

I was a career child abuse prosecutor in Prince William County, Virginia. I retired a month ago after 27 1/2 years in the Commonwealth Attorneys ' Office. Our county was always on the cutting edge, having successfully prosecuted the DC Sniper. During my time working with children, I brought the first therapy dog into a courthouse in the Commonwealth. Abby, a German Shepherd, was trained to teach children how to take the oath by raising her front paw and barking when asked if she would tell the whole truth. She taught kids about stranger danger and made the courthouse a friendlier place for children who had been sexually abused.

After Abby was the victim of medical malpractice and had nerves severed to her spine, she was even more effective. Many children who suffer sexual abuse develop enuresis. Seeing an 80 lb shepherd in a diaper helped children open up about their abuse. They would tell Abby things they dare not share with adults.

Our program expanded with Merlin- an abused pointer who had a quiet manner. Both dogs helped not only children but victims whose family members had been murdered. They were present when reviewing an autopsy with parents whose 3 month old was killed. The mother held on to Abby and thanked us for providing comfort.

I recently benefitted from therapy dogs while at TF Green airport leaving my elderly mother who had surgery and has Alzheimer's. It is truly a small thing we can do to help victims of horrific crimes gather strength to testify in a cold, unsympathetic judicial center.

Yours truly,
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