

Andy's Isolation Diary

Therapy Dogs and the Thrapston Dog Whisperer during Lockdown

During my last episode of severe mental illness I can remember the time a "Therapy Dog" was brought along to Kettering Mind, which I was attending a couple of days a week. I can also remember how much the presence of this dog was appreciated by all concerned.

Stroking and being in the company of a dog or a similar pet can certainly support more positive emotions and provide company for those who are totally alone. As someone who always finds mindfulness difficult when unwell I found stroking the dog helped distract me from the turmoil of negative thoughts and anxiety I was experiencing and for a time provided me with some respite from my most negative emotions.

During this current Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown the isolation for many has been hugely challenging and it's also provided me with a reminder of how positive the company of a loved pet, like a dog, can be for a person's mental health.

After five weeks of "lockdown" I found Homes Under the Hammer and Come Dine With Me were no longer floating my boat and I was also concerned to find the respite provided by the commercial breaks was increasingly being undermined by the numerous adverts for bladder leak products and similar issues. I wouldn't over estimate the trauma but it's sufficient to say that I'll never walk past men or women of a certain age again without first glancing down to see if they require an urgent visit to the dry cleaners.

When my smart phone revealed my average daily steps for the month of April to be a staggering 86 I immediately downloaded the "Couch to 5K App" before I morphed even closer to that of a Sumo wrestler. Unfortunately the App did not come with an instruction sheet telling me how to get off the couch in the first place.

Given my indolence and the fact my total garden area consists of about three square metres of shared concrete back courtyard you will probably appreciate my initial concern when it became clear I'd have to step in and look after a friend's dog while she was in hospital.

Skye is a four year old Irish rescue dog that I'd brought for my friend to provide some daily company for her. I now wondered how the dog would be and how I would cope looking after her.

I remember, during that first early morning walk, wondering how I'd got myself into this situation particularly when I was bending down at 7.30am in Islip Village high street to bag up the breakfast that Skye had just parked on the floor. I was also astonished how many times she stopped for a sniff of this or that before releasing a thimbleful of wee to mark the occasion. If this dog is ever able to book a package holiday again I'm certain it's reading book of choice will be "Fifty Shades of Urine." (continued on following page)

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'The Isolation Diaries' was an idea created by Time to Change Northamptonshire Champions with the aim to reduce loneliness and to make others aware it's OK to not be OK during these turbulent times! If you'd like to submit a 'Day in the Life of Isolation' you can send it to either steph@ketteringmind.org.uk or kizzym@teamworktrust.co.uk and we will circulate to other Champions. You can also attach photos too!