



How the Sport of Freestyle Positively Impacts Therapy Dog Teams

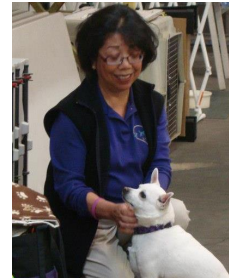
Throughout the United States, I've been honored to coach many therapy dog teams in the sport of freestyle. These teams use their freestyle skills and creativity to entertain and bring smiles to those in need. I think you will find their thoughts and experience inspiring for all therapy dog handlers worldwide.

Michelle Antonio, Loving Animals Providing Smiles Member

"Listening to music (especially nostalgic music) can be very therapeutic for seniors during visits. If you add some freestyle dancing by a handler and a therapy dog, it's even better! It definitely draws attention, and it's an uplifting and enjoyable way for seniors and staff to be entertained.

Freestyle dancing is a great tool, in addition to tricks and obedience demos, for all to enjoy together. When you have a large group of seniors and a limited number of therapy teams to spend one-on-one quality time with each client, they're great entertainment tools that come in handy.

Some clients enjoy the presence of therapy teams, but prefer not to have physical contact with the pets; it could be allergy-related, a physical disability, or cultural-related, so they prefer the visuals."



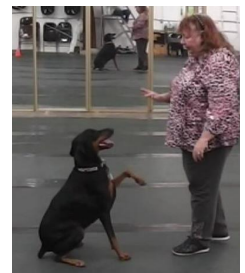
Stephanie Plucker, DVM, Lend a Heart Animal Assisted Therapy Member

"I have been working with Judy and Dogs Can Dance for about 13 years. I started with my Doberman, Drucilla. I had been a member of Lend a Heart Animal Assisted Therapy when I saw a member perform a freestyle routine for a group of elementary students. I was sure Drucilla could do this even though she was seven years old when we started canine freestyle. She became known in our group as the "Dancing Doberman", and delighted children and seniors at our therapy visits for the next six years.

My second Doberman, Willow, not only became a certified therapy dog at 1/5 years, but she also started training with Judy. She loved it and loved doing her routines at therapy visits. We decided to try competition in a combination of live performance and video performance. After 4 years of dedication, our team earned our Dogs Can Dance Champion Title.

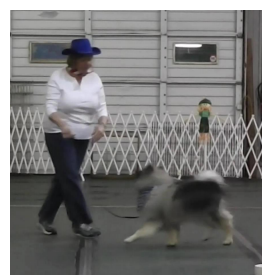
Willow will be 12 this month. She has some back and heart challenges, but I think because of her involvement in Judy's program, it has helped her handle these health issues. Willow is often seen sharing her talents at the Sacramento International Airport.

For those of you who have therapy dogs, doing Judy's program can add another dimension to your visits."



Marilane Bergfelt, Co-founder of Loving Animals Providing Smiles (LAPS). Past Pet Partner Handler and Licensed Evaluator, Past Lend a Heart Member

"In my two and a half decades of volunteering in animal-assisted interventions, I have found freestyle to be the best canine sport for therapy teams. So much of what we and our pets do in therapy settings is mirrored in this activity. For the handler, it's developing subtle verbal cues given in soft tones; small hand signals that are deliberate and relaxed; and clear, thoughtful body movements which guide the therapy dog into the right position at the right time. For the canine partner, the ability to work comfortably on both sides of its owner, moving with



fluid confidence, and calmly “checking in” with it’s owner makes the picture complete.

This refined communication helps the dog engage with people in a natural, polite way. And while this level of teamwork is often unnoticed by an observer, for those of us that have blended the two together, it is where therapy team can truly be effective. The recipient sees the teamwork and feels the connection between the pet and owner, making the individual feel accepted and safe. Once that rapport is created, then the magic begins – because making people feel special is what every therapy team strives for, everywhere they go.”

Judy Gamet, Owner
Dogs Can Dance, LLC
Changing the Future of Freestyle
www.DogsCanDance.com