

## Animal SIG Newsletter

### From Burnout to Brilliance: Turning Doggy Dreams into Reality

*Kelsey Jonas, PT, DPT, CCRT*  
*Canine PT and Me*  
*Portland, OR*

Kelsey Jonas, PT, DPT, CCRT started her physical therapy career wanting to treat athletes and help rehab them back to their sport. However, in her first year out of physical therapy school, working for a large corporate company, Kelsey quickly realized that she could not treat people for the entirety of her career. She was already burnt out in just her first year of practice! In 2019, she continued to suffer from treating people while using all of her paid time off to achieve her Certified Canine Rehabilitation Therapist (CCRT) certification. After completing her CCRT, Kelsey opened her own mobile canine rehab business (Canine PT and Me) in Portland, Oregon.

She never had any dream or intention of being a business owner, but this was the best pathway forward. Kelsey could work for herself, build the schedule that she wanted, choose the clientele to work with, and grow a business in this niche field. She quickly learned that starting a new business was only half of the battle. Since canine rehabilitation is a very small field, the other half of the battle was spreading the word that there was an alternative treatment for dogs rather than just rest and pain medication. Understandably, veterinarians were skeptical of a new approach until they saw the outcomes. That's when real change started taking shape.

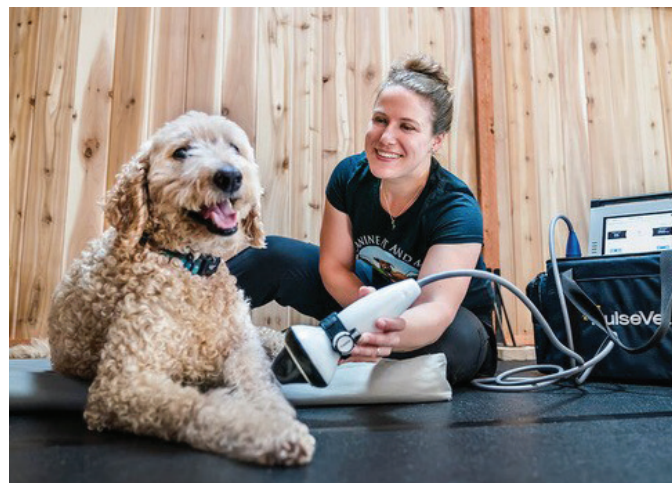
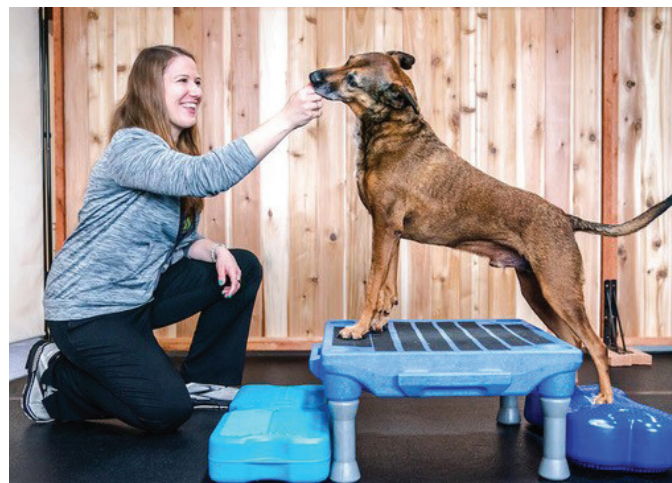
The timing of starting Canine PT and Me was seemingly unfortunate though. Kelsey's first patient was in April 2020 when the world shut down due to COVID-19. However, as we all know, the number of families adding canine members to their pack skyrocketed. Since people were at home and spending more time with their dogs, they were realizing that their dogs had problems that needed to be addressed. Some common conditions that are treated include aging geriatric dogs, cranial cruciate ligament (CCL) tears (dog equivalent of an ACL), post-op spine surgery, hip dysplasia, luxating patellae, medial shoulder syndrome/instability, intervertebral disc disease (IVDD), iliopsoas strain, elbow dysplasia, degenerative myelopathy, and the list goes on.

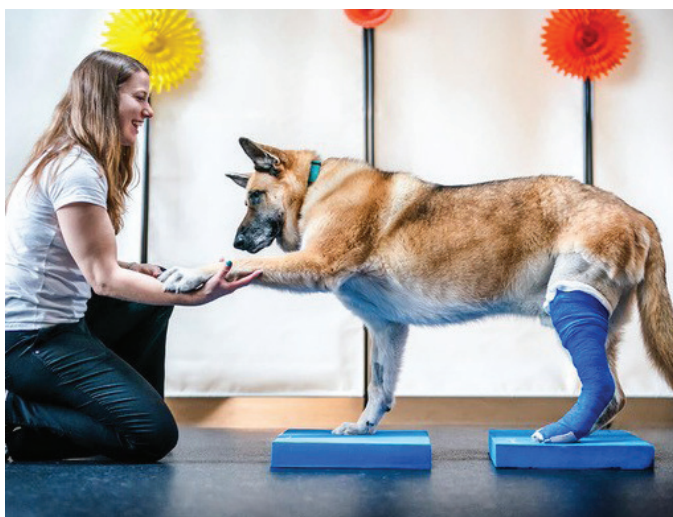
One of the challenges of starting a canine rehab business was how to network and acquire referrals. Kelsey wanted to do drop-in visits at local veterinary clinics, however everything was curbside during COVID. Pivoting from her original plan, Kelsey sent emails to numerous vet clinics asking if they had any questions about canine rehab or if they needed Canine PT and Me's information. With consistent emails over time, Canine PT and Me became more well-known in the veterinary community. Referring veterinarians were starting to see positive results with their patients after attending rehab and the trust began to build. It only

took a few solid connections with vets and surgeons to gain reliable referral sources. This positive rapport created a harmonious relationship and opened the doors of communication between veterinarians and canine rehabilitation therapists.

