

# Community Matters

## Therapy Dogs - Helping People Heal



The St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program is a part of one of the world's oldest humanitarian organizations – the Order of St. John – a worldwide charity dedicated to the service of others. The St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program is based on the principle that the petting, affection and regular visits by a dog makes a positive difference in the physical and emotional health of people. Since 2001, St. John Ambulance therapy dogs in Thunder Bay and across Northwestern Ontario have been doing just that. Therapy dogs visit people in long term care homes, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (patients and staff), St. Joseph Hospital, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay Airport, Confederation College, Thunder Bay Police Services, Superior North EMS, the Thunder Bay Courthouse, elementary and secondary schools and many other organizations.

We think of animal-assisted therapy as a recent form of therapy. However, in 1860, Florence Nightingale noted the positive effect animals had on those with chronic illnesses. Since then, research on animal-assisted therapy has substantiated this. Dogs are non-judgmental. They are accepting of those with physical or mental illness or those presenting with confusion or tears. They help decrease isolation and loneliness, lower anxiety, decrease agitation and diminish emotional health. The act of petting a dog produces an automatic relaxation response, lowering blood pressure and increasing serotonin and dopamine levels. Anyone can benefit from a therapy dog visit as it increases socialization, communication and helps a person focus.

Since 2019, St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program has received \$22,000 from the Kerri Chase Memorial Animal Fund and the Community Fund at the Thunder Bay Community Foundation. Jill Biggs, Program Coordinator explains “It is due to donors such as the Thunder Bay Community Foundation that this program is able to grow and give back to our communities. On behalf of the Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program, we would like to thank the Thunder Bay Community Foundation for supporting this program. Without their support we would not be able to do the work we do. We all work better when we work together and support one another.”

The purpose of the Thunder Bay Community Foundation is to inspire, promote and facilitate philanthropy to support the ever-changing needs of the District of Thunder Bay. The Thunder Bay Community Foundation provides grants to a variety of charitable organizations, like St. John Ambulance. Athena Kreiner, CEO of the Thunder Bay Community Foundation says, “Thanks to the Margaret & Ed Ayer Animal Welfare Fund, the Thunder Bay Community Foundation was able to continue to support the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program. It is because of the generous support of our donors that the Community Foundation is able to provide funds to charities in our community and help make a positive impact in the lives of so many people.”



### *Passionate about our Community?*

#### **Consider starting a Fund at the Thunder Bay Community Foundation!**

- Support organizations and areas of need that are important to you.
- Give students the gift of education by establishing a scholarship or bursary.

**Visit [tbcf.org](http://tbcf.org) or call (807) 475-7279 for more information**

