

Melissa Izon and Callie



I set out very intentionally to combine passions of working within the medical field and my love of dogs to train a therapy dog. But wait, Callie is a boxer and those of you who know boxers, know that they can be VERY exuberant, bouncy and well, boxy! But with my intentions in mind, we set out to find a mild mannered, trainable boxer. Callie was the runt of the litter and very timid in nature compared to her litter mates and giant big brothers. I was fairly confident from the day she came to live with us that this was going to be a good match. We quickly

worked our way through all the levels of obedience classes passing each one with ease. We took her to as many places as possible, exposing her to as many environments as possible.



As we continued our training, I met with Linda and Meme at Castle Rock Adventist Hospital (CRAH) to find out more about the Angel Paws program. I had set my goals on working within a hospital setting as this is what my work experiences had been.

At just 14 months old, Callie and I headed off to our first DPP evaluation. To the surprise of our evaluators, we passed with ease. As we were driving home from our successful evaluation, the World came to a stop! "Pandemic!" Callie and I continued to train during COVID and we were lucky enough to make a few visits to the staff at CRAH in outside settings. One year after our evaluation, our onboarding at Castle Rock Adventist Hospital was finally complete! Linda Tieman told me it was the longest onboarding she had ever done.

Over the next year, we continued to navigate through the restrictions brought on by COVID. We could visit staff one day and the next we were shut down. Things continued to evolve and eventually returned to normal.

Callie absolutely loves visiting staff. I think this is due to many emotional early visits in our career as a team. Callie is very intuitive to the needs of nurses and staff we visit. We have

DPP Team of the Month (July 2023)



had doctors sit on the floor with her, tearing up because of the day they had. We have received hugs from staff that had just lost their family pet. We have been a part of families who are experiencing the end of life. We have been there for good news, great news and the worst news. Some situations we engage in conversations of past and current pets, other times we just simply visit without a word spoken and let the power of touch between dog and human do what it can to help ease a situation that no one is ready to express with words.



We visit Castle Rock Adventist Hospital on Wednesdays. We have a set routine that starts with us checking in at the front desk to do our daily paperwork. We greet the volunteers and patients in the lobby. Then it is off to what most of the Angel Paw dogs call the “payroll department”. We visit a couple administration offices that have an endless supply of dog cookies. Once we have completed our socializing in these offices, Callie is ready to go to work and visit throughout the hospital. I have tried changing this routine, but Callie will have no part of it. She fully expects to receive payment in advance!

CRAH is really an extended family. We are often on our morning walkabout and we will see a staff member we know, and they will not only tell us about patients that they think would like a visit, but we are often told, I just sent nurse Jane in the OR a text to let her know you are here and she said she will be right out!

We have also been fortunate to volunteer as a neutral dog team for future and re-evaluating teams on evaluation day. We have served as a neutral dog team a number of times and we love seeing the success of new teams.

We recently added Parker Adventist Hospital to our weekly rotation. I was a little nervous about adding this large institution to our rotation as it is considerably larger than Castle Rock. We have been so pleasantly surprised. The hospital is large and there are so many patient rooms, labs, an ER, infusion center and many other destinations within the hospital to visit. This is where the boxer energy comes into play, we are usually there for our maximum visiting time of 2 hours making friends wherever we go.

DPP Team of the Month (July 2023)

In Callie's spare time, some of her favorite activities are going for walks and playing with pine cones. She also loves to wrestle with her Boston Terrier brother, Bo. Although it is generally Bo who is doing the wrestling. One of Callie's funny quirks...Callie loves to sleep with her head on a pillow.



We have had so many positive experiences volunteering as a DPP team. It can be something as simple as passing a nurse with her arms full in the hallway, and she says thank you for strolling through, it just makes our day!



One day we were on our rounds through ICU, visiting staff, when a nurse tracked us down. She said she had a family that had asked if we would consider visiting their mother. The young nurse tearfully told us that the patient was within hours of her end of life. She had told us although the patient was conscious, she had been unresponsive. We entered the room that was full of family and friends, I made our introductions and Callie immediately approached the hospital bed. The daughter explained to us that their mother had been an animal lover all her life, especially dogs. Callie very gently set her head on the patient's hand and within moments she began to pet Callie. After another minute, she was saying thank you and

making eye contact with her family. There was not a dry eye in the room! After our visit, we excused ourselves, collected our thoughts and emotions and carried on with our visiting. A few minutes later, the daughter tracked us down and gave Callie and I both a huge hug and said thank you! She said the family had tried everything to get their mom to respond one last time, but it was the simple touch of a dog that gave them some last words!

It is for these reasons and many more that Callie and I feel extremely blessed to have found what we call extended families within Denver Pet Partners, Castle Rock Adventist Hospital and the Parker Adventist Hospital where we have been fortunate enough to be there for those who may just need the love and tenderness of a 4-legged friend.

DPP Team of the Month (July 2023)

