

## Dogs ‘don’t let you down’: *UC Berkeley students de-stress with dogs*



### NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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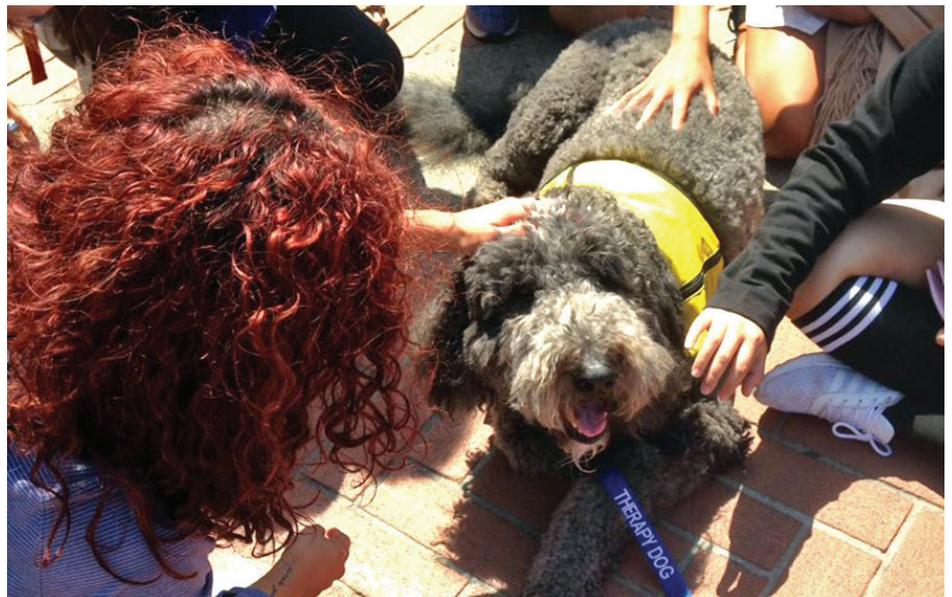
Petting and hugging eight visiting therapy dogs, students de-stressed Tuesday on Sproul Plaza during the first Pet Hug Pack event of the semester.

The Pet Hug Pack, a therapy dog group sponsored by Tony La Russa’s Animal Rescue Foundation, or ARF, features breeds that range from Shih Tzu poodles to Sheepadoodles and visits hospitals, nursing homes and schools to help people de-stress. The Pet Hug Pack visits campus on the first Tuesday of each month during the fall and spring semesters.

ARF, headquartered in Walnut Creek, was founded in 1991 by former Oakland A’s manager Tony La Russa and his wife after they were unable to find a local no-kill shelter for a stray cat that wandered onto the field during a baseball game.

“Some people are homesick for dogs they had to leave at home. Some people have never petted a dog before,” said Wendy Taylor-Tanielian, ARF marketing manager. “We love being able to bring a little bit of joy and unconditional love to campus.”

University Health Services at the Tang Center has partnered with the Pet Hug Pack over the past six years to bring therapy dogs to provide stress relief and “unconditional



love,” according to Meckell Milburn, a health educator at the Tang Center. Pet Hugs is one of the Tang Center’s health campaigns, along with other efforts such as its Be Well Cal initiative.

“A lot of students have had to leave their dogs at home or are living in spaces where they can’t have pets. So it’s really nice to get some pet love,” Milburn said.

Many of the dogs have been coming to campus for the past few years, including Michelle Peete’s dog Daisy, a 5-year-old black lab mix. Marci Allender’s dog Luigi, an 11-year-old rescued Spinone Italiano mix, has come to the event for the past three years.

Campus freshman Kayla Hidayat, who was among a crowd of students petting the dogs, said as she cuddled

Daisy that Pet Hugs has “made her week so far.

Campus junior Sara Chitlik, a student health worker at the Tang Center holding a sign advertising the event to passing students, said that Pet Hugs is one of her favorite events, second to those that advocate for sexual health.

As she bent down to pet a Barbet water dog named Henry, campus freshman Jackie O’Hara described the event as a cathartic experience. Unlike other dogs at the event, this was Henry’s first time coming to campus.

“It’s a good break from my stressful day,” O’Hara said. “No one is nicer than dogs. They don’t let you down like people — or grades.”

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