

BUILDING ACADEMIC RETENTION THROUGH K9S

ANNUAL REPORT

YEAR 13

2024/25



BARK

BUILDING ACADEMIC RETENTION THROUGH K9S



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B.A.R.K.'S MISSION STATEMENT

- B.A.R.K. upholds the following core beliefs and values:
1. Community members play a key role in enhancing research initiatives on campus. B.A.R.K. volunteer dog handlers contribute enormously to both student enrichment and research studies carried out through the B.A.R.K. lab.
 2. B.A.R.K. research and drop-in programs provide a framework for mentoring student scholars and volunteers.
 3. B.A.R.K. is committed to supporting diversity and strives to create working climates where everyone is welcome, recognized, and invited to contribute.
 4. B.A.R.K. is committed to community partnerships and supports the efforts of local animal-welfare groups (e.g., Paws it Forward, Kelowna SPCA).
 5. B.A.R.K. is committed to upholding the highest standards of research. This includes adhering to both Human Behavioural Research Ethics Standards and to Animal Welfare Ethics Standards, using experimental designs that include the randomization of participants into treatment and control conditions, and including follow-up assessments of treatment effects as part of methodological designs.
 6. B.A.R.K. is committed to giving back to the university community and pledges to have an active presence in student and university initiatives.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

DR. JOHN-TYLER BINFET

Reflecting on Year 13 in B.A.R.K., there are a number of highlights and milestones that warrant recognition. In addition to our on-campus programming that collectively saw over 6,000 visits, B.A.R.K. participated in a number of sessions held both on the UBCO campus and in the broader community including: Mount Boucherie High School Mental Health Week, the International Day for Persons with Disabilities, and a Social-Emotional Learning Session at Helen Gorman Elementary in the Okanagan Public Schools, SD23. Thanks to Freya and Mikaela, the RCMP program (now in its 7th year) was redesigned and saw a significant uptake from members and staff at the Kelowna Detachment. This innovative program serves as a model nation-wide for detachments keen to reduce the stress of its members. None of the above-mentioned programming would be possible without the hard work of our volunteer handlers who battle traffic to attend sessions, groom and exercise dogs before visits, and engage compassionately with clients in sessions.

The B.A.R.K. lab continues to be prolific in disseminating knowledge about therapy dogs and their impact on human well-being. This year we had 3 peer-reviewed publications and 4 book chapters published (most with student co-authors!). It merits mention that B.A.R.K. was invited to submit two chapters to the prestigious Handbook of Animal Therapy (2026) – the ultimate guide to all things human-animal interactions! In addition to these publications, B.A.R.K. participated in 3 podium presentations and a poster session at the International Society for Anthrozoology in Gloucester, England. Arising from our attendance at this conference, we saw Dr. Mona Mombeck from Paderborn University, Germany visit B.A.R.K. to observe programming and learn about what we do. Dr. Mombeck's visit follows visits from researchers in Calgary, Waterloo, and Swansea (Wales).

Before closing, it's important we recognize the achievements of B.A.R.K. students including Sunny, Rafa, Karen, Madisyn and Kevin. These students juggled the demands of their UBC coursework and gave countless volunteer hours to keep B.A.R.K. programs running. Although we're sad to see some of these students leave us, we know they will remain connected to B.A.R.K. and will always be a part of the B.A.R.K. family. In closing, we express appreciation to all those who donated to B.A.R.K. via Giving Day, to VEDA Exclusive Student Living who, for the past 9 years, has been a staunch financial supporter of programming, and to the Okanagan School of Education in which B.A.R.K. is nested.

Sincerely,
John-Tyler Binfet
B.A.R.K. Founder & Director



PROGRAM REPORT: ON-CAMPUS

By hosting two regular on-campus programs and attending numerous events, B.A.R.K. tracked over **6,000 in-person, on-campus interactions** between students and handler-therapy dog teams. This year, we continued our ever popular drop-in sessions on Friday evenings and expanded the BARK2Go program by adding our new, highly popular, Sawchuk station.

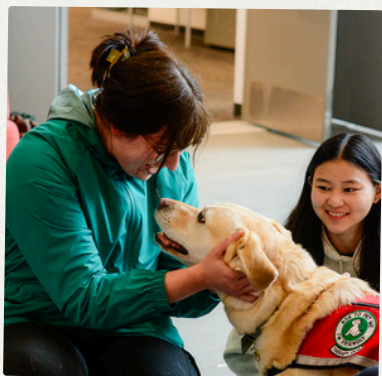
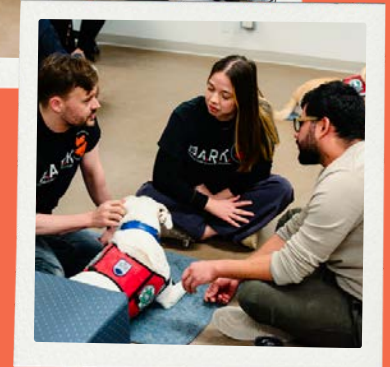
CAMPUS DROP-INS

B.A.R.K. offers regular drop-in sessions on Friday afternoons from 4:30-6:00pm in EME 1123, the Okanagan School of Education's Innovative Learning Centre. There are typically 12 to 14 dogs and handlers involved in each session, along with 15 student volunteers. On average 75 UBC students visit the lab each Friday and interact with therapy dogs and handlers for approximately 30 to 45 minutes per visit.

