

Meet Kobe: Experiential Therapy Assistant



Rogers Behavioral Health has a four-legged employee! It's our pleasure to introduce Kobe, experiential therapy assistant. Kobe is a two-year-old lab/golden retriever mix and comes to us from the Paws with a Cause (PAWS) custom-training facility in Wayland, Michigan.

It was nearly one year ago that Danielle Schilling, experiential therapist, was hired to help implement the Canine Assisted Intervention program. Since then, Danielle has been busy ensuring that all the necessary policies, protocols, and licensing has been taken care of in anticipation of our future facility dog.

"On March 15, we learned that there were nine facility dogs graduating from the program, and it was likely that one would be placed with us. When we received this news, we immediately reached out across the system to double-check that all protocols were approved and to notify

staff that they would soon be in use," said Danielle, "At the end of March, I had the privilege of driving out to the PAWS headquarters in Michigan to bring Kobe home."

Kobe was chosen for us based on his temperament and love of working with people. All PAWS facility dogs have a safe and steady personality and have the desired suitability for work in public spaces. Prior to coming to Rogers, Kobe completed PAWS' foster puppy obedience and public access training, as well as advanced

Kobe is a "facility dog," which means he is a working dog that is specifically trained to help more than one person at facilities like Rogers. Unlike assistance dogs that serve one person, Kobe is trained to work with a handler to serve multiple people who need social interaction, recovery motivation, comfort, and/or a feeling of safety.



Danielle Schilling, experiential therapist, has been instrumental in developing the Canine Assisted Intervention program and is considered Kobe's primary handler at Rogers.

Here, they practice relationship building skills while taking a walk on Rogers Behavioral Health's main campus in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.

training in the PAWS Prison Partners Program. Upon returning from this program, he received an additional eight weeks of assessment and training to ensure he was ready to graduate.

"The past year has been an incredible learning experience in understanding the many facets surrounding the adoption of a facility dog," Danielle reflected, "Aside from the adoption process itself, I spent quite a bit of time initially reaching out to other hospitals to inquire about their policies. From there, our infection control and legal teams became heavily involved from safety, illness, and liability standpoints. After months of investigation, Standard of Work policies were finalized and evaluated by Rogers' regulatory team to ensure compliance with Joint Commission and State regulations."

Throughout the process, there was a lot of system-wide education that needed to take place. Since there was already a "canine comfort program" in existence, many people were confused about how CAI differed and why new procedures were required. Before approvals could be granted, each person involved needed to know what the CAI program was about, what it meant to be a facility dog, the overall vision for the program, and how it differed from the existing program.

"It was a lot of work, but well worth it," said Danielle. "Today, we have a highly socialized dog that is ready for this role. I'm certain he's going to make a difference in our patients' lives."

Danielle describes Kobe as easy-going, sociable, keen, amusing, and food-loving – with an alternate description as being a 70-pound, wanna-be lap dog. Oh, and did we mention food-loving?



PAWS with a Cause has trained assistance dogs for 43 years, providing more than 3,000 dogs to people in 33 states. In 1986, PAWS helped create Assistance Dogs International (ADI), a worldwide coalition of organizations that train assistance dogs. They also establish standards of excellence used industry-wide.

Danielle laughed and explained that Kobe is very sweet and just wants all the pets and treats he can get!

Kobe is now undergoing an 18-week placement program with the support of a local Paws with a Cause field representative. Once a week, Donna comes on site to work with Danielle, Kobe's primary handler, as well as Kobe's two secondary handlers, on furthering relationship-building exercises and basic obedience. Once Donna thinks Kobe is ready, he will start to be incorporated into individual sessions with patients where Donna will continue to provide hands-on training. After the 18 weeks, Kobe and his handlers will be tested and, assuming they pass, will be given their official certification as a PAWS facility dog team.

To the dismay of Kobe's work teammates, they had to wait to meet him for the first couple of weeks to give him the chance to settle in without being overwhelmed. But now, several weeks into his placement process, he has been busy meeting his other two-legged co-workers and exploring the grounds. Staff, families, vendors, and patients alike cannot stop smiling when they see him.

Next up - We are looking forward to getting Kobe involved in what he was born to do: assist treatment teams in helping people overcome their challenges and live healthy lives!



Ongoing costs for Kobe, including veterinary care, food, grooming - and you guessed it, TREATS, are supported 100% by gracious donors of the "Paws Against Pain" fundraising initiative. Show your continued support for this valuable program by going to rogersbhfoundation.org/give.