



The Healing Power of Pets

During the terrorist attacks of 9-11, Irene who is now retired, told us: "I watched in horror, over and over, the images of the planes flying into those buildings, and I thought those poor people. Without even thinking, I called out for 'Beau.' I wanted to reach out and hold him, but then I remembered, he wasn't there anymore."

Silence greeted Irene, as she remembered with sadness, that her best friend 'Beau', who she had raised from a puppy, had died of cancer at the age of 14.

If you have ever looked into the eyes of a shivering, frightened animal and through a simple act of kindness been rewarded by a gentle nuzzle, the sounds of a whimper or a contented purr, and felt the gentle warmth of their heartbeat, then you know exactly what I'm talking about.

However, often we need science to quantify for us what our feelings and common sense are already telling us. Namely, that pets are natural therapists for children and adults alike. They can help kids overcome aggression and shyness, and they teach responsibility and empathy.

Scientific studies have demonstrated that pets lower blood pressure just by being present.

For example, in the early 1980s, the staff of The Humane Society of Canada helped pioneer the concept of pet facilitated therapy by visiting nursing homes with dogs and cats. Although they had to overcome a great deal of skepticism and opposition from many members of the medical community, the improvement in the disposition and the well being of some of the patients was nothing short of astonishing.

In a study at the Centre for the Human-Animal Bond at Purdue University in Indiana, Dr. Alan Beck, found that nearly 50% of adults and 70% of the children they studied at confide in their animals. They know that pets won't betray them, and animal give back unconditional love. Pets don't judge. They have no gender, no race and no age in the eyes of many people.

For nearly 25 years, research has shown that living with pets appears to provide certain health benefits. Heart attack patients with pet companions survive longer than those without, according to several studies. Male pet owners have lower triglyceride and cholesterol levels than non-owners, according to Australian researchers.

Even more interesting are the psychosocial effects according to Dr. Lynette Hart of the University of California at Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. Her studies have shown that Alzheimer's patients have fewer anxious outbursts if there is an animal in the home. Their caregivers also feel less burdened if there is a pet,

particularly if it the animal is a cat, which generally requires less care than a dog.

In the elderly, pets can be a great source of comfort and joy. Walking a dog or just caring for a pet, for those who are able, can provide exercise and companionship. In fact, one insurance company, Midland Life Insurance Company of Columbus, Ohio ask clients over the age of 75 if they have a pet as a part of their medical screening. A spokesperson for the company said that pet ownership often helps tip the scales in favour of older clients looking for life or long-term care insurance.



In addition, many people who are vulnerable to depression or anxiety suffer less if they have a pet than those living without pets. Dr. Judith Siegel, a UCLA professor of public health, published a study in May 2000 in the journal AIDS Care showing that pet owners with AIDS are far less likely to suffer from depression than those without pets. The benefit is especially pronounced when people are strongly attached to their pets.

Does this mean that everyone who suffers from heart disease or depression should adopt a pet to ease his or her pain?

No, say the researchers. The positive health aspects of living with a pet seem to work best in people who like animals. You can't simply prescribe a dog to everyone. People come along with a history of loving animals - perhaps certain kinds of animals - that brings with them those warm feelings. The benefits are there because you have the expectation of these warm, good feelings, according to the researchers.

A 1999 Australian study reported by Petnet Australia estimated that Australian dogs and cats saved \$ A 2.227 billion of current health expenditure in 1994-95. The study found that compared to non-pet owners:

- people who own pets typically visit the doctor less often and use less medication
- pet owners, on average, have lower cholesterol and lower blood pressure
- pet owners recover more quickly from illness and surgery
- pet owners deal better with stressful situations
- pet owners are less likely to report feeling lonely.



Puppy Love: Valentines for Chained Dogs Hope to Inspire a Change of Heart

By Rebecca Simmons

Each valentine was unique. Some were decorated with carefully cut-out construction paper hearts or edged with lace, others adorned with sprinkles of glitter or Crayon drawings.

These valentine cards weren't for fifth grade crushes or high school sweethearts. They were for dogs.

Last Valentine's Day, Dogs Deserve Better, a Pennsylvania-based non-profit dedicated to bringing dogs out of the backyard and into the home, celebrated Have a Heart for Chained Dogs Week by sending more than 3,000 handmade valentines to families whose dog was chained or penned.