Total sessions offered **13**

Average number of participants per session **75**

Total number of visits **969**



BARK2GO

B.A.R.K. also offers regular BARK2GO sessions, which sees therapy dog-handler teams, and a student facilitator situated in high traffic locations on campus. Held on Wednesdays in the UNC Building and the Library's flex space, BARK2GO sees 262 UBC students, on average per session. Students typically spend between 5 and 30 minutes per visit.

Total sessions offered **16**

Average number of participants per session **262**

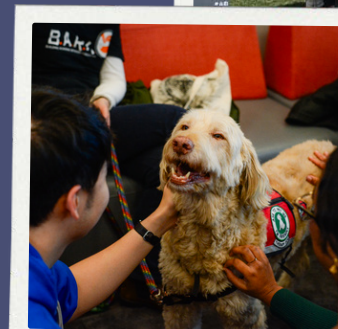
Total number of visits **4,188**

PROGRAM REPORT: ON-CAMPUS

SPECIAL EVENTS

B.A.R.K. participated in numerous campus collaborations, including:

- Community-building sessions with the English Foundation Program
- CREATE Orientation
- Jumpstart Orientation
- THRIVE sessions
- Staff Pit-Stop
- EXAM JAM
- Giving Day
- Weeks of Welcome Drop-ins (Sept & Dec)
- Exam-special BARK2Go sessions with the UBCO library
- International day for Persons with Disabilities event with the Disability Resource Centre



ON-CAMPUS SPECIAL EVENTS + PROGRAM VISITS = 6,084

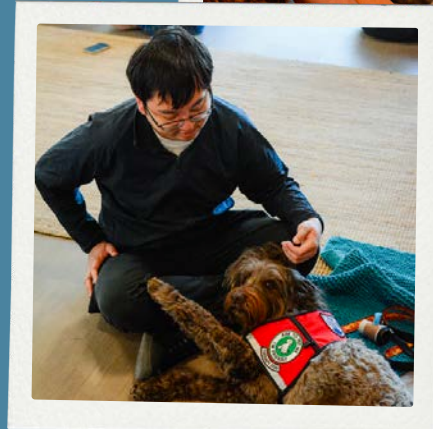
PROGRAM REPORT: COMMUNITY

Thanks to continued partnerships, B.A.R.K. entered a ninth year of programming at VEDA Exclusive Student Living and continued our stress-reduction and community-building sessions on Monday evenings. We also continued our stress-reduction program with the RCMP in the newer, high-traffic location within the detachment to meet the increasing demand to boost the well-being of RCMP members and Civic employees.

VEDA EXCLUSIVE STUDENT LIVING

B.A.R.K. is grateful for the continued sponsorship from VEDA Exclusive Student living. Therapy dogs and their handlers support resident well-being and build community within the cozy setting of the VEDA clubrooms on Monday evenings. Open to everyone, these sessions see approximately 15-30 students per visit.

Total sessions offered **8**
Average number of participants per session **17**
Total number of visits **136**



ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE (RCMP)

B.A.R.K. offers regular drop-in sessions on Thursday mornings at the Kelowna detachment. On average 73 RCMP and Bylaw members and City employees stop by our station, conveniently located in a central hub within the detachment, to de-stress and connect with B.A.R.K. therapy dogs, handlers, and staff.

Total sessions offered **5**
Average number of participants per session **73**
Total number of visits **365**



OFF-CAMPUS SPECIAL EVENTS + PROGRAM VISITS = 744

PROGRAM REPORT: COMMUNITY

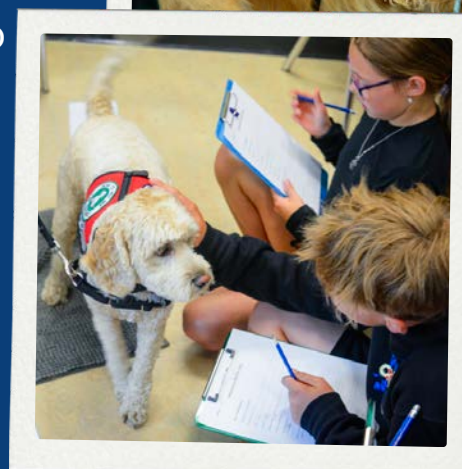
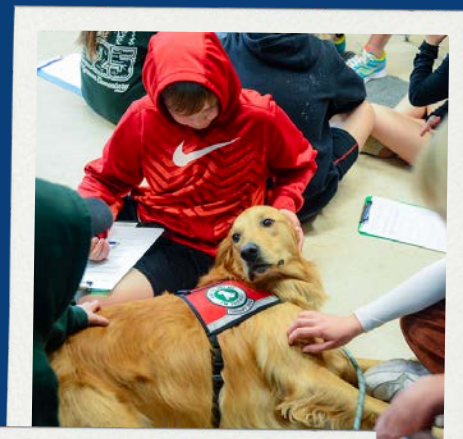
HELEN GORMAN ELEMENTARY

