

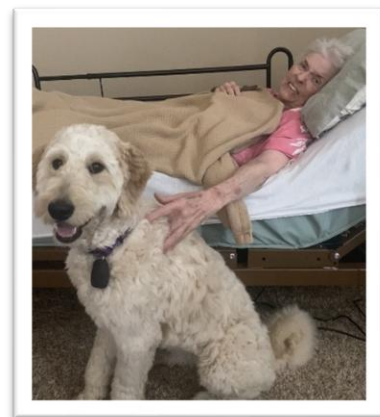
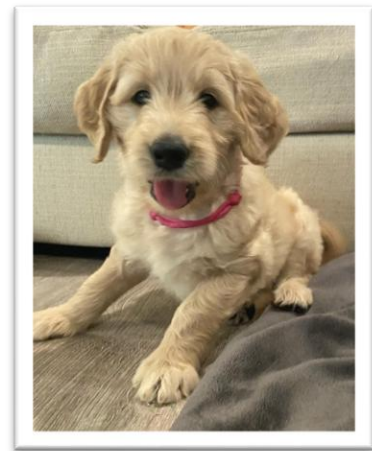
Helena Clark and Bailey



From my earliest memory, dogs, cats, and other creatures (some furry and some not) have been a part of my life! I always thought that it would be amazing to raise and train dogs one day. In the fall of 2022, a friend shared photos of a litter of goldendoodles on social media -- one remained who needed a home. At the same time, our 17-year-old daughter was slated to return home from a therapeutic boarding school just before Thanksgiving. Due to difficult relational dynamics, I knew I needed to pour myself into something different, something outside of myself and my relationship with her.

My husband and I said “yes” to Bailey, and our journey began the day

before Thanksgiving! To be honest, despite the fact that friends were always complimentary of my animals’ good behavior, I soon began to seriously question my decision to raise a puppy. Thankfully, in February 2023, I discovered an online training program that was a game changer, helping me to train Bailey “to be as obedient as a service dog.” In the meantime, a friend from church, who is also the volunteer coordinator at AdventHealth Castle Rock, encouraged me to look into the Angel Paws program. This led us to Pet Partners and eventually our connection with Denver Pet Partners (DPP).

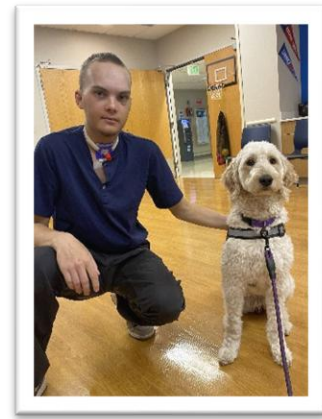


Later that Spring, my 87-year-old mom fell and broke her hip while living at my brother’s home in Texas. To help with her rehab, Bailey and I traveled to their home and ended up staying 7 weeks. My mom became our first introduction to care and comfort as a therapy team--Bailey was ok with wheelchairs, walkers, and awkward petting! And, since the obedience training was online, I could continue to work with Bailey. I read and devoured all the information I could about becoming a handler, the evaluation process, and possible settings to volunteer.

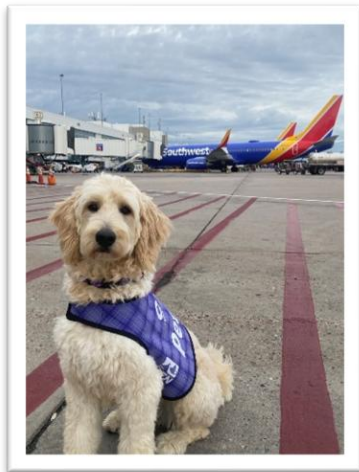
DPP Team of the Month (April 2026)



In November '23, at just 15 months old, Bailey and I passed the Pet Partners eval with a Predictable rating and began our journey. That same month, a family friend had a horrific motorcycle accident and ended up at Craig Hospital in Denver. We received special permission from his therapist and made our first official visit over the Christmas holidays to see him. After the first of the year, we onboarded with Angel Paws at AdventHealth Castle Rock and have been there ever since, making weekly visits.

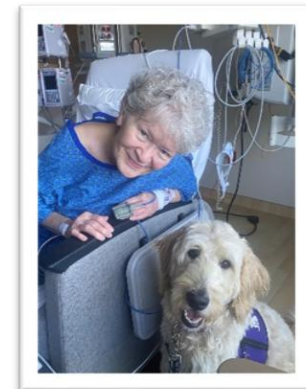


In addition to our weekly commitment at the hospital, we have investigated a number of settings, and we are still finding our way and exploring what is the right fit for us as a team. These settings have included joining the CATS program at DIA for a year, a short stint with Bark for Books at the Castle Rock library, a year of monthly visits at Rocky Vista University, and two summers at Camp Wapiyapi. We are so grateful for the opportunities that DPP has introduced us to over the last two years and the support we have received.



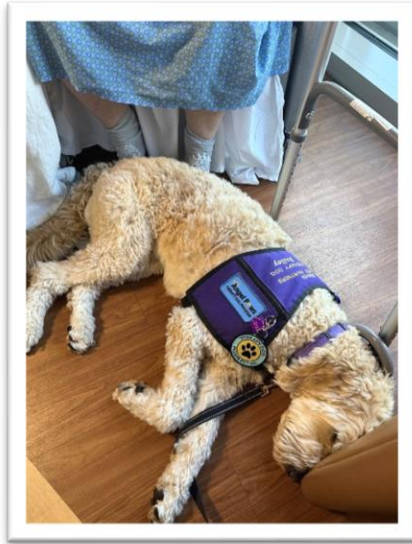
For regular ongoing commitments, we have landed at the hospital and the sensory inclusive performances at the Lone Tree Arts Center, keeping our outings to no more than two per week. Three times a year, we participate in the Canine Care class at Wellspring Community in Castle Rock, sharing about the differences between therapy, emotional support, and service animals, as well as how to train and care for Bailey – the STARS love our visits! We periodically make school visits; just last month

we joined a homeschool speech and debate tourney for a de-stress event!



I'll wrap up with a snapshot of a hospital visit... This day, I poked my head into a room and noticed the patient was having lunch. Knowing the timing wasn't great, we circled back at the end of our time. I entered the room and made my way to the chair. Bailey greeted them, and we began to talk. After some introductory chit-chat, I listened as they shared their story and what had brought them to an unexpected hospital stay via the ER-- one of

DPP Team of the Month (April 2026)



multiple stays in the last 9 months. Bailey took her cue and settled in for the duration, making herself comfortable between us, warming this patient's feet.

Over the course of the past two years, I've learned that during my two-hour visits, it's not the number of contacts we have with patients, visitors, and staff, but it's the time spent with each one that makes the difference. I feel honored and privileged to listen and provide a small diversion in an otherwise difficult circumstance. Sometimes, like this day, I get the privilege to lift the person up in prayer, asking for provision, care, and healing in their lives as they navigate this challenging situation.

Our journey as a therapy dog team has been an unexpected surprise in this season of my life. My girl and I get to be the hands and feet of Jesus!