"We thought sending a valentine to the family dog living in the backyard would be a touching way to educate people—to perhaps open their hearts to the information we'd provided, especially if that valentine was made by a child," said Tammy Sneath Grimes, founder and executive director of Dogs Deserve Better.

In 2002, the year that Dogs Deserve Better created the program, the organization sent out 250 valentines. This year, the group hopes to mail more than 4,500 cards during Have a Heart for Chained Dogs Week, February 7-14.

The valentines are created by volunteers, mostly children, and then mailed or delivered by Dogs Deserve Better—along with a brochure and dog treat coupon—to addresses provided by animal lovers in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Those who ask that valentines be sent to chained dogs in their community remain anonymous, allowing concerned citizens who may otherwise be too shy to confront their neighbors about the issue to speak up for chained dogs. While Dogs Deserve Better has no way of knowing how each recipient reacts to the valentine packet, there are several examples of families voluntarily finding another home for their dog, placing him up for adoption at the local shelter, or bringing him inside to be with the family. Lori Smith, an animal lover who last year submitted an address in her area where a chained dog lived, drove by the home one afternoon just before Valentine's Day and

saw a little girl reading the valentine to the dog chained outside.

"Just seeing that brought tears to my eyes, and I cried the whole way home," Smith wrote in a letter to Dogs Deserve Better. "I had noticed this dog for two years. It always broke my heart to see him, and I always kept this dog in my prayers. Two days later, I passed the house again, and the dog was no longer on the chain!"

Have a Heart for Chained Dogs Week helps to educate not only the families who receive a valentine, but also the volunteers who create the cards.

"This program is so exciting because it educates from both sides," said Grimes. "The students and volunteers who are making the valentines realize that dogs should not live their life on the end of the chain, ostracized from the family, and the program educates the families who receive the valentines."

Raising awareness among dog guardians, children, and others is a huge accomplishment for Dogs Deserve Better, but the ultimate goal—granting a reprieve to the dogs living lonely lives in a pen or at the end of chain—delivers the most reward. And the beauty of the program is that it's all accomplished with a bit of construction paper called a valentine.

Contact Dogs Deserve Better

Please remember to include your own contact information when contacting Dogs Deserve Better:

Dogs Deserve Better
P.O. Box 23
Tipton, PA 16684
1-877-636-1408 (toll-free)
814-941-7447

email:
info@dogsdeservebetter.org
www.DogsDeserveBetter.org

Give a dog a cell phone

(CNN) -- It's one of the biggest sources of guilt for a dog owner -- not spending enough time with their four-legged friends.

Now, a U.S. company has developed a device in a bid to reduce those feelings of despair, by inventing a cell phone so that dogs and their owners can communicate when they are away from each other.

The PetsCell, measuring 12.5cm (5 inches) by 7.5cm (3 inches), is shaped like a bone and is attached to the dog's collar. It works in much the same way as a conventional mobile phone.

The owner dials their pooch's number and after one ring, it automatically connects to the phone on the dog's collar, allowing the dog to hear its master's voice, transmitted out of a speaker built into the collar-piece.

If the dog barks in response, the owner will hear it through their own telephone, creating a dog-owner telephone "conversation."

PetsCell inventor Canadian Cameron Robb is now director of PetsMobility, the Arizona-based company producing the device.

As well as acting as a catalyst for absentee owners to communicate with their mutts, Robb has also had interest in the device from search-and-rescue and hunting groups.

He believes it would also be useful to help find lost dogs.

"The ability to talk to your pet from a distance on the pet's own cellular phone is definitely novel," he said.

"But I envision the PetsCell having search-and-rescue, military, guide dog or even potentially patient and elderly care applications, to name a few."

The device costs about £100 (\$188) and is expected to be on sale in the U.S. within the next six months, and in Britain by the end of the year.

Tim Miles, chief veterinary adviser for Britain's RSPCA, said micro-chipping dogs was a better way of keeping track of dogs.

Micro chipping involves a vet inserting a tiny device, about the size of a grain of rice, under the dog's skin.

If the dog is lost or stolen, dog wardens, the RSPCA or a vet can scan it for a microchip, which can immediately provide them with your contact details.

"The mobile phone could be removed by dog thieves, but a microchip is a reliable, permanent form of identification linking the animal to you," Miles said.



The PetsCell allows dogs to talk to their owners via telephone.