MAY 2025

There was a ripple of excitement through the hallways of Helen Gorman Elementary as B.A.R.K. handler-dog teams trotted into Shannon Kirkey-Stead's Grade 5 classroom for canine-assisted social emotional learning.

"We've been working especially on emotional regulation, observing body language, and reading the room," explained Kirkey-Stead. "We wanted B.A.R.K. to visit because we knew their unique approach, grounded in research, would resonate with our Grade 5s, offering comfort, connection, and a new way to understand emotions and empathy."

"We're grateful for the B.A.R.K. program and the people for giving up your time when you could have been doing something else."
Walker & Brooklyn, Grade 5



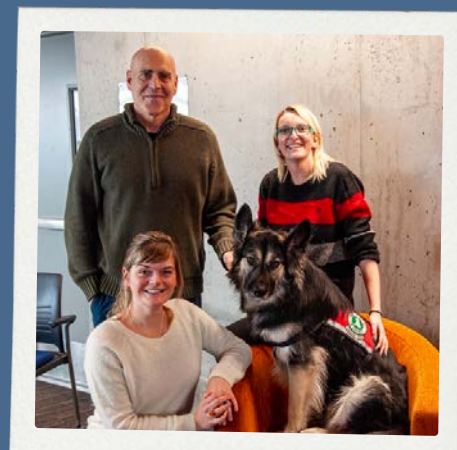
MOUNT BOUCHERIE SECONDARY

MAY 2025

In aid of Mental Health Week, B.A.R.K. collaborated with Mount Boucherie Secondary School to host a drop-in for high school students. Supporting messaging around self-care and well-being; this session saw over 200 people in attendance and provided high-school students the opportunity to de-stress and connect with peers during a busy week.

A VISIT FROM GERMANY

B.A.R.K. is honoured to receive visits from researchers and canine-assisted program directors from around the world keen to learn more about B.A.R.K. programming and research. This year, we welcomed Dr. Mona Mombeck from Paderborn University in Germany! Mona joined B.A.R.K. for a whole week to observe a variety of programs, learn about our protocol for safeguarding canine welfare, and hear about our innovative research projects!



THE B.A.R.K. TEAM

Running all of the varied B.A.R.K. programs would not be possible without the hardworking, dedicated team of student and community volunteers. The B.A.R.K. Team in 2024/25 consisted of the following members:

61

VOLUNTEER
HANDLERS

67

THERAPY
DOGS

21

STUDENT
VOLUNTEERS



2,071

total in-kind
volunteer hours

OUR GRADUATING STUDENTS

SUNNY, MADISYN, RAFAEL, KEVIN, & KAREN

The B.A.R.K. program simply would not be possible without the dedication and passion of our student volunteers. Each year, we conclude the academic year by celebrating our graduating students. This year we show our appreciation for, and celebrate the achievements of, five wonderful volunteers who have dedicated over 20 years between them to the B.A.R.K. program!



Suneet “Sunny” DiSilva - MDS in Data Science (‘25)

Despite Sunny only joining the team officially in 2024, his positive energy and strong ability to connect with others has made him a strong member of the B.A.R.K. team. Sunny has been an integral member of the data collection team during the drop-ins and has always been willing to help with BARK2Go, VEDA sessions, and all of our special events. We are thrilled that Sunny intends to remain in Kelowna and will continue as a B.A.R.K. Volunteer!

Madisyn Szypula - MAsc in Mechanical Engineering (‘25)

Madisyn began volunteering with B.A.R.K. in 2019 and quickly became a senior B.A.R.K. volunteer. Many will recognize Maddy from drop-ins and BARK2Go sessions, but Maddy is also an integral member of the B.A.R.K. research team. Throughout her time with B.A.R.K., Maddy has assisted with many research studies and co-authored studies examining the outcomes of participating in canine-assisted interventions by gender and the impact of B.A.R.K. on University student loneliness. We are thrilled to announce that Maddy, who is currently wrapping up her Master’s degree, will begin her doctoral studies at UBCO this fall and that she will remain on the B.A.R.K. leadership team!

