



Therapy Animals of Utah The Story of Our Logo

Tommy was sullen, withdrawn and violent. The little boy had a history of neglect, abandonment and abuse. His deeply disturbed father had brutally killed animals on the kitchen table in front of him in an attempt to intimidate and control him. Taken from the horrifying situation, the child had been placed in a series of foster homes, but each time his angry, violent behavior frightened even seasoned foster parents. He had killed family pets and animals that strayed near him and threatened his foster parents and other children. Again and again he was given a chance to bond and become part of a family, and again and again he had sabotaged the opportunity. Tommy had become experienced at distancing people, isolating himself and avoiding attachment to anyone or anything. Finally he was confined in a residential treatment program, a last hope for him to learn to live a normal life.

Mark, Tommy's therapist, asked Lana Davis and her German shepherd Grizzly to participate in animal-assisted therapy sessions in hope that bringing an animal into the treatment program might create an opportunity for the child to experience unconditional acceptance and nurturing. Lana committed to working with the child for as long as it took to find out if the treatment would work, or until the Tommy left the program. The two began to meet weekly with the child and therapist.

It was a long, difficult journey. On the first visit, Tommy wandered around the room, silently picking up toys and throwing them or slamming them down, ignoring the therapist, Lana and Grizzly. However, when Grizzly stood up and walked toward the door, his curiosity was piqued and approached the large animal. The two of them began a conversation of quiet woofs and words, and Tommy began to tell Grizzly about the other children on the unit, how no one liked him and how he hit and hurt other kids. The dog made quiet, understanding sounds as the boy sat beside him and a relationship began.

After months of work, Tommy began to change. The treatment team was joined by Judy Mills and her beautiful white Persian cat Cody, and Tommy was able to begin to attach not only to Grizzly, but also to Cody, Mark, Lana and Judy.

After one especially difficult day on the unit, Tommy came to therapy quiet and unhappy again. Lana suggested that they take some time just to rest with the animals. Tommy lay on his side, and Grizzly came over and lay at his back, curled around him.



Lana lay behind Grizzly. Cody curled up at Tommy's stomach, and Judy lay on her side facing the boy and curling near her cat. Mark lay on his side near Tommy's head, completing the circle. Silently, peacefully, the animals and people breathed together for what seemed like a long, long time.

Near the end of the session, Tommy began to stir and sat up. Grizzly sat up beside him, and Tommy put his arm around the big dog. Cody stood up and wrapped his beautiful white body around the boy as the three looked together out of the floor-length window of the therapy room. Because of the unconditional love of animals, Tommy was healing and able to look forward to a future.

Inspired by this experience, artist Judy Mills crafted the logo of Therapy Animals of Utah. Like Tommy surrounded by Grizzly and Cody's love and acceptance, we look with our clients to a future where animals are highly valued as teachers, healers and essential contributors to human health and well-being.