

Animal Reiki Program Report

For Leon by Ann Marie and Lori

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Animals and staff at the Nanaimo shelter have embraced their Reiki program. Healing sessions have been offered by Animal Reiki practitioners Ann Marie and Lori several times each week for the past two years. Our SPCA is one of two Canadian shelters that hold membership in the Shelter Animal Reiki Association. "SARA" ⁽¹⁾ is a non-profit, international organization that offers education, promotes ethical approaches to use when working with Reiki and animals and provides a standardized approach to implementing Reiki programs in shelters.

Reiki is an ancient form of energy healing that originated in Japan and is passed on from master to student – it is often translated as "universal life energy". As a holistic healing system, it can help heal physical, emotional, mental and spiritual challenges. Traditionally, Reiki practice has focused on people, however the field of animal Reiki has grown significantly over the past ten years. Animal Reiki practitioners now volunteer in shelters in every Canadian province and in many countries around the world. An experienced Reiki practitioner who wants to work with animals can complete additional training with a local teacher or on-line with a teacher such as Kathleen Prasad of "Animal Reiki Source" in California. ⁽²⁾

Reiki is helpful for animals that are stressed, traumatized, ill or dying. It also promotes relaxation, physical health and emotional wellbeing in healthy animals. Reiki is gentle, non-invasive and respectful of the animal's right to choose its level of participation. To offer an animal Reiki, the practitioner does not need



to touch or confine it. The animal determines how close to the person they want to sit or lie. Some jump into your lap or push a body part into your hands, actively seeking healing. Others choose to lie five or ten feet away and receive the energy from that distance. And sometimes, an animal clearly indicates it does not want to participate by moving to the far side of the kennel or running off to play.

Reiki sessions at our shelter last anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour. Sometimes it is best for us

to treat an animal one-on-one in a quiet room but most times, we sit in the kennel corridor or in the big cat room and offer Reiki to all the animals in the space. In good weather, we offer Reiki outdoors and animals that want to participate gather around.

Staff members often tell us they know when we are in the building because the kennel area is quiet. From our perspective, we always enjoy observing how quickly the barking stops when the dogs that recognize us start to settle, in anticipation of their Reiki session. We greet each dog and let them know they can choose to accept as much or little Reiki as they want. One by one, these beautiful creatures begin to sit or lie down on their beds. As the session proceeds, some start to yawn. Soon, it's all quiet and within a few minutes most dogs are enjoying a "Reiki doze".

The Nanaimo staff is an amazing team. As they saw the benefits of Reiki, especially for animals with challenges that hinder adoption, they began directing us to dogs and cats in special need. Our work is rewarding and exciting and we'd like to share a few stories about animals that have been our "Reiki teachers". Yes, we learn much from the animals we come to help and heal.



Patches was a beautiful, young border collie cross that was extremely hyperactive and very anxious. He had been in the shelter for a number of months and we knew he would be difficult to place for adoption. We decided to offer Reiki to Patches four days in a row. Four consecutive sessions is a special way of treating animals that are stressed and traumatized. During the first session, Patches chewed his squeaky toy continually and raced around his kennel for the hour. The next afternoon he was quieter but still highly distractible. At the third session, he lay down as soon as we entered the kennel and watched us calmly as we called Reiki into the space. On the fourth day, he was quiet and relaxed and enjoyed a long Reiki doze. Imagine our delight when we learned that Patches was adopted on Friday, the following day! Grayson also has a special place in our hearts. One of the staff members asked us to see this beautiful cat because he was unwell and seemed depressed. Grayson had suddenly become ill while at a satellite adoption centre. He saw the vet and returned to our shelter without a clear diagnosis. When Lori welcomed Reiki into the medical room, Grayson was lying at the back of kennel. Within a couple of minutes, he sat up, slowly came forward in the kennel and pressed himself against the door. Lori recognized that he wanted closer contact and moved towards the kennel. At that point, Grayson pulled himself up to a tall sitting position and made strong eye contact. Suddenly Lori experienced an overwhelming sense of sadness being released by the cat. This was an example of how Reiki can help an animal resolve pent-up emotions such as grief and depression. Within a few days Grayson recovered his health and was adopted.

Perhaps the most interesting story we can share is that of little Lucy, a tiny abandoned kitten that was the only one in her litter to be rescued. Staff hand fed her, and from the beginning, Lucy was feisty and spirited, to say the least. She would bite, scratch, hiss and spit at anyone who touched her. No one could imagine that Lucy would be adoptable and staff asked if Reiki might help her. Lucy participated in seven Reiki sessions and for the first six times, she would sit facing away from the practitioner, taking every opportunity to bite and scratch. Part way into the seventh Reiki session, we realized that Lucy had not tried to bite or scratch once. After a few minutes, Lucy turned to face the practitioner, making eye contact for the first time. Then she stretched out and relaxed. Lucy seemed ready to let Reiki help her find her centre. For the two days following, staff noted that Lucy was no longer biting or scratching. The following weekend she was adopted by a family who fell in love with her on first meeting. That was several months ago, and Lucy's forever home reports that she is a gentle, playful and happy cat.

Sometimes the ending for which we are hoping does not happen. Two of our beloved dogs that had major anxiety issues and received many Reiki treatments were never able to be adopted out. The emotion around some of these situations is challenging for us all but it reminds us that we don't control outcomes – that Reiki works for the highest good of the animal. We cannot impose our goals on Reiki – we can only welcome it in.

Another way we are reminded that we do not control the healing energy is that we see animals choosing where they will sit or lie to receive Reiki. In the yard, Ann Marie often offered Reiki to three of our favourite dogs, Tanner, Willa and Trinity. All three enjoyed Reiki and they quickly settle into their favourite places – close, closer and a little farther away.



Reiki is not a substitute for professional veterinary treatment. It is a non-medical therapy that compliments and supports all other healing therapies.⁽³⁾ We feel honoured to be able to offer Reiki to animals that have suffered abuse and trauma. We thank you, the staff and the volunteers for your support which helps makes our program what it is.

Resources and Reading

1. Shelter Animal Reiki Association (SARA). www.shelteranimalreikiassociation.org
2. Animal Reiki Source. www.animalreikisource.com
3. Fulton, E. and Prasad, K. (2006). Animal Reiki. Using Energy to Heal the Animals in Your Life. Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press.
4. Prasad, K. (2012). Reiki for Dogs. Using Spiritual Energy to Heal and Vitalize Man's Best Friend. Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press.