Rafael “Rafa” Grey - BSc in Mechanical Engineering (‘25)

Many will know Rafa as the charismatic and enthusiastic B.A.R.K. greeter, ready to welcome all of our drop-in visitors with a smile. As one of our 2018 volunteer additions, Rafa is one of our longest-serving and most loyal B.A.R.K. volunteers. During his time with B.A.R.K. he has been involved with numerous innovative research studies, drop-in sessions, BARK2GO, and VEDA. We are grateful to Rafa for always being so willing to support B.A.R.K., regardless of the task, and will miss his loyalty and dedication. We wish him all the best as he forges his new career in engineering!

Kevin Mario - BSc in Computer Science (‘25)

Kevin became a volunteer with B.A.R.K. in 2023. Very quickly, Kevin established himself as a reliable VEDA leader and an excellent handler liaison. He is always ready to jump in and provide support to our wonderful handler-dog teams. We’re incredibly grateful for Kevin’s unwavering support and willingness to jump in wherever needed. His loyalty and commitment have made a lasting impact, and he will be deeply missed. Although we are sad to see him go, we are confident that his kind nature, gentle spirit, and calm demeanor will serve him very well as he embarks upon his career in Computer Science!

Karen Sticchi Zambom - BSc in Medical & Molecular Biochemistry, minor in Psychology (‘25)

Often seen with one of our little grey B.A.R.K. dogs (Lacey, Cookie, or Zora), Karen has been a much-appreciated member of the B.A.R.K. family for many years. She officially became a volunteer in 2023 and has since become an integral member of our canine welfare and assessment team. We will miss Karen’s unwavering enthusiasm for all things B.A.R.K.-related, her willingness to volunteer for as many sessions as she could, and her sassy sense of humour. We wish her all the best as she returns to Brazil to pursue her career goals in medicine.



FINANCIAL REPORT

FINANCIAL REPORT 2024/25

Revenue	
Carry forward from 2023/24	17,868.13
Funding from VEDA Exclusive Living	10,000.00
Salary Funding from AVPS: Program Coordinator (for 2024-2026)	101,000.00
Central Finance: General Wage Increase	1,146.02
Donations	2,266.00
<hr/>	
Total Revenue	132,280.15
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Expenses	
Office & Operational Supplies	10,387.90
Salaries and Benefits: Students	5,108
Salaries and Benefits: Program Coordinator	58,908.82
Travel and Accommodation: Conferences & Workshops	4,058.72
<i>Note: Includes student participation in international conferences</i>	
Telecommunication Charges & Utilities	488.07
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Commitments	
Salaries and Benefits: Program Coordinator (FY2026)	58,908.82
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Total Expenses	78,951.51
Carry forward next fiscal	53,328.64
Total	132,280.15

Note: Awaiting \$40,000 in donations from Giving Day, April 2025

The B.A.R.K. program is supported on UBC's Okanagan campus by the AVP Students Office and the Okanagan School of Education's Innovative Learning Centre. We are also grateful for the continued sponsorship from VEDA Exclusive Student Living (<http://www.vedaliving.ca>), and the generous individual donors who participated in our fundraising campaign this year. Donations to B.A.R.K. can be made at www.bark.ok.ubc.ca.



innovative
learning
centre



City of
Kelowna



VEDA
EXCLUSIVE STUDENT LIVING

In Loving Memory of Sydney Bednarik (UBC Alumni, 2017)

We're honoured to remember Sydney Bednarik—a cherished member of the UBC community. Sydney's warmth, kindness, and love for the B.A.R.K. dogs left a lasting impact on our team and the extended B.A.R.K. family. In her memory, the Sydney Bednarik Mental Health Foundation has generously donated \$1,000 to support the B.A.R.K. program. We're deeply grateful to the Bednarik family for this heartfelt and meaningful gift.

The Sydney Bednarik Mental Health Foundation was created to raise awareness, collect donations, and support people and organizations making a direct and meaningful impact on our mental health systems. Their work is a powerful tribute to Sydney's legacy and a beacon of hope for others.



Sydney Bednarik Mental Health Foundation

UBC
Giving Day
APRIL 3, 2025

ALPINE
HELICOPTERS INC

VEDA
EXCLUSIVE STUDENT LIVING

MW
motor werke
okanagan
PASTA COMPANY
artisan style

On behalf of everyone on the B.A.R.K. team, we want to say a huge THANK YOU to everyone who supported us on UBC Giving Day! Thanks to your efforts, whether it was donating or re-posting on social media, we were able to raise over \$40,000 on April 3rd! With 132 donors, we far surpassed our previous record from our last Giving Day in 2022. Out of 84 causes across both UBC campuses participating, we finished 5th overall for most funds raised AND were the top in the Okanagan!

We are also incredibly grateful to the businesses in the community who sponsored our challenge gifts: Motor Werke, VEDA Exclusive Student Living, and Alpine Helicopters and would like to thank West Kelowna Oral Surgery, Mercedes and Lexus Kelowna, Safety Worx Safety Solutions, Freyjasnjoerd Analytical Specialists, and Okanagan Pasta Company for their generous donations.



