Comfort Dogs & Club Comfort

Jen Marr / Mary Perry / Addie Comfort Dog
Commonalities

- All were suffering from isolation & loneliness – some not visibly
- All were hesitant and not confident in reaching out to friends, family and to others who could help them
- All were eager or willing to spend more time helping others
- All have shown remarkable improvement and are compassionately connecting with others
Background

- Deployment to Sandy Hook School. Only K9’s allowed in the school.
- Led to many deployments in neighboring school districts and the involvement of numerous crisis response teams.
- Observed countless tragedies from the other side of a dog leash for over 4 years.
- Realized more has to be done to equip people to comfort others.
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So Lonely I Could Die

Social isolation, loneliness could be greater threat to public health than obesity, researchers say

WASHINGTON — Loneliness and social isolation may represent a greater public health hazard than obesity, and their impact has been growing and will continue to grow, according to research presented at the 125th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association.

“Being connected to others socially is widely considered a fundamental human need — crucial to both well-being and survival. Extreme examples show infants in custodial care who lack human contact fail to thrive and often die, and indeed, social isolation or solitary confinement has been used as a form of punishment,” said Julianne Holt-Lunstad, PhD, professor of psychology at Brigham Young University. “Yet an increasing portion of the U.S. population now experiences isolation regularly.”

“...a greater priority can be placed on research to tackle this... For instance, greater emphasis could be placed on social skills training for children in schools...”
Lessons learned from the Comfort Dogs

- They put you first, not focused on self
- They listen
- They don’t judge or hold grudges
- They are never at a loss for words
- They comfort anyone and everyone
- They are present
- They show up
- They are relational
What trends did we observe?

- Those hurting are feeling more isolated than ever
- Pace of life is changing
- Front loaded support / “Check it off the list” Kindness
- People really want to help others, they just don’t know how
- Social Media & Technology change the way people respond to those who are hurting
- True across all age groups
Barriers to comforting others

Awkward Zone™

- Fear (rejection / don’t want to make it worse)
- Paralyzing Perfectionism
- Group Think / Image
- Avoidance - Priorities / Requires Energy
- Passivity – Assume others will do it better
- Emotional reactive event, not in control of timing (unlike RAK’s)
- Does not come naturally – UNcomfortABLE
- Lack of Awareness / Assuming people are ok
- Caregiving Fatigue
- Lack of Knowledge – Show me how
Empathy is foundational to the ability to resolve conflict, collaborate in teams, align interests, listen effectively, make decisions, solve problems and drive change.

A Changemaking Skill that is losing its way through lack of connection
To have empathy, we have to notice and understand others' feelings, but that isn’t good enough. **We also need to care about them.**

We all sometimes fall into the **empathy-action gap**, when you care about a person... but don’t do anything to help
EVERYDAY LIFE

AWARENESS

INITIATIVE

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

UNcomfortABLE

REQUIRES ENERGY

OUT OF "COMFORT ZONE"

BARRIERS:

• DON’T KNOW WHAT TO SAY OR DO
• SHOW ME HOW
• DON’T WANT TO MAKE IT WORSE
• FEEL AWKWARD

* TEACH/EQUIP
* INTENTIONAL ACTION

COMFORT
Club Comfort is dedicated to teaching, sharing and encouraging people of all ages to provide comfort to those around them.
Practice the Paws

Paws to Remember

Paws for Thought

Paws to Create

Paws to Give

Paws to Reflect
Two groups of 20 middle schoolers, one met with Comfort Dog.
The groups met alternating weeks for 8 weeks plus wrap up party.
Parallel Capstone Project Study with WCSU Senior Marketing Class to study scalability of program.
1. Everyone Belongs Here
2. We have all made mistakes – here the slate is clean
3. We assume the best in each other
4. We support and care for each other
5. We will choose to make a difference in the lives of others
6. We will be ready for each meeting and follow through on take home tasks
1. Why Comfort ~ Comfort vs Kindness
2. Lessons we learn from the comfort dogs / pets
3. Circle of Comfort – Intentional Action
4. Ripples of Comfort
5. Everyone you know has a problem you don’t know about
6. Community Comfort
7. Comfort & Technology
8. Appreciative Comfort
Results across both groups were consistent. Program worked equally with or without a K9 present

100% positive feedback from students, parents, staff & community

The 8 lessons opened the kid’s world to all who are hurting, including the invisible and those they don’t know

The Awkward Zone™ is real. One way to break through it is to require an action that gets us out of our comfort zone and experiencing authentic connection

Repetition, consistency and a safe environment allow people to get comfortable, engage with each other, open up & trust each other

In many cases, students with deep hidden hurts shared how they felt

Helping others really does help ourselves

Increased empathy & compassion were evident with every participant
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