

Therapy dog

Who though a dog could change the attitude of so many people?

At St Phillip Howard Catholic High School we have got a new member of the school community, her name is Bonnie and she is a therapy dog, Bonnie is a chocolate coloured Labrador she belongs to the Mrs Leonard, our school nurse. It's her responsibility to train and look after her. Bonnie has many jobs around the school, one of them is to keep children on task in their lessons and calm the atmosphere. If there is a particular class that is louder than the other classes they can request for Bonnie to attend. We interviewed Mrs Leonard; you can listen to the whole interview at the bottom of the page.

As a school we decided to get Bonnie after the death of a student a year ago. Bonnie wasn't just got to help with reading and calming people but also to help as an aid through the grieving process. The parents of most people in the school supported the idea.

Therapy dogs are trained to provide affection and comfort in any situation. At the moment Bonnie is 7 months old, and she is still being integrated into school life, Bonnie is only working with a few individuals at the moment but as she gets older she will get a timetable of her working week like all of the students. When she is in school she spends her time spilt between Mrs Leonard and Claire, the schools Chaplain. Throughout the day she has plenty of walks and playtime.

Bonnie's jobs around school include helping children read and talk to her, as dogs have a hormone that relaxes the human body and makes you feel good about yourself. She also provides a safe place for people to confide in, as she won't form an opinion and won't judge you. For example Bonnie will rest her head across your leg while you read to her, so the child would feel that they are reading to a friend. The school also uses Bonnie to reward people, such as if you are always handing in your homework late then as a reward you could get to take Bonnie out for a walk if you hand five pieces of homework in on time.

When we interviewed Mrs Leonard and asked her if she had seen benefits around the school after Bonnie's arrival. She answered "As Bonnie is only working with individuals there hasn't been a massive impact on the whole school as of yet and when she walks in a room, the environment calms dramatically, but the individuals that Bonnie have been working with have definitely changed their whole enthusiasm towards school for the better". Another thing that was extremely interesting is when Mrs Leonard says that the difference in Bonnie when she has her work harness on oppose to just her collar is astonishing. "As soon as her work harness is clipped on she settles and it is as if she knows she is at work, it is like children; perfect around other people but a little cheeky at home".

We were interested to hear from a parent whose daughter who has benefited from having support from a therapy dog, in another school. A charity has helped fund the dog and it was to aid people who had confidence issues and it has really boosted her daughter read out loud. (The full interview is linked below)

We really hope Bonnie is going to stay with us for many years to come as she is a close part of our community and we hope that other schools all over the country get involved in this movement as it is clear that there are major benefits and we are still in early days and all the feedback has been very positive so far.