

# 'Man's best friend' therapeutic for stressed students

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When Las Positas instructor, Stephanie Tyler, steps into her 107 math class she is accompanied by Bruster, her stress therapist – a 6-year-old German Shepherd.

As the class proceeds, Bruster makes his rounds. Going from one student to the other, he brings a sense of calm and peace to everyone.

Tyler rescued Bruster when he was 2, wandering around a dirt road in the mountains Abandoned and neglected, Bruster was a survivalist, and as a survivalist, learned to adapt to stressful conditions.

Taken in by Tyler and her family, who loved and cared for him, Bruster is now paying it forward.

"Bruster loves coming here to LPC. He get's so excited to see the students," shared Tyler.

Tyler said that last semester was the first time she brought Bruster with her to every class. In comparison, the difference was notable with attendance and productivity better than her prior classes.

Therapy dogs have a positive history with the college, which stretches back several years.

In Apr. 2015, LPC Veterans Center Coordinator Todd Steffen reached out to Patricia H. Wheeler, author of "Successful Tails-The Wonders of Therapy Dogs." Steffen had observed how effective her dogs were at working with veterans in the community, so invited her to bring them

to the campus.

After several visits, Kelly Peters in the LPC Health and Wellness Center invited Wheeler after hearing how helpful the dogs were with the students. Since then, Wheeler has been coming with the other handlers for LPC campus events as well as regularly coming to the LPC Veterans resource center every first and third Tues. of the month.

These efforts led to Wheeler receiving an award from LPC for the Alliance of Therapy Dog teams on May 26, 2017.

The benefits of these companion dogs, whether a service dog, a therapy dog or an emotional support animal, is to help the recipient in some physical, or emotional manner.

Depression and anxiety run high on college campuses among students with all the pressure to perform. PTSD, caused from various reasons, is also a leading problem for many students.

In support of students who struggle with these issues specifically, the Health Center offers support and information. They also offer the students interactions with these lovable furry friends during their monthly visits. One of the main attractions is Nash.

Nash, a registered Therapy Dog, is an enormous Newfoundland breed and was a huge attraction. Students Ashley DeCarvalho and Jessica Savage were instantly drawn to him.

Student after student approached the dogs outside the



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Ashley DeCarvalho and Jessica Savage kneel down next to Nash, the Newfoundland breed service dog on Oct. 11, 2017. Nash is a part of the program to help students deal with stress.

cafeteria last Wednesday during one of the team's campus visits. Smiles and laughter are the automatic reactions to these adorable pups.

According to "Please Don't Pet Me," an organization promoting the understanding and respect for Service Dogs, explains the differences between the titles.

A service dog, serves as both a companion and a teammate to help their partners with safety concerns and limitations, is trained individually, specifically for their handler's needs and disabilities.

A therapy dog receives expansive training to provide physi-

ological and psychological therapy to individuals outside of their handlers themselves, usually their owners.

There are no training requirements for emotional support animals. They are simply there to provide companionship and comfort. They are great help to anyone with a physical or mental disability based on the unconditional love they give naturally.

LPC student and biology major, Timothy Hagerty brings his emotional support dog on campus. He takes his 6 year old German Shepherd, Trinity, everywhere he goes.

Hagerty spent this past sum-

mer homeless, sleeping in his car, after he was evicted. Hagerty, who suffers from both anxiety and depression, explained how Trinity was his source of companionship and comfort throughout this difficult scenario.

"One night when it was cold, Trinity cuddled up close to me and I felt her warmth. It made all the difference in the world," Hagerty said.

Whether it's a more commonly shared stress factor, such as taking a math class, or a life altering circumstance where a student finds themselves homeless, these canines are here to help.



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Patricia Wheeler stands with service dog Maddie in the quad outside the 1600 building. Wheeler comes regularly to LPC so students meet Maddie.



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Students of math 107 gather around their teacher Stephanie Tyler and her dog Bruster in class on Oct. 17, 2017. Bruster is a common part of the class, regularly coming up to students in the room.