

## Children's Hospital adds third therapy dog to team

**Pensacola, Fla.** (November 16, 2019) – Children recovering from an injury or disability will soon have the comfort of a furry friend during outpatient physical, occupational and speech therapy sessions at The Studer Family Children's Hospital at Ascension Sacred Heart, thanks to the addition of the hospital's third facility dog – a female golden retriever named Klio.

Klio's arrival was made possible by a \$100,300 grant from IMPACT 100 Pensacola Bay Area, Inc., which will fund two more facility dogs in the coming months.

Klio's handlers are Ascension Sacred Heart's director of rehabilitation services Julie-Anne Rispoli and pediatric rehabilitation manager Julie Skantz. Rispoli and Skantz received specialized training through Canine Assistants in order to bring Klio to the Children's Hospital.

"Klio is the first of our facility dogs to work exclusively in a rehabilitation setting, and we are excited because there are so many opportunities to utilize her in treating our patients," said Julia Humphries, facility dog coordinator for the Children's Hospital. "By brushing Klio's fur, zipping and unzipping her vest pockets, or completing a winding and weaving obstacle course together, children can improve their fine motor and gross motor skills. To improve range of motion, therapists might have kids throw or roll a ball to Klio or follow her while walking across the room. Working with a facility dog also helps pediatric patients practice communication and social skills."

The Children's Hospital's facility dog program launched in December 2017 with a female golden retriever named Sprout, who works in the Pediatric Infusion Center and outpatient pediatric hematology/oncology office. In September of this year, Sprout was joined by Sherlock, the first of the dogs to be funded by IMPACT 100. Sherlock works with patients and families on the inpatient floors of the Children's Hospital. The hospital's three fully trained and certified facility dogs came to Pensacola from Canine Assistants, a non-profit organization based in Milton, Georgia, that trains and provides service dogs for children and adults with physical disabilities or other special needs.

Klio, Sherlock and Sprout wear their service-dog vest at all times. They are given regular trips outside and breaks in a quiet space at the Children's Hospital. When not at work, the dogs live like normal pets, relaxing and playing with their handlers at home. The dogs are frequently bathed, via donated support from local groomer, Shampooochies, and also have spot clean-ups throughout the day as needed.

"Rehabilitation appointments can be hard work for kids, and having a facility dog fits perfectly into our goal of making the environment fun, enjoyable and stress-free for children," said Julie-Anne Rispoli, Ascension Sacred Heart director of rehabilitation services and one of Klio's handlers. "We know that

children learn and grow best through play. Research has shown that facility dogs significantly increase a child's engagement and desire to participate during a therapy session.”

To support the facility-dog program, please call the Ascension Sacred Heart Foundation at 850-416-4660 or visit [sacred-heart.org/foundation](https://sacred-heart.org/foundation).

### **About Ascension Sacred Heart**

In Florida, Ascension operates Ascension Sacred Heart based in Pensacola and Ascension St. Vincent's based in Jacksonville. Together, Ascension Florida operates seven hospitals and more than 100 other sites of care, and employs more than 11,000 associates. Across the region, Ascension Sacred Heart and Ascension St. Vincent's have served North Florida communities for more than 145 years. In fiscal year 2019, they provided nearly \$180 million in community benefit and care of persons living in poverty. Ascension ([www.ascension.org](http://www.ascension.org)) is a faith-based healthcare organization dedicated to transformation through innovation across the continuum of care. As one of the leading non-profit and Catholic health systems in the U.S., Ascension is committed to delivering compassionate, personalized care to all, with special attention to persons living in poverty and those most vulnerable. Ascension includes approximately 150,000 associates and 40,000 aligned providers. The national health system operates more than 2,600 sites of care – including 150 hospitals and more than 50 senior living facilities – in 20 states and the District of Columbia. For more information on Ascension Sacred Heart, visit <https://healthcare.ascension.org>.

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