



Your unrestricted philanthropic giving allows NorthShore University HealthSystem (NorthShore) to support the areas of greatest need across our organization, where giving has the most profound impact for our patients and their families. Unrestricted giving provides NorthShore the flexibility to pursue unforeseen opportunities as they arise and to sustain excellence in our diverse healthcare programs and services. The clinical area profiled here benefits from unrestricted gifts. Its exceptional reputation and patient outcomes are a testament to the impact of your support.

Special Visitors Assist with Recovery

Each Monday from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m., the energy in NorthShore Skokie Hospital's inpatient hallways changes. Patients recovering from surgery or other medical conditions eagerly await the arrival of a different kind of visitor. Skokie Hospital staff look for their favorite four-legged volunteers—of the canine variety—and without fail, they show up ready to work every Monday.

“We have a very economically, religiously and ethnically diverse group of patients here at Skokie Hospital,” said Corinne Manny, PT, DPT, Staff Physical Therapist. “Pet therapy is a universal way to communicate with the patients and to encourage interaction.”

For some, it is used to inspire a patient who has refused his or her therapy. The therapist uses the dog and the interaction to incorporate a patient's therapy routine. Patients may be asked to feed the dog cooked carrots or green beans from a cup with a fork. Other patients may be

asked if they would like to brush the dog's coat, then be asked to brush their own hair. These are just a few examples of how this therapy is used to simulate activities at home or better a patient's balance.

For others, it's simply a bright spot in a day filled with tests or a long stay at the hospital. Activities and skill sets are tailored to patients who are able to get out of bed as well as those physically unable to leave their bed.

Joann Benbow, a NorthShore patient who has a dog of her own at home, spent time enjoying animal therapy during her stay. “It sure was a great afternoon being with the dogs,” recalled Benbow. “It was wonderful walking with them and playing with them.”

Whether it is learning to walk with the dog's assistance or laughing as the dog plays a mini piano, a patient's day often is brightened when a

four-legged visitor shows up ready to work.

The animal assisted therapy program takes place in various forms at all four NorthShore Hospitals, with demand at Skokie being particularly high. Additional charitable giving would help cover associated costs, enabling enhancement and expansion of the program across not just Skokie Hospital, but also NorthShore Evanston, Glenbrook and Highland Park Hospitals. With more animal visits, even more patients would have the opportunity to participate in this special program, enhancing their experience at NorthShore.



Therapist Corinne Manny and therapy dog Maggie work with patient Joann Benbow

“For a moment, it's just about them, not their illness. There are no judgments. The therapists are able to use that moment of happiness to further the patient's progress.”

— Corinne Manny, PT, DPT
 Staff Physical Therapist
 Skokie Hospital

About Rainbow Animal Assisted Therapy, a NorthShore Partner

Rainbow Animal Assisted Therapy works with trained, registered therapy dogs that are gentle and friendly, having gone through a series of classes and careful observation to prepare them for this volunteer work. They use animals to facilitate healing and rehabilitation in a therapeutic setting with goal-directed intervention in which dogs are an integral part of the treatment process.

Collaboration Creates a Better Patient Experience

The animal assisted therapy program is made possible through the efforts of NorthShore staff and volunteers. Their seamless collaboration creates a better and more beneficial experience for patients at NorthShore.

“To make this work, it is a true collaboration with a unit concierge, nursing staff, physicians, NorthShore volunteers, dogs and handler teams from Rainbow Animal Assisted Therapy, physical therapy staff, and patients and their families,” said Elizabeth Thorn, Supervisor, Rehabilitation Services at NorthShore.

Medical staff or the unit concierge identifies patients who would like a visit from the dogs. They share the names with the physical therapist who works up a plan for a patient’s recovery. At times, there are family members of patients not on the list who come up and request a visit. The volunteers work with the nurses, who in turn work with the physicians to gain the necessary medical clearance for the visit to take place.

“This is one of the best programs that few people have heard of at NorthShore,” said Thorn. “This program truly delivers patient support. It helps patients feel human again by providing a positive break in their day. Even for the staff, it gives them a mental and emotional break from the important work they’re doing and allows them to recharge.”



Therapy dog Lola and her handler work with patient Kathleen Loutsch

The reward of the collaboration is hearing patients share their positive experiences at NorthShore. “This hospital is superb,” said 95-year-old patient Kathleen Loutsch as she visited with dogs from the animal assisted therapy program. “Everybody is so good and kind.”

Volunteers Give Their Time to Patients

Fred Polakow spends 20 hours a week as a volunteer at the front desk of Skokie Hospital, assisting patients and visitors as they enter the hospital. He also serves as a NorthShore representative, working with the Rainbow Animal Assisted Therapy dog handler volunteer teams.



NorthShore volunteer Fred Polakow escorts Rainbow Animal Assisted Therapy dog handler teams

“It’s very rewarding,” said Polakow. “The people you help really appreciate everything you do.”

When Monday afternoon rolls around, Polakow meets the volunteers from Rainbow Animal Assisted Therapy and escorts them to the patient rooms. Polakow goes into the room to ask if the patient still would like a visit. If so, Polakow places a clean sheet on top of the patient and has the patient use a hand sanitizer. After the visit, he removes the sheet and again has the patient use the hand sanitizer.

The Rainbow Animal Assisted Therapy volunteers evaluate how much time is appropriate with each patient. Kathie Gutrich, who also was a staff nurse at NorthShore for more than 26 years before retiring, now serves as a volunteer with Rainbow Animal Assisted Therapy and the NorthShore liaison for the visits.

“I love NorthShore,” said Gutrich. “I loved the patients and staff as an employee and wanted to give back to a place that gave me so many opportunities.”

Staff support of the program and its volunteers does not go unnoticed.

“The staff at NorthShore is very helpful,” shared Polakow. “Everyone I’ve met here in all stages of my volunteering has been very kind and always tries to do the best they can at what they’re doing. It’s a good place to volunteer.”