

## Leanne DB. and Jaxon - Pet Therapy Program



Leanne and her pet Jaxon, who is certified for pet visits from St. John Ambulances' Therapy Dog Program, were thrilled to join North York General Hospital's (NYGH) Volunteer Program in 2019. Not only is NYGH Leanne's community hospital, but she lives nearby, making it easy for her and Jaxon to visit.

NYGH's Pet Therapy Program serves several patient populations. Leanne says, "I chose to volunteer at Seniors' Health Centre because I have a soft spot for seniors. I feel seniors can become more isolated and lonelier, and I have always enjoyed visiting with them, as they have a wealth of knowledge and share the most fascinating stories."

In March 2020, Leanne, and Jaxon, like all volunteers were no longer able to volunteer onsite. When the Volunteer Services team reached out to Leanne last October to discuss piloting Pet Therapy virtually, she was willing to explore if this could work. We partnered Leanne and Jaxon with our Recreation Therapist at the Reactivation Care Centre, and they began visiting patients via her iPad. Leanne shares, "In the beginning I was somewhat apprehensive with Jaxon's participation. However, the experience exceeded my expectations. Jaxon is so relaxed, I thought it'd be boring for patients, but this gives them a point of conversation. Being virtual I can bring my other dog into the frame and sometimes my cat walks by, which engages them in further conversation!"

Leanne explained that language is never a barrier. Jaxon is fine if patients are not fluent in English, he is happy when patients speak to him in any language. Patients are always amused when they see Jaxon in his Halloween costume or dressed for the current holiday.

Virtual Pet Therapy has been a huge success at NYGH. Volunteer Services has expanded the number of accredited volunteer Pet Therapist participating virtually, and we are now able to support a greater number of patients. If you are interested in learning more about our Pet Therapy Program feel free to contact the Volunteer Services team.

Leanne and Jaxon, thank you for putting people first in everything you do!

