Camp Erin Colorado, a camp for children 6-18 that have lost a significant family member. We usually have about 70 kids and 35-40 volunteer staff plus 20 camp staff at the camps for 3 days. He is the hit of the camp. He seems to know who needs to hug him so they feel better. Staff have been amazed over the years at how Chief is able to read what the kids need at that time and who seems to need him most. He has had kids of all ages hug him, lay on him, cry on him, and tell him how awful their day is and he loves them and smiles and makes them feel that things will get better and they will get through whatever their problem is that day. He even went to an event for the families involved in the shooting at the STEM school in Highlands Ranch in 2019 to help comfort them.

One time we went to a seminar for therapists. This one was about using play therapy for children involved in child sexual abuse. It was a very heavy topic for the therapists and every break in the lectures, they came over to pet Chief and help relieve stress. He was surrounded by therapists for the full break every break. One group there was Bikers Against Child Abuse (BACA). When they found out his name was Chief, they gave him a fire chief hat and said that any child would feel he is a safe person to talk to about what was happening to them.

When Covid hit we had to suspend visits. We also moved from Aurora to the country SW of Florence, CO during the Covid shutdown. We visited Home Depot in Canon City which was always a hit with the staff and the Florence Farmers Market the summer of 2020 just so he could see other people. He couldn't figure out what he did wrong to be out of work for a year.

Finally, things started opening up and we now visit a Florence Care Home in Florence and Progressive Care Center in Canon City. We are looking at adding another nursing home in Canon City and the Veterans Home in Florence and have been talking to a regional hospice. We have also made it back up to the Denver area a few



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times for some more college finals de-stress events and a wellness event for Fidelity Investments in Greenwood Village.



He earned his Working Samoyed Excellent Title for 250 hours of visiting. He earned all 6 levels of AKC therapy titles the highest being the Therapy Dog Supreme Title which is 600 visits with a total number of visits as of February 24, 2023 of 1200 visits. But titles or not, I wouldn't deny him visiting others because he loves it so much. He just turned 9 years old in January, and I hope he has several more years to do what he loves.

