

## HEALTH

# Hospital's pet therapy gets two paws up from patients

By Adventist Midwest Health

No one can underestimate the influence a four-legged, best friend can have on a patient — especially a child. That's why Adventist Hinsdale Hospital has partnered with the Hinsdale Humane Society to launch a program of canine assisted rehabilitation, also known as CARE, to incorporate the therapeutic role of animals as part of the clinical healthcare treatment process.

The CARE team visits carefully selected patients at the hospital's outpatient Adventist Paulson Pediatric Rehabilitation facility, 222 E. Ogden Ave., Hinsdale. The goal of the program is to help patients achieve their physical rehabilitation goals, according to Deborah Kraus, pet therapy coordinator at Hinsdale Humane Society. Pet therapy helps children overcome fear of animals, further develop motor and coordination skills and improve their communication skills, among other benefits.

Karen Haines has seen those benefits firsthand. Her 15-year-old son, Christopher, underwent more than 10 sessions of pet therapy over the past several months. Diagnosed with cognitive disability, seizure disorder and developmental delays, Christopher has been coming to Adventist Paulson Pediatric Rehabilitation for therapy since age 1.

"After I was bitten by our neighbor's dog,

Christopher has been terrified of dogs and it got to the point where he wasn't able to be in the same room as them," said Haines, a Darien resident. "But after a few weeks in the CARE program, Christopher was able to slowly address dogs and in fact is now able to hold Leila Mae, his therapy dog. His progress and the success of this program are just remarkable and I couldn't be happier."

The pet teams help calm children who might be anxious about their therapy and provide interaction time which the children view as a reward for accomplishing certain tasks. The animals participate in therapist-guided activities to enhance motor skill therapy and are involved as a non-judgmental companions during therapy sessions.

The therapy teams are registered with Delta Society, an international non-profit organization of pet owners, volunteers, therapists, educators, veterinarians and health professionals. The society trains and screens volunteers and their pets for participation in visiting animal programs in hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers and schools.

"Our patients and staff have gained so much by working with the pet therapy team," said Carla Pister, manager of Adventist Paulson Pediatric Rehabilitation. "The animals have made a big difference in reducing patients' anxiety — sometimes their presence alone can be comforting."