

## *Maryann Vogt and Fern*



Fern and I are very proud to have been chosen Pet Partners of the month. Fern is a Boston Terrier and was about one and a half years old when she was rescued from a puppy mill in Kansas and brought to a foster home in Denver. Fern weighed 11 pounds, had pneumonia, and a large cyst on her face. After two weeks of “trying her out” I decided to adopt her to be a companion to Emma, my 14 year old border collie and a 20 plus

year old cat, Simon. Unfortunately Emma died about six months later. To deal with my grief because of the loss of Emma I decided to take Fern to an obedience class. Surprisingly she did very well. Soon after that I took her to a Good Canine Citizen class and at the end of those classes the instructor mentioned that I may want to consider some “volunteer visiting” with my dog.

It was then that I went on-line and found the organization which is now called Denver Pet Partners. I enrolled in the two-day classes and then immediately signed up for an evaluation, confident in Fern’s ability to help people. Fern passed the evaluation and the evaluators clapped when she had completed the evaluation. Fern and I stopped for a yogurt cone on the way home to celebrate.

Since then Fern and I have visited The Life Care Center, Shots for Tots, Paws to Read, and The Gathering Place (TGP). At the Life Care Center Fern greets patients recuperating from various ailments and she always brings a smile to their faces. We volunteer at Shots for Tots and Paws to Read as needed. But our favorite place to visit is TGP where we have gone every Wednesday for the past two years. TGP supports women and their children who are experiencing homelessness or poverty



by providing a safe daytime refuge and resources for self-sufficiency. During the time Fern and I have been visiting TGP we have made many friends. We have talked to some women who are living in shelters, on the street, or in their cars. The women are so grateful for TGP because they there is access to a shower, laundry room, food bank, clothing bank, and many other resources. There is another Pet Partner team, Ann and Ashley who visit the children on the third floor.



The women look forward to Fern’s visit each week. Sue was having breakfast one morning on the third floor, saw Fern and I walk across the parking lot, and ran down three flights of stairs yelling, “Fern is here!” Then there is Angela who is watching for us each week. She gives and receives lots of hugs and kisses from Fern before saying “Now I can go to library and work on the computer to find a job.” Angel told us one day that she did not know what she would do if we

did not come to see her each week. She definitely needs a “Fern fix” each week. One day a professional photographer came to take individual pictures of the ladies. Nancy asked if she could please pose for her picture with Fern. She did and it was a sweet photo. Sue is waiting for us as we walk in the door and comes with arms wide open for a hug and holds Fern for quite a while before she needs to look for a job. She says, “First things, first”.

A new client was filling out the required paper work when Fern and I went up to say hello. I asked her if she liked dogs and she said yes. I told her Fern could give her a hug because she looked as if she needed a hug. Fern did just that and the lady cried as she held Fern.

We look forward to seeing the staff at TGP. We visit Jose first - he always has a treat ready for Fern. The rest of the staff seem to enjoy seeing Fern as much as the clients -Geri in the food bank and Ashley at the resource desk. Ashley actually made a knitted cowl for Fern to wear in the winter to keep warm.

The clients who come in to TGP will get a hug from Fern – maybe the only hug they get all week. Fern is a great hugger and she can even “talk”. Some ladies wondered what she was saying. I told them that she is telling them to have a great day, be safe, and that we hope to see them again very soon. The ladies smile.



Fern seems to feel the sadness and stress some of the women feel. However, Fern can make them smile and clap their hands when she stands on her hind legs and does her little dance. What could possibly be better than that?

After our visit it doesn't take Fern long to fall asleep on our way home. A visit well done – a good long sleep well deserved.