That being said, veterinarians are not the only team members that we collaborate with. It is crucial to help a dog with whatever they need whether that be a referral to a neurologist or an orthopedist, getting them fitted for a custom wheelchair or brace, consulting with a prosthetist, or getting them a harness that assists them if they can't walk. There are so many products on the market to help canine rehab therapists with their patients, it's quite a blessing.

Canine PT and Me grew exponentially through COVID and Kelsey navigated the challenges of the pandemic with ease. She was flexible with client preferences. She would complete rehab sessions indoors with a mask on or she would perform rehab sessions outdoors in backyards. The mobile model of Canine PT and Me was quickly gaining popularity in the Portland metro area. Soon, Kelsey's schedule became full, and she was in higher demand as clients liked the convenience of mobile canine rehab. Nowadays,



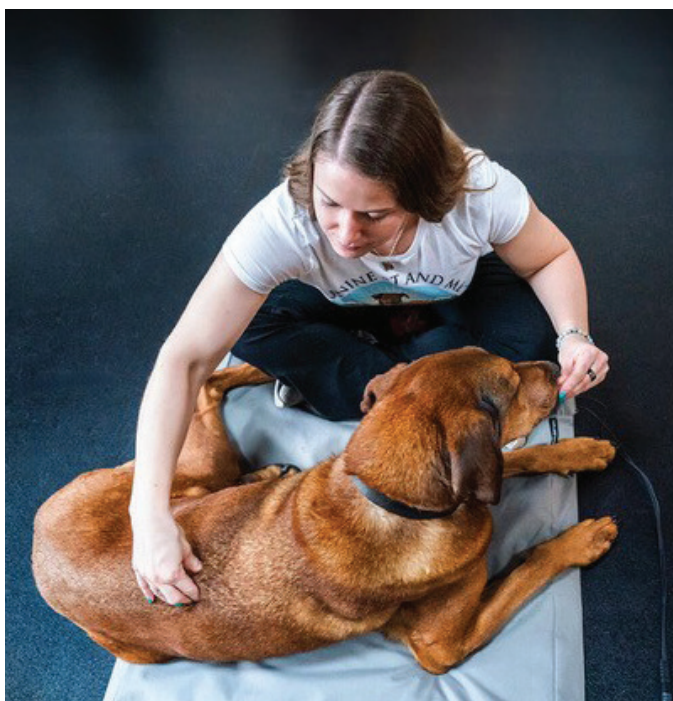


most of their referrals come from word of mouth, Google reviews, or vets referring directly to Canine PT and Me.

Due to the increase in business, Kelsey knew that she needed to change her business model to help more pups. She began looking for a clinic space to have a brick and mortar location. This proved to be more difficult than she imagined due to the limited availability of commercial space with parking in a central area of Portland. After 1 year of searching, she finally landed in a 2000+ square foot location. Then, the transition began.

Kelsey didn't know what to expect by changing her entire business model. Through the transition to a brick and mortar location, she only lost 1 client. Despite most clients' preference to have a mobile canine therapist, her clientele fully supported her and her business growth. After 3.5 years of being mobile, Canine PT and Me now had a stationary home.

As of February 2025, it has been almost 2 years in the clinic space and the number of patients being treated has more than doubled. Kelsey has also been able to expand her team to treat more canine patients and is continuing to grow. She now employs 2 other canine rehab therapists and an administrative staff



member. One of her CCRTs is a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) and the other CCRT is a physical therapist. This adds a lot of value to Canine PT and Me by having a multi-disciplinary staff.

One of the main differences in Canine PT and Me's treatment approach is not using an underwater treadmill. This seems to be the "shiny object" that most people think of when it comes to canine rehabilitation. The underwater treadmill is a great tool to have for neurologic patients, it helps offload joints for senior patients, or it can assist a dog learning to walk again. However, this piece of equipment is not a one-stop shop for canine rehabilitation. Canine PT and Me does not have an underwater treadmill and likely never will. The canine rehab therapists use their manual therapy skills, therapeutic exercise prescription, PEMF (pulsed electromagnetic field) bed technology, shockwave, cold laser therapy, and a few other modalities to treat patients. Canine rehabilitation is an entire wellness approach and should include a variety of treatment techniques to reach the goals set for each patient.

Throughout her 5-6 years in the canine rehab field, Kelsey has also been an active teaching assistant with the Canine Rehab Institute (CRI) for several years. She loves educating new and upcoming canine rehab therapists and she loves seeing the profession grow. Every step of navigating business growth has come with its own set of challenges that may not show on the surface.

Not many people talk about the mental and emotional toll that starting and running a business takes on oneself. It is not for the faint of heart. Business ownership is by far the most challenging thing that Kelsey has ever done, but she wouldn't trade it for anything. She's worked endlessly with mentors and colleagues in the field to gain guidance on how to grow and run a successful business. Kelsey fully attributes her triumph to them, and she would not be here without them.

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