Lastly, thank you to our amazing B.A.R.K. handlers, dogs, and student volunteers who made the event on April 3rd the success that it was. We couldn't do this without you!!

PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS

PUBLICATIONS

Tardif-Williams, C. Y., Binfet, J. T., Green, F. L. L., Godard, R. J. P., Singal, A., Rousseau, C. X., Roma, R. P. S. & Willcox, A. A. (in press). Beyond the campus context: Reducing stress among students and community members through virtual canine comfort modules. *Human-Animal Interactions*.

Binfet, J. T., Green, F. L. L., Godard, J. P., Szypula, M. M., & Willcox, A. A. (2025). Keeping loneliness on a short leash: Reducing university student stress and loneliness through a canine-assisted intervention. *Human-Animal Interactions*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1079/hai.2025.0001>

Green, F. L. L., Dahlman, M. L., Lomness, A., & Binfet, J. T. (2024). For the love of acronyms: An analysis of terminology and acronyms used in AAI research 2013–2023. *Human-Animal Interactions*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1079/hai.2024.0024>

BOOK CHAPTERS

Binfet, J. T., Rousseau, C. X., & Green, F. L. L. (2025). AAI in Special Settings: Hospitals, Colleges, & Correctional Facilities. In A. H. Fine, M. Mueller, Z. Ng, T Chastain Griffin, & P. Tedeschi (Eds.), *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Foundations and Guidelines for Animal-Assisted Interventions* (pp. 373-387). Academic Press.

Binfet, J. T., & Green, F. L. L. (2025). Building Academic Retention through K9s (B.A.R.K.): Supporting college students at the University of British Columbia. In A. H. Fine, M. Mueller, Z. Ng, T Chastain Griffin, & P. Tedeschi (Eds.), *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Foundations and Guidelines for Animal-Assisted Interventions* (pp. 458-461). Academic Press.

Binfet, J. T., Green, F. L. L., Godard, R. J. P., Rousseau, C. X., Szypula, M. M., & Decker, J. (2024). A mixed-methods examination of an on-campus canine-assisted intervention by gender: Men, women, and gender diverse students' self-reports of stress-reduction and well-being. In L. R. Kogan (Ed.), *The Impact of Therapy and Pet Animals on Human Stress* (pp. 170-186). CABI.

Green, F. L. L. & Binfet, J. T., & (2024). Therapy dogs, stress-reduction, and well-being within the detachment: Interviews with law-enforcement personnel. In L. R. Kogan (Ed.), *The Impact of Therapy and Pet Animals on Human Stress* (pp. 187-207). CABI.



PRESENTATIONS

Green, F. L. L., Dahlman, M. L., Lomness, A., & Binfet, J. T. (2024, June 29). For the love of acronyms: An analysis of terminology and acronyms used in AAI research 2013–2023. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Society for Anthrozoology, Hartpur, England.

Green, F. L. L., Willcox, A. A., & Binfet, J. T. (2024, June 28). Assessing therapy dog-handler teams: A content analysis of 10-years of positive and negative evaluation comments. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Society for Anthrozoology, Hartpur, England.

Rousseau, C. X., Willcox, A. A., & Binfet, J. T. (2024, June 28). Pups Uplifting Public Speaking: Developing key components of a pilot canine-assisted intervention for children with public speaking anxiety. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the International Society for Anthrozoology, Hartpur, England.

Binfet, J. T., Green, F. L. L., Godard, R. J. P., & Willcox, A. A. (2024, June 28). Reducing loneliness in the post-secondary context: A canine-assisted intervention pilot study. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Society for Anthrozoology, Hartpur, England.



NEWS & MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

RADIO & PODCASTS

Human Animal Interaction Section – Podcast with John-Tyler Binfet (2024, Dec 17)

Human Animal Interaction Section – Podcast with Freya Green (2024, Aug 7)

PRINT

Okanagan School of Education (2025, Apr 21). B.A.R.K. receives CRET funding to expand research and impact

KelownaNow (2025, Feb 16). Campus therapy dogs don’t just reduce stress, they also combat loneliness: UBCO study

Castanet (2025, Feb 12). UBC Okanagan research finds therapy dogs reduce student stress, loneliness.

Phys.Org (2025, Feb 12). Feeling lonely? Campus therapy dogs may be the fix, study says.

