

# Villa Samson: an ongoing tale of hope and smiles

For patients, time in hospital often means temporarily cutting ties with their daily lives – all the more so with their pets. Yet, studies show that the presence of pets is important for hospitalised patients' well-being, promoting healing and a shorter hospital stay in some cases. Children commonly say they miss their cat or dog, so a visit from their pet can brighten up their day, enabling them to experience again the unconditional love and acceptance they receive from their pet. It also helps to make the hospital environment more comfortable and less stressful. For lonely, older patients, their pet is frequently their family, and they worry about what is happening to their companion while missing the relationship and affection derived from their bond. In both cases, access to the family pet can help to provide a distraction from illness and hospitalisation.

**UZ Brussels University Hospital** was the first hospital in **Belgium** to create and build its own dedicated, specially equipped environment for animal-assisted therapy with dogs and cats.

**Villa Samson** is a pleasant, six-room setting where patients can choose to meet up with their family and their own pets, or to benefit from a pet therapy session with either cats or dogs. There are 2 Cavalier King Charles, Lili and Quito that are trained for therapy.

Our Purina business and team in Belgium has supported this project since its inception four years ago, not merely on a financial basis but also through the passionate commitment of our employees. Our experts provided practical and planning advice for the project and shared our expertise on how best to design the facilities to





## CASE STUDY



The pet-human bond

allow patients to be with their pets in a pleasant, soothing and reassuring environment. From the very first, our team organised events and fundraisers to help with the building costs. When it was up and running, they developed a volunteer programme during visiting hours and transported pets from patients' homes to the villa. They have also carried out social media campaigns for Villa Samson.

To support even more Villa Samson's daily activities, Purina offers to its employees the possibility of volunteering two half working days per year at the Villa. Purina and other volunteers facilitated a visit of 50 children who had been referred by UZ medical staff. The children were shown around the villa and spent time with Misty and Luna, the resident Maine Coone cats, and with Kasjmir and Zsa – two bobtail cats, who were especially invited for the day. We also supply pet food for the dogs and cats that live at or visit Villa Samson.

Our vision for the future is to help researchers quantify scientifically the benefits that pets have on patients. Today the benefits are visible on patient's face, but we want to go even further with quantified research.

**In the months since opening, Villa Samson has shown huge benefits with more than 40 patients having been visited by their pets and over 500 patients from different departments visiting Villa Samson's dogs and cats. An overwhelming number of emotional testimonials, from both family and patients, have cited many positive impacts on their healing process resulting from having access to the pets in the Villa.**



## CASE STUDY

# Helping VITA train assistance dogs in Euskirchen

For 15 years our team in **Germany** has supported VITA Assistenzhunde e.V. in the training of assistance dogs to help disabled people manage life more easily. In 2018, Purina organised a Social Day at the VITA office to help rebuild and restore infrastructure.

Furthermore, we have supported the cost of training one assistance dog every year as well as being a main sponsor of the organisation's charity gala which involved over 1,000 guests from government, business and society. In 2018, this event raised over €400,000 to support **VITA's** work. For Purina, this is a great way to engage with our stakeholders and celebrate the contribution and role of pets in our society.





# Supporting assistance dogs in Spain

**P**urina has supported research into dog-assisted therapies at **Barcelona's Sant Joan de Déu Hospital** – the first Spanish hospital in **Spain** to have an assistance dog unit. Sant Joan de Déu now has 12 therapy dogs which collaborate with medical staff in mental health, paediatrics and emergency units, helping children adapt to hospital facilities and medical procedures that may cause stress.

The presence of therapy dogs helps reassure and distract children at critical moments. The dogs go into outpatient clinic waiting rooms to interact with families and children, bringing smiles to children's faces, making their waiting times seem shorter and letting them forget their pain for a little while.

