



WILLO

Therapy dog offers comfort to hospice patients



Photos by Tracy Klimek/New Jersey Herald

Ellie Benz, above top, fixes the bandana on her therapy dog Willo, an Irish water spaniel, before visiting with patients at the Karen Ann Quinlan Home for Hospice in Fredon.

Above, Ellie and Willo visit with therapy musician, Julia Craig of Phillipsburg as they visit a patient.



Every Friday, patients at the Karen Ann Quinlan Home for Hospice are visited by Willo, a 3-year-old Irish water spaniel.

Accompanied by her owner, Ellie Benz, of Newton, Willo, was certified as a therapy dog in February of 2015 and began visiting the hospice the following month.

"I just thought she had the right temperament for it. My other two dogs are boisterous and I wouldn't want to foist them off on anybody," Benz said.

Benz said Willo is the perfect fit for the job. Her name is short for will-o'-the-wisp, she said, referring to the expression for the so-called ghost light.

"We sign in. I ask the staff if anyone would like a visit or not. There are people who definitely don't want to be bothered," Benz said. If invited in, "We place a chair up next to the bed, Benz said. The more they like dogs, the more interactive she is."

On occasion, a sleeping patient has been awakened by Willo licking their hand.

"The farther along they are in their journey, she becomes attuned to that. It's fascinating stuff. I'm in awe of it," she said.

Willo not only provides comfort, but being around her can also help relieve a patient's stress, Benz said.

"She's very, very soft and curly. People just love to touch her," Benz said.

● **KAREN ANN QUINLAN HOSPICE**, 99 Sparta Avenue, Newton can be reached 24 hours a day at 800-882-1117. Information about the organization and programs can be found at www.karenannquinlanhospice.org or visit them at njherald.com/healthconnections.