Okanagan School of Education (2024, Aug 12). Oh my D.O.G.: For the love of acronyms

Ubyyssey (2024, June 11). UBCO’s B.A.R.K. program reduces student stress with canine assisted interventions

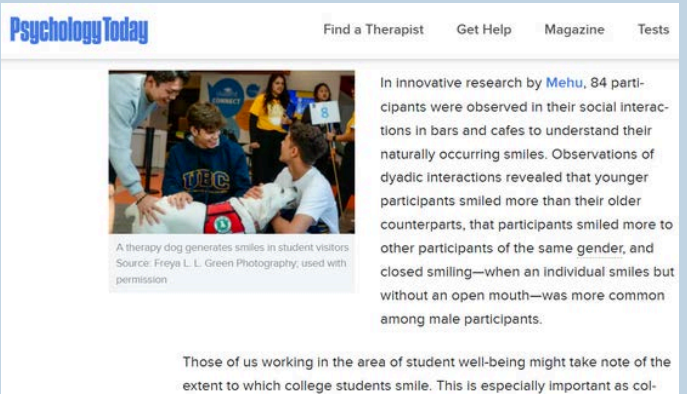
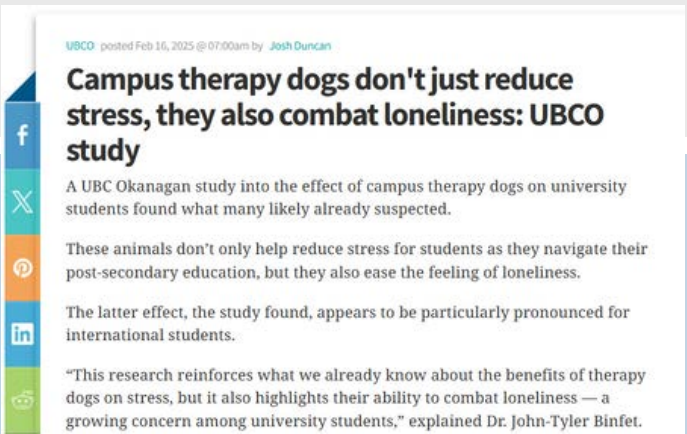
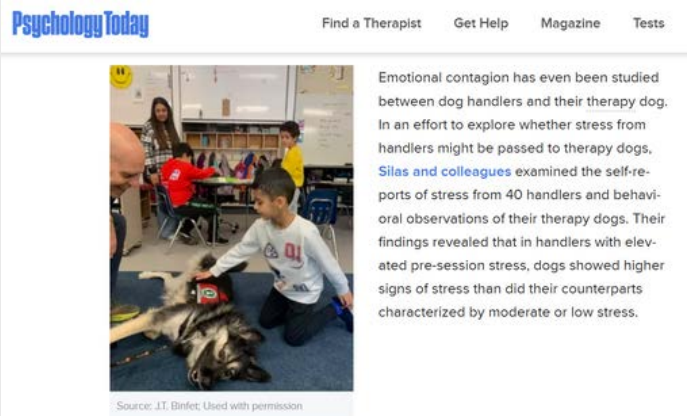
PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

(2025, Mar 12). How Therapy Dogs Can Support Neurodiverse College Students.

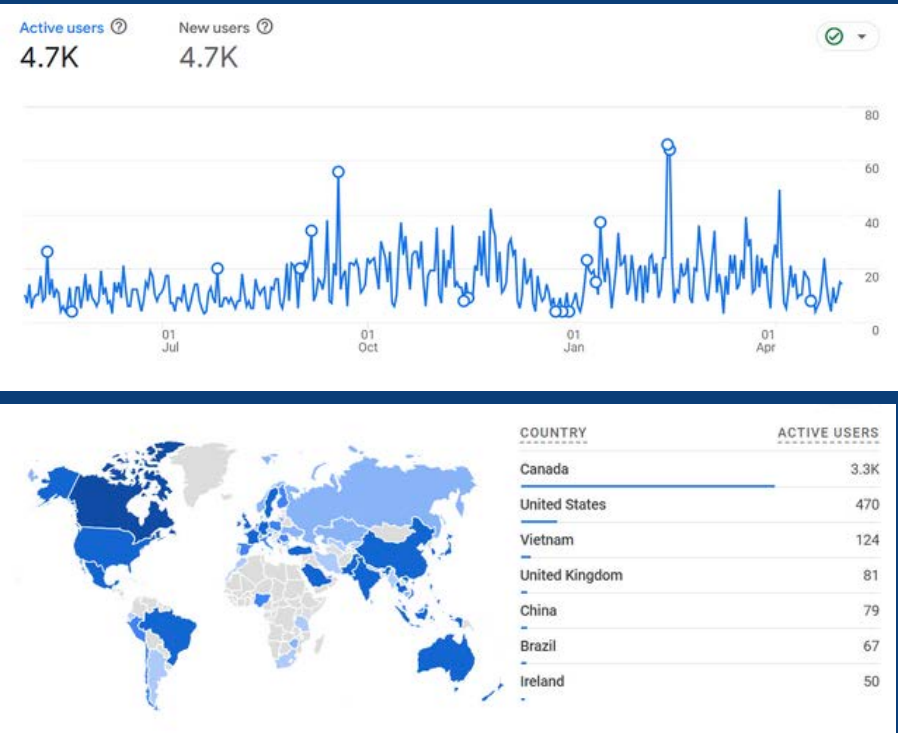
(2025, Jan 22). A Guaranteed Way to Get Students to Smile on Campus: Smiling on campus provides a window into student well-being.