The research team, formed of health professionals from Sant Joan de Déu Hospital along with canine trainers from CTAC, have developed a study on the effect of dog-assisted interventions in paediatrics and its benefits on hospitalised patients. This report has been possible thanks to Purina collaboration and the research grant awarded to the hospital.

In addition, **Rey Juan Carlos University** and **Hospital Niño Jesús** have begun a research collaboration measuring the benefits and impacts of therapy dogs on children with eating disorders. The programme, which Purina joined in March 2018, has the dogs engaging with child patients in a 50-minute session once weekly.





## CASE STUDY

To date, the study has shown that involving animals as a complementary part of care is highly beneficial: 86.5% of parents agree that while their child is playing with the dogs the anguish they feel at the doctor's appointment is significantly lower; 96.5% of parents consider their children are more relaxed when the medical visit starts and 95% agreed that their child's mood improved thanks to the dogs.

Partial results from the research undertaken at Hospital Niño Jesús suggests that patients in the programme have more initiative, take more responsibility, volunteer and interact with other patients more since dogs have become part of their routine. They have also seen a reduction in anxiety and symptoms of depression along with an increase in self-esteem in the teenagers who engaged in assisted therapies with dogs. We look forward to seeing the final results in 2019.



The pet-human bond





## CASE STUDY

# Canistherapy in Ukraine

In early 2017, our team in **Ukraine** created partnerships with dog therapists and sponsored three canine therapy events for children with varying disabilities. These events helped the families with children requiring rehabilitation to meet with dog trainers and therapist dogs in friendly settings.

We also hosted a two-week summer camp for children on the autism spectrum who spent time with dog therapists. A psychologist from their specialist school tested the children before and after the camp, and recorded positive dynamic shifts in their condition.

We created the **First International Canine Therapy Conference** for dog behaviour experts, psychologists, students, parents from all over Ukraine and a guest speaker, the president of the **Lithuania Canistherapy Association**. The conference was successful in sharing best practice in canine therapy development from different parts of Ukraine.



In 2018, we formed a partnership with **Vidchuy**, an organisation supporting deaf people in Ukraine. Some deaf children struggle to accept their disability, facing tough psychological reactions and canine therapy is used as part of their rehabilitation process.

Purina's support also helped to establish the **Ukrainian Association of Canistherapy**, an important milestone in promoting the therapy, paving the way towards government regulation through the certification of dog therapists.



## CASE STUDY



The pet-human bond

## Canine Partners in the UK

Since 2000, our Purina team in the **UK** have been supporting Canine Partners who provide and train assistance dogs to transform the lives of people with disabilities.

These amazing dogs are trained to help with everyday tasks such as opening and closing doors, unloading the washing machine, picking up dropped items, getting their owner dressed and undressed, pressing buttons and switches, and raising the alarm in an emergency

They provide their partners with increased independence, quality of life, confidence, routine and companionship. As part of our partnership with Canine Partners, every year we supply subsidised food for these truly remarkable dogs helping to ensure they receive a healthy, well-balanced diet whilst they receive their training.

“We are looking forward to embarking on our 20th year in partnership with Purina. It’s staggering what we have been able to achieve as a result of Purina’s long-standing support. It has enabled us to have certainty of both charitable funding and quality food as we train and develop our assistance dogs from young puppies through to fully-fledged Canine Partners. There is a tremendous breadth to our relationship, apart from vital funding, we benefit from the help of volunteers at our events, dog treats as prizes at our annual dog shows and the opportunity to proudly promote our relationship on our uniforms and dog jackets. We are also proud members of the Pets at Work Alliance and we have valued their expertise in providing nutritional advice and training to our teams. We plan to tap into more of Purina’s expertise in the coming years as we grow as an organisation. At the start of 2019 there were **over 430 adults with physical disabilities** across the UK enjoying the support of an assistance dog trained by Canine Partners. **Purina’s support has been integral to helping us transform their lives so each day they can enjoy greater independence and the confidence to achieve their full potential.**”

**Nicola Martin**

Chief Executive Officer Canine Partners