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ANNUAL CRUELTY-FREE ISSUE

BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE IN THE WORLD

Each day the LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs effortlessly gave goodness with their loving and gentle spirit.



LCC Comfort Dogs on a Mission

Comfort Dogs bring a sense of healing to the Parkland Community within hours of the February 14, 2018 mass shooting

BY ANNE LUCAS

WITHIN HOURS OF THE FEBRUARY 14, 2018 MASS SHOOTING at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, Lutheran Church Charities received an invitation to bring the LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs to minister to the students and faculty of the school and surrounding communities. By noon on Thursday the first LCC K-9 Dog, "Jacob Comfort" and his team arrived. He immediately went to work, attending an outdoor vigil in Parkland and standing side by side with officials and clergy, many of who spoke.

By day's end six of the nineteen LCC Comfort Dogs and their teams were on-site at the pop-up memorial built at a park less than a mile away from the high school. Each day the number of people stopping by increased, and the students would return to visit the crosses and stars that marked the memory of their friends and family. Parents brought their children, holding each one a little closer and a little tighter.

The pictures of the LCC Comfort Dogs dutifully lined up in front of the

high school evoked strong emotions. Tim Hetzner, President of LCC, referred to the dogs as "furry counselors". He went on to explain, "The concept is simple. All the dogs are Golden Retrievers; all are acquired at eight weeks and are trained for 12 months. The dogs receive multiple handlers right off the bat so that they will be able to adapt to all ages, handicaps, situations, noises and types of travel. Each dog has a minimum of five handlers, one secondary, one primary and two caregivers. The program has branched out to serve military veterans and police who are in need of comfort dogs due to trauma. The dogs are accompanied by trained members of each group."

These dogs now serve in churches, schools and universities throughout the country ministering to those in need. As Hetzner said, "People have individual crises every day." LCC began with their K-9 Comfort Dog program in 2008. The charity never charges those they serve, and as Hetzner has said, "Together we offer the hands and feet of Jesus to a suffering commu-

nity. We are ready to respond with boots and paws within 24 hours of any crisis or disaster situation we are invited into. We now have over 130 dogs in 25 states and 2000 Disaster Alert volunteers. Whenever and wherever we are invited we bring that mercy, compassion and presence of Jesus to those who are suffering and in need. We listen, share smiles, cry tears and pray with individuals and first responders. The dogs provide the calming effect."

It is a certainty that wherever there is a crisis, LCC Comfort Dogs have responded; be it hurricanes in Haiti, or tragedies in Sandy Hook, Orlando or Dallas. All comfort dogs have business cards, Facebook pages and Twitter accounts, which allow the community to be aware of their presence and availability, as well as establish a personal connection, built on faith and trust.

Within days of being in Parkland, the LCC K-9 Comfort Dog Ministry received an invitation to work with the counselors of Broward County Schools. Broward County School District is no stranger to adversity having successfully navigated it in the recent past. The sixth largest school district in the United States with over 300 schools and approximately 300,000 students, it has just finished recovering from Hurricane Irma and assimilating thousands of students from Puerto Rico as a result of Hurricane Maria. The shooting at Margery Stoneman Douglas High School would present another challenge that no school district would ever want to face.

Many say Golden Retrievers possess a "sixth sense." Few would argue after observing what they inherently gave to the Parkland Community. The dogs are said to have been comfort rugs with a heartbeat. They were a safe haven. They gave what no others could. They were confidential, unconditional, taking no notes, offering no judgment and remaining steadfast in their loyalty. When the high school reopened for half days on February 28, the LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs were there as the doors opened and remained for the after-school activities. All took delight when the handlers gave the dogs the command, PLAY, allowing the students on the tennis team to throw balls for the dogs, bringing welcomed hope and laughter.

Each day the LCC K-9 Comfort Dogs effortlessly gave goodness with their loving and gentle spirit, and their actions spoke beyond measure without saying a word.

Well done, noble friends! 🐾

k9comfort.org

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*LCC K-9 Dog,
"Jacob Comfort".*