(2024, Nov 25). Therapy Dogs and Joy Contagion in the Classroom: Emotional contagion often focuses on passing stress, but joy can be shared, too.

(2024, July 29). Fighting Campus Loneliness: College students can build a social and emotional bank to ward off loneliness.



WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA REPORT



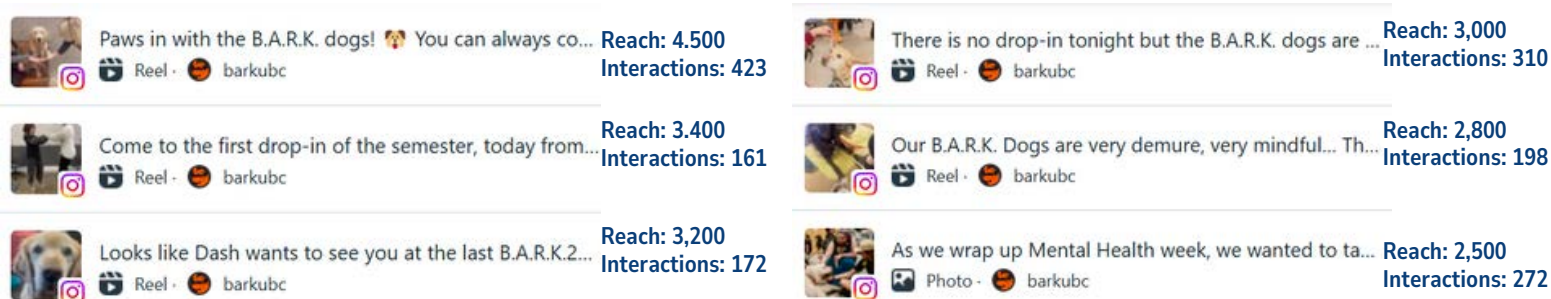
WEBSITE VISITORS

USERS: 4,700
VIEWS: 15,000

SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

FACEBOOK: 2,696
INSTAGRAM: 3,172
THREADS: 372

TOP SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



IN MEMORIAM



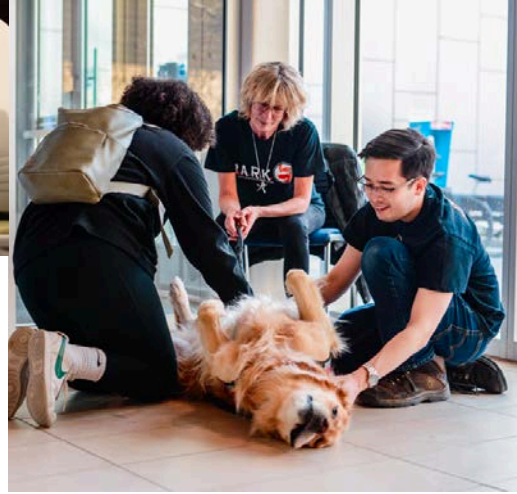
Maya
Fondly known by the B.A.R.K. crew as “Miss Softest Ears in the Program”, we remember Maya for her calm, stoic, and kind nature. Maya and her handler Michelle volunteered with us from 2019-2024 and we are so grateful for the love they shared with all of our students, staff, and faculty! Many will remember Maya from the EME BARK2Go station. We send our best wishes to Michelle and her family as we take this opportunity to remember Maya.



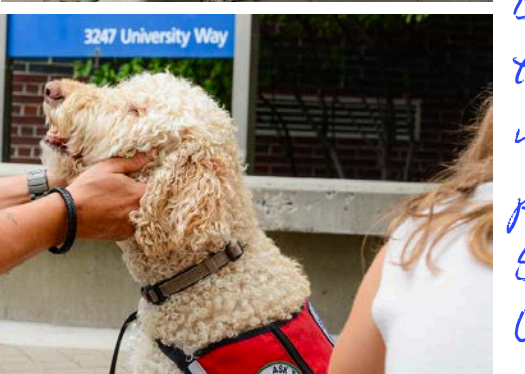
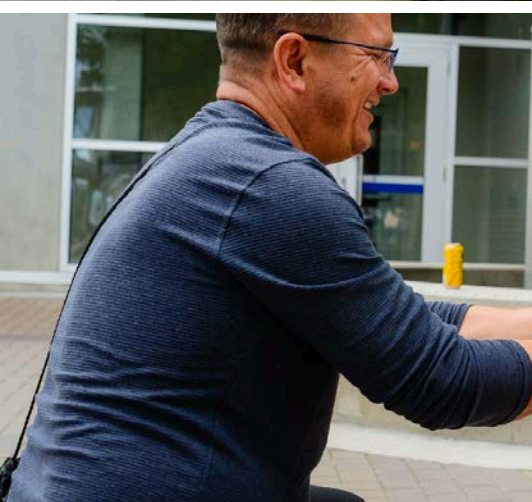
Monkey
Monkey and his sister Angel (along with their handler Colleen) were amongst the first paws to set foot on the Okanagan campus. We remember Monkey for his gentle snuggles, his love of everyone’s laps, and his cheeky but charming personality. We send our best wishes to Colleen and her family as we remember this lovely chap and the legacy he left at UBC. We’re thankful that Monkey lived to a golden age of 17 and shared so many memories with B.A.R.K.



