

# 'Magic' helps NIC students de-stress

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North Island College used Magic to help students de-stress at this time of the year.

Faced with a myriad of project deadlines and final exams, it was what many students needed. However, it was not the hocus pocus kind of assistance.

The college used dog-therapy as a way to relieve students of their tensions, pressures and stresses.

The dog that melted the hearts of many at the school is named Magic. He has lived up to his name because he has indeed performed wonders for many students who at this time are deeply immersed in their studies at the North Island College library.

By merely stroking his white fur and the way he reciprocates by putting his paw on their arms, helped make their stresses at that one moment vanish. It is magical.

"It definitely works," said Corey O'Connell, a first year nursing student. "It's nice to have something to de-stress and dogs are really a good thing. It's relaxing and not thinking about exams just for a little while."

Shanti Payne enjoys how Magic reacts to their touch and makes her feel that everything is going to be ok.

"I just like how dogs love people more than they love themselves," said Payne, who is also a nursing student. "They are willing to put out a paw, hug you and let you do whatever you want to do to them. It's really nice."

Faith Daybutch, a psychology student, said Magic's presence provides them with a soothing distraction from their tenuous school work.

"I have a couple of dogs at home and any time I am stressed out, they calm me, they cuddle me. I just feel really love I guess," said Daybutch. "I find them comforting."

Magic is one of St. John's Ambulance's 38 therapy dogs working in the Comox Valley. He was invited by Kyra Devers, a fourth year nursing student, who is doing research on pet therapy.

Devers said there's scientific evidence that proves petting a pooch can reduce blood pressure, stress and bad vibes and enhances memory retention.

As she wanted to see the therapy in action and corresponding results, Devers asked Dave Fletcher, director of the St. Johns' Therapy Dog program, to bring Magic to the campus during exam week.

"For students who are super stressed with exams, to take that five, ten minutes to pet the dogs really helps with them," said Devers, who plans to pass on this project to another student next semester with some alterations, focusing on what worked and what didn't.

Devers spent a month promoting her "Paws from everything, Come Pet a Pooch." The reception it received was satisfying to Devers. On Tuesday, the library had



NIC students enjoy their visit with therapy dog 'Magic' and handler Dave Fletcher

over 70 students who came out to pet Magic and another therapy dog, Ozzie, and also fed them dog biscuits that were handed out at the cafeteria.

"It was pretty great," said Devers.

Fletcher, who initiated dog therapy here in the Comox Valley, calls the working canines "emotional support dogs."

At present, the well-trained pooches are working at St. Joseph's Hospital in both The Views and psych ward, Glacier View Lodge, Casa Loma Seniors' Village, Cumberland Care and Abbeyfield House. St. John's also offer a children's program and brought the dogs to the schools — Mark Isfeld and G.P. Vanier secondary schools, and at five elementary schools where kids who are embarrassed to read to an adults can practice their reading to the dog.

"Some teachers reported up to 80 per cent of the students have shown improvements in the kids' responses," said Fletcher.

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