

Therapy dog brings smiles to patients

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Local News



Three-year-old Jack Russell Rey visits Victoria Rasho. Picture: Chris Lane

At what is often an unspeakable time for patients and their families, Rey talks a different language. The language of love.

Rey - a three-year-old Jack Russell - is a frequent visitor to Liverpool Hospital's palliative care patients. Together with another PAWS Pet Therapy pooch Bunny they roam the corridors of Ward 4C and sit on the bed with patients who request a cuddle.

The smiles Rey generates as she peeks her wet, black nose into rooms are infectious. The pooches are treated like rock stars as they enter the ward with staff always on hand to say hello.



Maria Bakic says hello to Rey. Picture: Chris Lane

On Wednesday during National Palliative Care Week, the *Champion* were invited to join Rey and her goofy smile, wagging tail and huge heart as she did her rounds. Led by PAWS Pet Therapy volunteer Jody Asquith she had one mission: to spread love to people with life-threatening illnesses.

First-up was Victoria Rasho of Horsley Park who has motor neurone disease. She then went to visit Smithfield resident Maria Bakic.

The results were the same: big smiles and lots of love to the patients and their families.

Liverpool Hospital Palliative Care End of Life Care coordinator Naomi Ellis said people don't have to speak to see the effect the dogs have.

"Look at Victoria's smile, it is worth a thousands words," she said.

"Patients can be here for days, weeks or months on end so it is like a little bit of home especially for those who have animals and it is a great distraction from the clinical environment.

"Pet therapy is great for the patients but also the families as well. The relatives get just as much out of it as the patients."



Victoria Rasho with PAWS Pet Therapy's Jody Asquith and Rey. Picture: Chris Lane

PAWS Pet Therapy is a not-for-profit charitable organisation which trains volunteers and their pooches to provide pet-assisted therapy to people in hospital, nursing homes, and university.

The organisation also runs a Paw'n'Tales program which helps children with reading difficulties increase their literacy skills and confidence by reading to a dog.

Palliative care volunteers have helped fund PAWS Pet Therapy's visits which started this year.