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*Elu, a 3-year-old Red Siberian Husky,  
is a Keystone Pet Enhanced Therapy Services  
specially trained volunteer.*

## Pet therapy provides comfort to hospice patients

When Elu walks into Carroll Hospice's Dove House, she is on a mission: to support and comfort. But she is not a typical hospice volunteer. Elu is a therapy dog.

Carroll Hospice's new pet therapy program features volunteers from Keystone Pet Enhanced Therapy Services (KPETS) and Pets on Wheels who bring in specially trained dogs to visit patients and families, says Debbie Zepp, Carroll Hospice's volunteer coordinator.

"The therapy dogs are the best medicine for the moment for our patients, families and staff," says Zepp. "In this environment, at the end of life, the dogs seem to be especially intuitive to people's emotional needs." The pet therapy volunteers have completed volunteer training at Carroll Hospice as well as a screening process through their respective organization.

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KPETS volunteer dogs have been tested to make sure that they have the right temperament, can follow simple commands, are comfortable in unfamiliar surroundings, and more, says Lorain Land, KPETS volunteer.

Thirteen therapy dogs of various breeds and sizes volunteer at Carroll Hospice, says Zepp, and Dove House even has therapy doves for patients who love birds.

Land has been bringing Elu, her 3-year-old Red Siberian Husky, to Dove House, Carroll Hospice's inpatient facility, for about eight months. Sometimes, they visit patients in their rooms if they are receptive, and other times they sit in the family room at Dove House and make themselves available. "We are there for people to take a break and feel that unconditional puppy love," Land says.

Elu and the other pet therapy dogs give patients and families a mental break from the situation at hand and provide them with another aspect of comfort. "It's been absolutely well received," Land says, with their visits often spurring conversations with patients about their own pets.

The therapy dogs also travel to the other locations where Carroll Hospice provides hospice care, such as nursing homes and private residences. They even visited with the children at Camp T.R., Carroll Hospice's weekend grief camp, this June. "It was such a joy," Land recalls. "It was just a little way we could spend some time with them."