



# The Amazing Healing Power of *Pooches*

By Beth Powell, LCSW

“The word, ‘dog’ is God spelled backward,” one of my moms told me the other day. Could dogs really be angels in disguise? Some authors seem to think so, and dogs do seem to have an amazing sense of love, compassion and healing power for the people with whom they have a relationship, especially for those who need a relationship when humans seem too threatening.

I’ve been providing trauma-informed care as a psychotherapist and neuro-behavioral educator for the past 12 years with a side-kick therapy dog named “Julie.” My loving little weiner dog has been licking children’s faces, snuggling up to exhausted adoptive parents and tolerating, with wagging tail, the tugs, pats and pushes of hands operationally impeded by the unmodulated muscle tone of

sensory processing disorder for longer than most people can remember.

Providing companionship, playfulness and joy is Julie’s job; it’s what she lives for. Even though she is aging now, tires easily and definitely needs a rescue from hands that are too small and from bodies that are moving too fast, she is insistent upon being in the therapy room. Bringing laughter and support to those who hurt is what she does; it keeps her going. So she’ll be allowed to continue being a part of the therapy session for as long as she is able, not just for her, but for the adults and children who come in seeking the help that they need, from this therapist and from Julie, the angel dog whom they know will be there to “love on” them as soon as they come walking through the doors. She’s just simply a part

of the services this practice offers. And when her time comes to pass on to the other side, when it’s God’s time to call and her time to answer, another angel “pooch” will continue her role — loving and serving others in the therapy room, to assist them along their healing journey.

Julie technically falls under the category of canine-assisted psychotherapy, which is a different category from psychiatric service dog or emotional support dog — even though she certainly is emotional support for this therapist at the end of a long day. Dogs are by nature excellent therapeutic companions, regardless of the helping category, for individuals suffering from grief, loss, depression, anxiety, loneliness and most pertinent for today’s society: Post-Traumatic Stress

Disorder and acute stress. Dogs are by nature loyal and tend to forgive human faux pas easier than most humans do, and always seem to be so happy to see someone they've made a connection with, even when that person may not feel so happy to see themselves.

Parents with whom I have worked throughout the years have reported the healing benefits of canine companions for the children they are fostering or for whom they have adopted. One mom I'm working with has arranged a service dog in training for her 11-year-old daughter. Her daughter has worked through so much of her attachment/trauma issues on an emotional level and currently deals with the neurological and relationship issues of Asperger's.

"Dixie," has helped her daughter develop better social give-and-take skills so important in forming relationships with others. The daughter's eye contact has gotten better, and her nurturing skills have improved, the mom reports. The mom says she has truly seen how her daughter has developed more of a sense of purpose, thereby increasing her sense of self-esteem because she's needed in helping to train Dixie for psychiatric service to others.

I remember the story an adoptive dad told me once of how the family's new rescue pooch became the attachment vehicle for a teenage boy's journey to compassion for other living, breathing creatures. When the new rescue arrived with a broken leg set in a cast, the boy took it upon himself to see to that dog's transportation needs and never left his side, determining when the dog needed to be



picked up and carried by learning to accurately interpret the dog's eye contact with his. As the father watched the miracle unfolding of a boy so previously into himself and so rejecting of human interaction connect with a hurting animal and see to that animal's needs, he knew, at some point, his son would transfer that compassion to the world of human beings and some day connect with them, as well.

Could dogs be angels in disguise? Allen and Linda C. Anderson, authors of "Angel Dogs: Divine Messengers of Love" certainly believe so. They say in their book that people who are hurting often can't hear the voice of God reminding them that they are not alone, and that they are loved. "So God sends them a messenger with a furry face, wagging tail, licking tongue, and generous heart," they write in the book.

So, for all of the dog-loving parents who are rearing kids from hard places and to all the children in their care, may everyone be reminded through the wagging tails and loving hearts of the amazing angel pooches in their homes who give so much and who ask for so little in return, that maybe "dog" really is God spelled backward.

*Conroe, Texas-based psychotherapist and neuro-behavioral educator, Beth Powell, LCSW, specializes in helping traumatized children and their families heal. Powell is also a CEU training provider, a social work intern supervisor and an adjunct professor in human services at Lone Star College. She has created a unique systems-based, child-in-family approach that includes the child's caregivers as part of the treatment team. For more information, visit [www.infamilyservices.net](http://www.infamilyservices.net) or on Facebook at <http://facebook.com/InFamilyServices>.*

## Full Circle Family Counseling, PLLC

Tracey Turner-Keyser, MA, BC-DMT, LPC-S

Full Circle Family Counseling specializes in healing mal-attachment in children and families struggling with developmental complex trauma.

[www.fullcirclefamilycounseling.com](http://www.fullcirclefamilycounseling.com) • 919-545-9833



*Healing the Heart to Heart Connection one family at a time.*