"The community that comes together to hang out and pet sweet dogs is so meaningful"
Grad student, Jan 2023

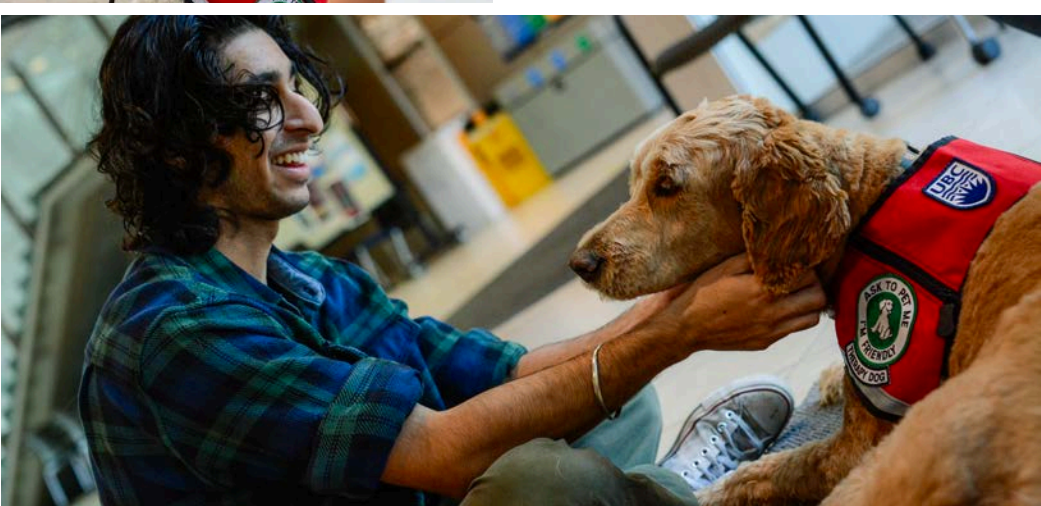


"Words cannot express how grateful I am for having BARK part of my life. I loved the BARK program and the amazing people who make the program possible even before coming to UBCO"



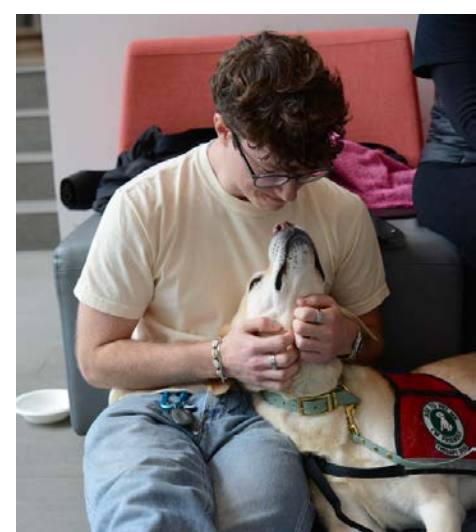
"KINDEST, MOST FRIENDLY SOULS TO EXIST. BEST CREATURE ON THE PLANET"

1ST YEAR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT, SEPT 2024





"Helped bring a sense of comfort while I'm away from home. You guys are awesome! Thank you!"
1st Year student, Nov. 2024



"Dogs are so accepting! I wish humans were more like that!"
1st year student, Jan. 2025



"I lost a dog last December. I spent time today with Shai who felt very comfortable with me. It reminded me of cuddling my dog Mazie. Thank you <3"





The University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus
1137 Alumni Avenue, EME 3118
Kelowna, BC, V1V 1V7

Website: bark.ok.ubc.ca
Facebook: BARK UBCO
Threads/Instagram: BARKUBC

Photographs provided by: Freya Green, Amanda Lamberti, and Erem Ozdemir



CONTACT

Freya Green, Program Coordinator

As Program Coordinator, Freya assists with the administration and implementation of on-campus and community-based B.A.R.K. programs. Any questions regarding volunteering for B.A.R.K., requesting B.A.R.K. visitation, or general inquiries should be directed to Freya Green at bark.dogtherapy@ubc.ca