

## HOW ANIMALS ENRICH OUR LIVES

The relationship between humans and pets goes back a long time and no doubt started out as a practical one. Cats kept homes rodent-free and dogs guarded and protected "their humans" in exchange for food, water, and shelter. We took care of them and they took care of us. It was a "hand-and-paw-shake-on-it" good deal for all concerned.

"There are two cats that come around the house and when I'm sad and depressed I pet these lovable animals. I feel better knowing I have something that loves me back like I love them. I'm not used to love like that. I feel it is beneficial to my treatment and recovery."  
-Dominick C., A Common Bond



"Don't we just look like we enjoy being together? ... NOT! I was here first and I am NOT going to leave just because HE showed up!" -Ariel to Aladdin (pictured above)  
-Debra Sticht, Admin. Office

### Pets and Companionship

Whoever coined the saying "good friends are hard to find" probably didn't have a pet. Pets are loyal, nonjudgmental, and full of love. Who could ask for anything more? One of the more beautiful and unifying aspects of humanity is how we treasure our pets, because in many ways they remind us of what we wish to be. They are loyal without demanding the same and they find joy in the simplest, smallest things. They have no need for excess and go to sleep unworried about the future. Ask anybody about their relationship with their pets and they'll tell you that it isn't a one-way street. We benefit from our pets as much, or even more, than they benefit from us. The physical, social, and psychological advantages of animal companionship are myriad, and while the old cliché of man's best friend may be tired, it's also truer than we can imagine.

### Our Furry Pals Help Us Stay Healthy

Those of us with pets have been found to have lower cholesterol, heart rates, and stress levels than those without. It's not just your cat who finds serenity in a belly rub. Pet interaction naturally causes your brain to release oxytocin and serotonin, giving you a serenity of your own. Even watching your goldfish swim in and out of his little sunken castle for a few minutes can reduce cortisol, a hormone associated with stress. And petting something furry is a proven immune boost. Pets make us smile and laugh with their amusing antics and lovable gestures, and joy and laughter trigger the release of chemicals in the brain that enhance our immune function.



"Tico and Chloe provide unconditional love and snuggles!"  
-Monica O'Connor, Admin. Office

Dogs and some cats can be trained to detect all manner of health hazards, from low blood glucose and food allergens to seizures and several types of cancer. For those who need help getting back in the saddle, pets have proven invaluable in helping

with physical therapy and rehab for patients by encouraging mobility and socialization. Many nursing homes have house cats whose very presence seems to bring peace to the patients. These furry, pawed members of the staff seem to instinctively know when they're needed. Therapy dogs have been known to reach people suffering from Alzheimer's. A beautiful collie named Jesse was a sweet-natured, gentle miracle worker of sorts for a woman suffering from this disease. She rarely spoke and never recognized anyone in her family. One day, when Jesse was brought over to the woman, he put his head in her lap. She looked at him, stroked his head and simply said, "Lassie." His presence had sparked a sweet, tiny memory for her.



"I really wish I was able to adopt Butch. I just love him so much."  
-Chris Marottoli, Sheldon Terrace

And because there's no better way to improve your health than exercise, nothing really beats a simple walk with your dog – a low-impact exercise that benefits your heart and mind and provides you with your daily dose of sunshine/vitamin

D. Even a languorous stretch with your cat will do some good. A household pet could be just what the doctor ordered!

### The Psychological and Social Benefits

Researchers from Miami University and Saint Louis University found “pet owners had greater self-esteem, were more physically fit, tended to be less lonely, were more conscientious, were more extroverted, tended to be less fearful and tended to be less preoccupied than non-owners.” It’s no wonder that pets have been prescribed to people suffering from depression, low self-esteem, and severe anxiety. Their calming presence and active demeanor encourages the same attitude in their owners. Taking care of a pet gets you out of your own head and provides you with a positive, affirming way to spend your time. Even taking them out for a walk gives you a different perspective on the world—it’s hard to not reconsider your own priorities when you see your best friend is having the time of his life just sniffing his way down the street.



“I think I should change my kitten Sydney’s name to Shadow because every time I turn around, there she is! I love that she enjoys my company as much as I adore hers.”  
-Janday Wilson, Admin. Office



“I could never live without a dog, or two!” (pictured: Jewel & Thor)  
-Patti Walker, President & CEO

A bad day can instantly dissolve when you get home after a long day at work and are greeted with wet, slobbery kisses. For many people, interacting with a pet is the ultimate antidote to a stressful day. In fact, in one study, when people were presented with stressful tasks in four different situations – alone, with their spouse, with their pet, or with both their spouse and their pet – they experienced the lowest stress response and the quickest recovery in the situation where they were only with their pet!

Many shelters allow people to volunteer, working with the animals and walking the dogs. You can also offer to pet-sit for friends or turn pet-sitting into a side gig and make a few extra bucks along the way. If you are trying to decide if a pet is right for you, be mindful that pets do add to your daily responsibilities. For many, the benefits more than make up for the added costs and extra duties, but decide carefully for yourself because being a pet guardian is a long-term commitment, albeit one with long-term rewards!

There is an inexplicable tug of our hearts towards the creatures with whom we share our lives, a primal need to interact with them and to love them. What they give to us is something that is precious and rare. They love us without reservation, they trust us implicitly, and they accept us as we are. What a perfect definition of unconditional love!

“The cats here at Sheldon Terrace are part of life here. I help the cats the way help was given to me. I have been given a chance to have a better life. I know they appreciate the care that has been given to them, just as I am grateful for the care that has been shown to me. I am thankful for the opportunity to engage with them and to have them here. I love the cats.”  
-Sheldon Terrace Resident

“Dottie [Jack Russell Terrier mix] has been my best friend for a little over a month now. She’s helped me cope with stress and the fear of being alone in my apartment. She’s also kept my anxiety to a minimum. When she’s laying next to me...I don’t seem to think about the pain that’s flowing through my body, and for that I’m thankful for her in every way possible.”  
-Dyshelle Lucas, formerly with McQueeney