

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

March 13, 2019

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[Download Photo of Jessica Welp](#)

[Download Photo of Shotgun, Certified Therapy Dog](#)

**Therapy Dog and Emergency Senior Shelter Administrator  
Have Special Bond that Benefits Others**

**(OKLAHOMA CITY)** –Shotgun, a certified therapy dog, began his journey with Sunbeam Family Services over 5 years ago. Shotgun is a Border Collie mix who was rescued in 2012 from the Sulphur animal shelter by Jessica Welp, Sunbeam’s emergency senior shelter administrator. Shotgun received his pet therapy certification through “A New Leash on Life”, an organization dedicated to changing lives by developing the special abilities of dogs and providing resources for pet owners.

With Jessica by his side, Shotgun visits hospitals, libraries, senior centers, support groups and Palomar, Oklahoma City’s Family Justice Center. He also assists with pet therapy presentations at the Geriatric Institute, the Annual Caregiver Conference and the State Conference on Aging. At Sunbeam, Shotgun provides love and support to residents at Sunbeam’s Emergency Senior Shelter and to clients visiting the Sunbeam Counseling program. He is often seen around the Sunbeam home office wearing festive holiday attire and receiving treats for his display of special tricks.

When asked about Shotgun’s impact at Sunbeam Welp stated, “People look forward to seeing Shotgun. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a new resident transitioning from a traumatic situation into our shelter or a coworker on a Monday, Shotgun has a way of bringing smiles to people’s faces.”

Welp received her bachelor’s degree in English from the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma. After working with seniors for several years in Sunbeam’s Caregiver Fundamentals Program, she earned her master’s degree in Social Work from the University of Oklahoma in 2018. Welp is the current administrator of Sunbeam’s Emergency Senior Shelter, the only shelter for homeless seniors in the state Oklahoma.

Last fiscal year, 99 homeless seniors aged 60 and older sought safety in the Emergency Senior Shelter, many of whom were without a family support system and had a limited monthly income. The shelter is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is supported by therapists from Sunbeam’s Counseling program.

There are numerous benefits to pet therapy, defined as an animal trained to provide affection and comfort to people in hospitals, retirement homes, nursing homes, schools, hospices, people with learning difficulties, and stressful situations such as disaster areas. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), pets can decrease blood pressure, cholesterol levels, triglyceride levels, and feelings of loneliness. They can also provide greater opportunities for exercise and outdoor activities. According to [PetMD](#), in addition to improving the lives of their owners, pets also strengthen relationships among humans.

Welp believes in the benefits of pet therapy agrees, “To many people, pets are family members - they bring us joy and dote on them. Our pets love us unconditionally and we want to talk about them! So, they become conversation starters and many people can find common ground in sharing stories about pets they have or have had in the past.”

Sunbeam offers high-quality, affordable Counseling services for people of all ages who need help with life’s challenges. Clients learn ways to identify, cope and build strengths to overcome difficulties.

Sunbeam’s staff consists of mental health professionals who provide traditional counseling services based on their professional training, experience and areas of expertise. Counselors are Licensed, License Eligible, or

Master Level Interns who are supervised by Licensed Clinicians. Sunbeam's counselors are professionally trained in individual, marital, relationship and family therapies. They have the experience and dedication to help individuals and families find solutions that provide hope. For more information call 405-528-7721.

Through March 31, Sunbeam is asking the community to join them in "giving hope and restoring dignity" for Oklahoma's seniors who are homeless through raising \$65,000 to fund Sunbeam's Emergency Senior Shelter. Thanks to Randy Thurman CPA, CFP, donations will be matched up to \$5,000. For more information, visit [sunbeamfamilyservices.org/dignity](http://sunbeamfamilyservices.org/dignity) or call 405-609-8994.

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#### About Sunbeam Family Services

Founded in 1907, Sunbeam Family Services is one of Oklahoma's longest serving nonprofits and is one of the original United Way of Central Oklahoma Community partners. Sunbeam's mission is to provide help, hope and the opportunity to succeed to people of all ages and all stages of life in central Oklahoma through Early Childhood, Counseling, Foster Care and Senior Services. To learn more, call 405-528-7721, visit [sunbeamfamilyservices.org](http://sunbeamfamilyservices.org), or join the conversation on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

#### About a New Leash on Life

A New Leash on Life, Inc. was founded to improve people's lives by utilizing the special abilities of dogs. New Leash trains Service Dogs for people with disabilities, Therapy Dogs to cheer the elderly and motivate children learning to read or in therapy, and Companion Dogs for adoption from unwanted shelter dogs through an inmate training program at a local correctional facility.

#### About Palomar

Palomar, Oklahoma City's Family Justice Center (OKCFJC), is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary service model where teams of professionals come together under one roof to provide coordinated services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, child abuse, elder abuse and human trafficking. The mission is to provide protection, hope and healing. If you have been a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking, please call the 24-hour Safeline at 1-800-522-SAFE for assistance with safety planning, crisis intervention and shelter.