

# UW Health Kids: American Family Children's Hospital launches CHAMPs

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MADISON, Wis. – The newest employee at American Family Children's Hospital has a big smile, a soft spot for kids, and four legs.

Kiko, a two-year-old golden retriever from Georgia, arrived this week to work as a facility dog. She is professionally trained to work in healthcare settings and provide comfort to children during their treatment process.

Kiko will be the first dog in the new Canine Health And Medical Pals program, known as CHAMPs, at American Family Children's Hospital. She is also the first facility dog in the state.

The program pairs a facility dog with a child life specialist, who is trained to be a facility dog handler, to provide customized interventions in conjunction with a coping plan for patients. For example, the dog might sit with a child as they get blood drawn or have a stressful procedure.

Kiko will live with Brianna Hampton, child life specialist, UW Health Kids, and come to work with her each day. Child life specialists are medically trained professionals who help patients and families navigate and cope with complex medical information during a stay at the hospital.

"Kiko has a very calming presence, and most kids are already familiar with dogs so she will be a great addition to our team," said Hampton. "Kiko is the first facility dog in the state of Wisconsin. I am honored to work with her and can't wait to get started."

American Family Children's Hospital is partnering with Canine Assistants for this program, a non-profit organization in Georgia that matches dogs to hospitals. In this

partnership, the children's hospital will receive two fully trained facility dogs to work as part of the child life team. The second dog will arrive in the spring of 2022. The name and breed of the second facility dog will be announced at that time.

This new facility dog program does not replace UW Health's Pet Pals therapy program, which began in 1996. Pet Pals are dogs of volunteers that provide comfort and cuddle time during a patient visit in a group setting, two times a week for a short amount of time. Facility dogs are specifically trained and work a full 40 hours a week and are an intentional part of the child life team with very specific intervention and coping plans.

Pet Pals is currently on hold due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The program is funded entirely through philanthropic donations. Each dog has an individual sponsor. This program also includes a partnership with the UW School of Veterinary Medicine, which will take care of the dog's medical and infection control needs.

Like any new employee, Kiko is getting used to her role and it will take some time for her to get acclimated. She will begin onboarding in October and should be going into patient rooms soon.

Today, we are offering video of Kiko's arrival and a recorded interview with a child life specialist. In the coming months, we will make Kiko available for recording and share video of her interacting with children.