

Comfort in Crisis: Shodair's Facility Dog Brings Light to Montana School After Tragedy

Shodair supports Montana students with outpatient care and allied therapy, including facility dogs, reaching beyond the hospital.

HELENA, MT, UNITED STATES,
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EINPresswire.com/ -- Shodair Facility
Dog Banksy Brings Comfort to CR
Anderson Students After Classmate's
Passing



Shodair's Facility Dog Banksy with Handler Bridgette Supports Students

More than 100 students at C.R. Anderson Middle School received comfort last week from Banksy, one of [Shodair Children's Hospital's facility dogs](#), following the death of a student who had battled cancer. For two days, Banksy and his handler, Recreational Therapist II Bridgette, offered support to students and staff as they processed grief and loss.

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One of the most meaningful moments was when a close friend of the student who passed cried on Banksy. He provided the quiet presence that child needed.”

*Bridgette Wiegand,
Recreational Therapist II,
Shodair Children's Hospital*

The school initially reached out to Shodair's Chief Clinical Officer, who coordinated available resources. Bridgette said Shodair works closely with each school to determine the most appropriate support, which can include therapy dog teams, therapists, or teacher assistance. The team also coordinates with other organizations providing services to ensure they do not overwhelm the school.

Banksy spent much of his time in the school library, where students could come and go freely on the first day. On the second day, eighth-grade classes, including peers of the

student who passed, rotated through the library to spend time with Banksy. Teachers read announcements informing students of the loss and letting them know Banksy would be available, along with individual counseling.

Bridgette said, "The students responded incredibly positively to Banksy. Many came in tears, and

he simply leaned into them, offering comfort. One of the most meaningful moments was when a close friend of the student who passed cried on Banksy. He provided the quiet presence that child needed."

She added, "Banksy also brings moments of lightness during dark times. Rolling on the floor, making his wookie noises, or chasing his tail helped students laugh and connect. It gave them space to share memories and support each other."

Staff members also benefited. "Often teachers try to stay strong for their students," Bridgette said. "Interacting with Banksy allowed them to take a minute for themselves and process their own emotions."

During the visits, Shodair also introduced students to Sanctuary safety plan cards. These cards help students identify coping strategies and practice self-care. The Sanctuary Model is Shodair's trauma-informed care framework, created by Dr. Sandra Bloom, which focuses on empathy, structure, resilience, and creating safe, healing environments.

School administrators shared their appreciation for Shodair's presence and said the support helped immensely.

Shodair CEO Craig Aasved added, "At Shodair, we care deeply about Montana's children. We are more than an inpatient mental health hospital. [We also offer outpatient programs](#), [genetic services](#), and specialized services like our facility dog program to help children and their families across the state. Facility dogs like Banksy bring comfort and hope



Shodair Children's Hospital thanks facility dog Banksy for bringing comfort and support to students at C.R. Anderson Middle School.



Shodair Children's Hospital logo, reflecting our mission to heal, help, and inspire hope for children and families across Montana.

during difficult times. This visit to C.R. Anderson shows how schools can partner with us to bring our skills, compassion, and care directly to students when they need it most."

This visit marks the fourth time Shodair has supported local schools during student loss, following previous visits to Helena High School, Capital High School, and PAL. Shodair encourages schools across Montana to reach out when students face challenges or tragedy so they can access therapy dogs, specialized programs, and trained staff to help students and staff heal.

CONTACTS FOR SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Emergency Response Coordination - Jenna German, Chief Clinical Officer:
JGerman@shodair.org
- Facility Dog Outreach - Melissa Nichols, Director of Recreation Therapy: MNichols@shodair.org

Shodair Children's Hospital remains committed to helping Montana's kids heal, help, and inspire hope.

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About Shodair Children's Hospital

Since 1896, Shodair Children's Hospital has served Montana's most vulnerable residents, evolving to meet the state's changing needs. Today, Shodair offers a wide range of services, including acute, residential, and outpatient psychiatric care for children (ages 3–18), an accredited school for those in care, and the state's only comprehensive medical genetics program, serving individuals of all ages. As Montana's only Children's Miracle Network Hospital, Shodair serves children from all 56 counties, with many patients receiving Medicaid assistance. Shodair is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the mental health and well-being of Montana families. For more information, visit [Shodair.org](https://shodair.org).

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